

Attitudes to media freedom and independence in Central Europe

Selected outcomes from a 4-country survey
26 April 2022

Aim of the poll

Main objective:

to explore the extent of people's concerns about and support for media freedom and independent journalism in V4 countries

Research questions:

- how do people assess the **state of media freedom** in their country?
- how much are they concerned about current **threats to media freedom**?
- what is their perceived **importance of independent journalism**?
- what do people think should be done to **protect media freedom and support independent journalism**?

Research methodology

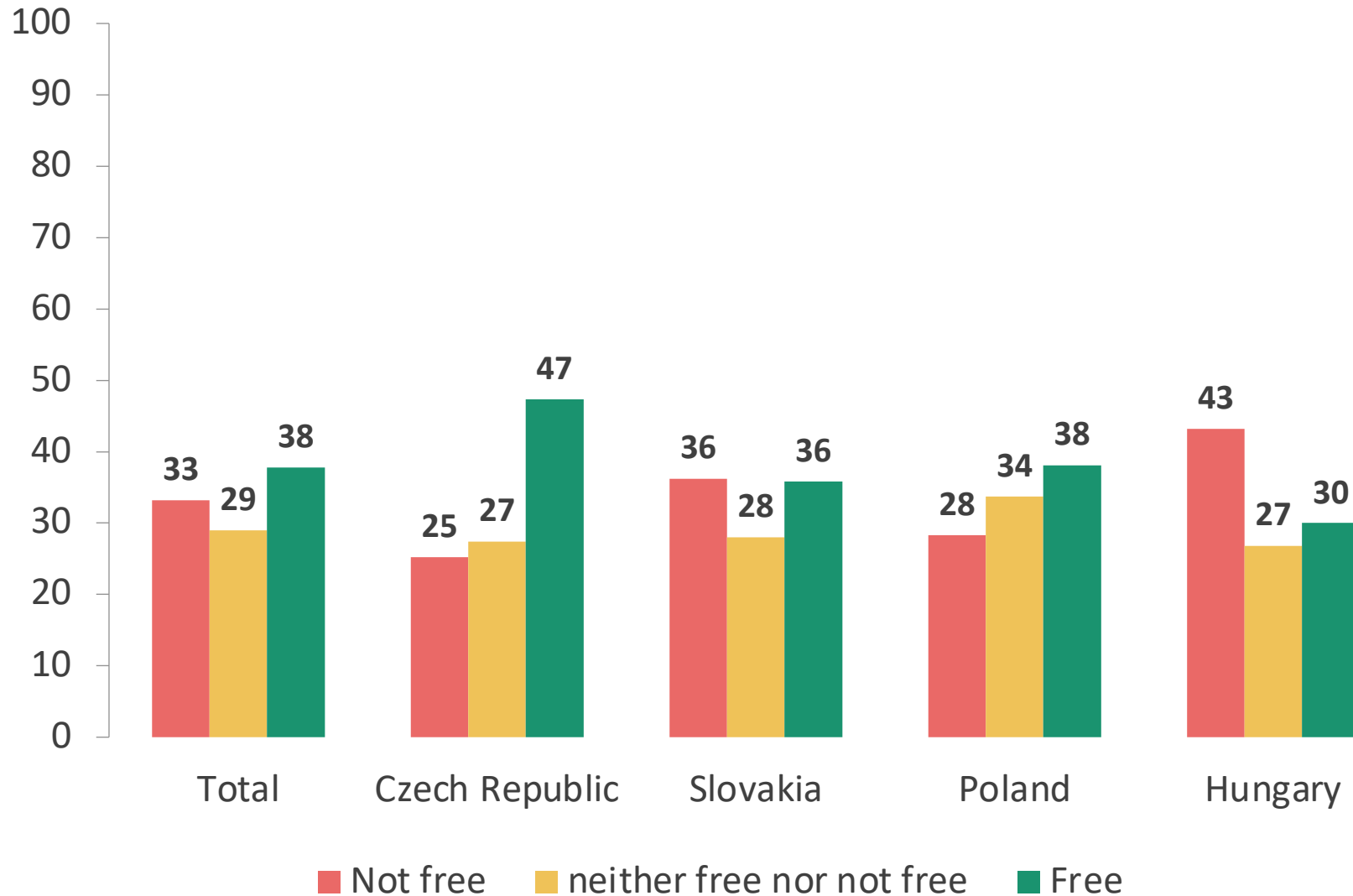
Sample size	4 069 respondents aged 18+ (Sample size per country: CZ = 1 010; SK = 1 000; PL = 1 043; HU = 1 016)
Dates of interviewing	1st – 17th February 2022
Method of data collection	personal interviews, online panel questioning (CAWI) and telephone interviews (CATI)
Method of sampling	Quota sampling method
Representativeness	Research is representative on population aged 18 and more of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland), for basic sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, region and size of place of residence)
Research design and supervision	Dr Václav Štětka (Loughborough University), on behalf of the Committee for Editorial Independence
Implementer and client	The data was collected out by MEDIAN, s.r.o. (member of SIMAR) exclusively for Bakala Foundation.

Executive summary

- There is a widespread support for media independence (as a general value) across V4 countries, but less of an agreement about its key ingredients
- Majority of people express concern about the current state of media freedom, and see it as having declined over the last several years
 - However, assessment significantly varies based on party lines, especially in Hungary and Poland
 - Relatively smaller concern about media freedom among the younger generation
- There is a relatively sizeable minority (15-20%) who does not agree with some of the basic conditions for editorial autonomy (the interference of the government or media owners with the news content)
 - By far the highest disagreement in Hungary
- News sources impact on attitudes: heavy online news consumption is linked with higher support for media freedom and independence across V4; frequent newspaper readers in Hungary and Poland express lower support
- Most people support an increased role of both the state and the EU in the efforts to safeguard media freedom
 - Relatively lower agreement about economic support by the state

**How do people assess the state of media freedom
in their country?**

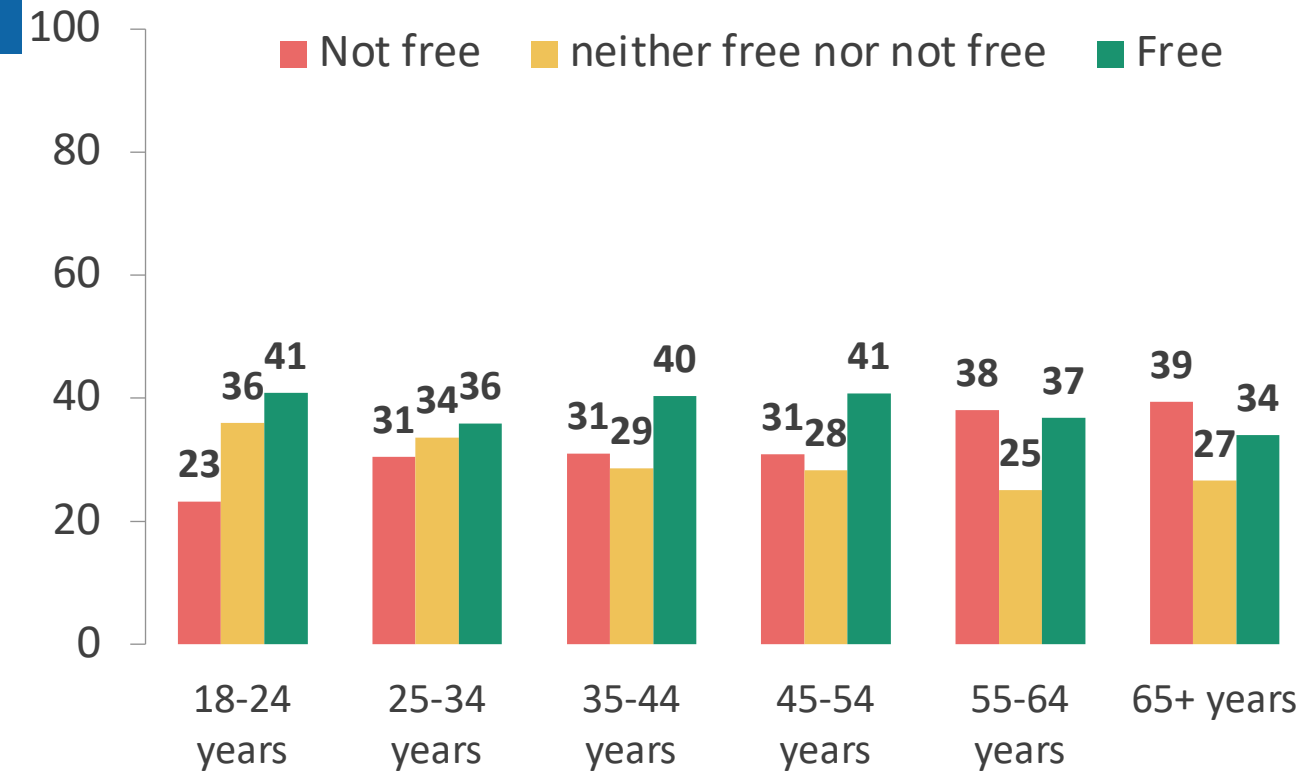
Perception of media freedom from the state / government



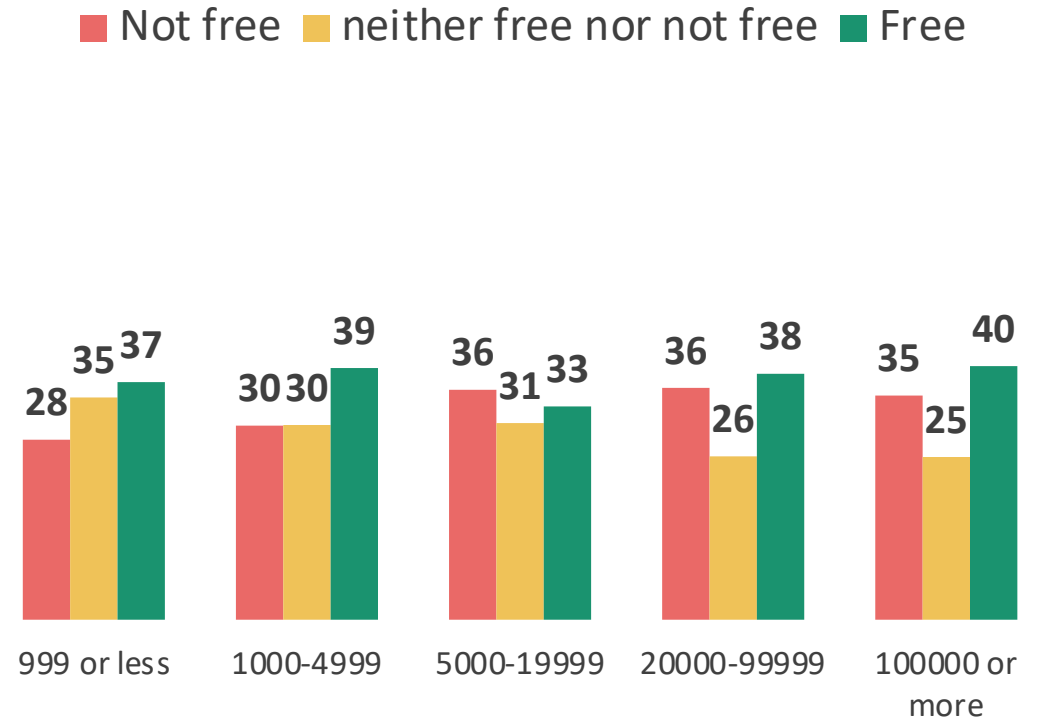
People across V4 are divided in their assessment of media freedom.

Significantly more Czechs see their media as free, while the opposite is true for the Hungarians.

Perception of media freedom from the state / government: socio-demographic differences

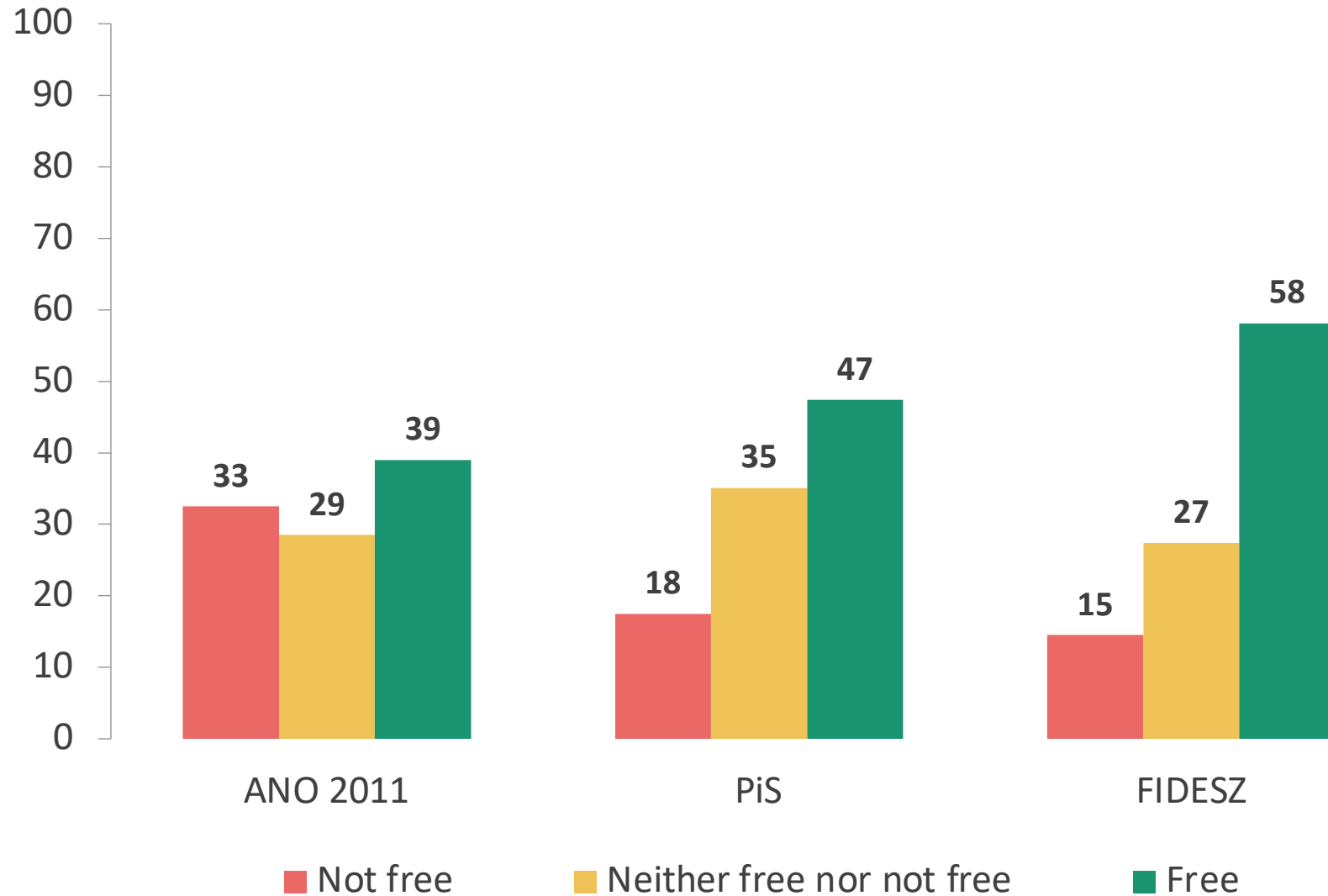


Young people tend to see the **media as relatively more free** than the older generations; the elderly are the most critical.



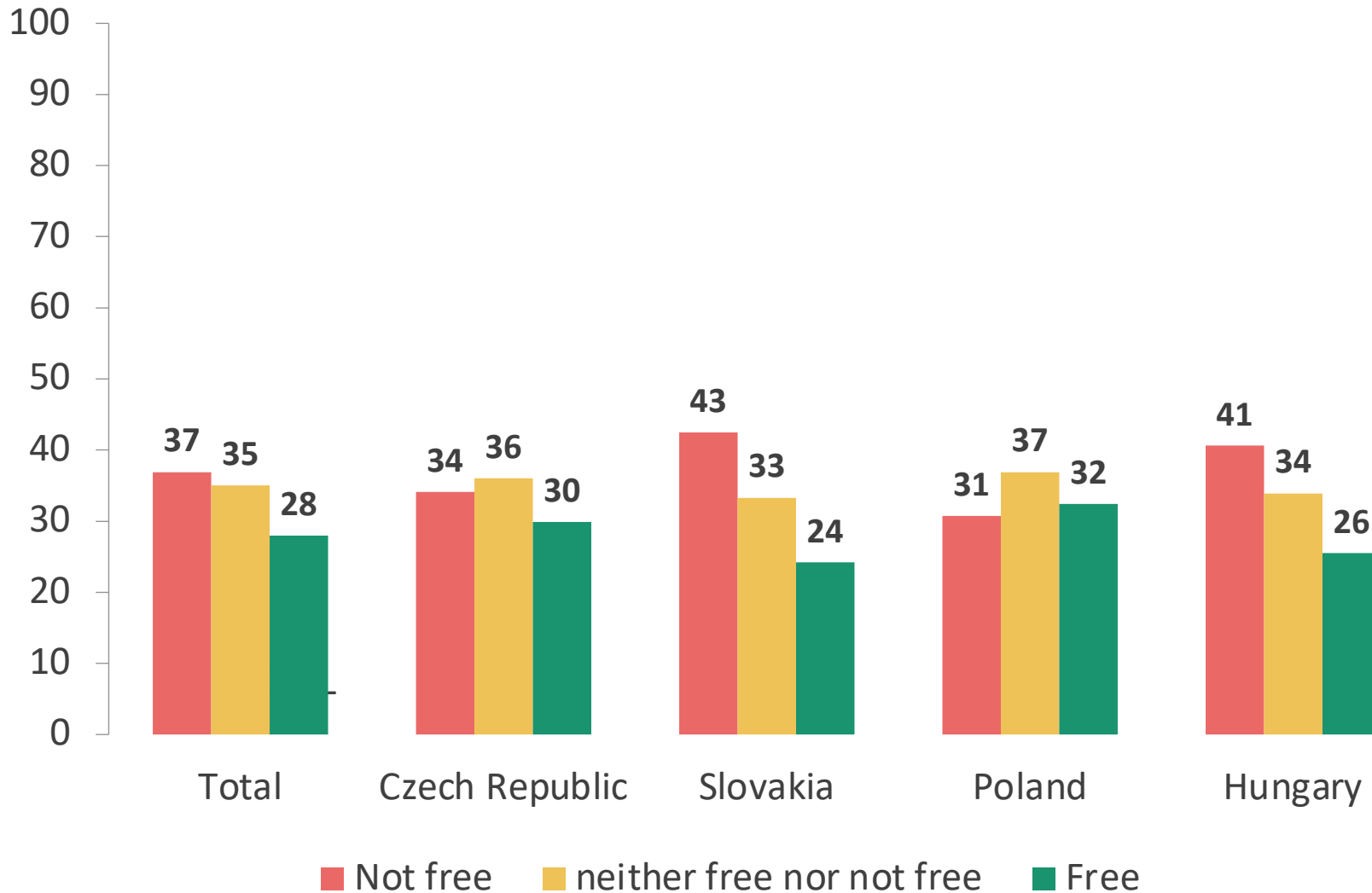
People in the **bigger towns and cities** are **more polarized** about the state of media freedom than in the villages.

Perceived freedom of media from the state/government – voters of selected parties in CZ, PL, HU



Voters of PiS and Fidesz see the media much more as free than not free; voters of ANO2011 are more divided.

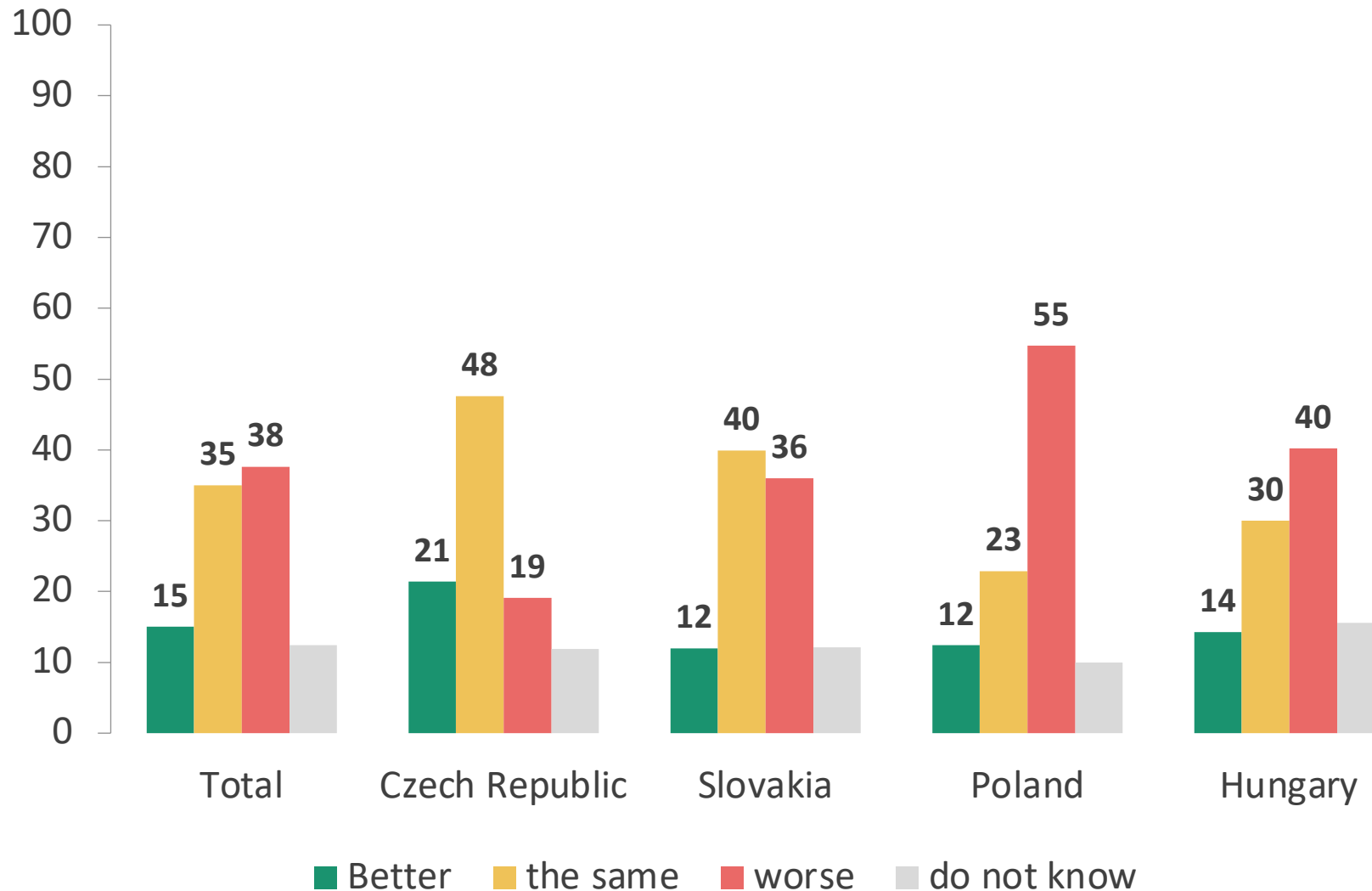
Perception of media freedom from ownership / business interests



In most V4 countries, media are more often perceived as **not free from ownership and business interests**.

The **exception is Poland**, where the perception is more balanced.

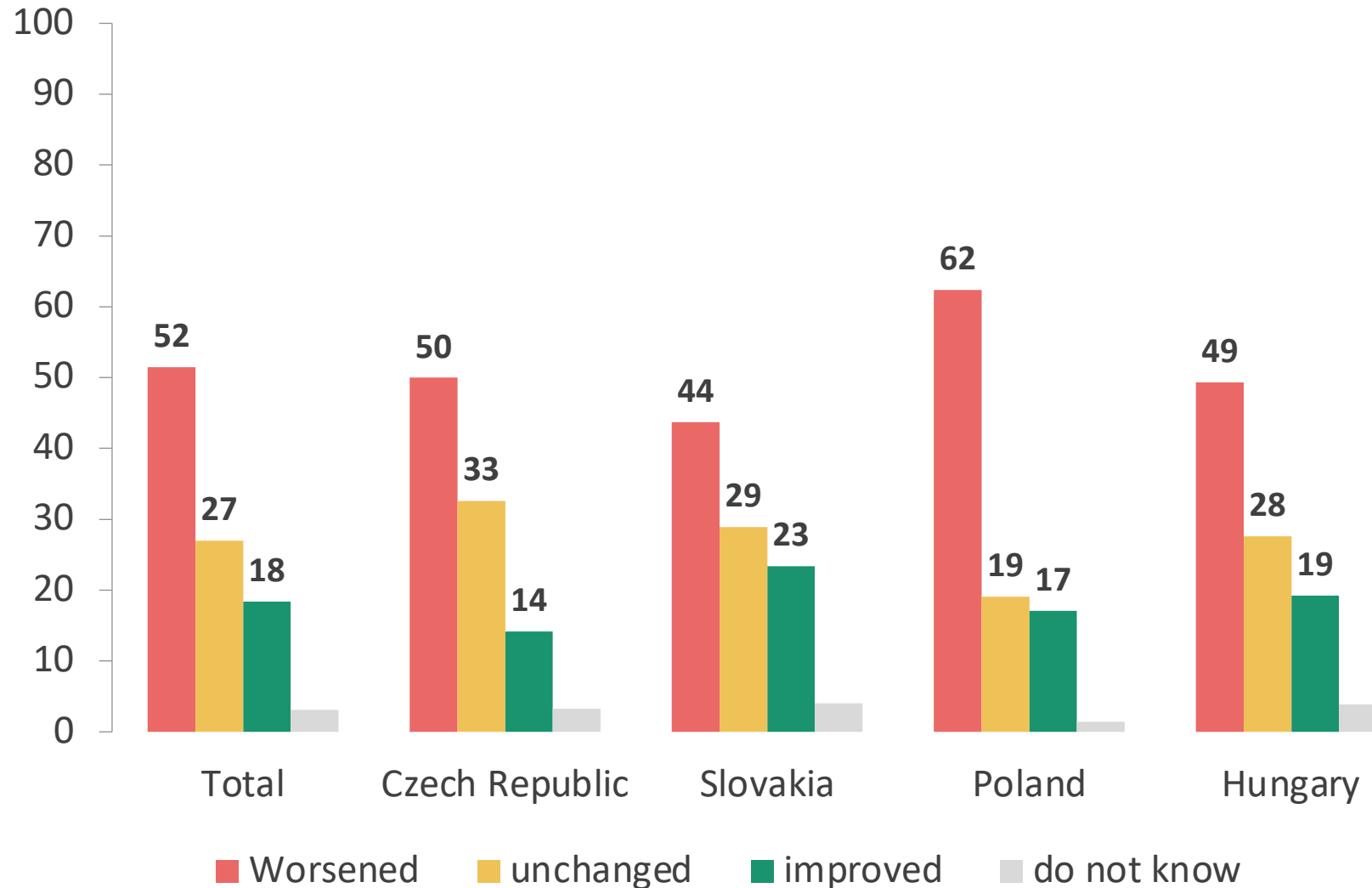
Comparison of media freedom across CEE



Most people across V4 believe the **state of media freedom in their country is worse** than elsewhere in CEE.

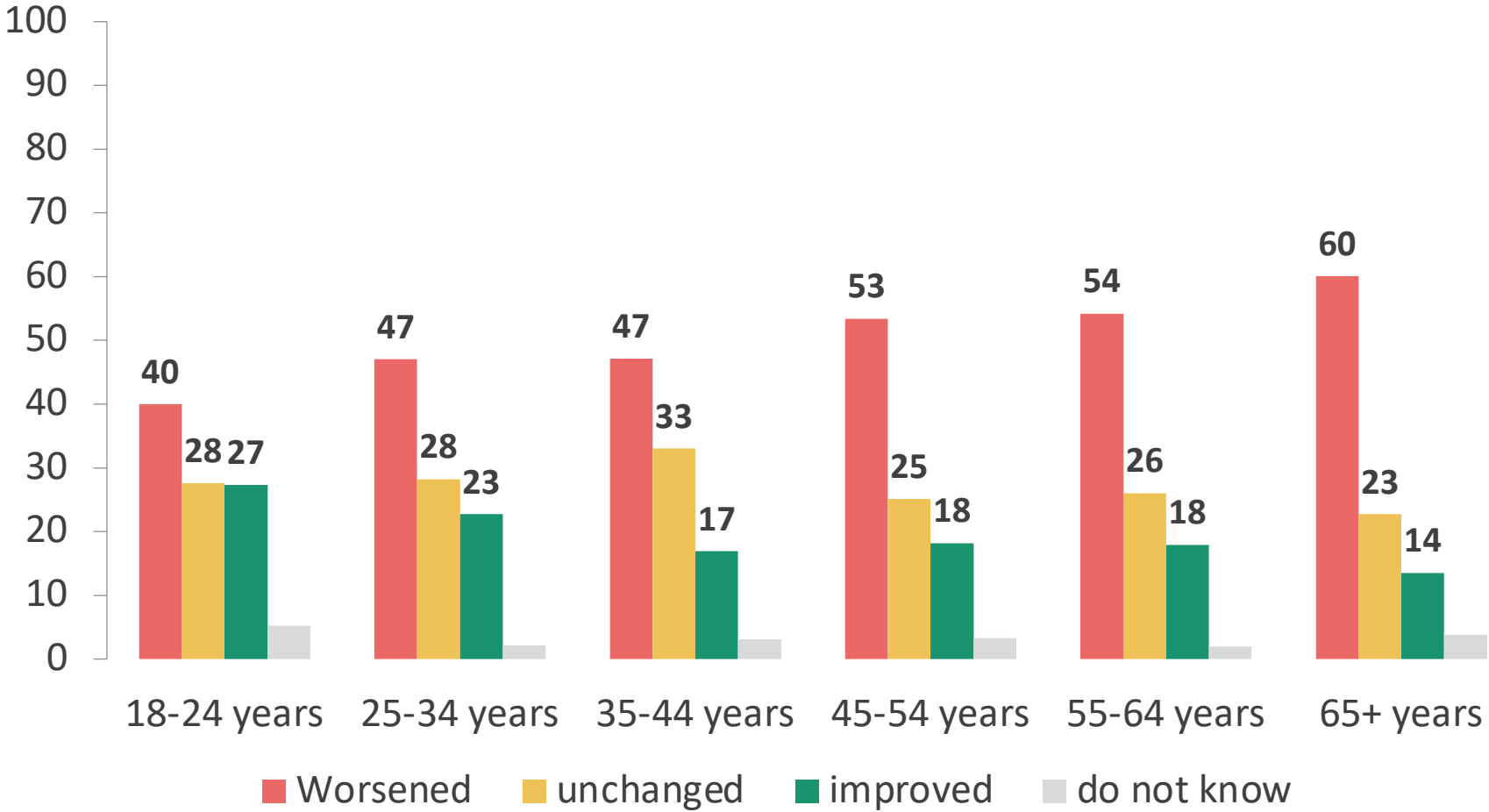
Czech Rep. is the only exception (people unsure/divided).

Perceived change of media freedom



Majority of people believe the state of media freedom **has worsened over the last 5 years** – especially the Poles.

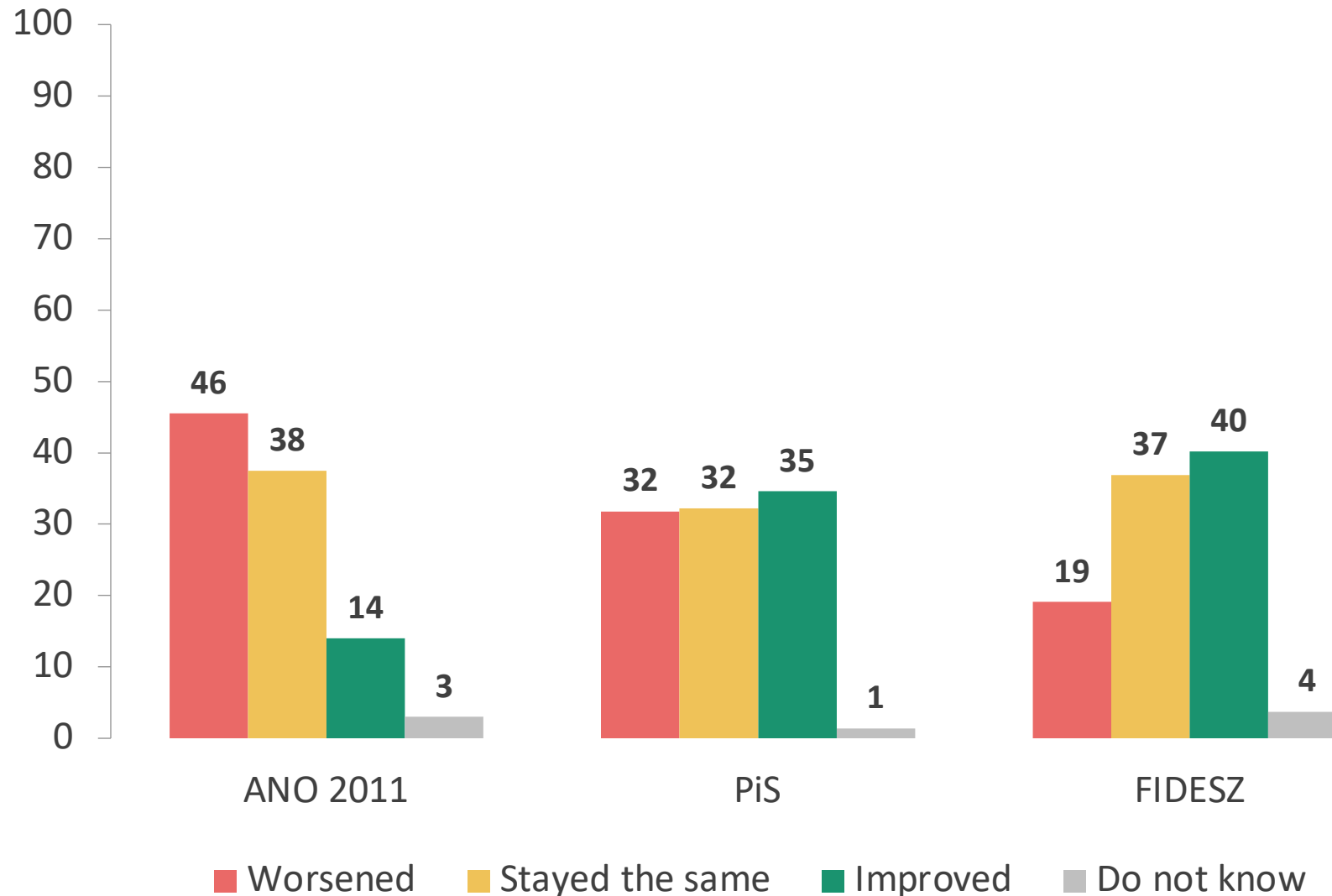
Perceived change of media freedom by age



Clear correlation with age – **the older the people, the more critical they are** about the change of media freedom.

Q06. In your opinion, has the state of media freedom in your country rather worsened, rather improved, or stayed the same over the last 5 years?

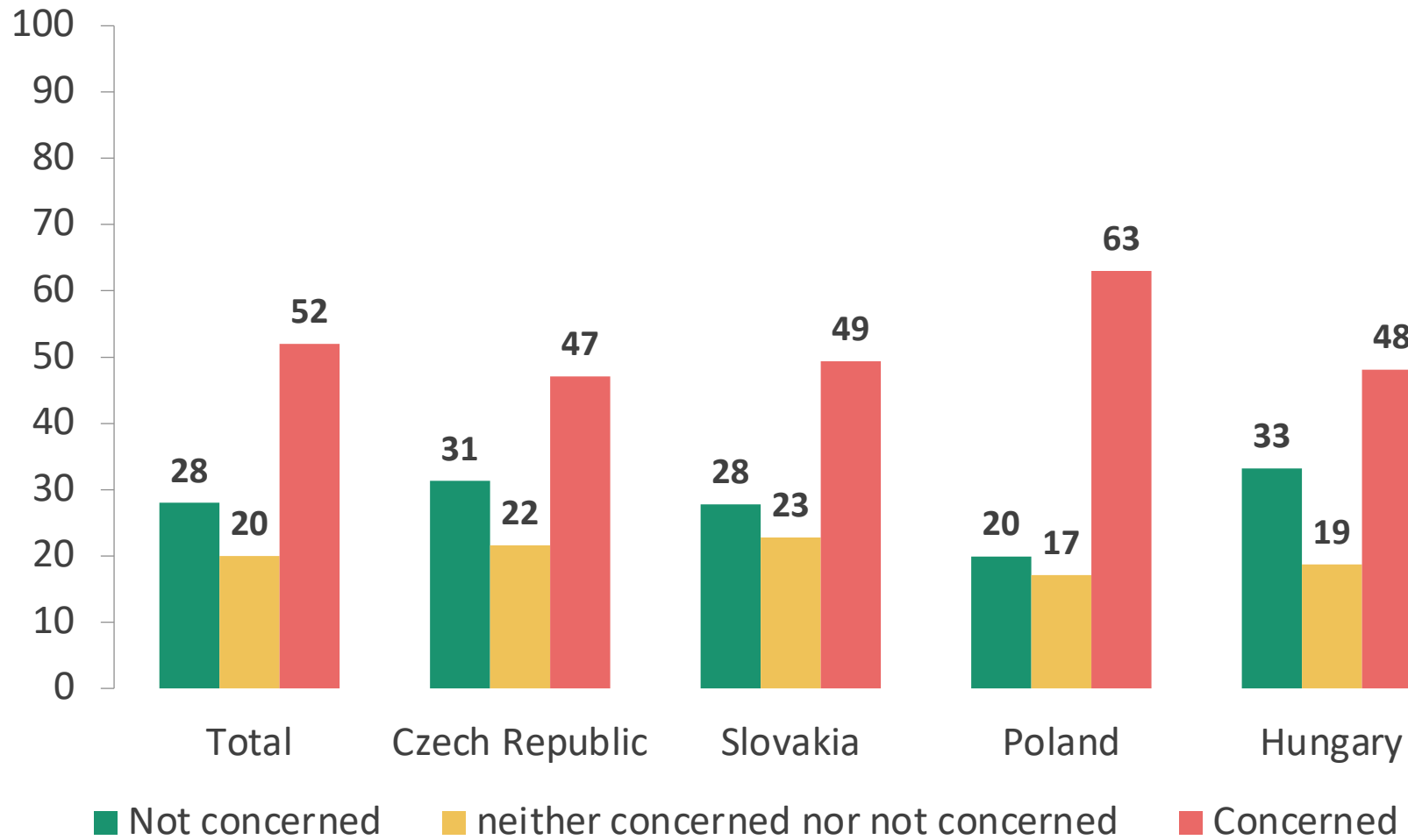
Perceived change of media freedom - voters of selected parties in CZ, PL, HU



Voters of PiS and Fidesz see the change of media freedom in positive terms, unlike voters of ANO 2011.

**How concerned are people about the state of
media freedom?**

Concerns about media freedom

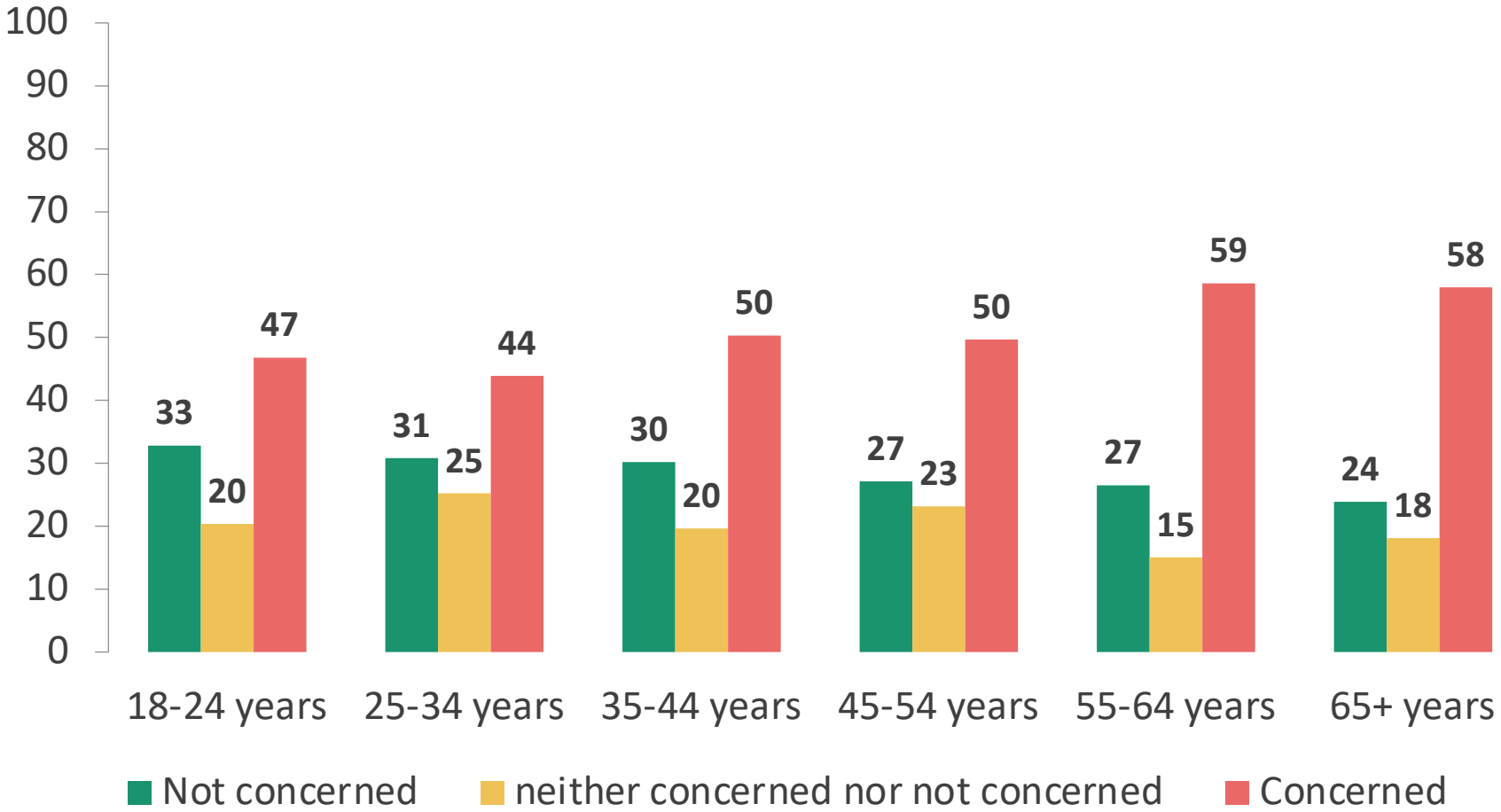


Majority of people expresses concern about the current state of media freedom.

The Poles are the most concerned, the Czechs the least.

Hungary: **59%** of those reading **online** news daily are **concerned**, but only **47%** of those reading **newspapers** daily

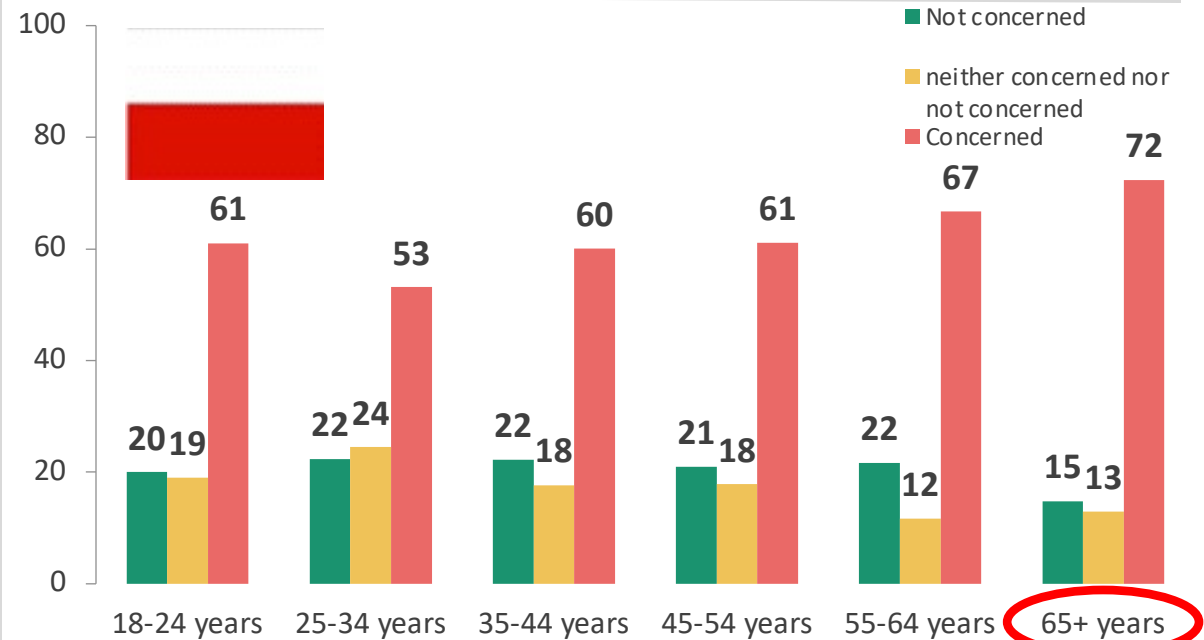
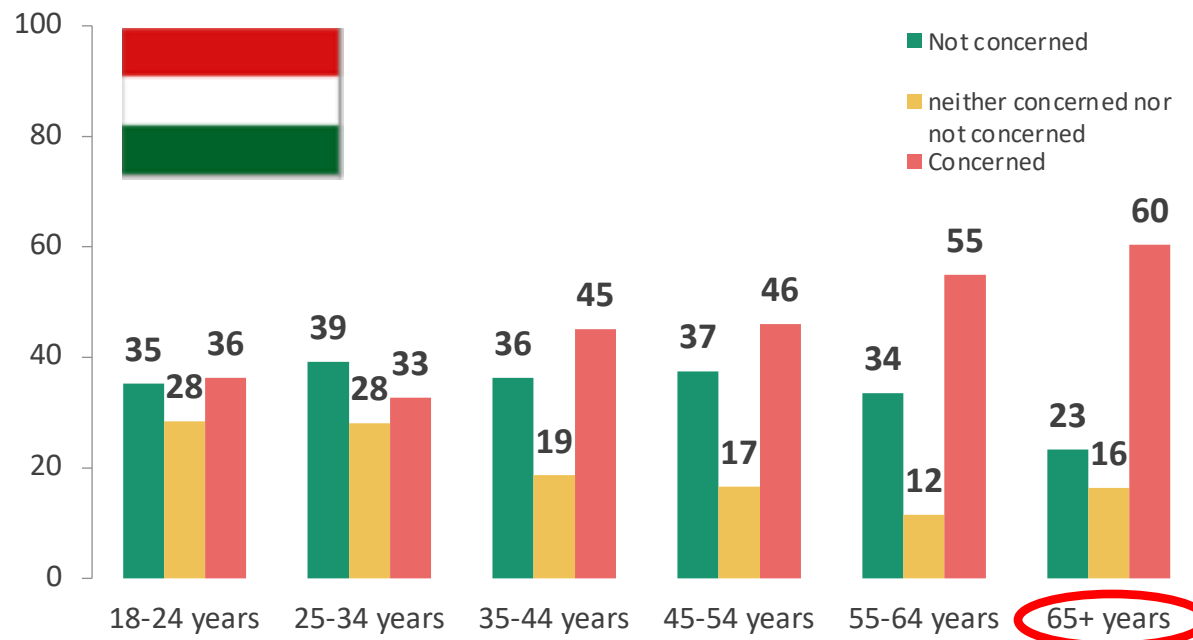
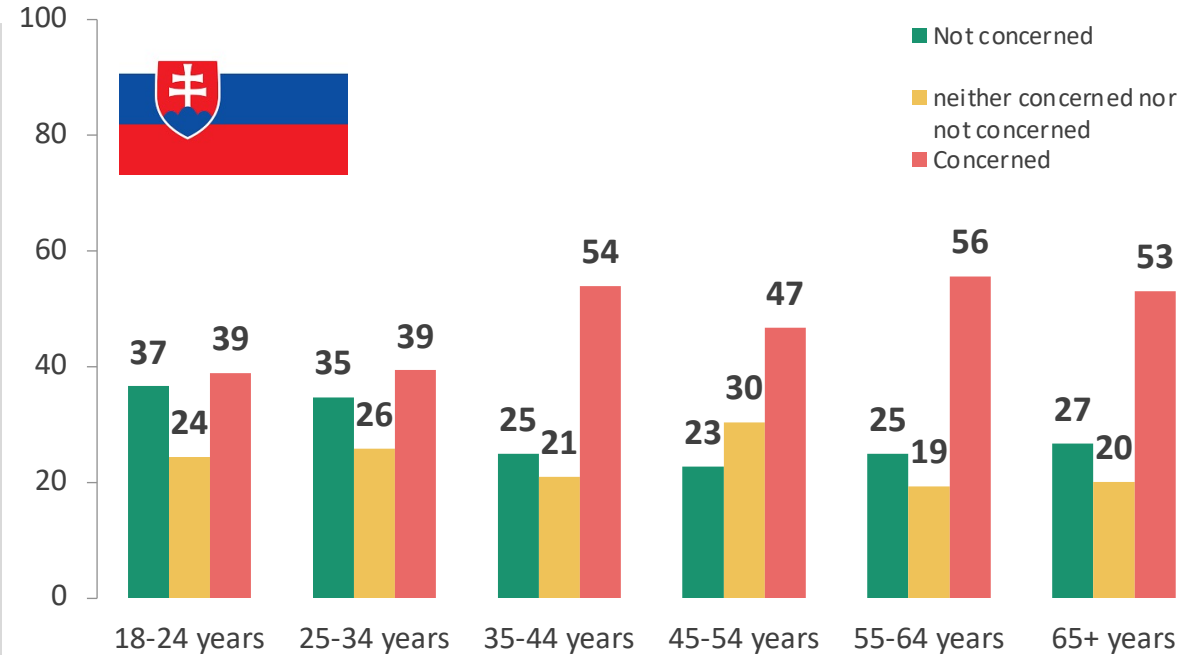
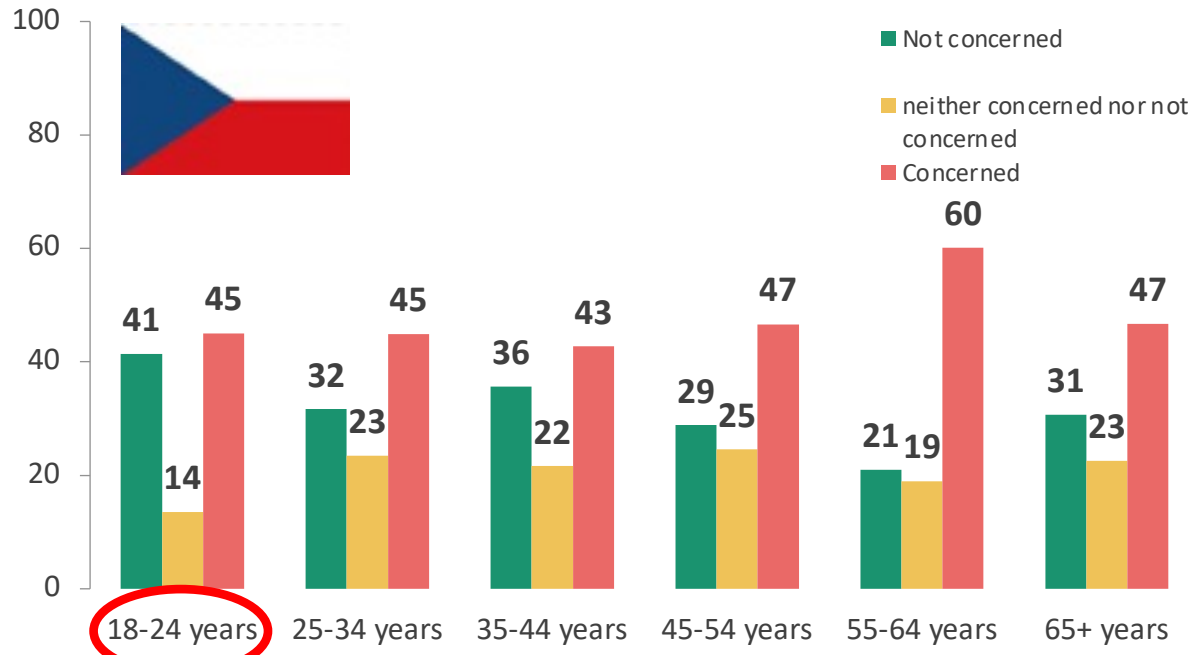
Concerns about media freedom by age



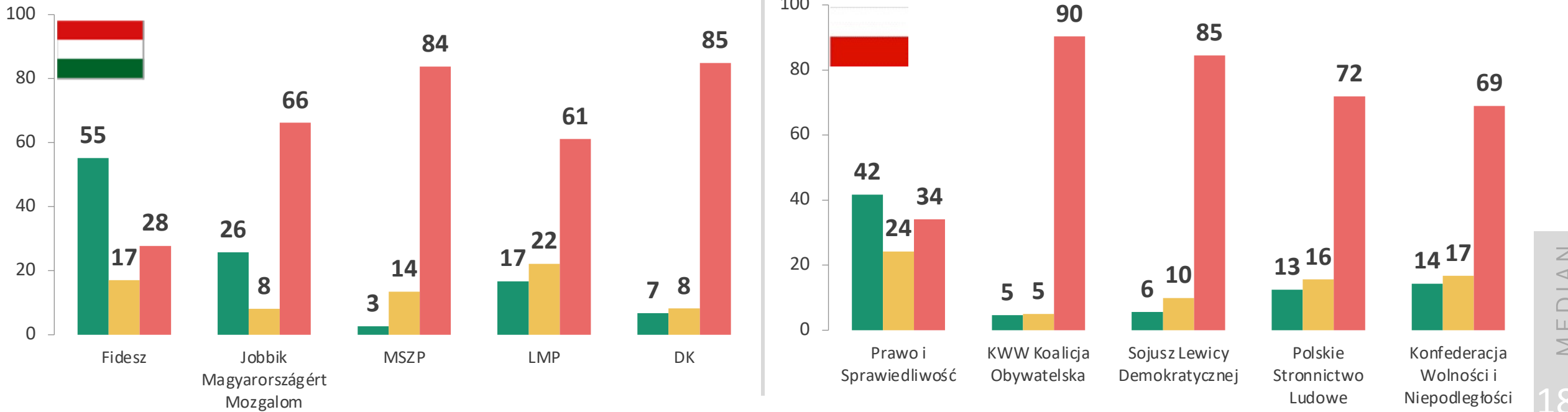
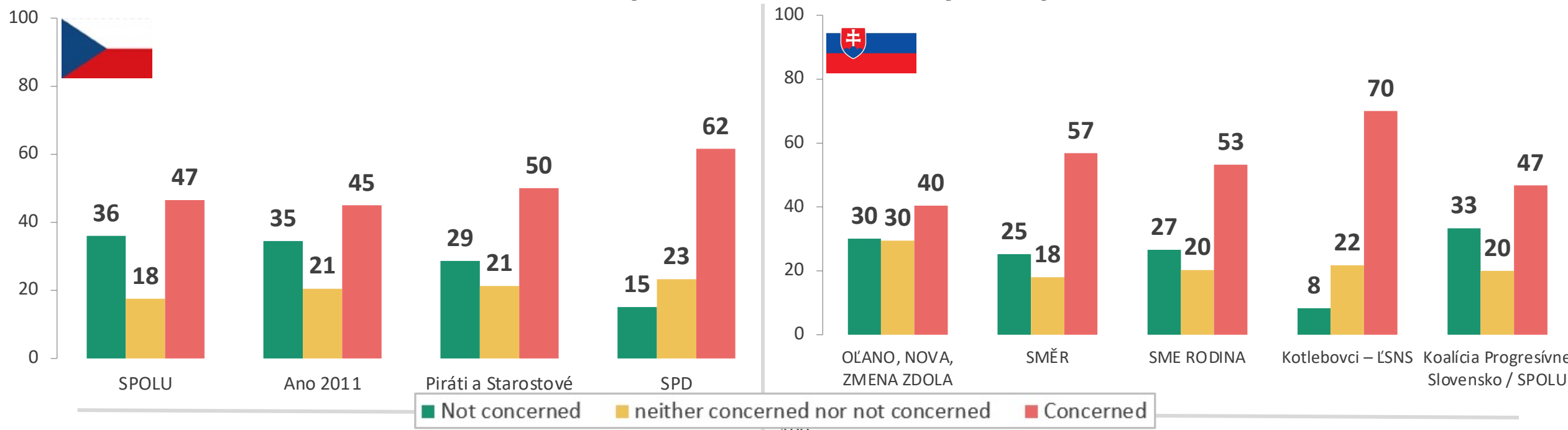
Concerns about the current state of media freedom grows with age.

Q07. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

Concerns about media freedom: age categories country comparison



Concerns about media freedom: vote preferences country comparison

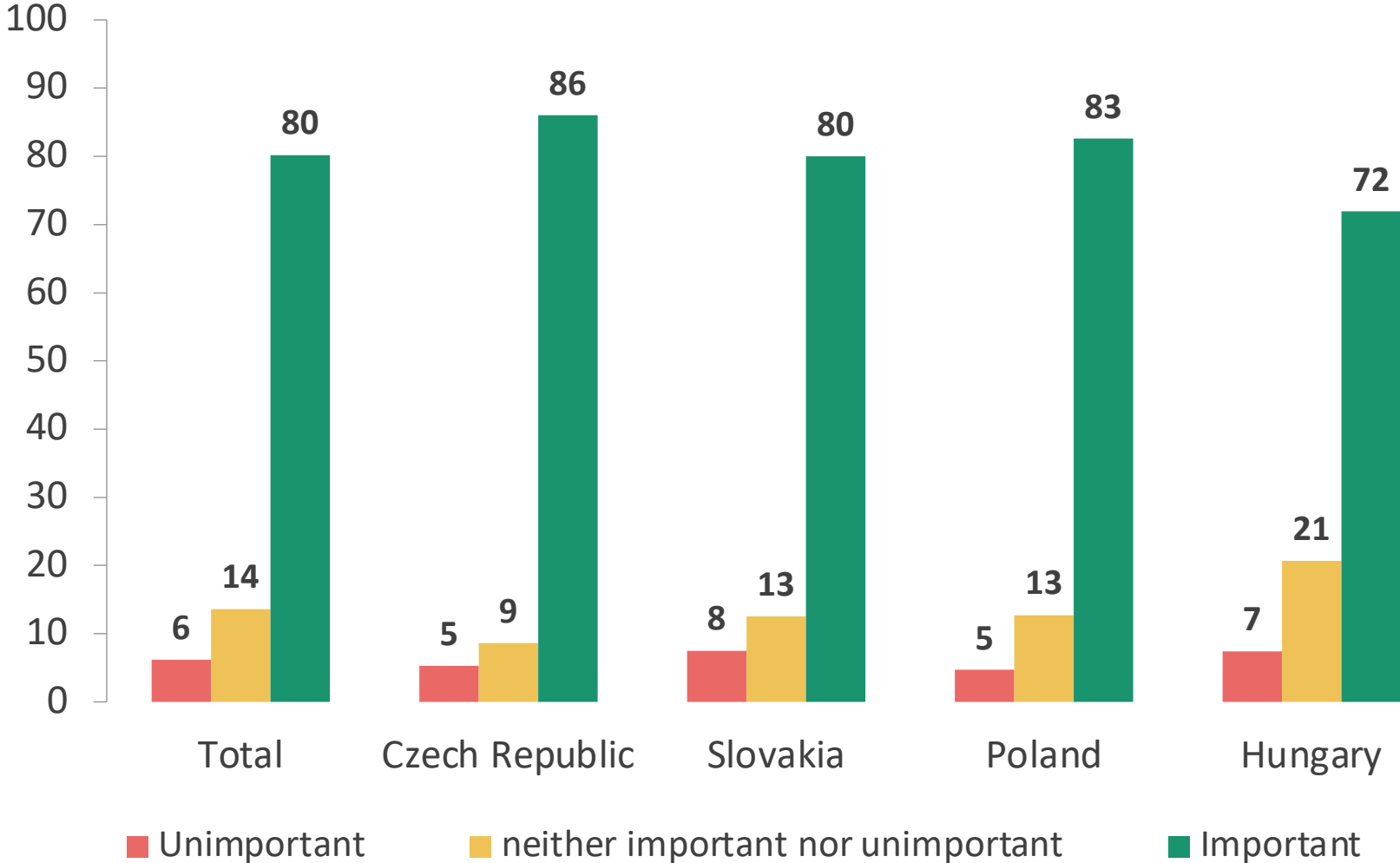


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**How do people assess the importance of
independent media?**

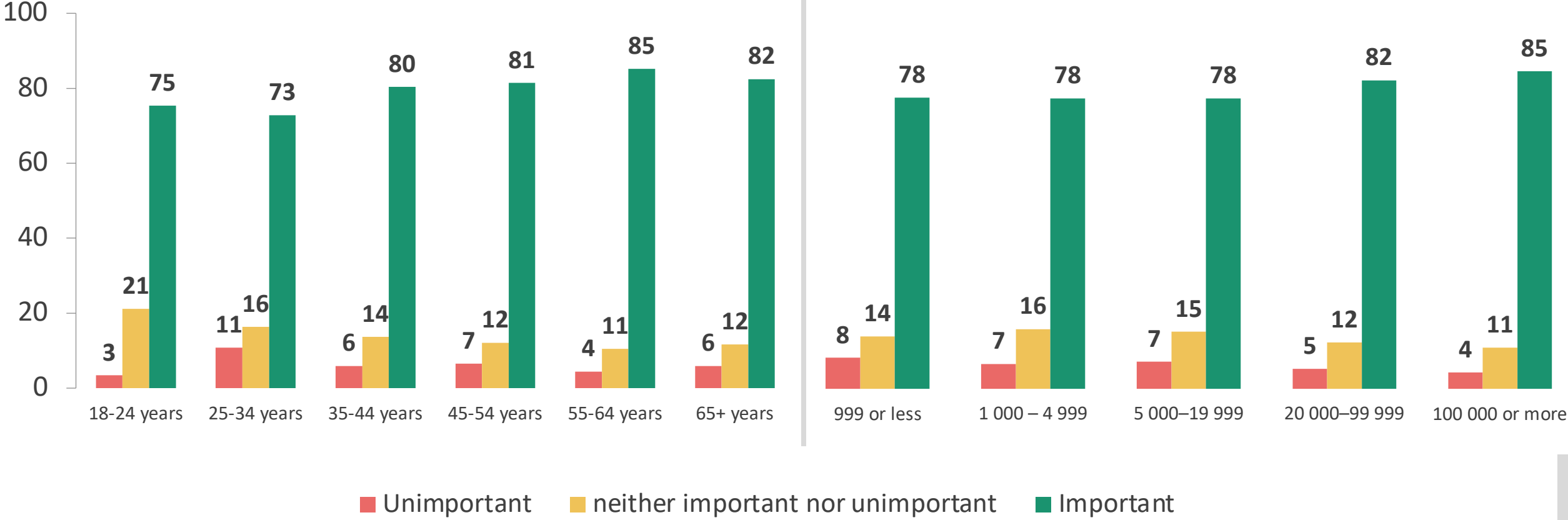
Importance of having independent media



Vast majority of people see having independent media as “absolutely important”.

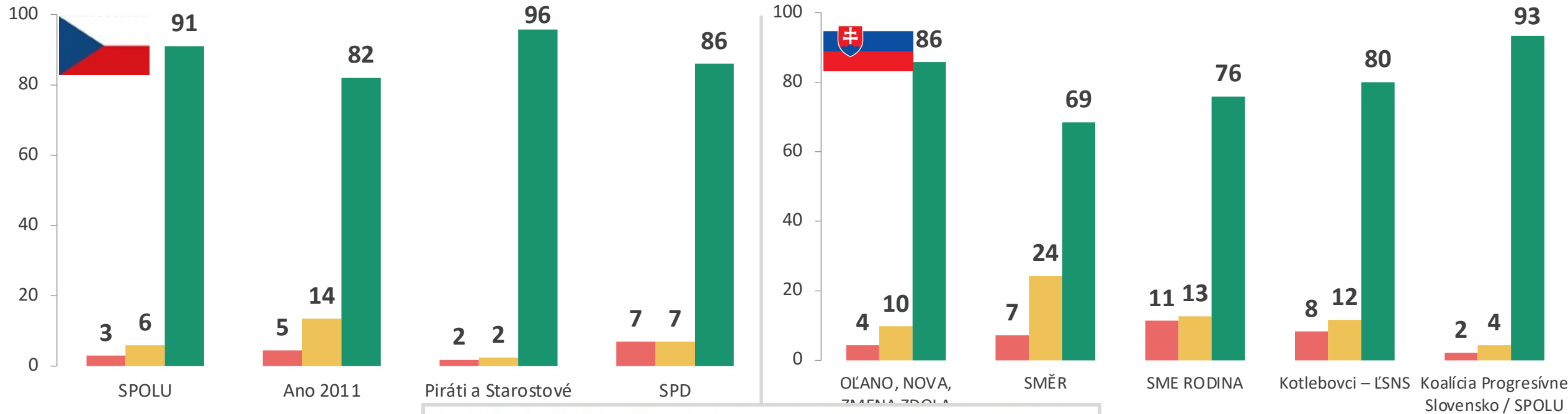
However, 7-8% of people in Hungary and in Slovakia have the opposite view

Importance of having independent media grows with age and living in big cities

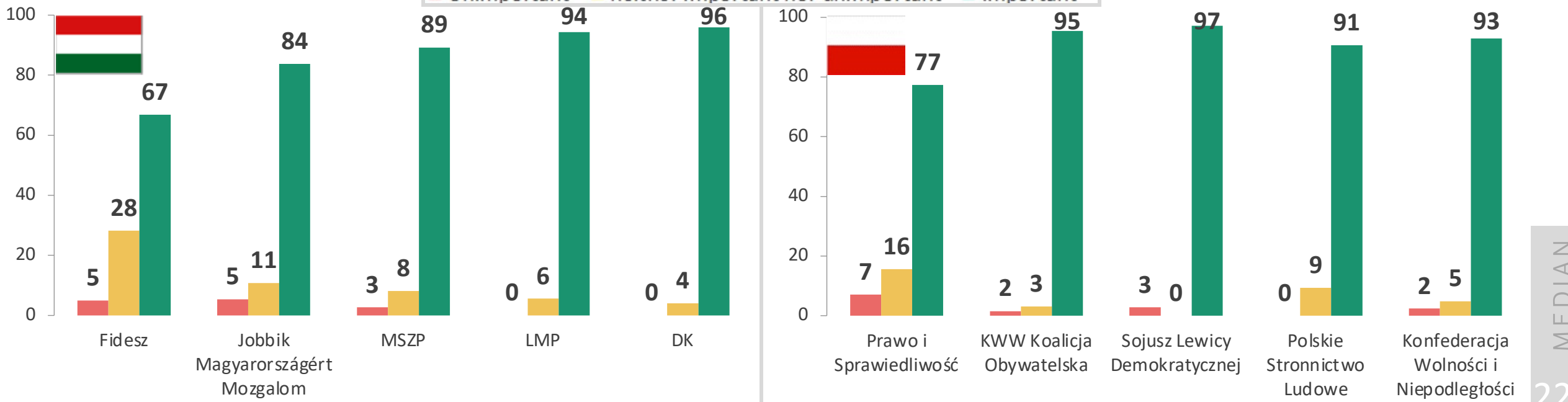


Q03. How important it is for a society to have news media that can operate without any interferences or censorship by the state or government?

Importance of having independent media: vote preferences country comparison

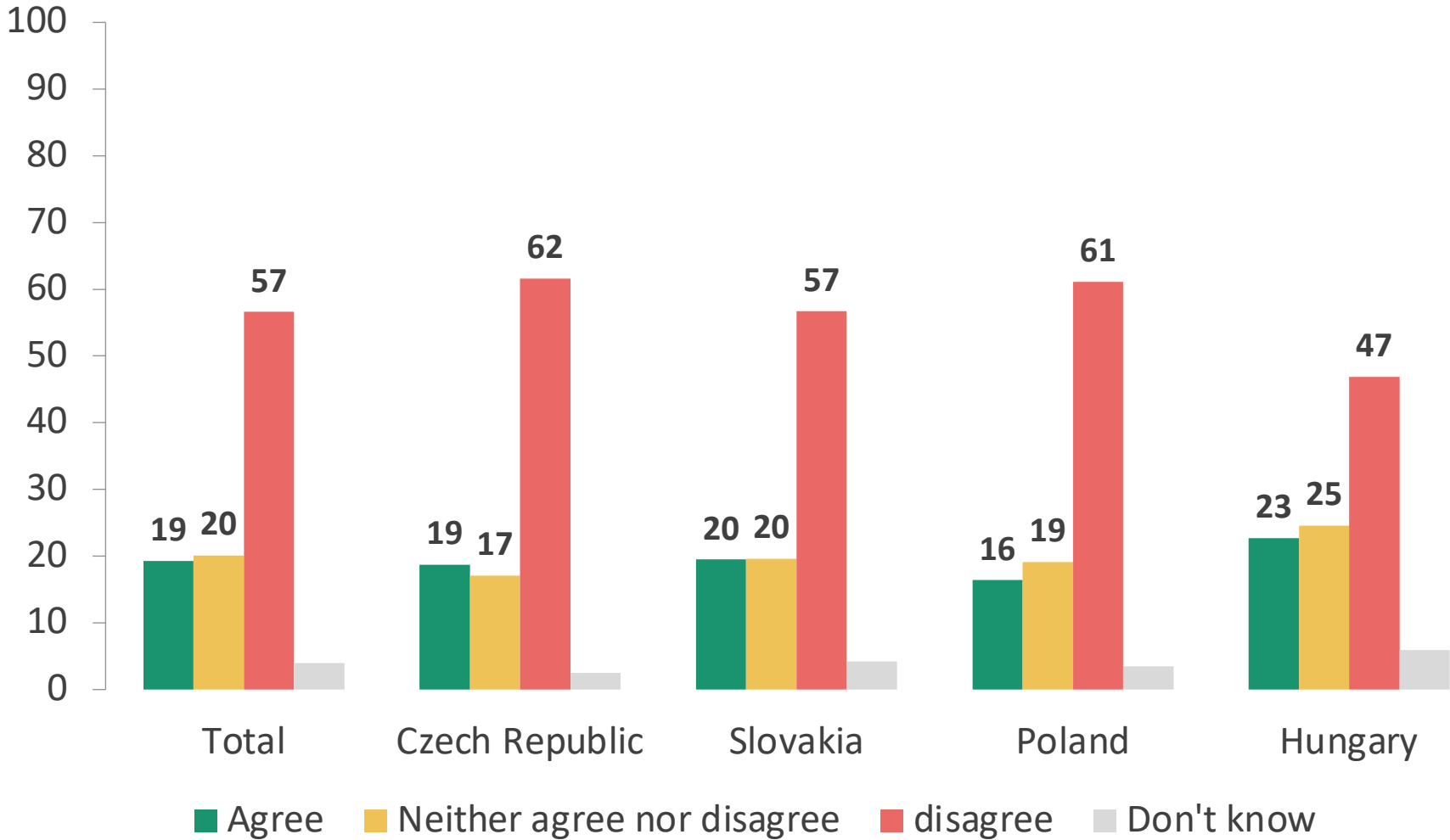


■ Unimportant ■ neither important nor unimportant ■ Important



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Opinions on the role of media owners



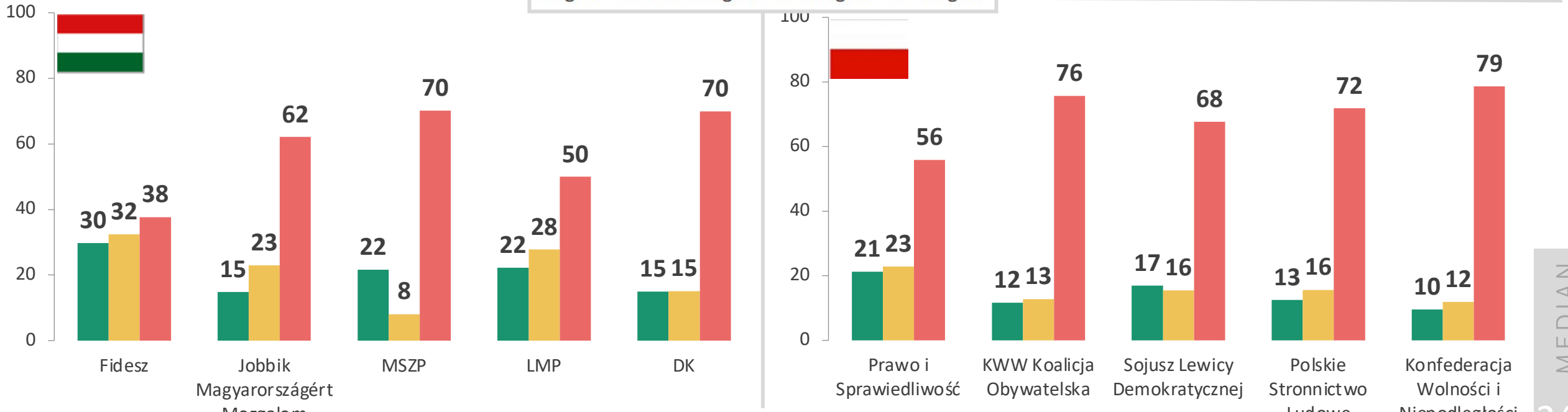
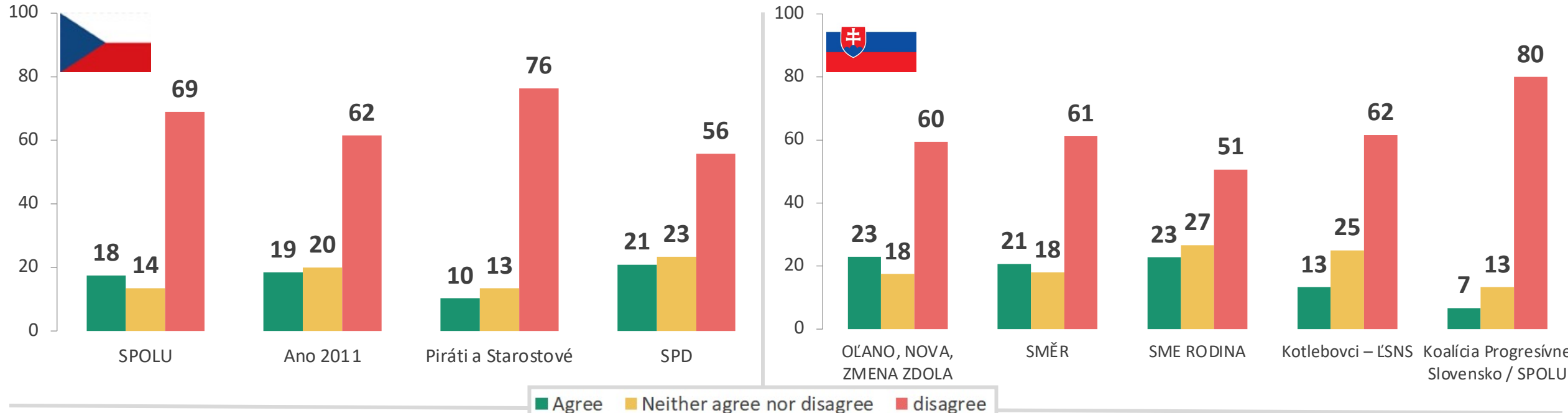
Majority of people believe that **owners should not have a right to interfere with editorial autonomy.**

However, the % is notably lower in Hungary.

Of those who read **newspapers** daily **agree 28% (Poland), 37% (Hungary)**

Q09A. Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

Opinions on the role of media owners: vote preferences country comparison

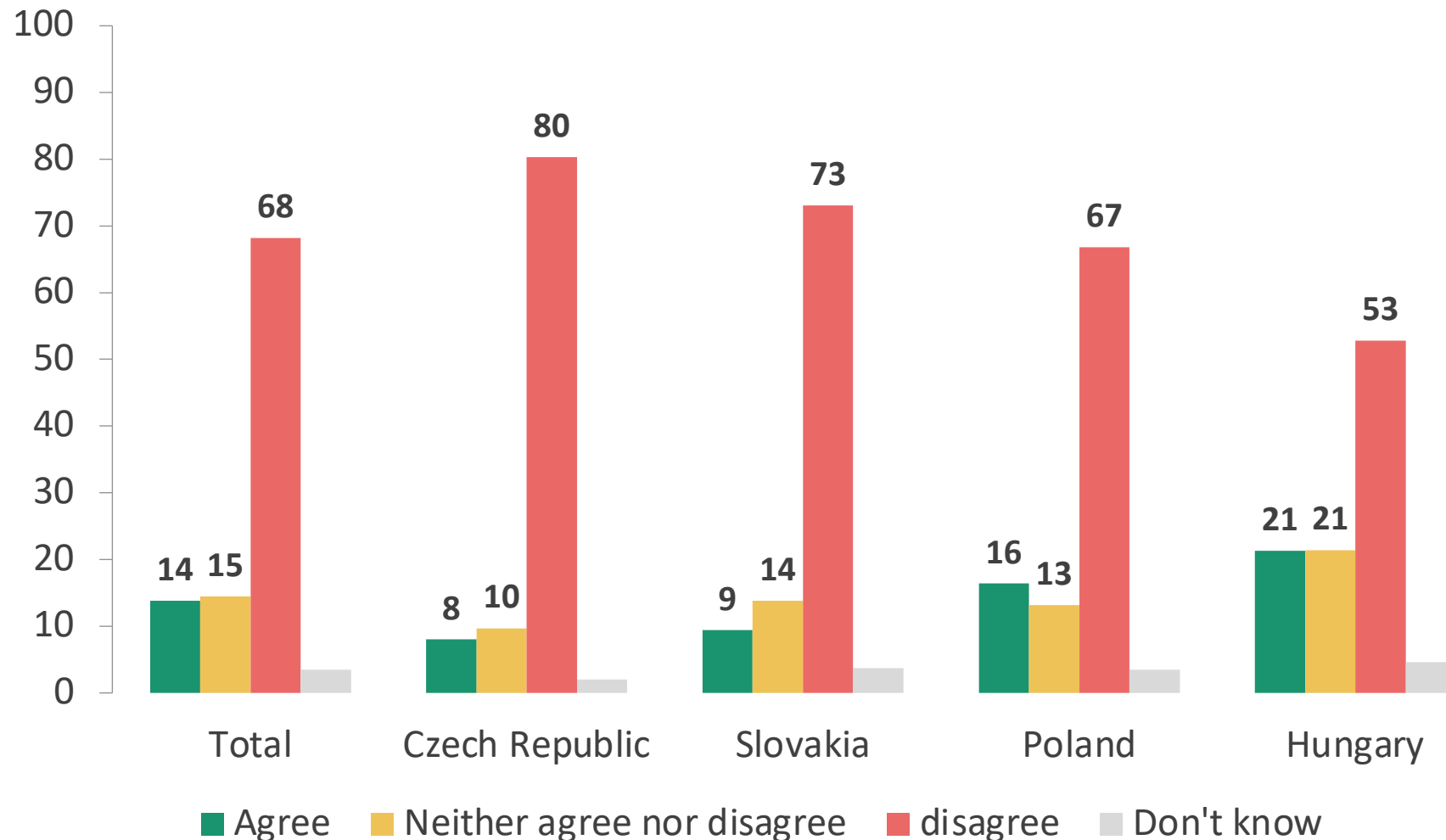


Q09A. Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

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Government interference with the content of public service media



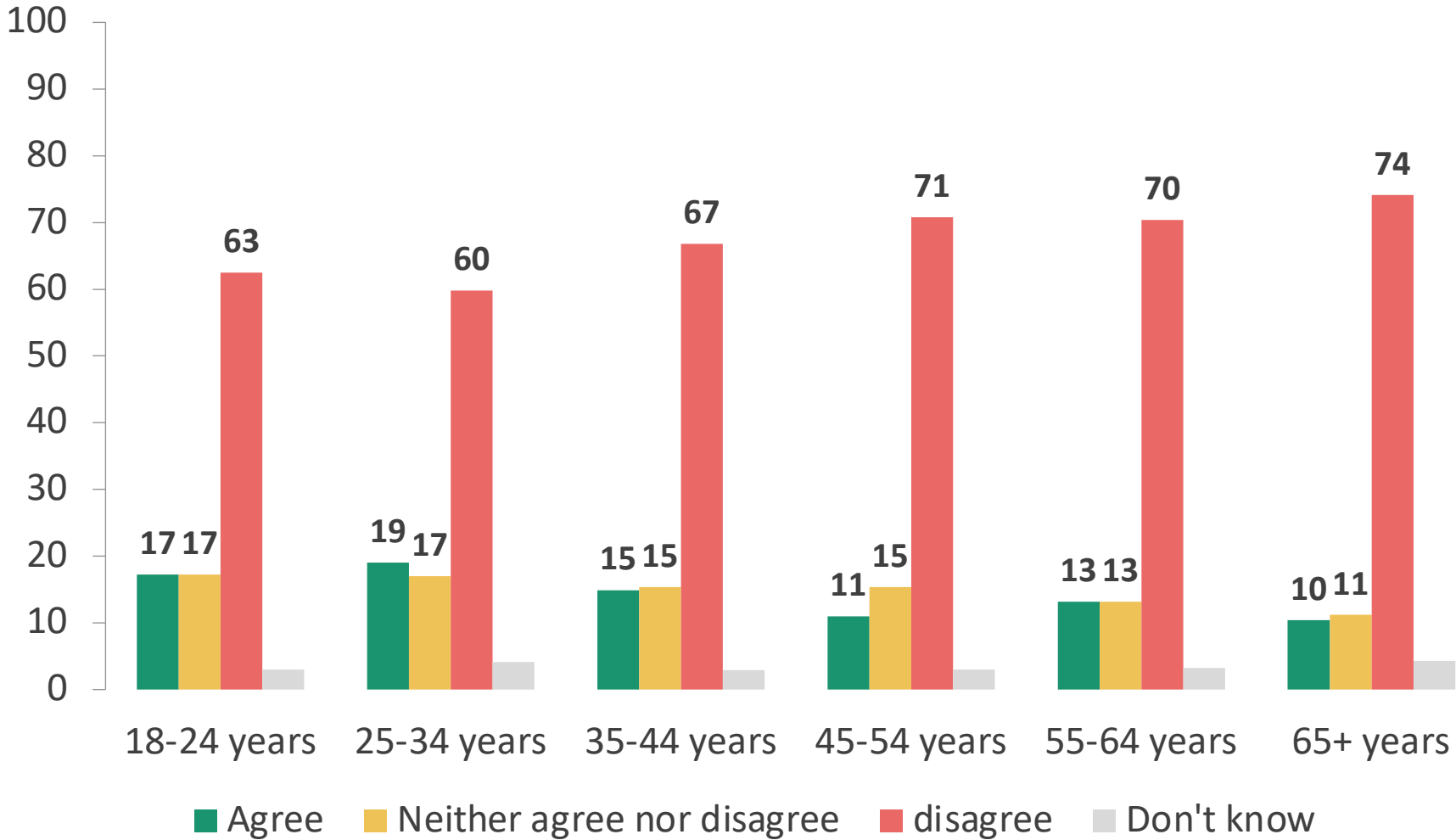
Majority of people believe that **the government should not influence the content of PSB.**

However, the % is notably lower in Hungary (where 2.5x as many people believe that it should have that right).

Of those who **read newspapers daily agree:** 34% in Poland; 35% in Hungary

Reading **online news** increases **disagreement.**

Government interference with the content of public service media by age



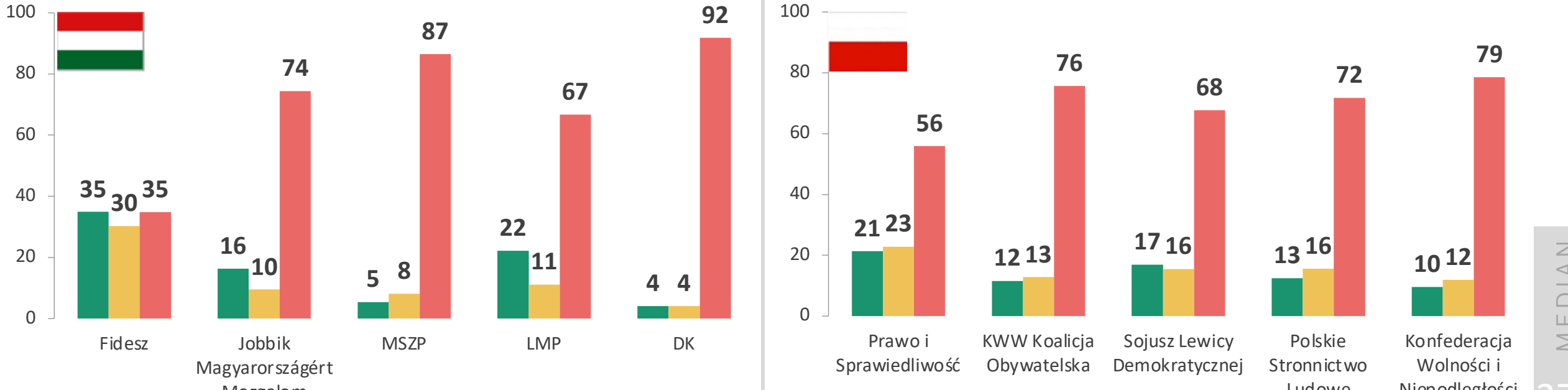
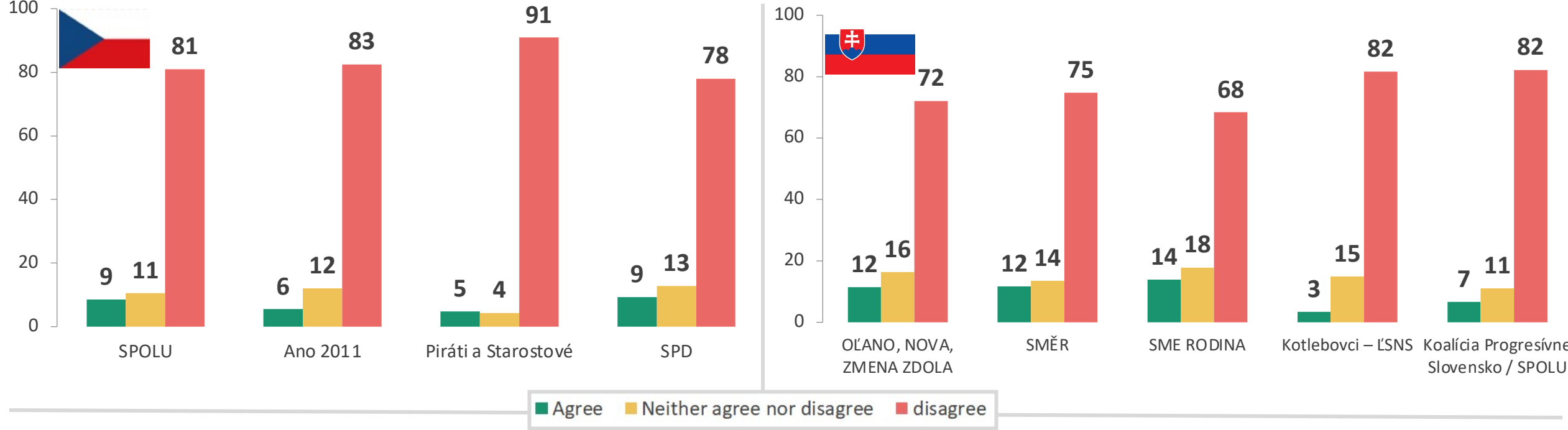
Share of agreement rises with age.

Youngest cohorts relatively less certain that the government should not influence PSB content.

In Hungary & Poland, **people who feel well represented by PSB** are more likely to support government interference.

Q09B. The government has a right to influence the content of the news that is broadcasted by public service media.

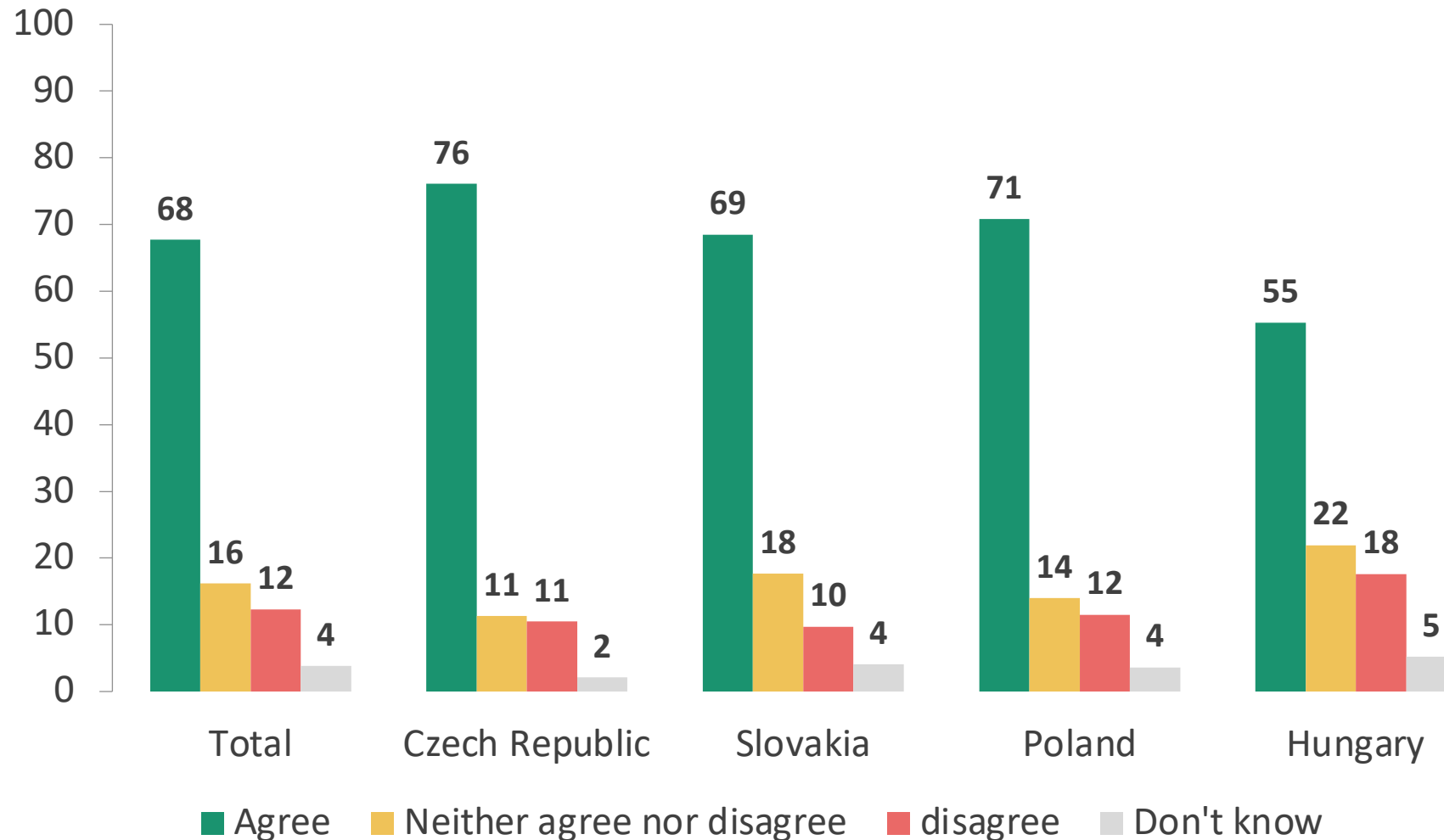
PSB vs. the role of the government: vote preferences country comparison



Q09B. The government has a right to influence the content of the news that is broadcasted by public service media.

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Editorial autonomy of newsrooms

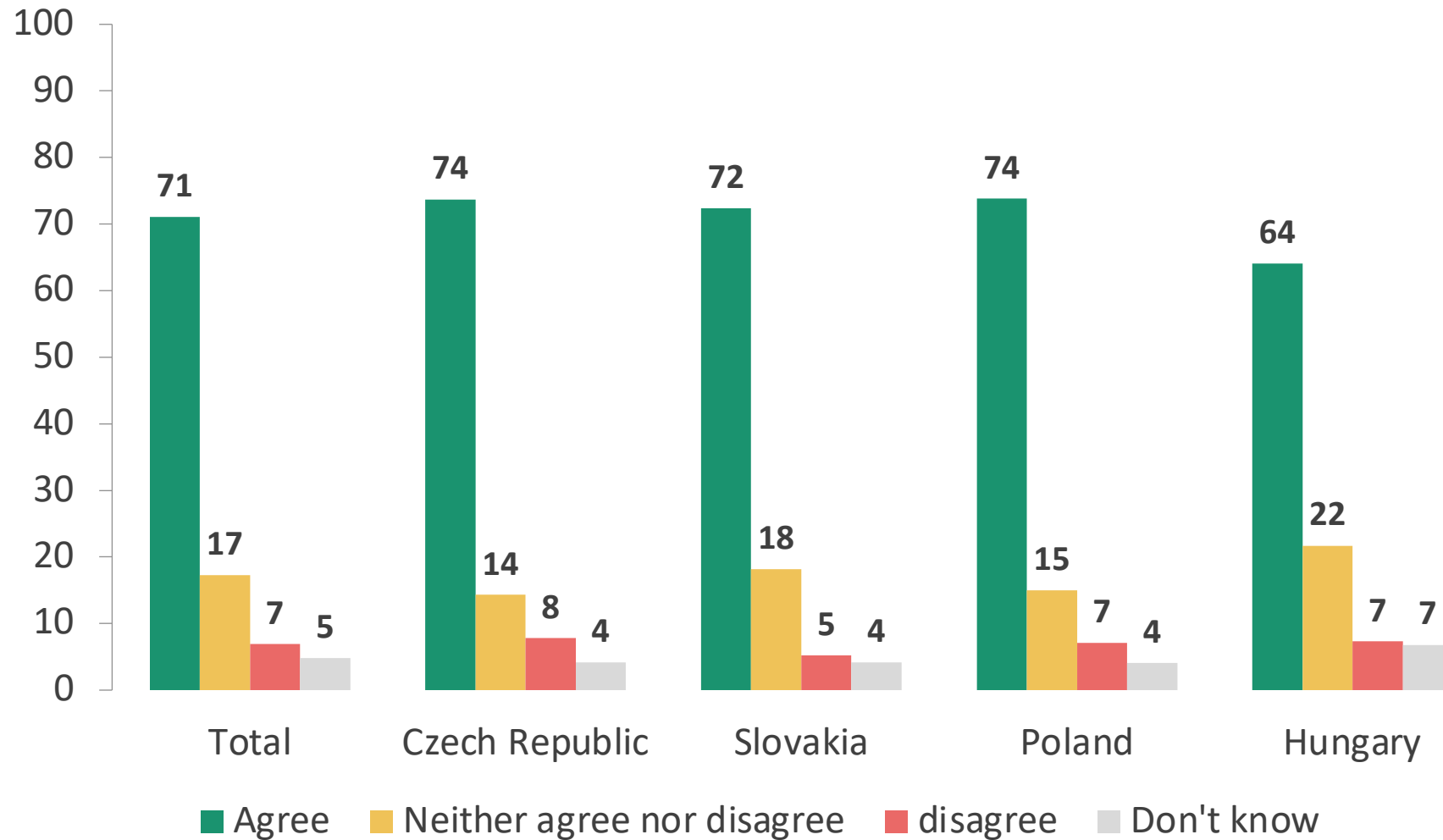


Majority of people agree that **newsrooms should have a full editorial autonomy.**

Again, relatively **lower agreement in Hungary.**

**What should be done to safeguard media
freedom?**

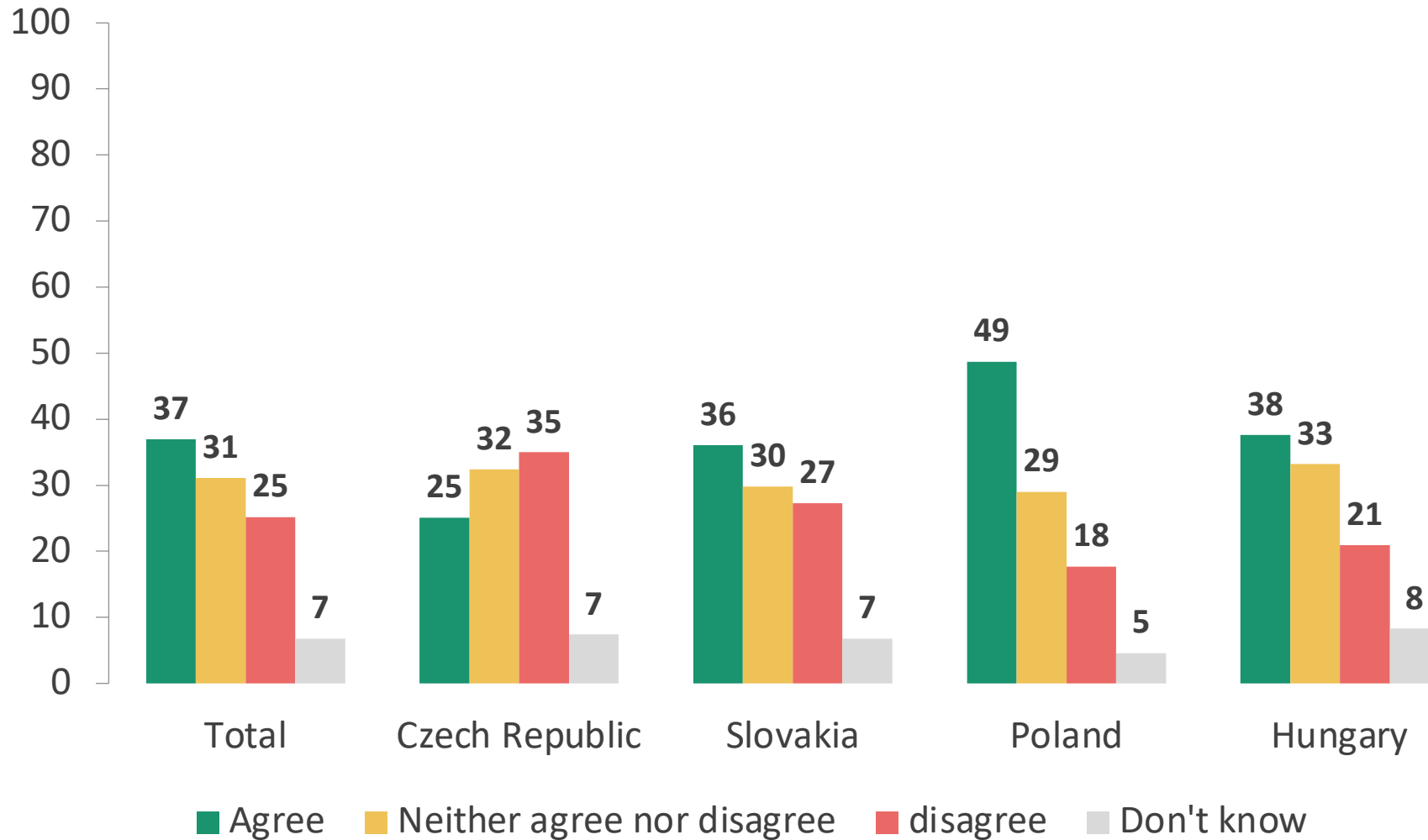
Strengthening legislation by the state



Broad **approval** for the state to strengthen legislation across all V4 countries.

Agreement increases with age.

Economic support by the state

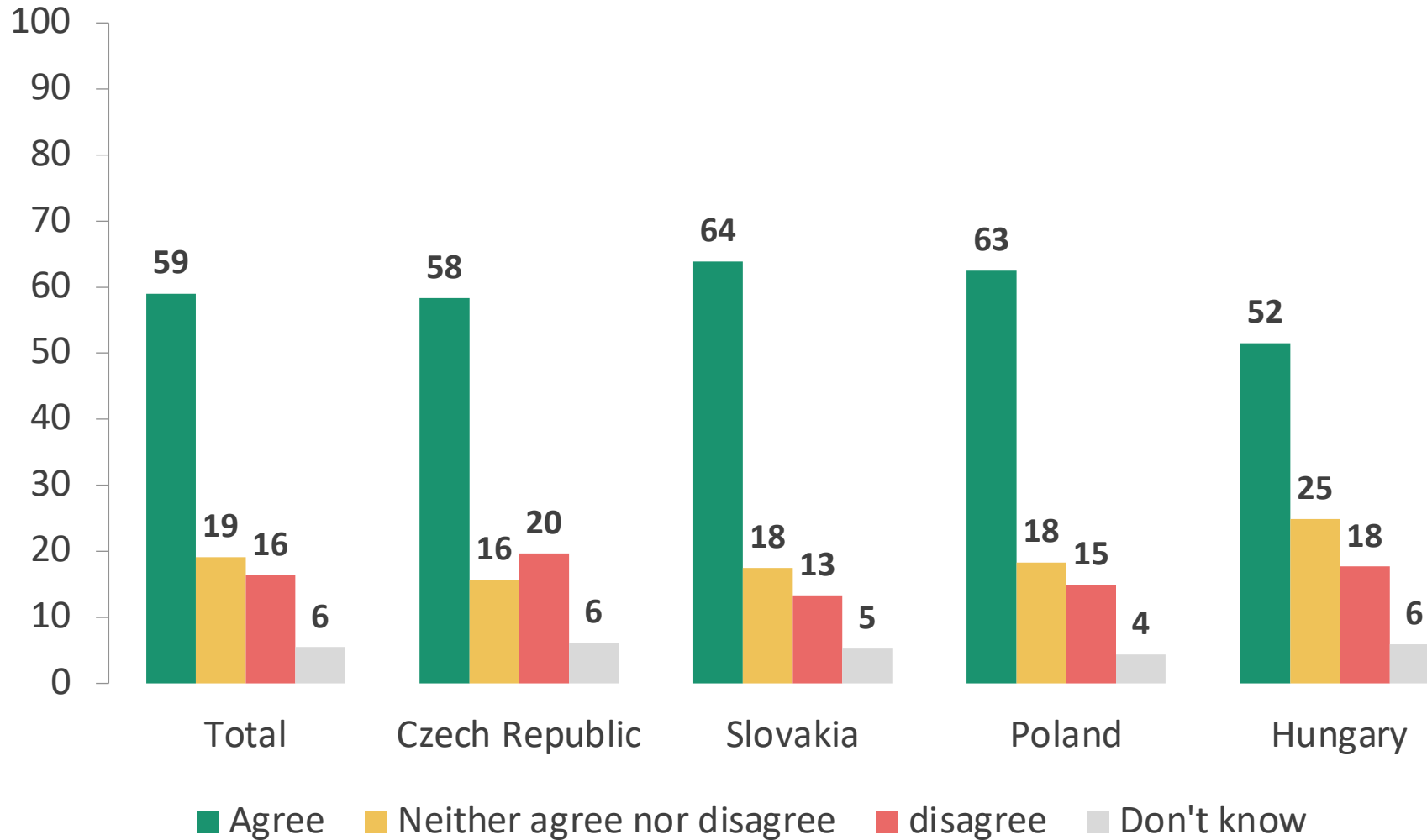


V4 citizens **generally more in favour rather than against the idea.**

Overwhelming support in Poland, and substantial one in Hungary, **but disagreement in the Czech Republic.**

Disagreement grows with age.

Penalties or sanctions by the EU

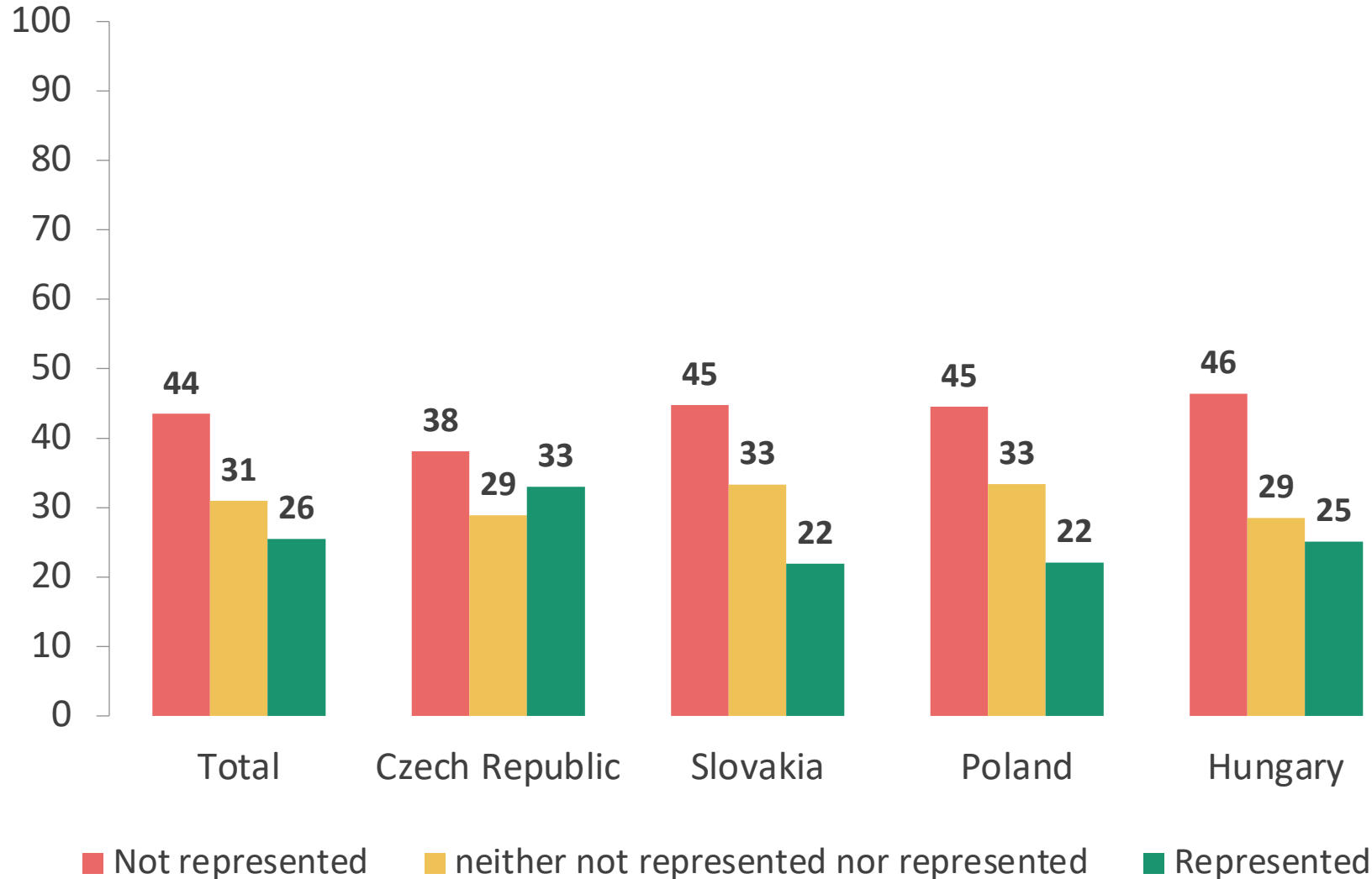


Majority of people agree with the more substantial role of the EU in protecting media freedom, by imposing penalties or sanctions.

Disagreement grows with age.

Other selected variables

Feeling represented by PSB

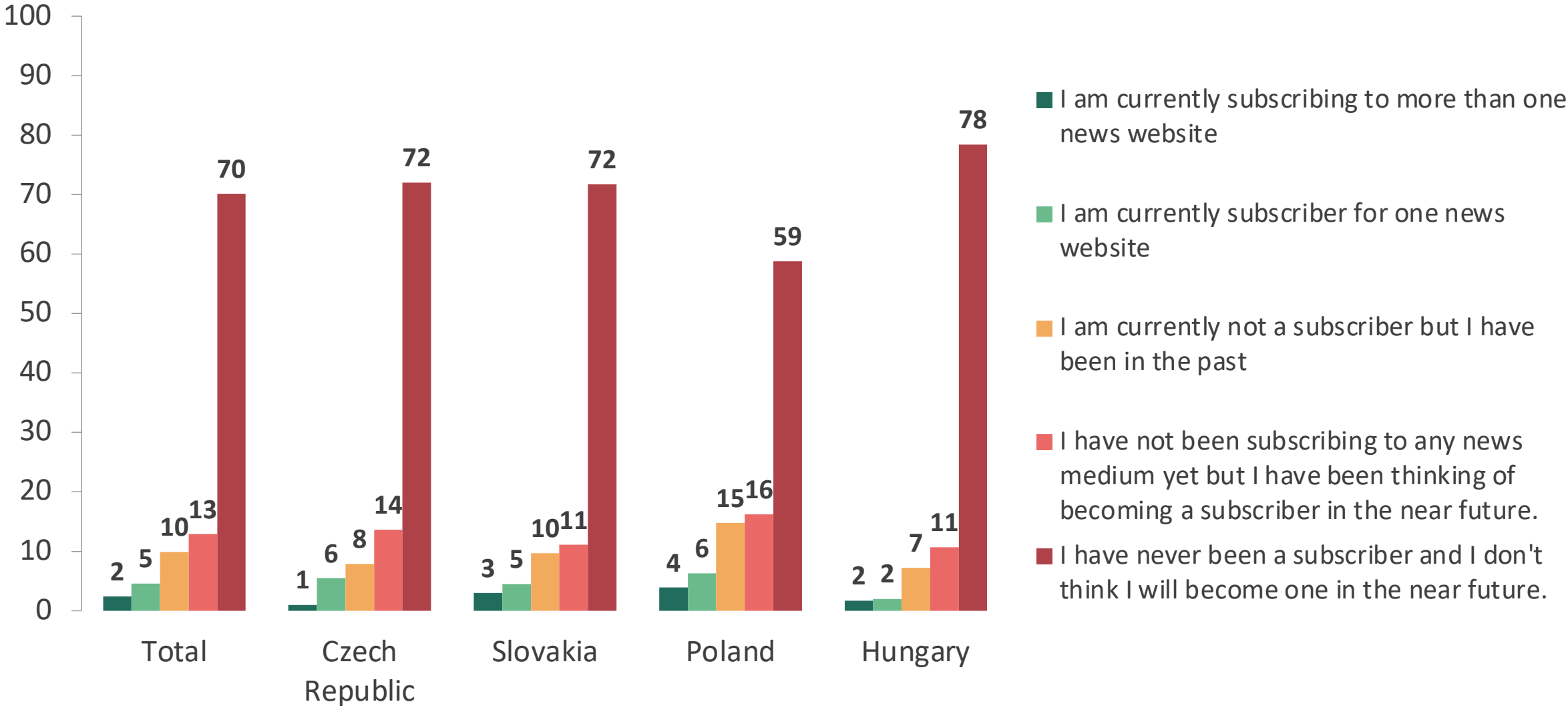


Substantially more people feel their political views are not adequately represented on PSB – with the exception of the Czech Republic.

Dissatisfaction steeply rises with age.

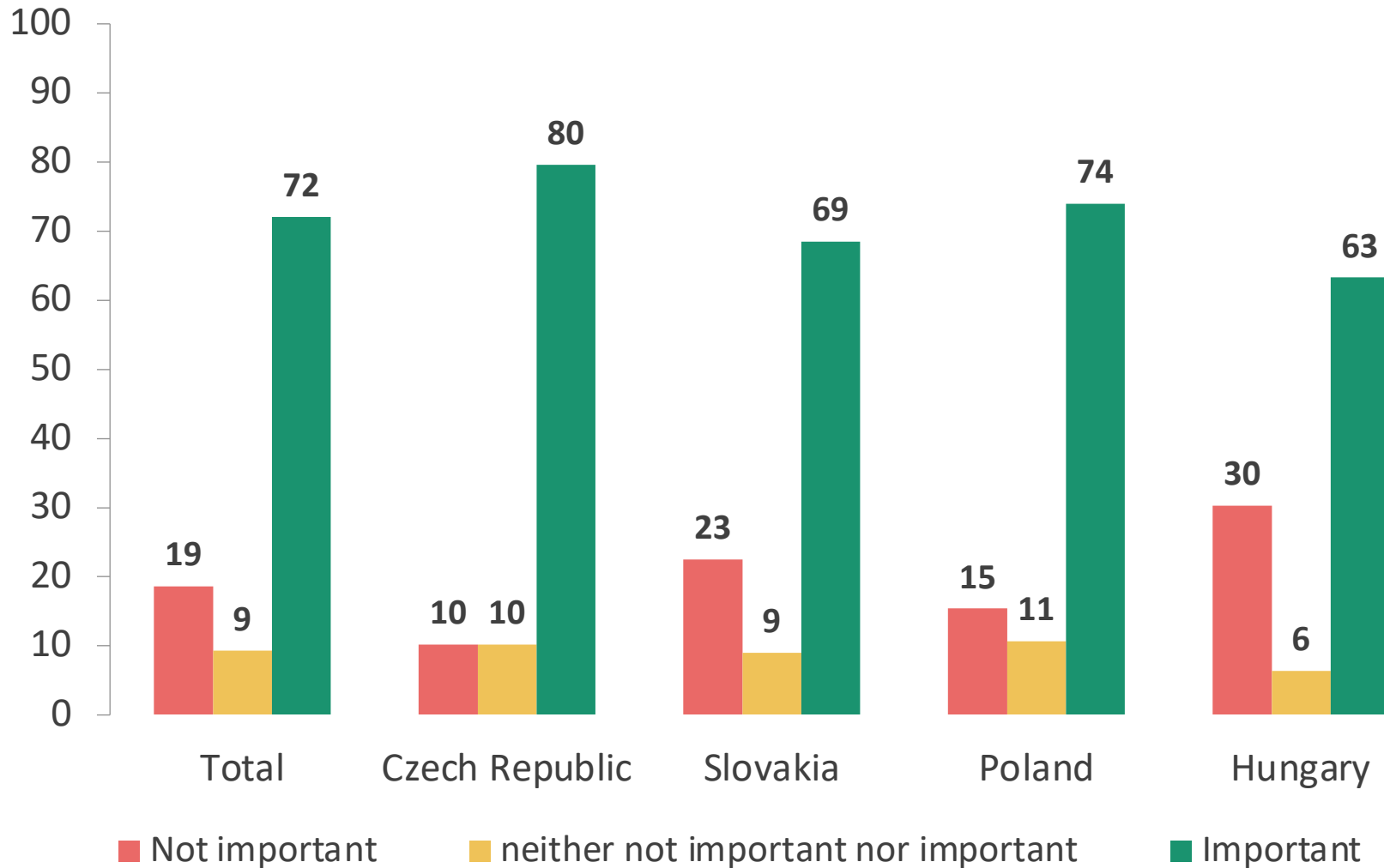
Q11. When it comes to public service broadcasting in your country, how much would you say its content represents people like you, in terms of your own political views?

Subscribing to online news



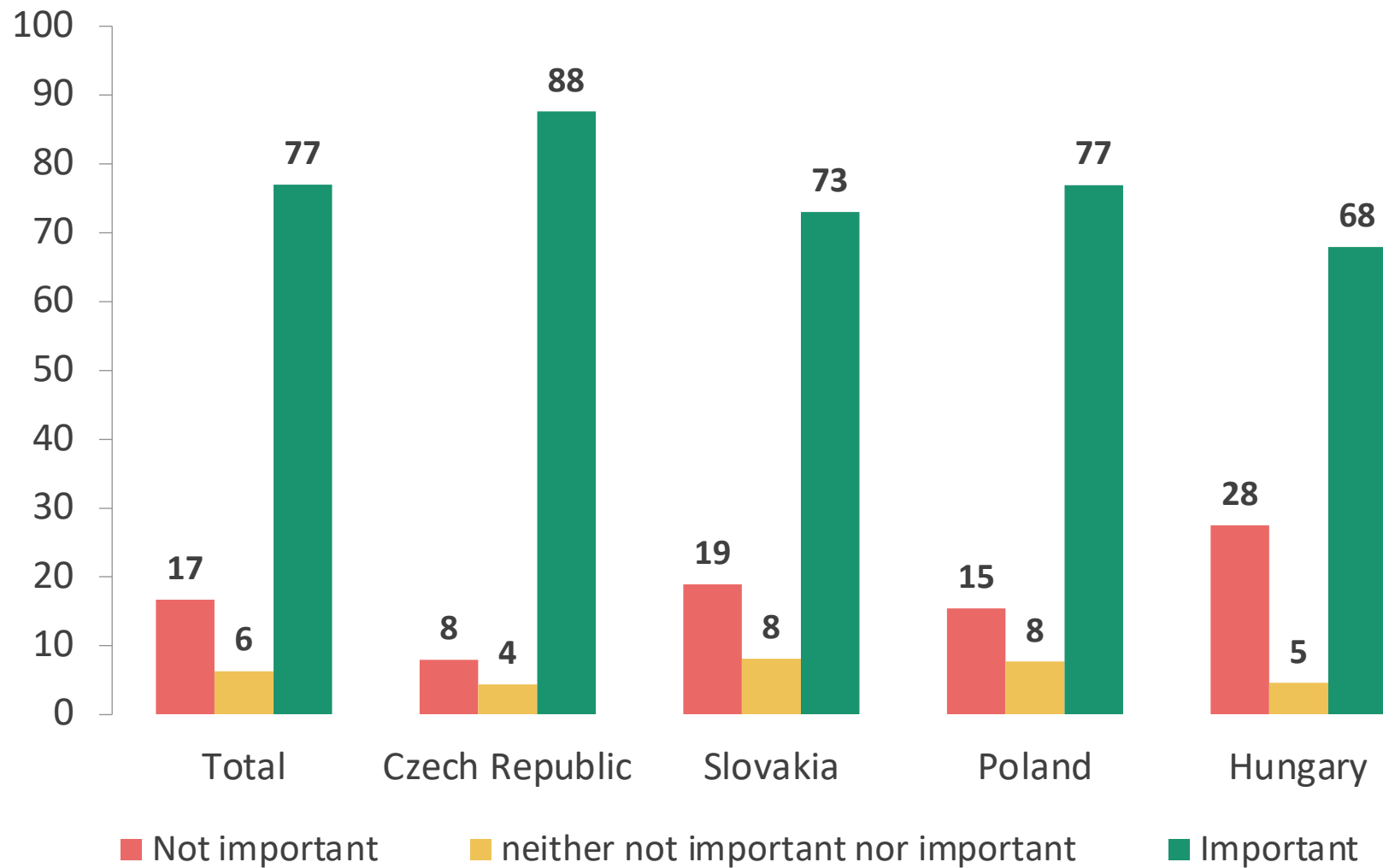
Q12. Can you tell us whether you have been subscribing to online news, or what is the likelihood that you might become a subscriber in the future?

Potential factors in deciding to pay for news: editorial independence



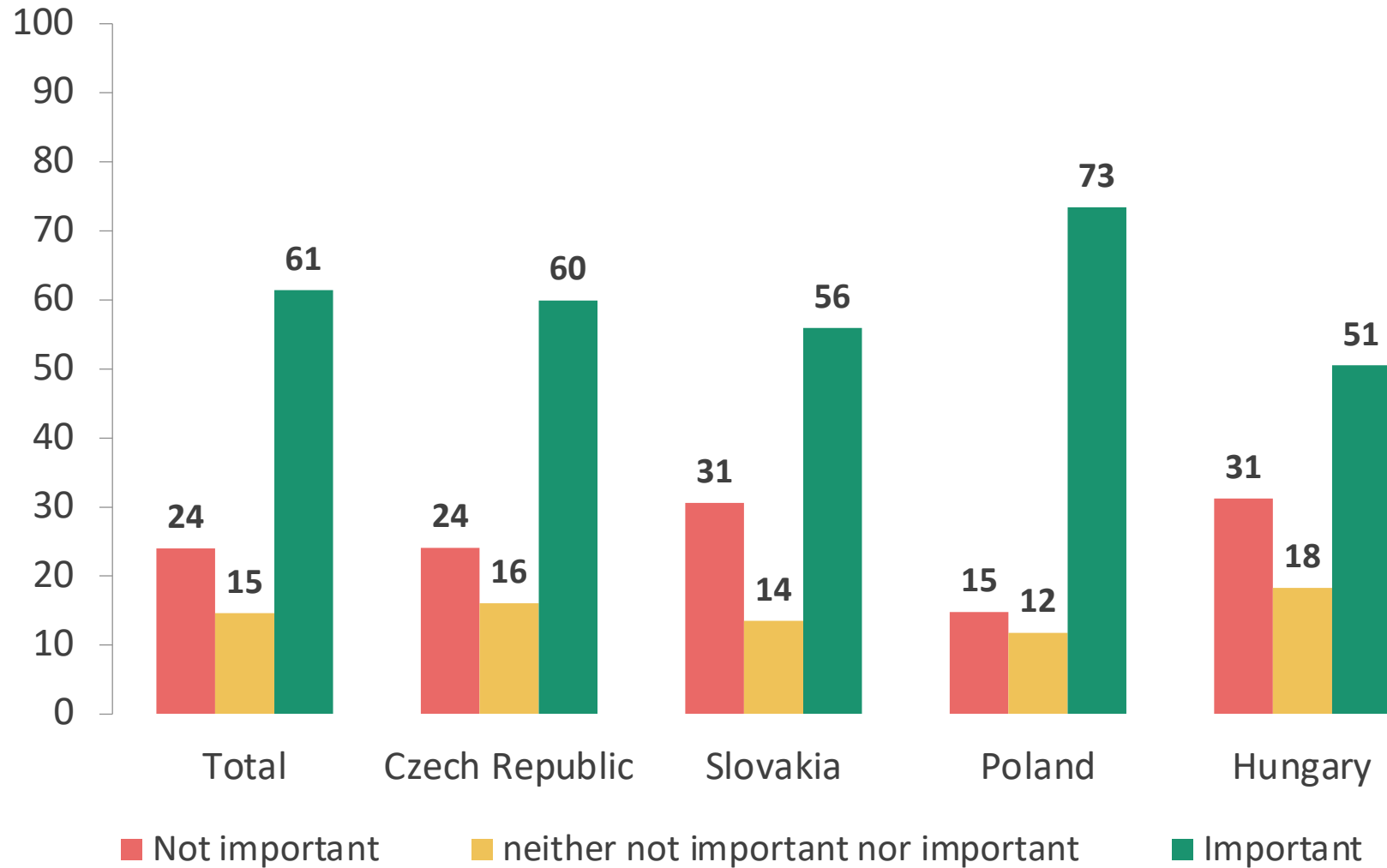
Less important for younger people than for older ones.

Potential factors in deciding to pay for news: quality and accuracy of news content



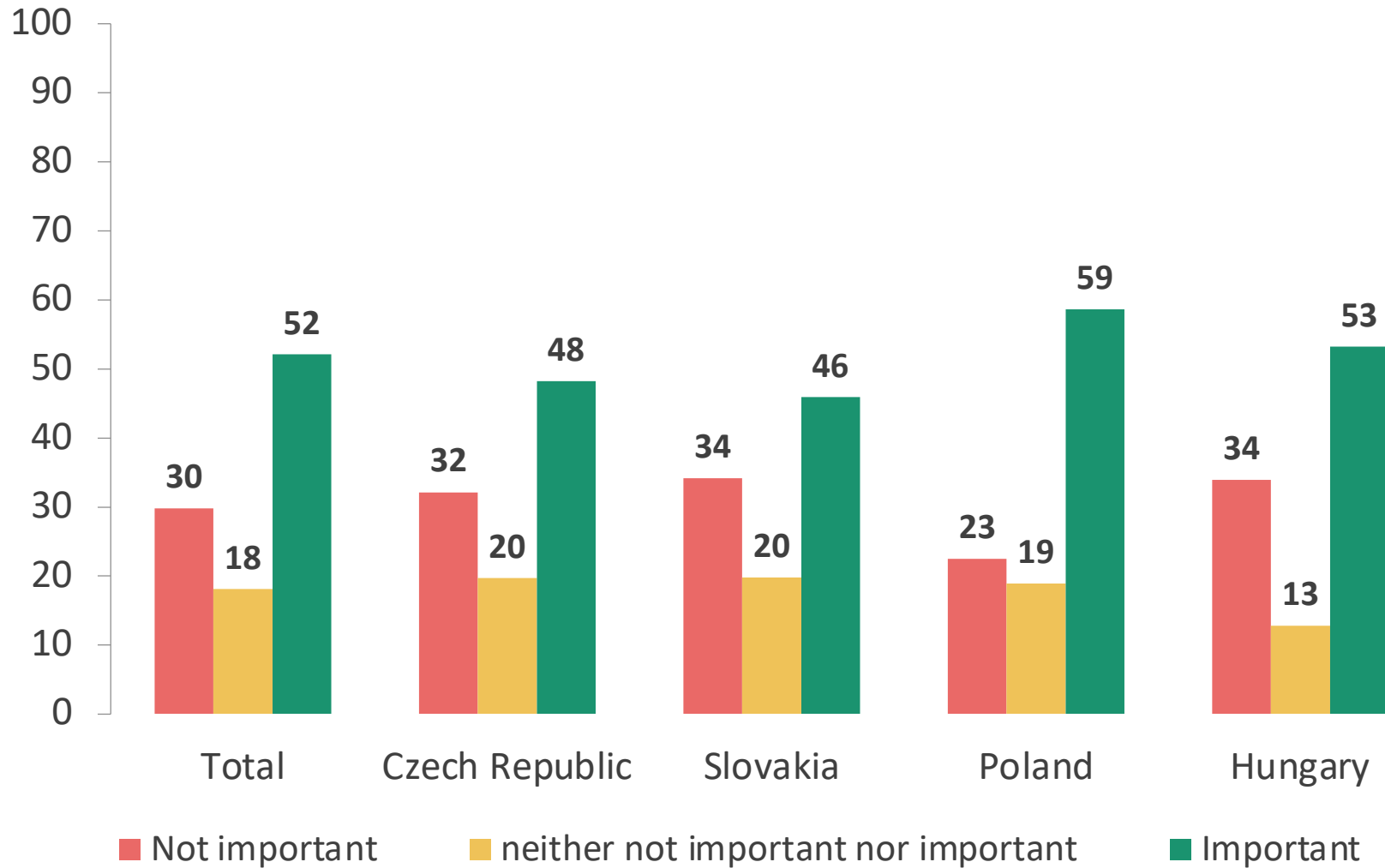
Less important for younger people than for older ones.

Potential factors in deciding to pay for news: easiness of online access (e.g. via an app)



Very important for the youngest cohort (but also for the oldest one).

Potential factors in deciding to pay for news: access to premium content



Q14. How important for you are the following factors when deciding which medium would you be most likely willing to pay for?

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