

# Disinformation in Social Media

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

July 23 2021



# Study design

## 📅 Survey period

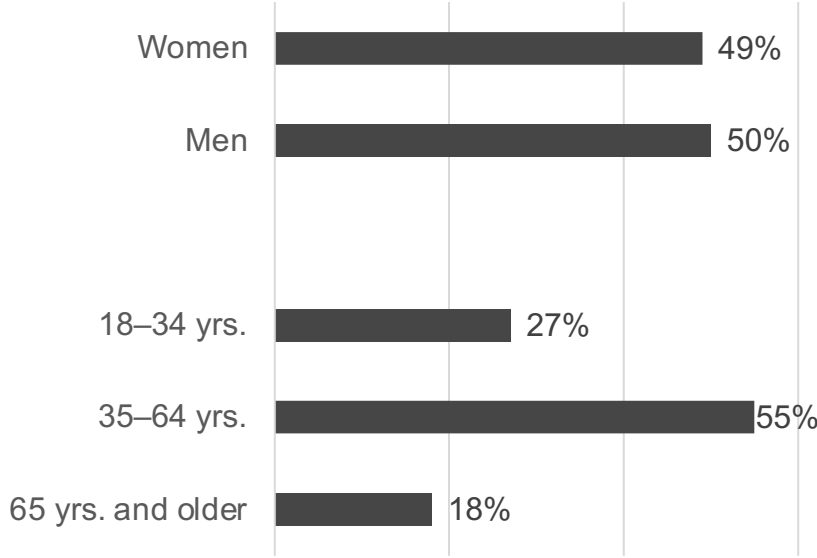
June 22 to June 29 2021

## 🔍 Survey method

Online survey / CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview)

## 👤 Sample size and population

n = 3.009 internet users eligible to vote



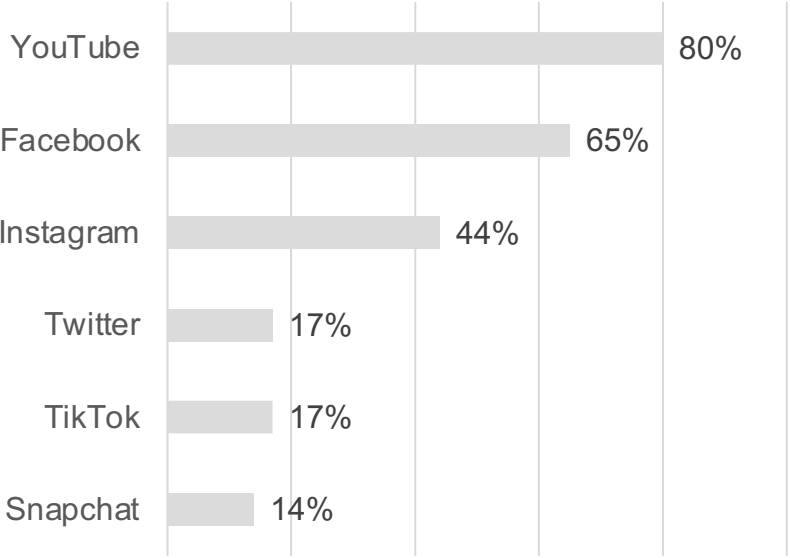
Data is weighted to ensure that the results are representative.

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

## 📖 Definitions

Social media users

Users of the various services



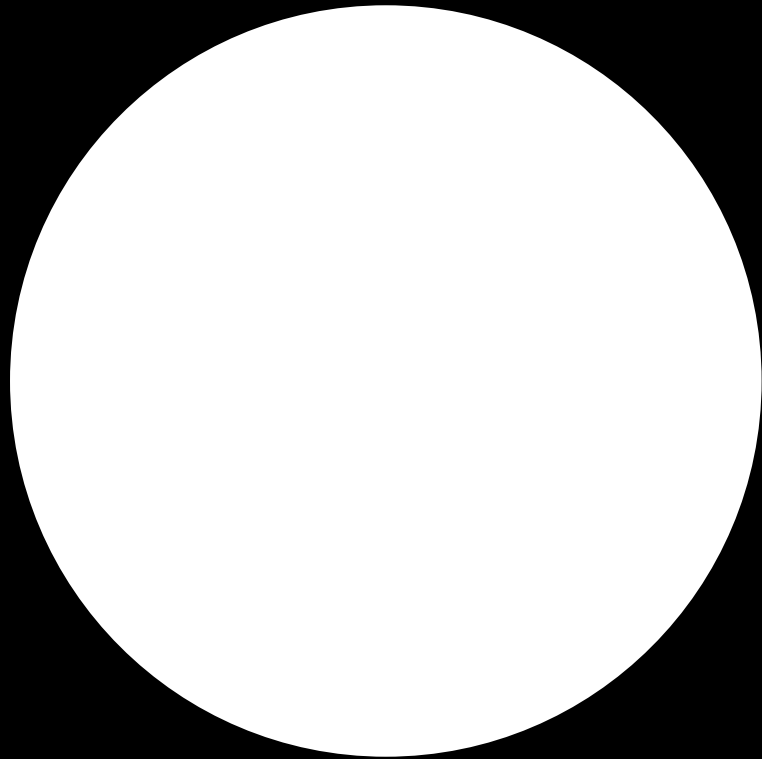
**91%** of all internet users use at least one of the above-mentioned sites (= social media users)

Deviations from 100% due to rounding



# Executive Summary

- One of the greatest challenges in digital public spaces is that of accessing reliable information. Which source can I trust? Which outlet is credible? This flood of digital information is replete with misinformation and disinformation. The public is keenly aware of this problem, with 85 percent of all Internet users we surveyed, who are eligible to vote, considering disinformation to be a (very) great problem for our society. Among those persons, 63 percent state that they encounter disinformation (very) often online.
- At least in their own estimation, three quarters of the those surveyed feel confident in their ability to distinguish between true and false information. The fact that this is not a task all individuals are capable of assuming is evidenced by their willingness to yield responsibility for this task to platforms and political authorities, with 76 percent wanting the adoption of stronger measures to combat disinformation on the part of both in equal measure.
- The combat against Internet disinformation is particularly important given the sheer number of users. Around half of the persons surveyed reported that they obtain most of their information concerning Germany's federal election online. Precisely for younger people (18-24), the Internet serves as their most important source of information (79 percent). And there are clear indications of how the digital election campaign should be conducted: 67 percent of those surveyed would like the election campaign on the Internet to be conducted less aggressively; 59 percent are concerned that a considerable amount of fake news could accompany the election campaign. 31 percent fear that the election (via mail-in ballots, for example) might involve illicit activities. The concern over mail-in voting is expressed most often by AfD voters (69 percent).
- One out of two persons have seen comments or posts on social media denying the reality of climate change. In addition, 65 percent of those surveyed claim to have seen posts or comments advising against COVID-19 vaccination. Agreement with some of these fake news is alarmingly high. We investigated the belief in certain conspiracy theories. For example, 28 percent believe that the Greens wish to completely ban the operation of motor vehicles (21 percent of replies partly/partly); 23 percent believe that Muslims wish to establish a theocratic State under Sharia law in Germany (31 percent of replies partly/partly). On average, about 20 percent of those surveyed share a belief in these conspiracy theories. There is a disproportionate number of AfD supporters who believe much of the fake news circulating on the Internet.



01

# Perception of problem

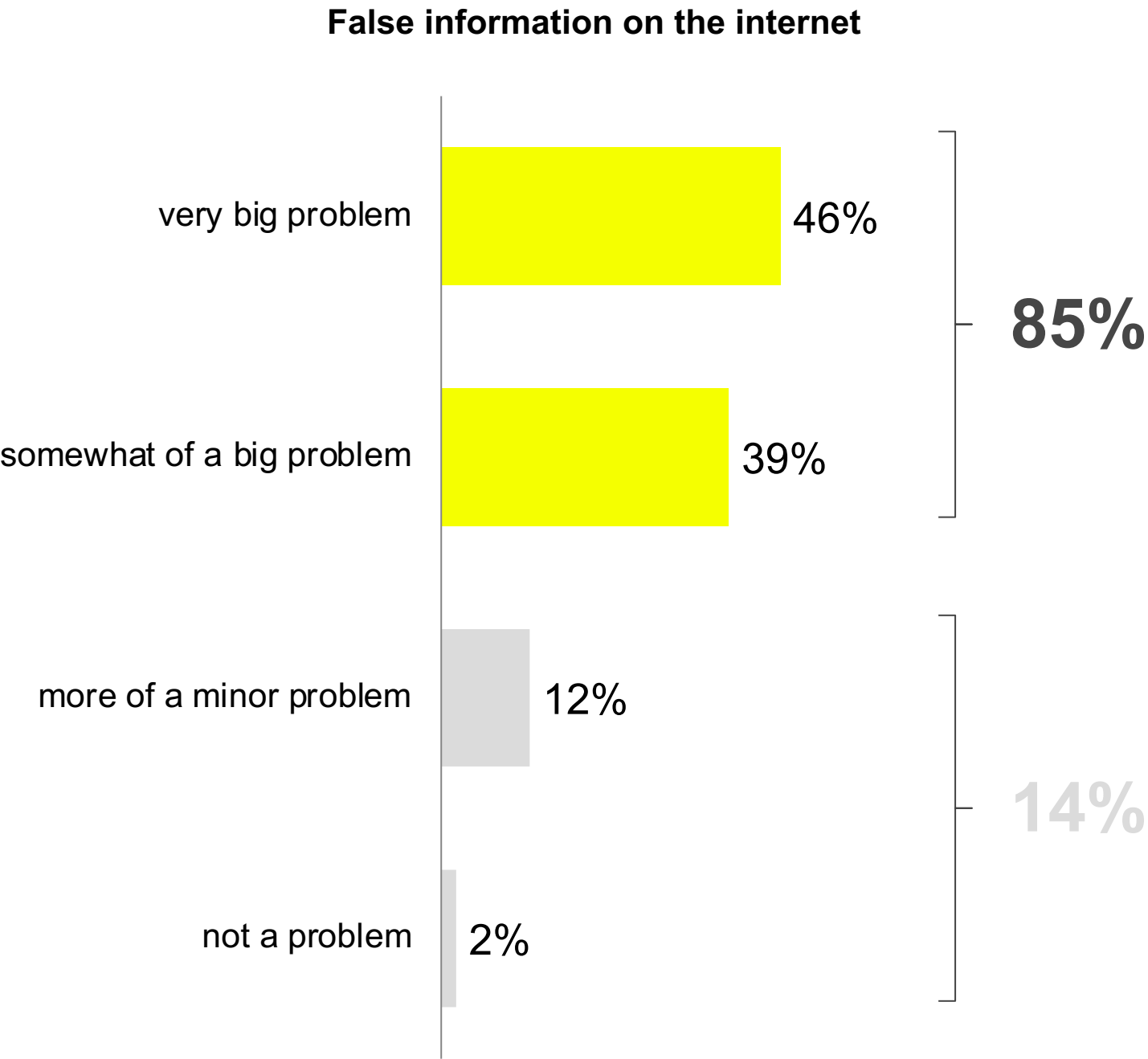
Perception of problem

85 percent consider false information on the internet to be a somewhat to very big problem for society.

Perceived problem of disinformation

To what extent do you think the following are a problem for our society?

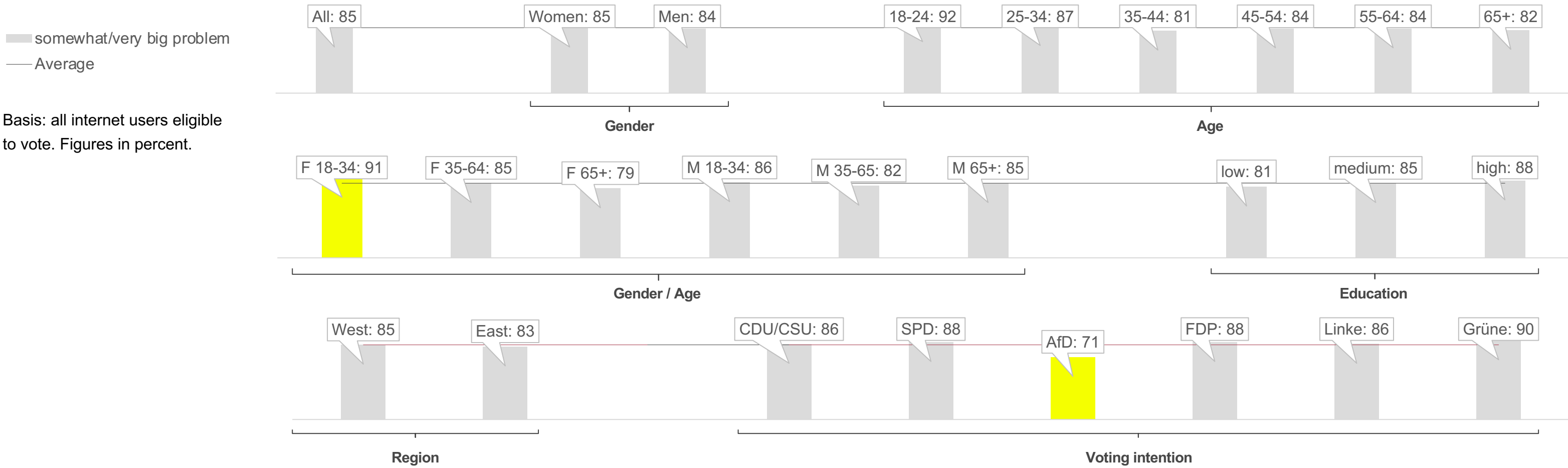
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Missing values: don't know.



Perception of problem

Young women have the highest perceived problem with disinformation on the internet, AfD voters the lowest

False information on the internet



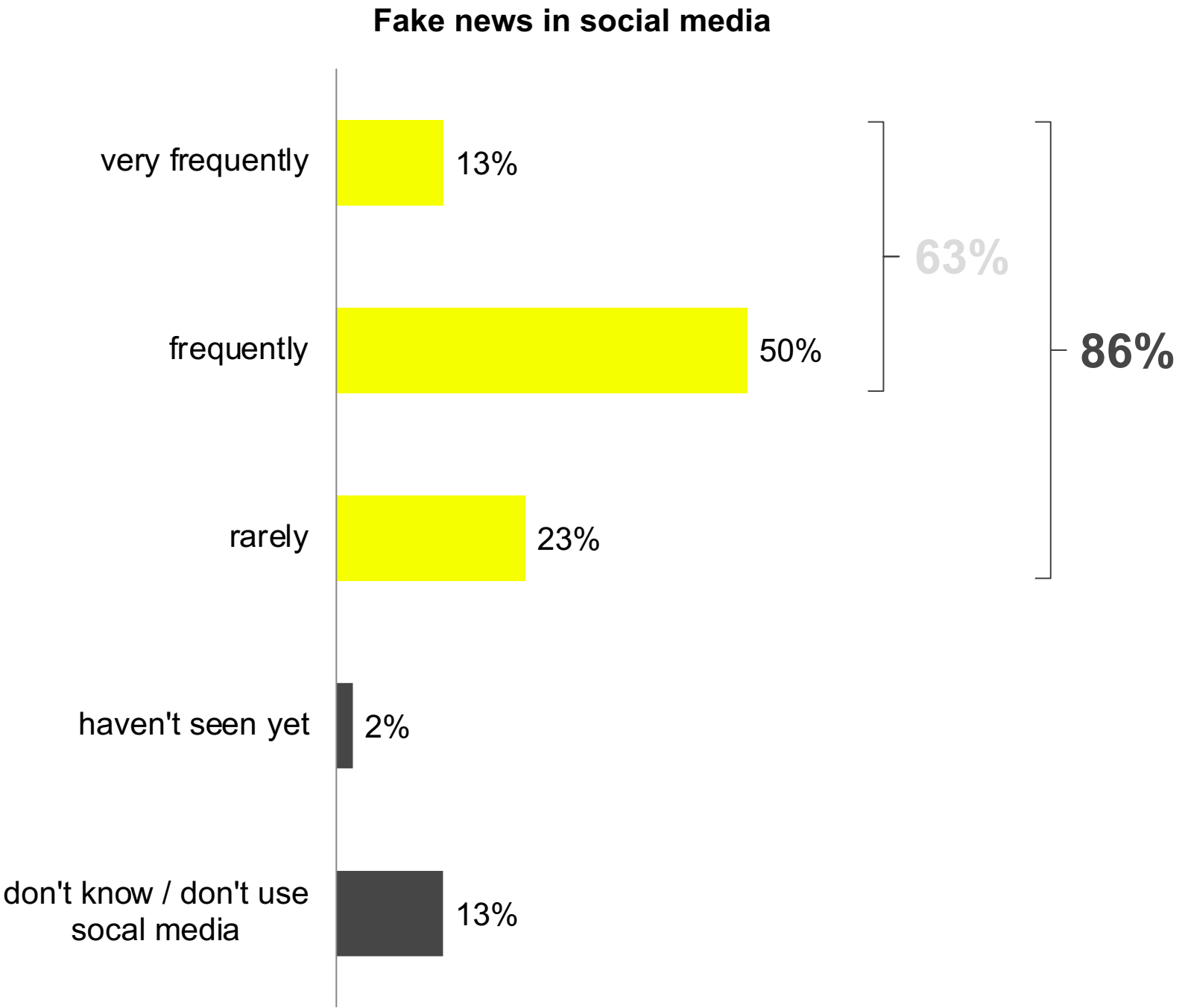
Perception of problem

Nearly 9 out of 10 internet users have already perceived disinformation in social media, 63 percent even (very) frequently.

Perceived frequency of disinformation

How often do you think you encounter fake news on social media, that is, posts that deliberately spread false information?

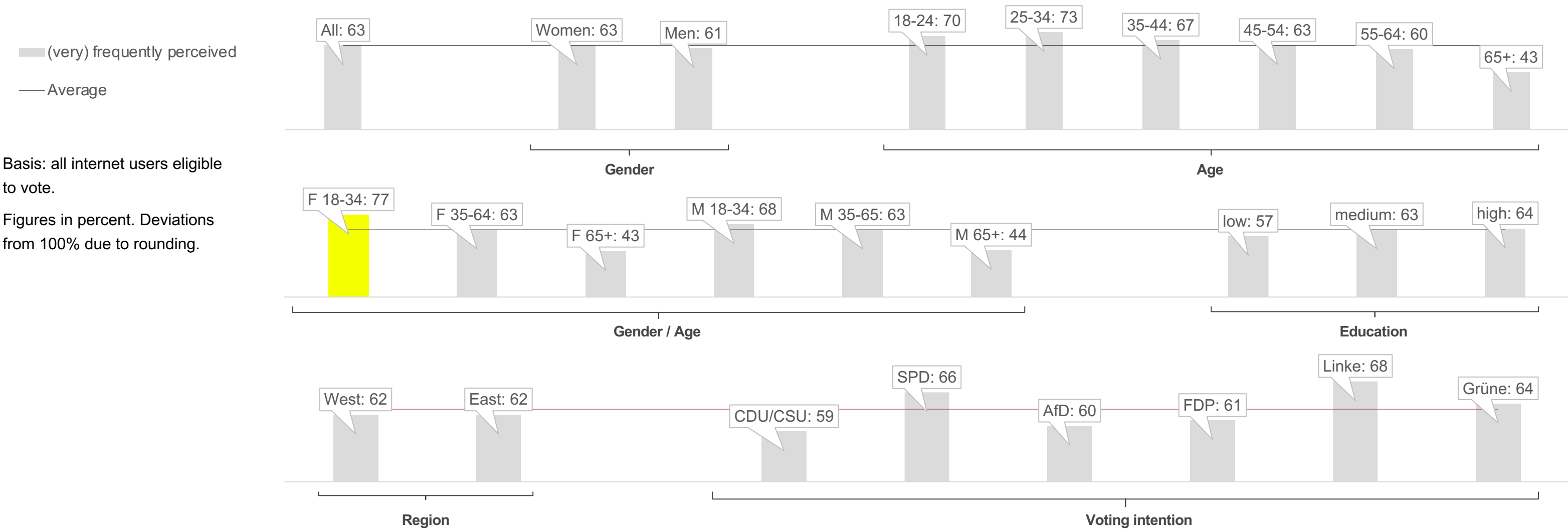
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.



Perception of problem

Young women perceive disinformation on social media with above-average frequency

Fake news in social media





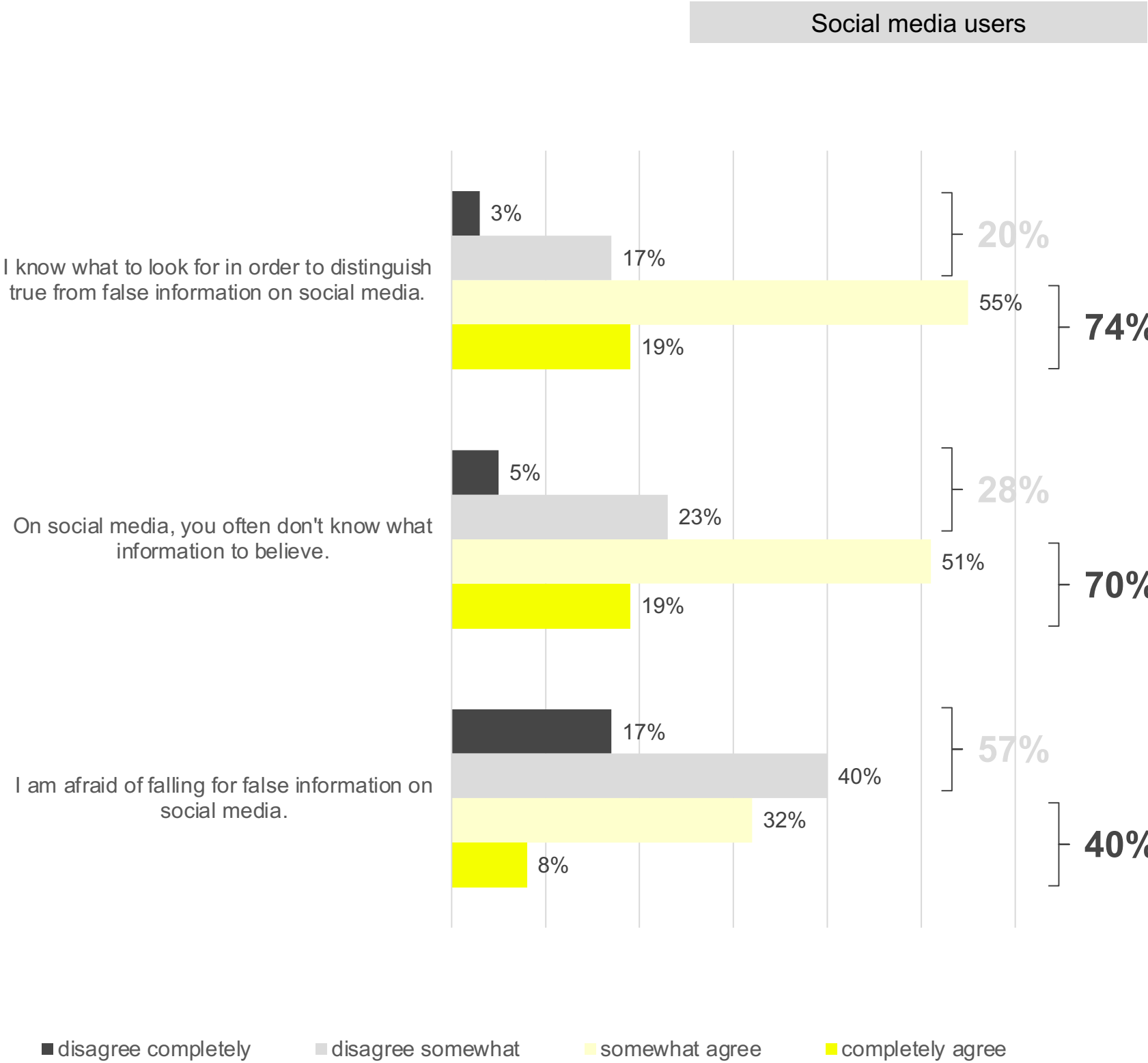
Perception of problem

Disinformation as a problem for others: 74 percent see themselves as being able to identify false information

Disinformation in social media

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

Basis: all social media users.  
Missing values: don't know.

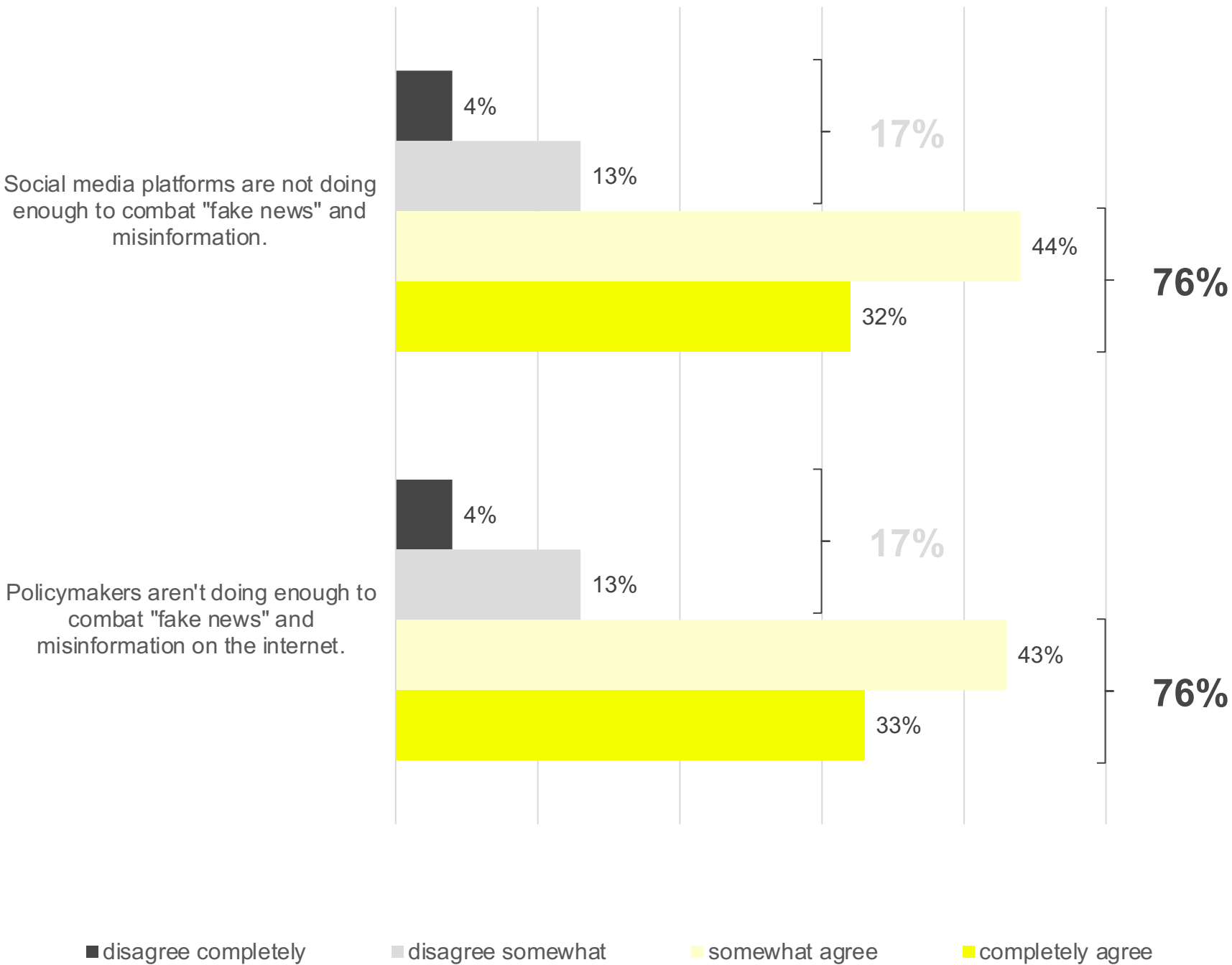


Perception of problem

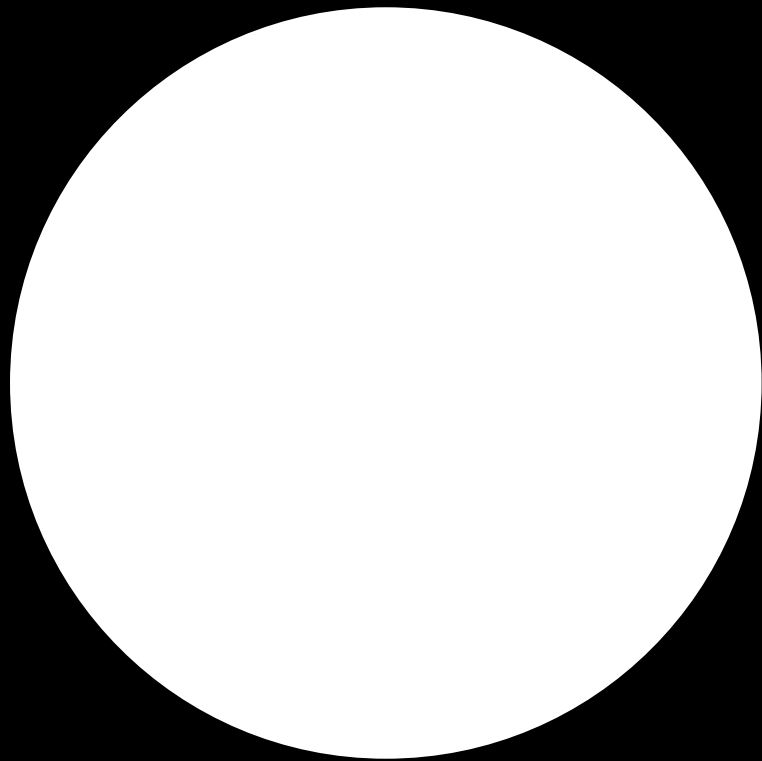
Stronger measures against disinformation are expected from platforms as much as from politics.

Responsibility / regulation

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



Basis: all internet users eligible to vote. Missing values: don't know.



02

# Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

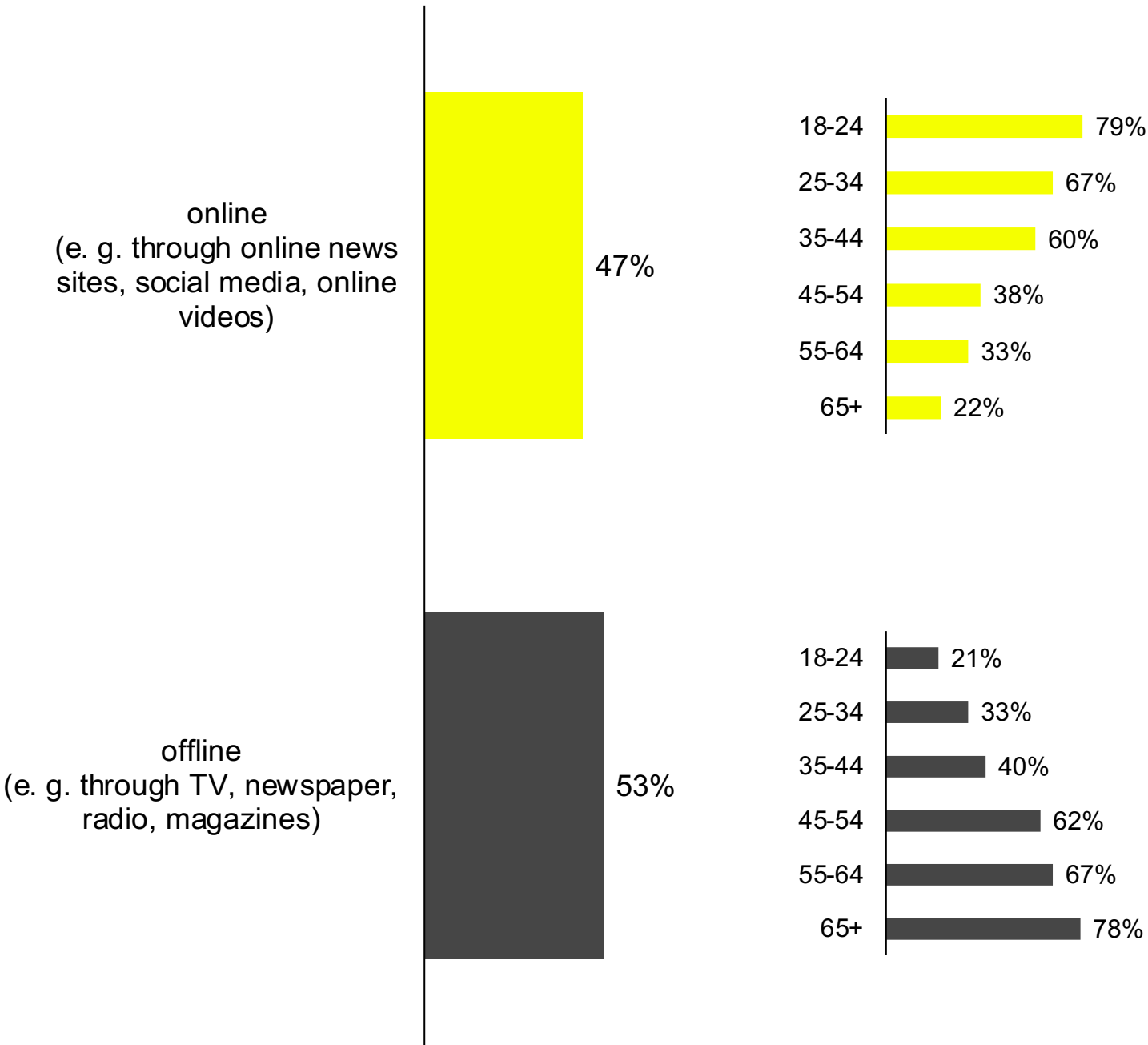
# Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

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, ...?

Basis: all eligible internet users.



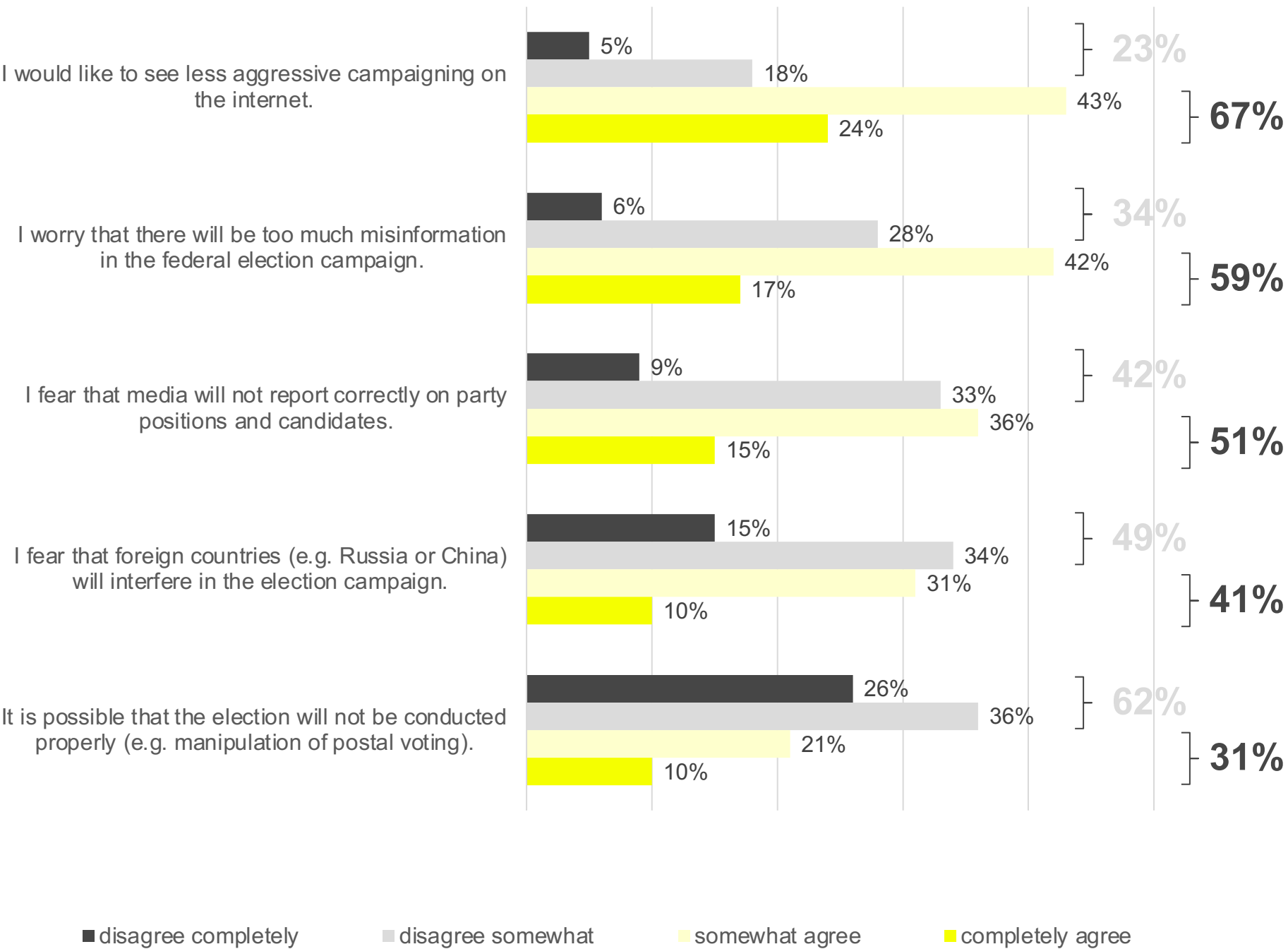
Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

Concern about “fake news” and false reporting in the election campaign is widespread.

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?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Missing values: don't know.





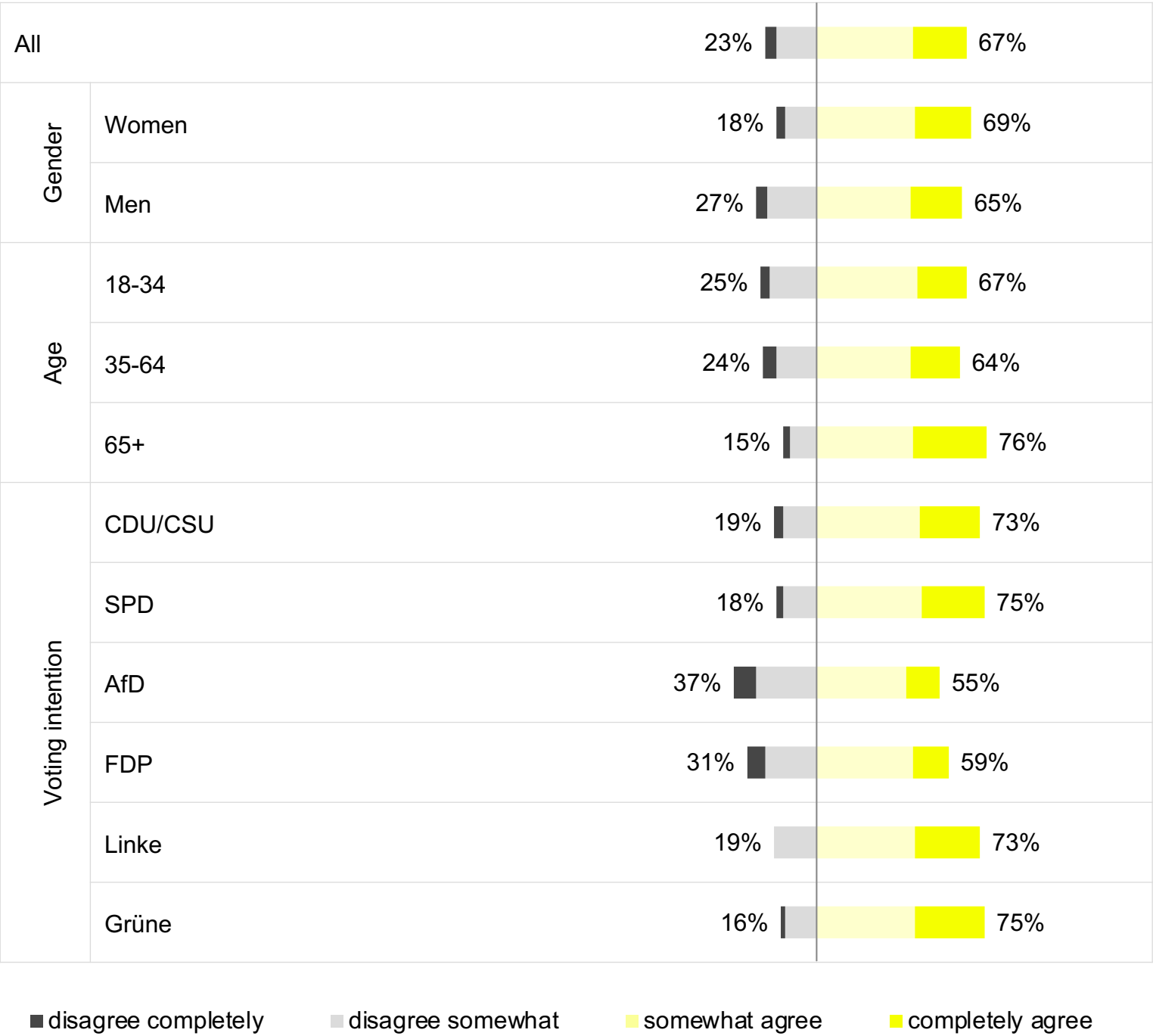
# Strong desire for online campaigning to be less aggressive

## 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 internet users eligible to vote.  
Missing values: don't know.



Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

Concern about too much misinformation in the election campaign, especially among AfD voters

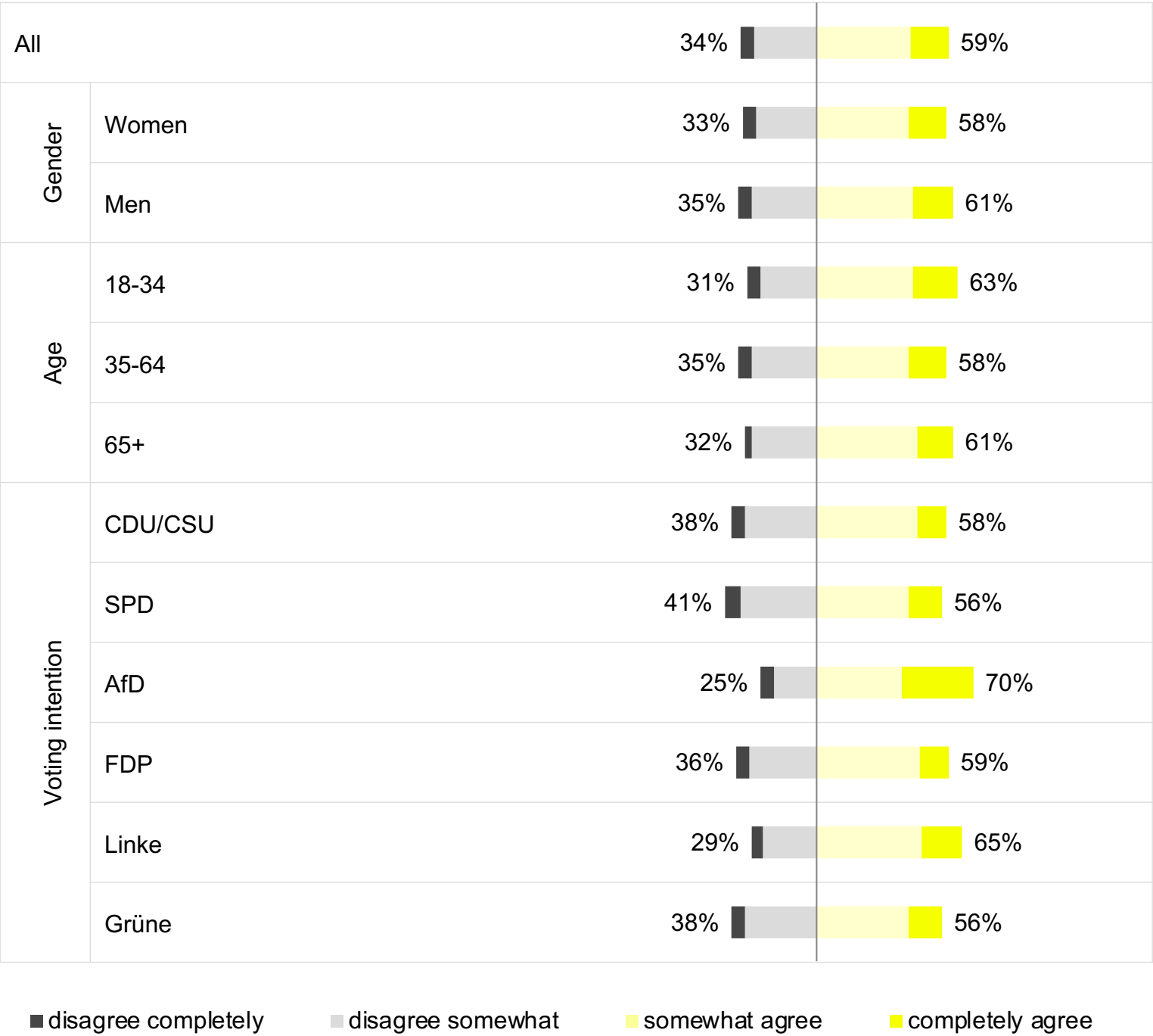
Integrity Federal Election 2021

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

„I worry that there will be too much misinformation in the federal election campaign.“

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.



# Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

The concern that media outlets are not reporting correctly is primarily voiced by AfD voters

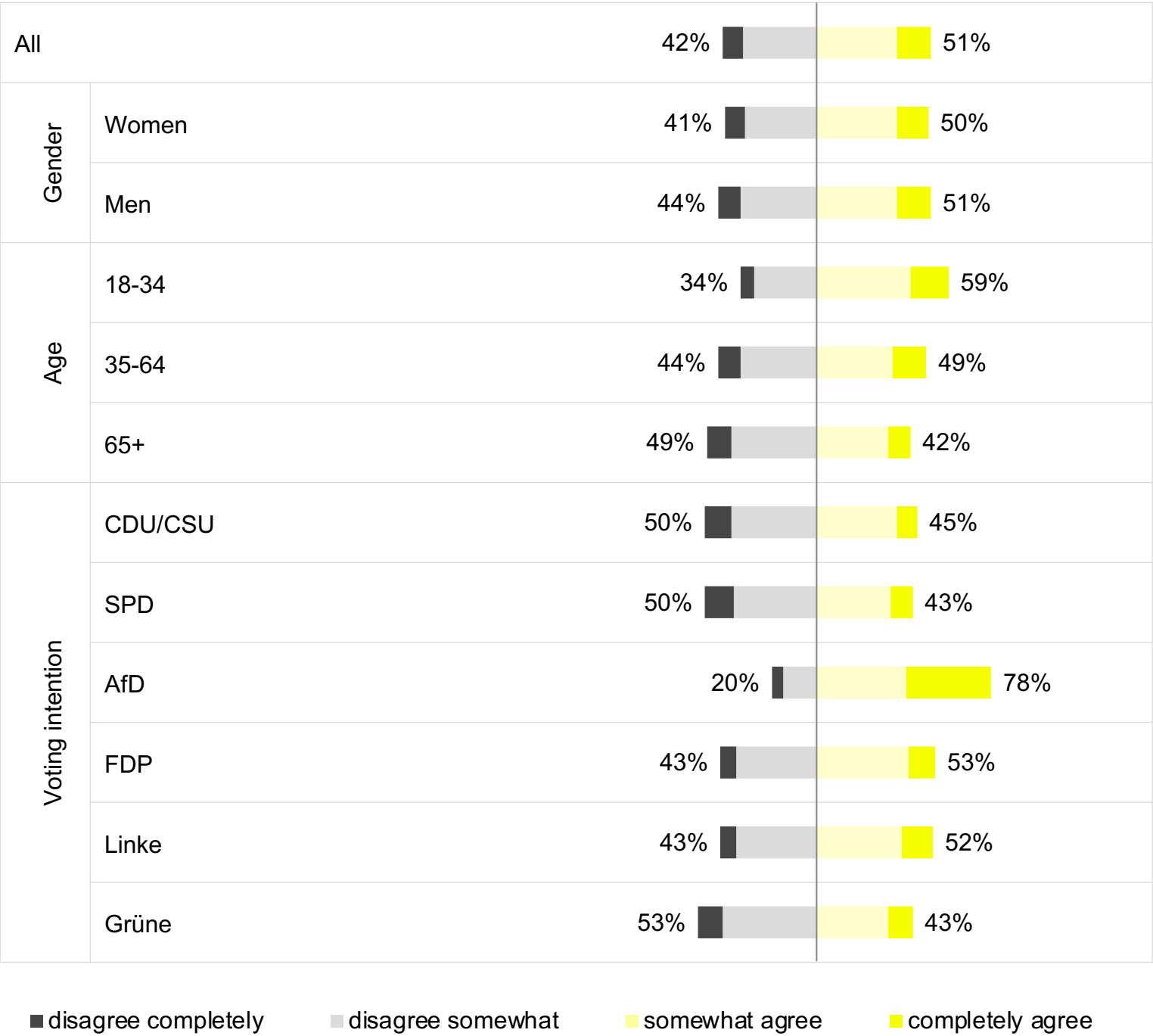
## Integrity Federal Election 2021

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

„I fear that media will not report correctly on party positions and candidates.“

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.



# Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

AfD and Linke voters are less likely to fear interference in the election campaign by foreign countries

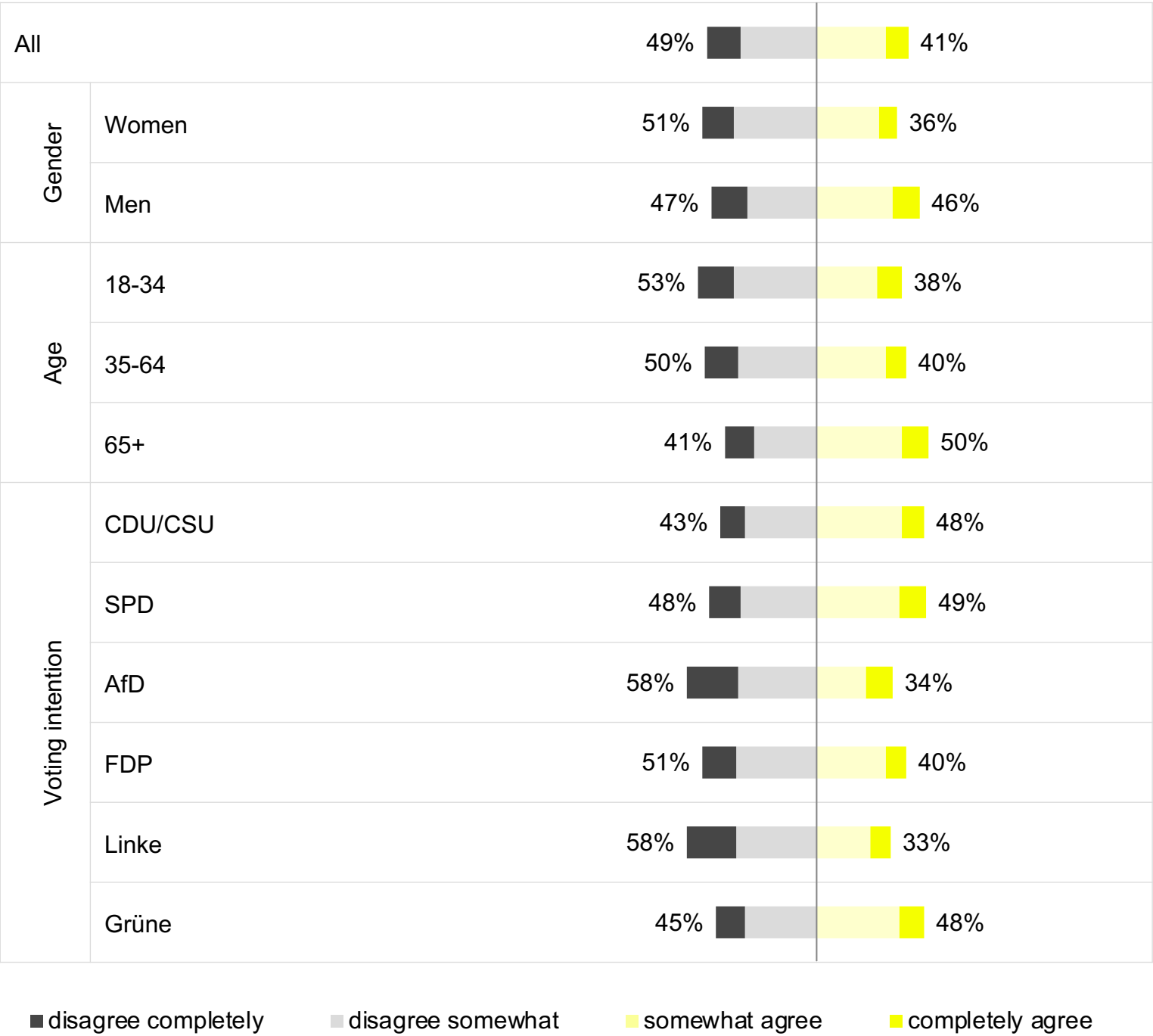
## Integrity Federal Election 2021

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

„I fear that foreign countries (e.g. Russia or China) will interfere in the election campaign.“

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.



# Disinformation with regard to the federal election campaign

Suspicion that the election could be manipulated is more likely among younger people and primarily among AfD voters.

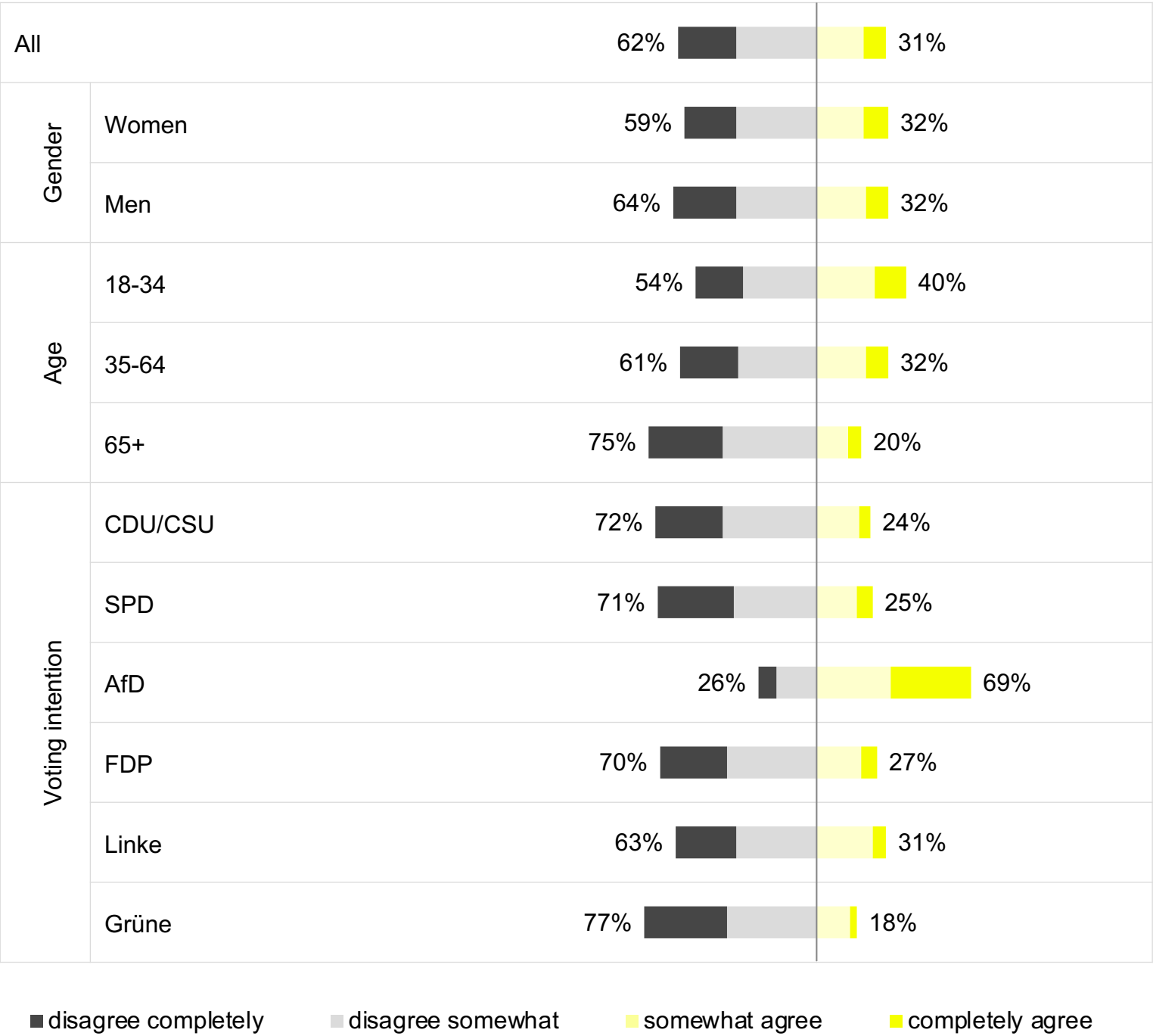
## Integrity Federal Election 2021

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

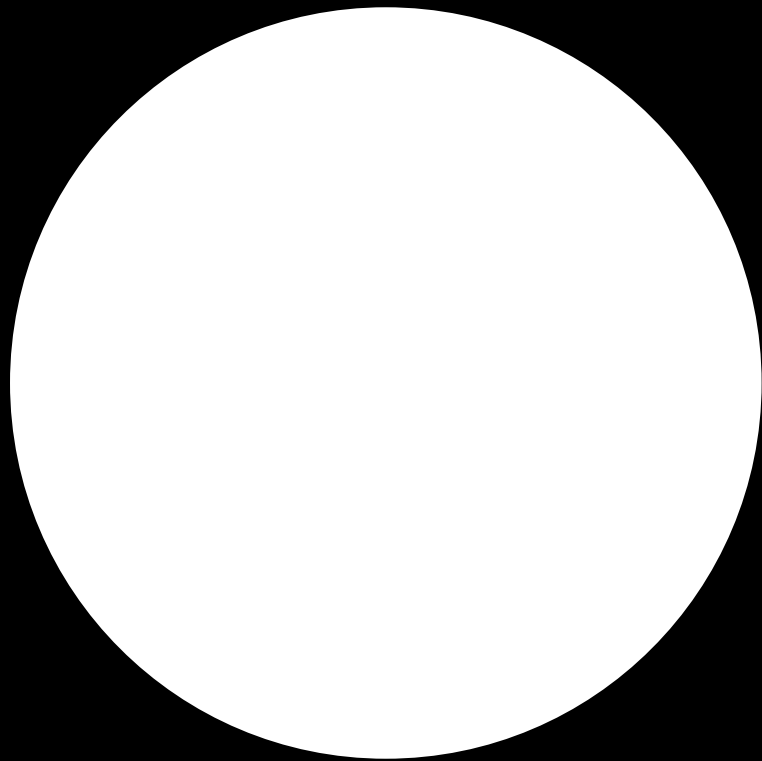
„It is possible that the election will not be conducted properly (e.g. manipulation of postal voting).“

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing values: don't know.







03

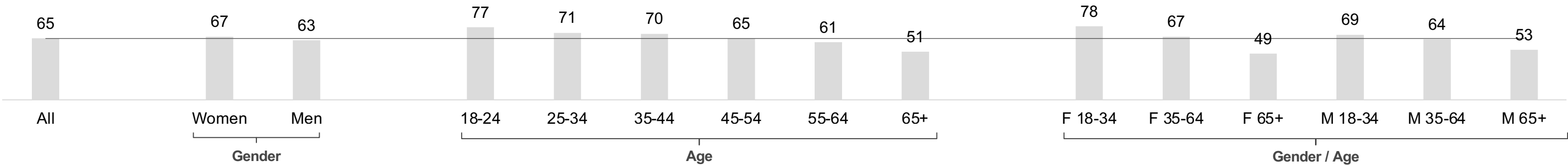
# The spread of disinformation

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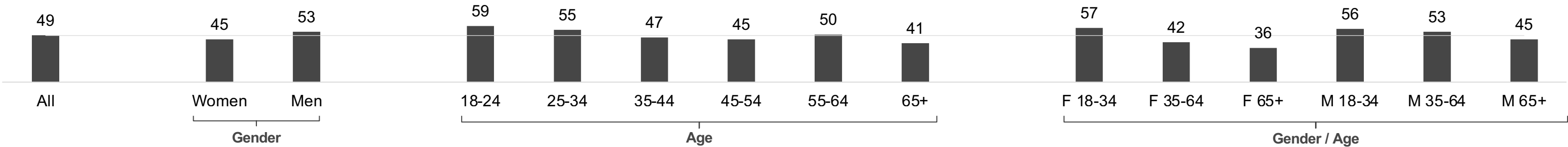
65 percent have seen posts advising against COVID vaccination; one in two have seen posts denying climate change

*"I have seen posts or comments on social media ...*

**... advising against the COVID vaccination."**



**... that have portrayed climate change as a hoax."**



Basis: all internet users eligible to vote. Figures in percent.

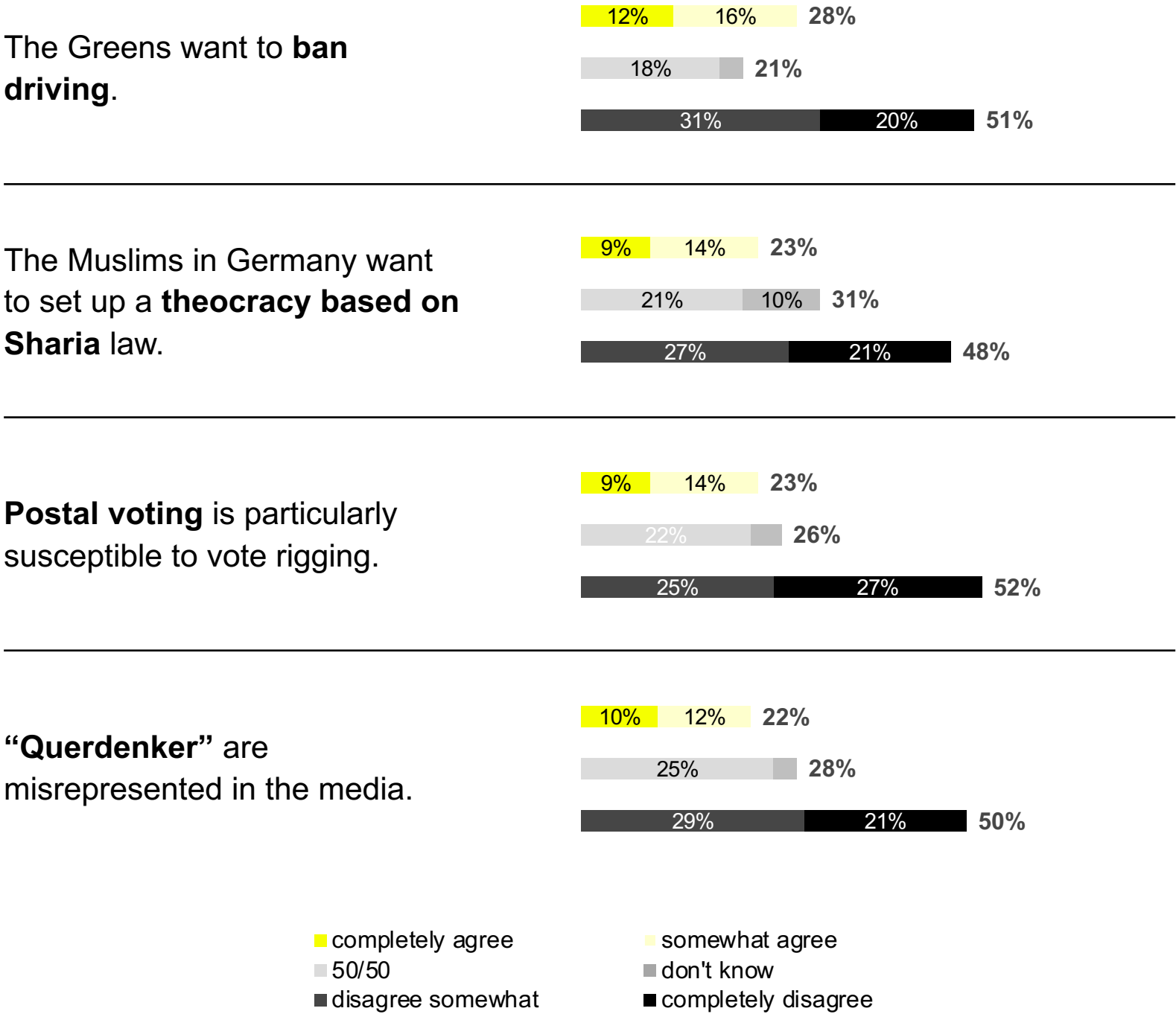
# The spread of disinformation

Around a quarter of internet users believe disinformation regarding driving bans, Sharia law and postal voting

## The spread of disinformation

Here are some statements that are being made in the public debate. To what extent do you agree with each of them?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Deviations from 100% due to rounding.



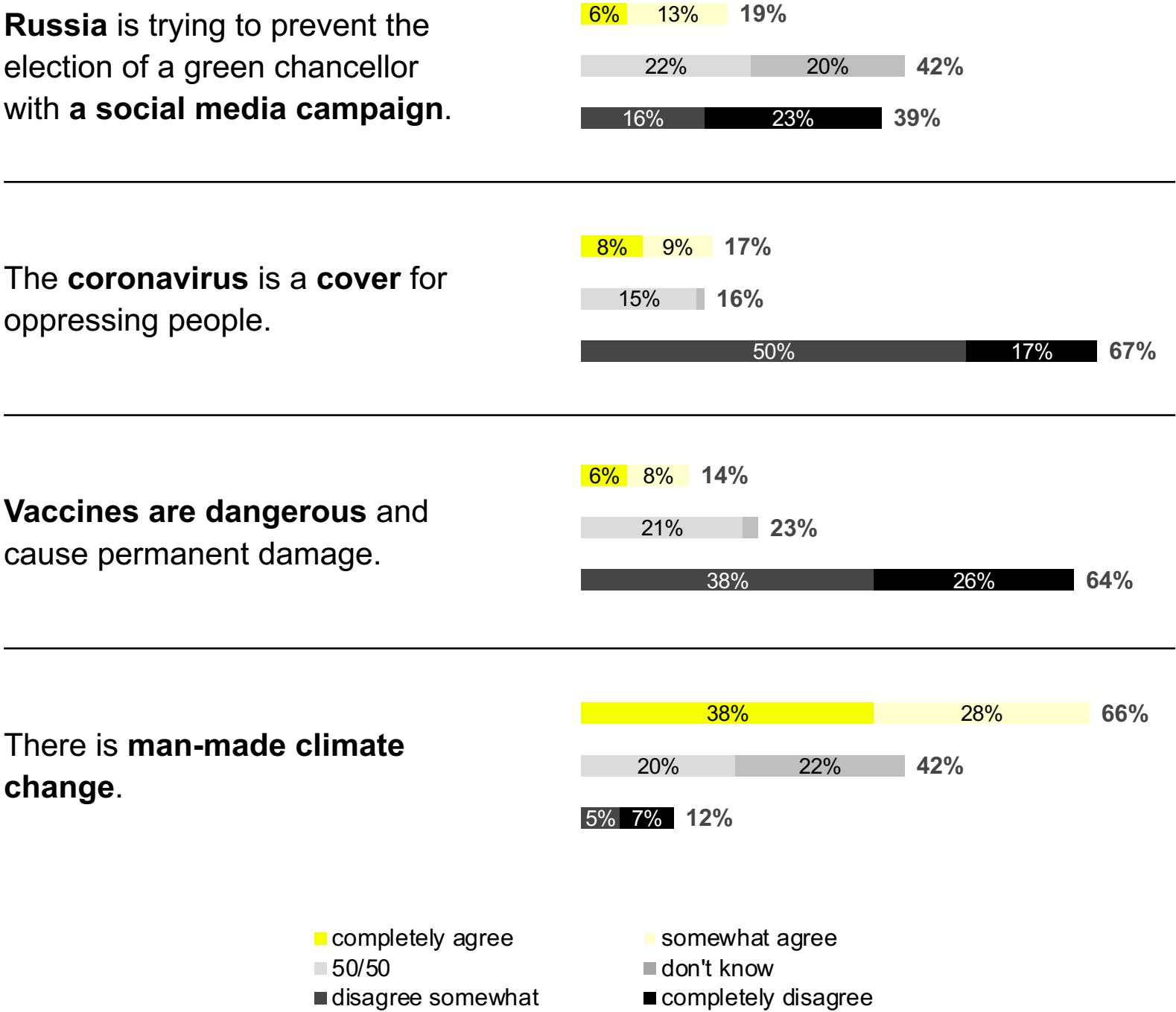
# The spread of disinformation

17 percent believe that the coronavirus is a cover to oppress people.

## The spread of disinformation

Here are some statements that are being made in the public debate. To what extent do you agree with each of them?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Deviations from 100% due to rounding.



The spread of disinformation

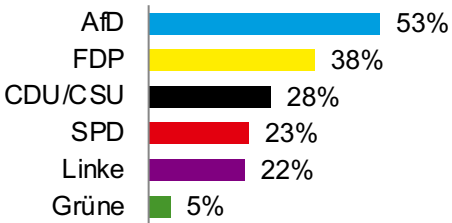
Significant differences according to voting intention: only AfD voters believe a majority of all disinformation/narratives

The spread of disinformation

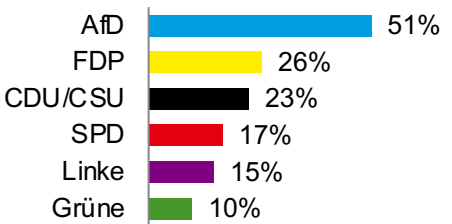
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Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

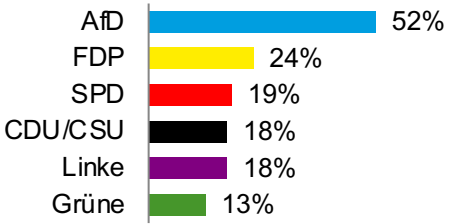
The Greens want to **ban driving**.



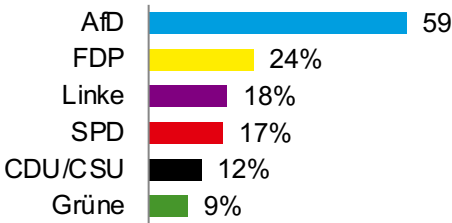
The Muslims in Germany want to set up a **theocracy based on Sharia law**.



**Postal voting** is particularly susceptible to vote rigging.



**“Querdenker”** are misrepresented in the media.



● Agreement (completely agree/somewhat agree)  
| | Agreement x Voting intention



# The spread of disinformation

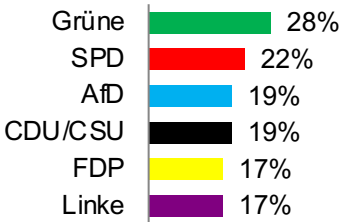
Only accusations of Russian interference in elections are widespread among voters of other parties as well.

## The spread of disinformation

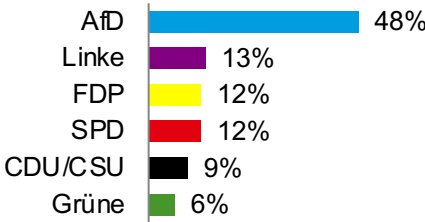
Here are some statements that are being made in the public debate. To what extent do you agree with each of them?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

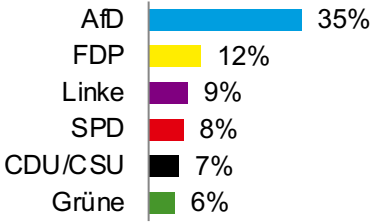
Russia is trying to prevent the election of a green chancellor with a **social media campaign**.



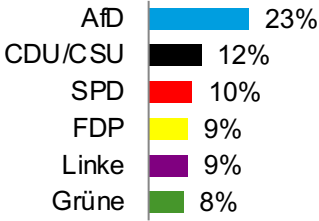
The **coronavirus** is a **cover** for oppressing people.



**Vaccines are dangerous** and cause permanent damage.



There is **man-made climate change**.



- Agreement (completely agree/somewhat agree)
- Disagreement (somewhat/completely disagree)
- | | Agreement/Disagreement x Voting intention

04

# Trust in social media

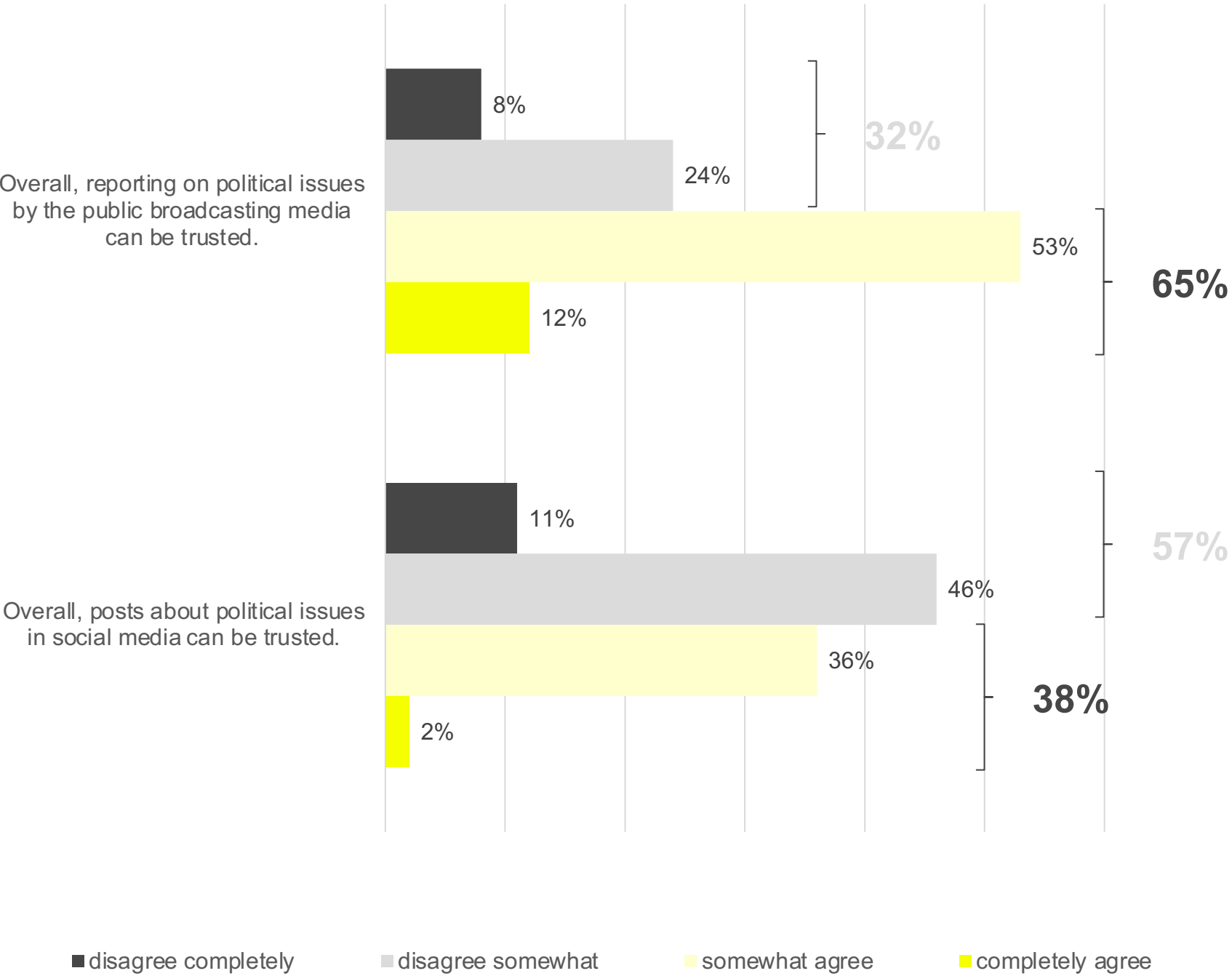
Trust in social media

Political reporting in public broadcasting media is predominantly trusted; distrust prevails in social media

Trust in social media/public broadcasting services

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

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Missing values: don't know.



Trust in social media

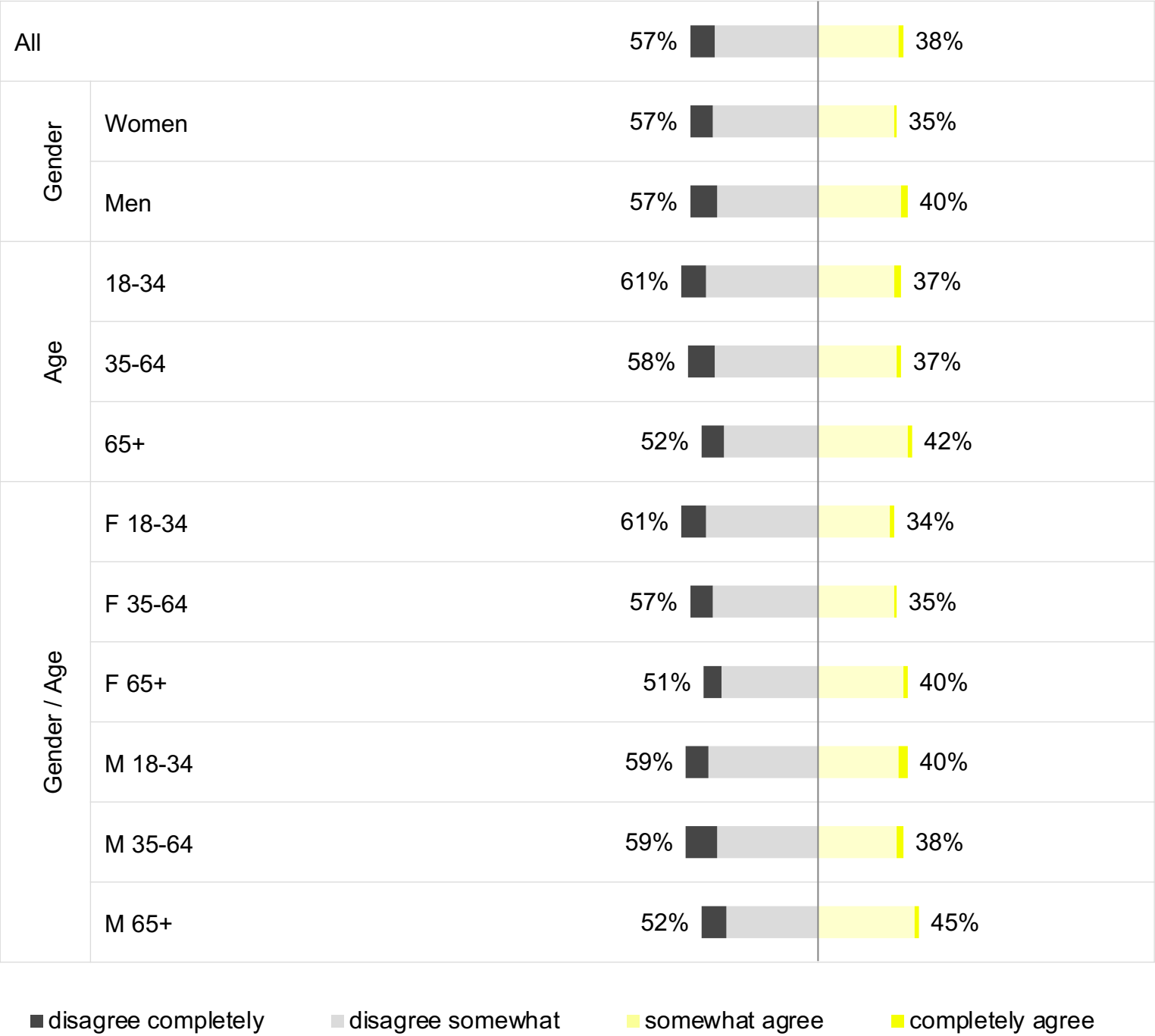
There are only minor differences between different age groups or gender

Trust in social media

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

„Overall, posts about political issues in social media can be trusted.“

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Missing values: don't know.



# Trust in social media

The majority of social media users also doubt the trustworthiness of political contributions in the networks

## Trust in social media

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

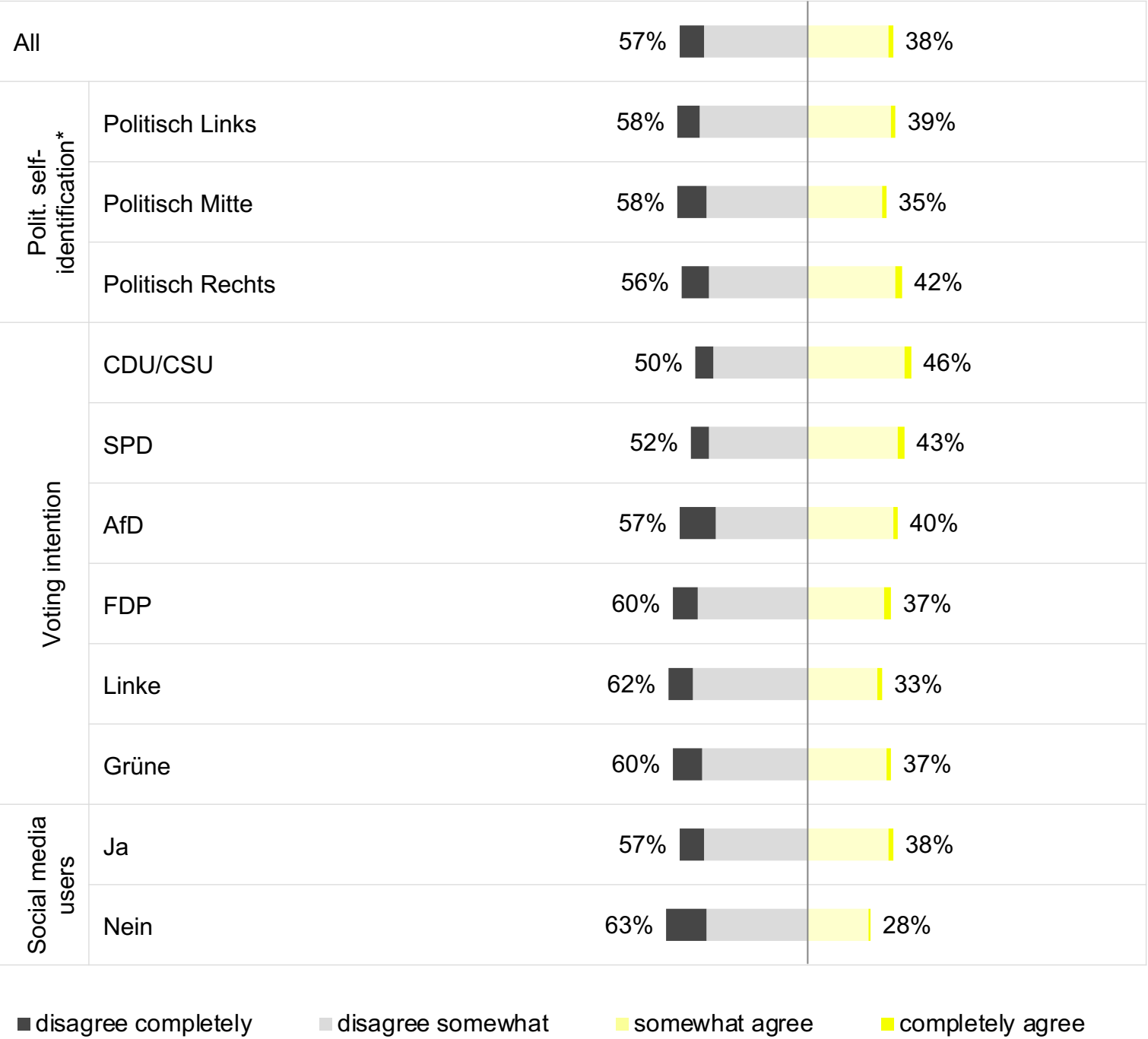
„Overall, posts about political issues in social media can be trusted.“

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.





05

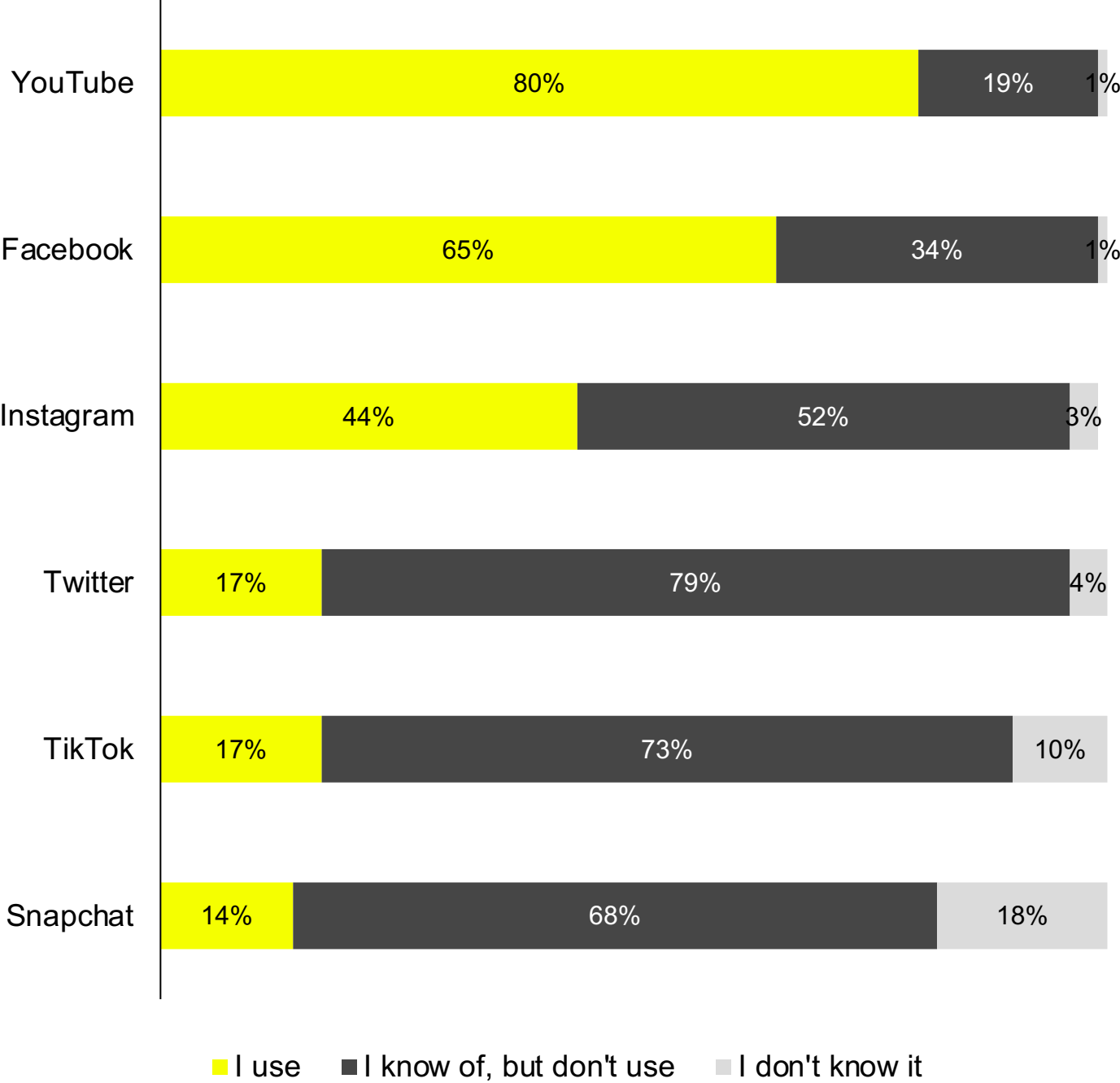
# Appendix: Social media use

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.



Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.  
Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

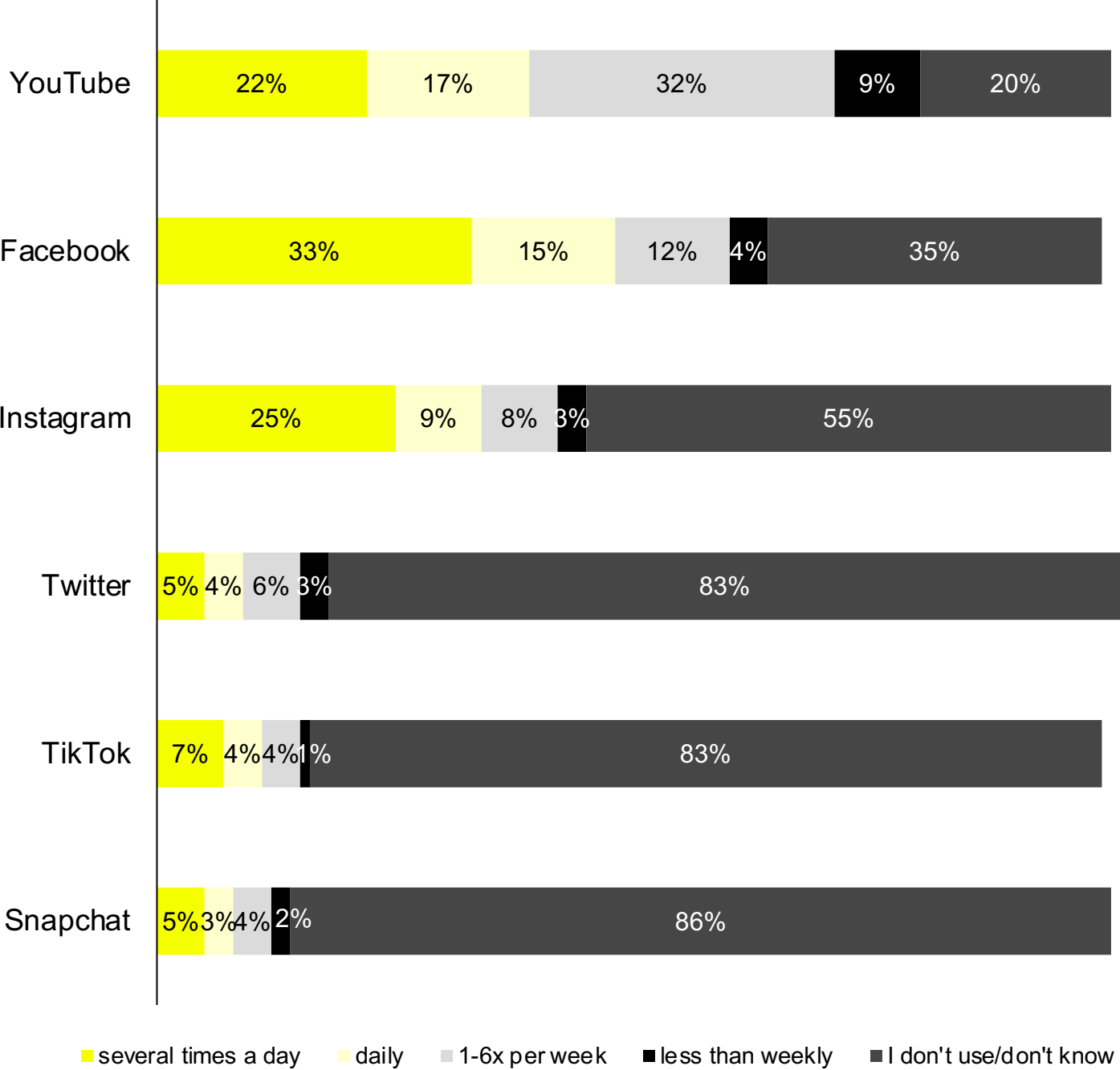
Appendix: Social media use

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?



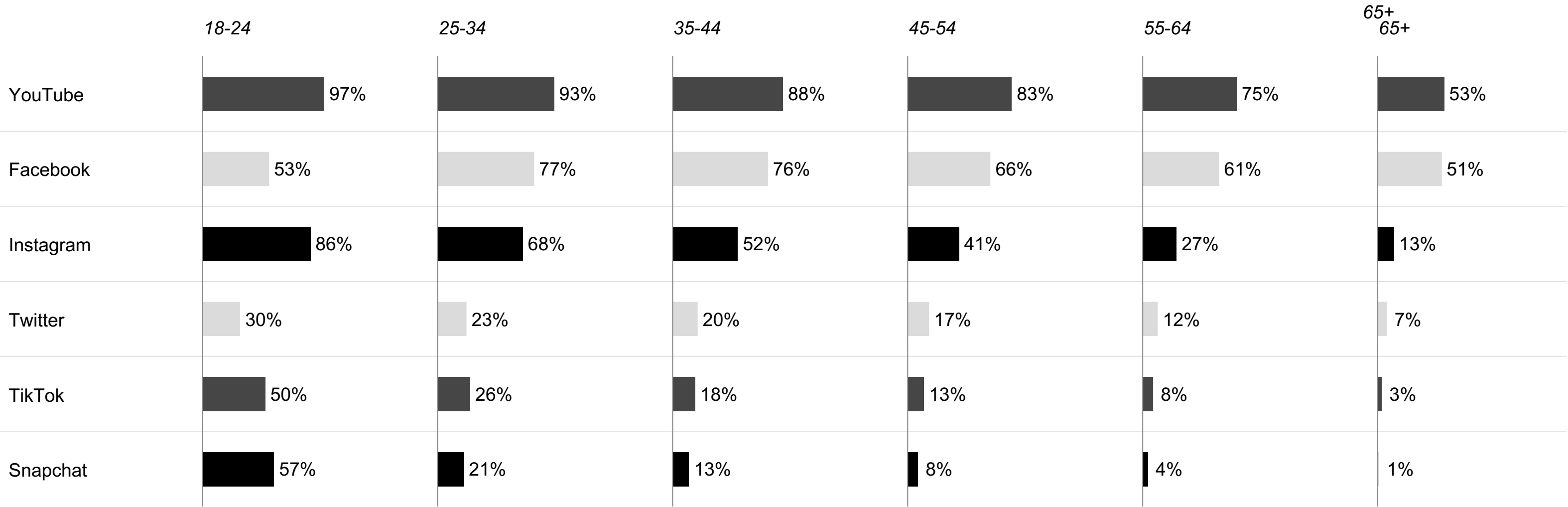
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

Appendix: Social media use

Significant differences in usage according to age

Social media usage by age



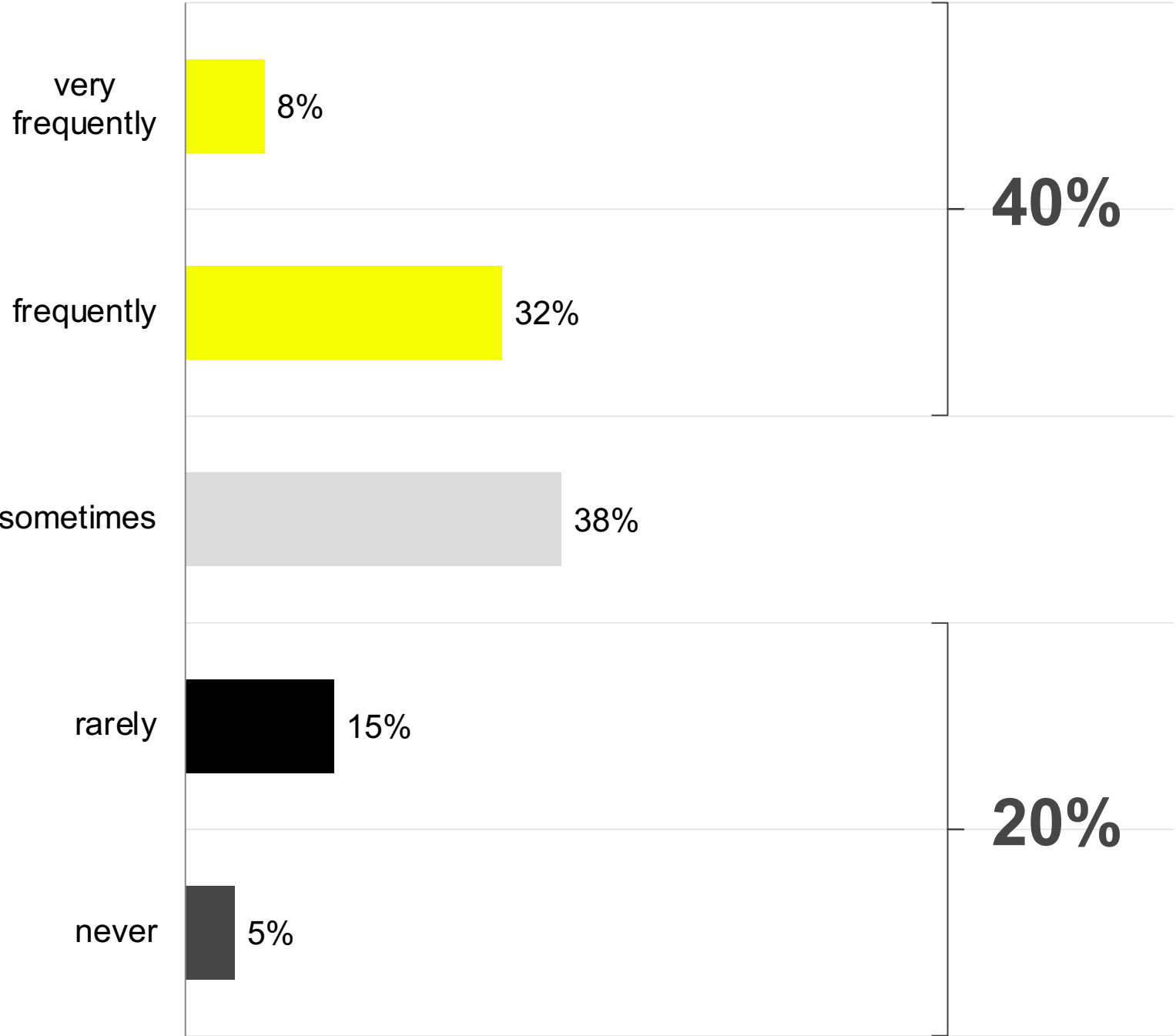
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote. Values represented; "I use".

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

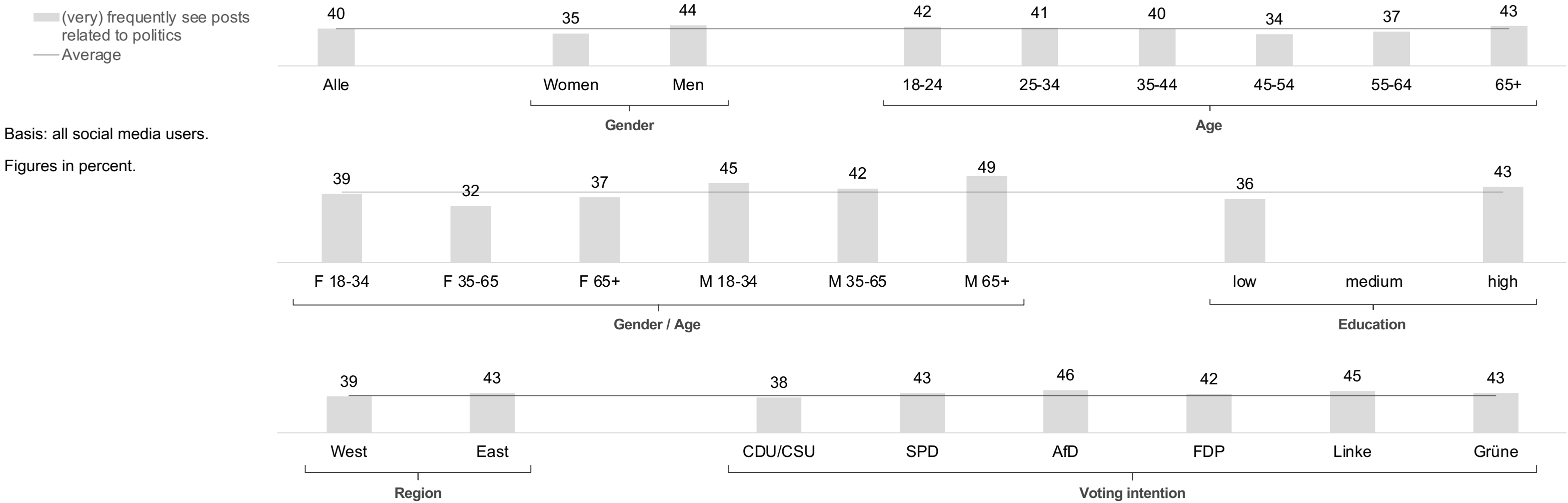
Politics in social media

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

Basis: all social media users.  
Missing values: don't know.



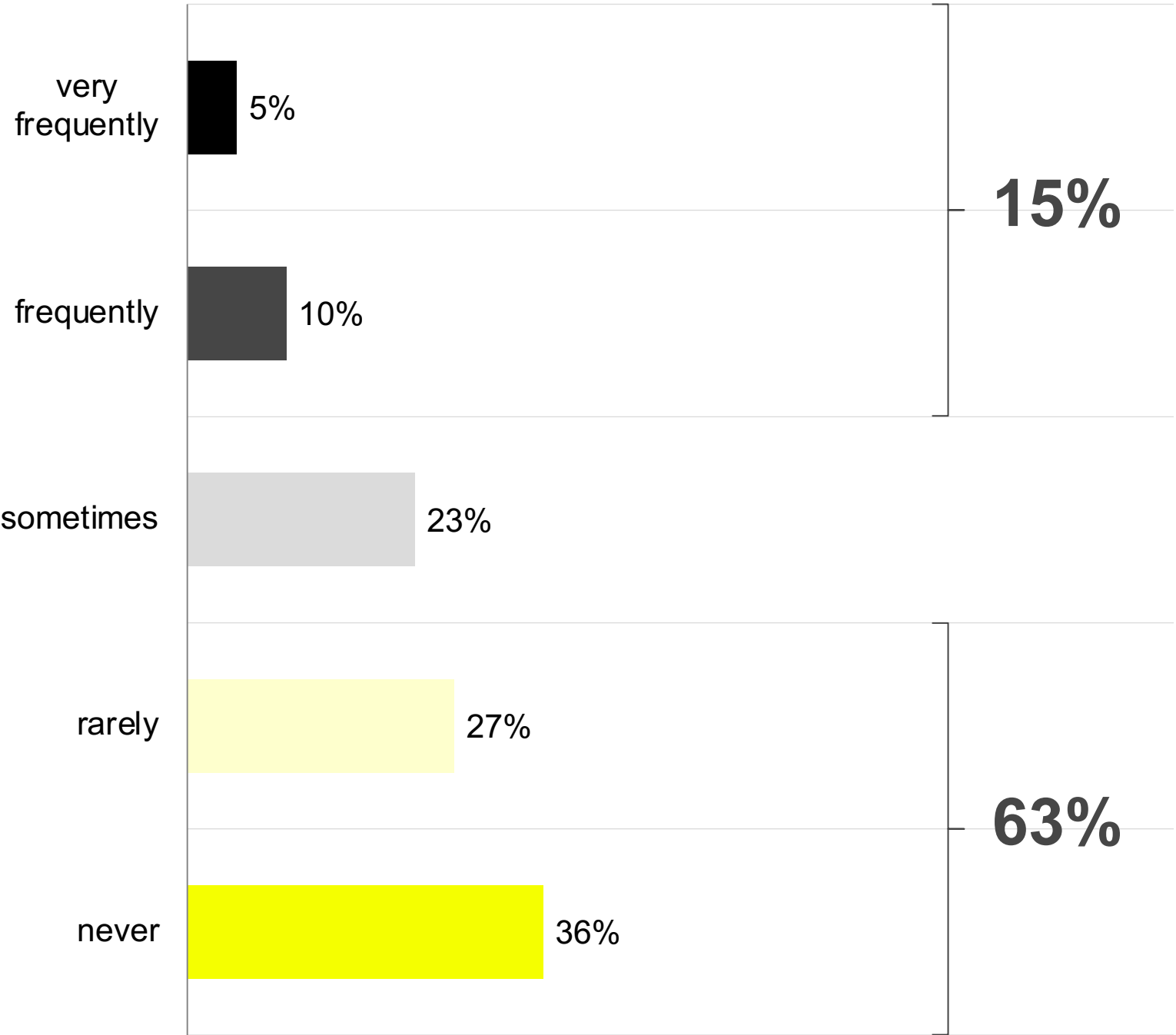
# Political content in social media is more often perceived by men



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

Politics in social media

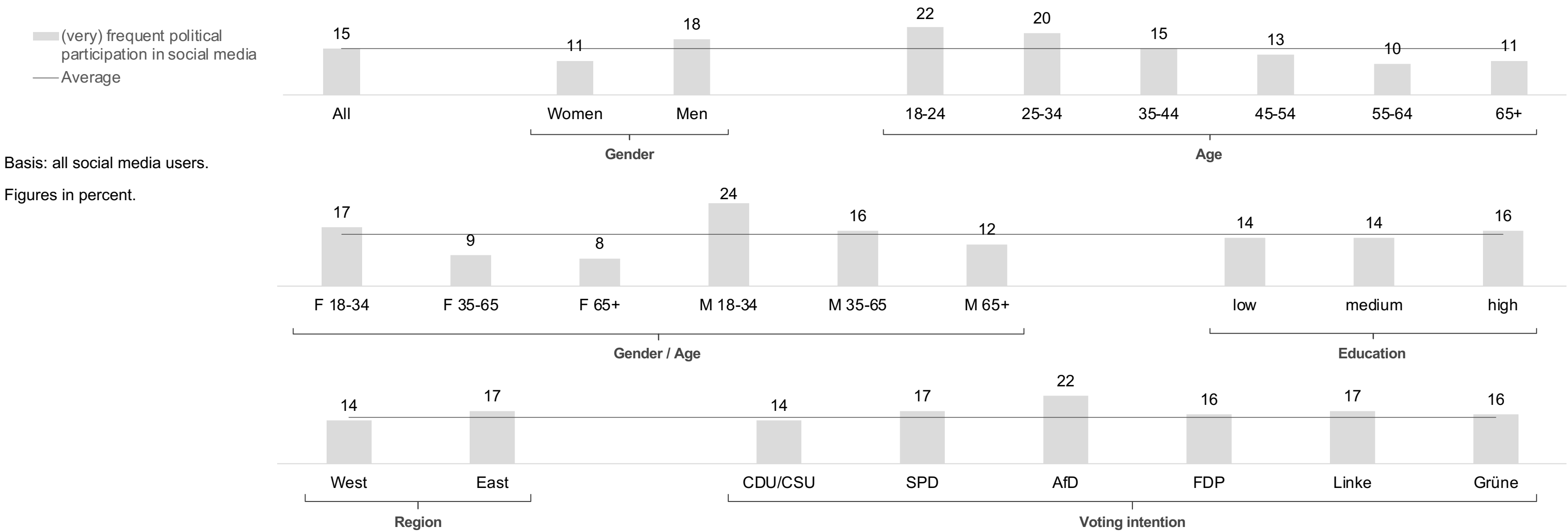
How often do you find yourself liking, sharing, commenting on or writing posts about politics on social media?



Basis: all social media users.

Missing values: don't know.

# More often politically active on social media: younger people, men and AfD voters



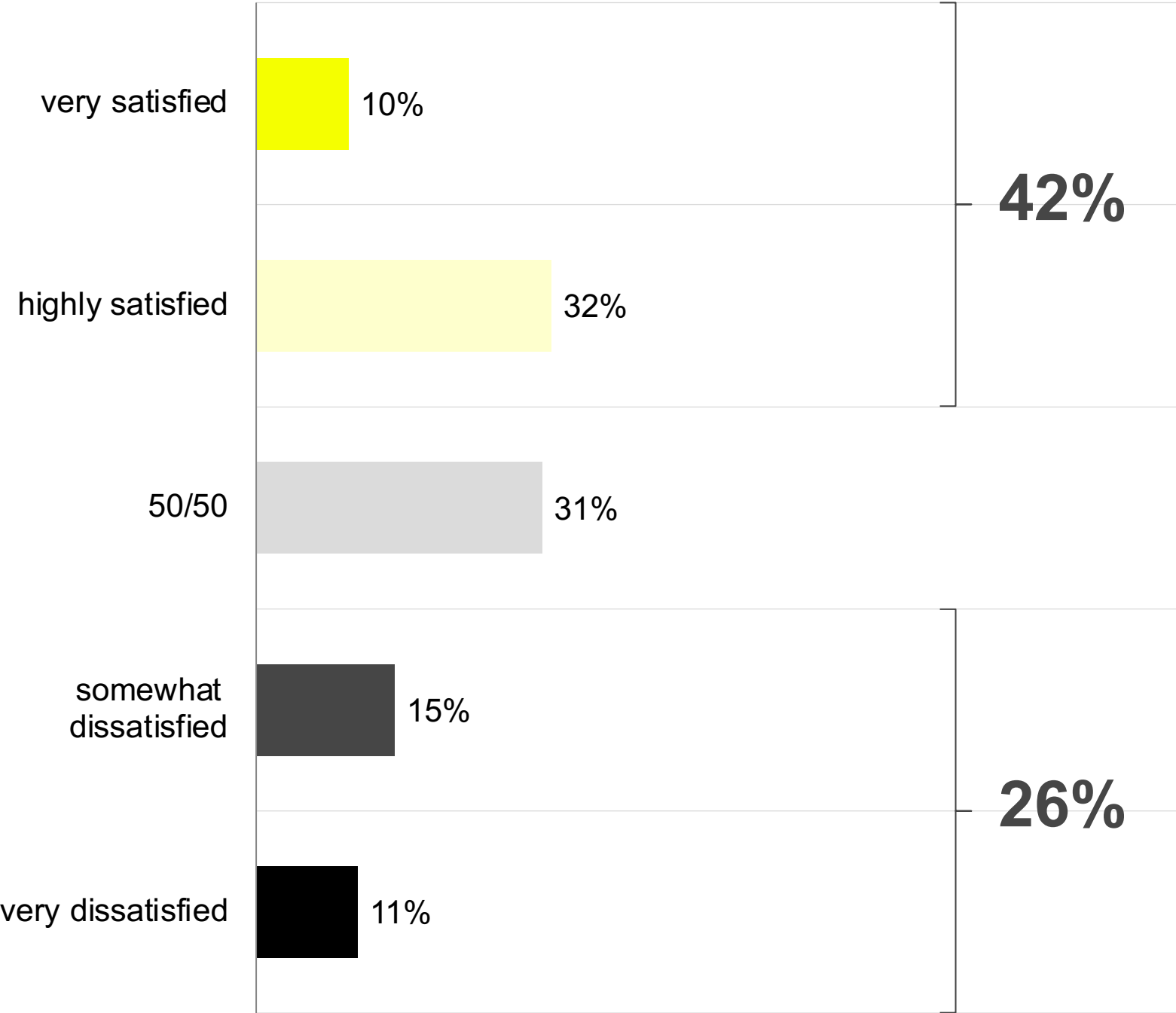


# Satisfaction with democracy

42 percent are somewhat satisfied with democracy in Germany, about a quarter are dissatisfied

## Satisfaction with democracy

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you – all in all – with democracy as it exists in Germany?

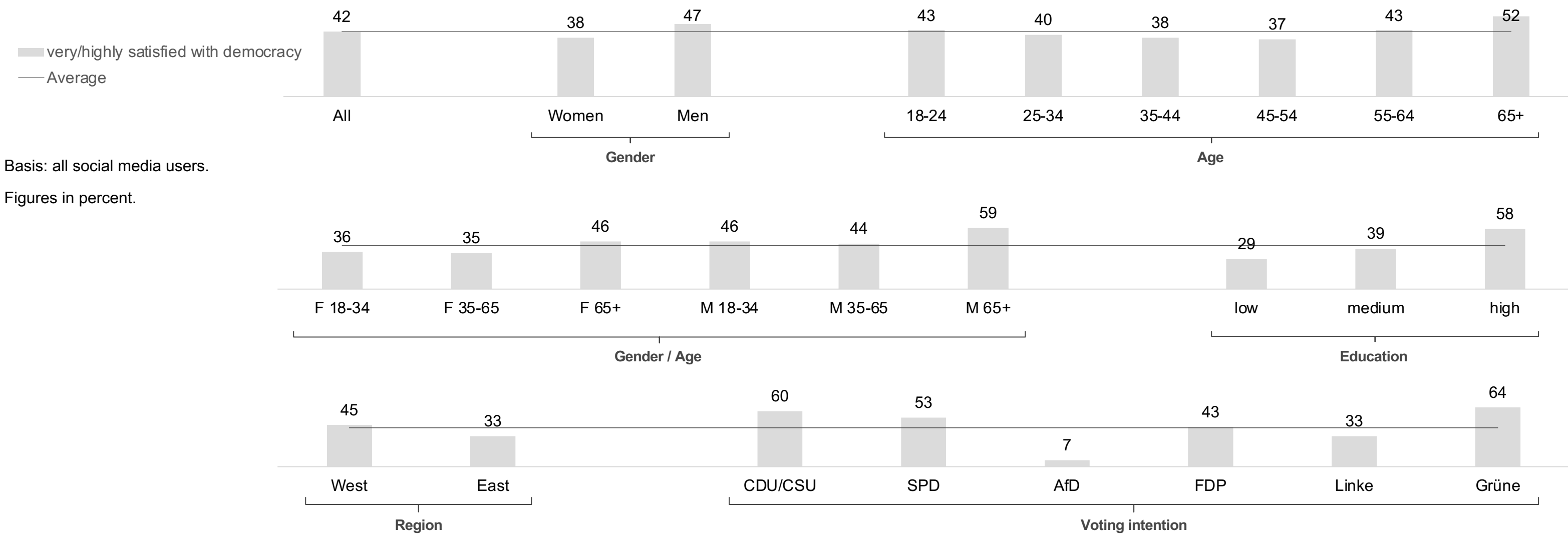


Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

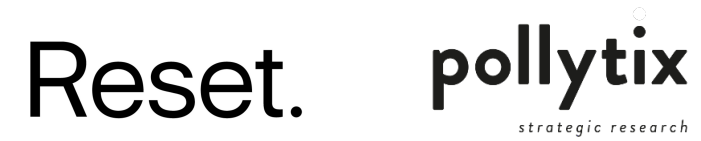
Missing values: don't know.

# Satisfaction with democracy

## Only 7 percent of AfD voters satisfied with the democracy in Germany



Basis: all social media users.  
Figures in percent.



**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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