Reset.

pollytix
strategic research

The culture of debate in Social Media

Nationwide comprehensive representative survey of internet users
eligible to vote, conducted: 22-29 June 2021, n=3,009
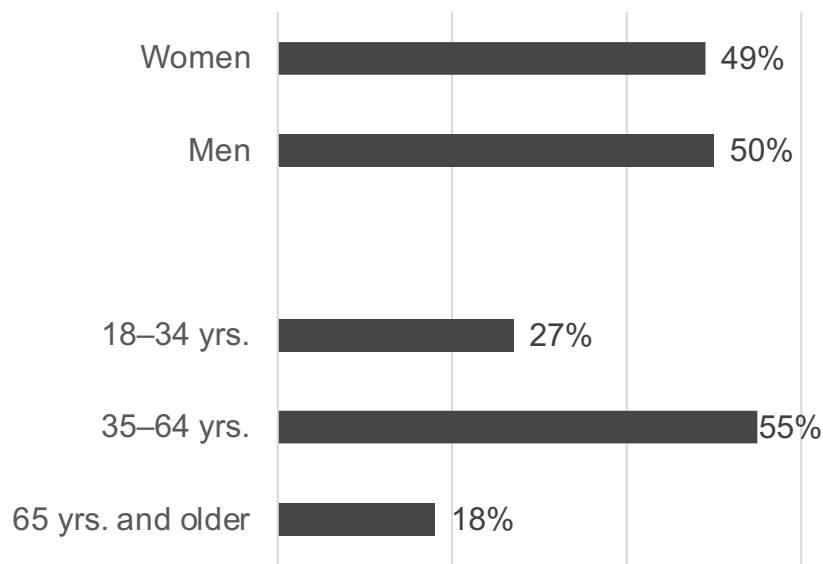
July 26 2021

Study design

Survey period

June 22 to June 29 2021

Survey method

Online survey / CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview)

Sample size and population

n = 3.009 internet users eligible to vote

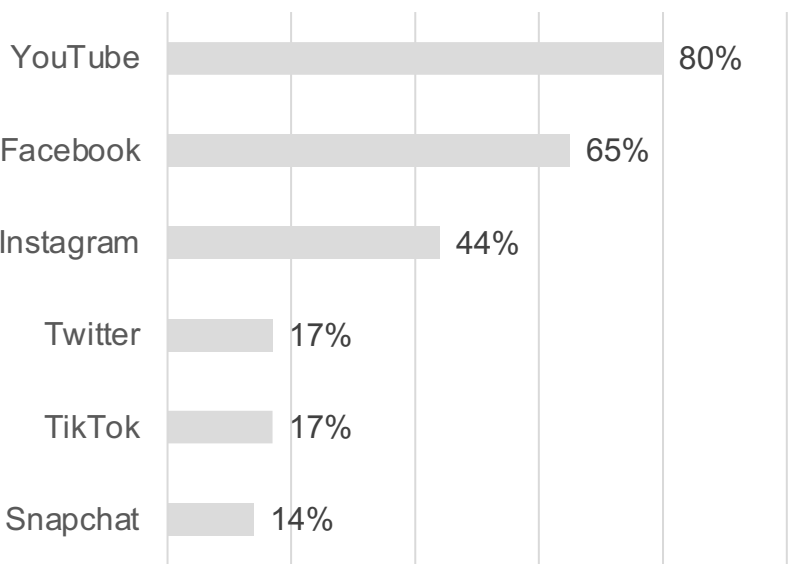|	
Women	49%
Men	50%
18–34 yrs.	27%
35–64 yrs.	55%
65 yrs. and older	18%

Data is weighted to ensure that the results are representative.

* Maximum margin of error for n=3,009 with a 95% confidence interval: +/- 1.8%.

Definitions

Social media users

Users of the various services

YouTube	80%
Facebook	65%
Instagram	44%
Twitter	17%
TikTok	17%
Snapchat	14%

91% of all internet users use at least one of the above-mentioned sites (= social media users)

Deviations from 100% due to rounding

Executive Summary

- Democracy thrives on debate, participation and joining in the conversation within <mark>digital public spaces</mark>. But the question of whether our democracy benefits, in fact, from the presence of digital debate fora is a subject of controversy, as 48 percent of Internet users participating in those fora – almost one out of two of the eligible voters we surveyed – see <mark>no enhancement of our democracy</mark> because of their existence.

- While more than two-thirds of internet users eligible to vote consider traditional media such as local newspapers and officially recognized public radio to have <mark>a rather positive influence on the culture of discussion</mark>, <mark>only every third internet user</mark> considers <mark>social media to have such a positive impact</mark>.

- The origin of this rather negative influence can be seen in the manner in which debate is conducted on social media. One out of two persons considers the <mark>tone on social media to be too coarse</mark>. Only a clear majority of AfD voters, 64 percent, consider the tone not be too coarse. This can also be clearly seen in the current German federal election campaign: two thirds of those surveyed affirm they would prefer <mark>the election campaign to be conducted less aggressively</mark> online.

- Our survey shows that most <mark>social media users</mark> also encounter political content there–even as much as 40 percent (very) frequently. However, three out of four users <mark>refrain deliberately from entering into political debates</mark>. A clear majority of users (63 percent) remain passive on the whole concerning the topic of politics, <mark>participating rarely or not at all via likes, posts, comments or the sharing of articles of a political nature</mark>. Only a small minority (15 percent) frequently comment on political issues online, with younger men and AfD supporters representing a disproportionately large number of individuals. The results of this survey show that the public debate cannot be considered inclusive.

01
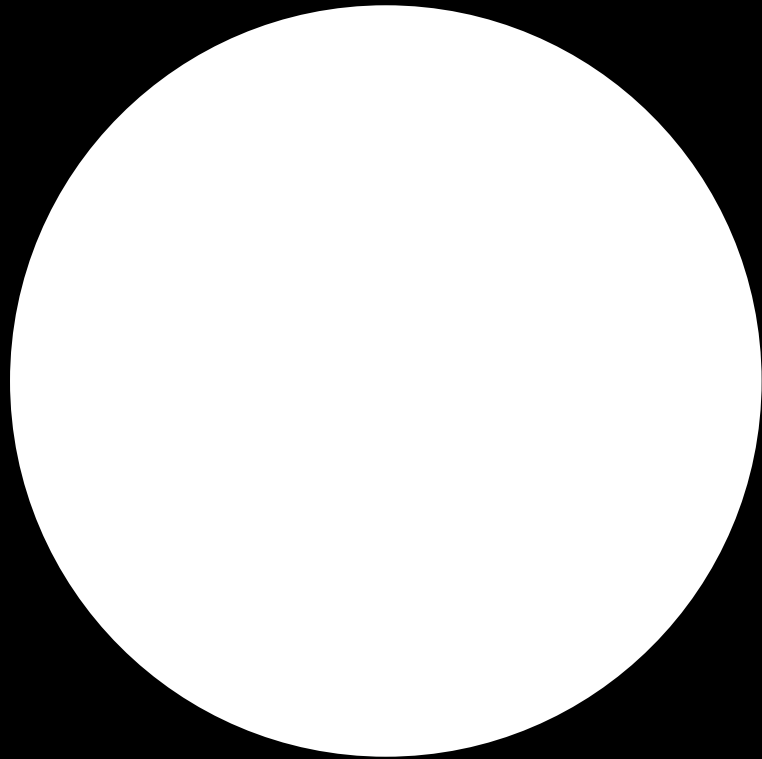
The culture of debate in social media

Divided opinion as to whether debates on social media enhance democracy

Perception of Social Media

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?

„Debates conducted on social media can enhance our democracy.“

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

		disagree completely	disagree somwhat	somewhat agree	completely agree
All		48%			43%
Gender	Women	50%			39%
	Men	46%			47%
Age	18-34	43%			49%
	35-64	51%			40%
	65+	47%			44%
Gender / Age	F 18-34	47%			44%
	F 35-64	52%			36%
	F 65+	48%			39%
	M 18-34	40%			53%
	M 35-64	49%			44%
	M 65+	45%			50%

The culture of debate in social media

Internet users located in the political centre or with low interest in politics are less likely to consider democracy to be enhanced
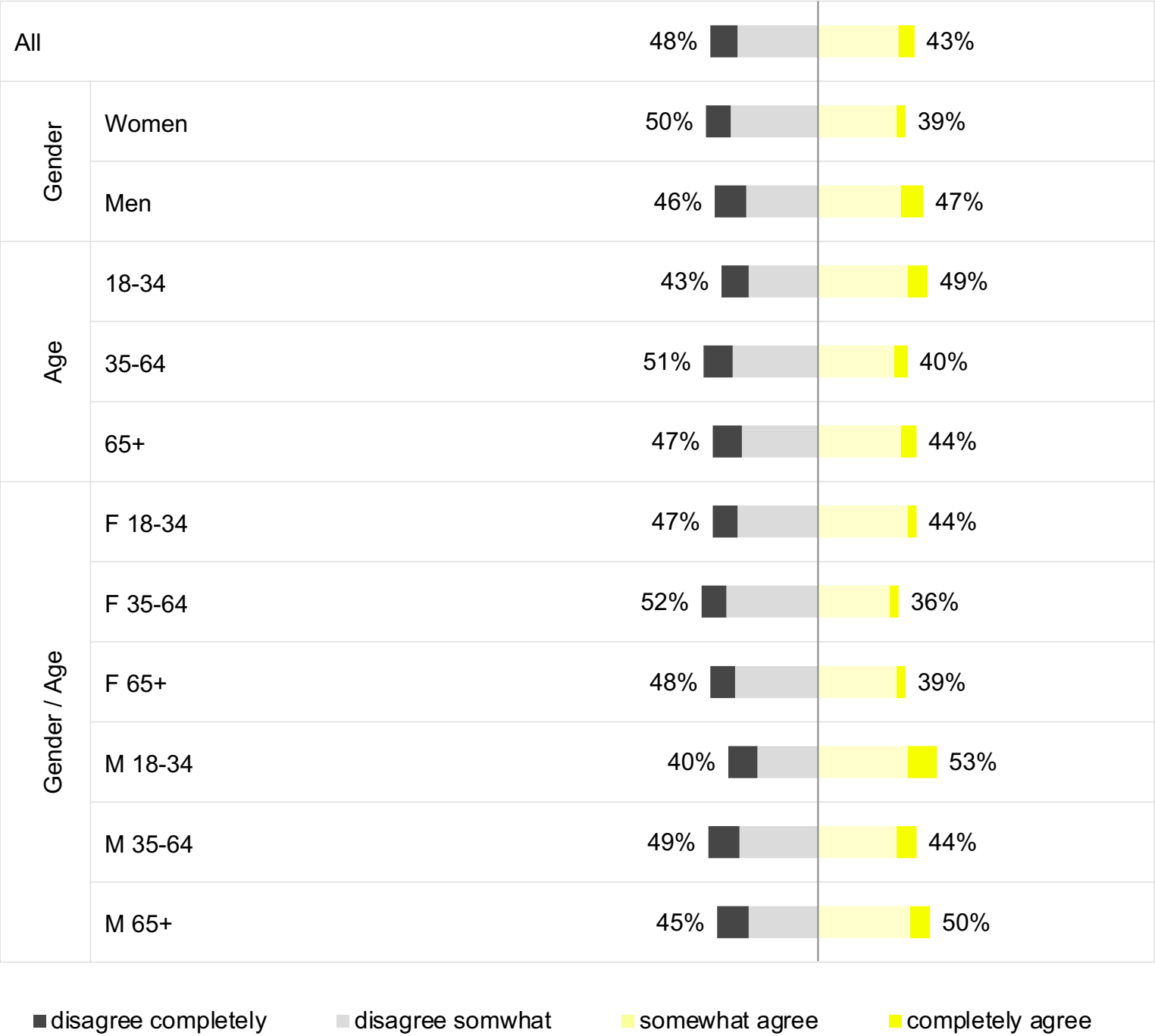
Perception of Social Media

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?

<mark>*„Debates conducted on social media can enhance our democracy.“*</mark>

		disagree completely	disagree somewhat	somewhat agree	completely agree
All		48%			43%
Polit. self-identification*	Political Left	48%			44%
	Political Centre	50%			37%
	Political Right	45%			51%
Polit. interest	low	57%			26%
	moderate	50%			41%
	somewhat/very strong	44%			50%

- disagree completely
- disagree somewhat
- somewhat agree
- completely agree

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.

*Political self-identification on a left-right scale of 0-10.
Grouped values: 0-4=left, 5=centre, 6-10=right.

More than one out of two persons hold a negative view of the influence of social media on the culture of discussion in Germany

Influence on culture of debate

Do you feel the following have a rather positive or a rather negative influence on the manner in which discussions are carried out in Germany?

	rather positive	rather negative	don't know
Local newspapers	69%	18%	13%
Public Radio/TV	67%	21%	11%
Social media	33%	54%	13%
Facebook	21%	63%	17%
Twitter	20%	53%	27%
BILD-Zeitung (Tabloid)	17%	69%	14%

■ rather positive ■ rather negative ■ don't know

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.
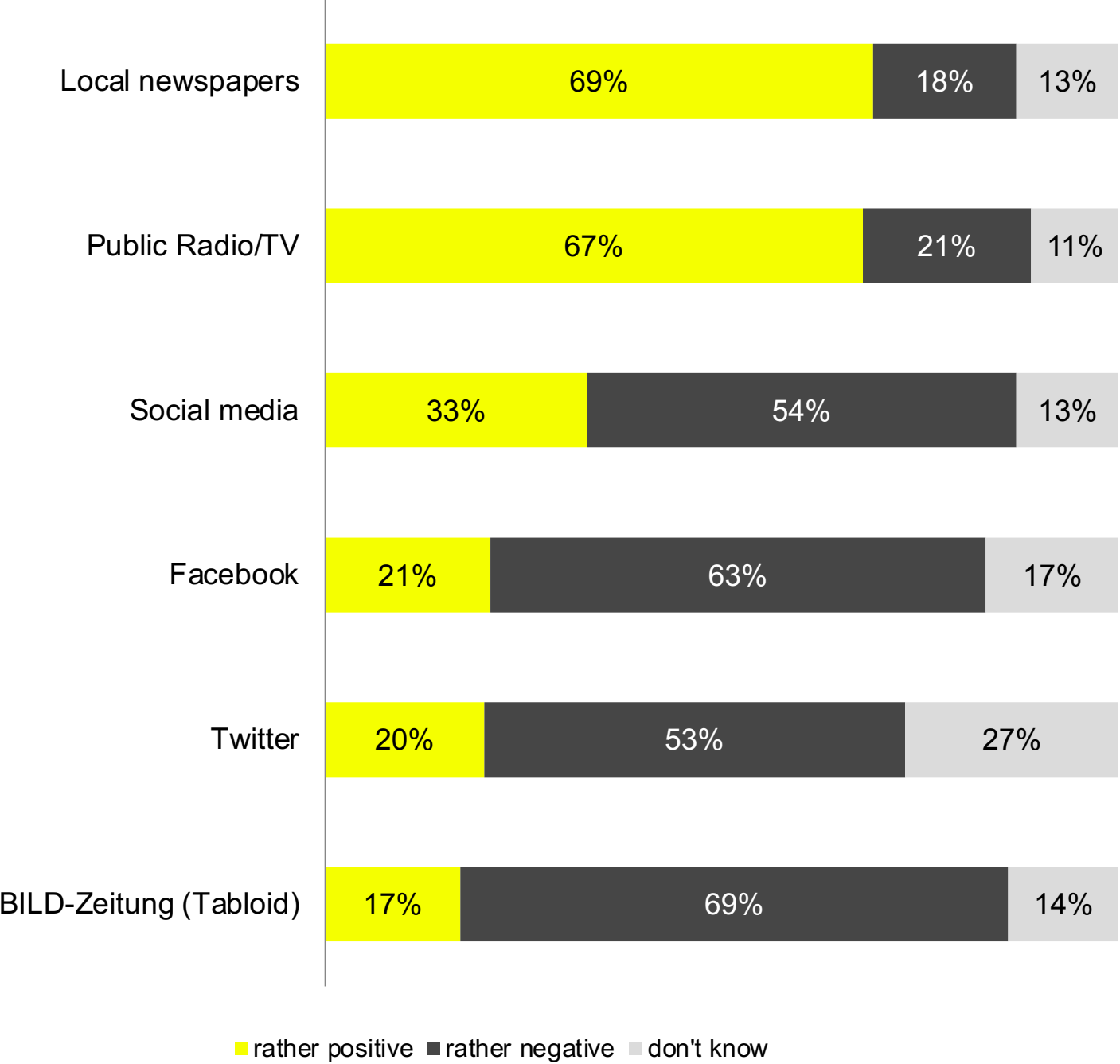
The majority holding a negative view is independent of age and gender

Influence on culture of debate

Do you feel the following have a rather positive or a rather negative influence on the manner in which discussions are carried out in Germany?

Social media
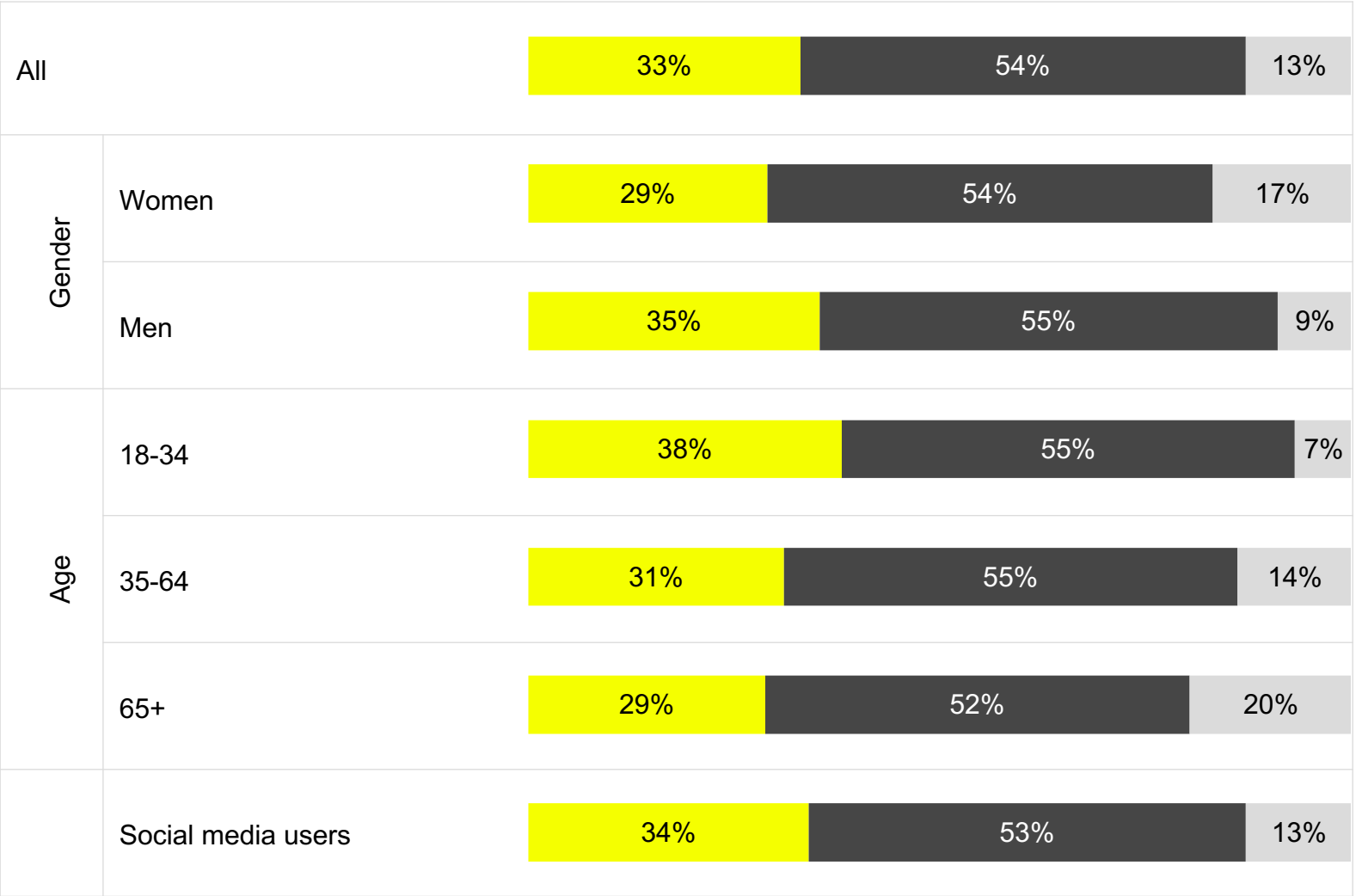
		rather positive	rather negative	don't know
All		33%	54%	13%
Gender	Women	29%	54%	17%
	Men	35%	55%	9%
Age	18-34	38%	55%	7%
	35-64	31%	55%	14%
	65+	29%	52%	20%
	Social media users	34%	53%	13%

■ rather positive   ■ rather negative   ■ don't know

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

The culture of debate in social media

Even among Facebook users, only one in four considers its influence to be positive

Influence on culture of debate

Do you feel the following have a rather positive or a rather negative influence on the manner in which discussions are carried out in Germany?

==Facebook==

		rather positive	rather negative	don't know
All		21%	63%	17%
Gender	Women	20%	60%	20%
	Men	22%	65%	13%
Age	18-34	24%	66%	10%
	35-64	20%	62%	17%
	65+	18%	58%	24%
	Facebook users	28%	57%	15%

■ rather positive   ■ rather negative   ■ don't know

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

On the other hand, Twitter users more often consider debates conducted on their social network as having a positive influence.
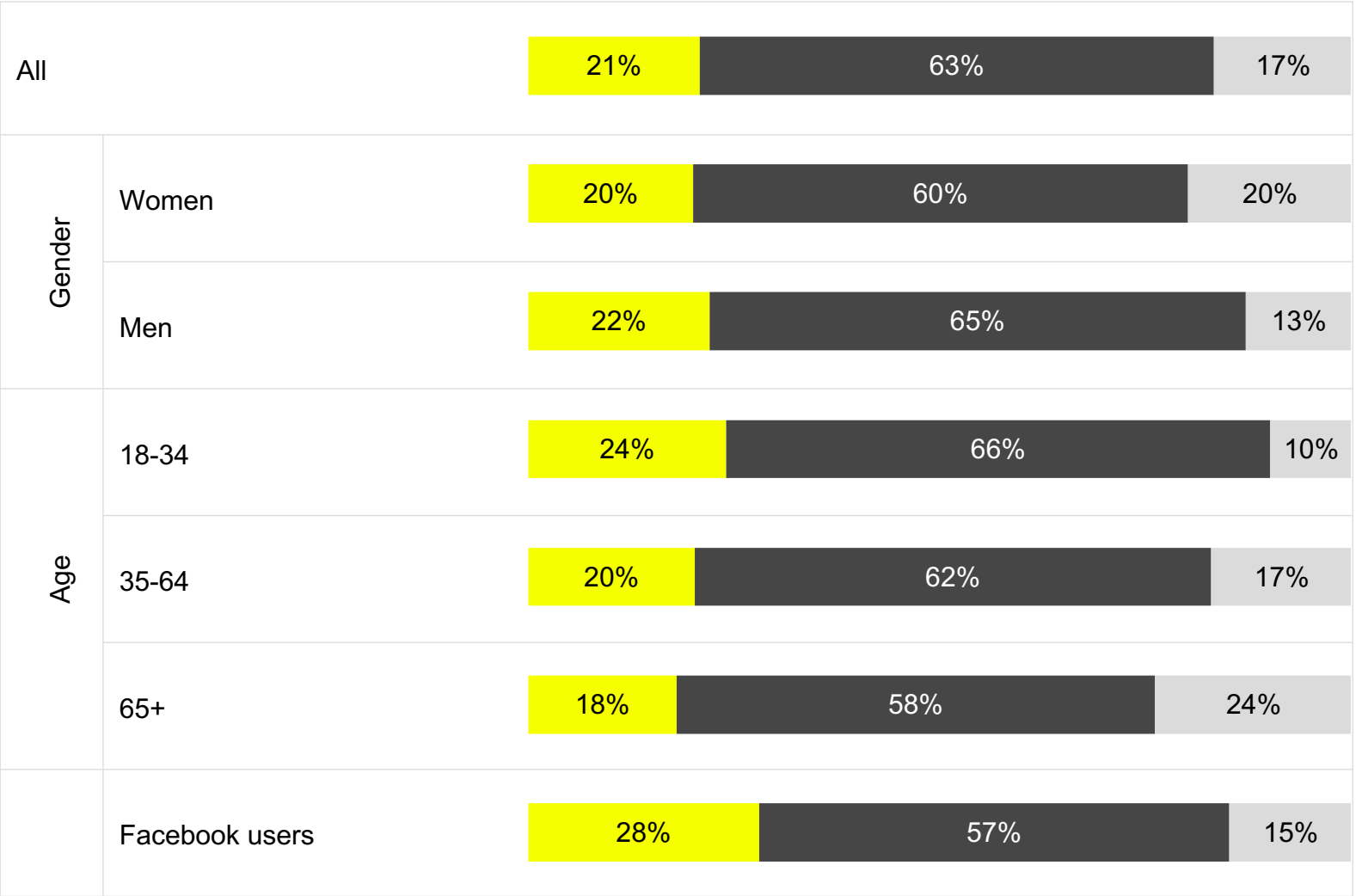
Influence on culture of debate

Do you feel the following have a rather positive or a rather negative influence on the manner in which discussions are carried out in Germany?

Twitter

		rather positive	rather negative	don't know
All		20%	53%	27%
Gender	Women	17%	51%	33%
	Men	23%	56%	21%
Age	18-34	30%	53%	17%
	35-64	17%	54%	28%
	65+	13%	50%	37%
	Twitter users	47%	41%	11%

■ rather positive　■ rather negative　■ don't know

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.
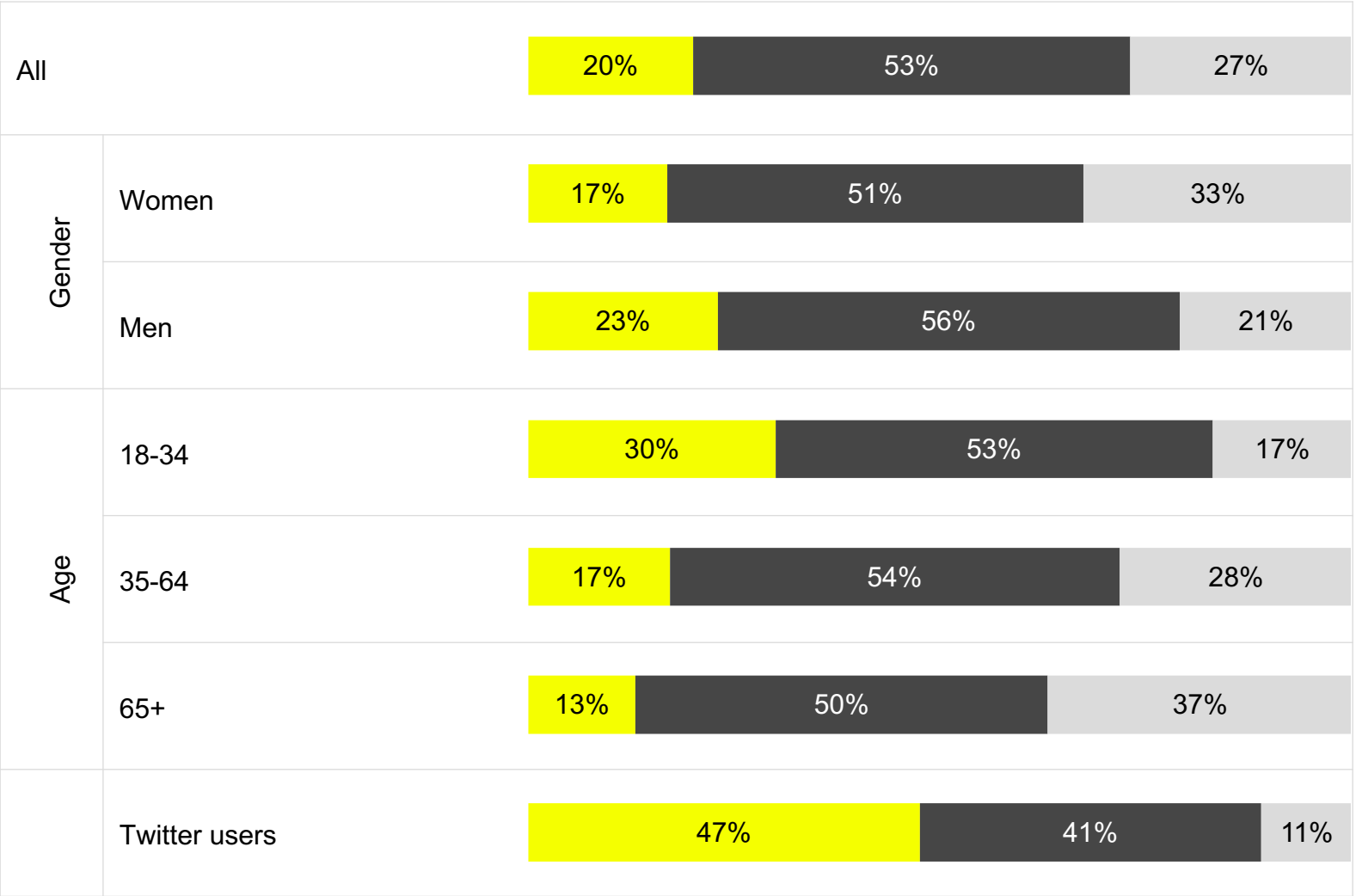
The culture of debate in social media

Approximately one out of two persons considers the tone on social media to be too coarse; this, irrespective of age or gender.

Perception of social media

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?

<mark>*„The tone of social media is too coarse for me."*</mark>

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

		disagree completely / disagree somewhat	somewhat agree / completely agree
All		42%	51%
Gender	Women	40%	52%
	Men	44%	50%
Age	18-34	44%	49%
	35-64	42%	51%
	65+	37%	54%
Gender / Age	F 18-34	42%	51%
	F 35-64	41%	50%
	F 65+	33%	55%
	M 18-34	48%	46%
	M 35-64	43%	52%
	M 65+	40%	52%

■ disagree completely   ■ disagree somwhat   ■ somewhat agree   ■ completely agree

The culture of debate in social media

Only among AfD voters does the majority consider the tone on social media not to be too coarse
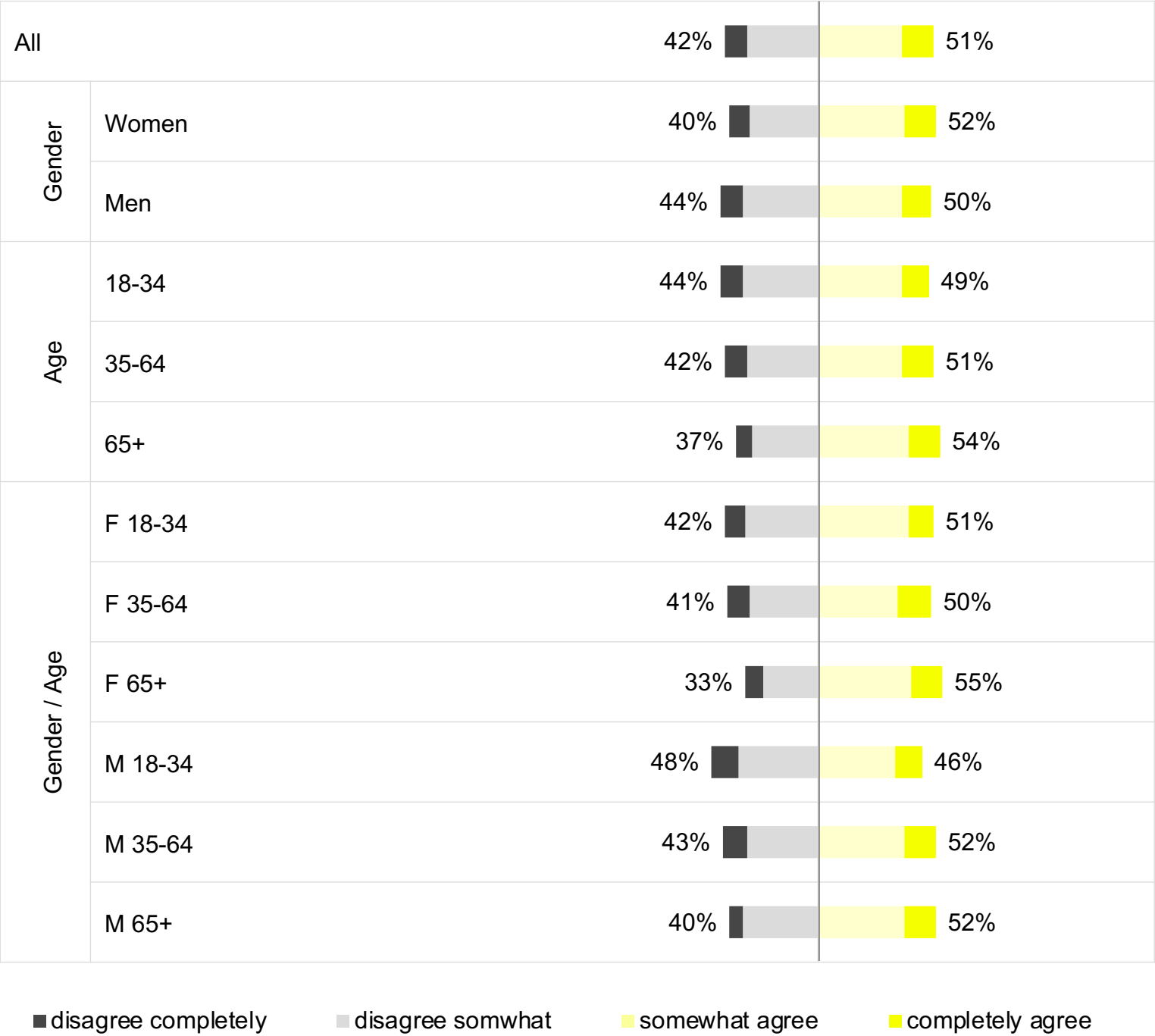
Perception of social media

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?

„The tone of social media is too coarse for me."

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.

*Political self-identification on a left-right scale of 0-10.
Grouped values: 0-4=left, 5=centre, 6-10=right.

		disagree	agree
All		42%	51%
Polit. self-identification*	Politisch Links	38%	55%
	Politisch Mitte	41%	49%
	Politisch Rechts	46%	48%
Voting intention	CDU/CSU	38%	56%
	SPD	41%	52%
	AfD	64%	32%
	FDP	39%	55%
	Linke	37%	57%
	Grüne	32%	59%

■ disagree completely   ■ disagree somwhat   ■ somewhat agree   ■ completely agree
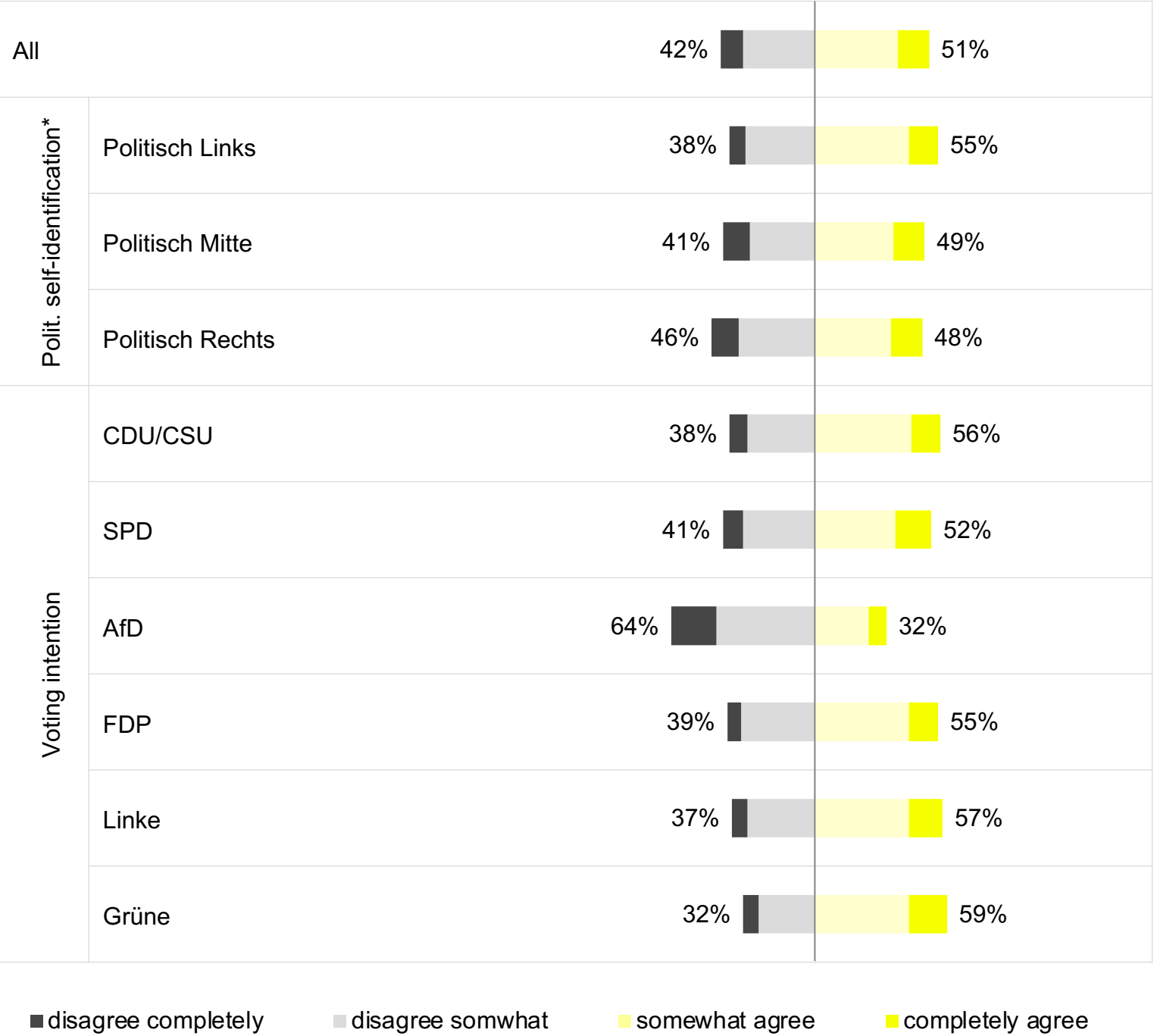
The culture of debate in social media

Even before the heated election phase, a strong wish for online campaigning to be conducted less aggressively

Integrity Federal Election 2021

The federal election is on 26 September. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the upcoming election?

„I would like to see less aggressive campaigning on the internet."

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

		disagree completely	disagree somewhat	somewhat agree	completely agree
All			23%		67%
Gender	Women		18%		69%
	Men		27%		65%
Age	18-34		25%		67%
	35-64		24%		64%
	65+		15%		76%
Voting intention	CDU/CSU		19%		73%
	SPD		18%		75%
	AfD	37%			55%
	FDP	31%			59%
	Linke		19%		73%
	Grüne		16%		75%

02

Political content and participation among social media users
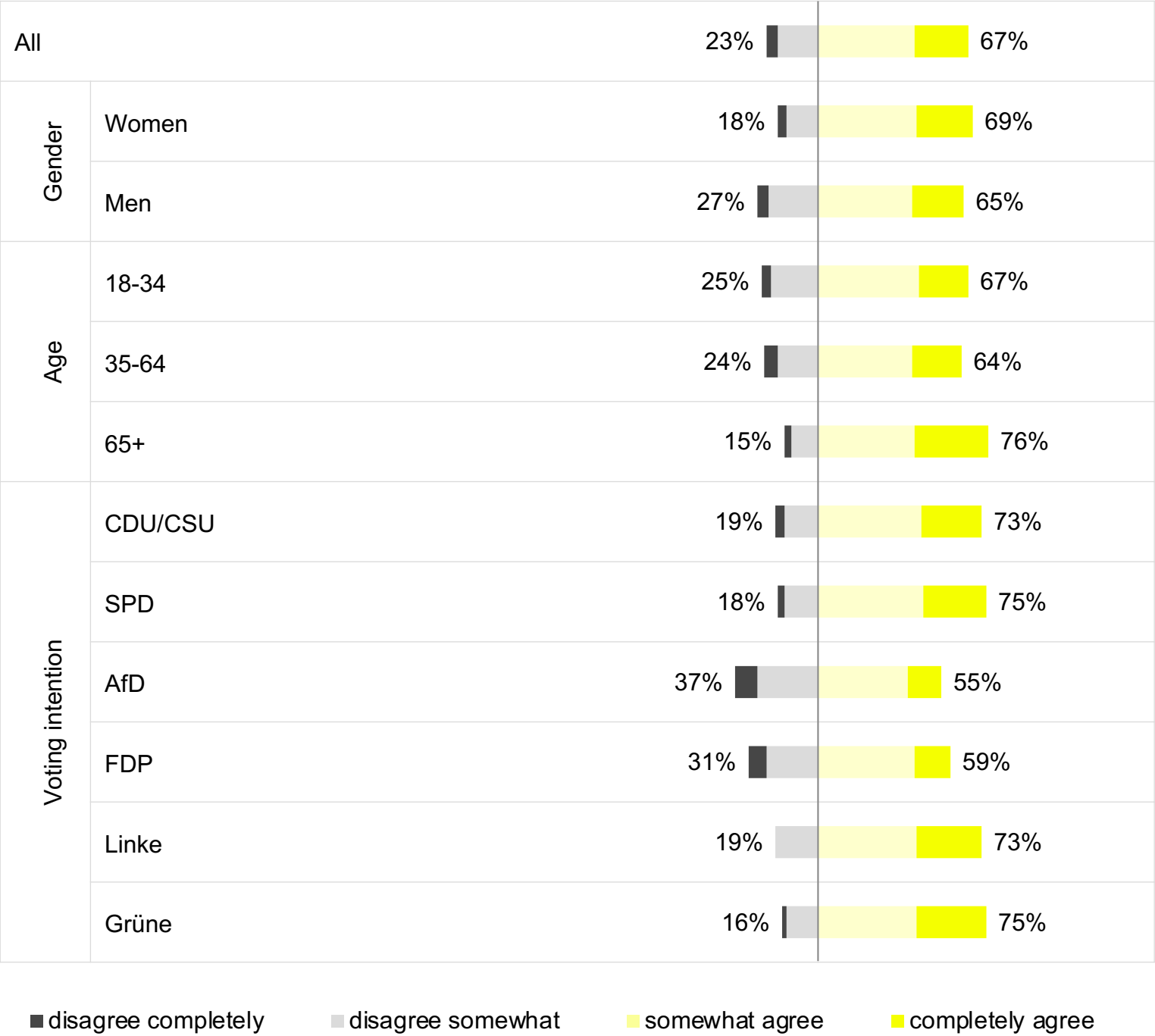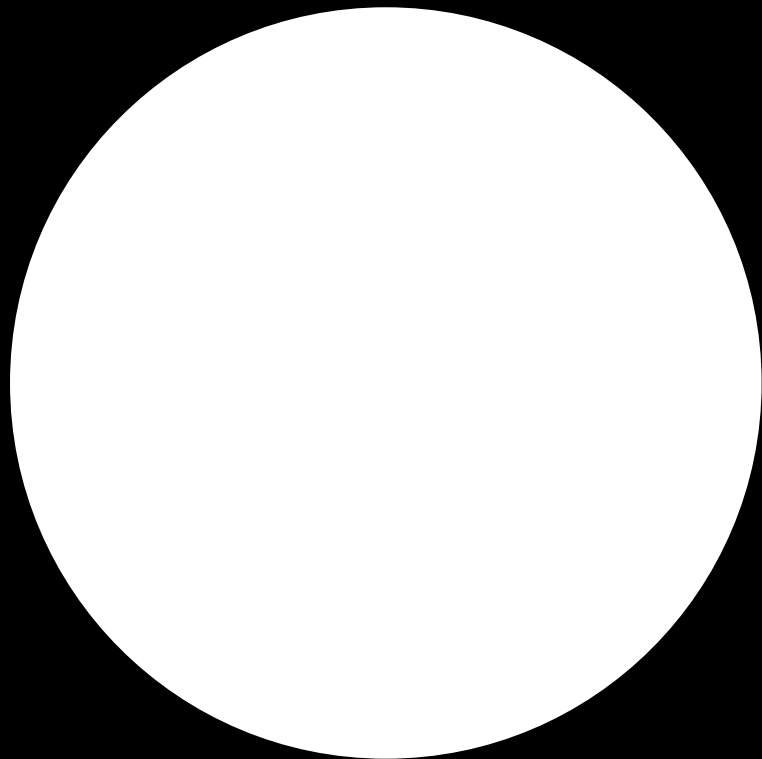
Political content and participation among social media users

Majority of social media users come across political content there, 40 percent even frequently to very frequently

Politics in social media

Thinking about the posts you come across on social media, how often are they about politicians, parties or political issues?

very frequently	8%
frequently	32%
	40%
sometimes	38%
rarely	15%
	20%
never	5%

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.
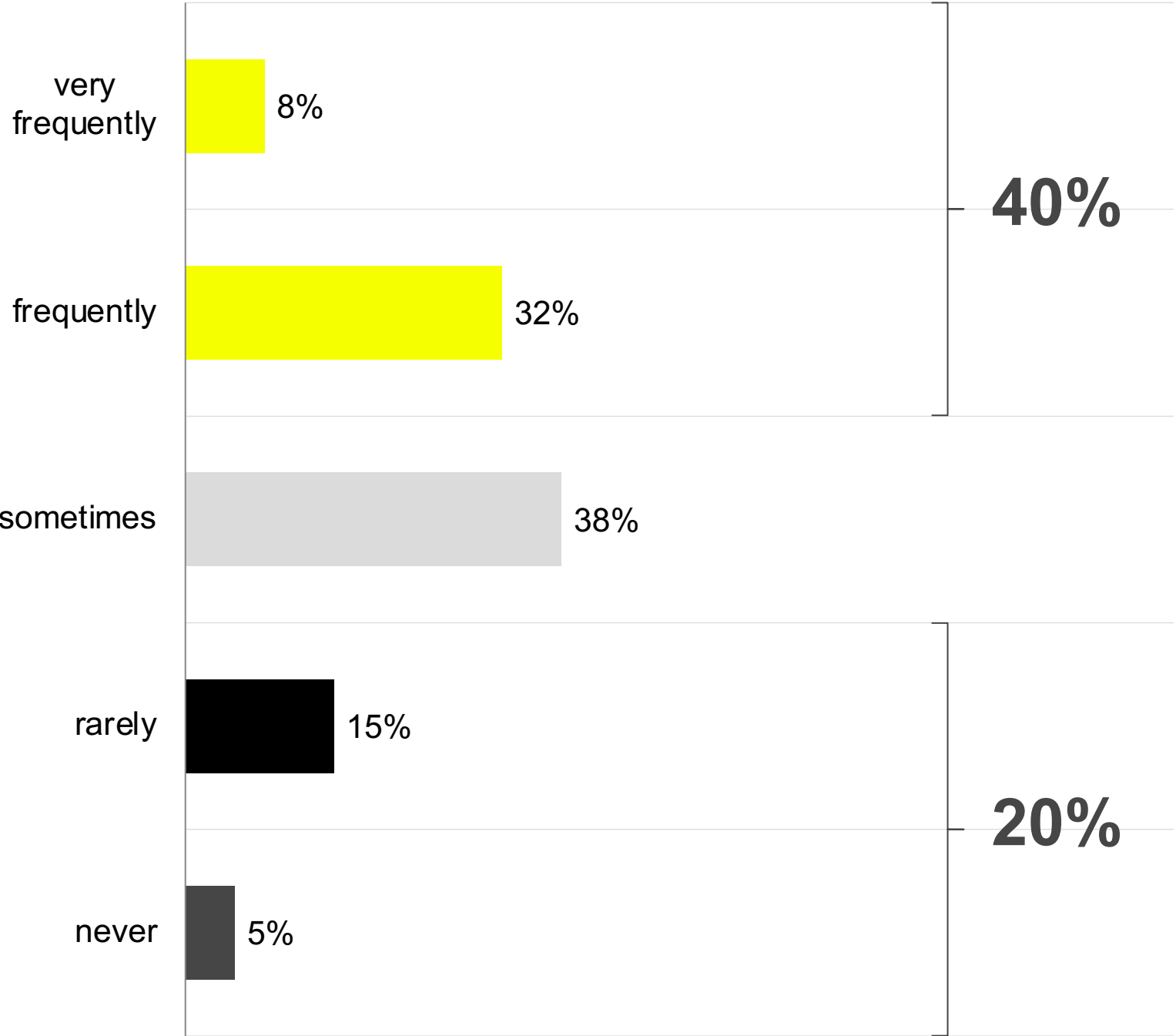
Political content in social media is more often perceived by men

(very) frequently see posts related to politics
—— Average

Basis: all social media users.

Figures in percent.

Alle	40			

Gender: Women 35, Men 44

Age: 18-24 42, 25-34 41, 35-44 40, 45-54 34, 55-64 37, 65+ 43

Gender / Age: F 18-34 39, F 35-65 32, F 65+ 37, M 18-34 45, M 35-65 42, M 65+ 49

Education: low 36, medium, high 43

Region: West 39, East 43

Voting intention: CDU/CSU 38, SPD 43, AfD 46, FDP 42, Linke 45, Grüne 43
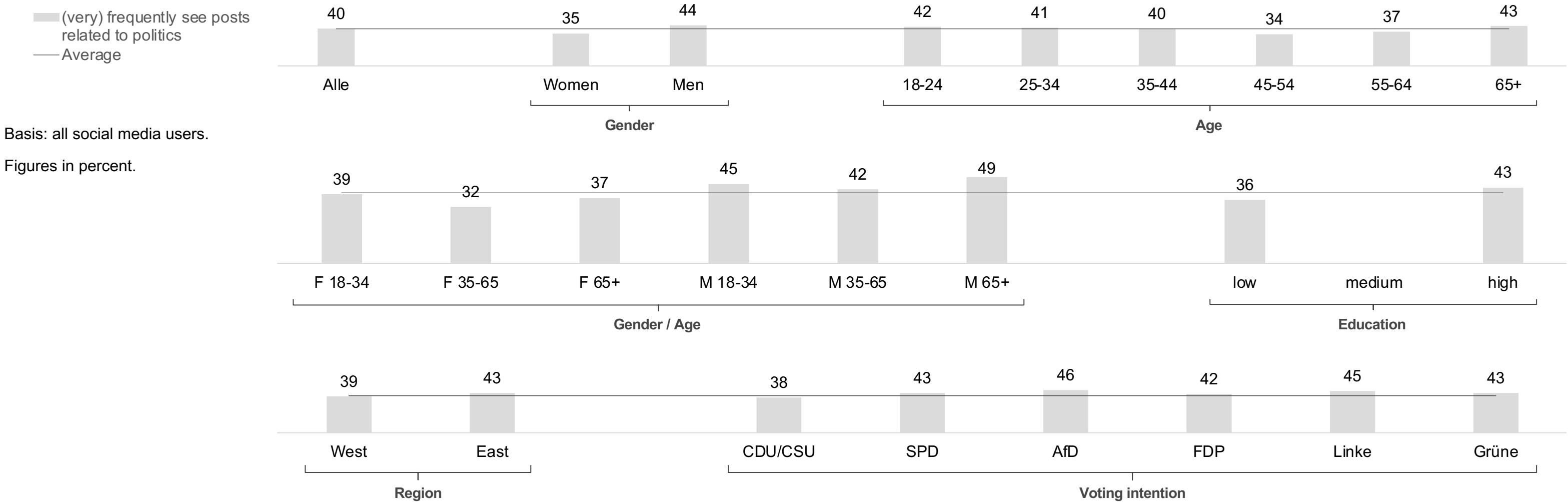
However, a clear majority of social media users prefer to refrain from participation in political discussions on social media

Perception of social media

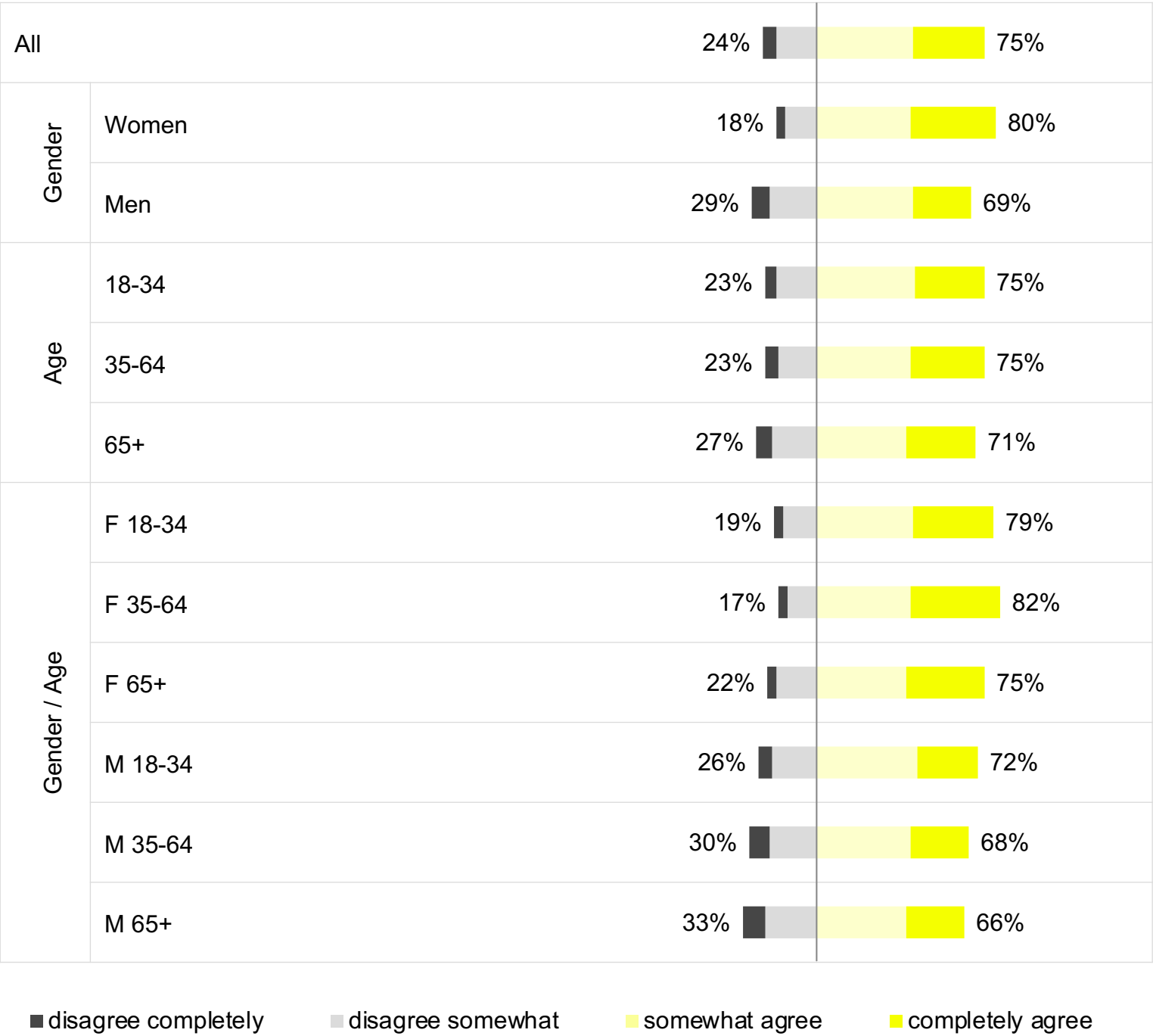To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?

„I refrain from entering into political discussions on social media."

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.

		disagree completely	disagree somewhat	somewhat agree	completely agree
All			24%		75%
Gender	Women		18%		80%
	Men		29%		69%
Age	18-34		23%		75%
	35-64		23%		75%
	65+		27%		71%
Gender / Age	F 18-34		19%		79%
	F 35-64		17%		82%
	F 65+		22%		75%
	M 18-34		26%		72%
	M 35-64		30%		68%
	M 65+		33%		66%

■ disagree completely   ■ disagree somewhat   ■ somewhat agree   ■ completely agree

The majority, however, rarely or never actively engage in political topics on social media.

Politics in social media

How often do you find yourself liking, sharing, commenting on or writing posts about politics on social media?
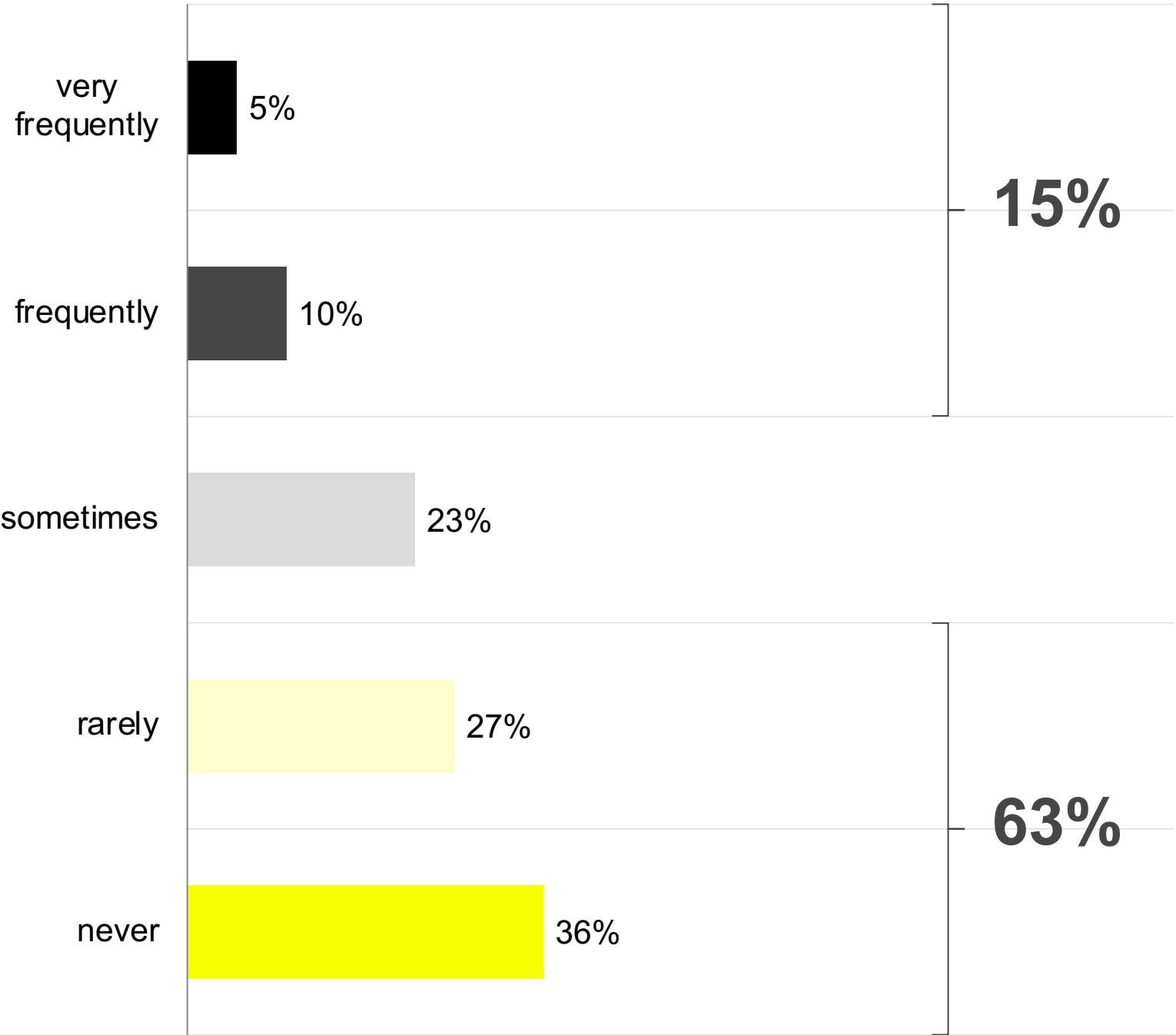
very frequently	5%
frequently	10%

15%

sometimes	23%
rarely	27%
never	36%

63%

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

Political content and participation among social media users

(very) frequent political participation in social media

— Average

Basis: all social media users.

Figures in percent.

| | All | | Women | Men | | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65+ |
| 15 | | | 11 | 18 | | 22 | 20 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 11 |

Gender **Age**

| F 18-34 | F 35-65 | F 65+ | M 18-34 | M 35-65 | M 65+ | low | medium | high |
| 17 | 9 | 8 | 24 | 16 | 12 | 14 | 14 | 16 |

Gender / Age **Education**

| West | East | | CDU/CSU | SPD | AfD | FDP | Linke | Grüne |
| 14 | 17 | | 14 | 17 | 22 | 16 | 17 | 16 |

Region **Voting intention**
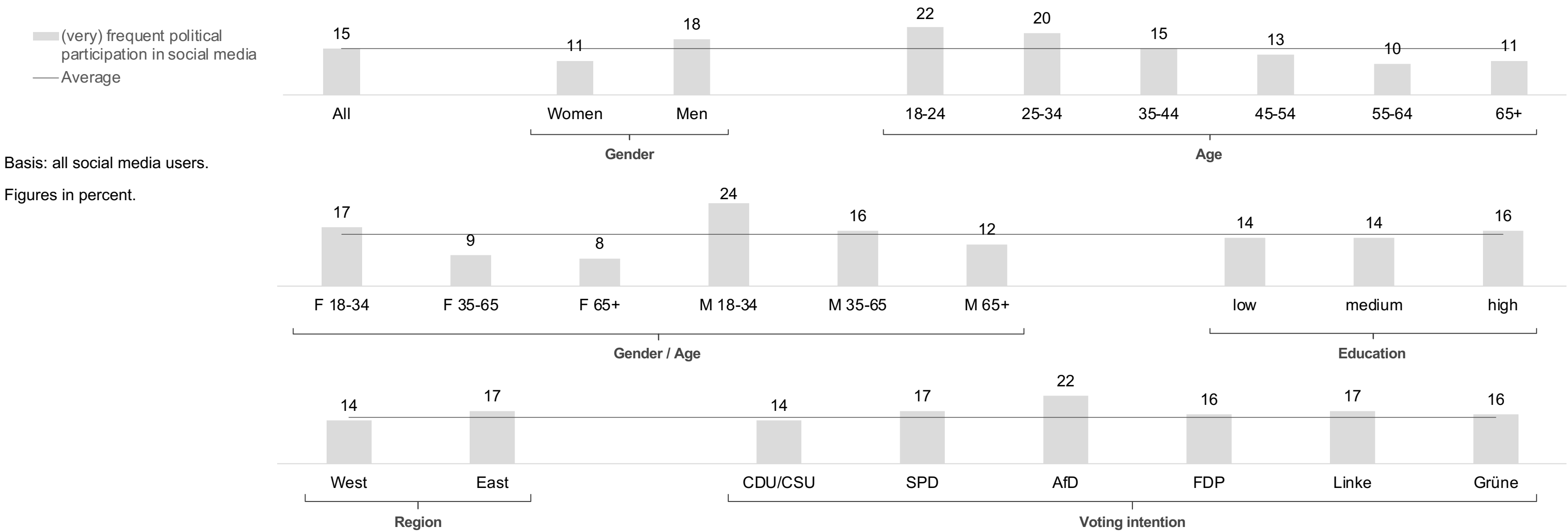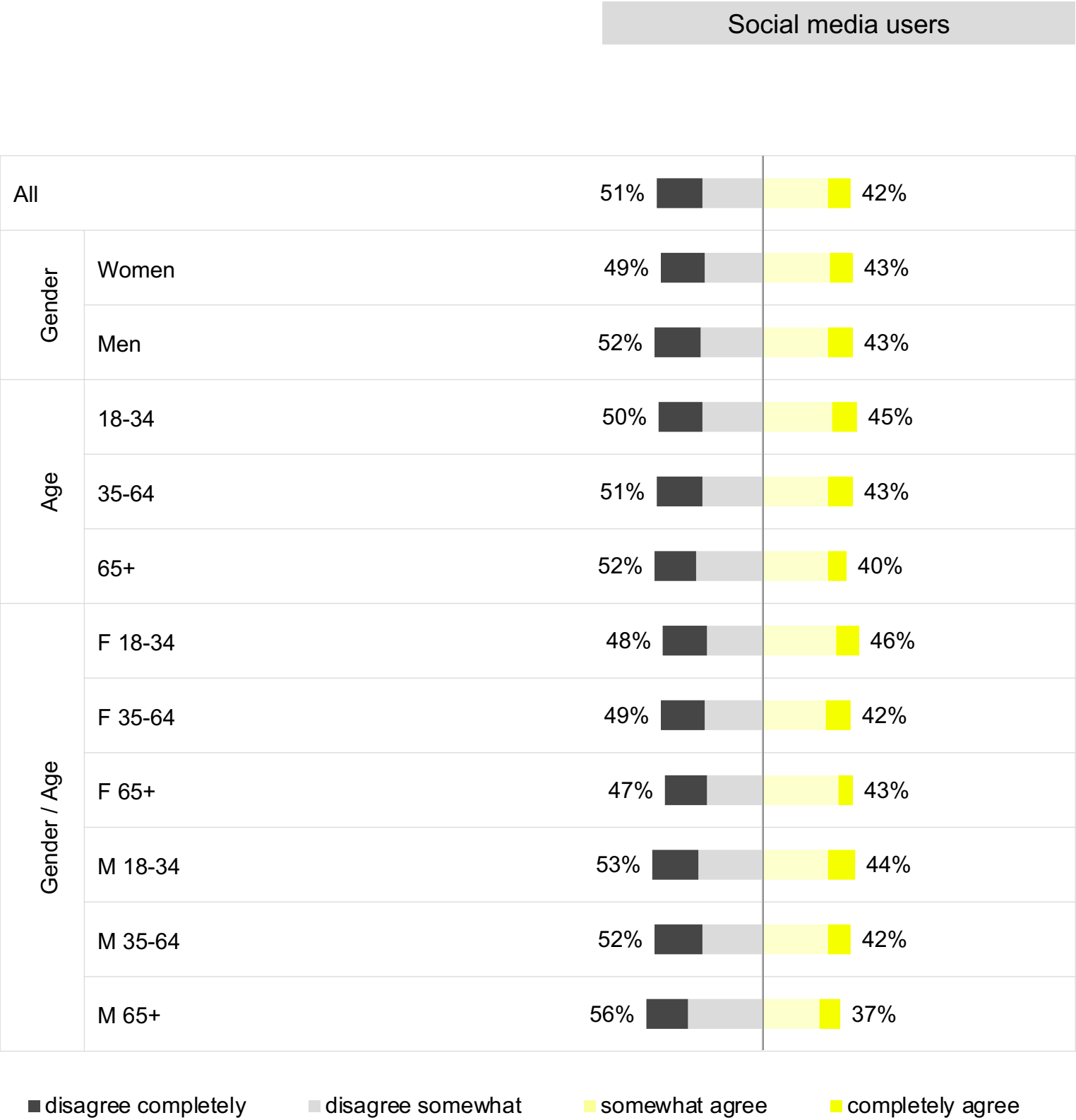
Social media users

"Political correctness" causes 42 percent to be reluctant to speak their mind on social media

Perception of social media

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?

„Because of political correctness, I sometimes am hesitant to say what I really think on social media.“

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

		disagree completely	somewhat agree
All		51%	42%
Gender	Women	49%	43%
	Men	52%	43%
Age	18-34	50%	45%
	35-64	51%	43%
	65+	52%	40%
Gender / Age	F 18-34	48%	46%
	F 35-64	49%	42%
	F 65+	47%	43%
	M 18-34	53%	44%
	M 35-64	52%	42%
	M 65+	56%	37%

■ disagree completely　■ disagree somewhat　■ somewhat agree　■ completely agree

People who are politically more "right-wing" are more likely to feel inhibited by "political correctness" on social media

Perception of social media

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about social media?
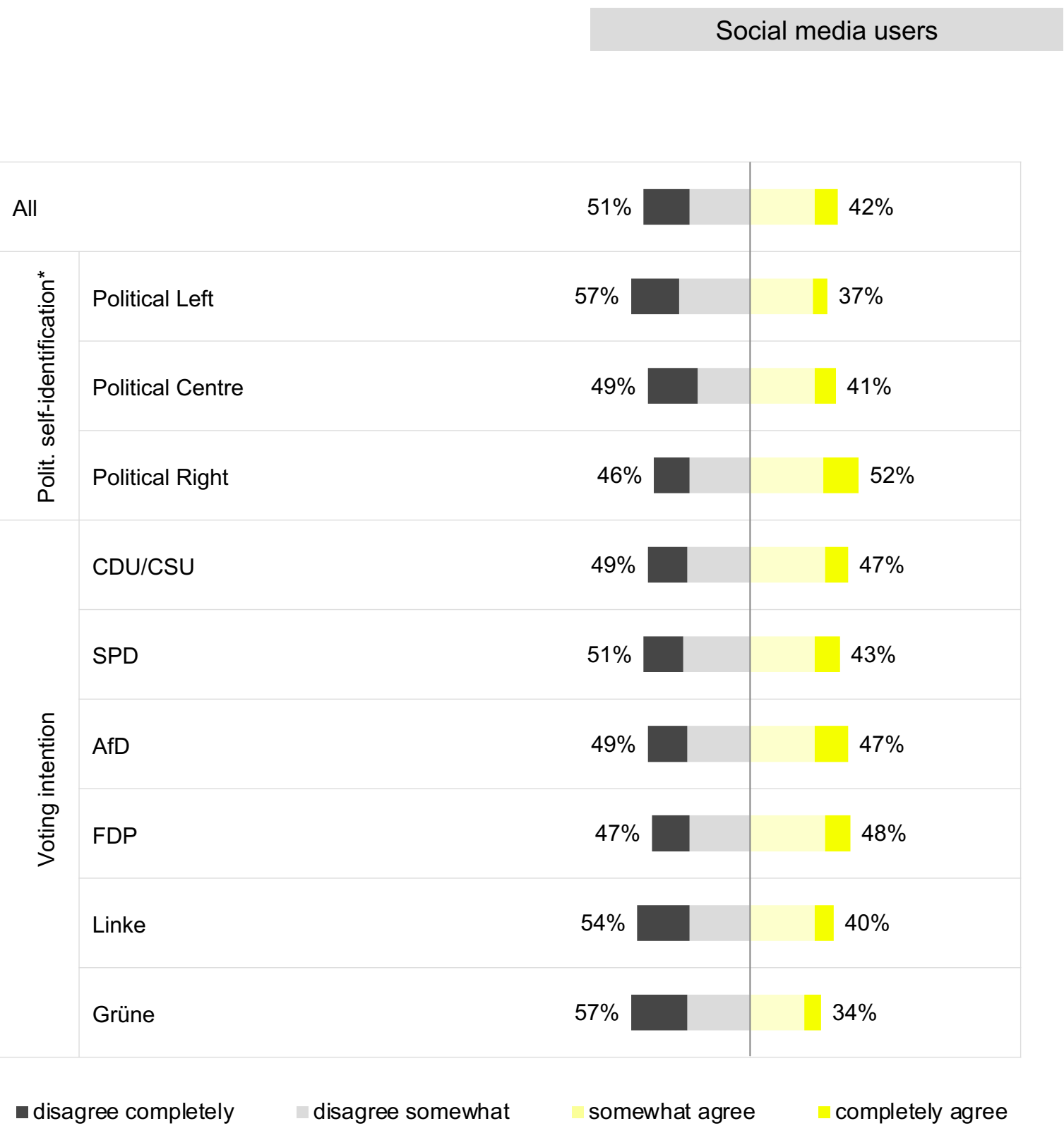
„Because of political correctness, I sometimes am hesitant to say what I really think on social media."

Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

*Political self-identification on a left-right scale of 0-10.

Grouped values: 0-4=left, 5=centre, 6-10=right.

			disagree completely	disagree somewhat	somewhat agree	completely agree
All			51%			42%
Polit. self-identification*	Political Left		57%			37%
	Political Centre		49%			41%
	Political Right		46%			52%
Voting intention	CDU/CSU		49%			47%
	SPD		51%			43%
	AfD		49%			47%
	FDP		47%			48%
	Linke		54%			40%
	Grüne		57%			34%

■ disagree completely ■ disagree somewhat ■ somewhat agree ■ completely agree

03
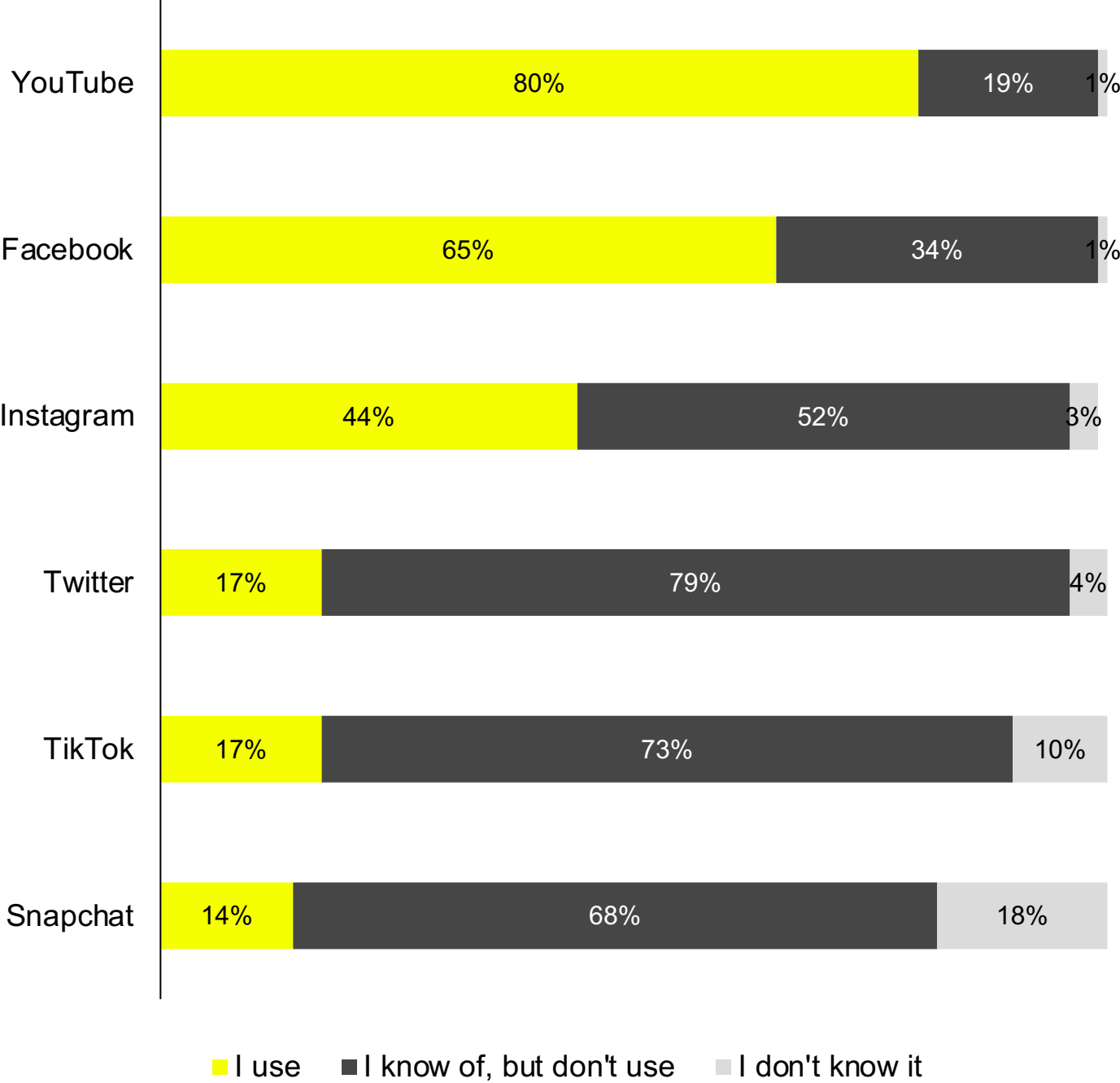
Appendix: Social media use

YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are the most used social media.

Usage and familiarity with social media

Please indicate whether you are familiar with and use each of the following.

	I use	I know of, but don't use	I don't know it
YouTube	80%	19%	1%
Facebook	65%	34%	1%
Instagram	44%	52%	3%
Twitter	17%	79%	4%
TikTok	17%	73%	10%
Snapchat	14%	68%	18%

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.
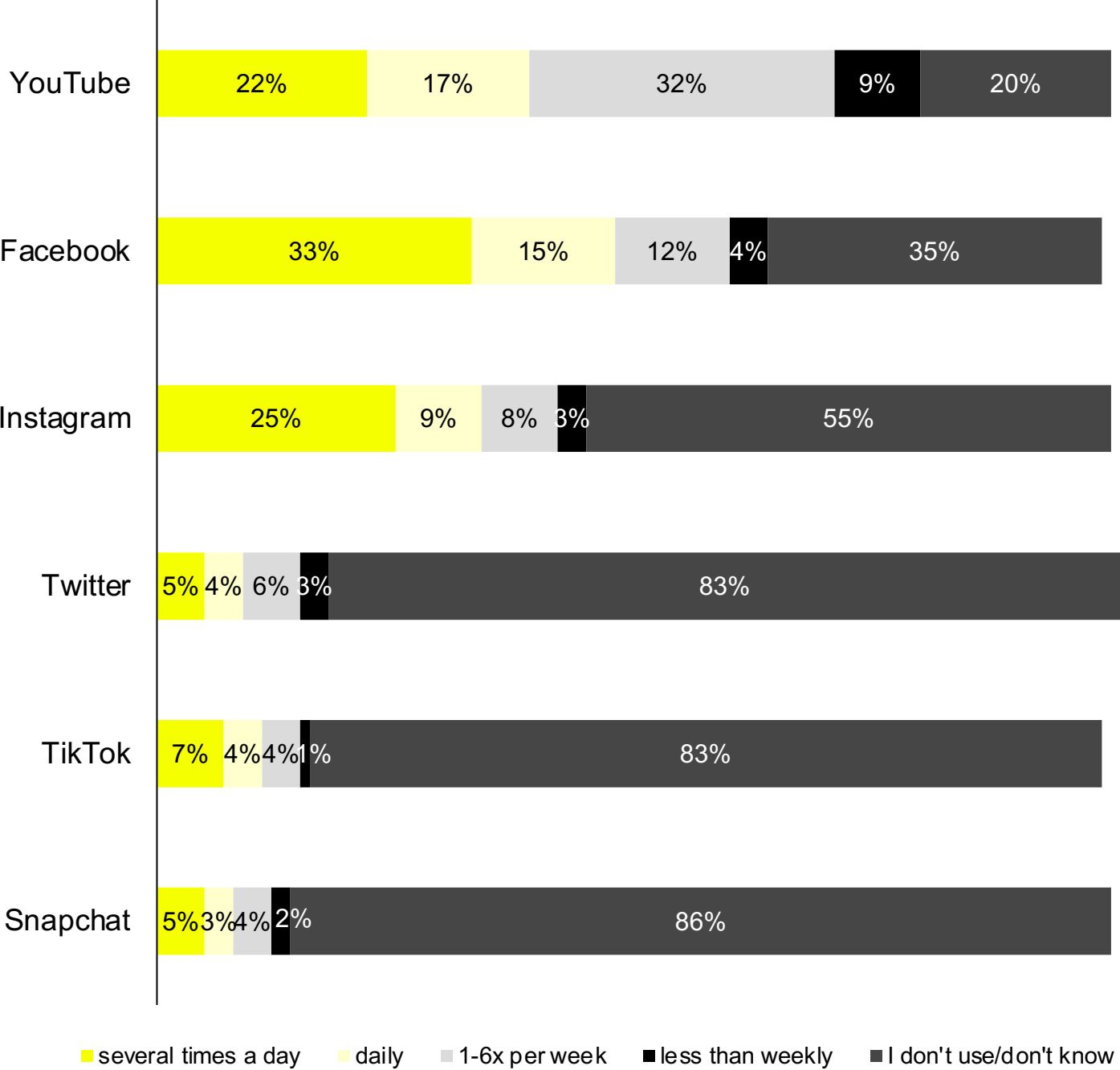
High proportion of very active users: one third of internet users use Facebook several times a day

Intensity of use of social media

Please indicate whether you are familiar with and use each of the following.

And how often do you use or visit each of these?

	several times a day	daily	1-6x per week	less than weekly	I don't use/don't know
YouTube	22%	17%	32%	9%	20%
Facebook	33%	15%	12%	4%	35%
Instagram	25%	9%	8%	3%	55%
Twitter	5%	4%	6%	3%	83%
TikTok	7%	4%	4%	1%	83%
Snapchat	5%	3%	4%	2%	86%

Legend: ■ several times a day ■ daily ■ 1-6x per week ■ less than weekly ■ I don't use/don't know
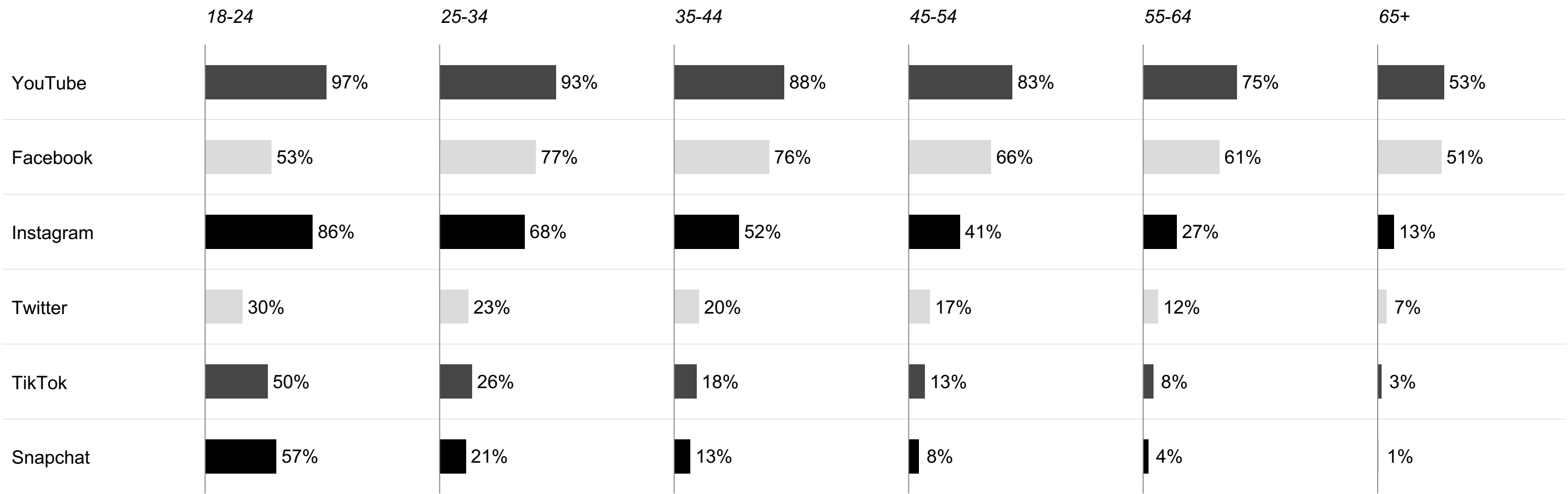
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

Significant differences in usage according to age

Social media usage by age

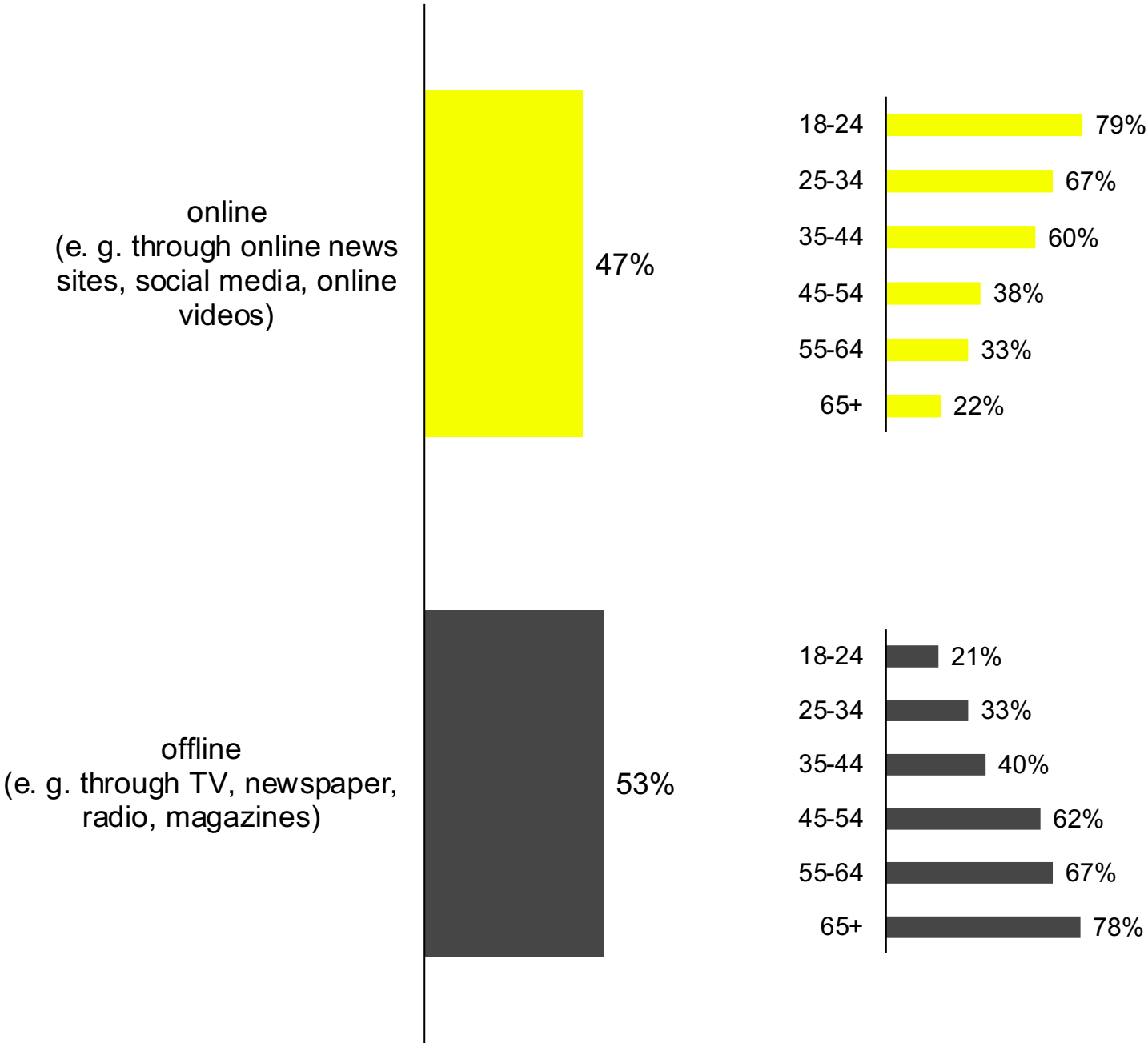|	*18-24*	*25-34*	*35-44*	*45-54*	*55-64*	*65+*
YouTube	97%	93%	88%	83%	75%	53%
Facebook	53%	77%	76%	66%	61%	51%
Instagram	86%	68%	52%	41%	27%	13%
Twitter	30%	23%	20%	17%	12%	7%
TikTok	50%	26%	18%	13%	8%	3%
Snapchat	57%	21%	13%	8%	4%	1%

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote. Values represented; "I use".

Around half are more likely to get information on politics and the upcoming federal election online - strongly age-dependent.

Political information - online vs. offline

Are you more likely to get most of your information on political issues, such as the upcoming federal election, ...?

online
(e. g. through online news sites, social media, online videos)

47%

18-24	79%
25-34	67%
35-44	60%
45-54	38%
55-64	33%
65+	22%

offline
(e. g. through TV, newspaper, radio, magazines)

53%

18-24	21%
25-34	33%
35-44	40%
45-54	62%
55-64	67%
65+	78%

Basis: all eligible internet users.

Around half of Internet users with very strong or rather strong political interests

Political interest

Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?

very strong	18%
somehwat strong	32%

50%

moderate	34%

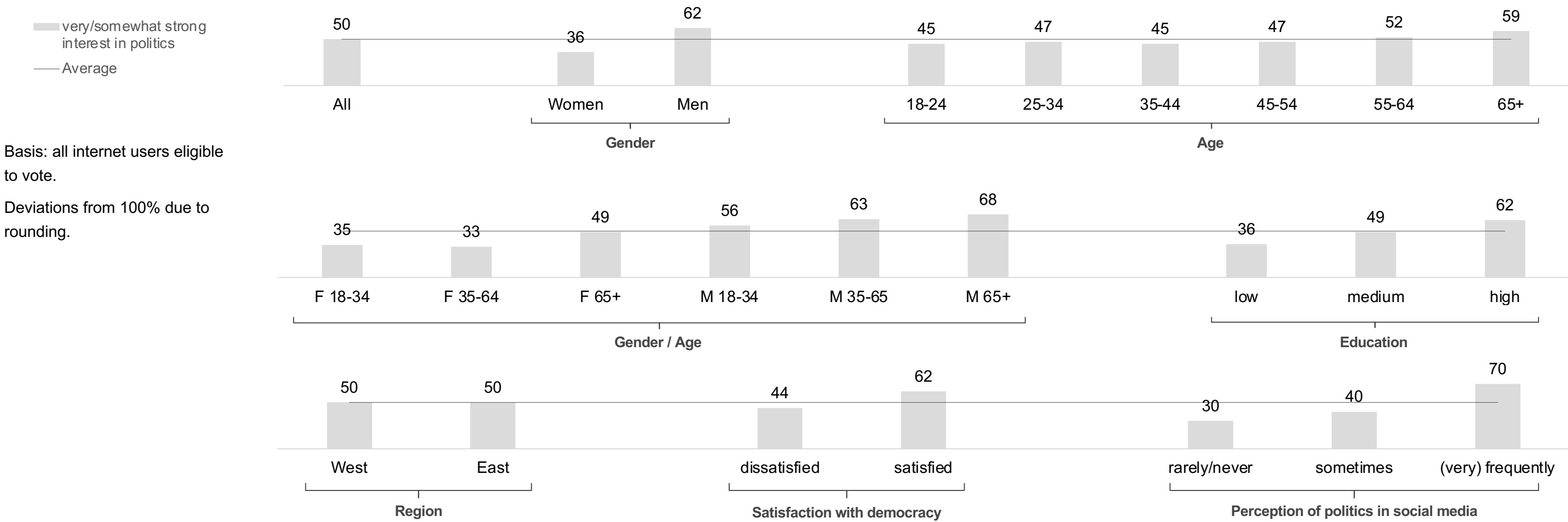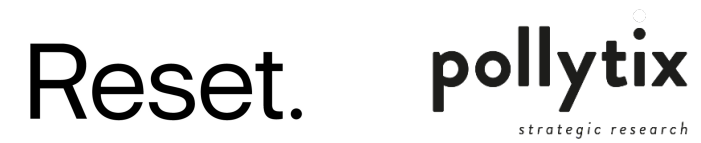|	
somewhat weak	11%
very weak	5%

16%
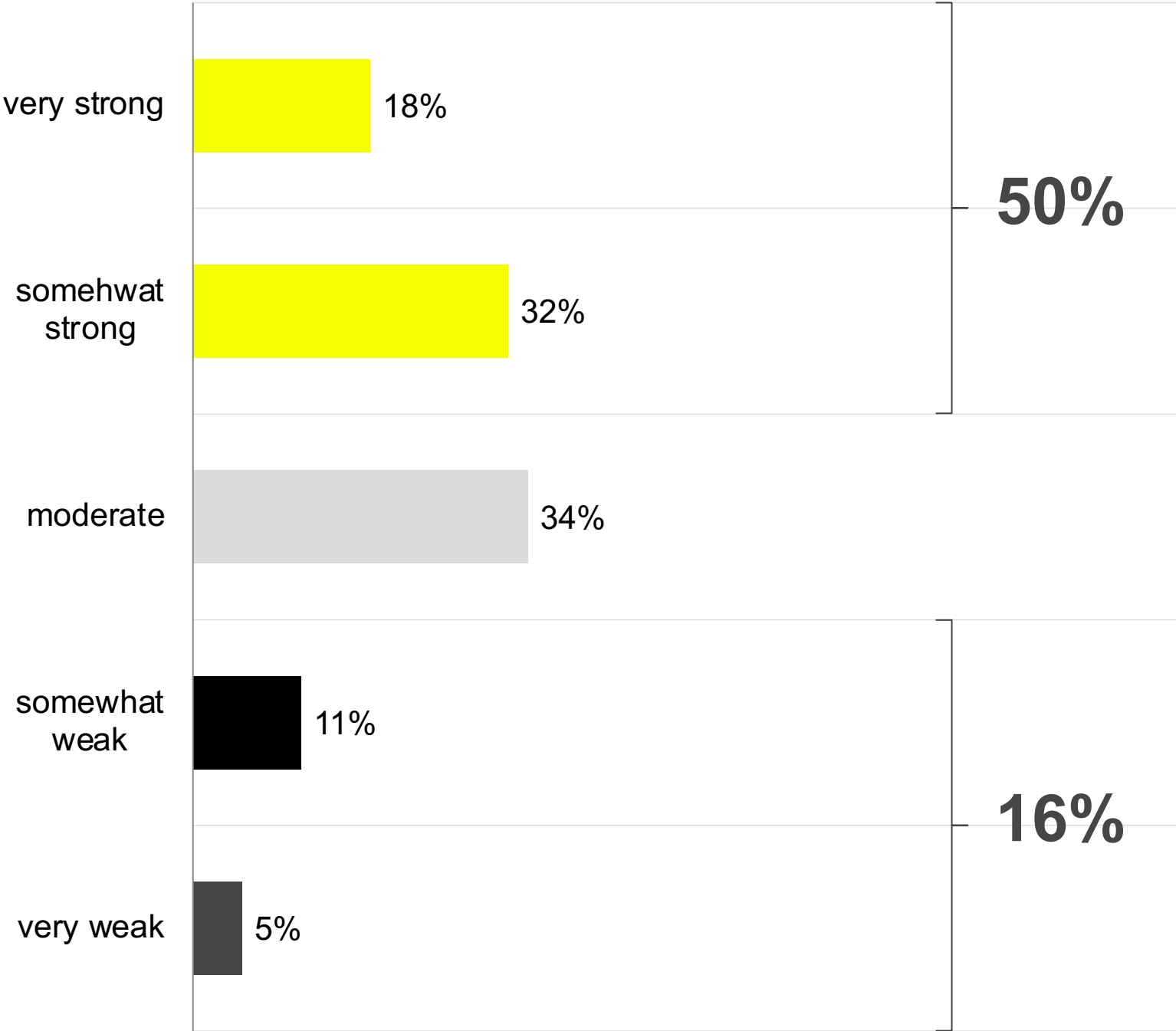
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.

Appendix: Social media use

Interest is more pronounced among men, older persons and those with a higher level of education

██ very/somewhat strong interest in politics
—— Average

50 All
36 Women   62 Men
Gender

45 18-24   47 25-34   45 35-44   47 45-54   52 55-64   59 65+
Age

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

35 F 18-34   33 F 35-64   49 F 65+   56 M 18-34   63 M 35-65   68 M 65+
Gender / Age

36 low   49 medium   62 high
Education

50 West   50 East
Region

44 dissatisfied   62 satisfied
Satisfaction with democracy

30 rarely/never   40 sometimes   70 (very) frequently
Perception of politics in social media

Reset.

pollytix
strategic research

Reset. is an initiative that advocates for digital technologies to serve democracy again. Above all, it focuses on the regulation of big tech so that disinformation, hatred and manipulation can be reduced.

pollytix strategic research is the agency for opinion research and research-based consulting at the interface of politics, business and society.

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