

PUBLIC ASSESSMENT OF JUDICIAL REFORM AND THE PROSECUTION'S WORK: NO ONE IS INNOCENT



Characteristics of the study

Method of data registration: standardised face-to-face personal interview with tablet-assisted personal interviewing (TAPI).

Sample size: 1020 interviews with adult Bulgarian citizens

Sampling method: two-stage cluster quota sampling, stratified by age, sex, education and settlement type

Study period: 26 November-15 December 2024.

Representativeness: nationally representative of the adult population of the country

The survey reproduces the population structure by the following demographic characteristics:

- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Type of settlement

Client: Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives

Contractor: Sociological Agency Global Metrics

Main results of the study

Ten years after the adoption of the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of Judicial Reform, public assessments of judicial reform in the country are overwhelmingly critical. At the end of December 2024, more than two-thirds of adult Bulgarians believe that it is stagnating. Between a fifth and a third of respondents still see some, albeit very weak, results in individual areas. According to public opinion, the main reasons for the failure to implement judicial reform are the interests of various social circles working against its implementation, as well as the political crisis and the lack of political will for reforms in this sector. Around one third of the respondents also tend to point to a lack of will among magistrates, which shows that, from the point of view of public opinion, there are no "innocents" for the failure to implement judicial reform. As a counterpoint to these assessments, the view that there is no public support for the reform is shared by only 9% of the respondents.

There is a broad consensus on the importance of judicial reform. Almost everyone is of this opinion: 75% consider it very important and 20% - rather important. Bulgarian citizens set a wide range of priorities for judicial reform in the next few years, the most important of which they consider to be: a real and effective fight against corruption at the highest levels of power, independence of the courts, a speedy trial, a fight against domestic crime, an accountable and effective prosecution service, and a fight against domestic violence.

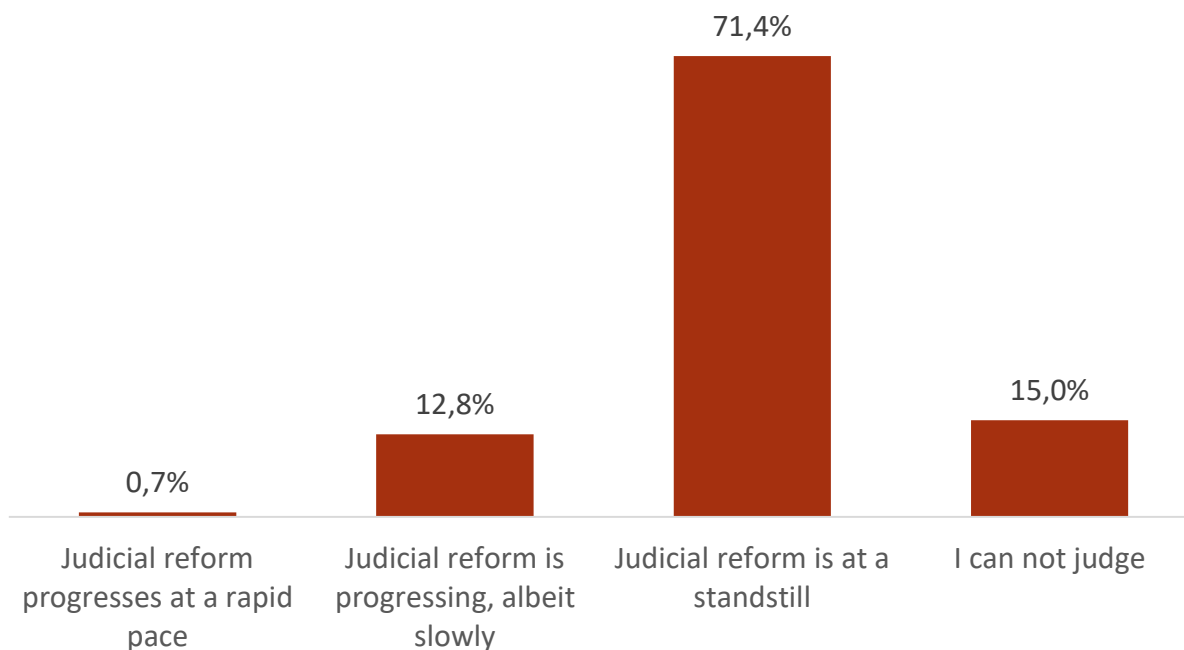
Assessments of the prosecution's performance over the last ten years are predominantly low and reflect the repeatedly registered low confidence in its work. According to public opinion, the work of the prosecutor's office under the leadership of Sotir Tsatsarov (according to a BILI survey from 2019 implemented by Global Metrics), Ivan Geshev and Borislav Sarafov on a five-point scale from 2 to 6 converts in "Weak" 2 and "Average" 3. The average score for the prosecution's performance during Sotir Tsatsarov's term was 3.05, under Ivan Geshev's leadership it was 2.75, and during Borislav Sarafov's - 2.81. However, there are also specifics - while the assessments of the work of the prosecution under Sotir Tsatsarov were also critical, but pulled into the more moderate positions of the scale, the work of the prosecution under Ivan Geshev was given twice as many weak ratings. The same trend persists, albeit slightly mitigated, in the ratings for Borislav

Sarafov. The evaluations for all three general prosecutors show highly critical opinions, which are an indicator of weak results in dealing with both domestic crime and the fight against high-level corruption. Citizens see the work in these areas mainly as campaigning, and the prevailing opinion is that **the prosecutor's office is used for political purposes** and there are no benefits for society from the work of the prosecutor general.

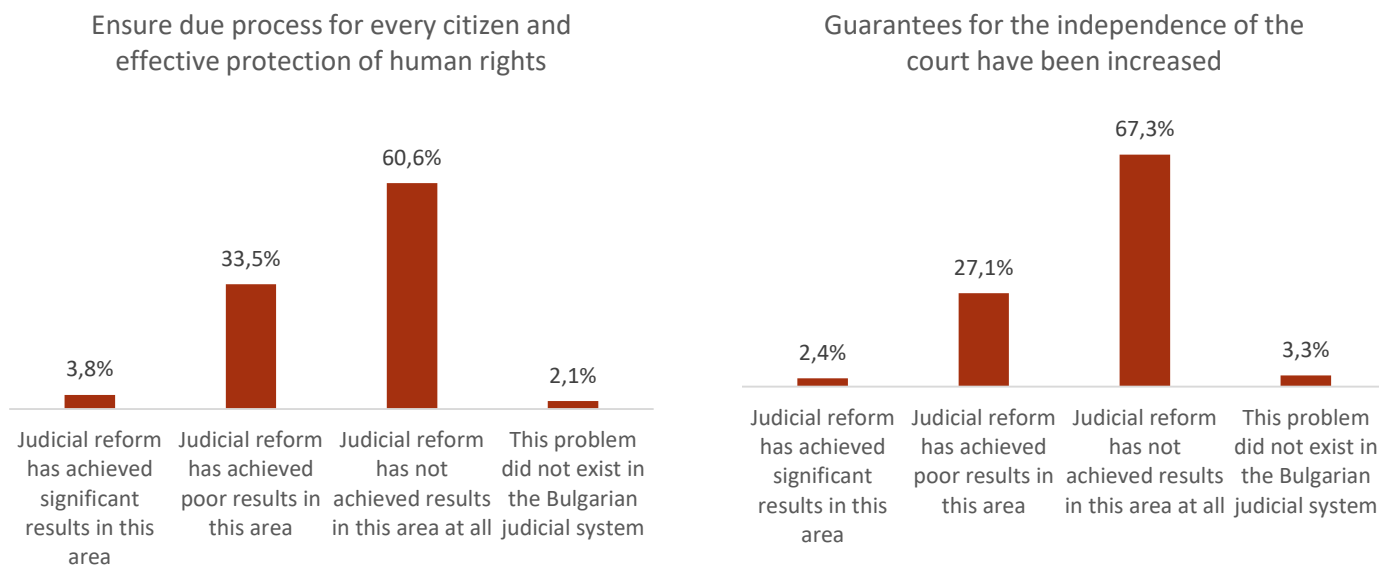
In conclusion, public opinion gives strong support and clear priorities for judicial reform, but is extremely dissatisfied with the lack of results.

Assessment of the judicial reform

If you had to give an assessment of the judicial reform in Bulgaria, what would you say?



Nearly three quarters of the adult Bulgarians are of the opinion that the judicial reform is stagnating. Only 13% think there is progress, albeit slow. People with higher education and those working in the public sector are more likely to be of this opinion. However, even among these groups, the opinion that judicial reform is not progressing dominates.



According to the general public, the judicial reform has failed in all major areas, and for almost two thirds of the respondents it has failed to ensure a fair trial for every citizen. Only a third believe there have been some, albeit weak, results in this area.

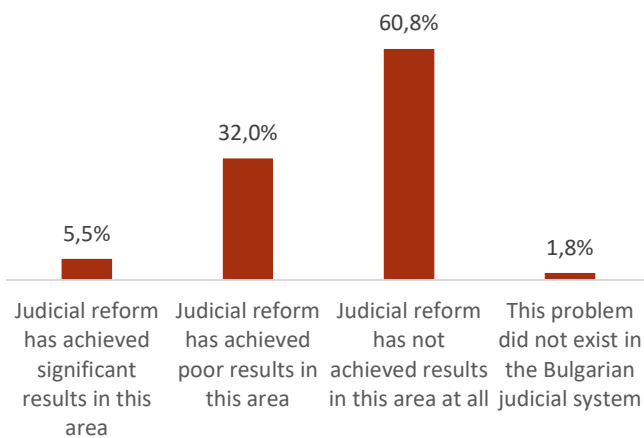
The attitudes are similar regarding the guarantees for the independence of the courts, ensuring objectivity in investigations against magistrates when there are legal grounds for this, as well as regarding the accountability and independence of the prosecution from political influence and the overall protection of the judiciary from economic influence. The assessments in each of these areas are dominated by the view that judicial reform has achieved nothing (between two-thirds and three-quarters of citizens take this view) or that progress in this area has been too weak (between one-fifth and one-third take this view).

In the four areas where the assessments of the judicial reform are most critical (the highest share of opinions that the reform has not achieved results in this area), the following statistical trends emerge:

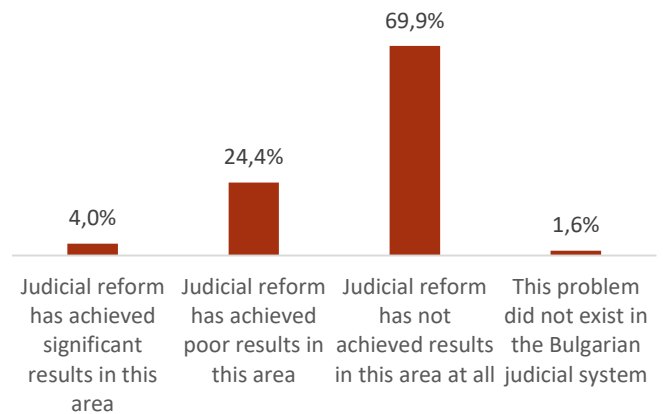
- 76% are of the opinion that there is a lack of results in terms of the goal to limit **political influence on the courts and prosecution**
- 73% are of the opinion that there is a lack of results in terms of the objective to **prevent conflicts of interest and corruption within the judiciary**

- 70% are of the opinion that there is a lack of results in terms of the objective to reduce the possibilities for abuse of office and use of the judiciary **to settle political and economic scores**
- 70% are of the opinion that there is a lack of results in terms of the objective to reduce the **economic influence on the courts and prosecution**

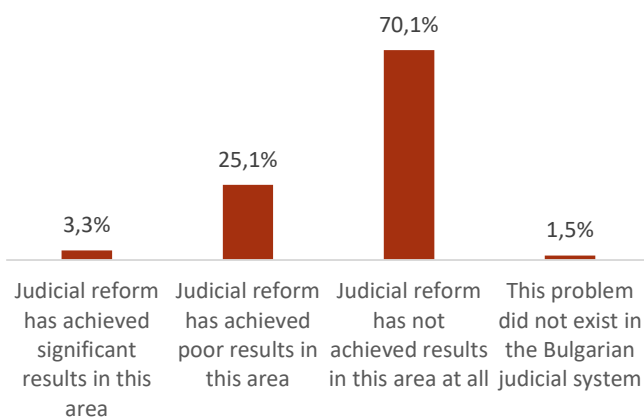
Effective investigation of cases of intimidation of magistrates



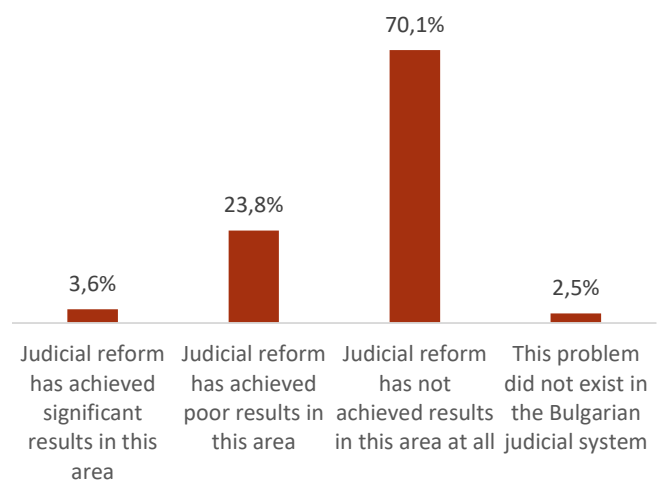
Investigations against magistrates, where there are legal grounds for doing so, shall be conducted objectively



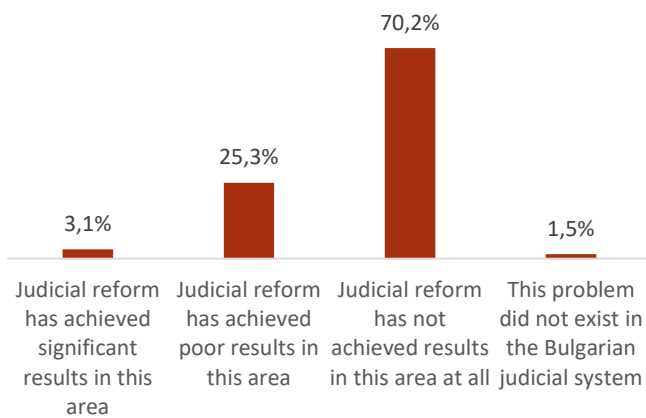
The prosecution became more accountable and independent from political and economic influence



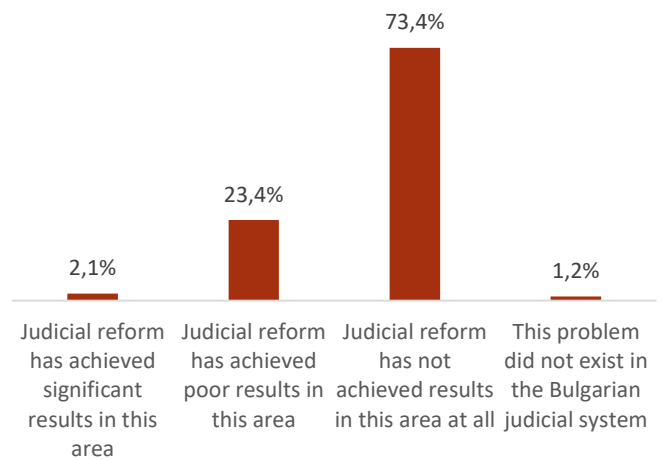
Limit the economic influence on the judiciary



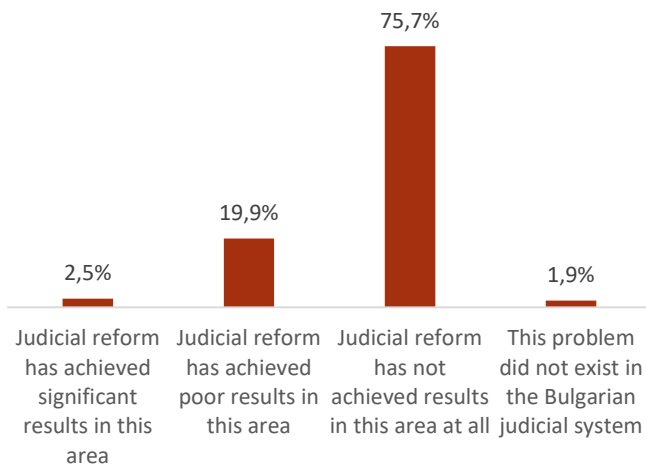
Opportunities for abuse of office and use of the judiciary to settle political and economic scores have been reduced



Prevent conflict of interest and corruption within the judiciary



Limit political influence on courts and prosecution



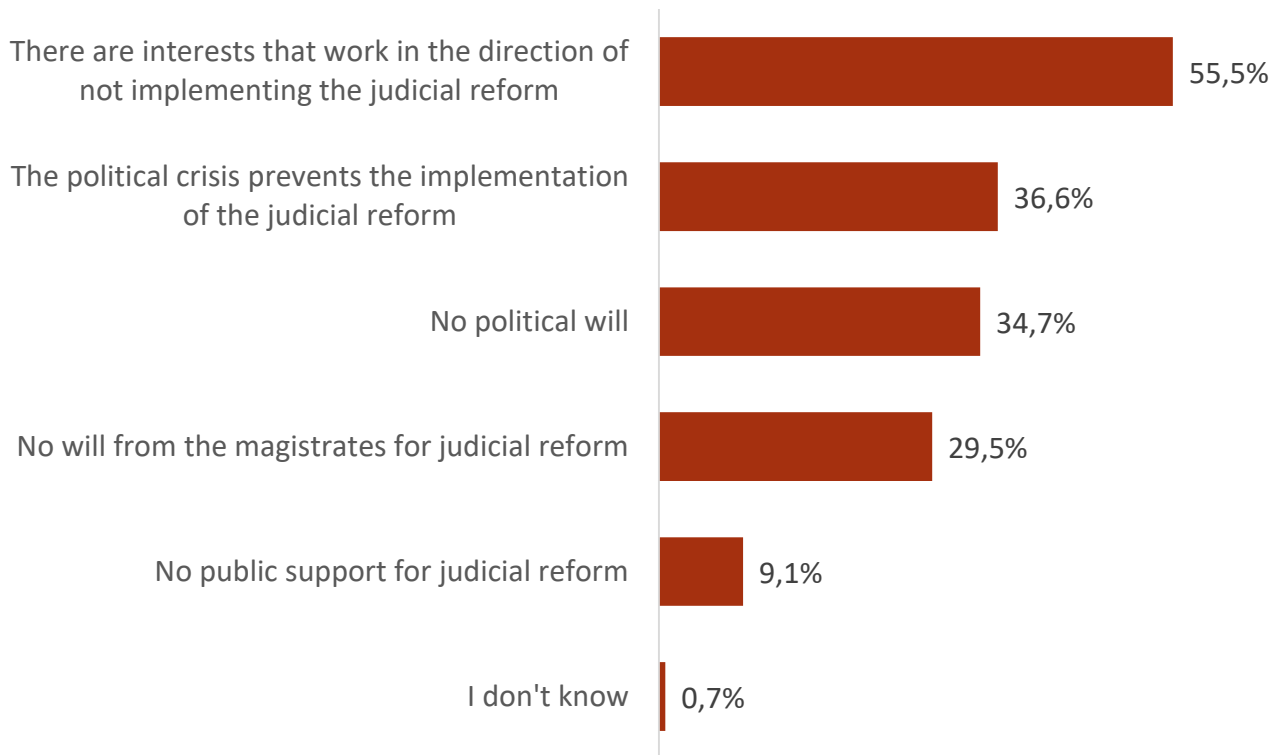
Women are more likely than men to believe that poor results have been achieved, while men are more likely to indicate that the judiciary has made no progress at all. People with higher education and residents of the capital, as well as those working in the public sector, are more likely to think that there have been results, albeit weak, while residents of small towns and villages share more critical views.

The political divisions along the "status quo-change" axis also affect the assessments of the judicial reform. Voters who sympathise with parties that have been on the political horizon for a long time are more likely to see, albeit weak, changes as a result of judicial reform.

Among the leading reasons for the delay in judicial reform, the general public highlights the interests of groups working against the implementation of judicial reform (56%). Lack of political will and the political crisis are factors cited by about one-third of adult Bulgarians. Just under a third are of the opinion that magistrates lack the will for judicial reform. These results show that, from the point of view of public opinion, there are no "innocents" for the lack of judicial reform. As

a counterpoint to these assessments, the view that there is no public support is shared by only 9% of respondents.

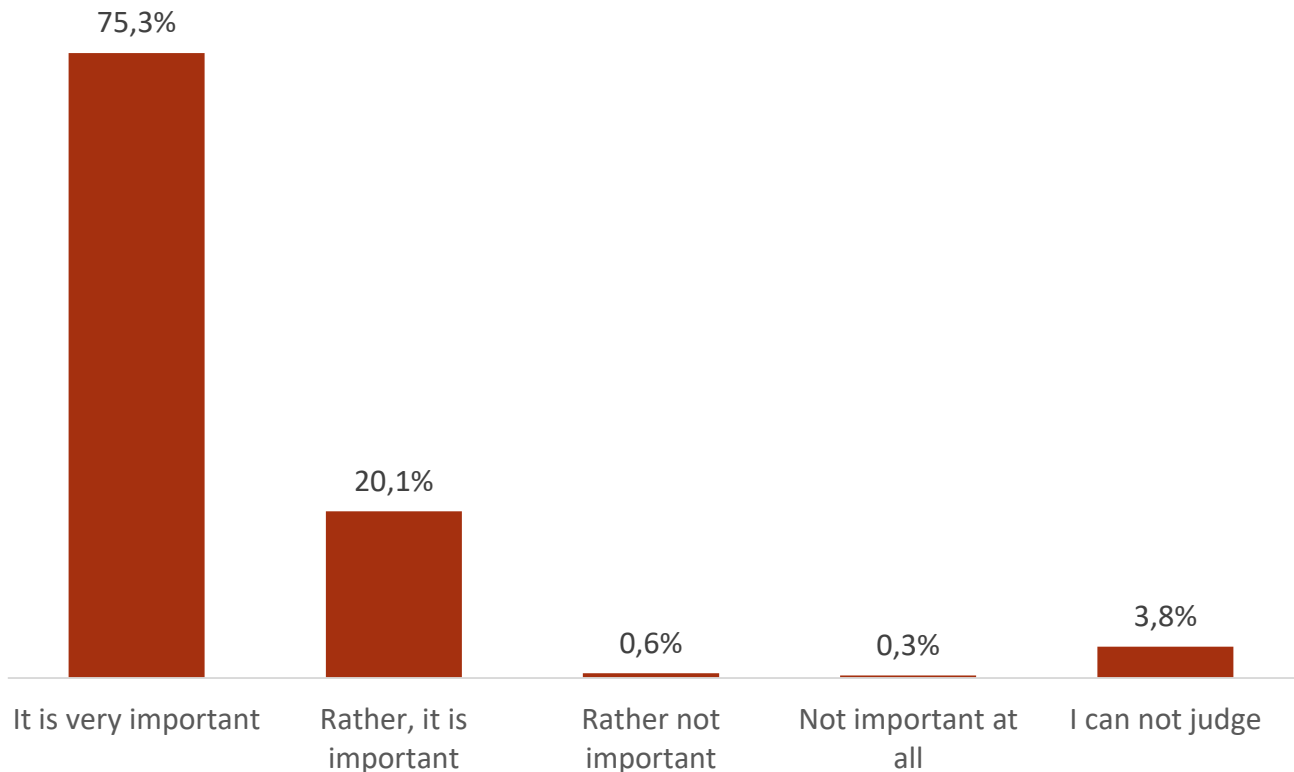
What are the reasons for the judicial reform to stall?



Those working in the private sector, residents of the capital and middle-aged people are more likely than others to believe that there are vested interests working to prevent judicial reform.

Assessments of the importance of judicial reform

How important do you think judicial reform is?



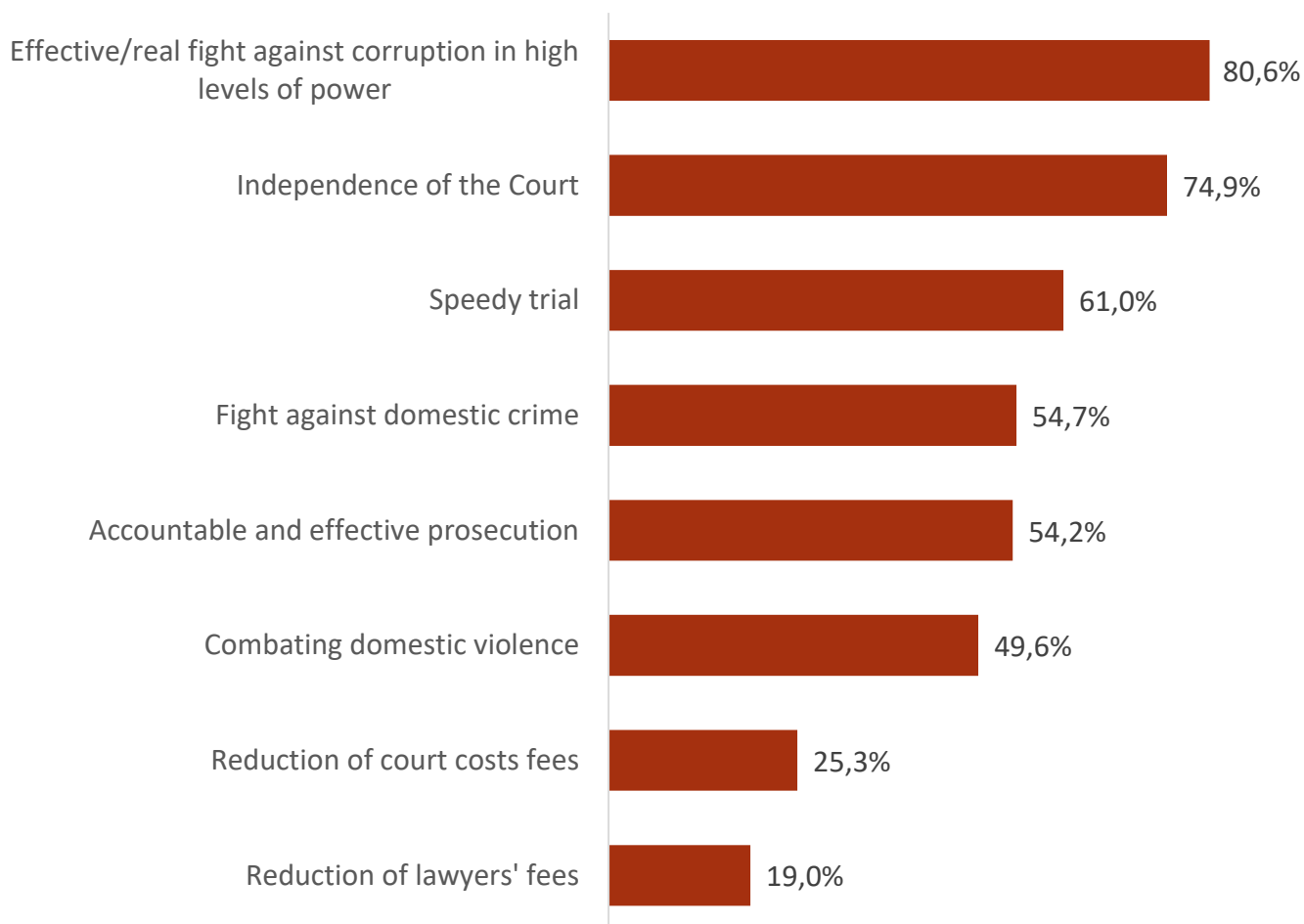
There is a broad consensus on the importance of judicial reform, reaching a record 95%. Three quarters (75%) consider judicial reform very important and 20% consider it rather important. Bulgarian citizens set a wide range of priorities for judicial reform in the next few years, the most important of which they consider to be: a real and effective fight against corruption in high levels of power, independence of the courts, a speedy trial, a fight against domestic crime, an accountable and effective prosecution service, and a fight against domestic violence.

Priorities for judicial reform

The priorities for the judiciary are clearly outlined in the face of the public and among the most important are not socio-economic measures that would have an impact on citizens and litigants (such as reduction of court fees and lawyers' fees), but the most neuralgic points and high expectations for judicial reform. Support for the first three priorities is very high, reaching four-

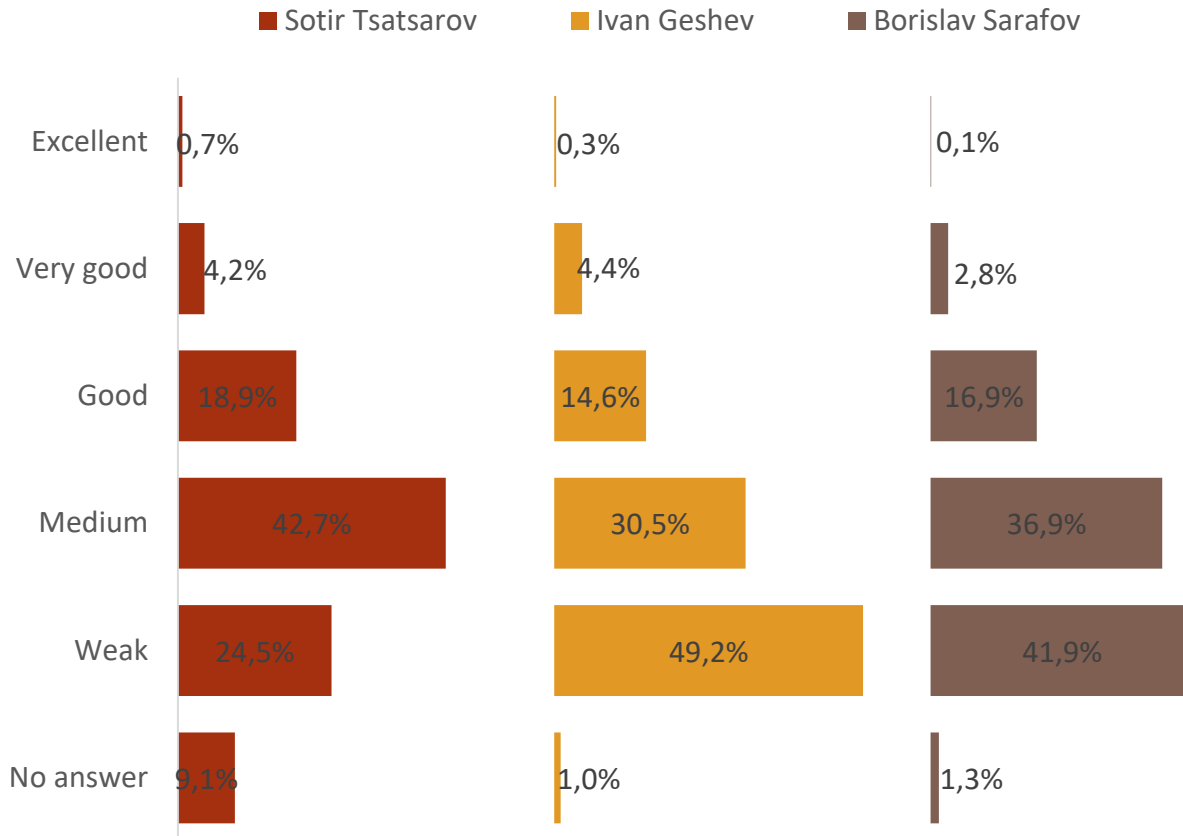
fifths, three-quarters and two-thirds of adult citizens, respectively. **These are an effective and real fight against high level corruption, independence of the courts and a speedy trial.** The two issues that directly affect citizens and are characterised by their mass scale (domestic crime and domestic violence) are also highlighted, each with around 50-55% support. **Women cite combating domestic violence as a priority 15 percentage points more often than men (it is a priority for 56% of women and 41% of men).** Domestic crime is a focus for residents of the capital and small towns. Domestic violence attracts the most attention and concern for those living in the capital and younger generations.

What is important/priority for you to be part of the judicial reform in the coming years?



Assessment of the work of the prosecution

Evaluation of the work of the prosecution under the leadership of:



Average assessment of the work of the prosecution under the leadership of			
	Sotir Tsatsarov	Ivan Geshev	Borislav Sarafov
	3,05	2,75	2,81
	<i>Survey conducted by Global Metrics, 2019</i>		<i>Survey conducted by Global Metrics, 2024</i>

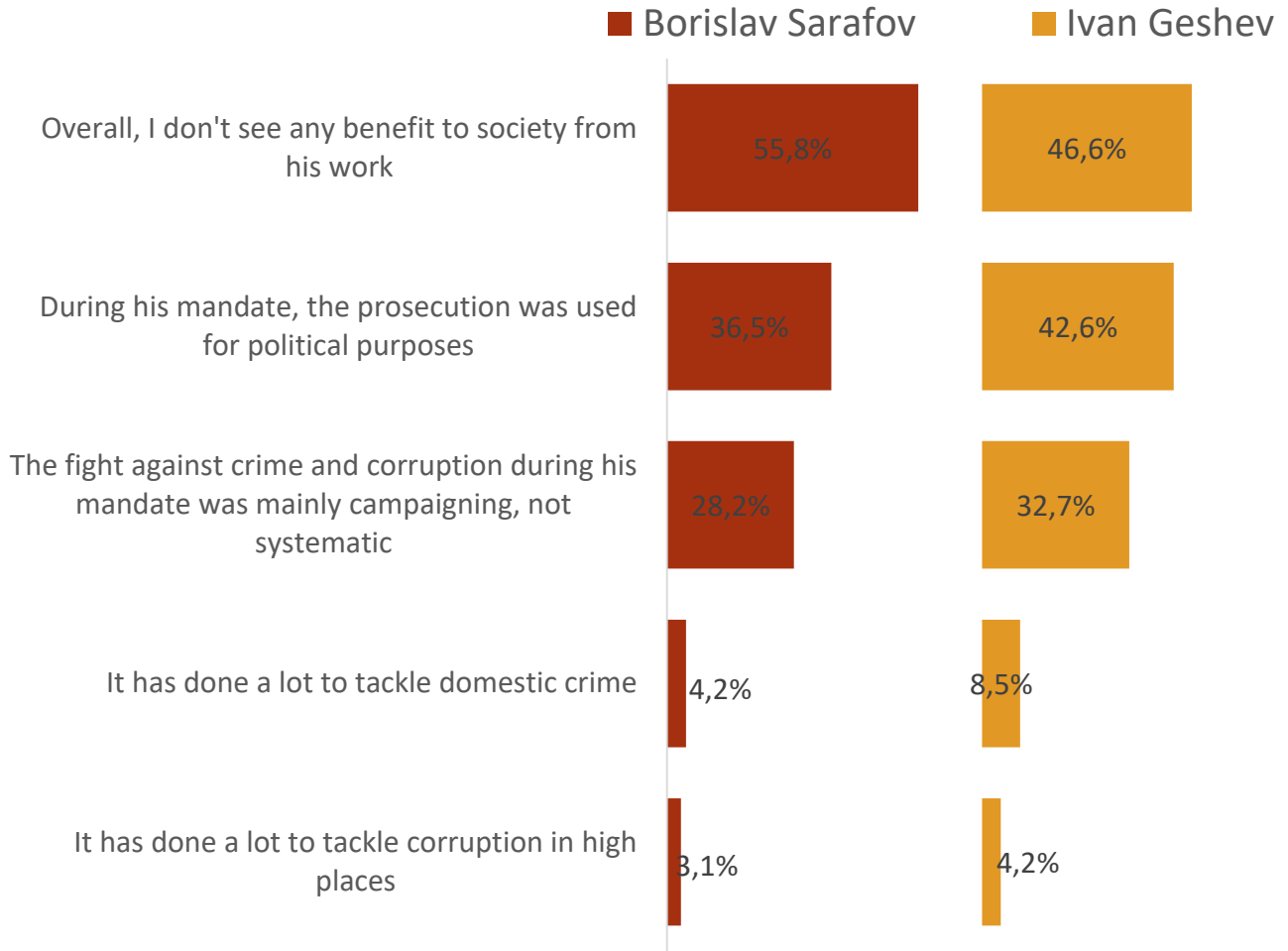
Assessments of the prosecution's performance over the past ten years have been predominantly low and reflect the repeatedly recorded low confidence in its work. According to public opinion, the work of the prosecution under the leadership of Sotir Tsatsarov, Ivan Geshev

and Borislav Sarafov on a five-point scale from 2 to 6 is concentrated in "Weak" 2 and "Average" 3. However, there are also specifics - while the ratings for Sotir Tsatsarov were also critical, but pulled into the more moderate positions of the scale (good rating - 19%, average - 43%, weak - 25%), the performance of the prosecutor's office under Ivan Geshev was given twice as many weak ratings (49%). The same tendency is maintained, although slightly mitigated, in the assessments of Borislav Sarafov, for whom 42% of respondents gave weak ratings. **The average ratings for the work of the heads of the prosecutor's office in the period 2016-2024 are around "average" three - for Sotir Tsatsarov 3.05, for Ivan Geshev 2.75 and for Borislav Sarafov 2.81**

Performance evaluations of the Prosecutor General

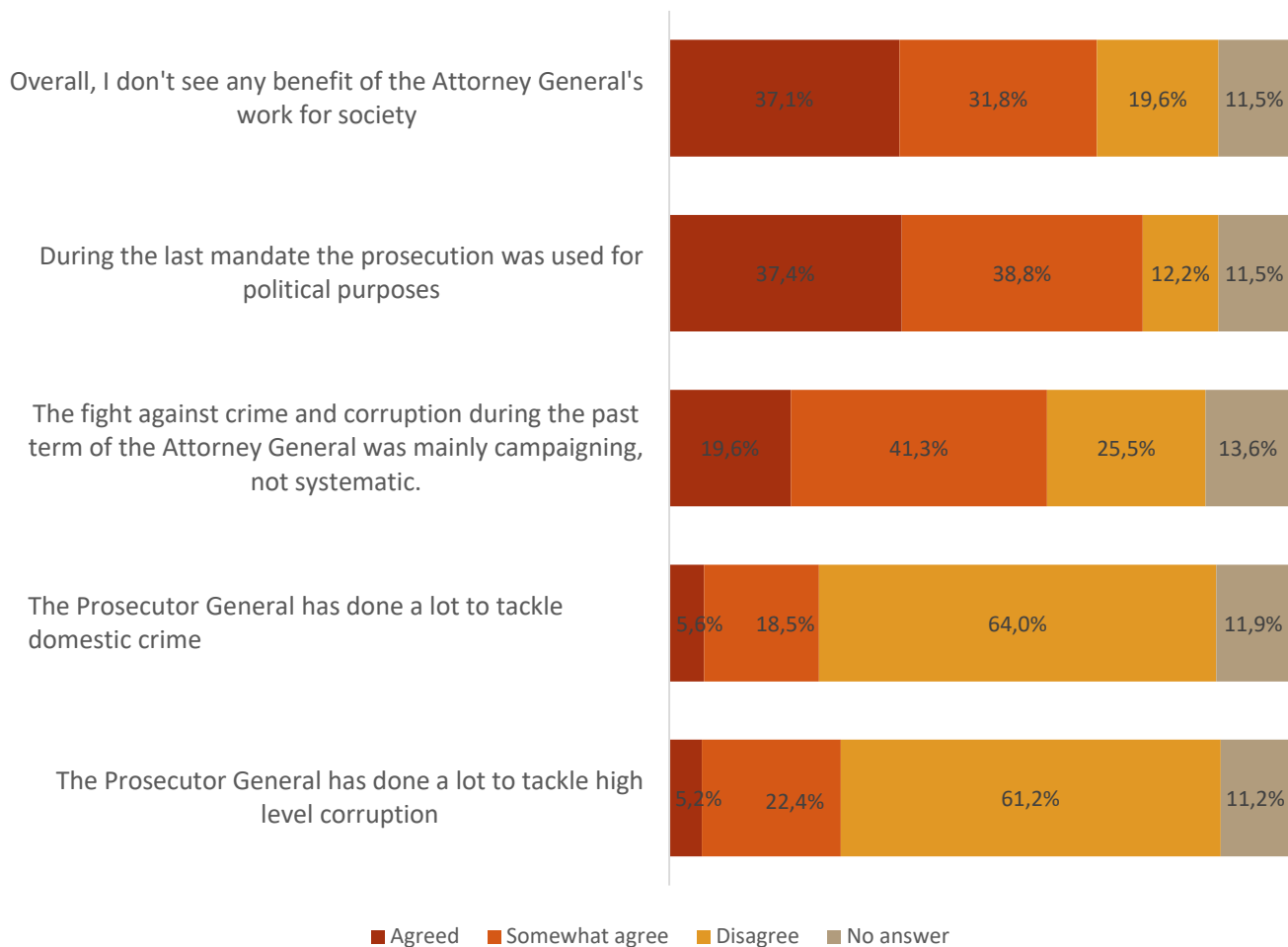
The evaluations of the three heads of the prosecutor's office in the period 2016-2024 show highly critical opinions, which are an indicator of weak results in tackling both domestic crime and high-level corruption. Citizens see the work in these areas mainly as campaigning, and the prevailing opinion is that **the Prosecutor's Office is used for political purposes** and there are no benefits for society from the work of the Prosecutor General.

Which of the following opinions about the Attorney General's work is closest to yours:



Survey conducted by Global Metrics for the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives, December 2024

Evaluation of the work of Sotir Tsatsarov



Survey conducted by Global Metrics for the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives, 2019