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Democracy and Youth in the Digital Age

Access creep: A mixed methods approach exploring political participation among adolescents in Luxembourg

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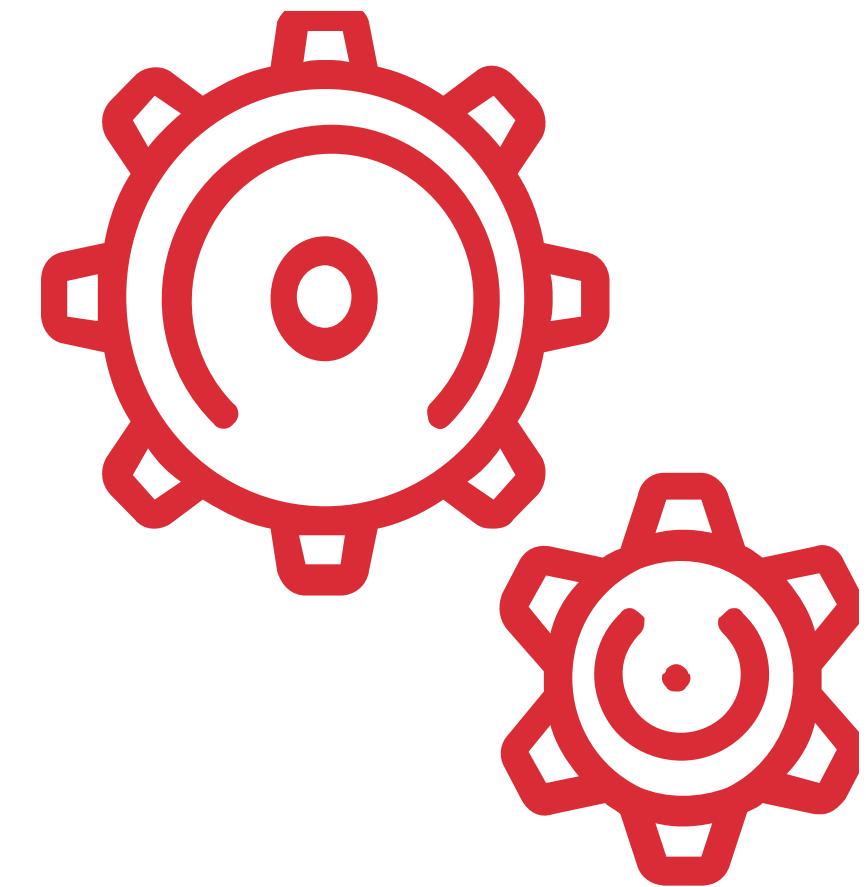
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES,
EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES



Political participation in the digital age

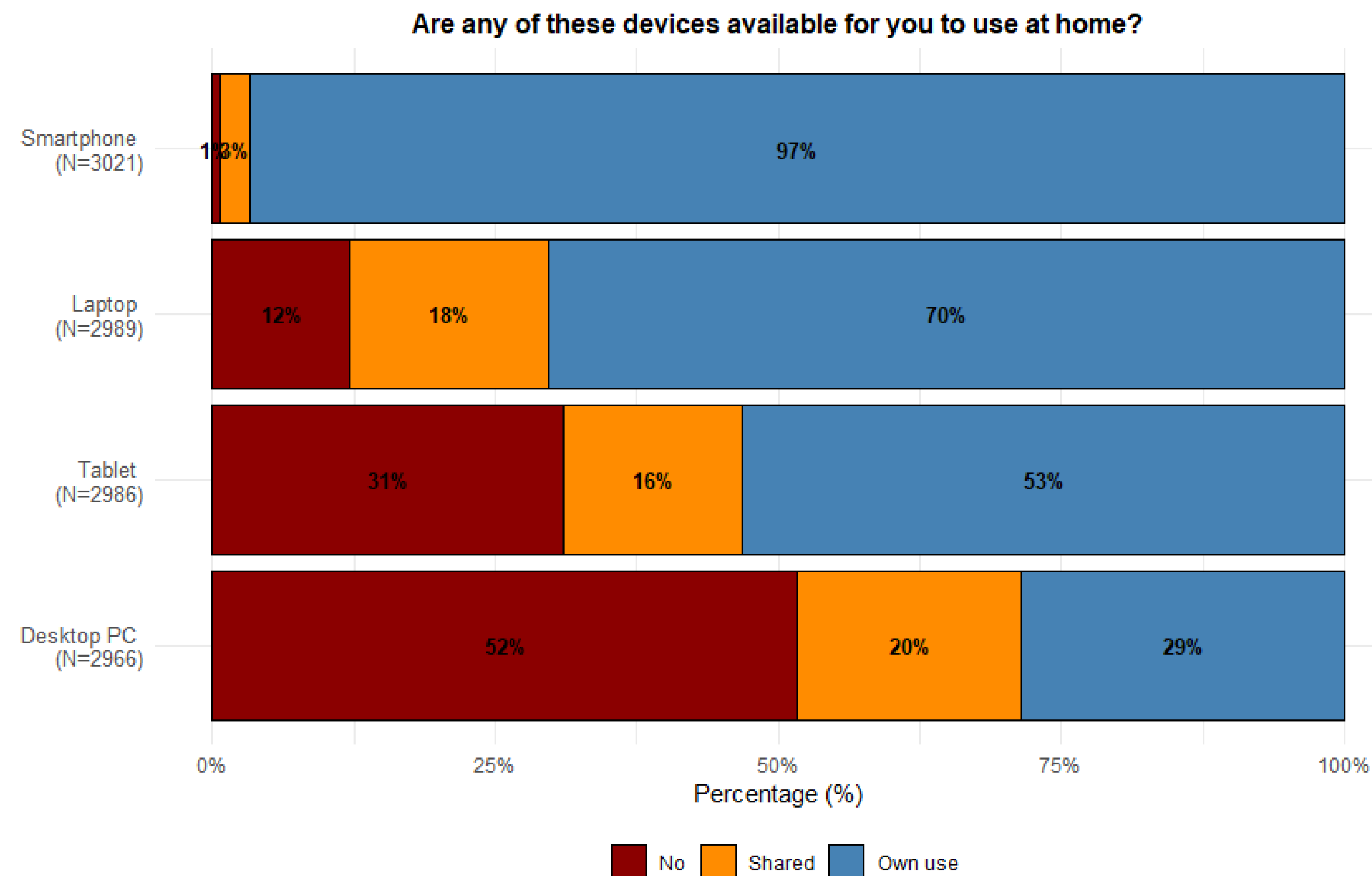
Digital media is shaping the political landscape:

- Traditional media is declining (Global Web Index, 2019; Newman et al., 2024)
- Engagement on social media is trending up
 - *Content Creators* are becoming increasingly prominent (Global Web Index, 2019; Newman et al., 2024)
- Positive correlation between digital/social media use and political participation (Bouilanne, 2015; Bouilanne & Theocharis, 2018; Wathan, 2024)
 - Depends on motivation for use (Bouilanne & Theocharis, 2018; Neag et al., 2024)
- “*Unconventional*” means of political participation by young people might be missed (Kitanova, 2020)



Access creep: Digital access in Luxembourg

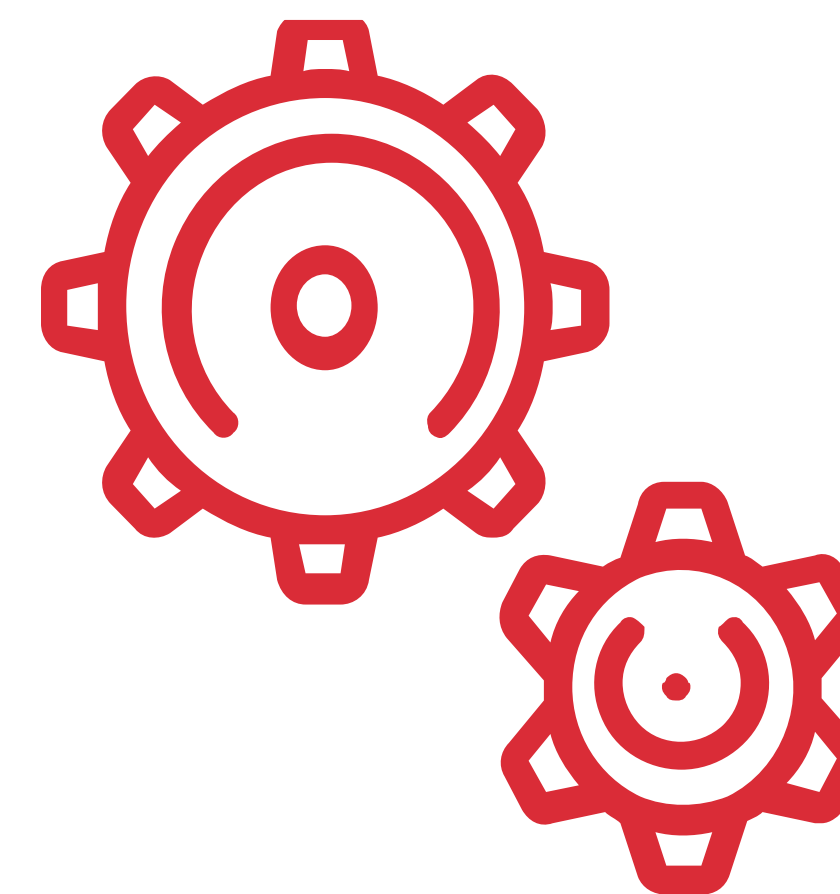
- Globally, about 87% internet penetration (Newman et al., 2024)
- Locally, more than 90% since 2010 (STATEC, 2022)
- 99.4% in 2024 (STATEC, 2024)
- 97% in our sample (aged 12-29, living in Luxembourg)



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

Research Questions

1. How interested are Luxembourgish adolescents in politics?
2. How do Luxembourgish adolescents engage with politics online?
3. What is the perspective of Luxembourgish adolescents on politics and news?
Where does this perspective come from?
4. Which institutions do Luxembourgish adolescents trust, and why?
How do they define trust?



Data sources and design

Mixed Design

- The research is an offspring of the data collection for the Youth Report 2025
- In a preliminary stage
- Contextualise using quantitative data analysis
- Deeper exploration through qualitative interviews

Quantitative

- Youth Survey Luxembourg (N = 5307)
- Random proportional stratified sampling
- Representative survey on Luxembourgish youth aged 12 to 29
- Collected April 2024 to May 2024
- Analyses limited to ages 16 to 29

Qualitative

- Youth Report Luxembourg Interviews (N = 37)
- 26 first interviews, 11 second interviews, complementary digital diaries, aged 12 to 29
- Theoretical and contrasting sampling
- Conducted February 2024 to July 2024
- Exploratory methodology

Interest in politics (I)

“Oh yeah, did you hear about that? Or something in Luxembourg, like, 'Oh, the Prime Minister is doing this or that', maybe then, but not really, not that often. We talk about other topics, yeah.”

(Marie, F, 19 – On whether she talks about [local] politics with her friends and family)**



Dall-E (ChatGPT): Create a modern, vector-style illustration for the cover of a national youth report. The image should feature a diverse group of youth arranged in a dynamic semi-circle. They should represent various genders and ethnicities with authentic, contemporary casual attire. One individual in the group is holding a smartphone prominently to symbolize digital connectivity. The overall style should be clean and minimalistic, with crisp lines, geometric shapes, and a subtle abstract background featuring a gentle gradient. Use a vibrant color palette that includes cool blues, vibrant teals, and warm accents like orange or yellow. The lighting should be soft and even, giving the image a professional, forward-thinking feel.

Interest in politics (I)

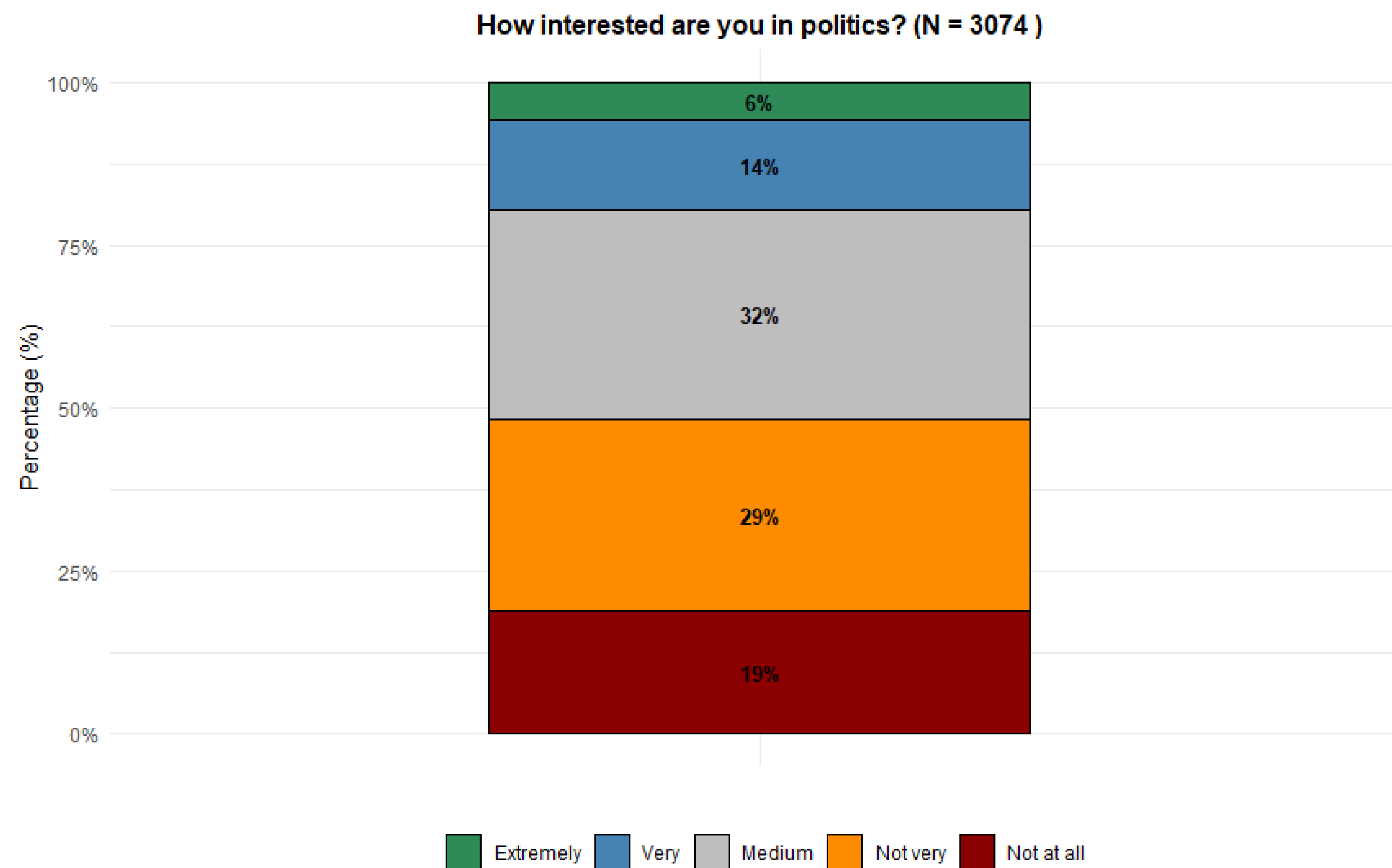
“When the war in Ukraine broke out, there was a lesson where people only talked about the Ukraine war.”
(Jean, M, 18 – On whether his school covers recent geopolitical events)*



Dall-E (ChatGPT): Create a modern, vector-style illustration for the cover of a national youth report. The image should feature a diverse group of youth arranged in a dynamic semi-circle. They should represent various genders and ethnicities with authentic, contemporary casual attire. One individual in the group is holding a smartphone prominently to symbolize digital connectivity. The overall style should be clean and minimalistic, with crisp lines, geometric shapes, and a subtle abstract background featuring a gentle gradient. Use a vibrant color palette that includes cool blues, vibrant teals, and warm accents like orange or yellow. The lighting should be soft and even, giving the image a professional, forward-thinking feel.

Interest in politics (II)

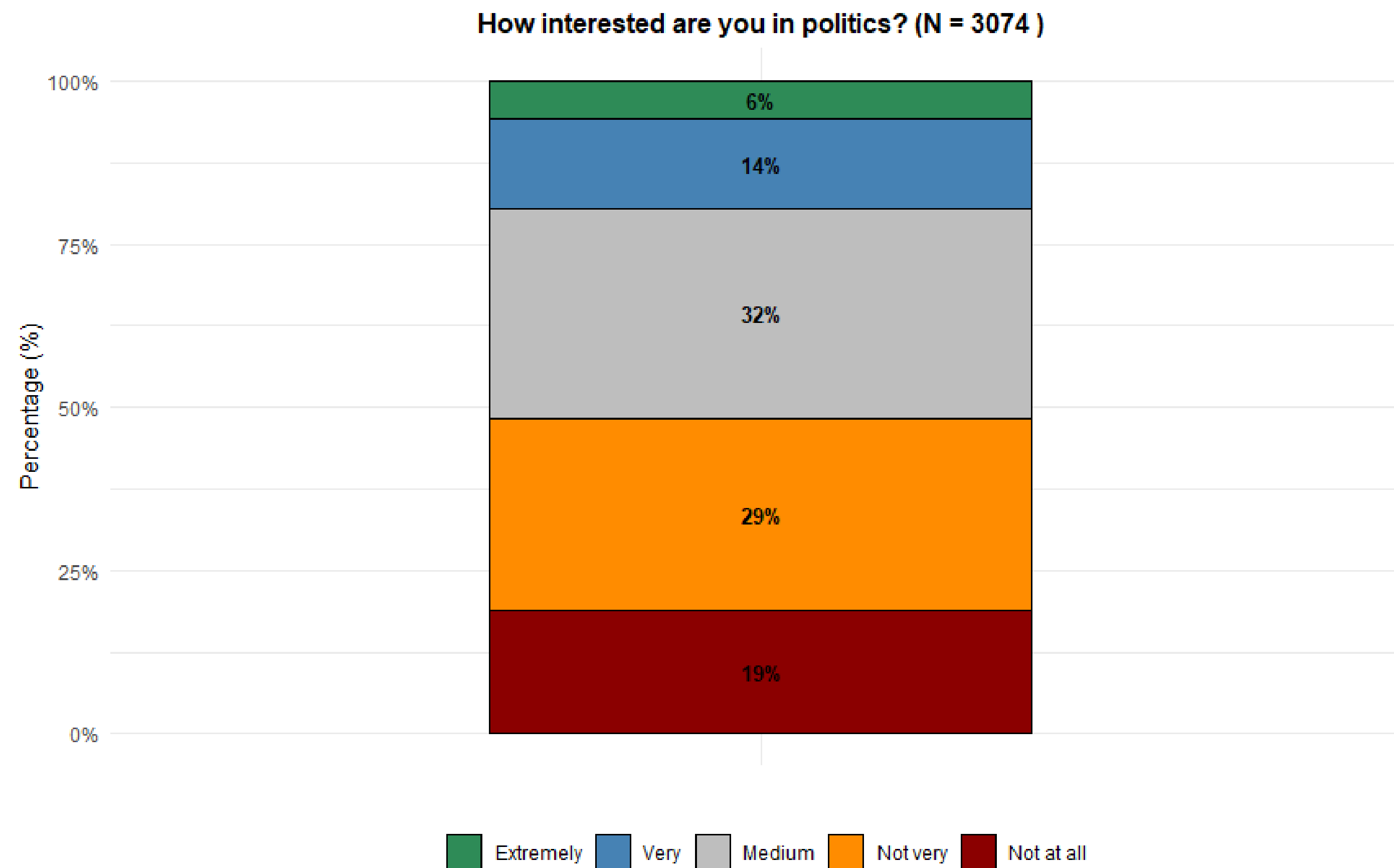
- 48% of participants indicate a low interest in politics
- High SES, males and higher age groups show more interest than their counterparts
- Comparing data from the Youth Survey 2019 and Youth Survey 2024:
 - Decline in political interest (Residori & Samuel, 2025)



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

Interest in politics (III)

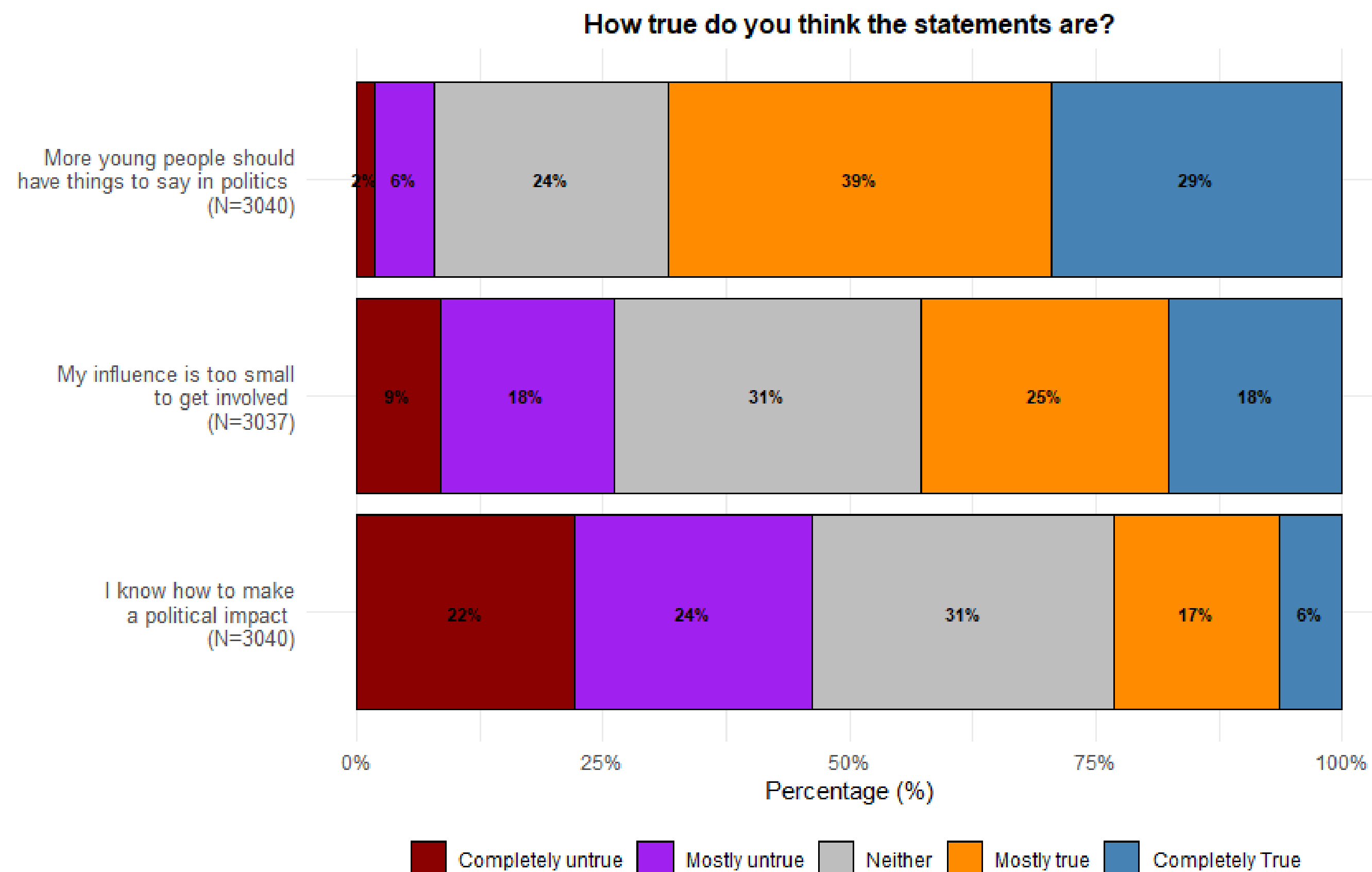
“I often download it in the evening so that I don’t have to look for one again in the morning [...] During breaks, I tend to watch politics, just like that [...] There’s a small YouTube channel called TLDR, and they show everything about current politics.”
(Jean, M, 18 - On where he gets recent political information)*



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

Attitudes towards politics (I)

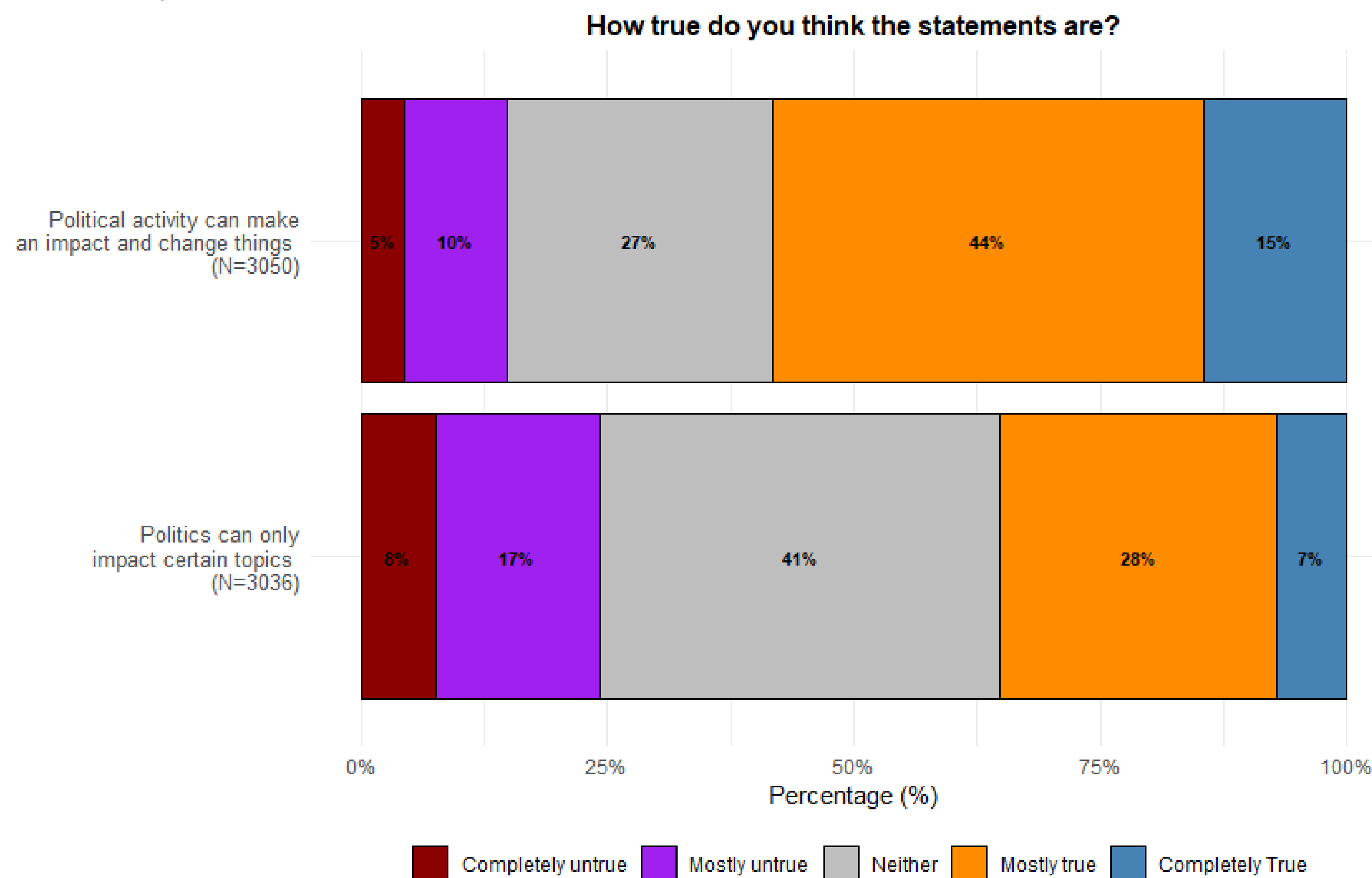
- Majority of the respondents think that more young people should have a say
- They further express feeling that their influence is too small, and they do not know how to make an impact
- Higher SES respondents feel that they have an impact more frequently



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

Attitudes towards politics (II)

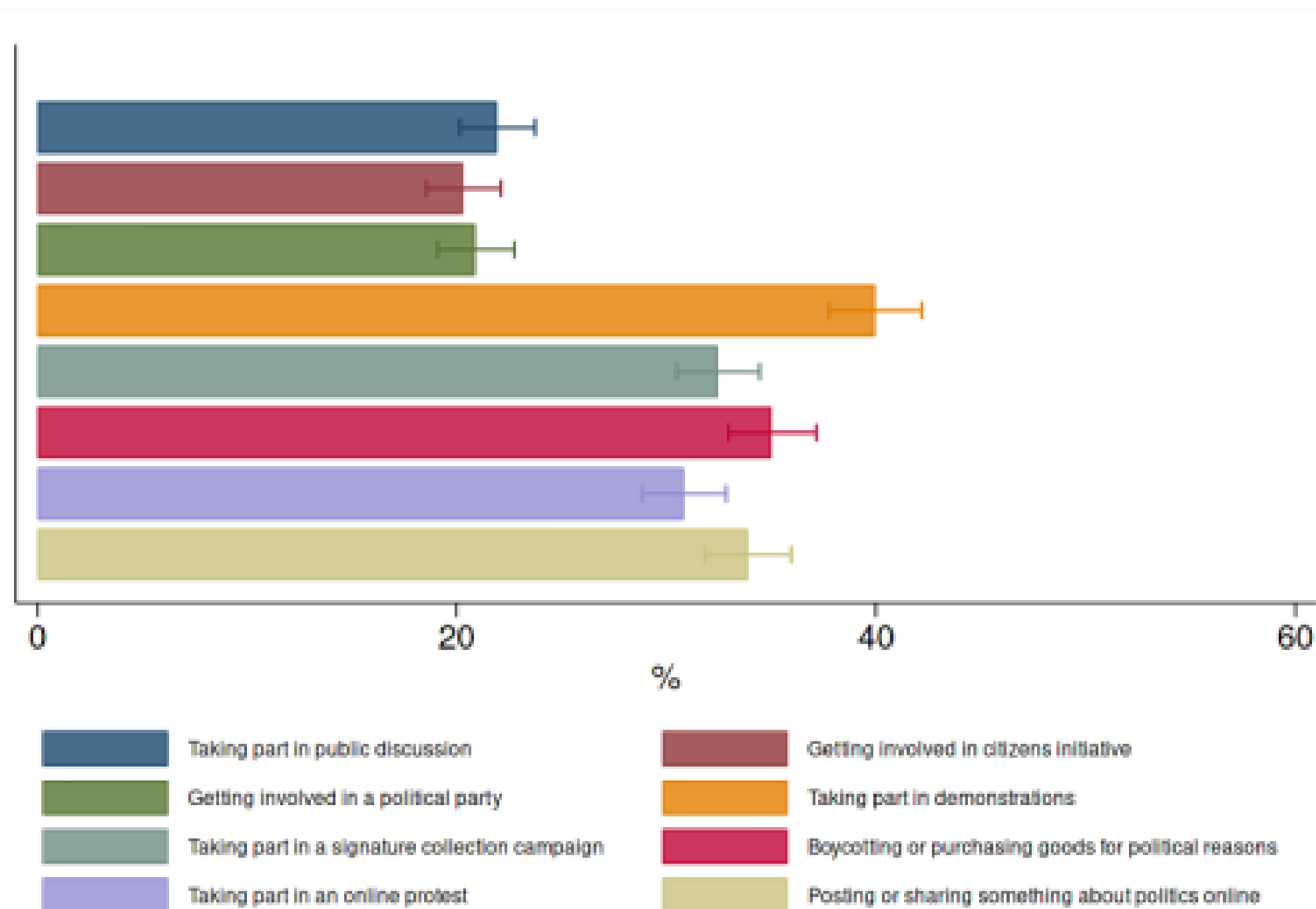
“I get my knowledge from a video I watched, and then, when we meet in a congress or a committee, I share what I know...”
(Jean, M, 18 – On how he prepares for youth congress / youth politics)**



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

Political participation (I)

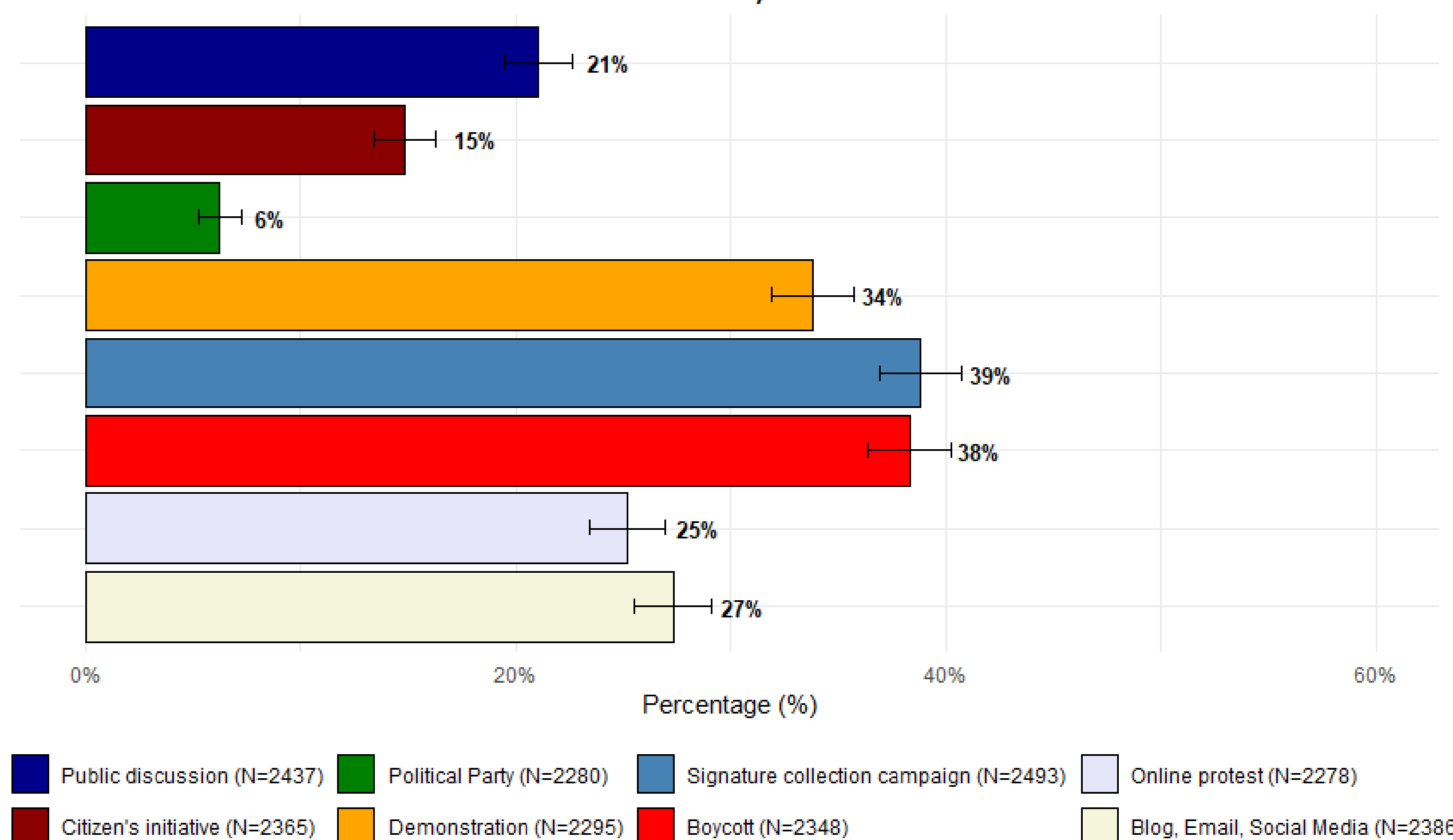
Figure 7: Types of political actions done in the past, in percent (YSL 2019)



N= 2091, 2026, 1954, 1915, 2191, 2027, 2092, 2087

Source: Procopio et al., 2021 – data source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2019, ages 16-29

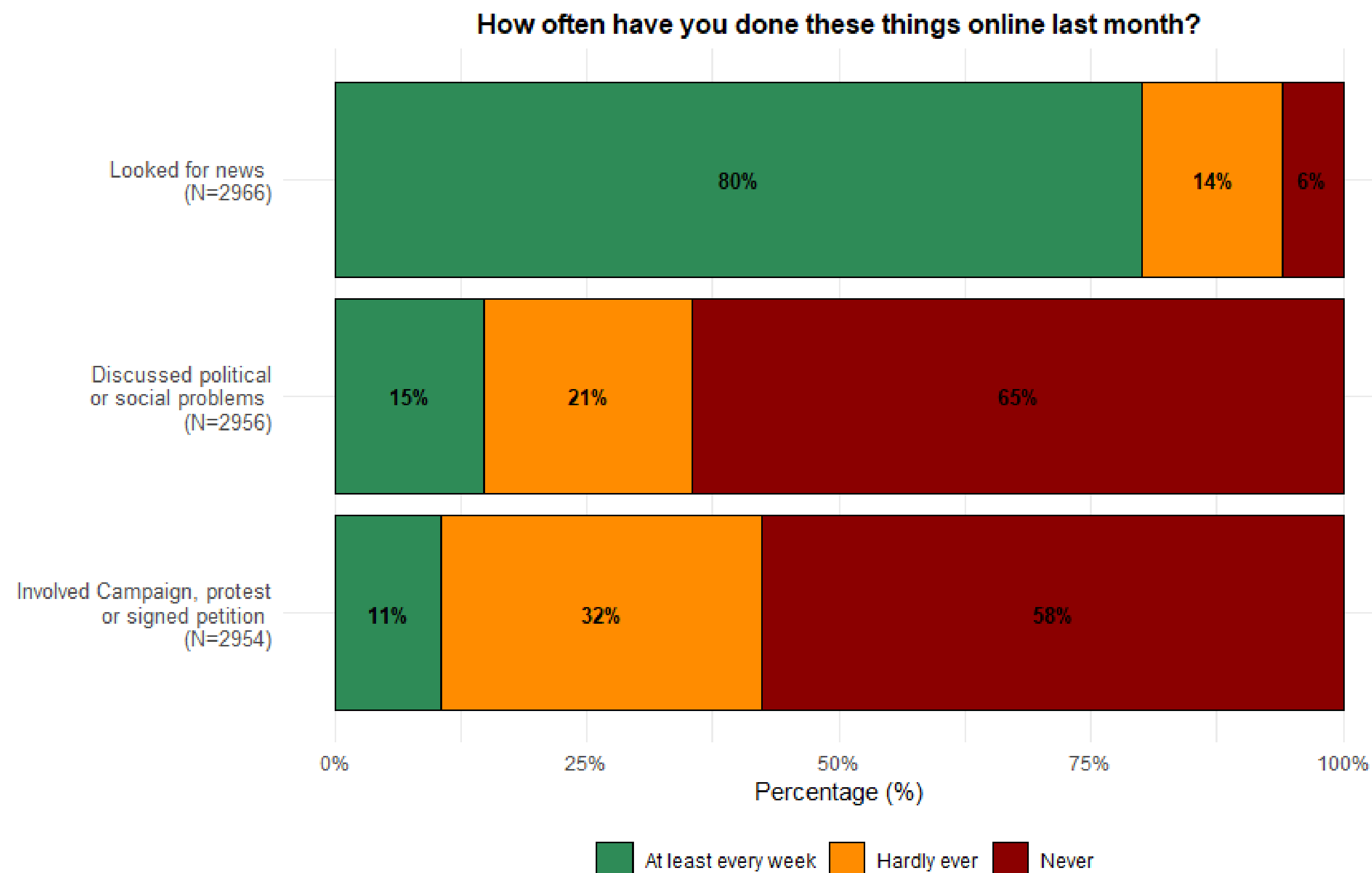
Types of political actions done in the past, in percent (YSL 2024)



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

Political participation (II)

- “You get different perspectives from different people, even if you start from this neutral standpoint [...] and then, so to speak, form your own opinion about it.”
(Eva, F, 27 – On building her political opinion through online sources)
- “Yeah, I sometimes have newspapers at home too, a newspaper, really old-school, I know [laughs].”
(Marie, F, 19 – On where she gets news from)



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

A question of trust? (I)

“But it's someone who is really more famous. Also, more people follow him on YouTube and so on. [...] He's really someone whose words matter. Because there are really a lot of people who follow him, and they are important and famous people, and they wouldn't just follow anyone. [...] Where he gets his sources from, I don't know. But he is neutral. He's really there. He doesn't take one side or the other. He's really there to tell things as they are.”

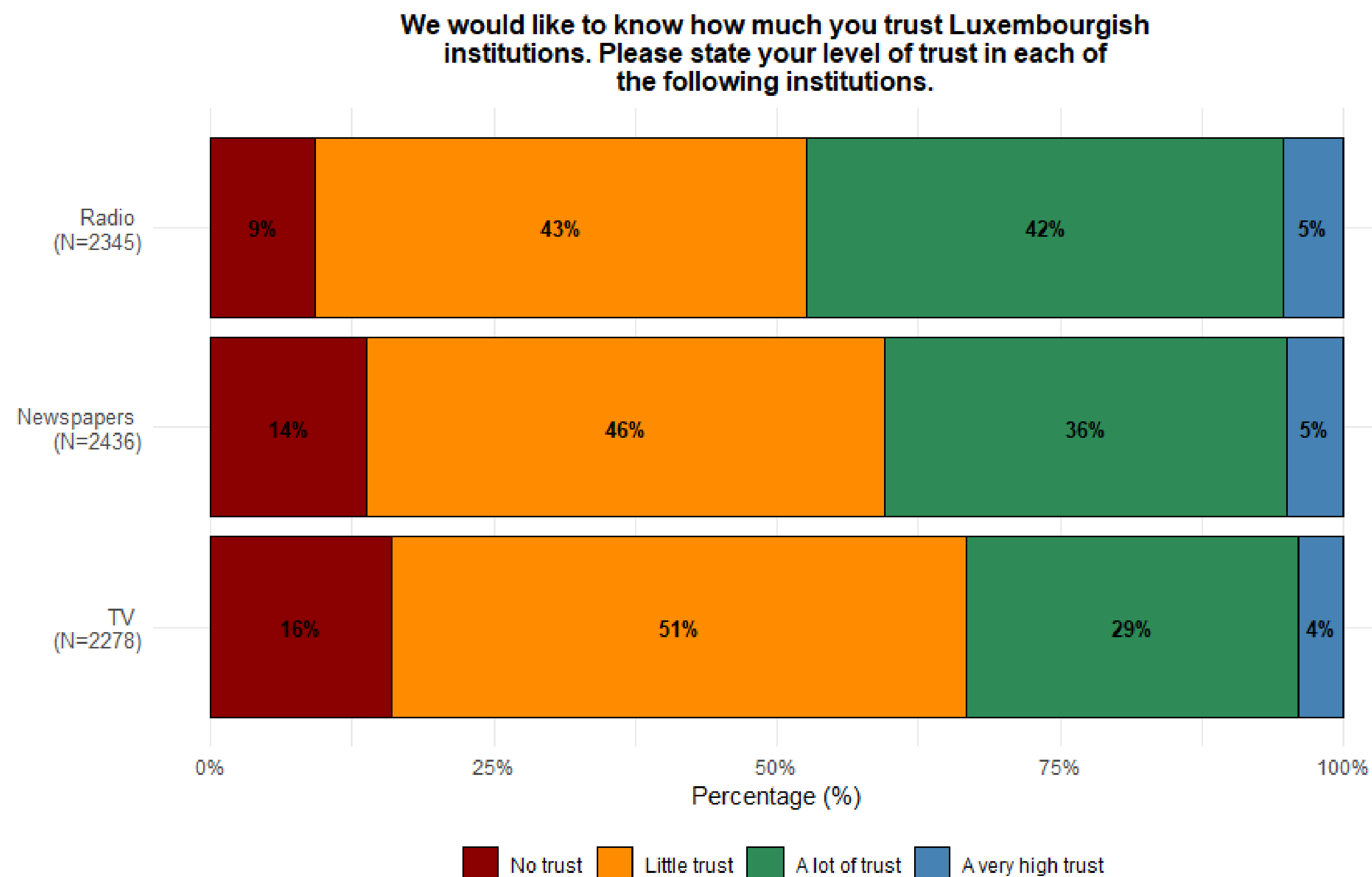
(Carla, F, 20 – On following “famous” people for information)**



Dall-E (ChatGPT): Create a modern, vector-style illustration for the cover of a national youth report based on the quote. The overall style should be clean and minimalistic, with crisp lines, geometric shapes, and a subtle abstract background featuring a gentle gradient. Use a vibrant color palette that includes cool blues, vibrant teals, and warm accents like orange or yellow. The lighting should be soft and even, giving the image a professional, forward-thinking feel.

A question of trust? (II)

- Most of the youth has low or no trust in traditional news outlets
- TV has the lowest level of trust among them
- Higher SES respondents indicate more trust towards all three institutions



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

A question of trust? (III)

“Watching the news in general has almost no value for me because it’s always viewed through some kind of lens, whether it’s just the reporter’s perspective or even some underlying political interests.”

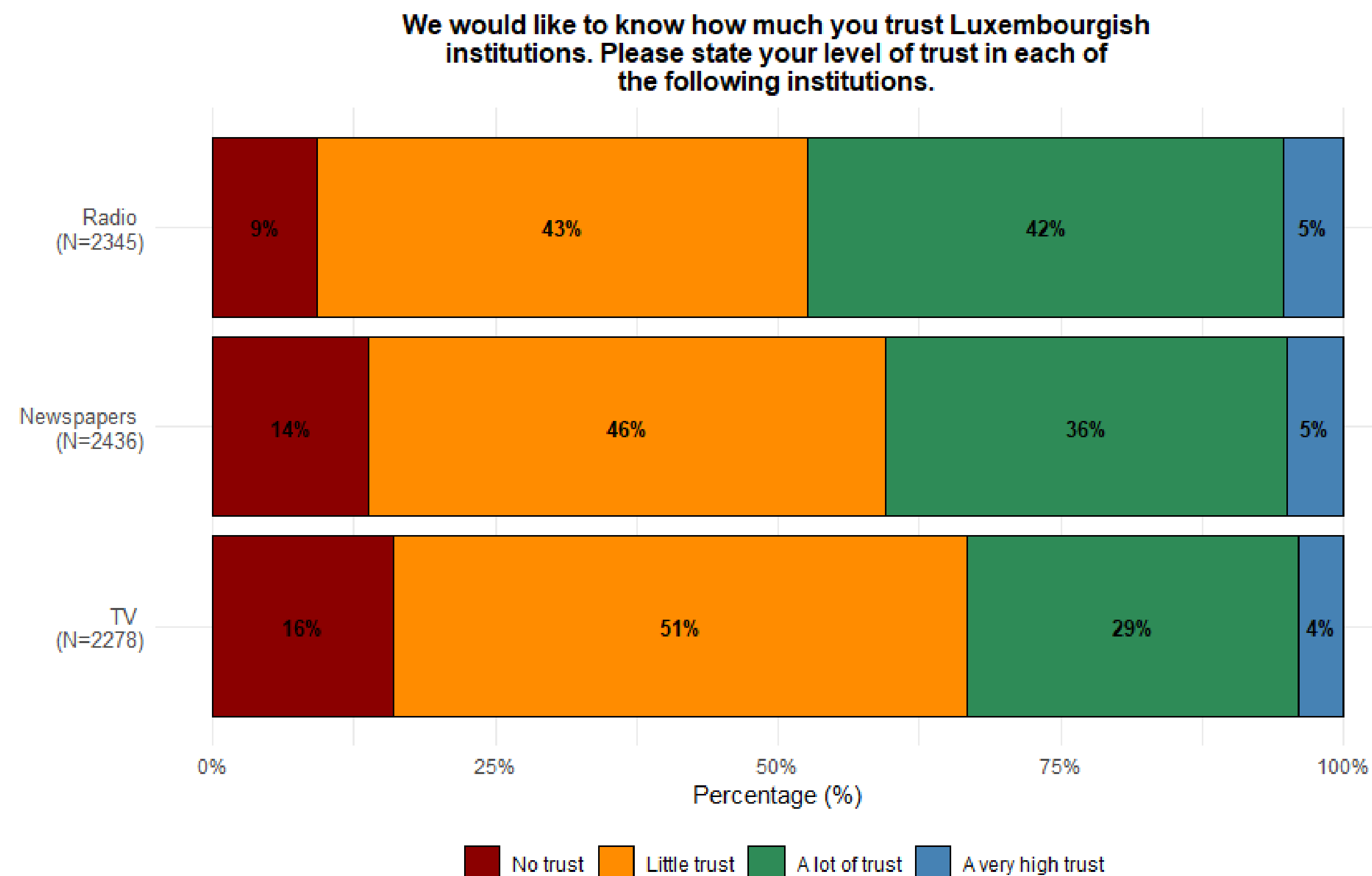
(Frank, M, 28 – On not watching the news)*

“I usually refer to third party independent people who are there, usually on YouTube or Spotify or Apple Podcasts. Mostly people who have worked or working in the field. Not some professor, not some news channel people. I don’t trust them.”

(Aarav, M, 28 – On trust in mainstream media)

“I have these RTL news here, like 25 of them, but I’m not actually reading them.”

(Christiane, F, 22 – On news related push notifications)**



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29

A question of trust? (IV)

- “When trust in news is low, the issue is thus generally not that people do not know what to look for. It is that many do not feel they are getting it. If they are right, news has a product problem. If they are wrong, news has a communications problem.” (Newman et al., 2024, p.36)
- Mis- or disinformation is easy to spread (Chan et al. 2023)
 - This can often be emotionally charged, leading to statements that appeal to emotions and beliefs, not objective facts.

“What if someone, I don’t know, puts politicians with false statements on the internet or whatever? Those are huge fake news stories that would spread like crazy.”
(Evan, M, 21 – On using AI to spread fake news)**

“If I’m looking for geopolitical news, I don’t refer to any mainstream media at all. [...] I usually refer to some retired army general.”
(Aarav, M, 28 – On where he gets trustworthy news)

A question of trust? (V)



Grok (X): Can you make an image of Donald Trump doing charity in Kenya?



Grok (X): Can you make an image of Kamala Harris looking extremely confused and lost while interacting with an audience?

Bias and echo chambers (I)

- Online content, be it general or political news, is inherently customizable (Auxier & Vitak 2019, Chan et al. 2023)
- Algorithms on social media drive first impressions and lead to superficial scrolling, which in turn encourages biased cognitive outcomes (Vaccari & Chadwick 2020).
- Online content can easily and quickly lead to further fragmentation in democratic participants (Habermas 2024).

“Tucker Carlson, for example, when he was previously at Fox, I did not watch much of his thing. But once he got away from Fox News, now I watch him a lot because [...] I could see the freshness or the freedom in his reporting.”
(Aarav, M, 28 – On which news sources he consumes)

“There’s a lot of chaos in France with weapons and all that stuff, that schools sometimes get attacked and things like that. I hear a lot about that. It’s not always on RTL. But on TikTok, it is. They also show it with videos, with proof and everything. And it’s actually much worse things, let’s put it that way.”
(Carla, F, 20 – On not finding news she is interested in on mainstream media + authenticity)**

Bias and echo chambers (II): perception

- Young people in the qualitative sample perceive that mainstream media does not meet their immediate needs:
 - They cite time constraints, lack of authenticity and a general mistrust, often motivated through personal situations and backgrounds, towards “classical” media.
 - Newman et al., (2024) note the popularity “alternative” political sources, such as Tucker Carlson and Joe Rogan in the US, or Hugo Décrypte in France have. These *content creators* boast subscriber numbers in the millions on platforms where mainstream media struggles to reach an audience, making them far more influential among adolescents.

Conclusions

1. Interest in politics

- Below average in European context (Sloam, 2016)
- Still trending slightly downwards compared to 2019

2. Engagement with politics

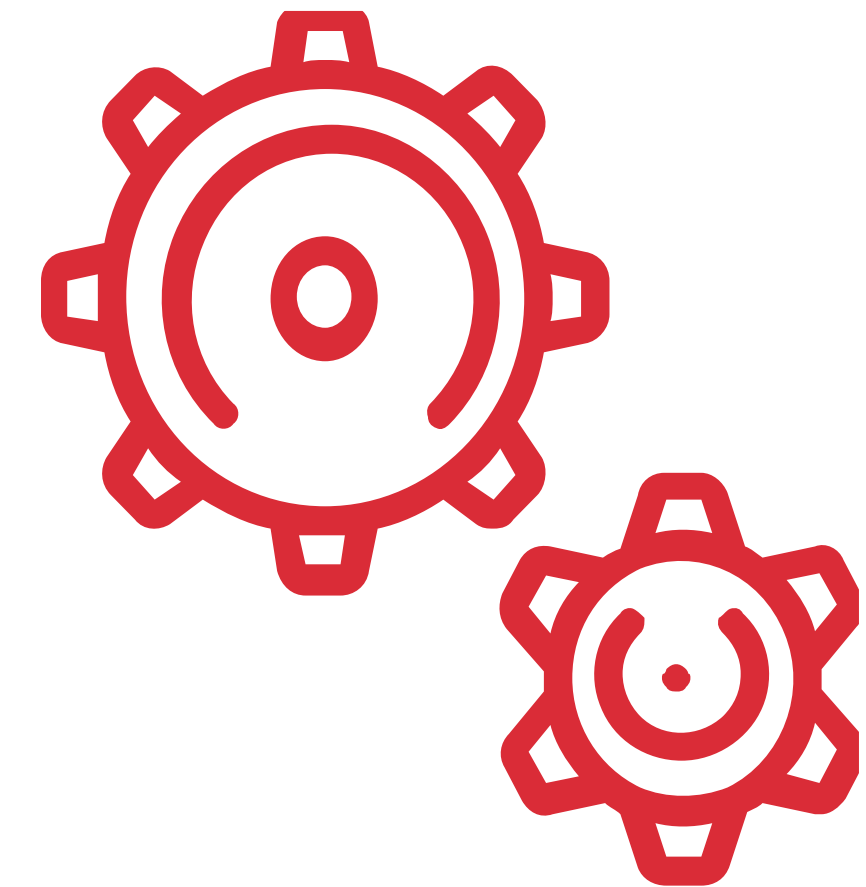
- Political engagement is shifting
- Consumption shifting to short form online sources and other “unconventional” means (Kitanova, 2020)

3. Perspective on news and politics

- Distrust in traditional outlets
- But politics still regarded as avenue for change
- Youth should have more of a say, but also don't know how to enact change

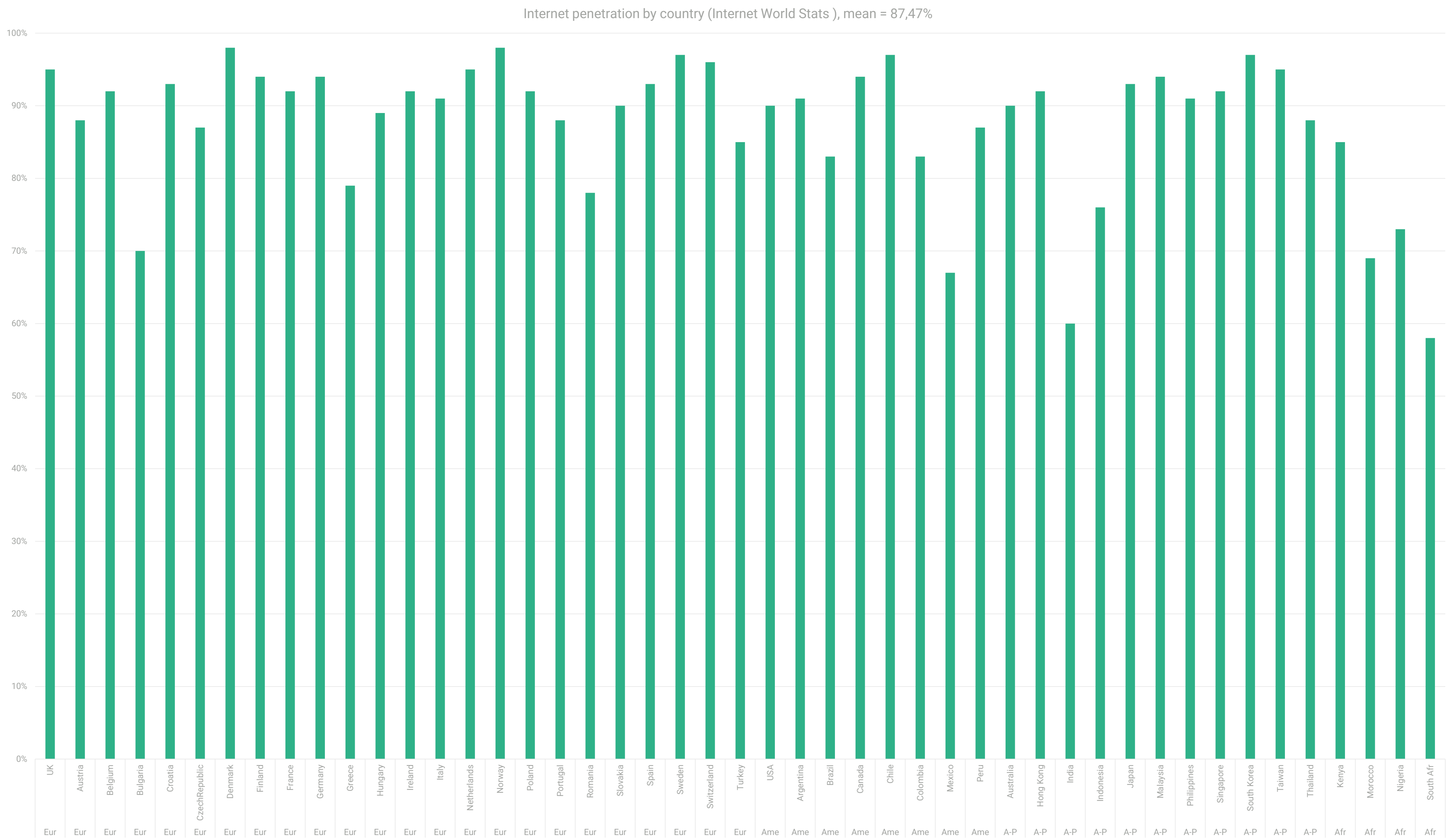
4. Trust

- Youth want to be curators of content they consume, online diversity in access allows them to make subjectively informed choices

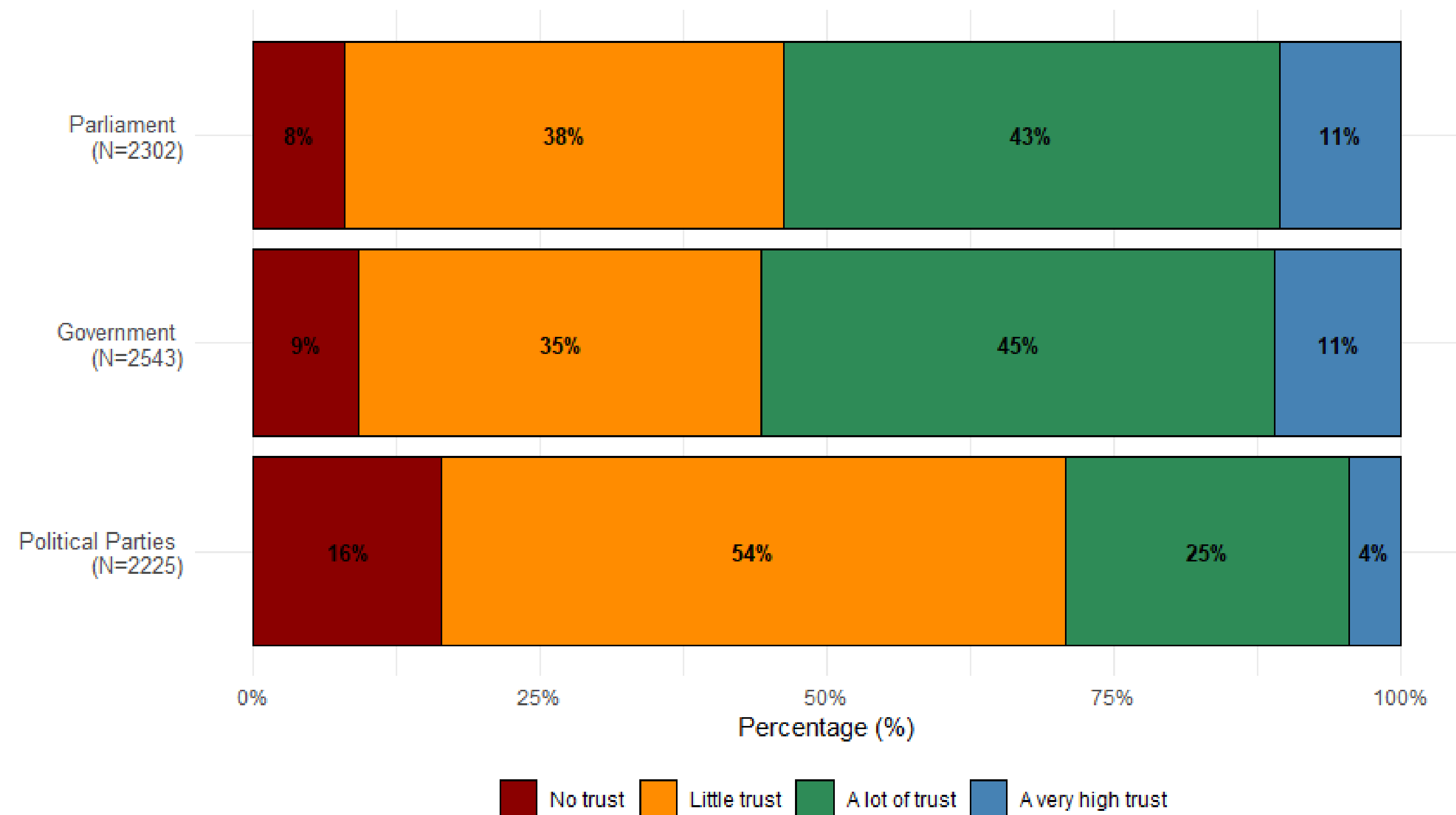


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We would like to know how much you trust Luxembourgish institutions. Please state your level of trust in each of the following institutions.



Source: Youth Survey Luxembourg 2024, unweighted, ages 16-29