

Hate, Disinformation and the Culture of Debate in the Federal Election Campaign

Nationwide comprehensive representative survey of
internet users eligible to vote, conducted:
1 – 6 October 2021, n=3,210 on behalf of Reset.

October 15 2021



Study Design

📅 Survey period

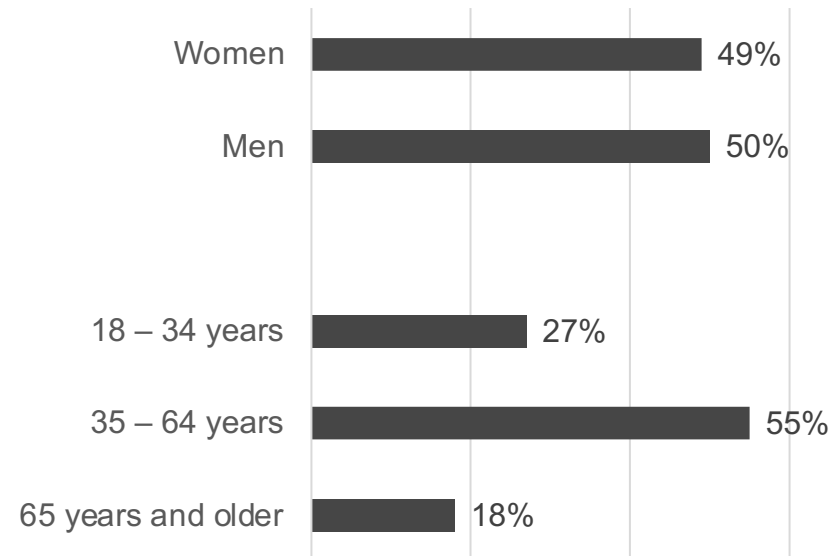
1 – 6 October 2021

🔍 Survey method

Online survey / CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview)

👤 Sample size and population

n = 3.210* internet users eligible to vote



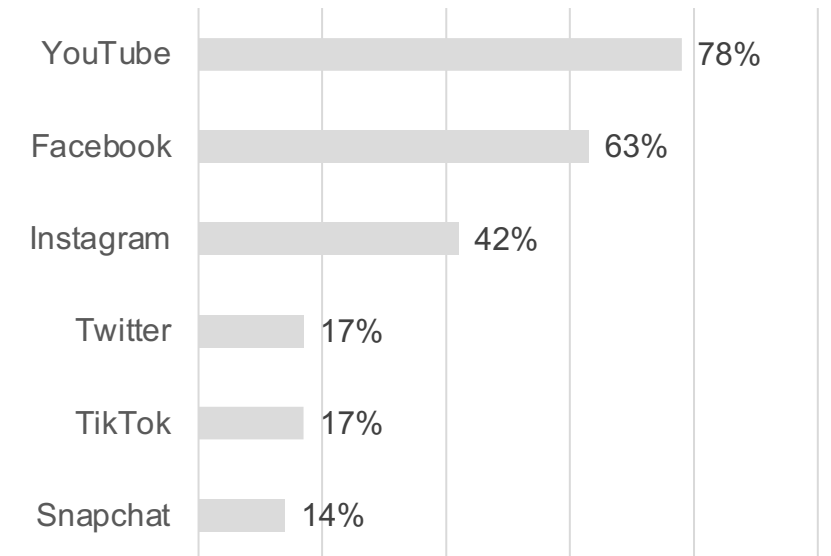
Data is weighted to ensure that the results are representative.

* Maximum margin of error for n=3,210 with a 95% confidence interval: +/- 1.8%.

📖 Definition

Social media users

Users of the following services:



90% of all internet users use at least one of the above-mentioned sites (= social media users)

Deviations from 100% due to rounding.

Executive Summary I/III

How did eligible voters experience the 2021 German federal election campaign on the internet and social media? How widespread were hatred, incitement and disinformation according to German citizens? These are some of the questions we investigated a few days after the federal election, in a representative survey of 3,210 internet users eligible to vote.

Hate

- A majority (51 per cent) of internet users surveyed who are eligible to vote felt that there was a lot of hate and agitation on social media during the federal election campaign. Half of them perceived that the candidates for chancellor were insulted a lot on social media. According to internet users eligible to vote, Armin Laschet suffered most of the attacks (43 per cent), followed by Annalena Baerbock (35 per cent). Only a minority of 6 per cent thought Olaf Scholz received most of the attacks. The majority believe a possible reason why Annalena Baerbock was attacked on social media was her mistakes in the election campaign, but a third also see clear sexist motives and (also) attribute the attacks to the fact that she is a woman (younger people see this possible motive more often than older people).
- Only one in five think that the platforms did enough to combat hate and incitement during the election campaign. A majority of 70 per cent, on the other hand, believe that the platforms did not do enough. The desire for the new Federal Government to make platforms more accountable for taking action against hate and incitement is therefore widespread (82 per cent agreement).

Executive Summary II/III

Disinformation

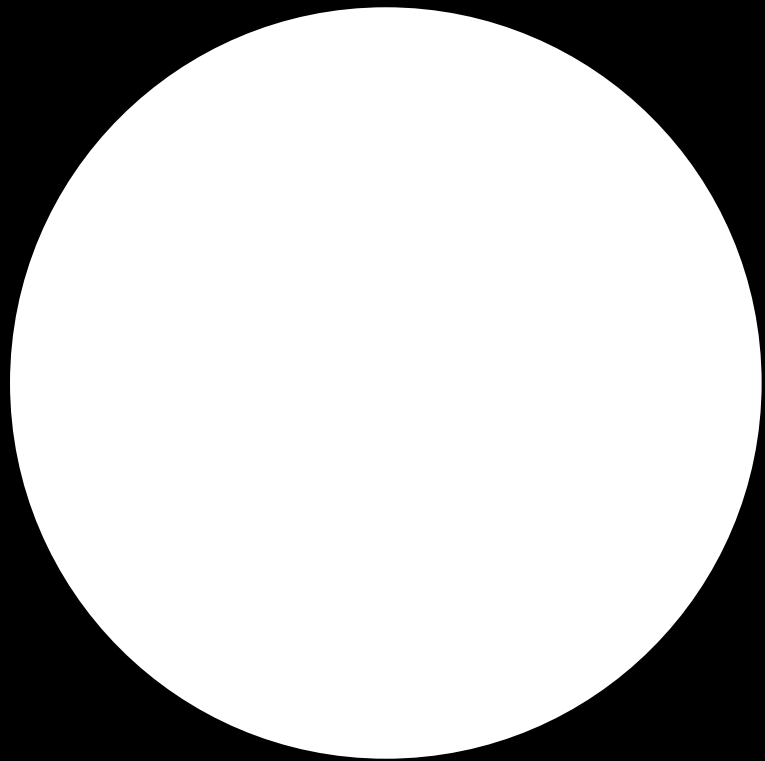
- According to the internet users surveyed, disinformation also played a role in the election campaign, especially on social media. 45 per cent believe that there was a lot of misinformation on social media during the election campaign. As a possible consequence of this, 41 per cent say they often did not know which information to believe during the campaign. Younger people had this feeling even more often.
- 38 per cent suspect that the media did not report correctly on party programmes and candidates. This assumption is particularly strong among AfD voters (67 per cent agreement). A total of 19 per cent, i.e. almost one in five eligible voters, believe that the election has been manipulated; among AfD voters, a majority of 57 per cent believe this.
- About 9 out of 10 social media users have already encountered disinformation on social media. On the other hand, only 29 per cent of social media users have ever seen warnings from the platforms about posts containing disinformation. The most common place to see these warnings is on Facebook. Overall, 27 per cent of Facebook users have seen a warning about a post - on Twitter, however, only 13 per cent of users, on Instagram 12 per cent and on TikTok 9 per cent of users.

Executive Summary III/III

Culture of Debate

- As a possible consequence of the perceived incitement and disinformation on social media, the majority (58 per cent) of social media users see the debates about the election held there as not very valuable. For 64 per cent, not enough attention was paid to the really important issues. Half of the users (51 per cent) even deliberately did not follow any information about the federal election on social media. A quarter, on the other hand, found the debates on social media to be helpful in their voting decision; among younger people it was as many as a third.
- Tagesschau.de is the most frequently mentioned public online news service used at least once a week (39 per cent). Only AfD voters make below-average use of public broadcasting services (28 per cent). Overall, the media consumption of AfD voters differs strongly from the usage patterns of those who vote for other parties. For

example, they use Bild.de with an above-average frequency (28 per cent) and are also the only voter group with above-average use of RT Deutsch (12 per cent) and Epoch Times (4 per cent). Concerning social media offerings and messengers, it is evident that AfD voters use Facebook (57 per cent), YouTube (43 per cent), and Telegram (17 per cent) at least once a day with above-average frequency.



01

Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

70 per cent believe that the platforms have done too little against hate and incitement; 82 per cent demand more commitment from the new government

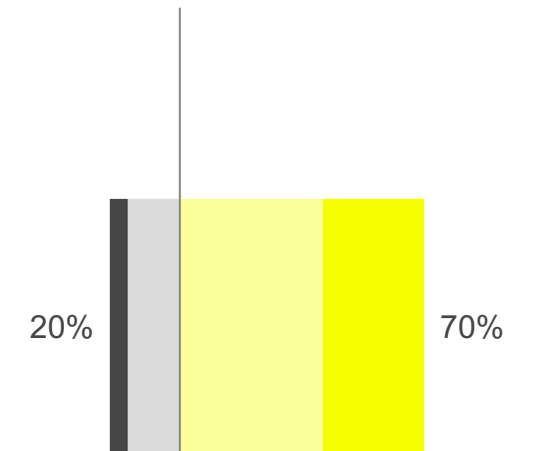
Responsibility of platforms and policymakers

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

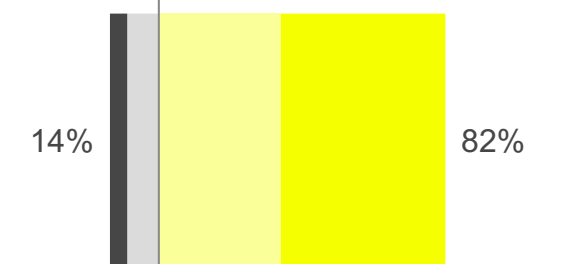
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

“Social media platforms have done too little to tackle hate and incitement in the election campaign.”



“The new Federal Government should force social media platforms to take stronger action against hate and incitement.”



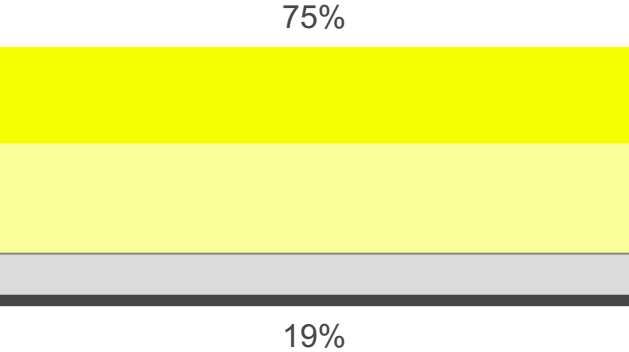
■ disagree completely ■ disagree somewhat ■ somewhat agree ■ completely agree

Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

There is strong agreement before and after the election that the platforms are doing too little to combat hate and incitement

Before the federal election:

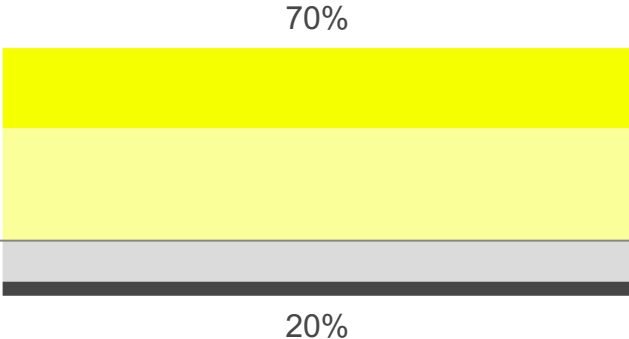
Social media platforms are not doing enough to combat **hate and incitement**.



Jun 21

After the federal election:

Social media platforms have done too little to tackle **hate and incitement** in the election campaign.



Oct 21

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

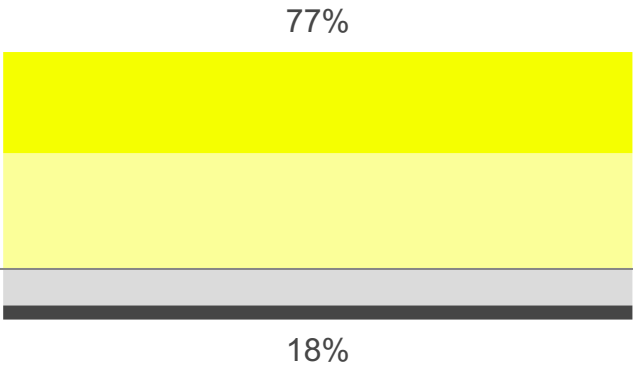
■ disagree completely ■ disagree somewhat ■ somewhat agree ■ completely agree

Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

The demand for stronger political action has even slightly increased compared to before the federal election

Before the federal election:

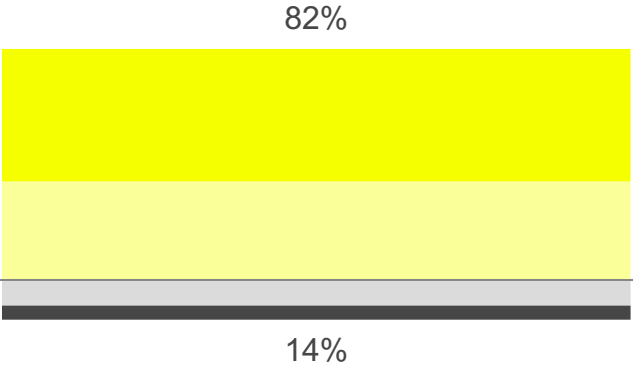
Policymakers are not doing enough to combat **hate and incitement** on the internet.



Jun 21

After the federal election:

The **new Federal Government** should force social media platforms to take stronger action against **hate and incitement**.



Oct 21

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

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

Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

For the majority, the election campaign on social media was characterized by too much hate and incitement and attacks on the candidates

Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

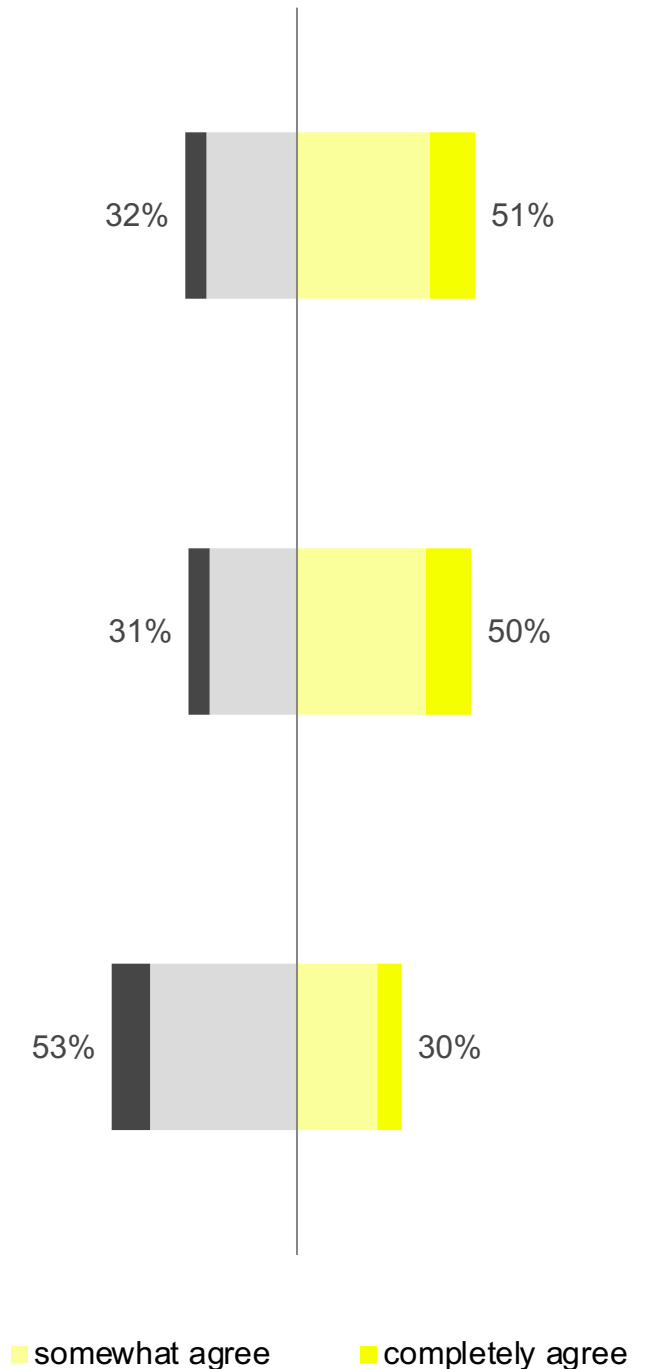
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

“There was a lot of hate and incitement on social media during the federal election campaign.”

“The candidates for Chancellor were much maligned on social media.”

“The election campaign on the internet was conducted too aggressively.”



Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

Hate and incitement in the election campaign was noticed mainly by younger people and Grüne voters, less by AfD voters

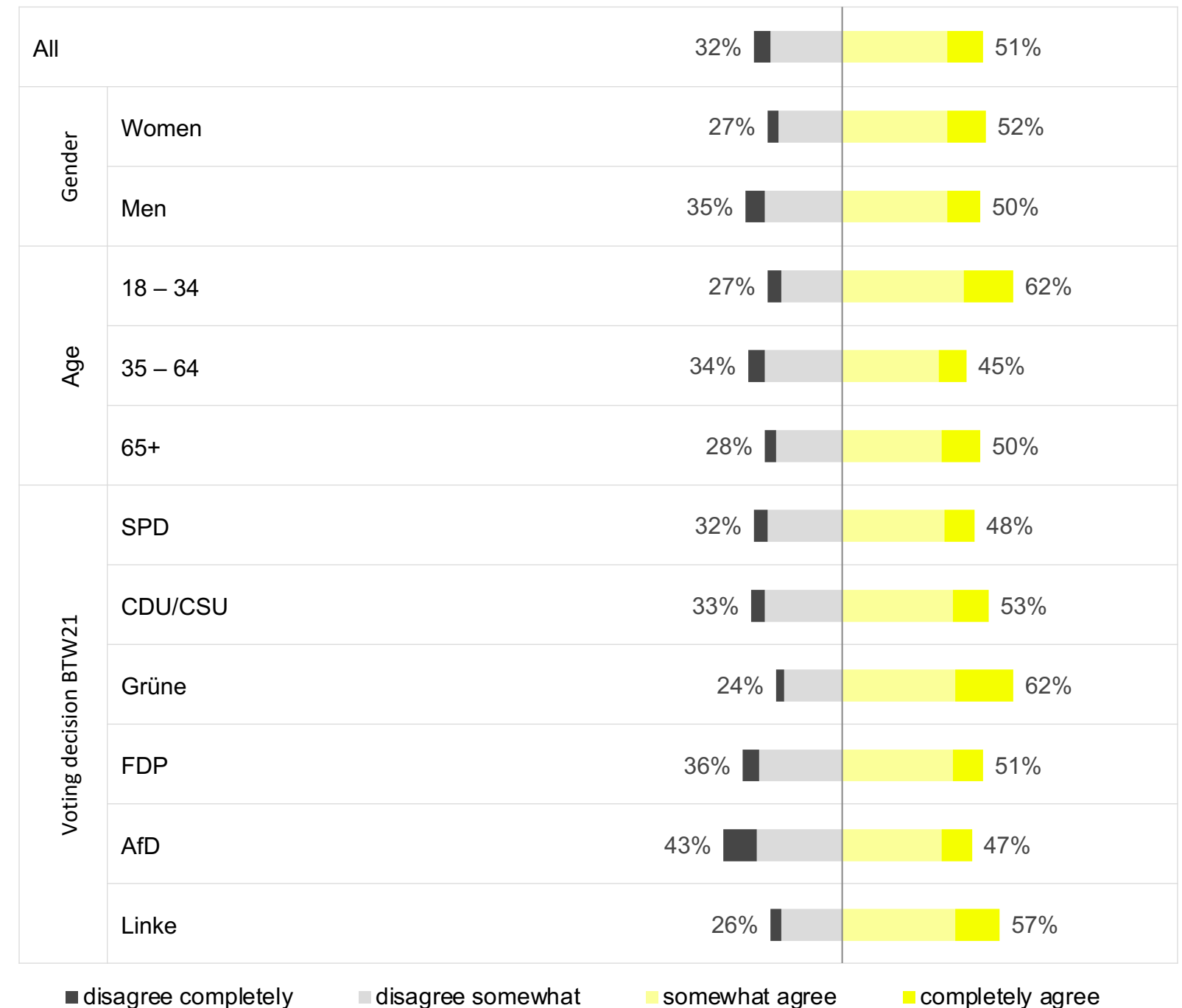
Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“There was a lot of hate and incitement on social media during the federal election campaign.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

Insults towards candidates in social media were also more likely to be perceived by younger people and Grüne voters

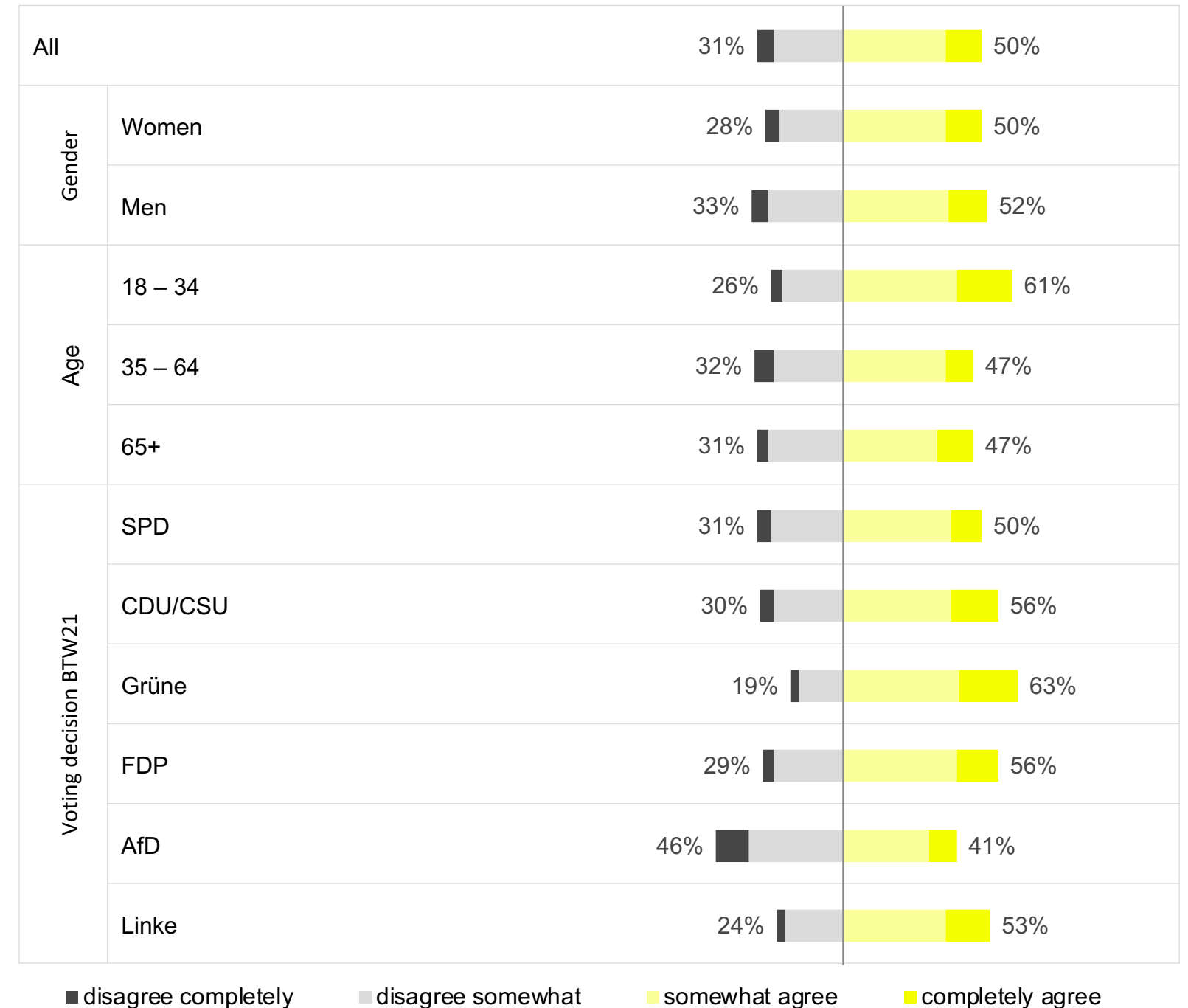
Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The candidates for Chancellor were much maligned on social media.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

However, the election campaign online was not seen as too aggressive by all age and voter groups

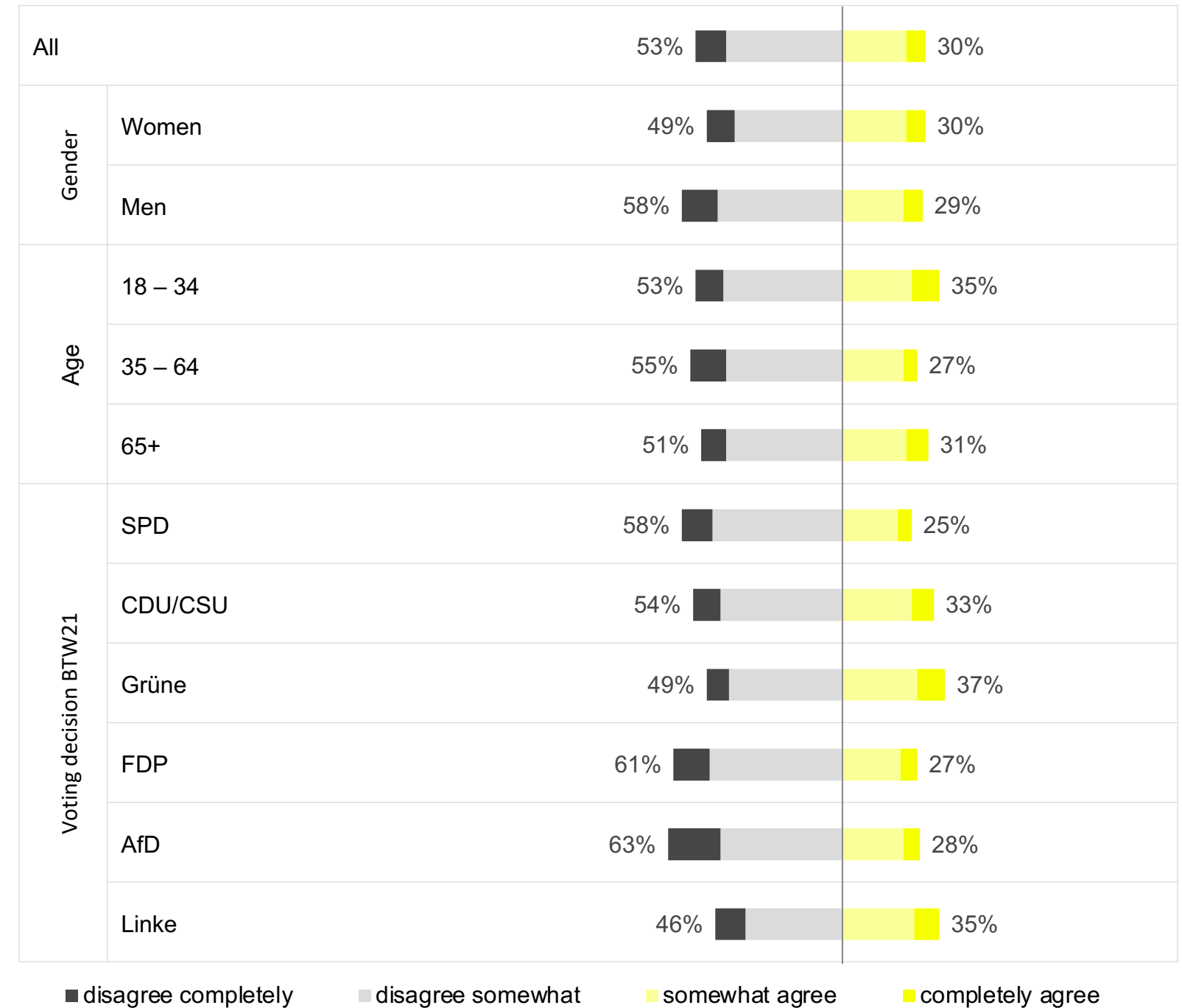
Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The election campaign on the internet was conducted too aggressively.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

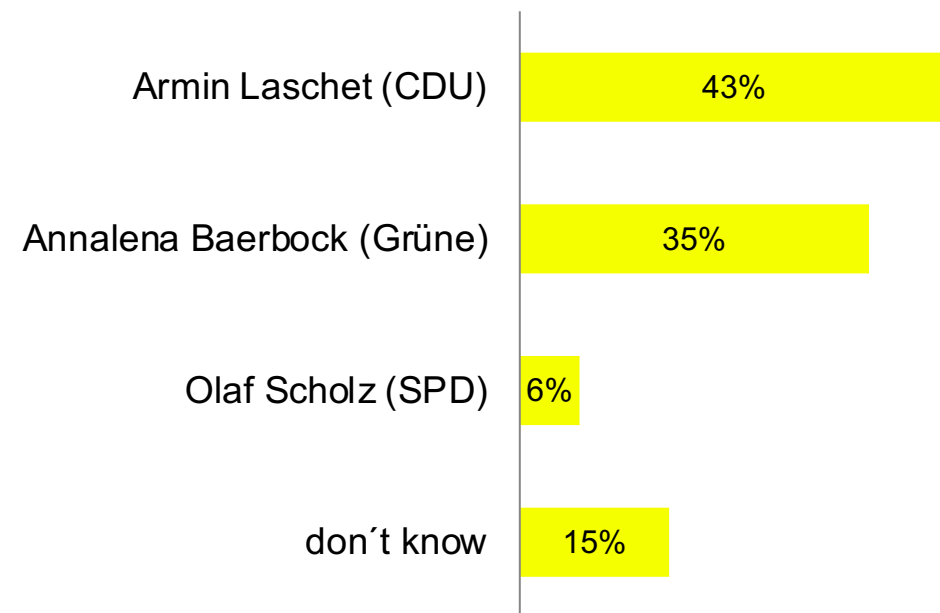


Hate in the Federal Election Campaign

Armin Laschet is considered to be the most attacked person on social media, followed by Annalena Baerbock - in her case, a third of people suspect sexist motives behind these attacks

Most attacks on social media

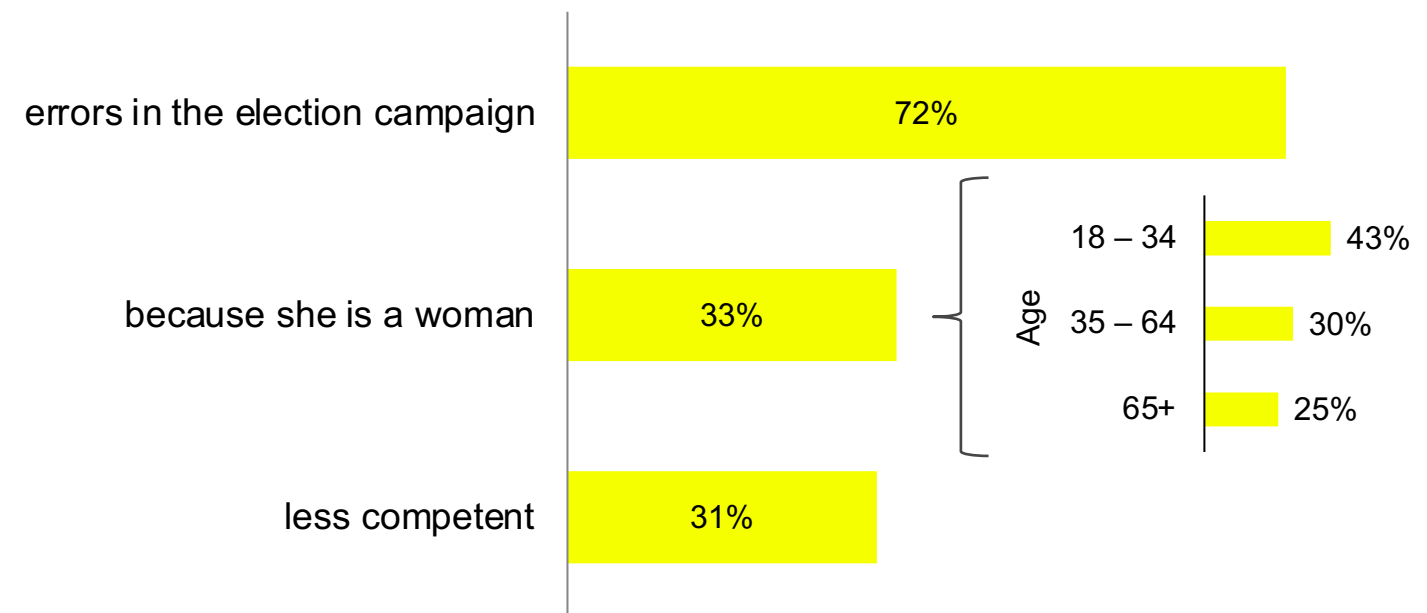
Which of the three candidates for Chancellor do you think received the most attacks on social media during the election campaign?



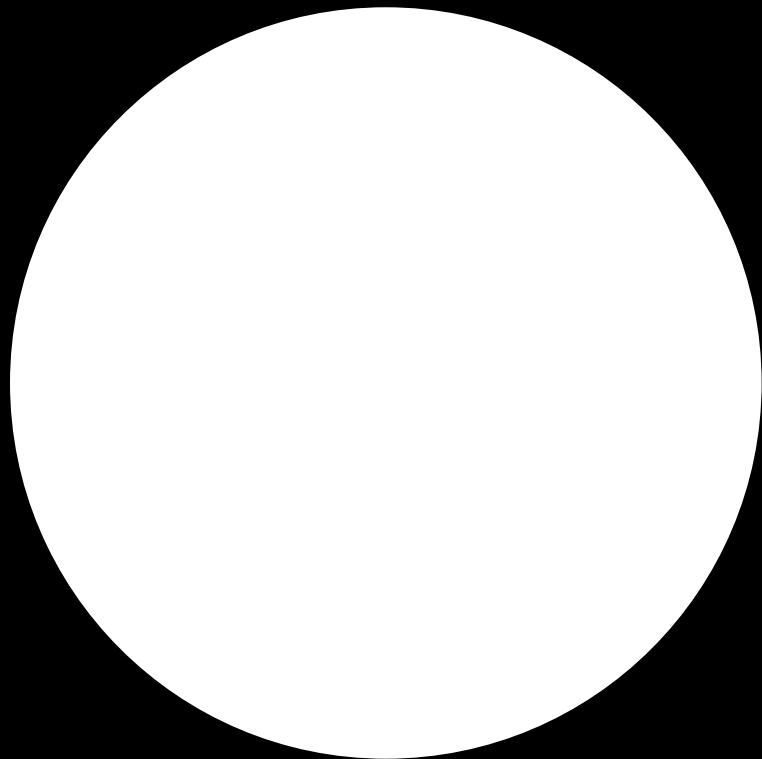
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Perceived reasons for the attacks on Annalena Baerbock

Why do you think Annalena Baerbock received the most attacks?



Basis: All those who believe that Annalena Baerbock has received the most attacks.
Multiple entries are possible.



02

Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

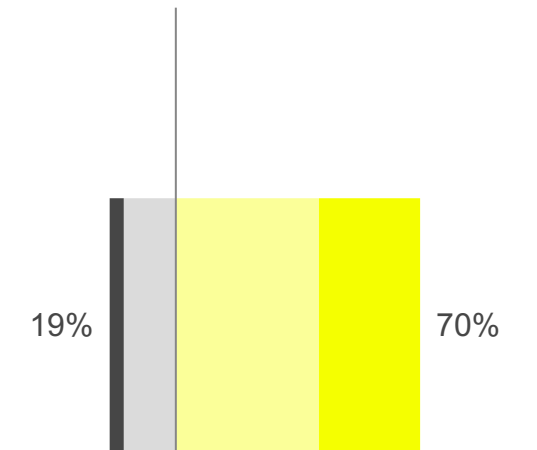
Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

A clear majority wants the new Federal Government to force platforms to take stronger action against misinformation

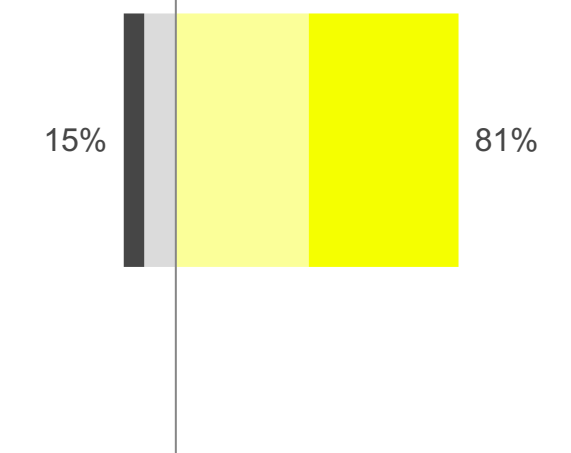
Responsibility of platforms and policymakers

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

“The social media platforms have done too little to curb fake news and misinformation in the election campaign.”



“The new Federal Government should force social media platforms more strongly to take action against fake news and misinformation.”



Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

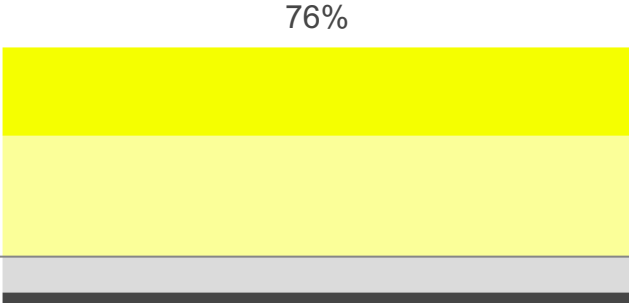
■ disagree completely ■ disagree somewhat ■ somewhat agree ■ completely agree

Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

Even before the federal election, the strong consensus was that the platforms were doing too little to combat disinformation

Before the federal election:

Social media platforms are not doing enough to combat **fake news and misinformation**.

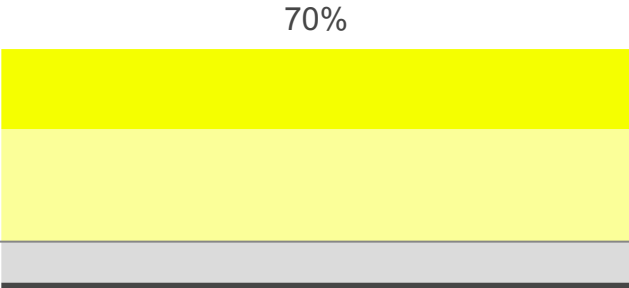


17%

Jun 21

After the federal election:

The **social media platforms** have done too little to curb **fake news and misinformation** in the election campaign.



19%

Oct 21

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

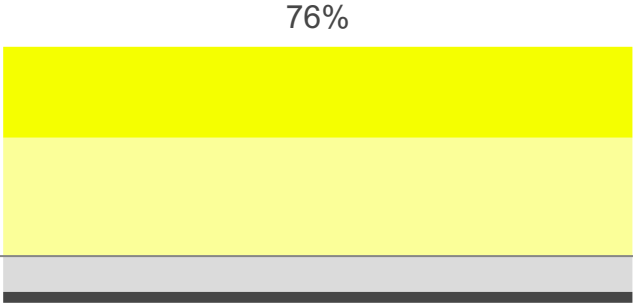
■ disagree completely ■ disagree somewhat ■ somewhat agree ■ completely agree

Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

Even after the federal election, a clear majority calls for stronger action against disinformation on part of the politicians

Before the federal election:

Policymakers are not doing enough to combat **fake news and misinformation** on the internet.

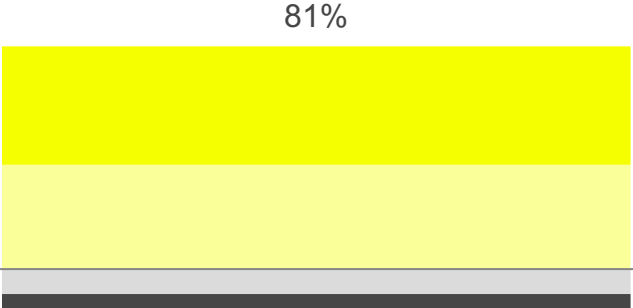


17%

Jun 21

After the federal election:

The **new Federal Government** should force social media platforms more strongly to take action against **fake news and misinformation**.



15%

Oct 21

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

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

Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

45 per cent believe that there was a lot of misinformation on social media during the election campaign; around one in five believe that the election was manipulated

Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

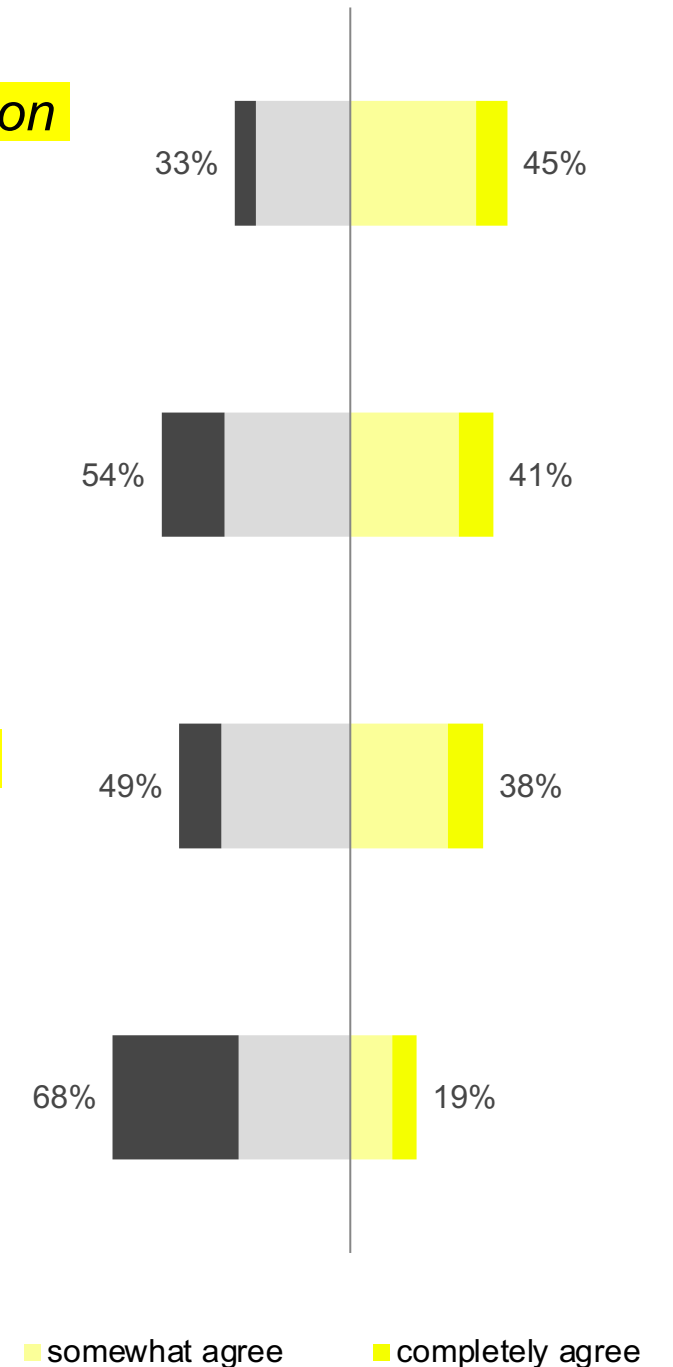
Missing Values: don't know.

“There was a lot of misinformation on social media during the federal election campaign.”

“During the election campaign, I often did not know what information to believe.”

“The media did not report correctly on the party programmes and candidates.”

“The election was manipulated.”



Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

Circulation of a lot of misinformation on social media is more often suspected by younger people

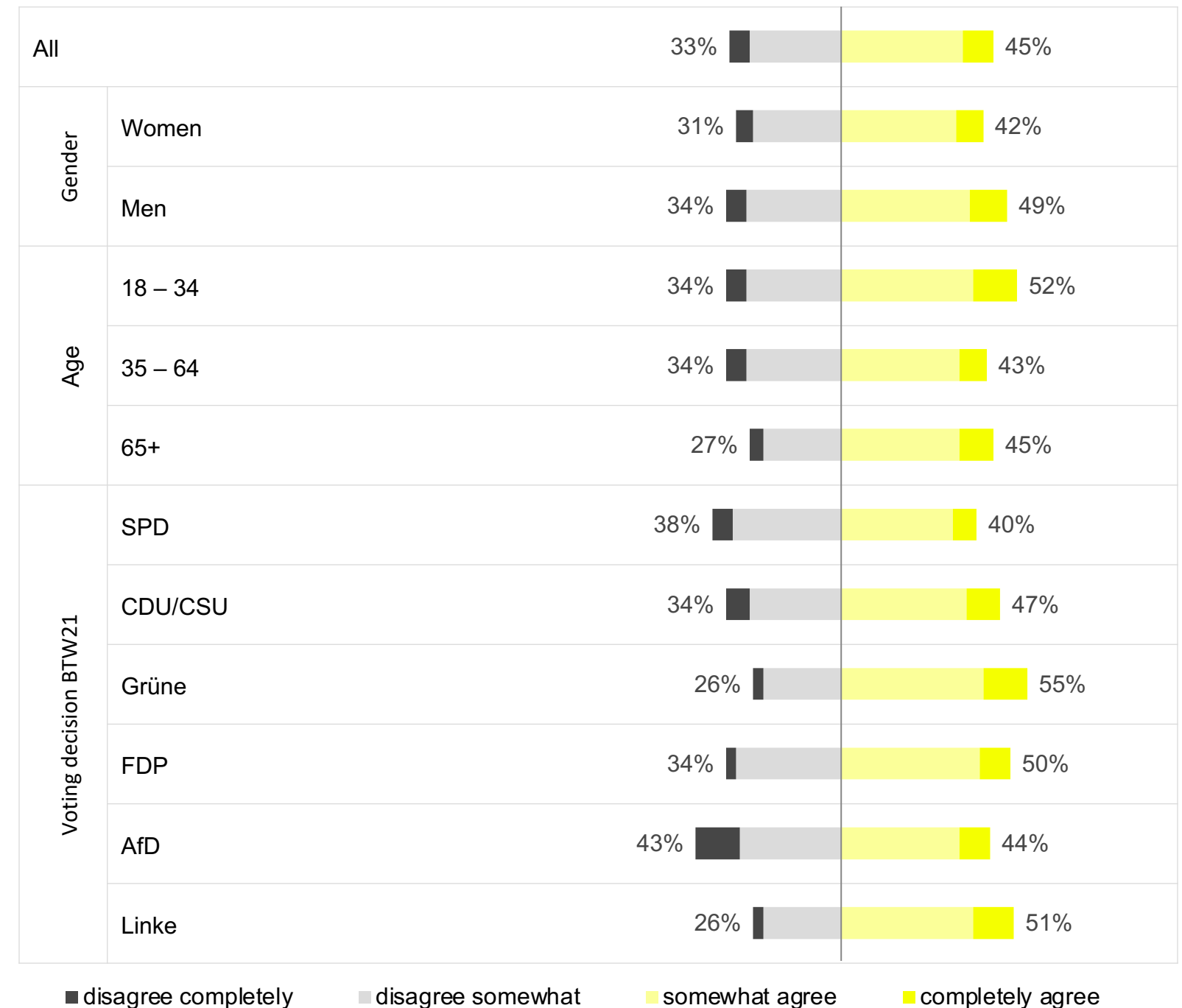
Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“There was a lot of misinformation on social media during the federal election campaign.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

The feeling of no longer knowing what information to believe affected women and younger people more frequently

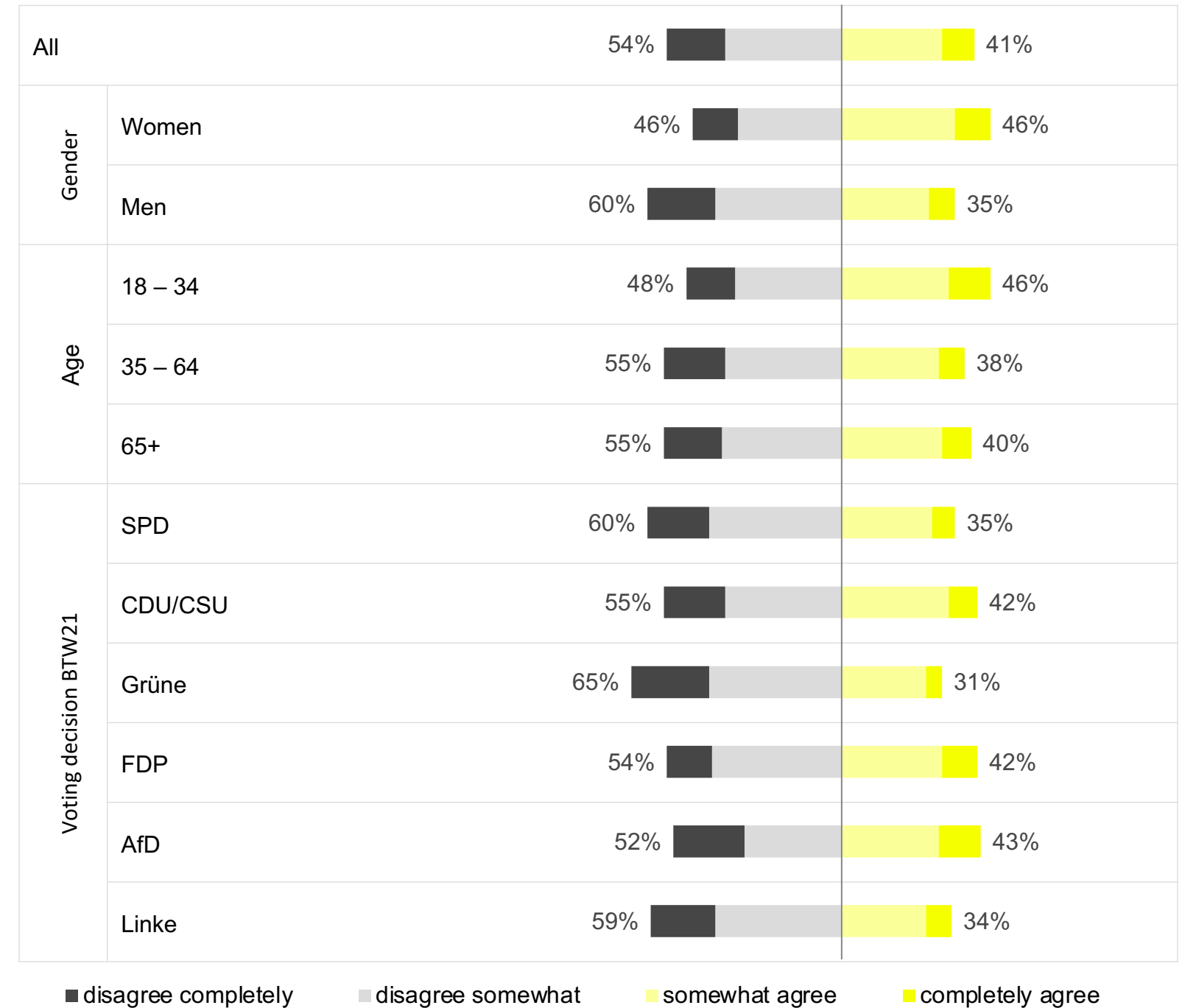
Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“During the election campaign, I often did not know what information to believe.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

AfD voters in particular blame the media and believe that they might have not reported correctly on programmes and candidates

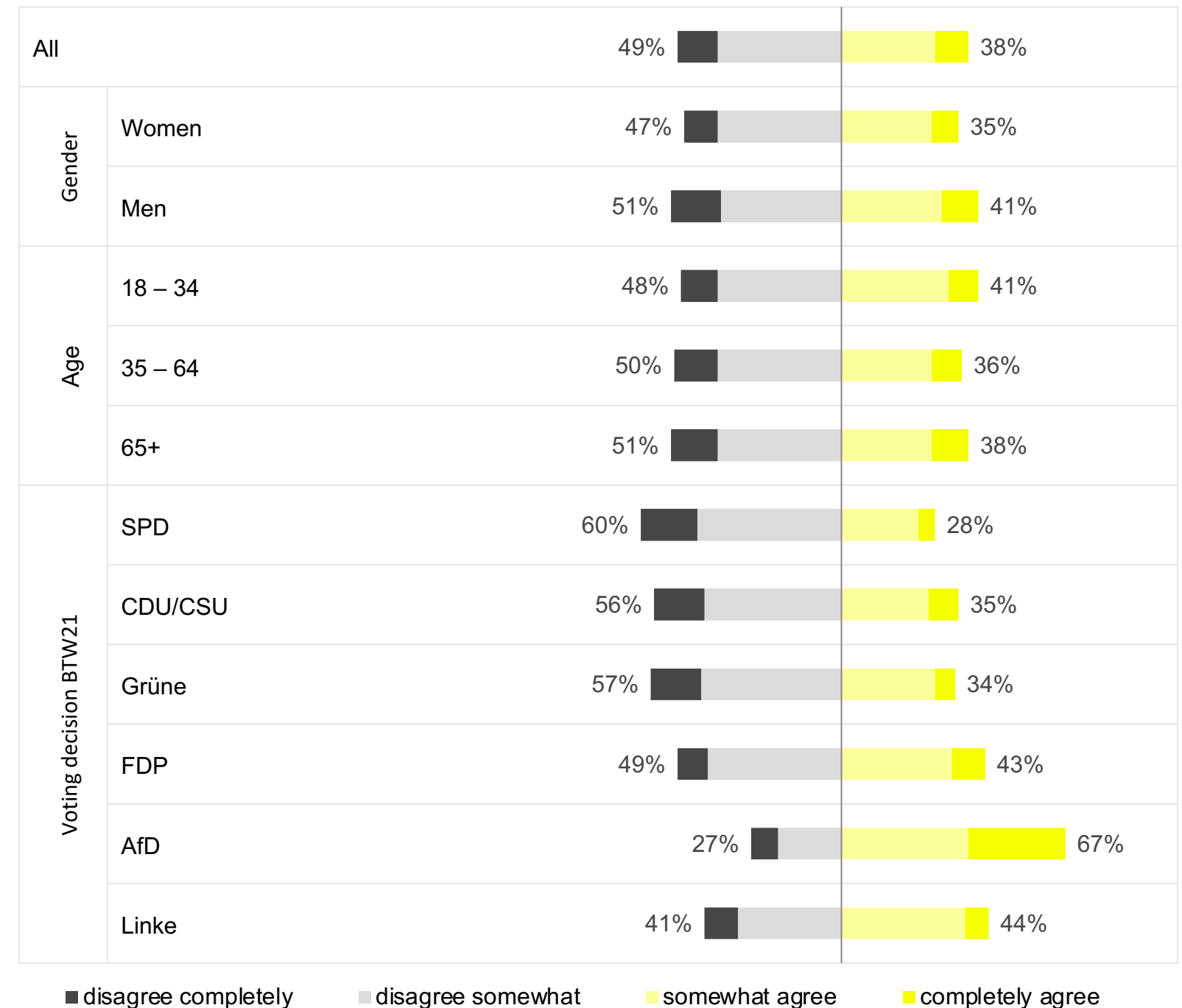
Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The media did not report correctly on the party programmes and candidates.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

Only a majority of AfD voters believe that the election was manipulated

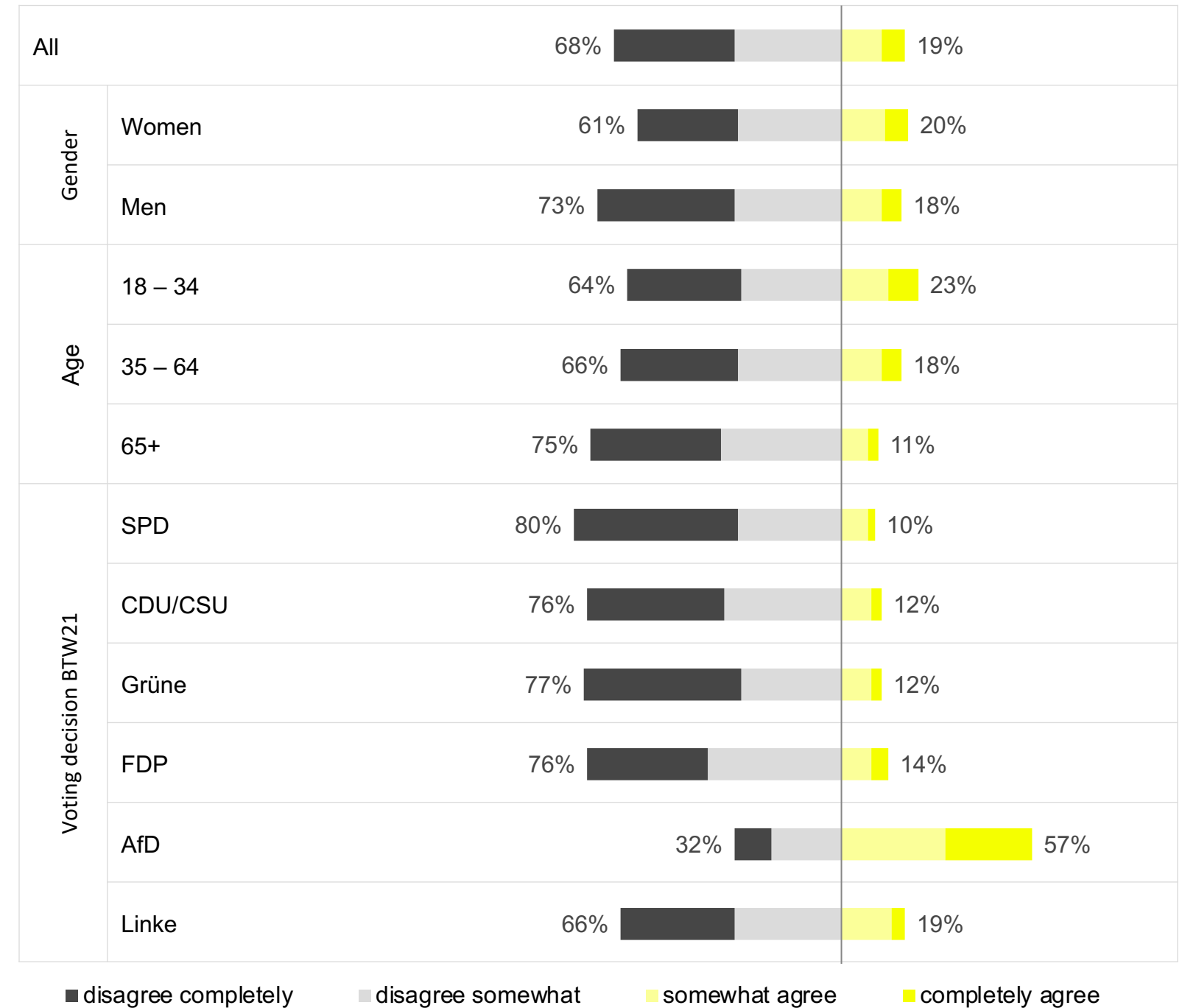
Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The election was manipulated.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

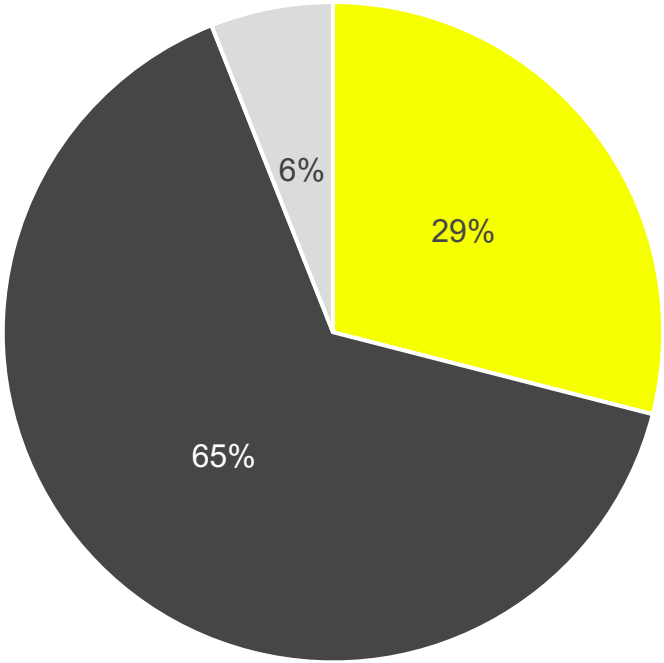


Disinformation in the Federal Election Campaign

Around a quarter of all users have seen a warning about disinformation on Facebook; this happens much less frequently to users on other platforms

Perception of warnings from the platforms

Have you ever seen a warning on a post on social media where the platform has flagged it as misinformation?

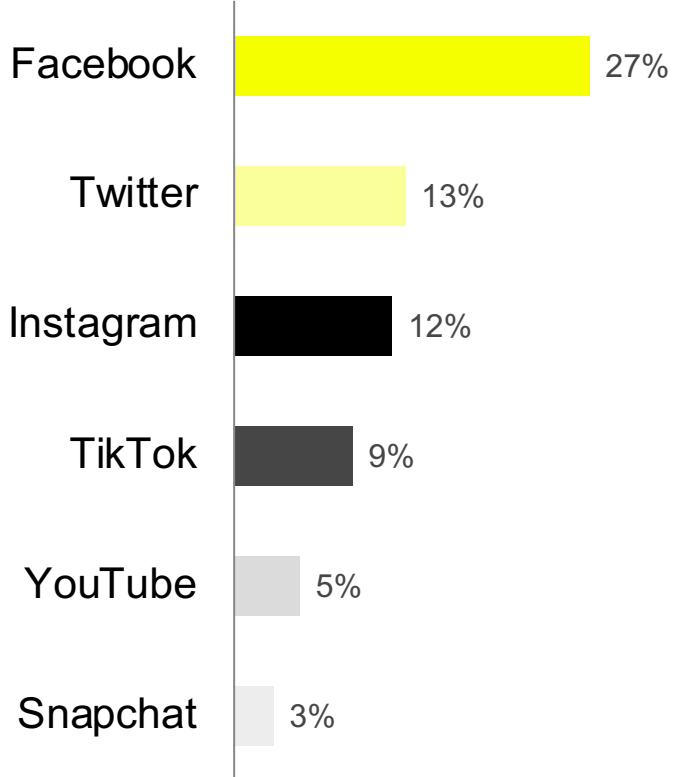


■ no ■ don't know ■ yes

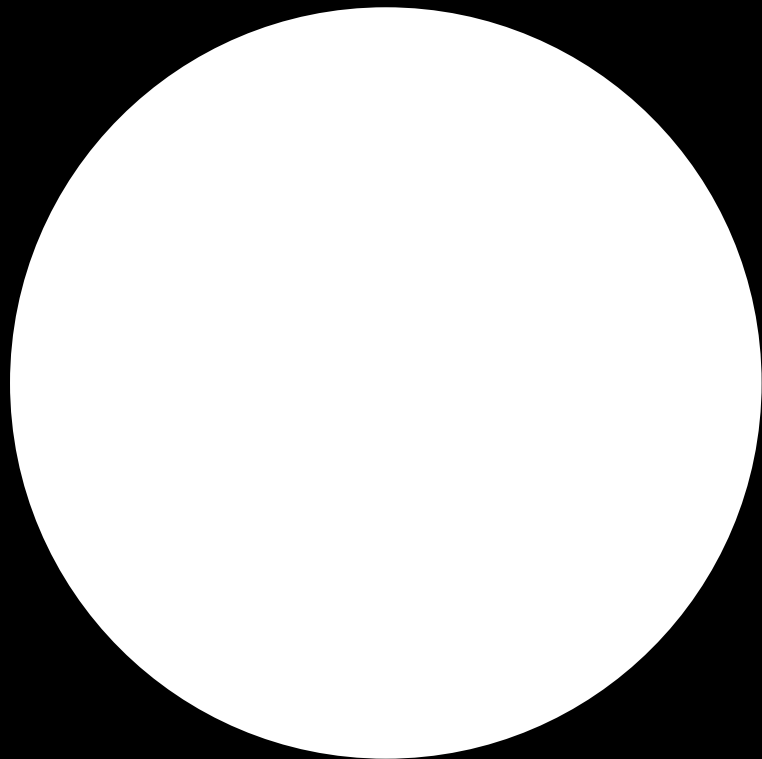
Basis: all social media users.

Perception of warnings platform-specific

On which platform did you see this warning?



Basis: Users of the respective platform. Multiple entries are possible.



03

Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

Social media debates on election topics are perceived as valuable by only a few; half of the users deliberately did not look for information there

Culture of Debate in Social Media in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

Basis: all social media users.

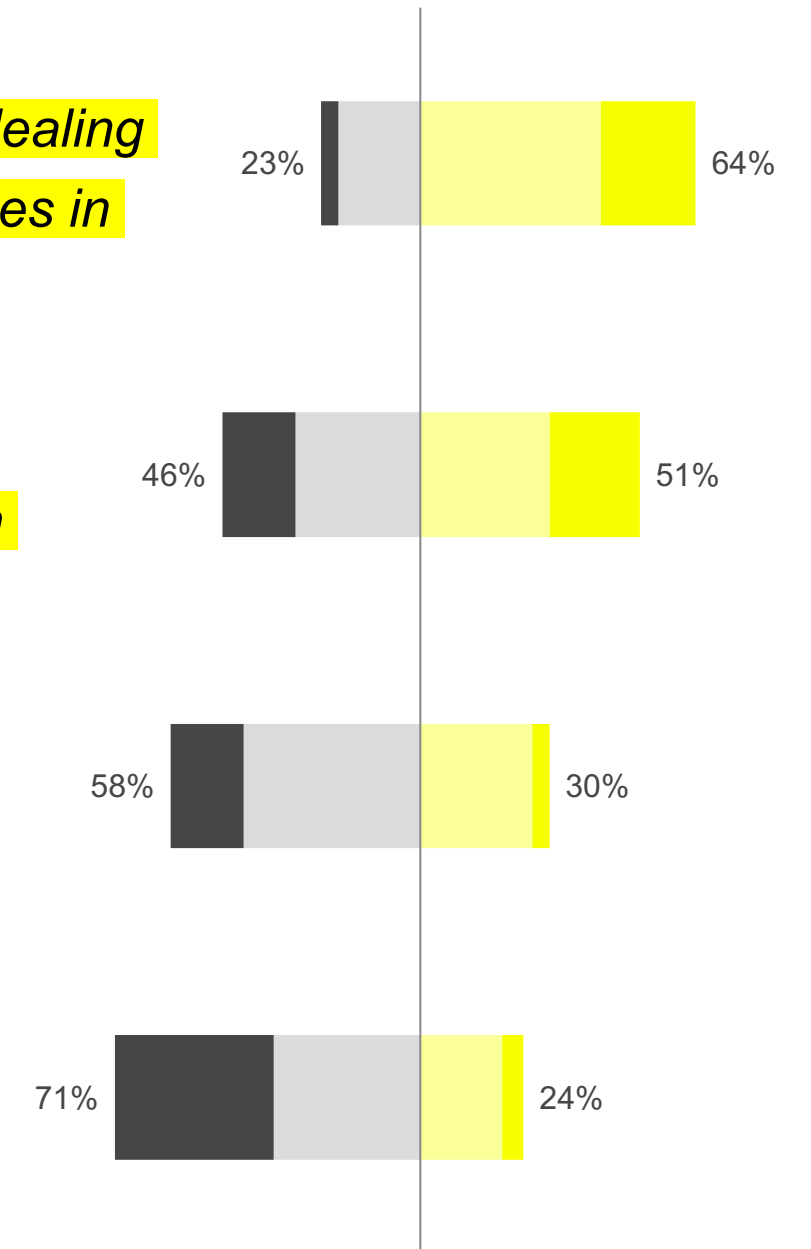
Missing Values: don't know.

"The debates on social media were dealing too little with the really important issues in the election campaign."

"I deliberately did not follow any information about the federal election on social media."

"The debates on social media around the federal election have enriched society."

"The debates on social media helped me to make a decision in the federal election."



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

Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

A vast majority of users believe that the important issues of the election campaign were neglected on social media

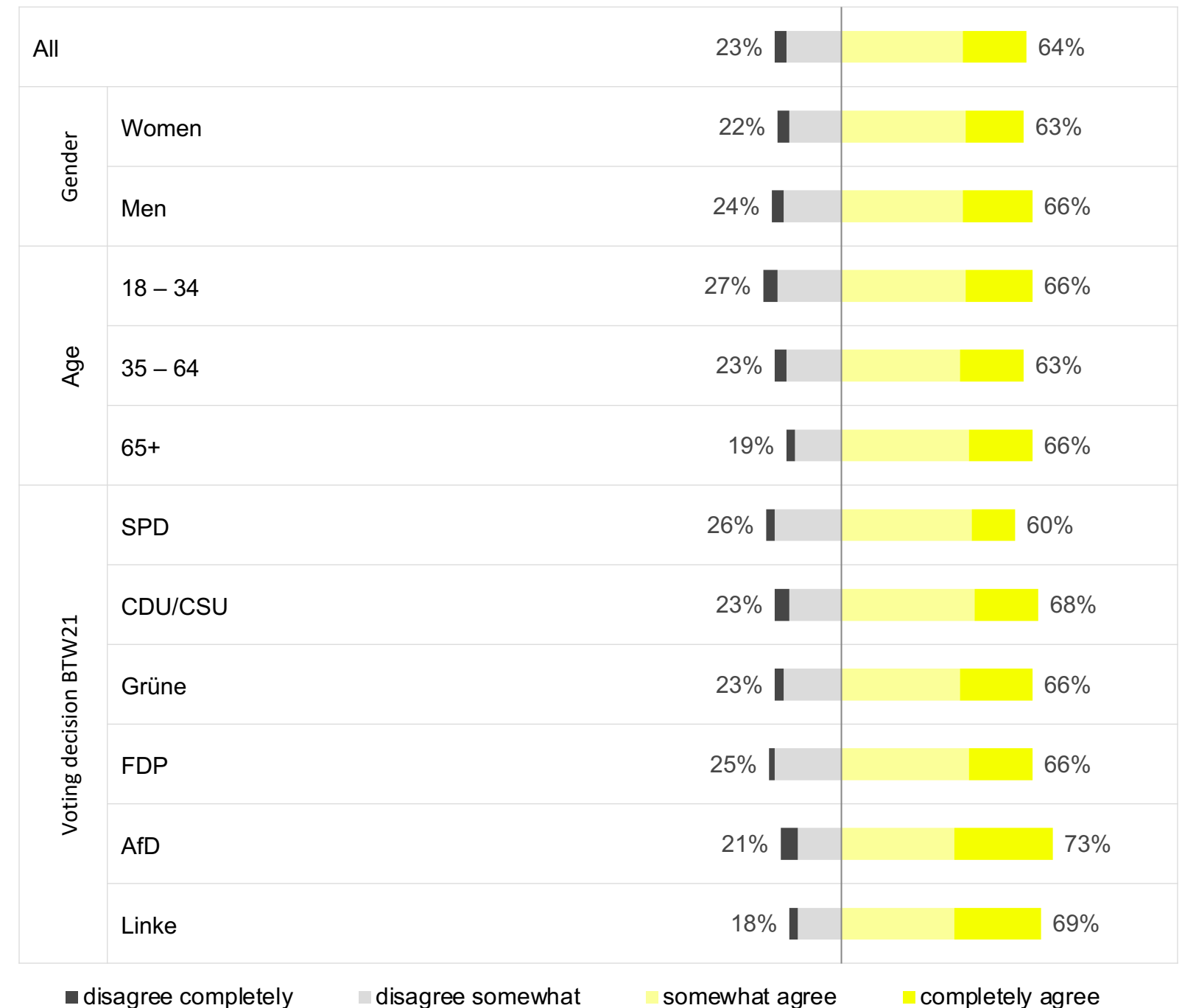
Culture of Debate in Social Media in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The debates on social media were dealing too little with the really important issues in the election campaign.”

Basis: all social media users.

Missing Values: don't know.



Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

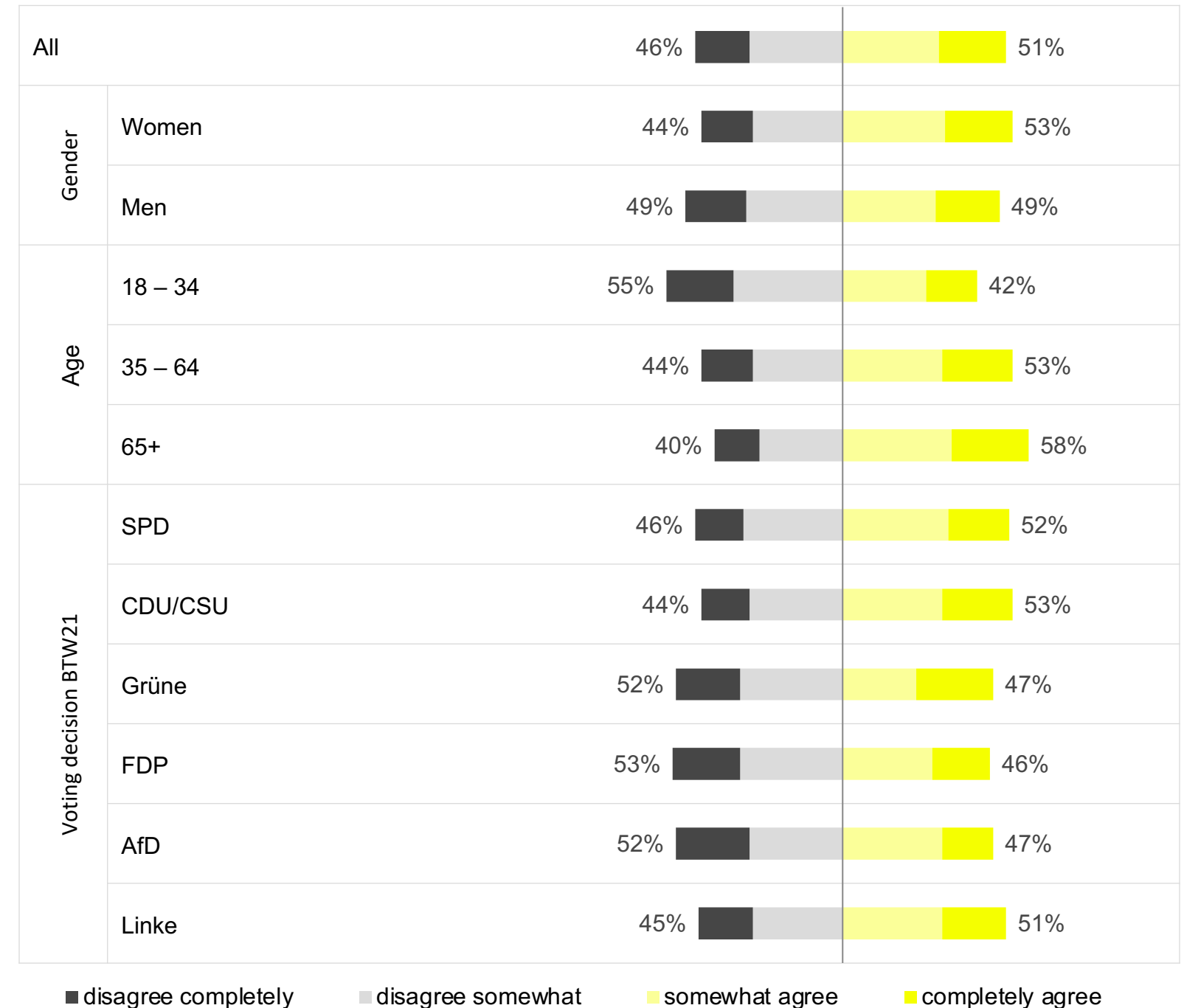
Social media users are divided: around half have deliberately ignored information about the election on social media, older people more often than younger people

Culture of Debate in Social Media in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

"I deliberately did not follow any information about the federal election on social media."

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



Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

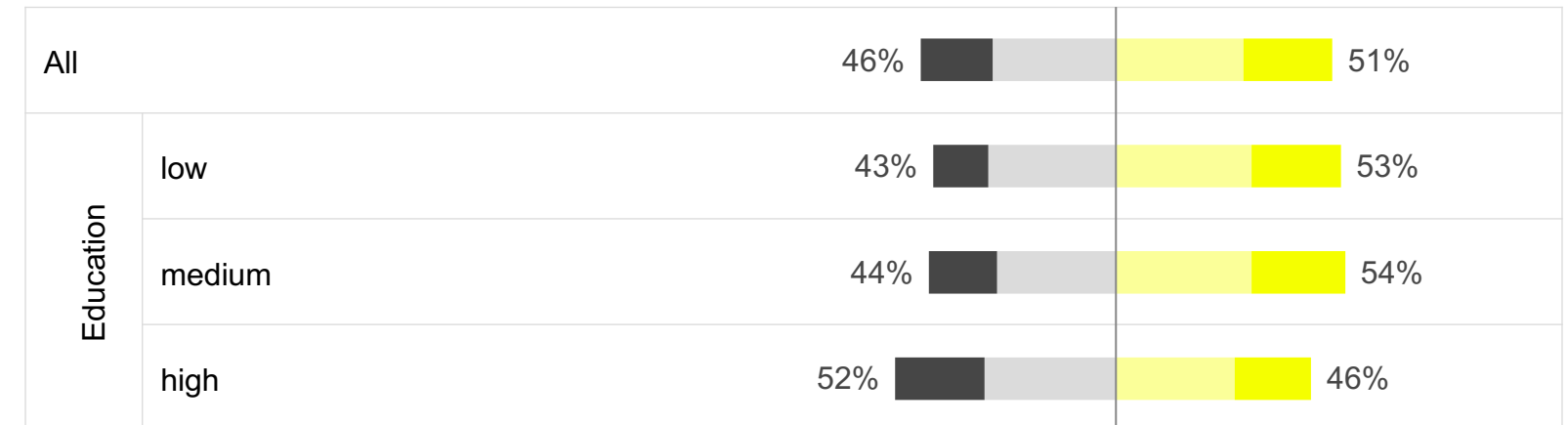
Social media users with a low/medium level of education were slightly more likely to have intentionally ignored information on the federal election

Culture of Debate in Social Media in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

"I deliberately did not follow any information about the federal election on social media."

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



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

Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

Only about one third of social media users consider the debates on the election held there to be enriching

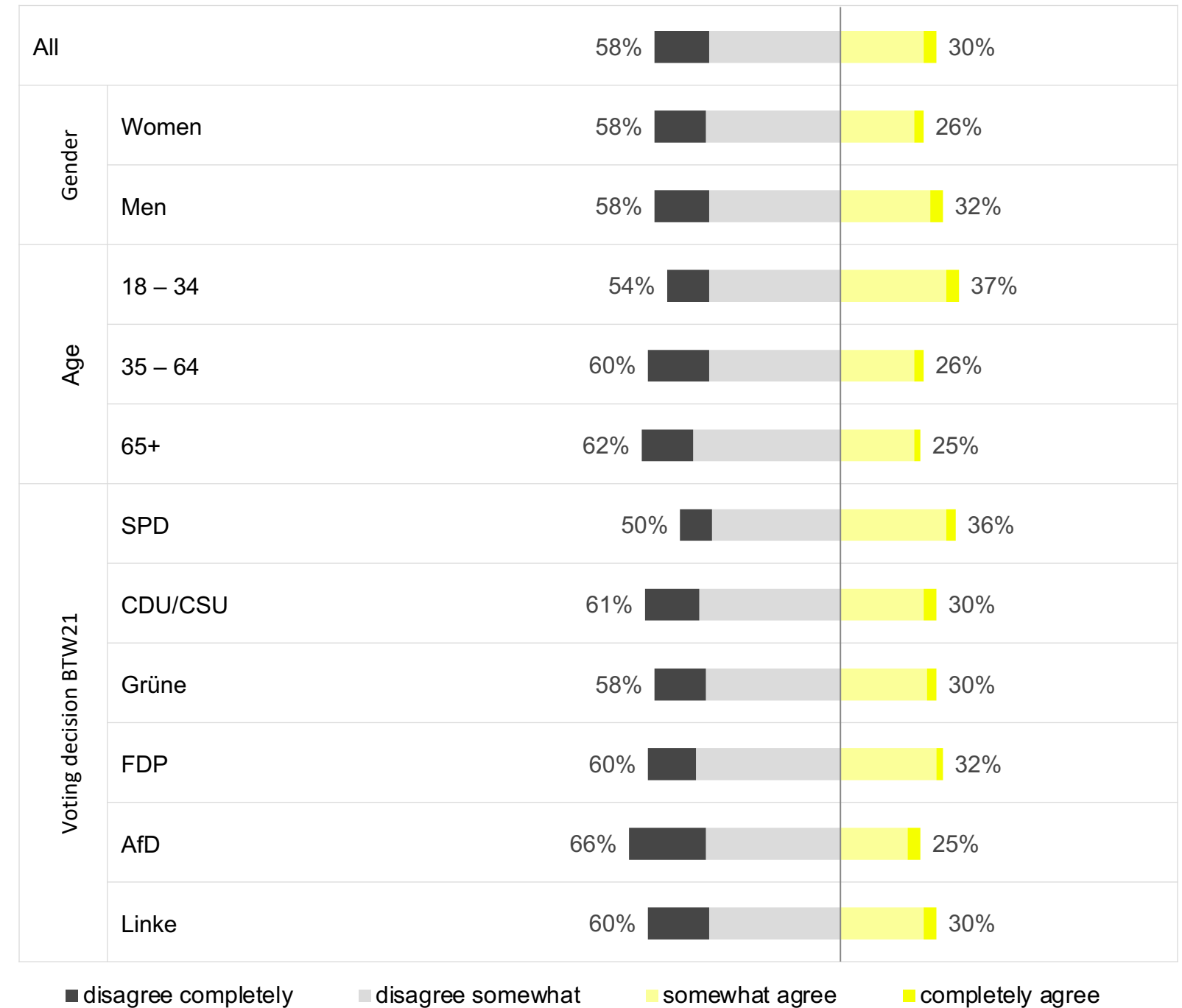
Culture of Debate in Social Media in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The debates on social media around the federal election have enriched society.”

Basis: all social media users.

Missing Values: don't know.



Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

However, the debates on social media were helpful for a quarter in their decision to vote; among younger people even for a third

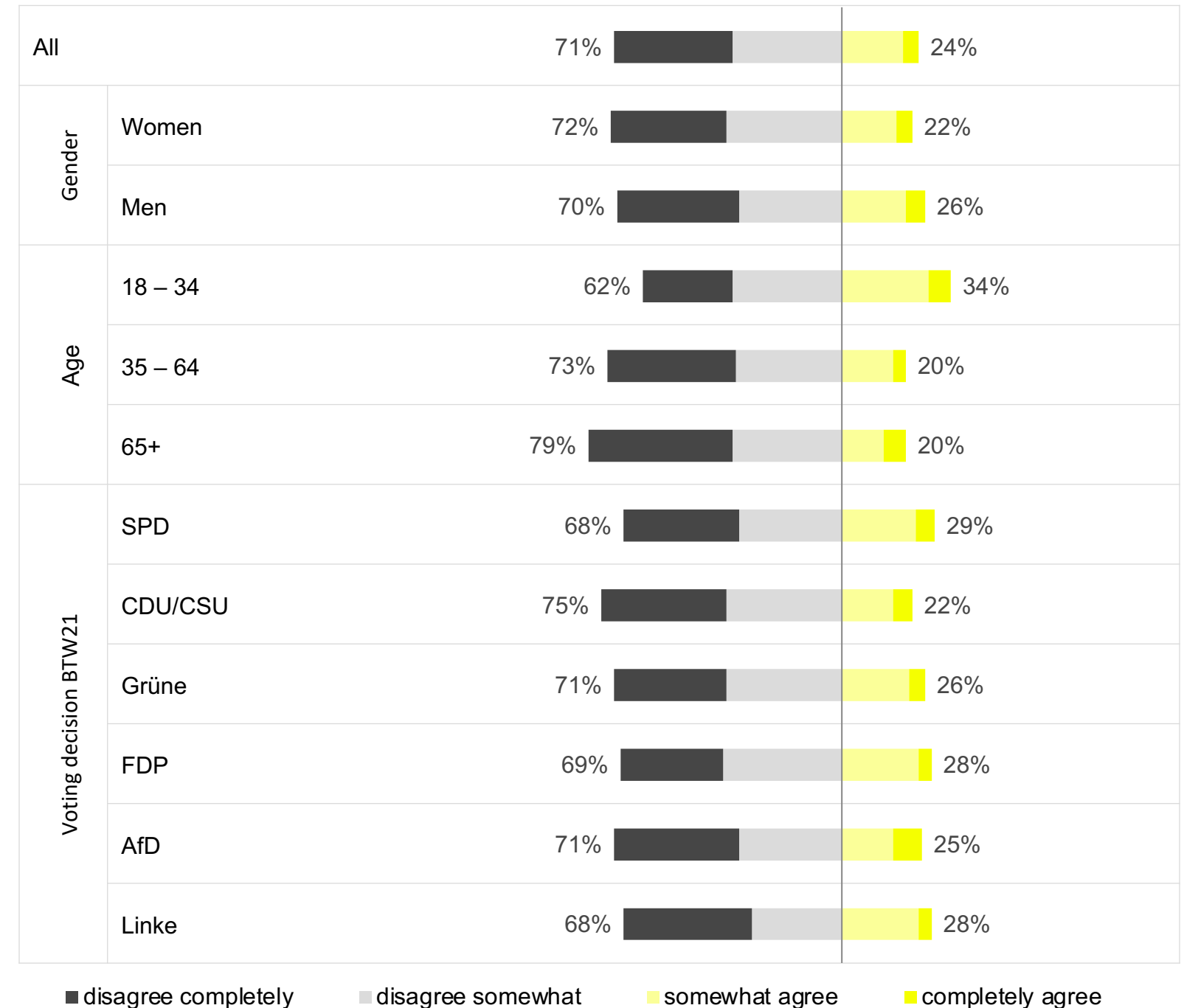
Culture of Debate in Social Media in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“The debates on social media helped me make a decision in the federal election.”

Basis: all social media users.

Missing Values: don't know.



Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

73 per cent accuse the media of neglecting the important issues in the election campaign; nevertheless, the majority felt well-informed

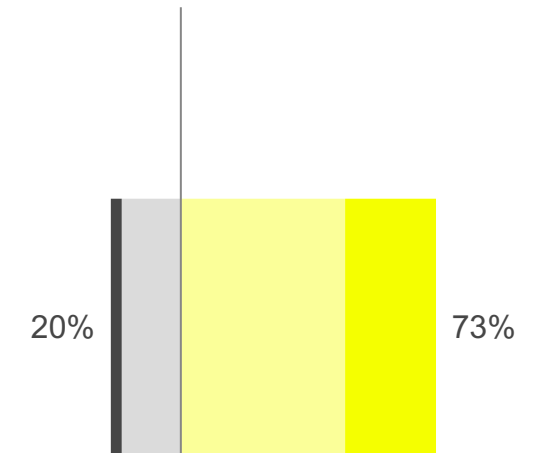
Media Coverage/ Information in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

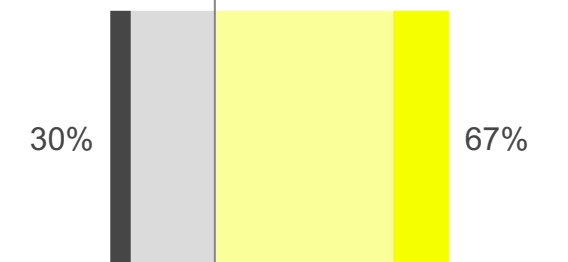
Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.

“During the election campaign, the media reported too much about people and too little about issues.”



“All in all, I felt well-informed about the federal election.”



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

Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

Reporting with too much focus on people instead of issues is most often criticized by older people

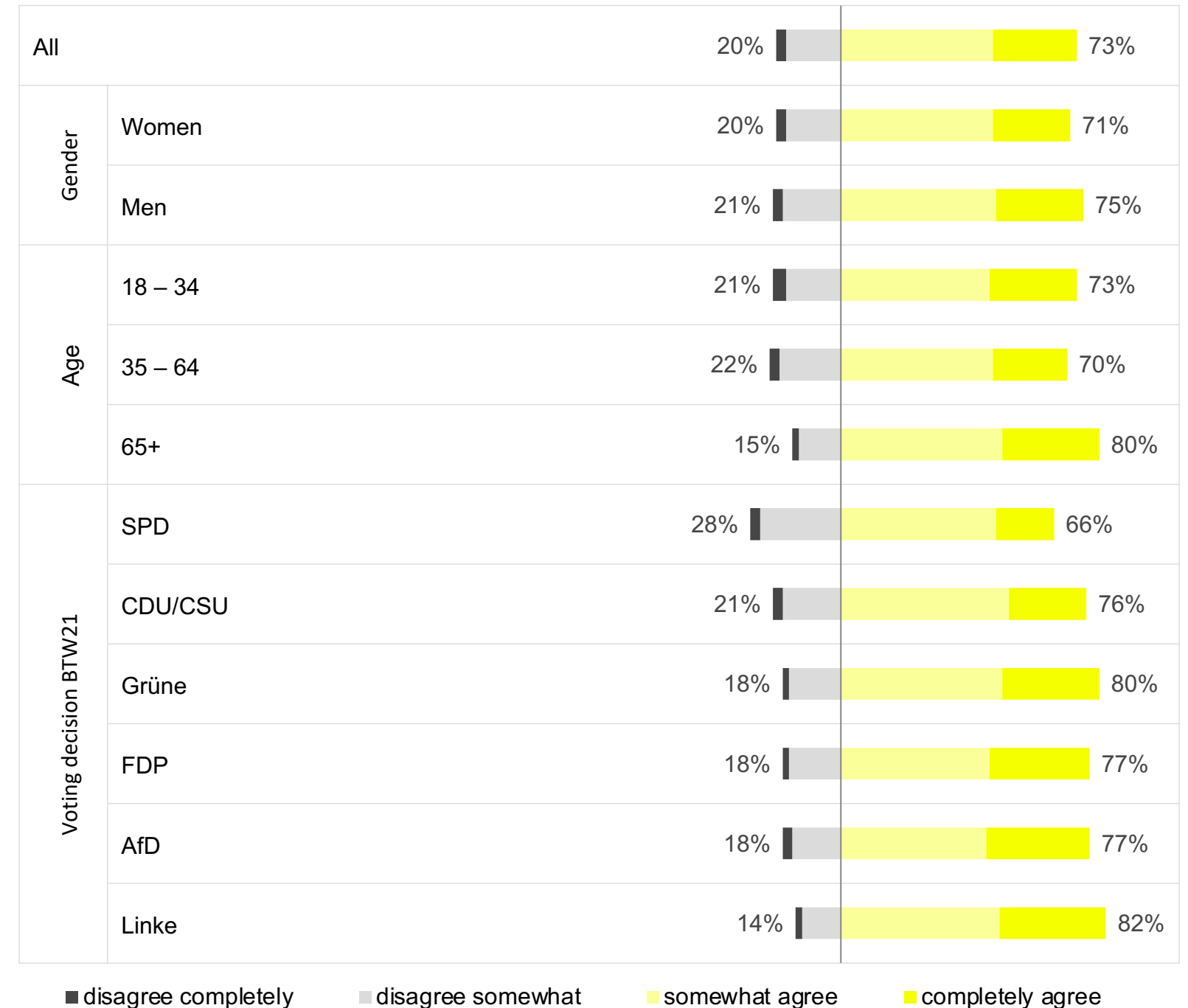
Media Coverage/ Information in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“During the election campaign, the media reported too much about people and too little about issues.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

The majority, with the exception of non-voters, felt well-informed about the federal election; younger people, however, less often than older people

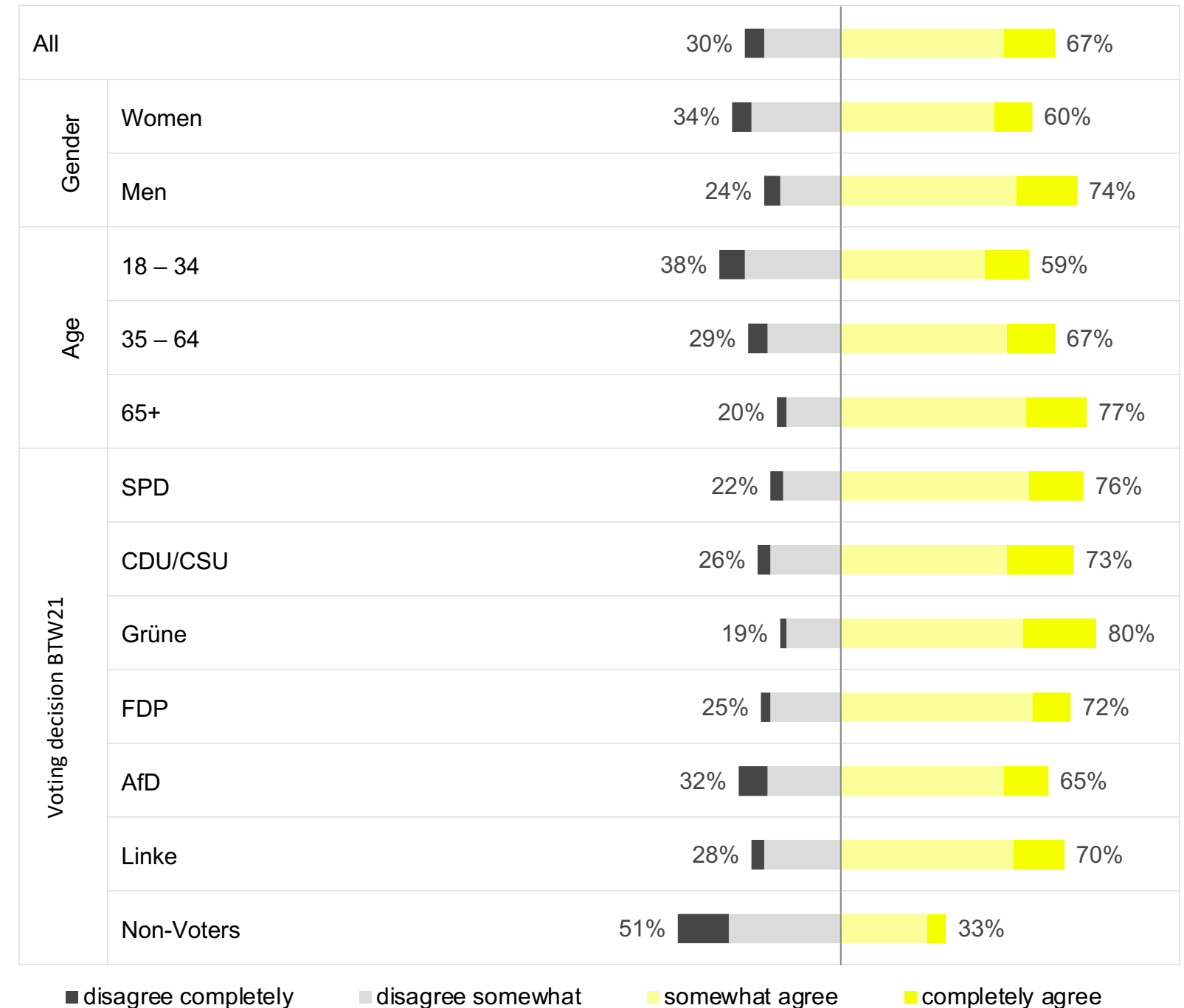
Media Coverage/ Information in the Federal Election Campaign

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the federal election and the election campaign this year?

“All in all, I felt well-informed about the federal election.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

Use of online news services differs along voter groups; AfD voters obtain information from Bild, RT Deutsch and Epoch Times with above-average frequency

Online news services used on a weekly basis

| | All | SPD voters | CDU/CSU voters | Grünen voters | FDP voters | AfD voters | Linken voters |
|----------------|-----|------------|----------------|---------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| Tagesschau.de | 39% | 45% | 46% | 54% | 41% | 28% | 40% |
| Spiegel Online | 22% | 25% | 19% | 34% | 31% | 16% | 27% |
| Focus Online | 20% | 20% | 21% | 19% | 30% | 21% | 21% |
| Bild.de | 19% | 20% | 20% | 11% | 23% | 28% | 14% |
| Welt Online | 15% | 15% | 14% | 15% | 21% | 18% | 14% |
| RT Deutsch | 4% | 3% | 2% | 3% | 3% | 12% | 4% |
| Epoch Times | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 4% | 1% |

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote. Values represented: „used“. Example: 54 per cent of all Grüne voters use Tagesschau.de at least weekly. Among AfD voters, on the other hand, only 28 per cent use tagesschau.de at least weekly.

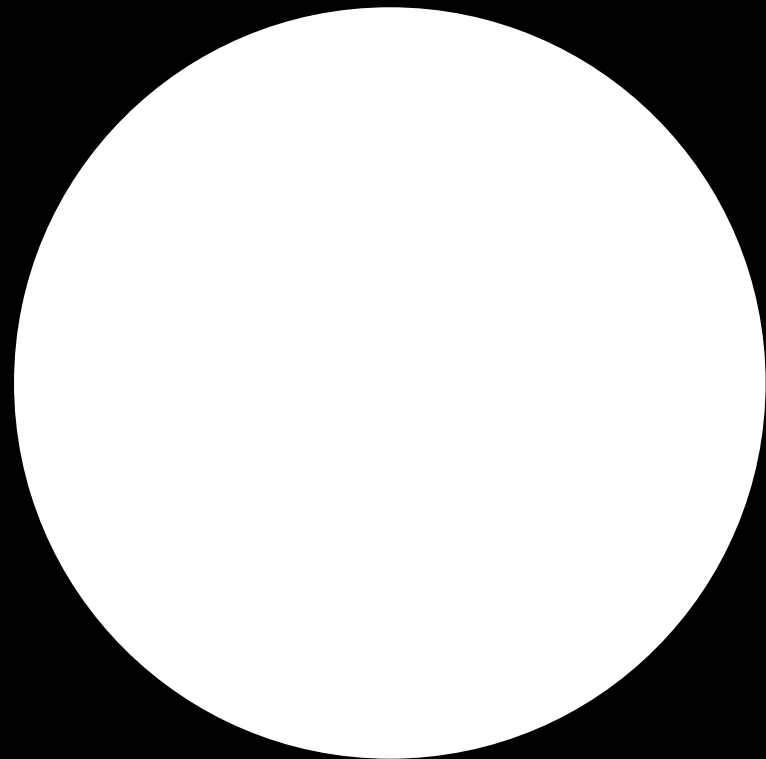
Culture of Debate and Media Coverage in the Federal Election Campaign

The daily use of social media and messenger services also shows clear differences; Facebook is used the most by AfD voters

Social media/messengers used at least daily

| | All | SPD voters | CDU/CSU voters | Grünen voters | FDP voters | AfD voters | Linken voters |
|-----------|-----|------------|----------------|---------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| WhatsApp | 80% | 80% | 79% | 81% | 85% | 79% | 71% |
| Facebook | 47% | 46% | 45% | 40% | 47% | 57% | 44% |
| YouTube | 37% | 32% | 30% | 39% | 39% | 43% | 42% |
| Instagram | 32% | 28% | 25% | 39% | 42% | 28% | 32% |
| TikTok | 11% | 11% | 7% | 9% | 10% | 13% | 14% |
| Telegram | 10% | 8% | 8% | 9% | 8% | 17% | 8% |
| Snapchat | 8% | 8% | 7% | 11% | 11% | 7% | 8% |
| Twitter | 8% | 7% | 6% | 17% | 6% | 7% | 12% |

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote. Values represented : "used daily or several times a day".
 Example: 40 per cent of all Grüne voters use Facebook at least daily. Among AfD voters, on the other hand, 57 per cent use Facebook at least daily.



04

Voter Decision and Party Perception

Voter Decision and Party Perception

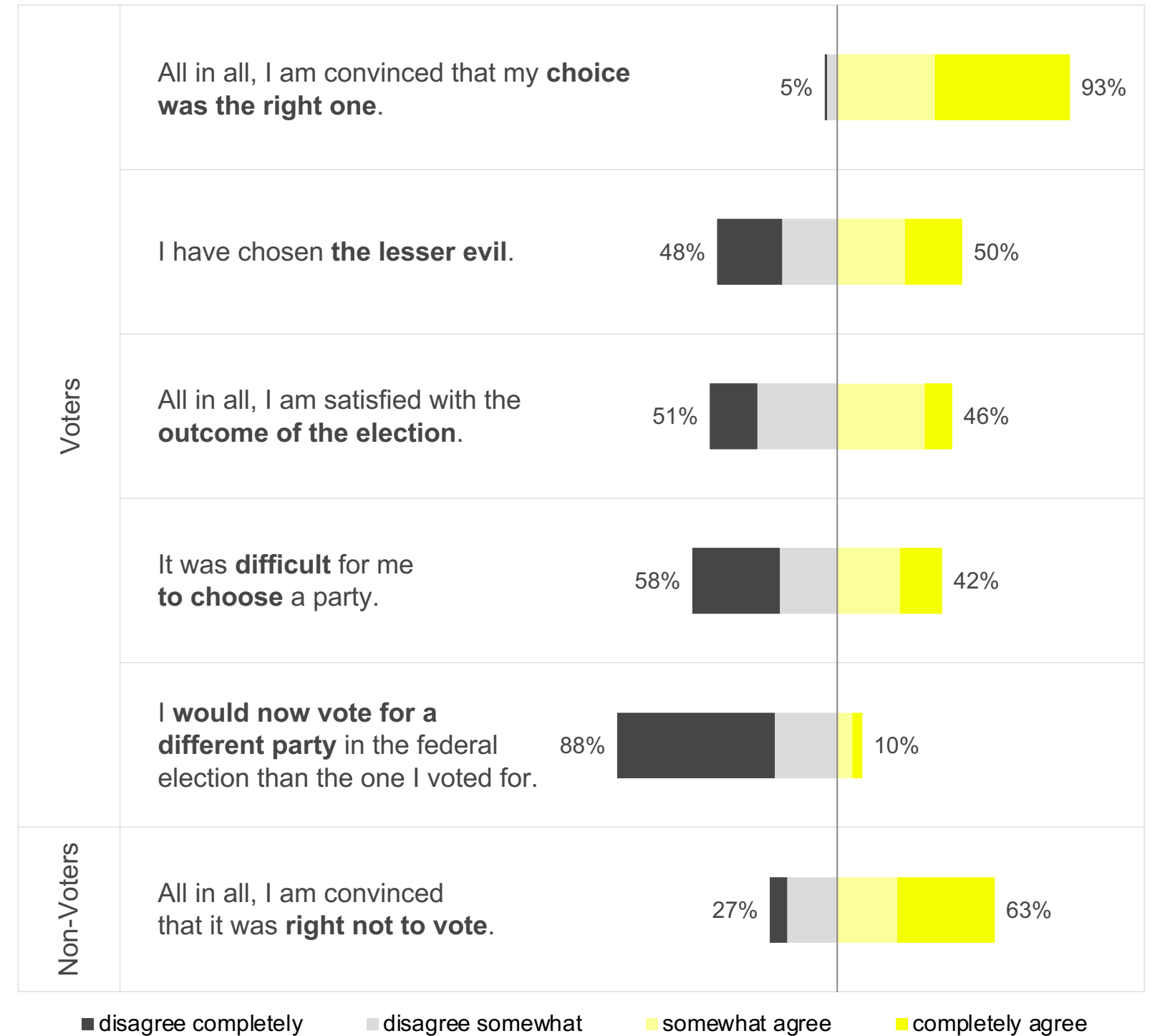
Divided picture: about half of the people are satisfied with the election results, the other half are dissatisfied; one in ten would vote differently than he/she did

Voting Decision

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the election and your voting decision?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted or did not vote.

Missing Values: don't know.



Voter Decision and Party Perception

A few days after the election, the majority of all voters are (still) convinced that they made the right decision

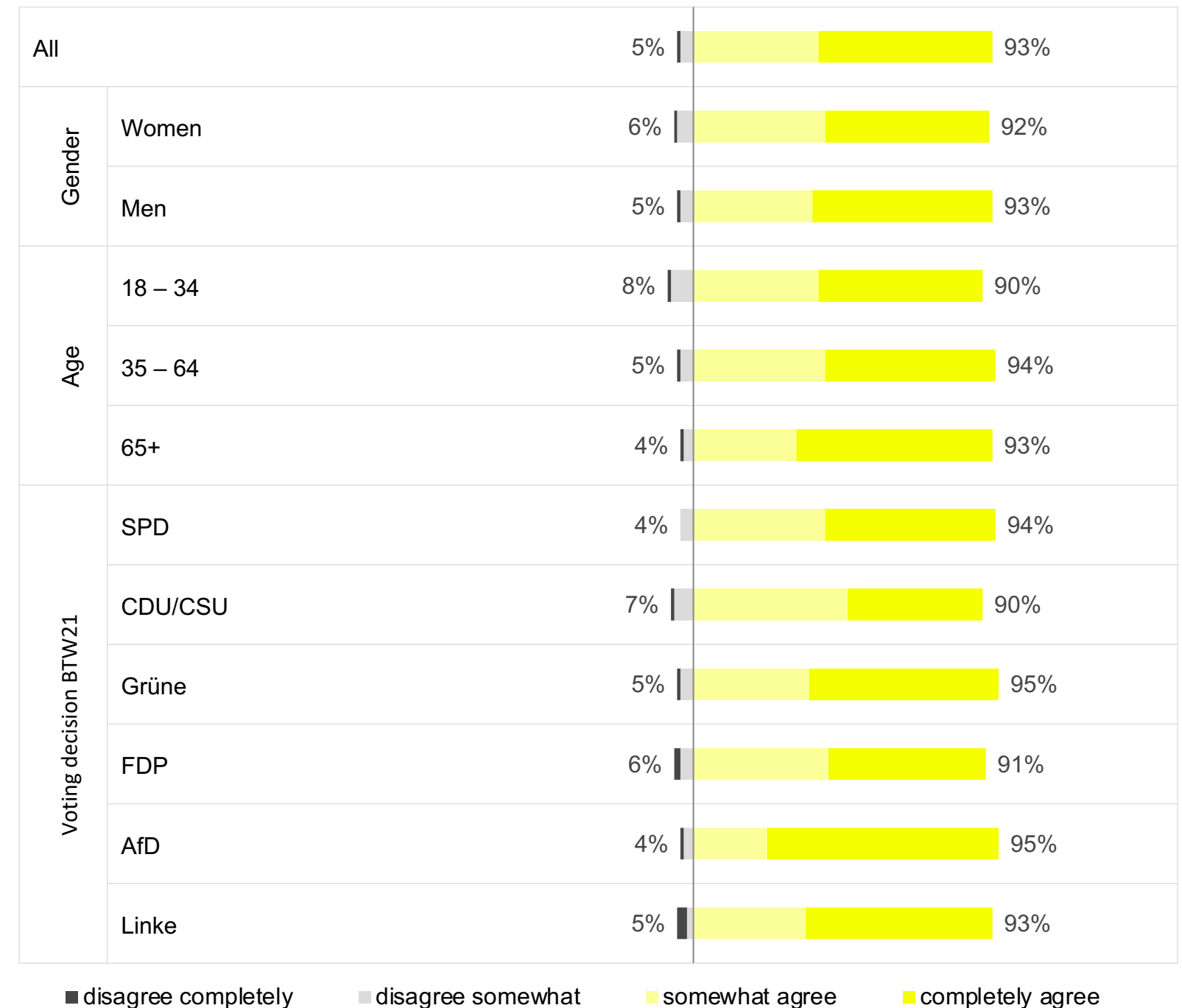
Voting Decision

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the election and your voting decision?

"All in all, I am convinced that my choice was the right one."

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted.

Missing Values: don't know.



Voter Decision and Party Perception

Younger people, CDU/CSU and AfD voters in particular think they have chosen the "lesser evil"

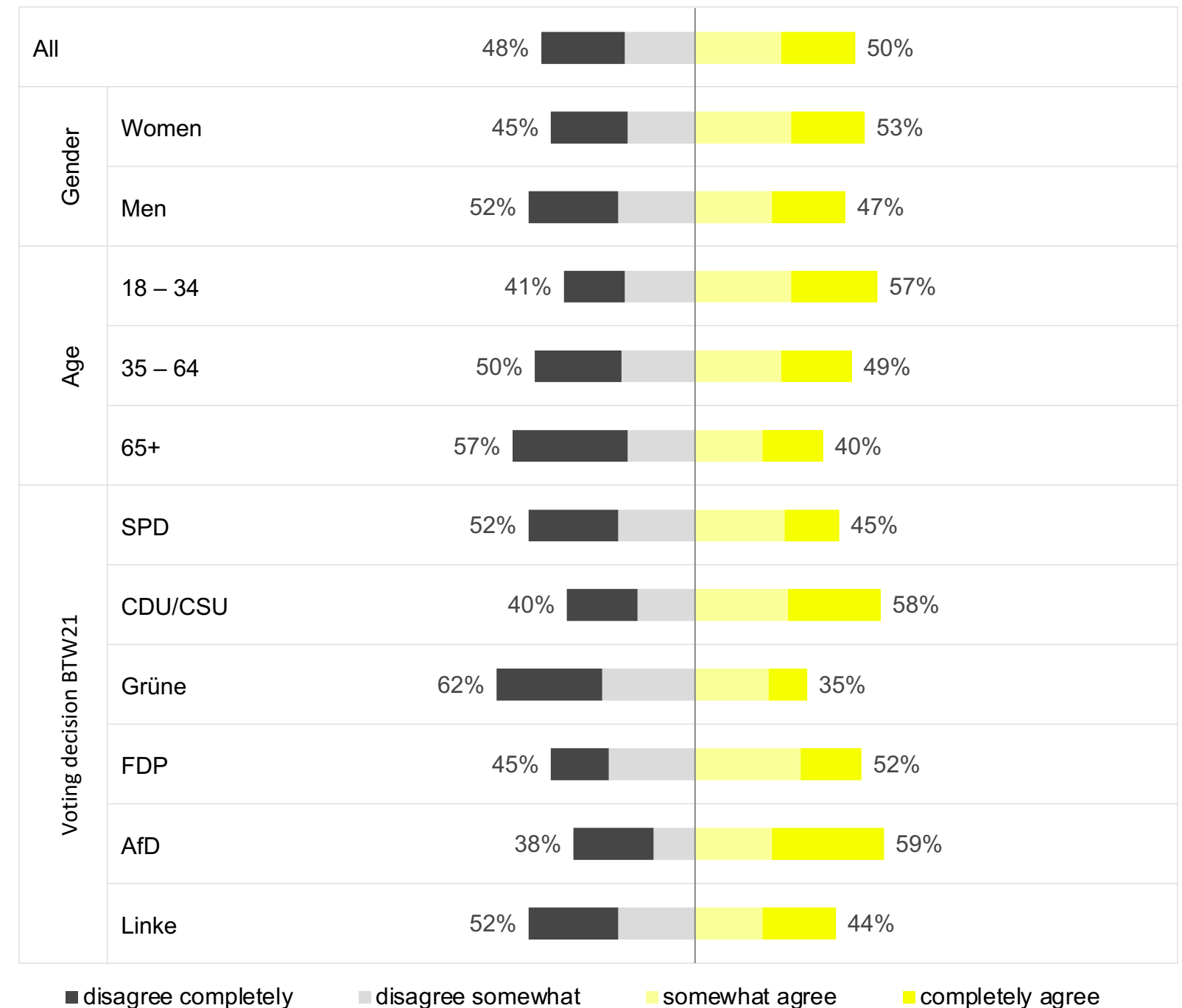
Voting Decision

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the election and your voting decision?

"I have chosen the lesser evil."

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted.

Missing Values: don't know.



Voter Decision and Party Perception

The majority of SPD, Grüne and FDP voters are satisfied with the outcome of the election; AfD and CDU/CSU voters are the most dissatisfied

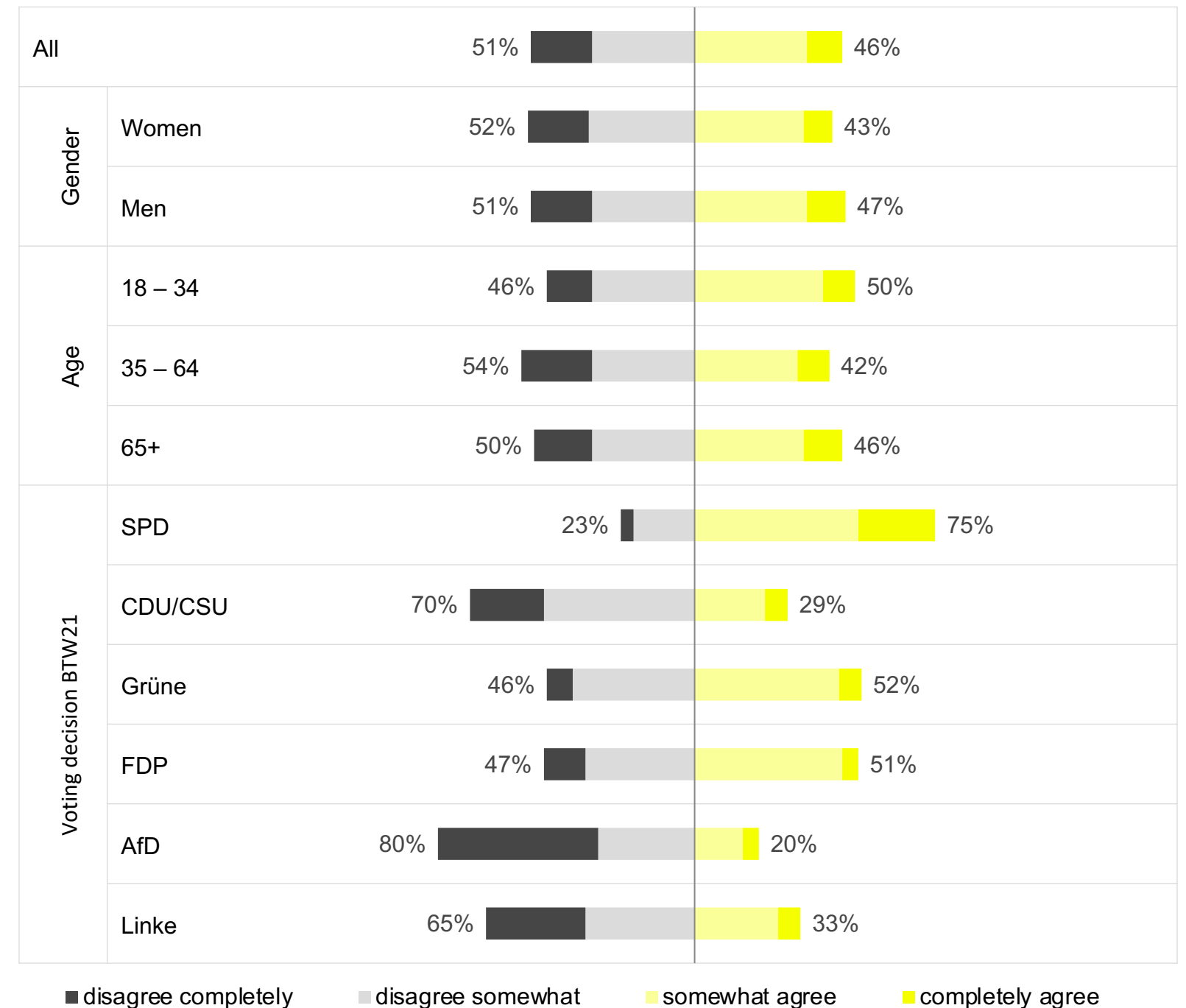
Voting Decision

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the election and your voting decision?

“All in all, I am satisfied with the outcome of the election.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted.

Missing Values: don't know.



Voter Decision and Party Perception

Younger people generally found it more difficult to decide in favour of a party; AfD voters are particularly confident about their party choice

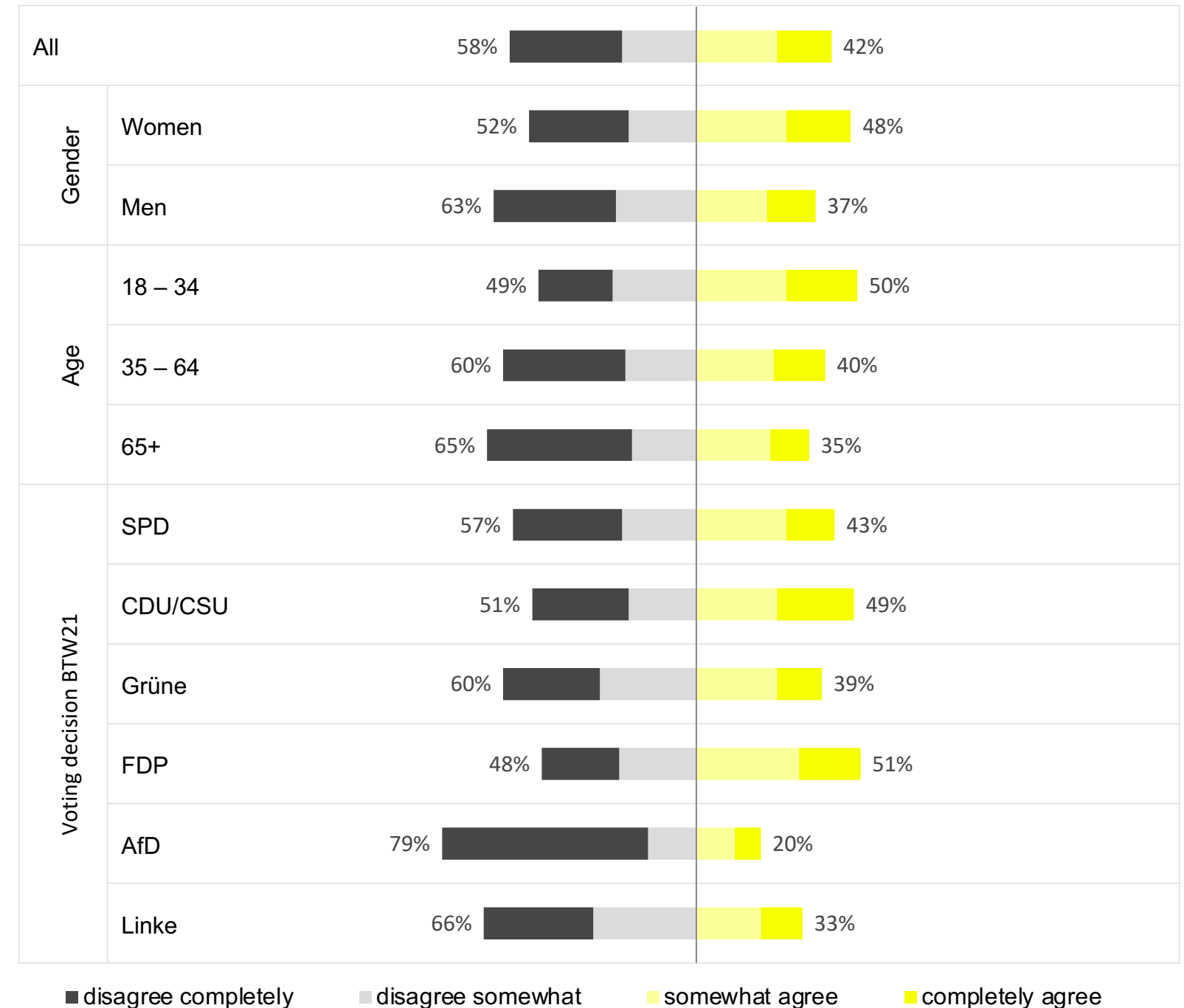
Voting Decision

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the election and your voting decision?

“It was difficult for me to choose a party.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted.

Missing Values: don't know.



Voter Decision and Party Perception

One in ten would currently prefer to vote for a different party than they did, among CDU/CSU voters even one in seven

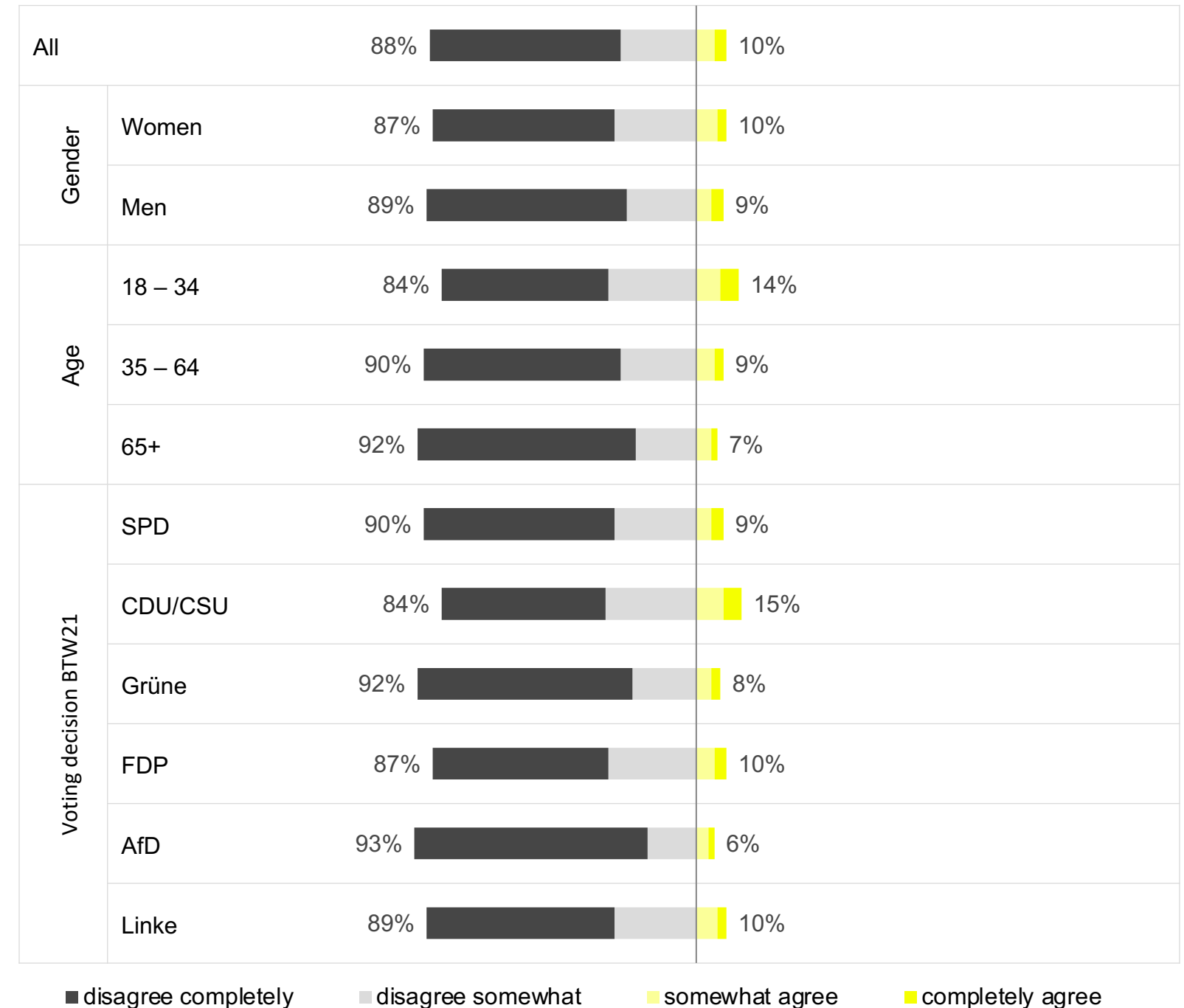
Voting Decision

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the election and your voting decision?

“I would now vote for a different party in the federal election than the one I voted for.”

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted.

Missing Values: don't know.



Voter Decision and Party Perception

In comparison, the SPD has convinced its voters the most with its candidate; only one third of CDU/CSU voters considered Laschet the best candidate; the green party convinces their voters particularly strongly with their topics

Thinking about the party you voted for, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Basis: all internet users eligible to vote who voted.
 Values represented: Agreement [„agree completely“ + „agree somewhat“]. Example: 89 per cent of SPD voters agree with the statement that the SPD has the best leading candidate. Among CDU/CSU voters, only 32 per cent agree with the statement that the CDU/CSU has the best candidate.

| The party I voted for... | All | SPD voters | CDU/CSU voters | Grünen voters | FDP voters | AfD voters | Linken voters |
|---|-----|------------|----------------|---------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>most closely represents my values.</i> | 92% | 93% | 90% | 96% | 91% | 92% | 95% |
| <i>thematized issues that were important to me.</i> | 91% | 91% | 81% | 97% | 92% | 93% | 94% |
| <i>was credible in the election campaign.</i> | 86% | 91% | 72% | 90% | 90% | 89% | 85% |
| <i>has presented a good election programme.</i> | 85% | 88% | 74% | 91% | 88% | 89% | 82% |
| <i>spread a positive mood during the election campaign.</i> | 75% | 87% | 49% | 82% | 84% | 78% | 65% |
| <i>has the best leading candidate.</i> | 64% | 89% | 32% | 64% | 73% | 73% | 50% |

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.

Contact

Reset.

Alexander Sangerlaub

+49 (0) 171 20 62 56 8

alex@de.reset.tech

pollytix strategic research

Leonie Schulz

+49 (0) 178 68 27 68 4

leonie.schulz@pollytix.de