

Attitudes to media freedom and independence in Central Europe

Selected outcomes from a 4-country survey

24 April 2023

Aim of the poll

Main objective:

to explore people's perspectives on media freedom and their support for independent journalism in V4 countries

Research questions:

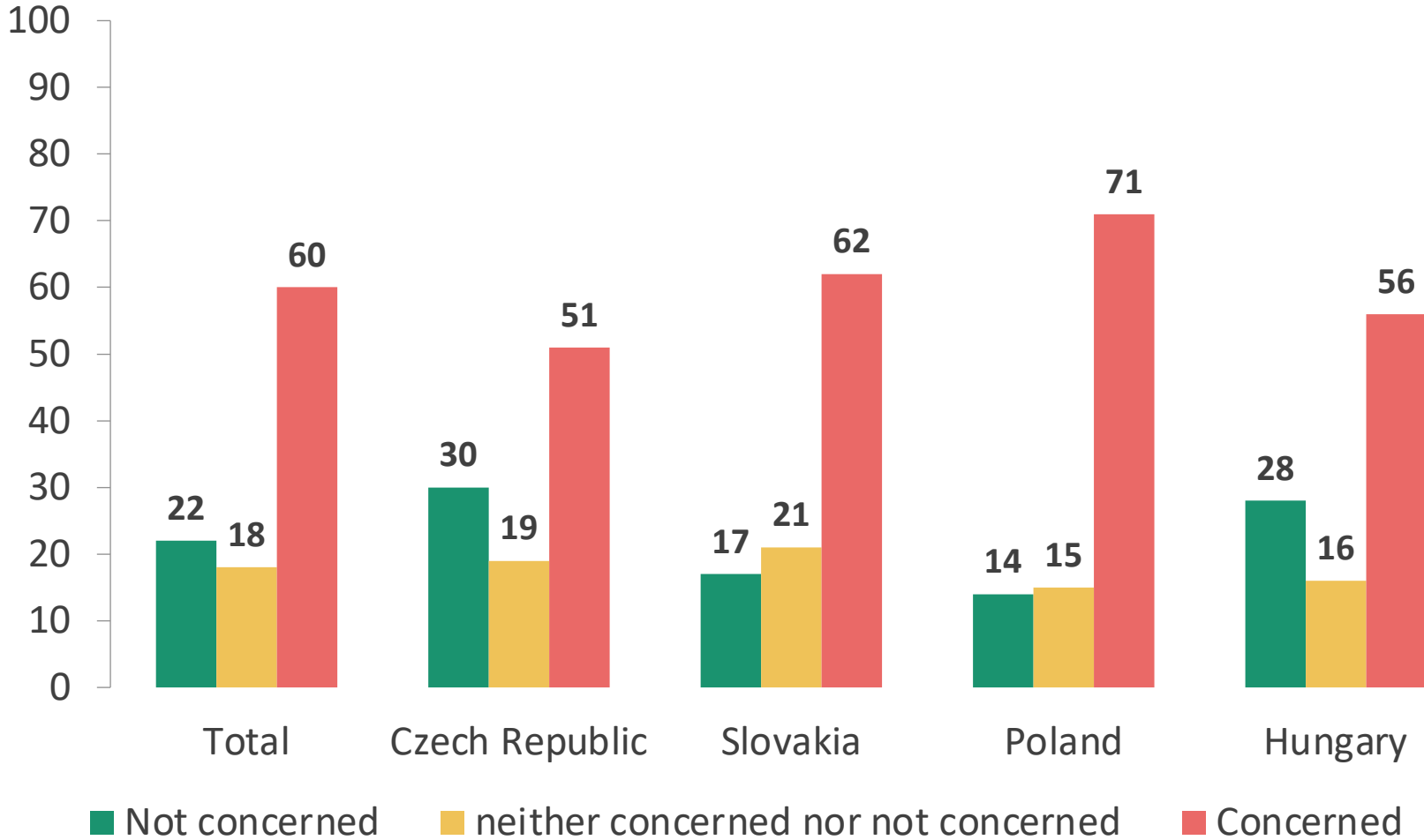
- How much concerned are people about the **current state** and **threats to media freedom**? Have these concerns changed since last year?
- What do people think should be done to **protect media freedom and support independent journalism**, and which institutions do they trust in this regard?
- What is people's perceived **importance of values that are associated with journalistic professionalism and independence**?

Methodology

Sample size	4 023 respondents aged 18+ Sample size per country: CZ = 1 007 SK = 1 004 PL = 1 009 HU = 1 003
Dates of interviewing	6th – 21st March 2023
Method of data collection	personal interviews, online panel questioning (CAWI) and telephone interviews (CATI)
Method of sampling	Quota sampling method (gender, age, education, region and size of place of residence)
Research design & supervision	Dr Václav Štětka, Loughborough University & Committee for Editorial Independence
Implementer and client	The research was carried out by MEDIAN, s.r.o. (member of SIMAR) exclusively for Bakala Foundation

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

Concerns about media freedom

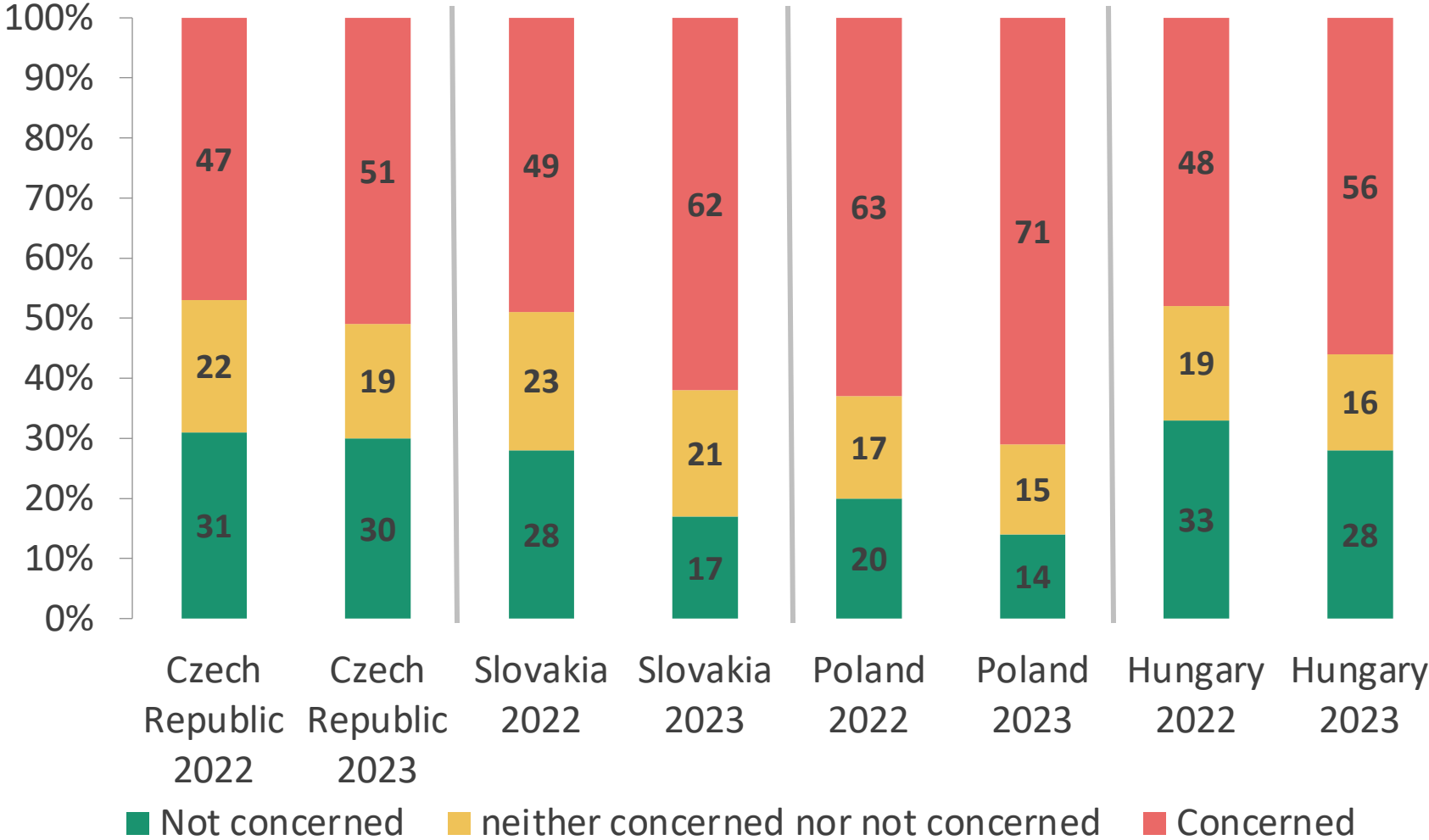


Most people express concern about the current state of media freedom.

The largest % in Poland, the smallest in the Czech Republic (but still > 50%).

Q06. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

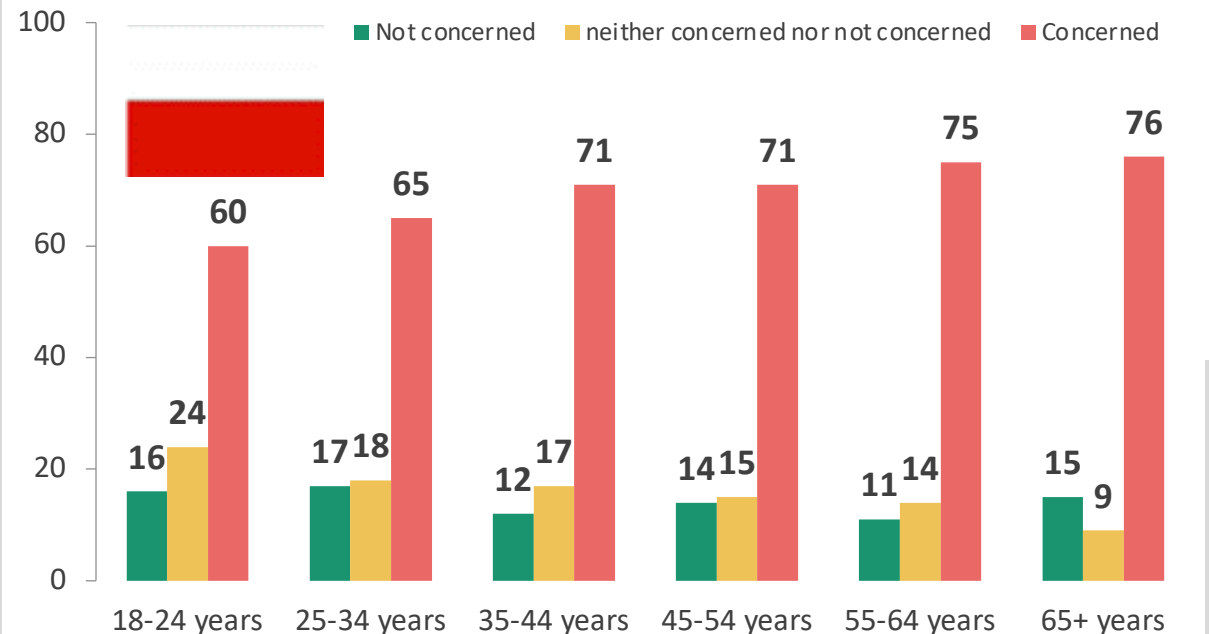
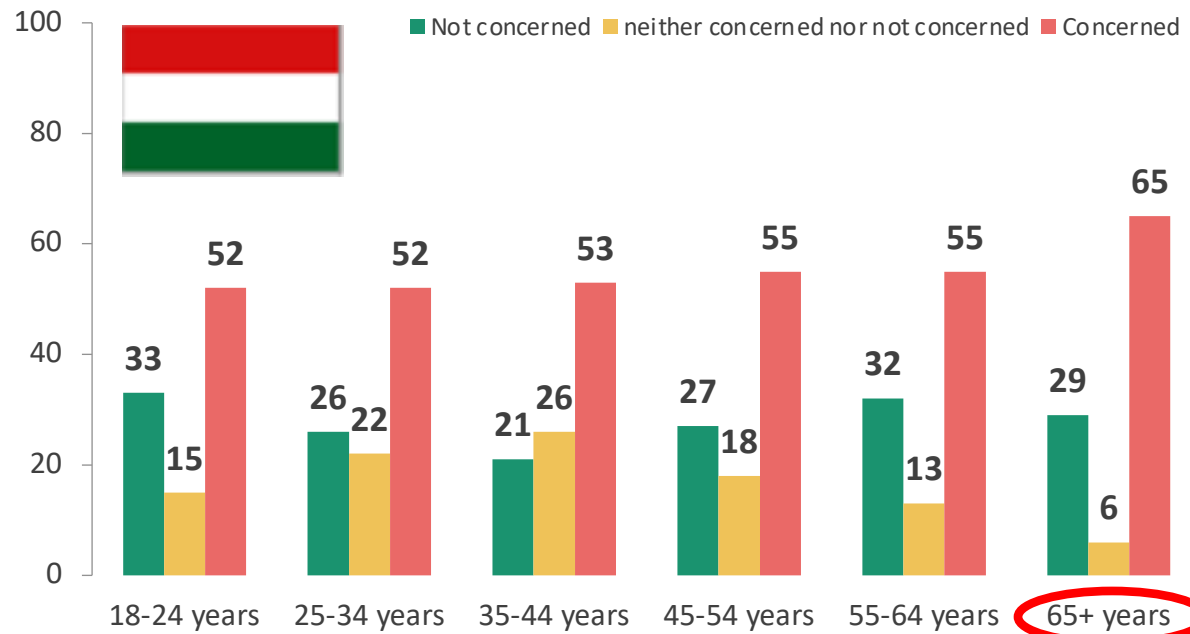
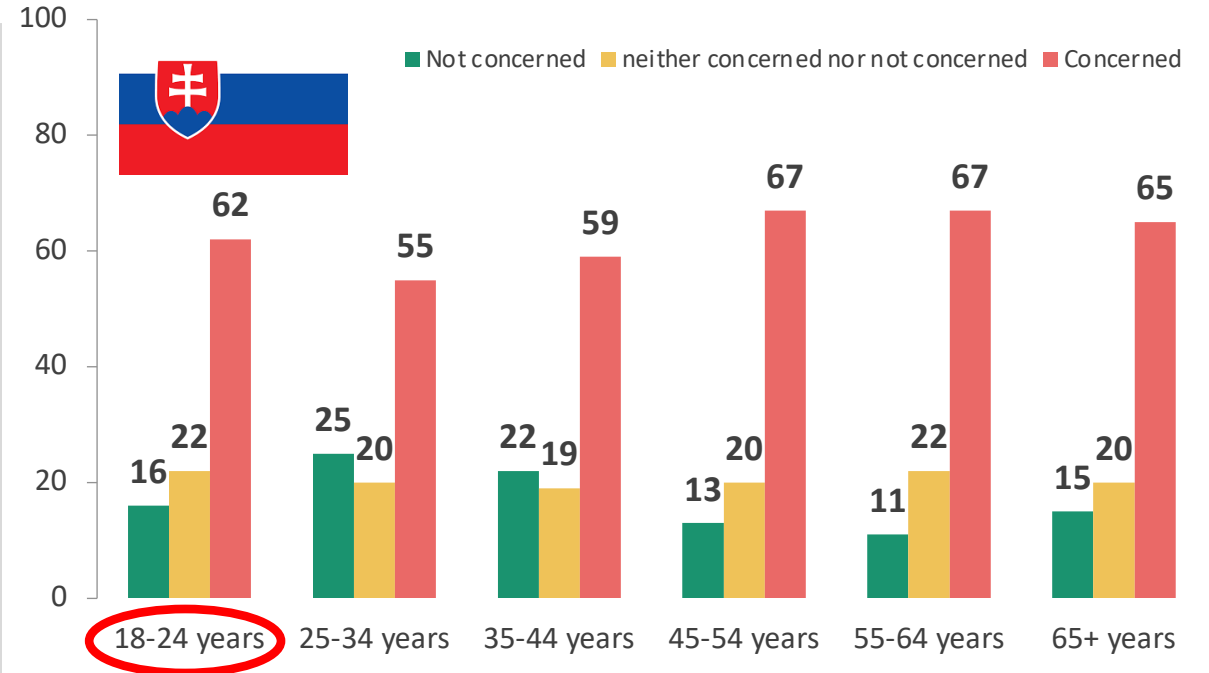
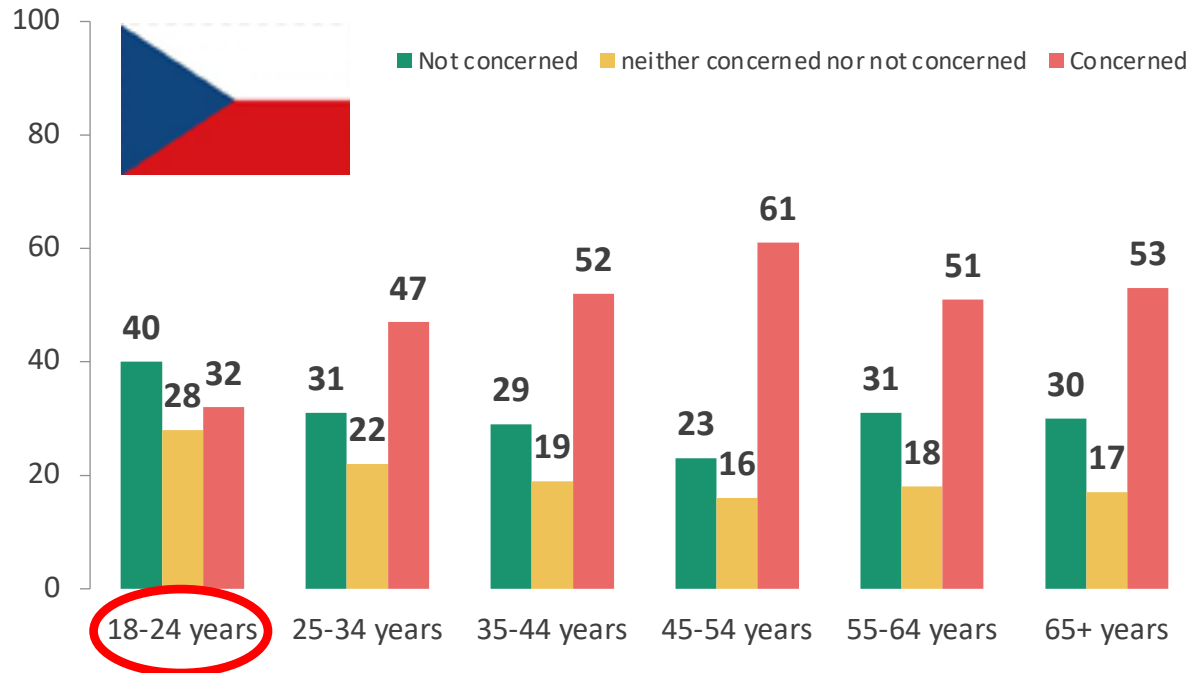
Concerns about media freedom: comparison with 2022 data



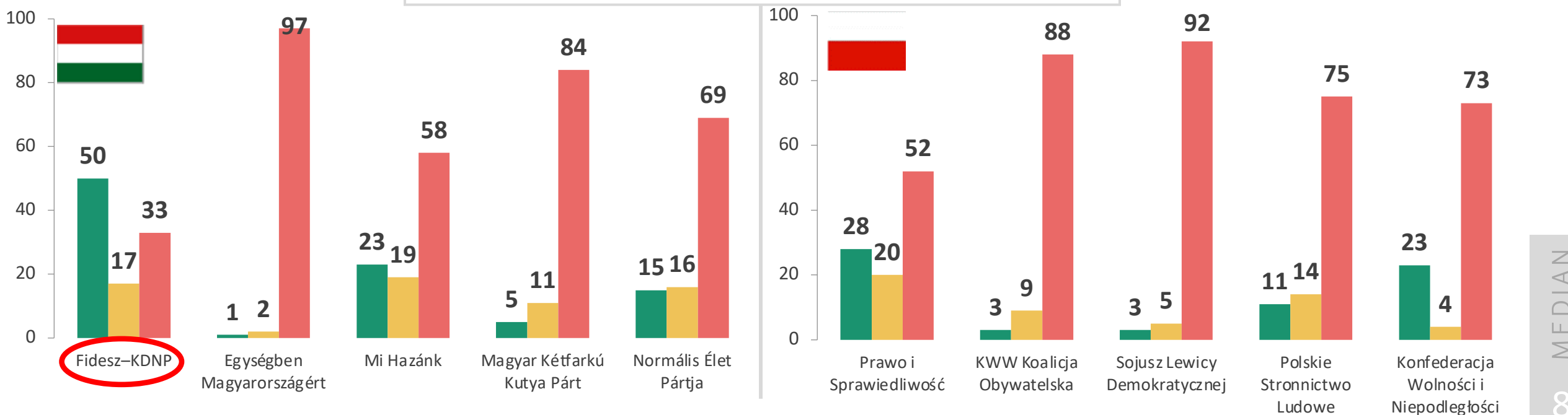
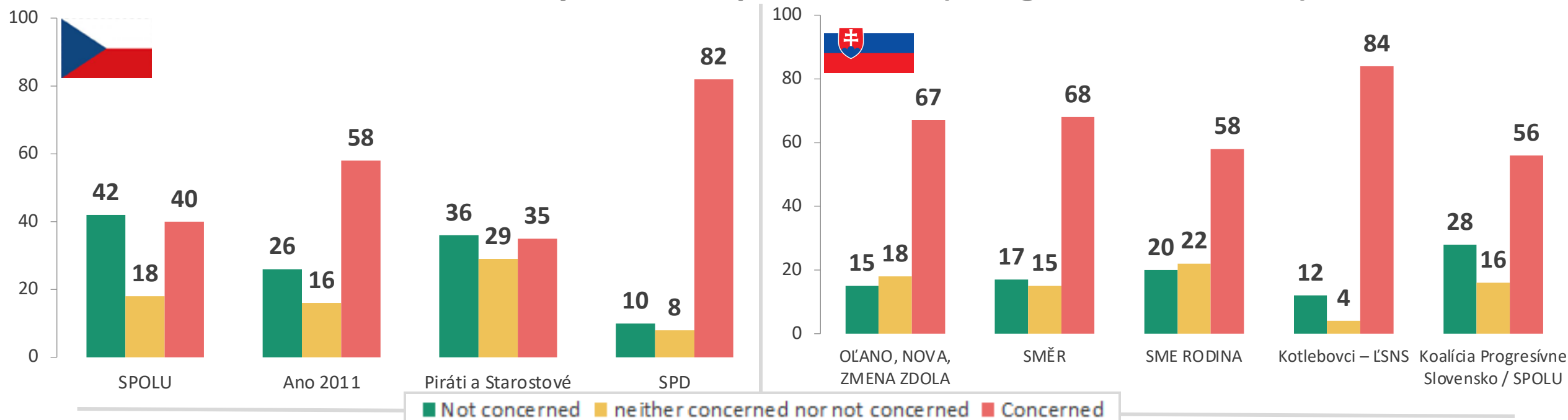
Concerns about media freedom have grown across the four countries – the most in Slovakia (from 49% to 62%), followed by Poland and Hungary.

Q06. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

Concerns about media freedom by age categories

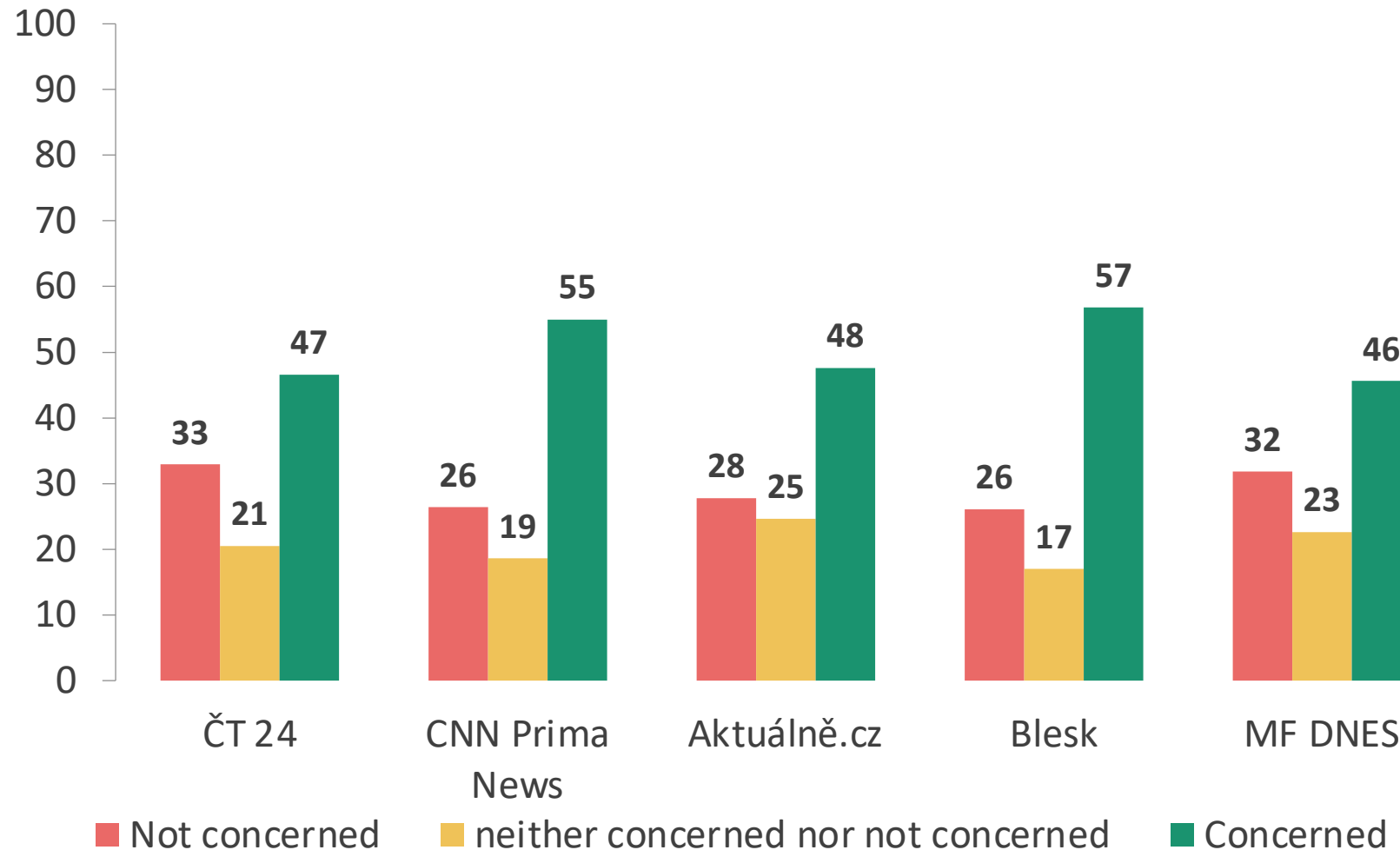


Concerns about media freedom by electoral preferences (last general elections)



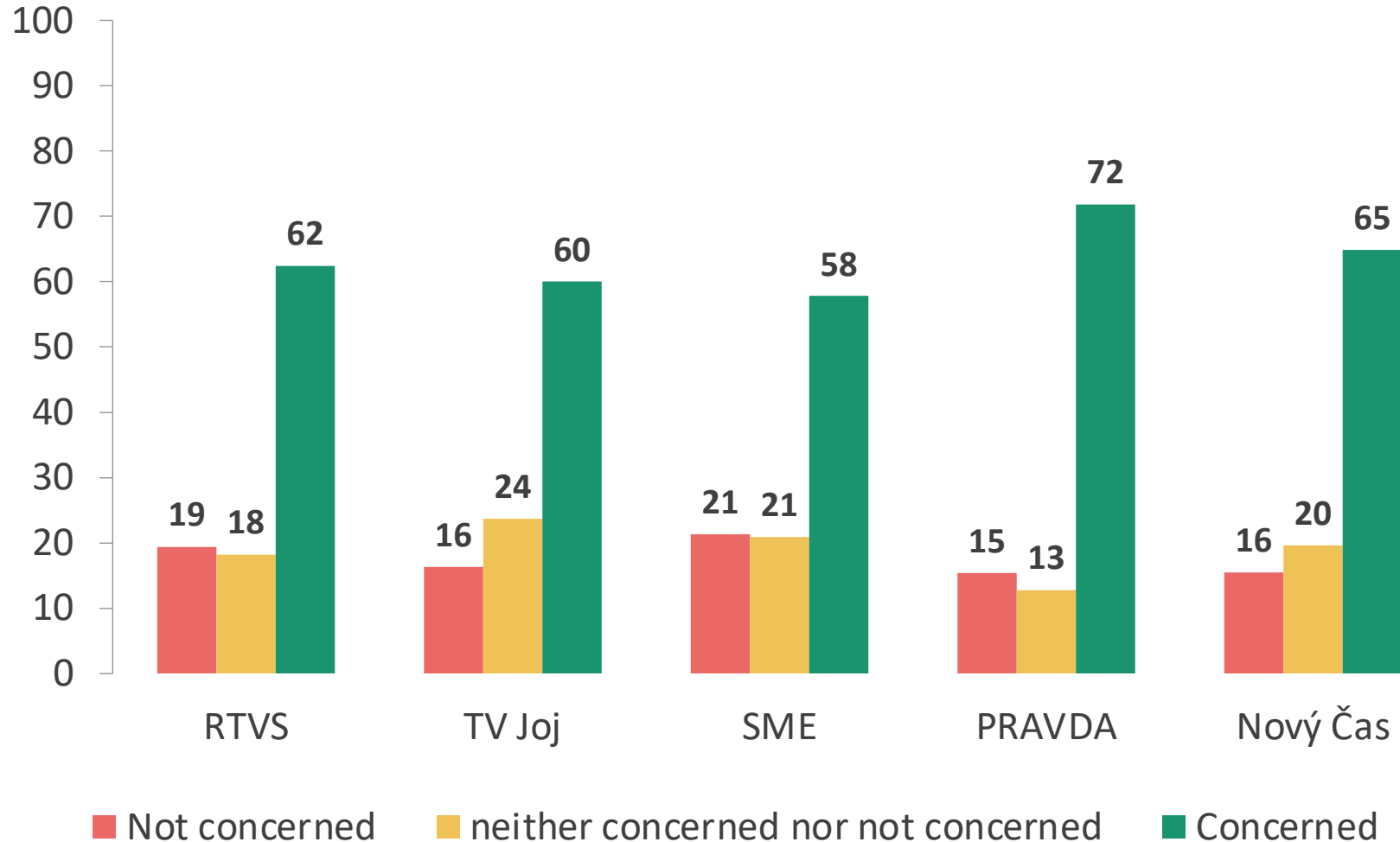
Concerns about media freedom by users of specific news brands

News brands consumption and concerns about media freedom: Czech Republic



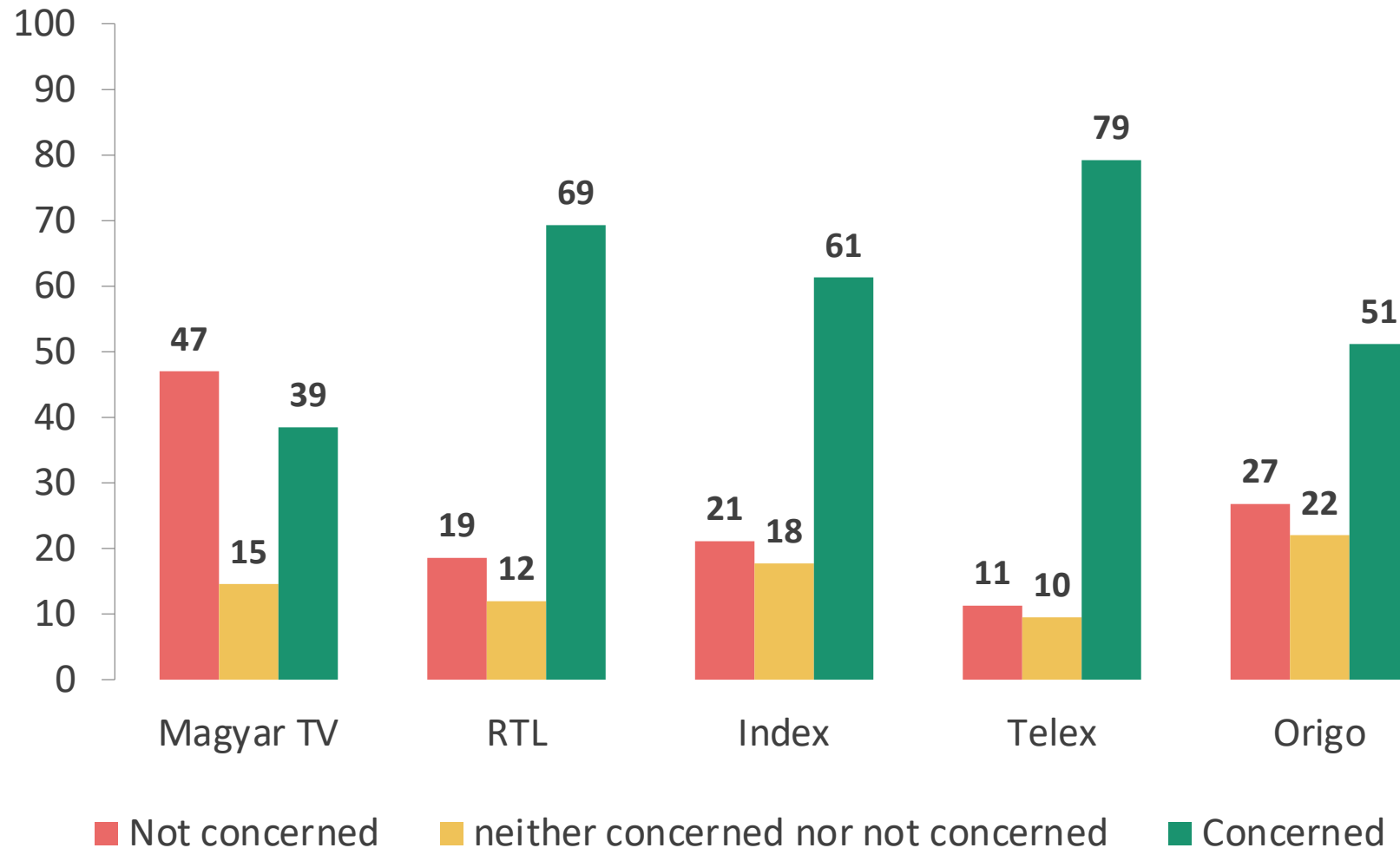
Q06. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

News brands consumption and concerns about media freedom : Slovakia



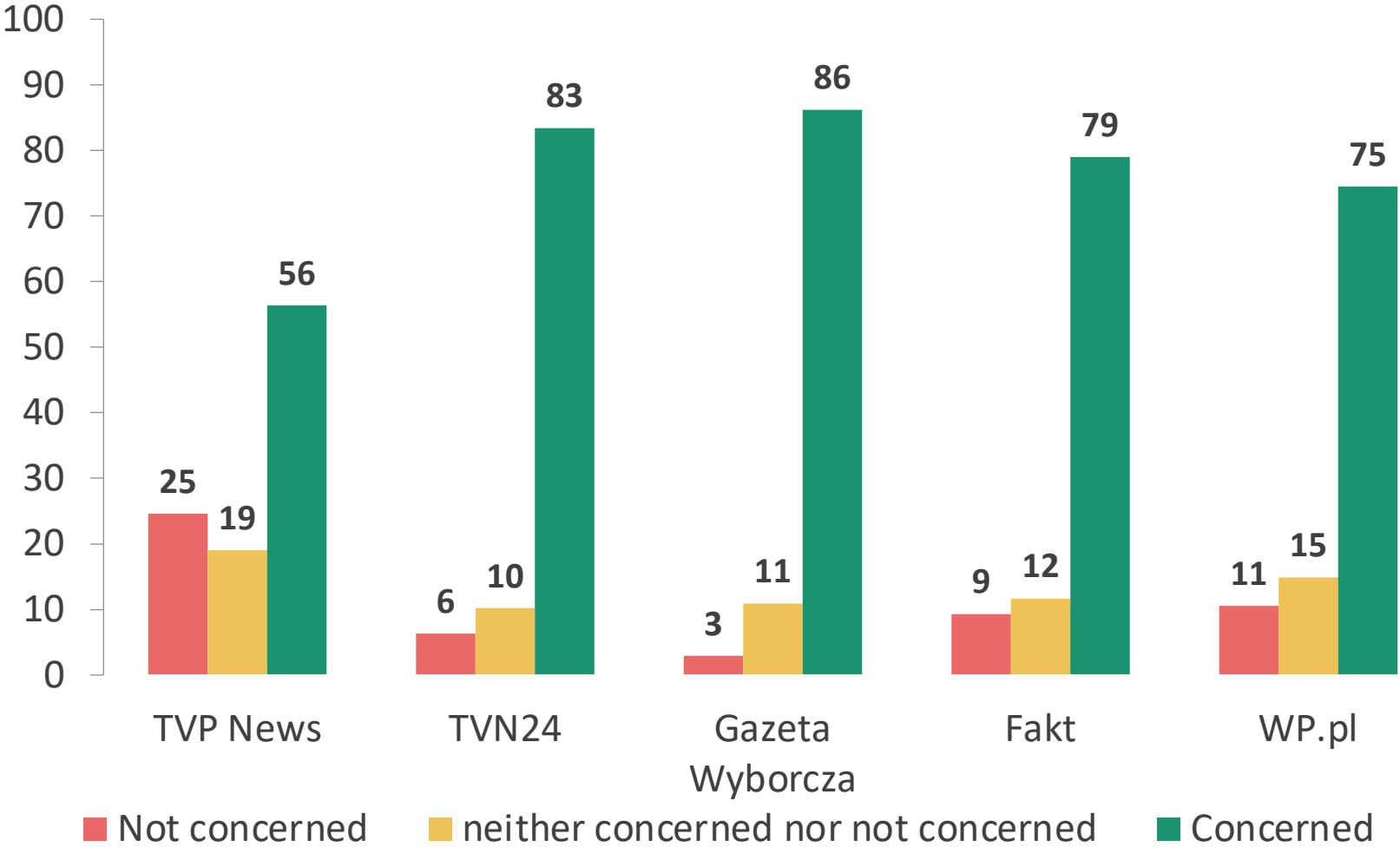
Q06. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

News brands consumption and concerns about media freedom : Hungary



Q06. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

News brands consumption and concerns about media freedom : Poland



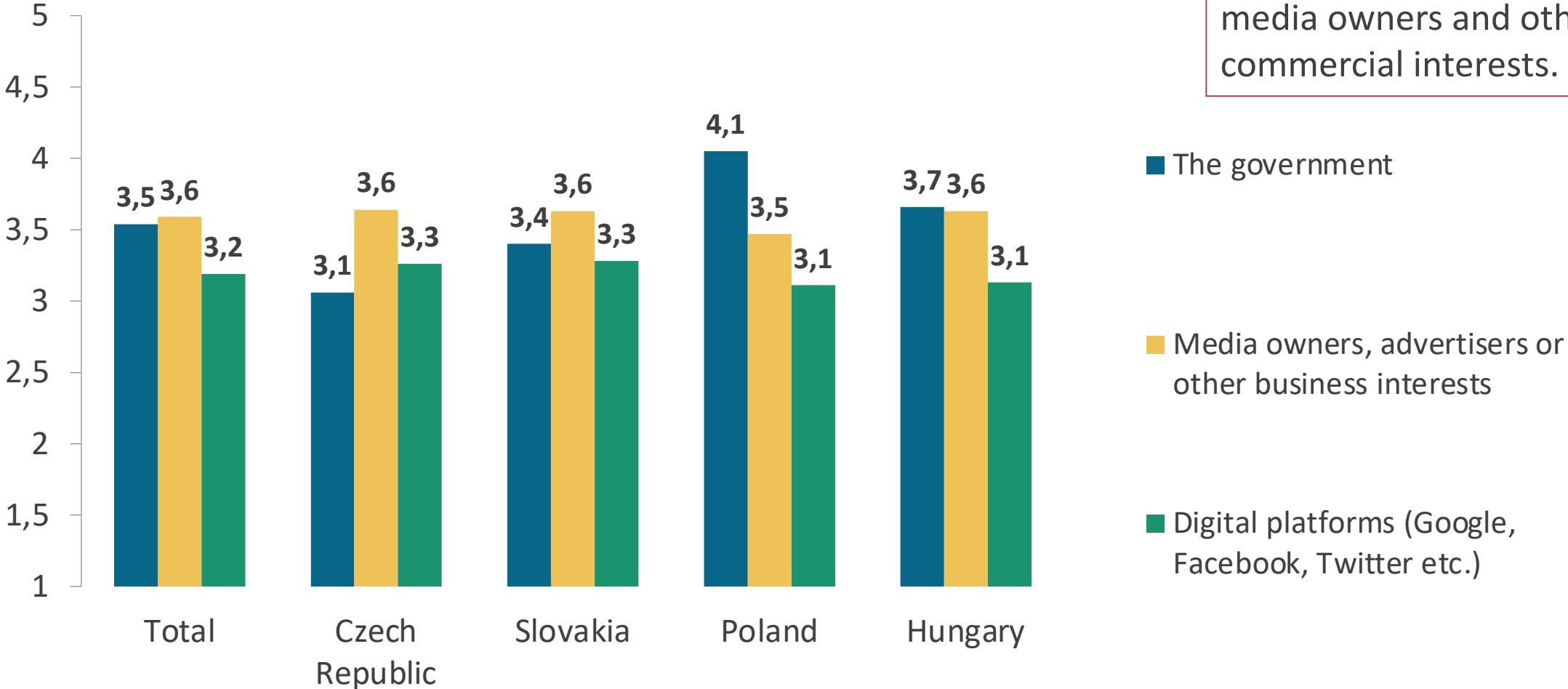
Q06. Can you tell us how concerned are you right now about the current state of media freedom in your country?

Threats to media freedom

Perceived threats to media freedom

(average scores)

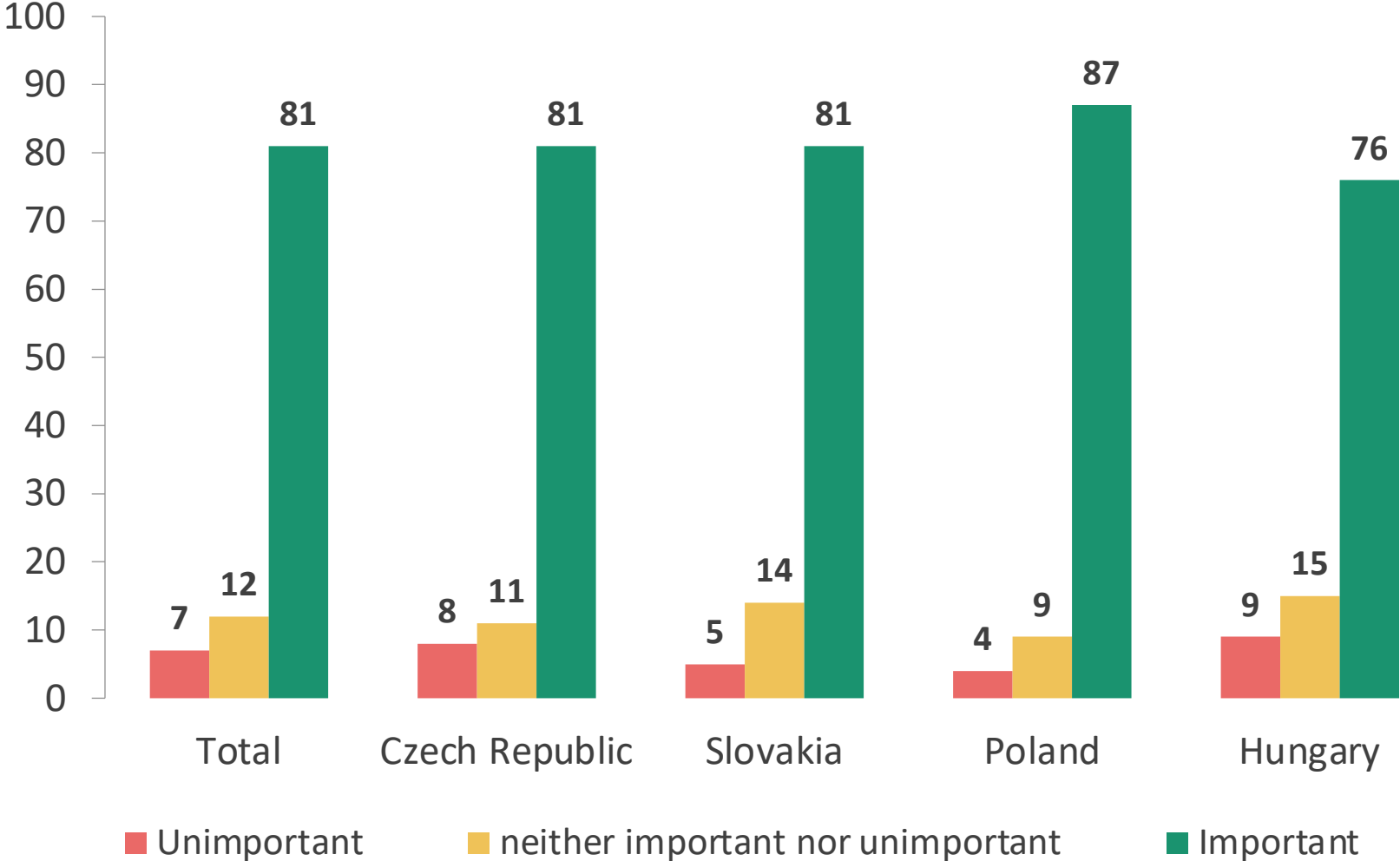
In Poland and Hungary, the government is seen as the biggest threat to media freedom. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it is the media owners and other commercial interests.



Q07. Thinking about the state of media in [COUNTRY], can you tell us to what extent it is currently being threatened by....

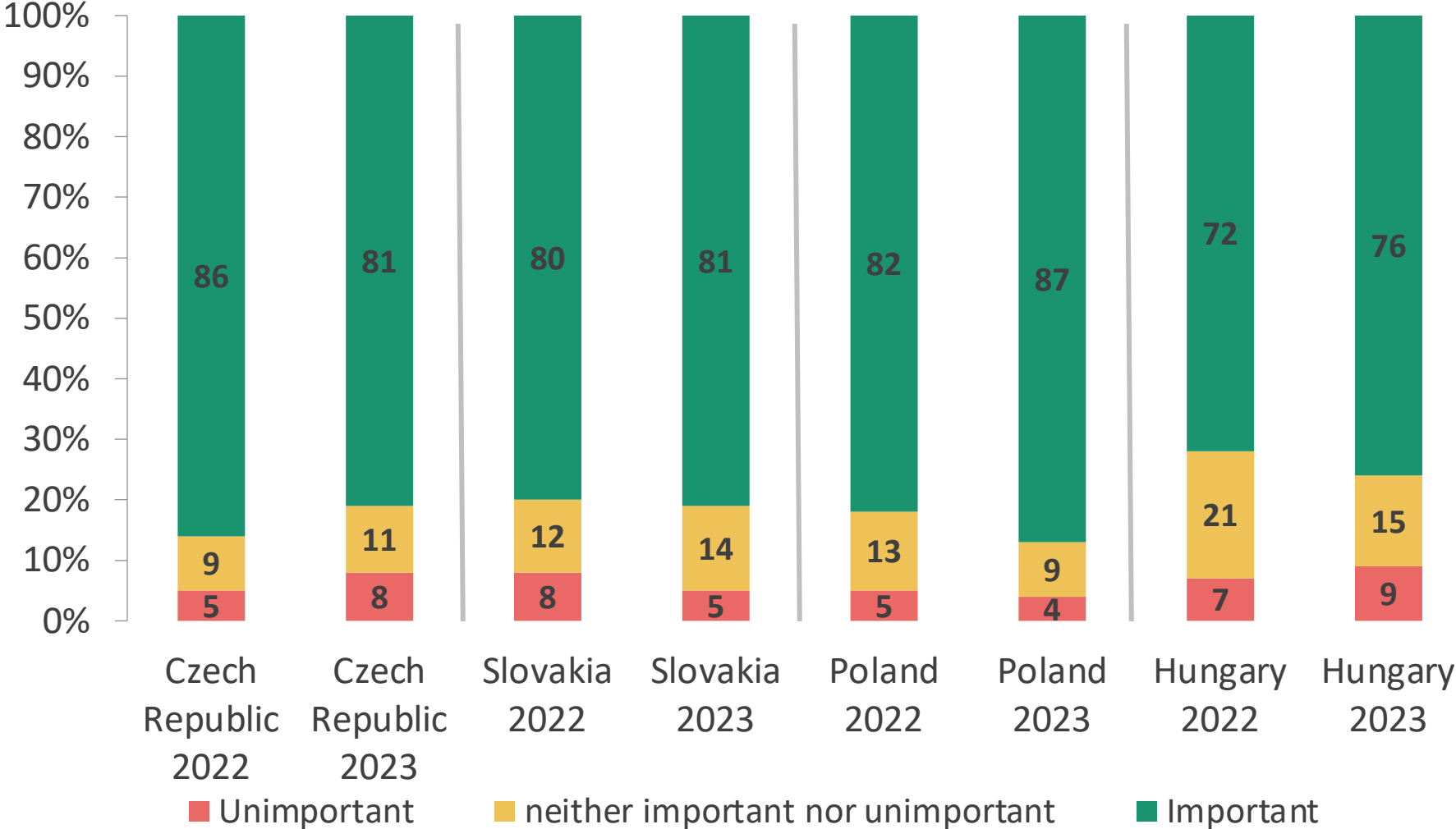
**How do people assess the importance of
independent media?**

Importance of political independence of media (2023)



Just as last year, the vast majority of people across all 4 countries see having independent media as important, with the majority of those as “absolutely important” (i.e. choosing the highest option on the scale).

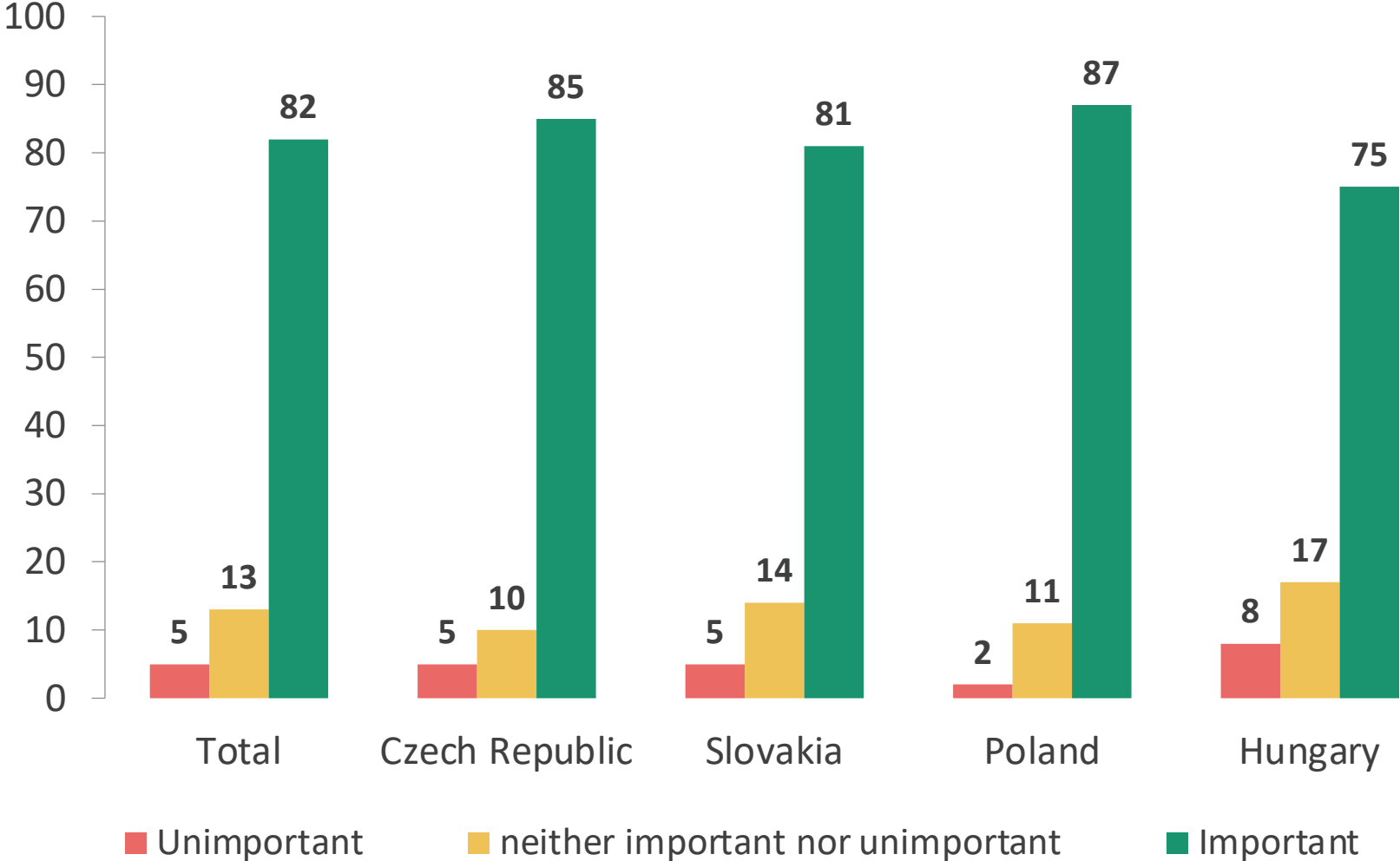
Importance of political independence of media: comparison with 2022 data



There is a widespread consensus among the public about the importance of political independence of media. The increase in the perceived importance of this value is the highest in Poland (+5pp).

Q04. 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 business independence of media

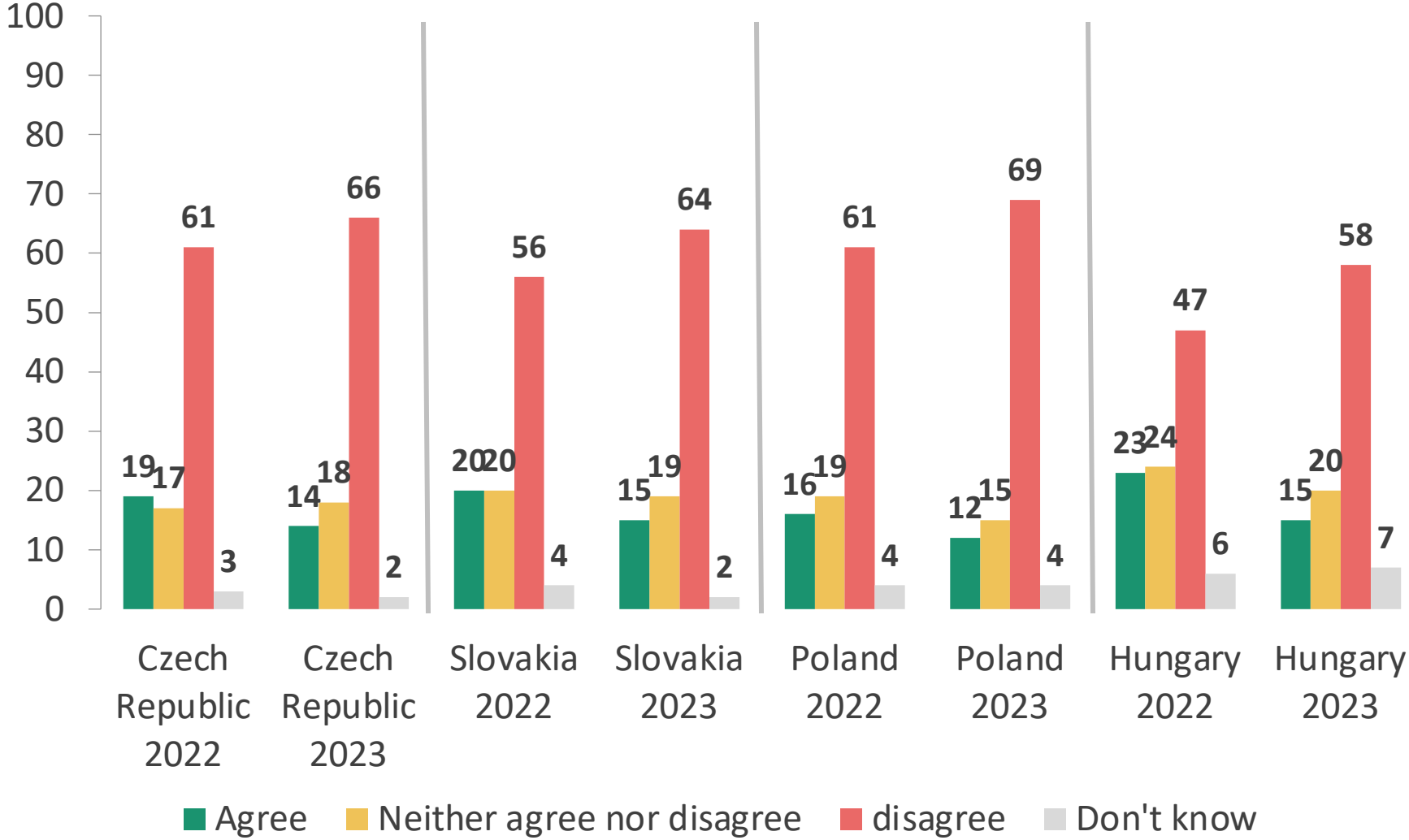


Independence from owners or business interests is also seen as very important, with the level of support similar to political independence in most countries.

Editorial autonomy of media

Opinions on the role of media owners:

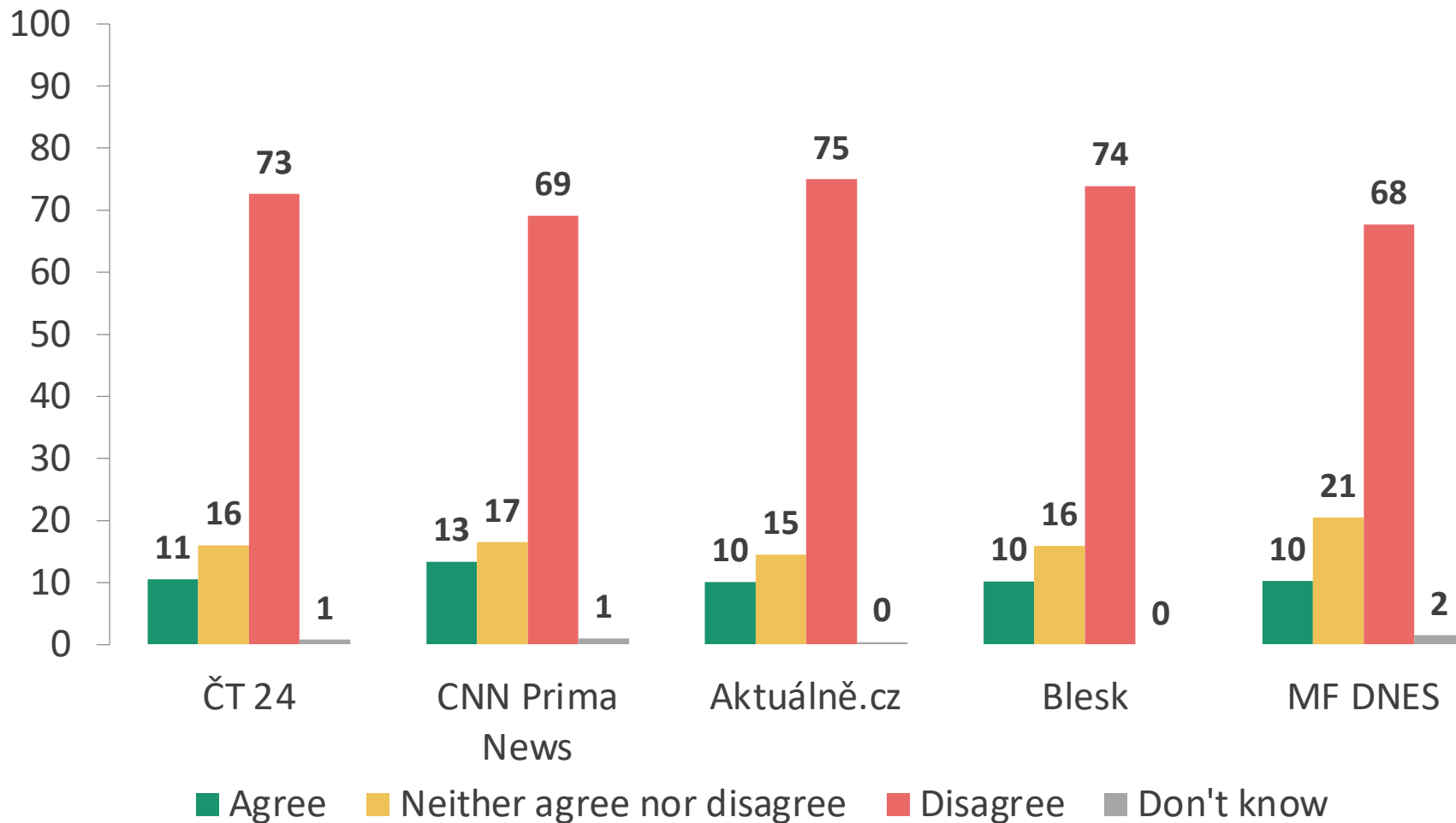
“media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say”



In all countries, the % of people who disagree has grown, most significantly in Hungary (+11pp).

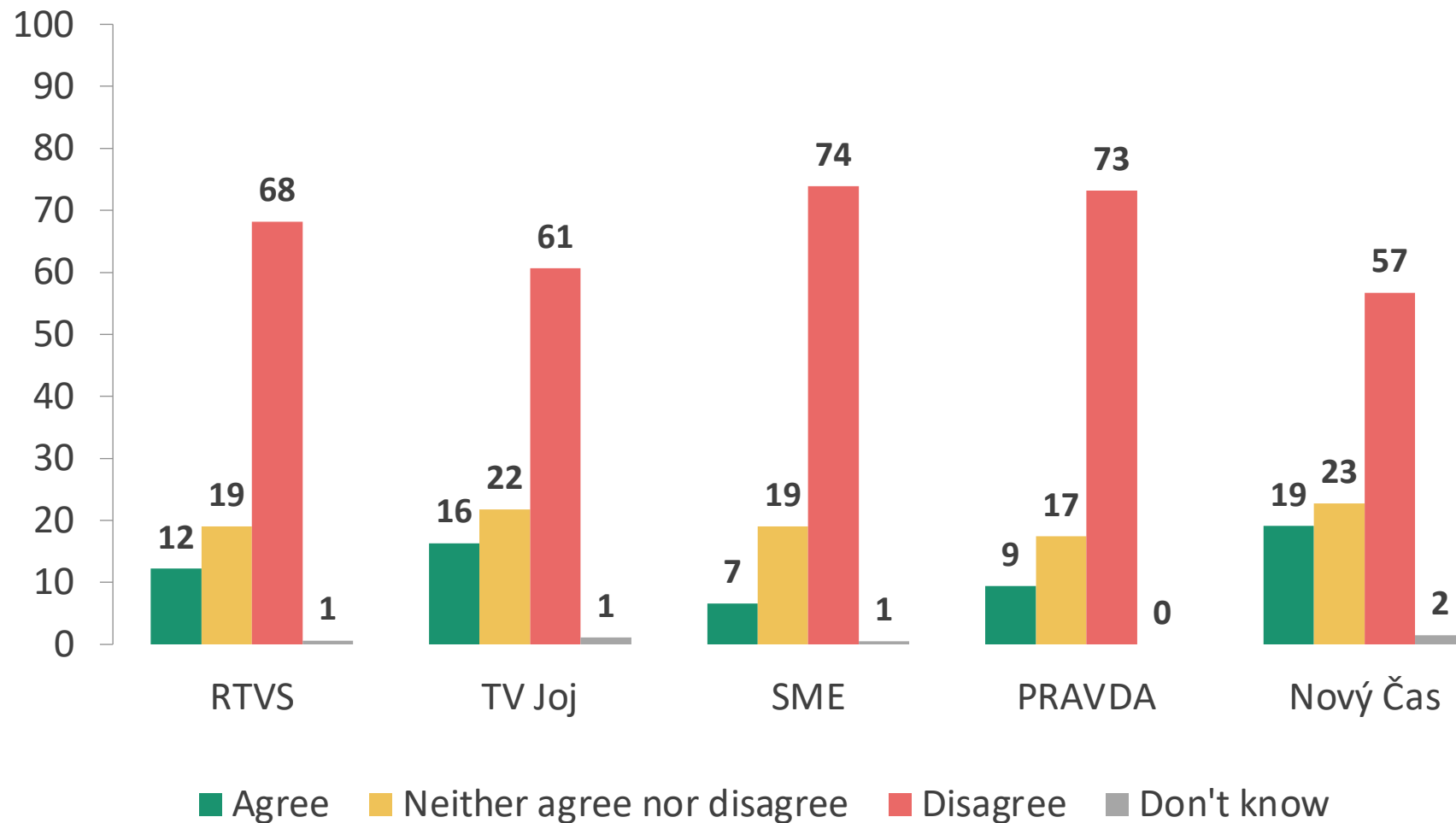
Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

Opinions on the role of media owners by users of specific news brands in the Czech Republic



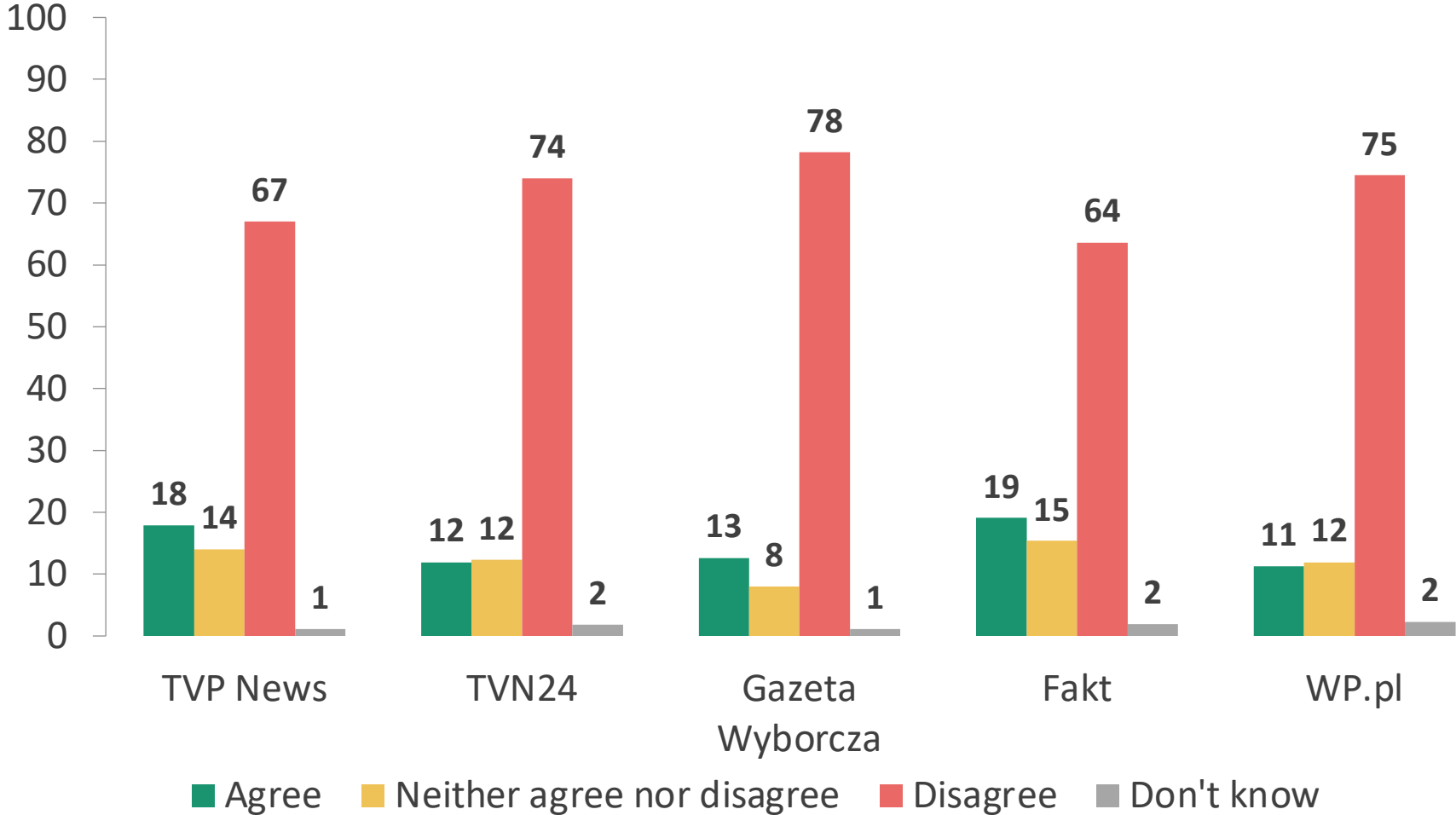
Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

Opinions on the role of media owners by users of specific news brands in Slovakia



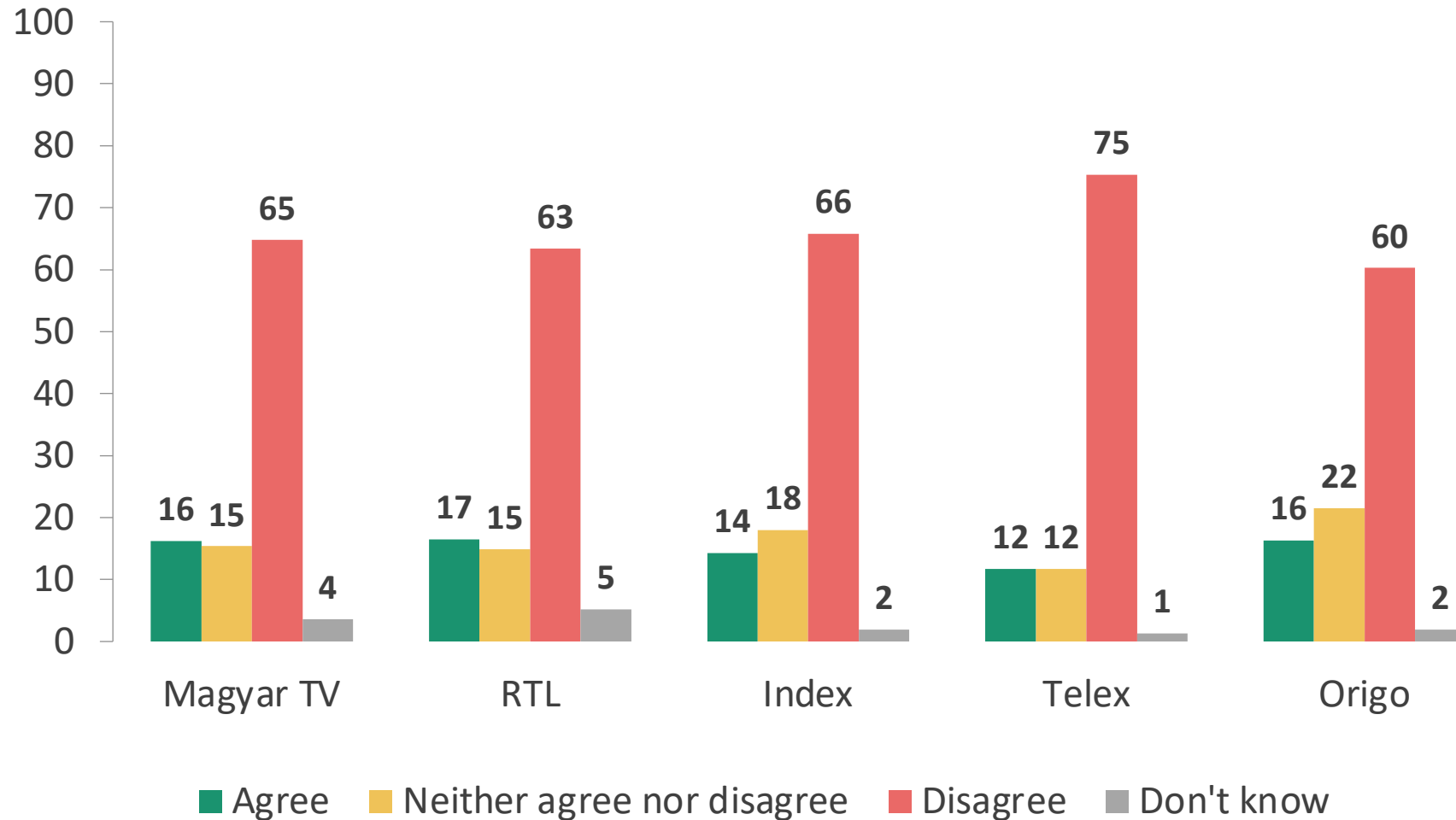
Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

Opinions on the role of media owners by users of specific news brands in Poland



Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

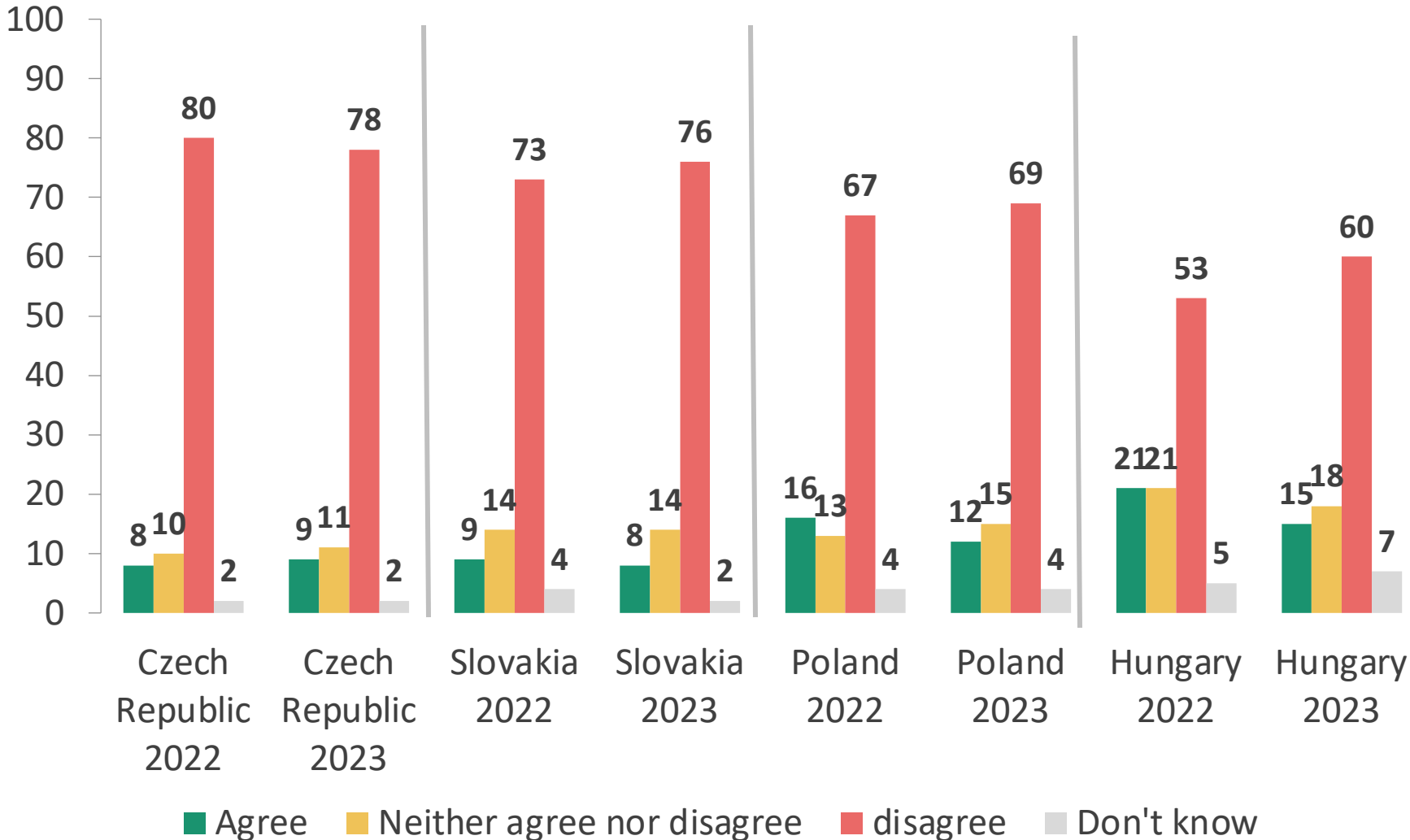
Opinions on the role of media owners by users of specific news brands in Hungary



Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: Media owners have a right to tell their journalists what to write or say.

Opinions on the role of the government:

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

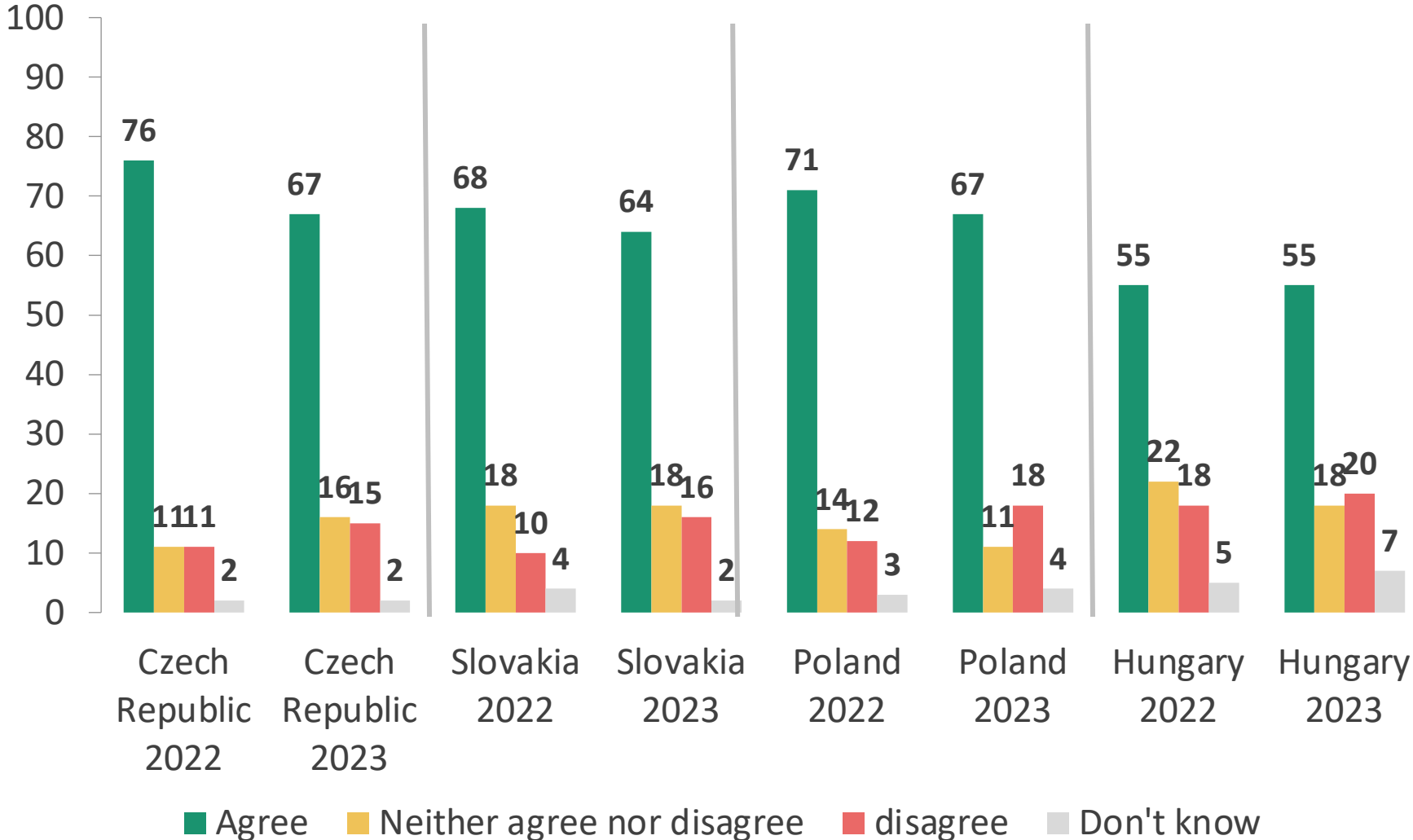


Similar results as last year in most countries, apart from Hungary, where the % of people who disagree has grown by +7pp.

Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: The government has a right to influence the content of the news that is broadcasted by public service media..

Opinions on the editorial autonomy of newsrooms:

“Newsroom should always be able to decide what to write about without any external interference”

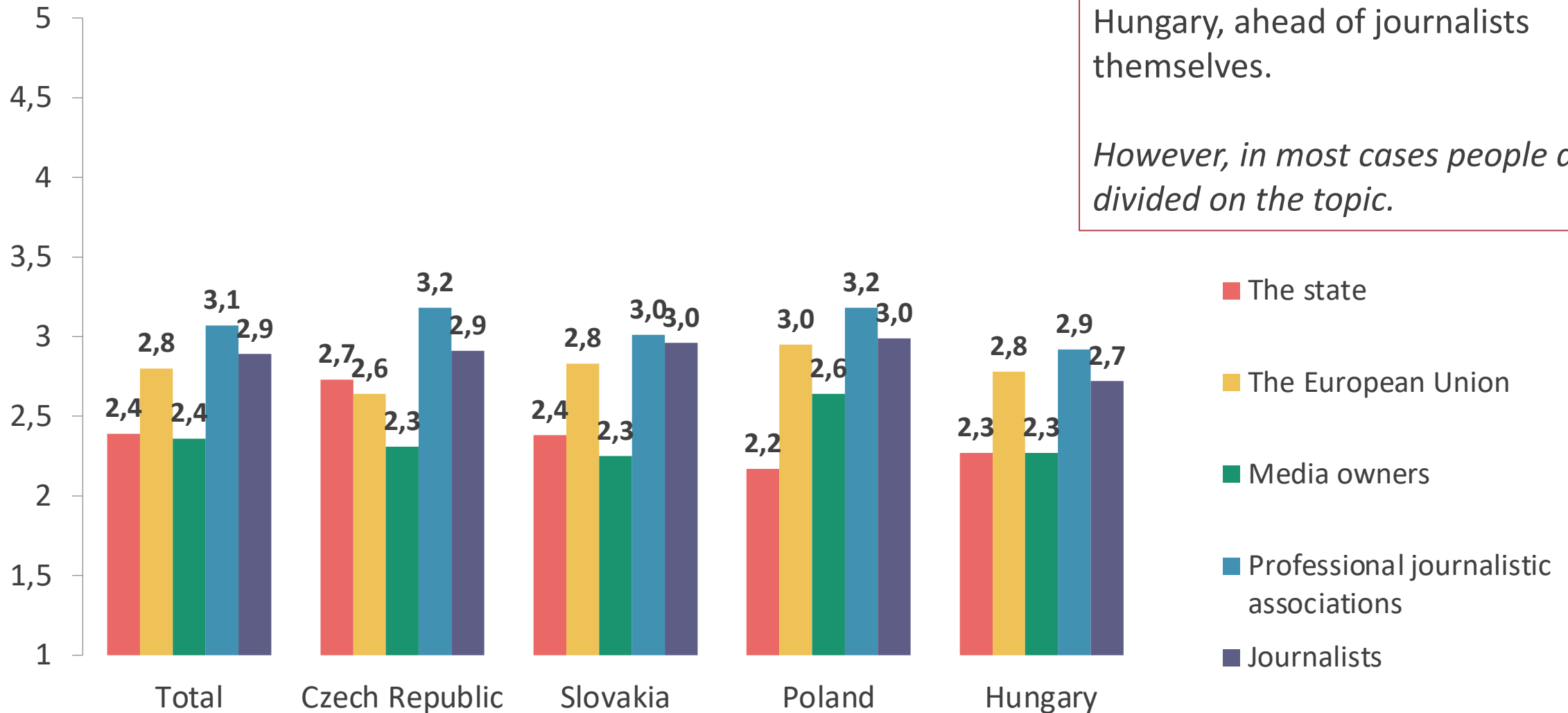


The share of people who agree with newsrooms’ editorial autonomy has declined in most countries; the biggest drop is in the Czech Republic (-9pp).

Q13. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with following statements: Newsroom should always be able to decide what to write about without any external interference.

Trust in protecting media freedom

Trust in protecting media freedom (average scores)

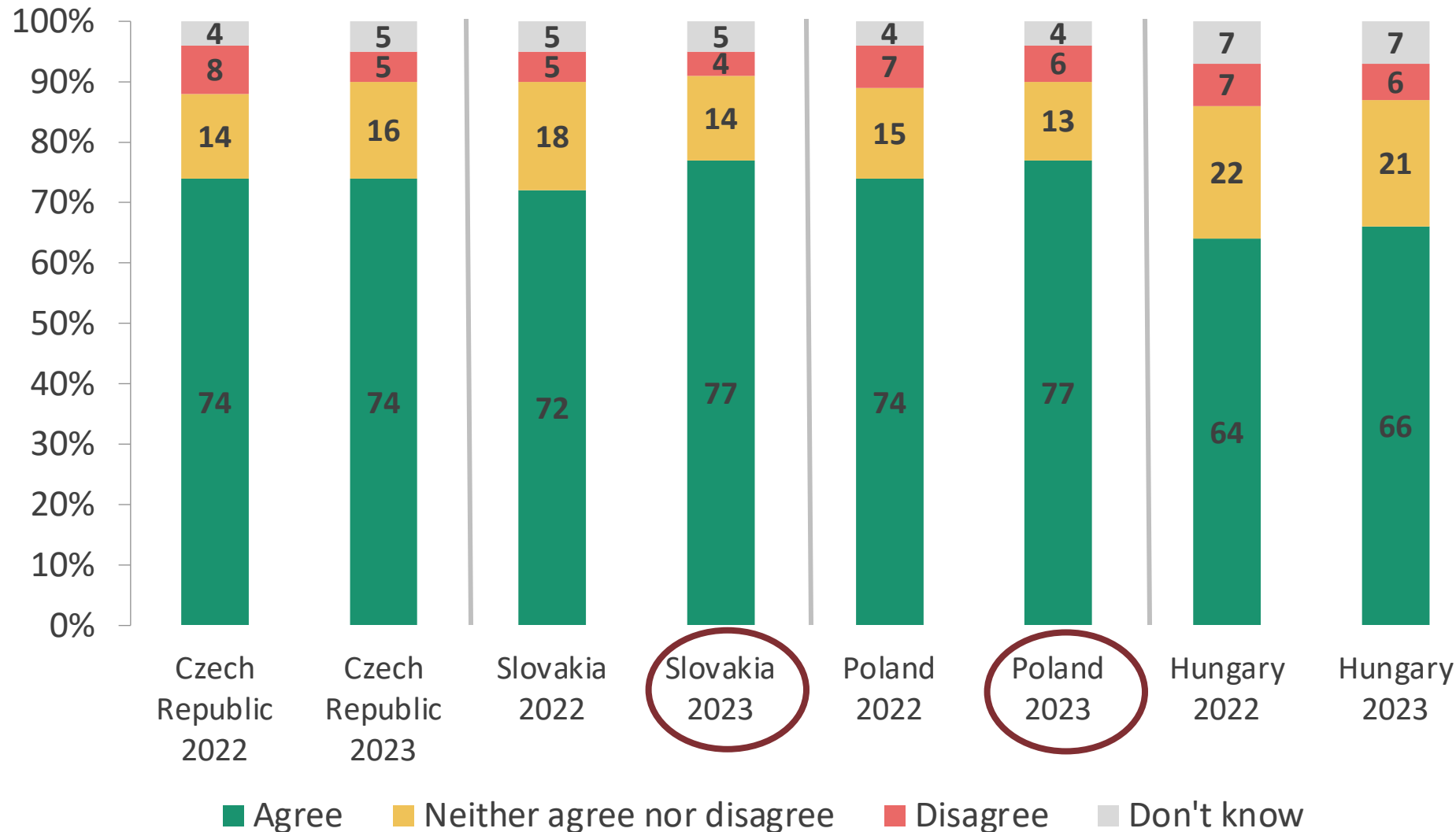


People across V4 trust professional journalistic associations the most to protect media freedom. The EU is the 2nd most trusted actor in Hungary, ahead of journalists themselves.

However, in most cases people are divided on the topic.

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

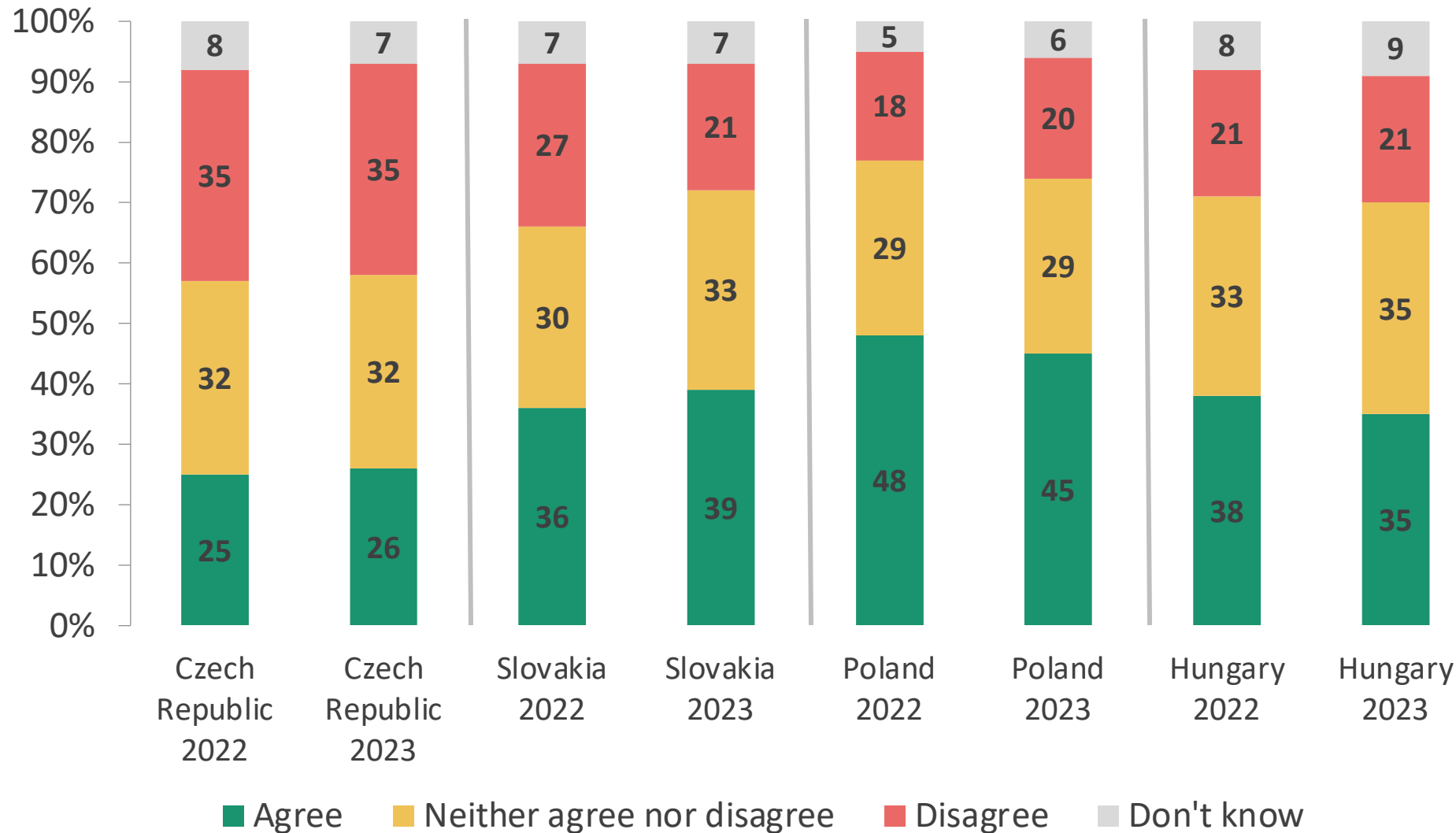
State should strengthen legislation



Most people are in support of stronger legislation to safeguard media freedom and independence; the % of agreement slightly higher this year in Slovakia and Poland.

Q17A The state should strengthen legislation to safeguard media freedom and independence.

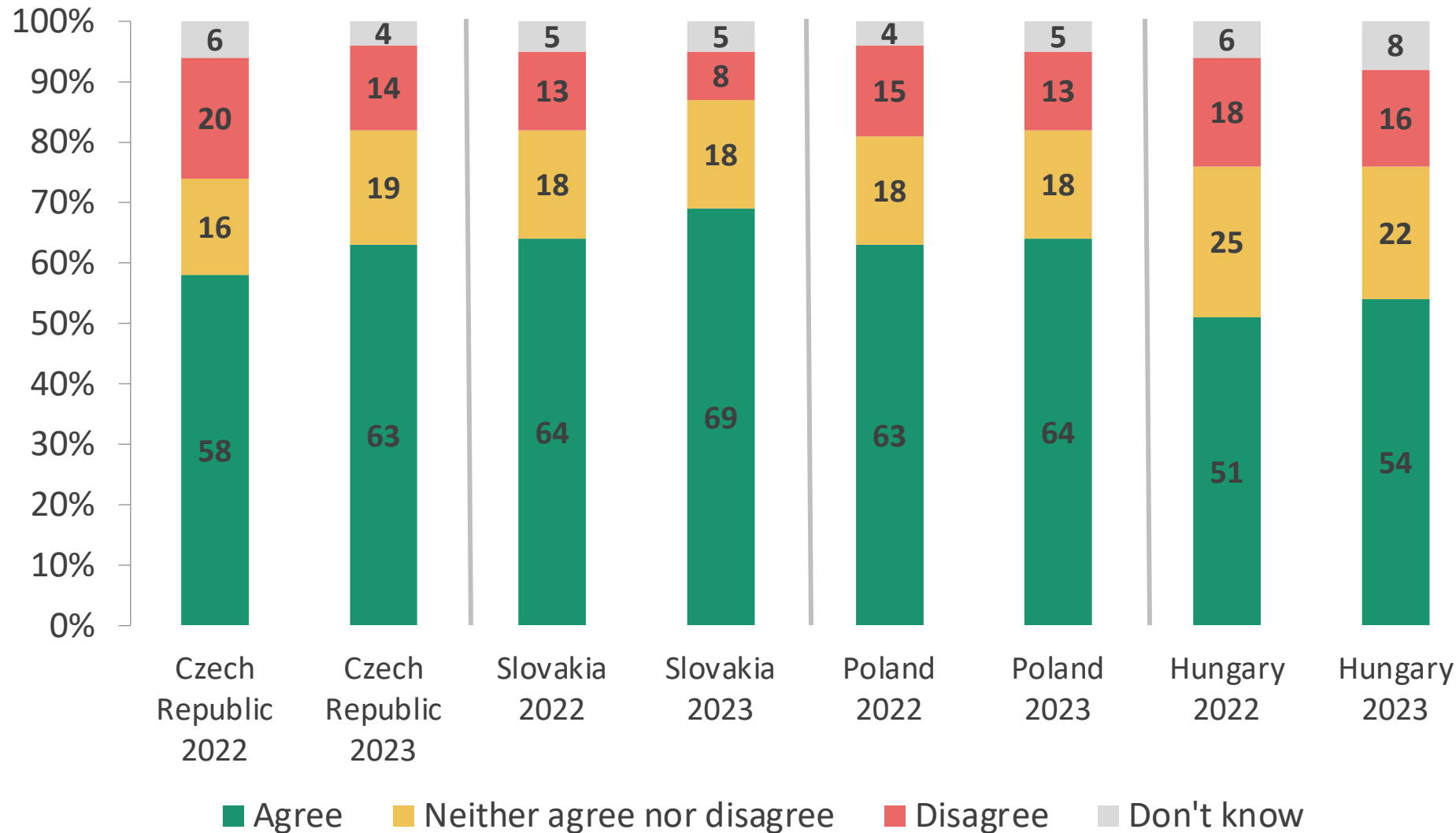
Economic support by the state:



People are divided on the question of state's subsidies for media; the Poles are relatively the most supportive, the Czechs disagree with economic support by the state.

Q17B. The state should provide media with more economic support, for example by subsidies or tax reliefs.

The role of the EU in protecting media freedom



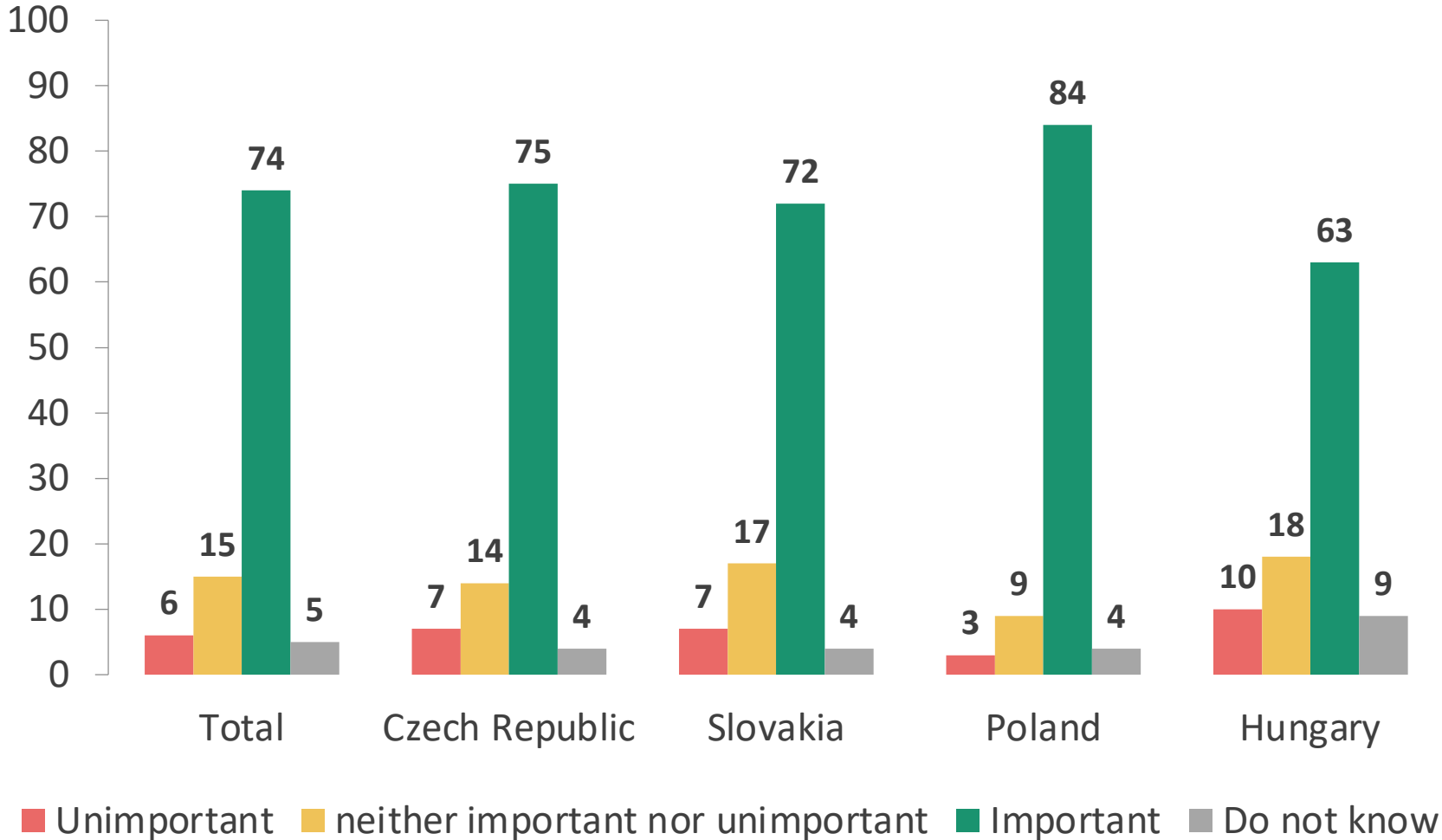
Q17C. The EU should impose penalties or sanctions on countries whose governments interfere with media freedom.

Just like last year, majority of people are in favour of the EU imposing sanctions on countries for interfering with media freedom, most in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (+5pp compared to last year).

Importance of journalistic values

Importance of journalistic values:

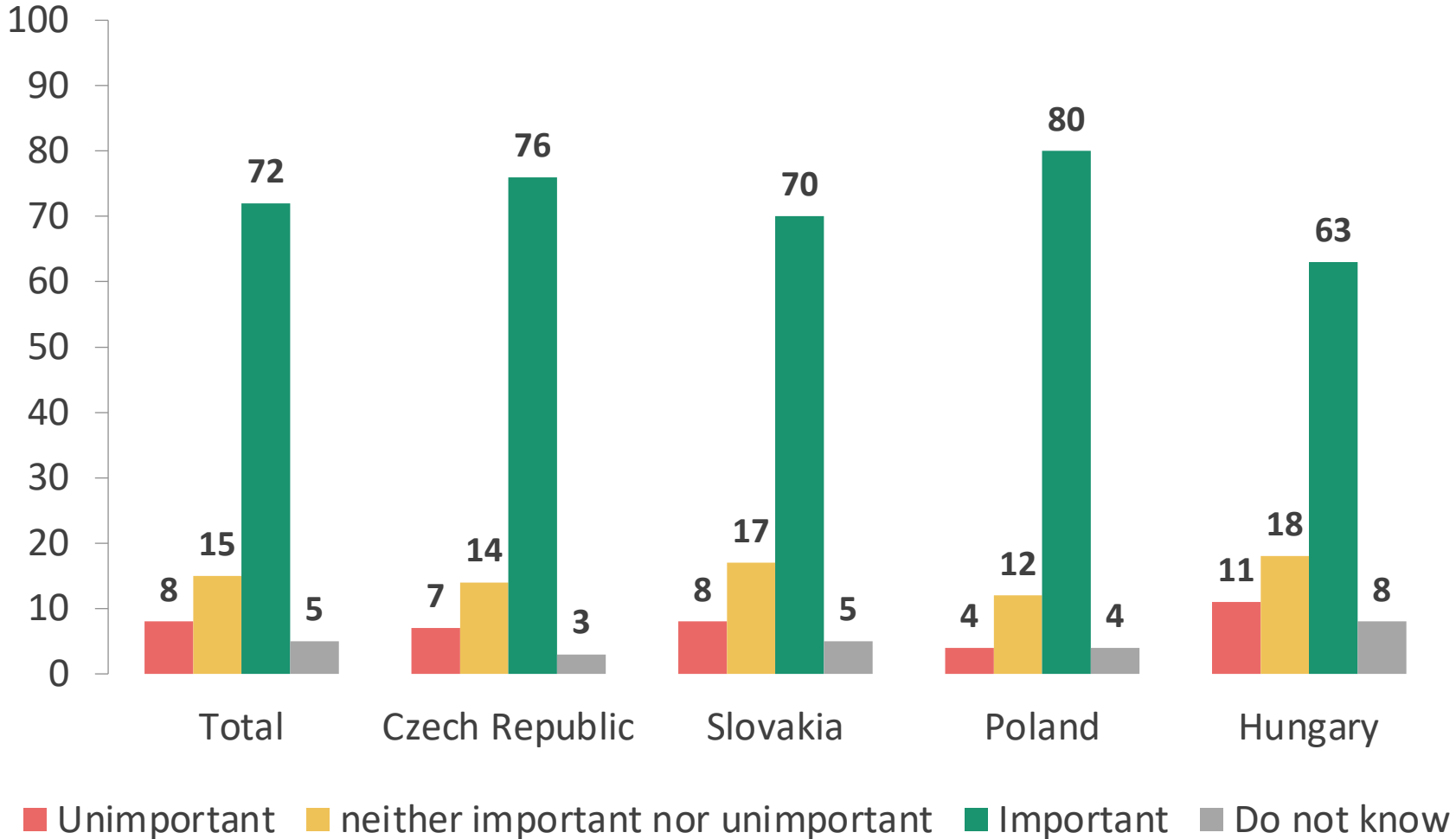
editorial content is independent from the government



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values:

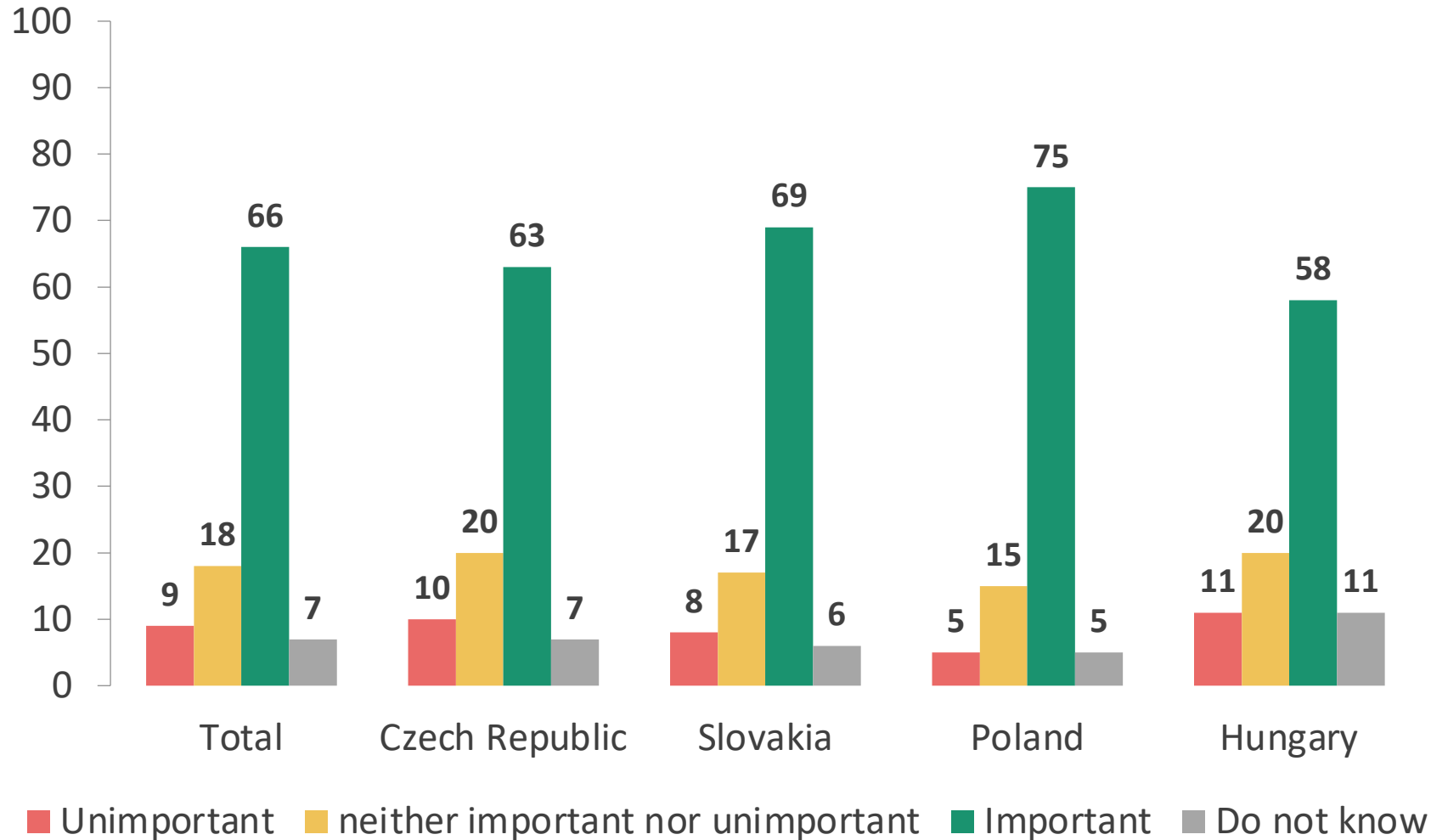
media are not linked to any political party



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values :

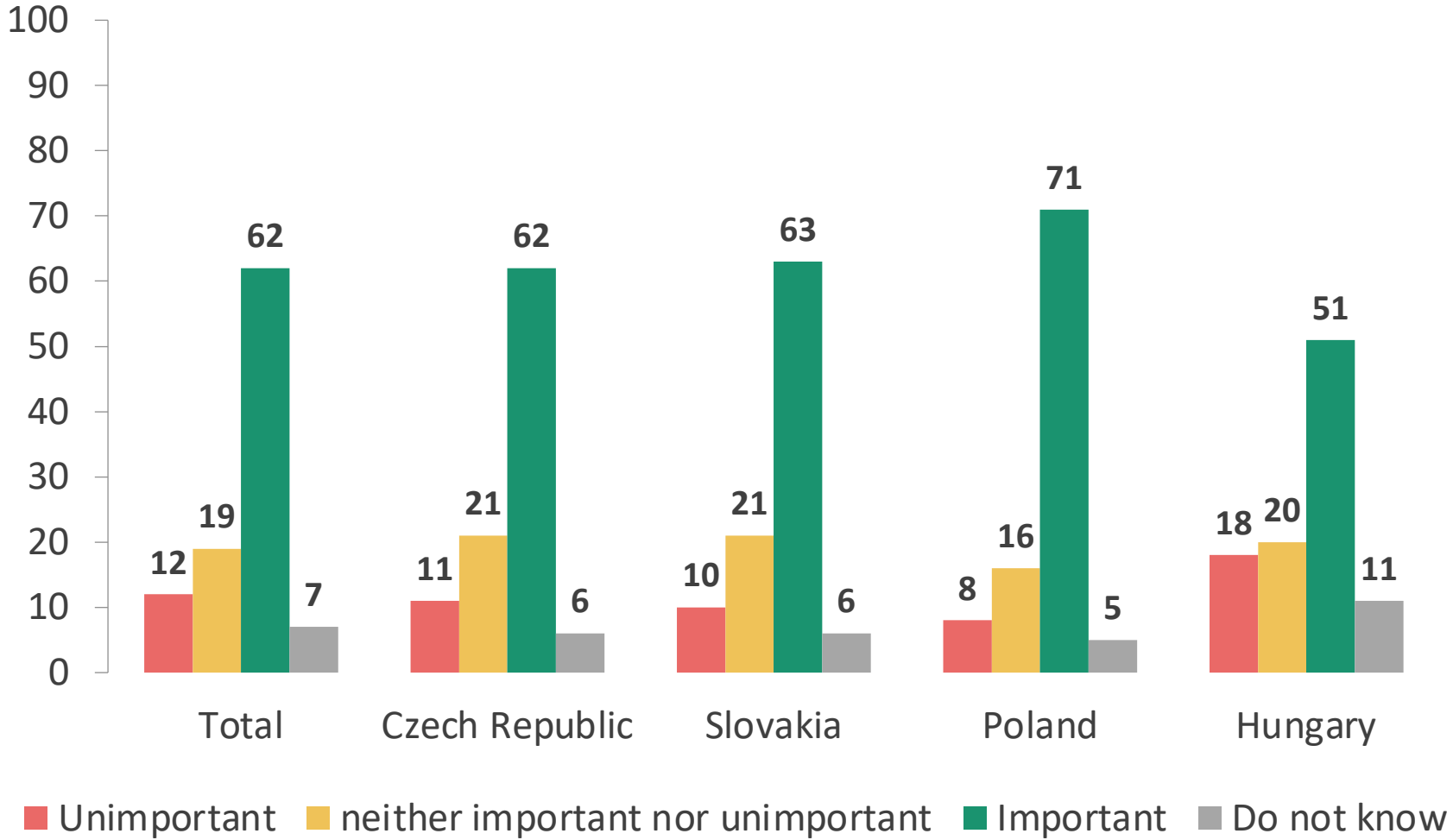
media are not owned by an oligarch or a major business group



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values :

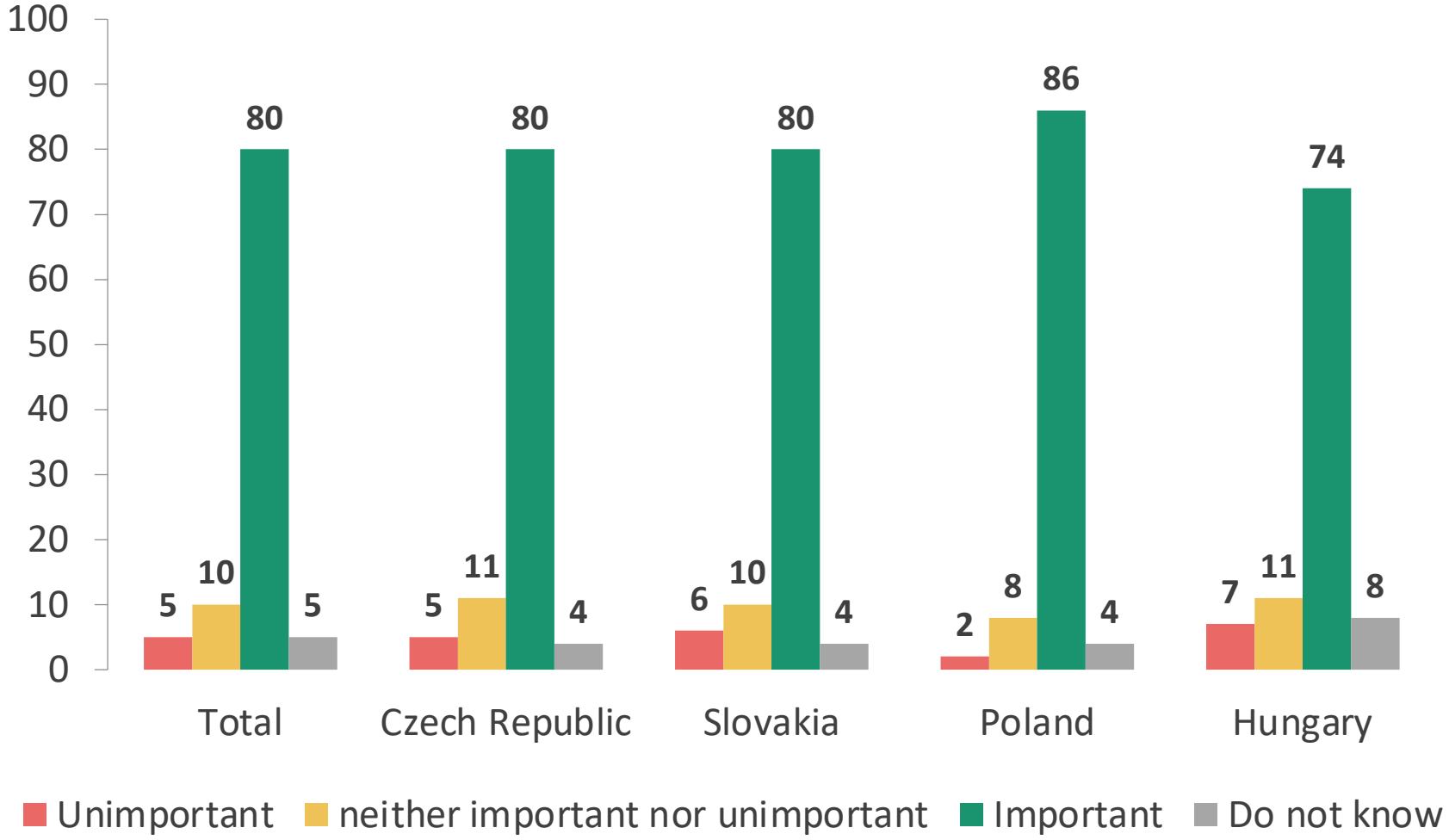
media are not controlled by any foreign entities



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values :

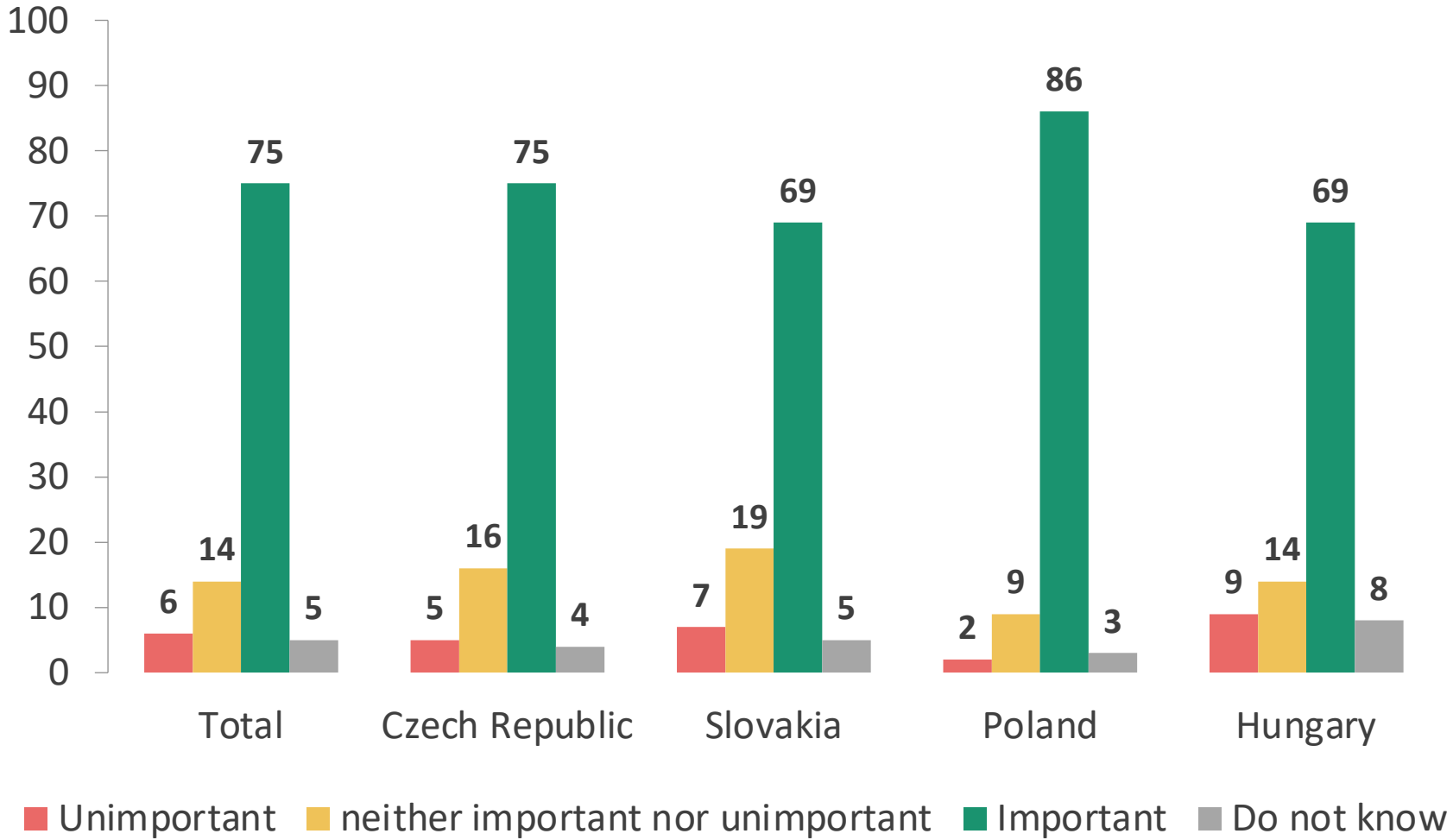
media produce news content that is truthful and factually accurate



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values :

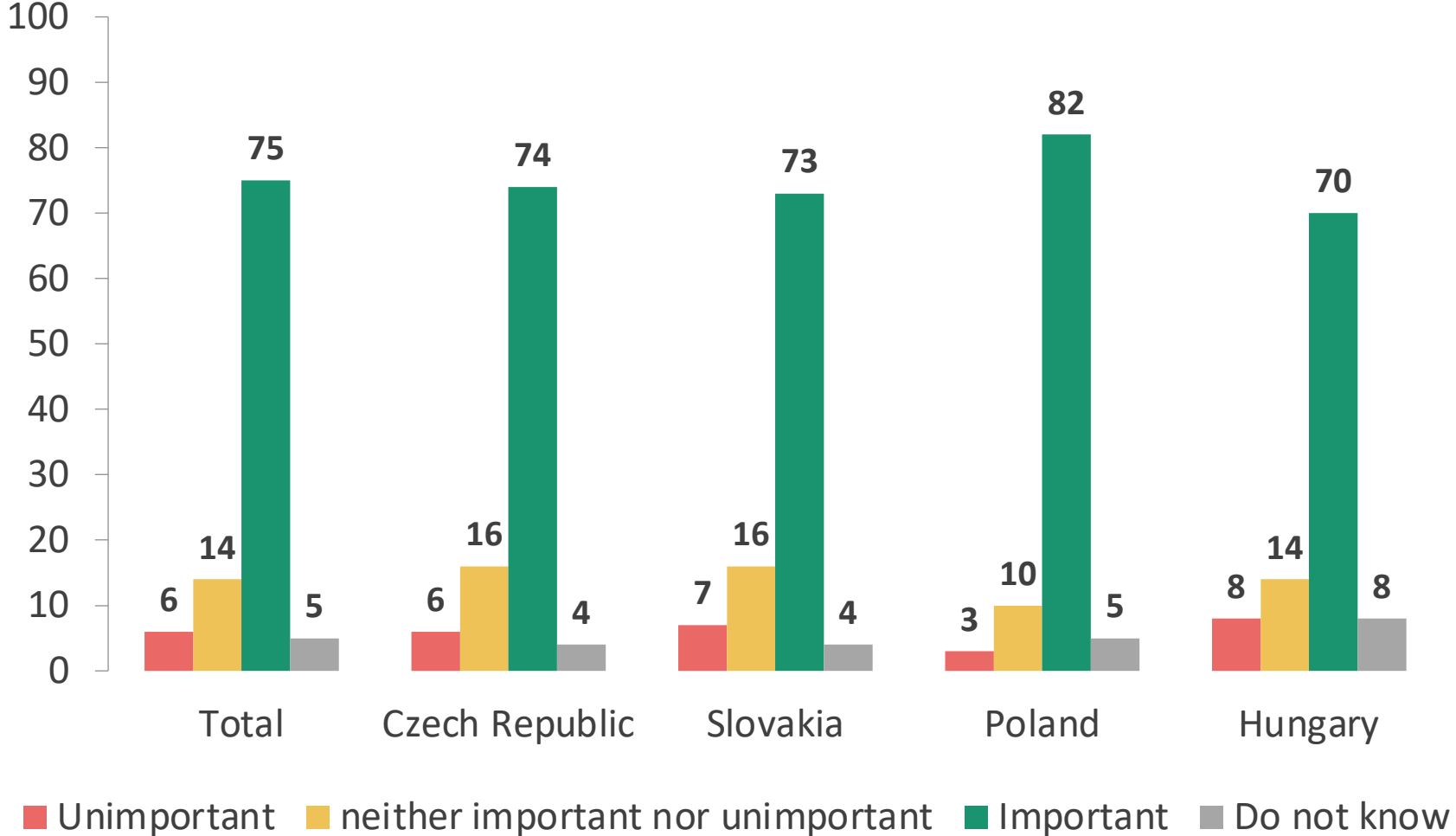
media emphasize factual information, rather than their own point of view



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values :

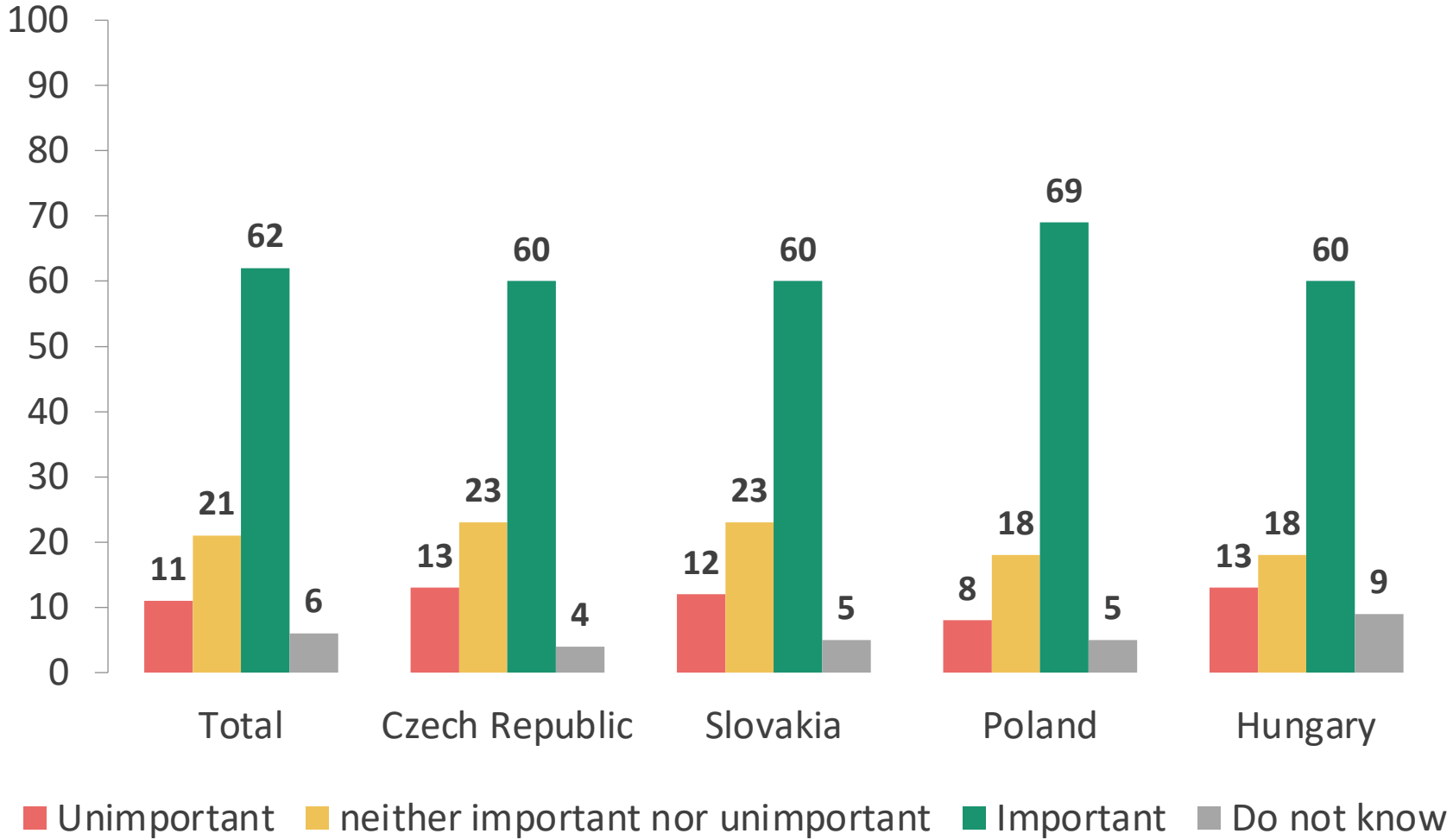
reporting on politics and society is fair and balanced, giving equal space to all views



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

Importance of journalistic values :

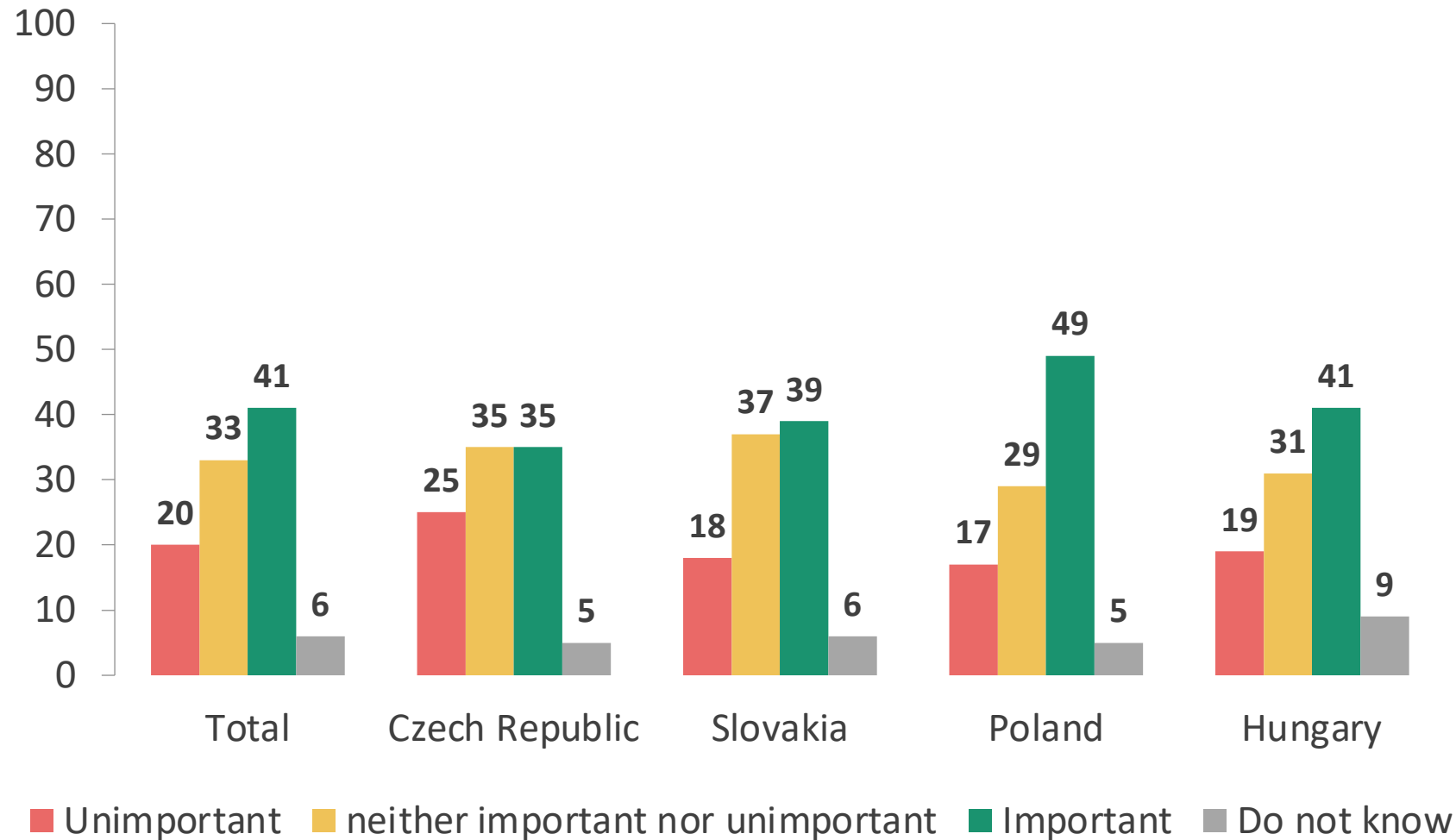
media content is in line with the interests of my nation



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

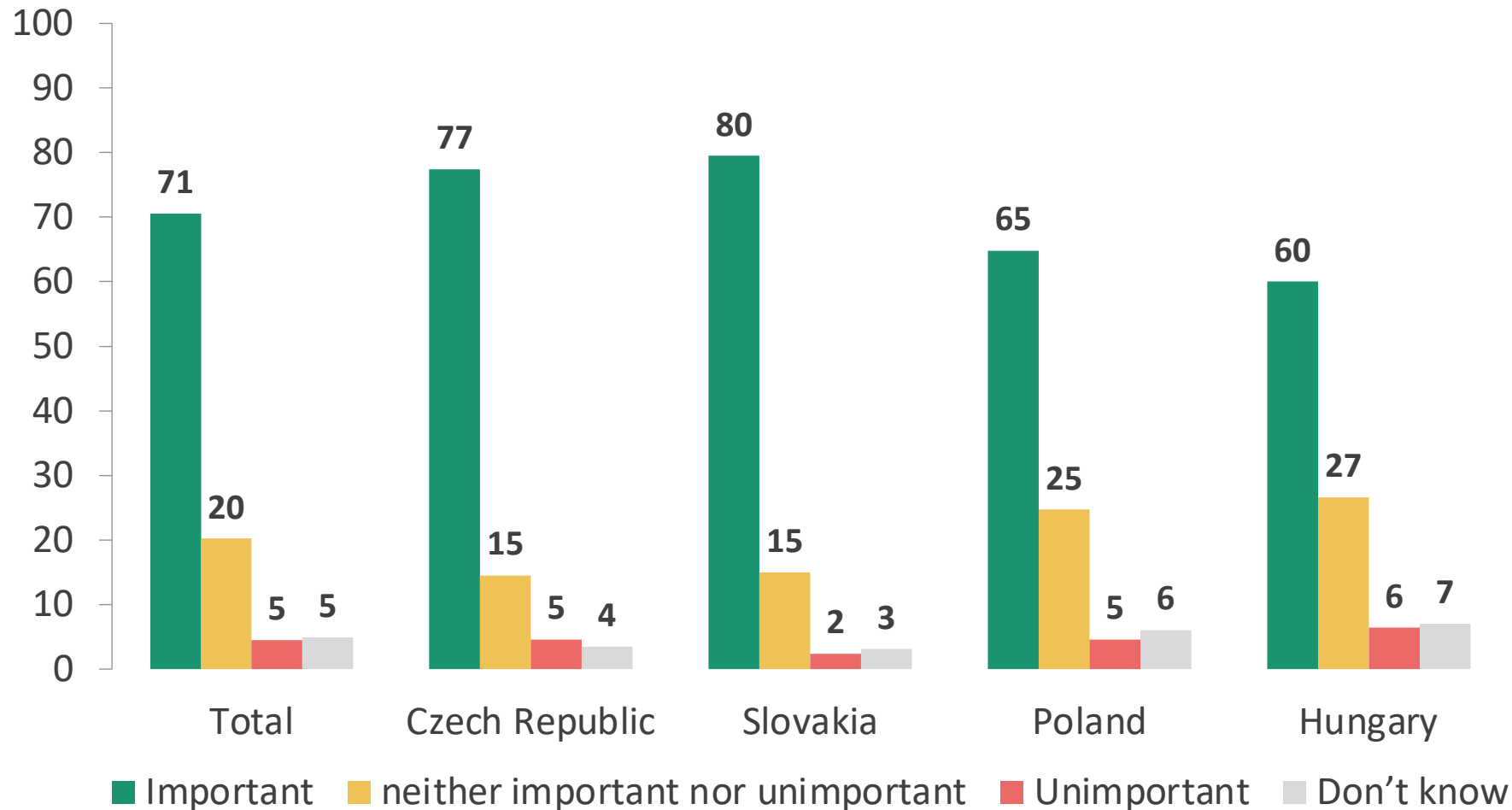
Importance of journalistic values :

media content corresponds to my own views on politics and society



Q12. Thinking about news media outlets that you consume regularly, please tell us how important it is for you that...

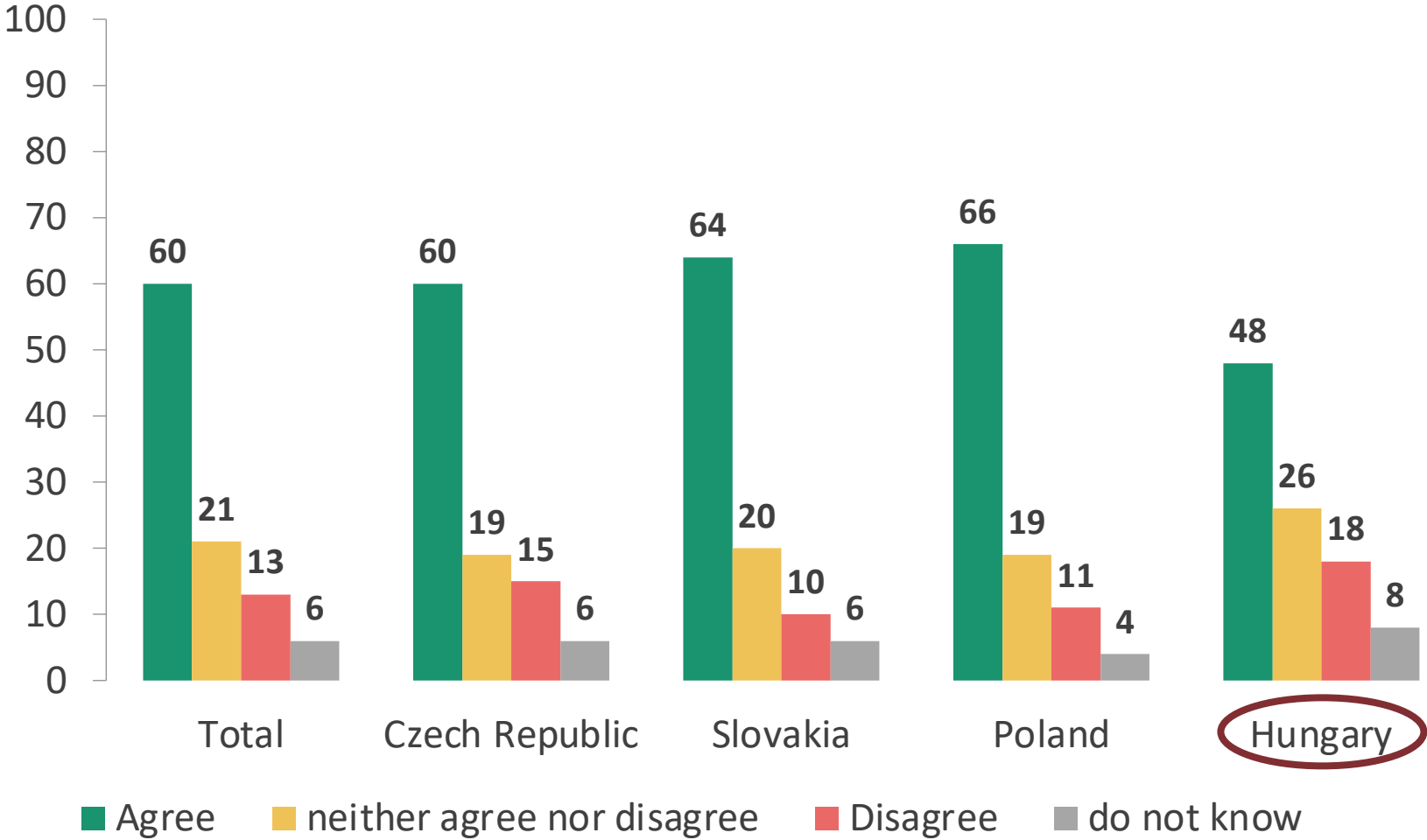
War in Ukraine and the need for accurate news



Most people believe that the war in Ukraine has made it more important to have access to truthful and accurate news; however, large gaps between Slovakia (80% agree) and Hungary (60%).

Opinions on media ownership

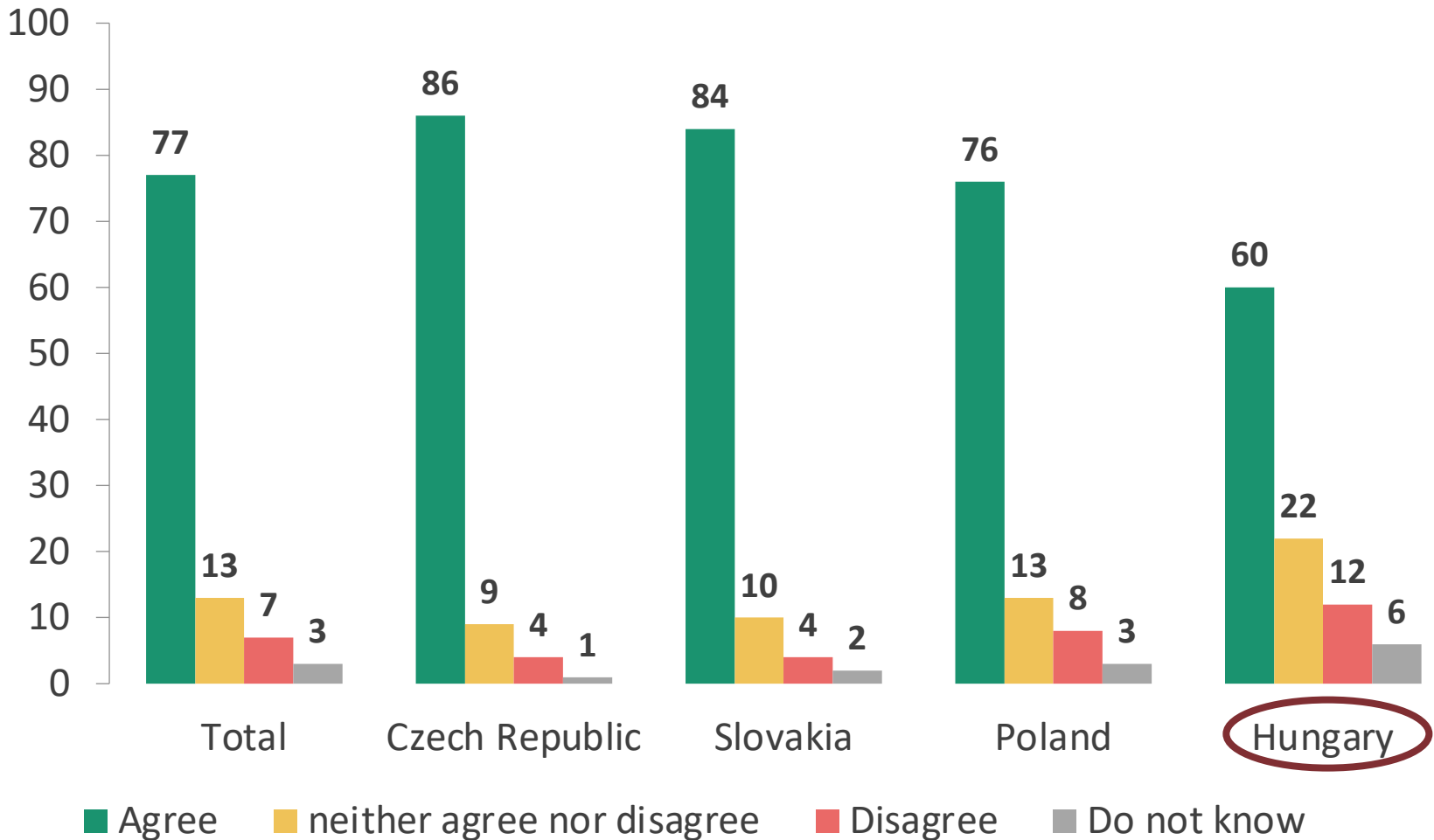
Concentration of media ownership



Most people agree that there should be limits on media ownership in the hands of single owner. In Hungary, the share of those who agree is lower.

Q14A. Thinking about news media in „country“, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with following statements: There should be limits to the amount of control a single individual owner or company have over the media in my country.

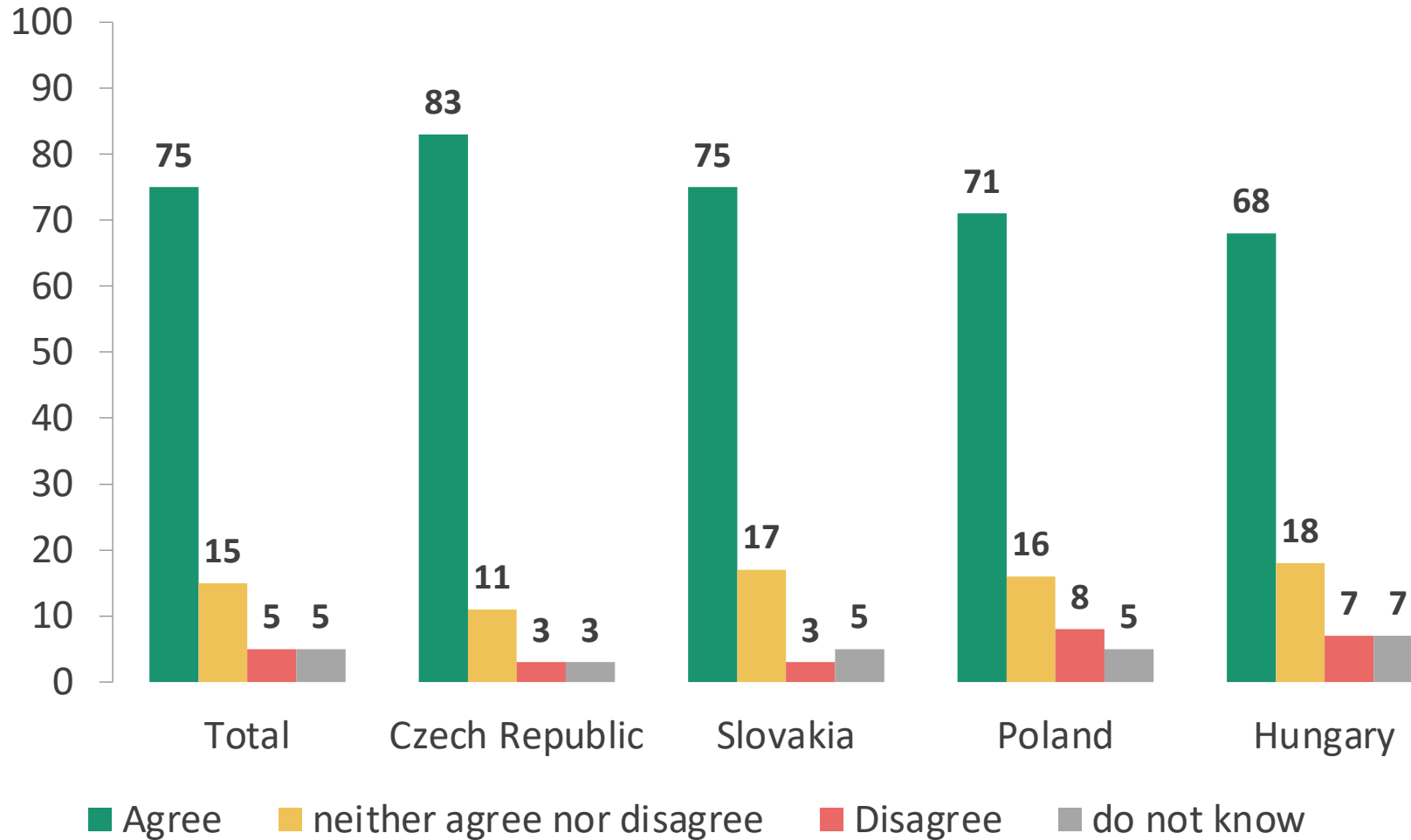
Media ownership transparency



Most people agree that it is important for the public to know who owns the media. Hungary displays relatively lower agreement than the rest of the V4 countries.

Q14B. Thinking about news media in „country“, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with following statements: It is important that the public knows who owns the media .

Conflict of interests disclosure

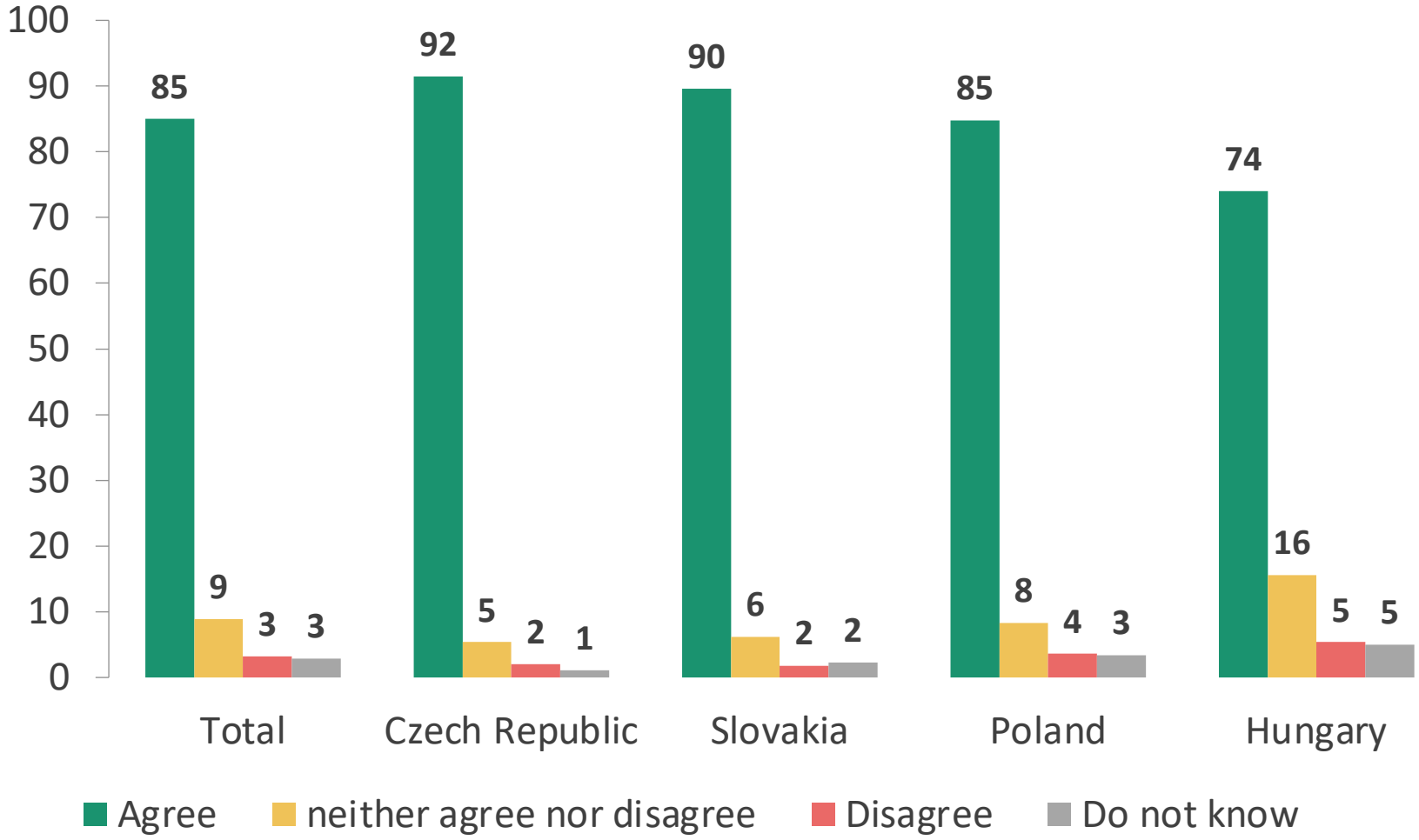


Most people believe that media should always disclose possible conflict of interest.

Q14C. Thinking about news media in „country“, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with following statements: Media should always disclose any possible conflict of interests when covering specific issues .

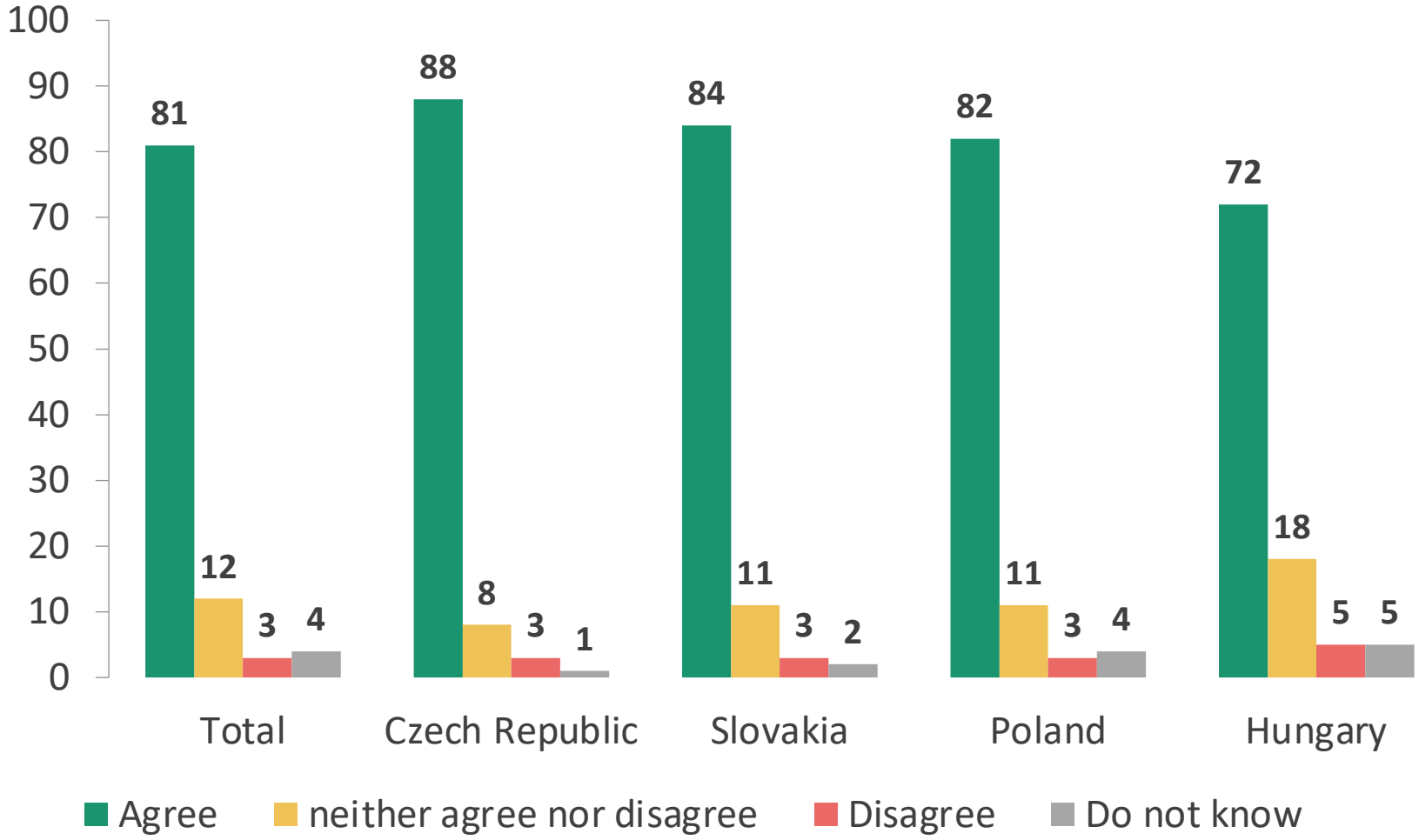
Impartiality of public service broadcasting

Impartiality of public service broadcasting



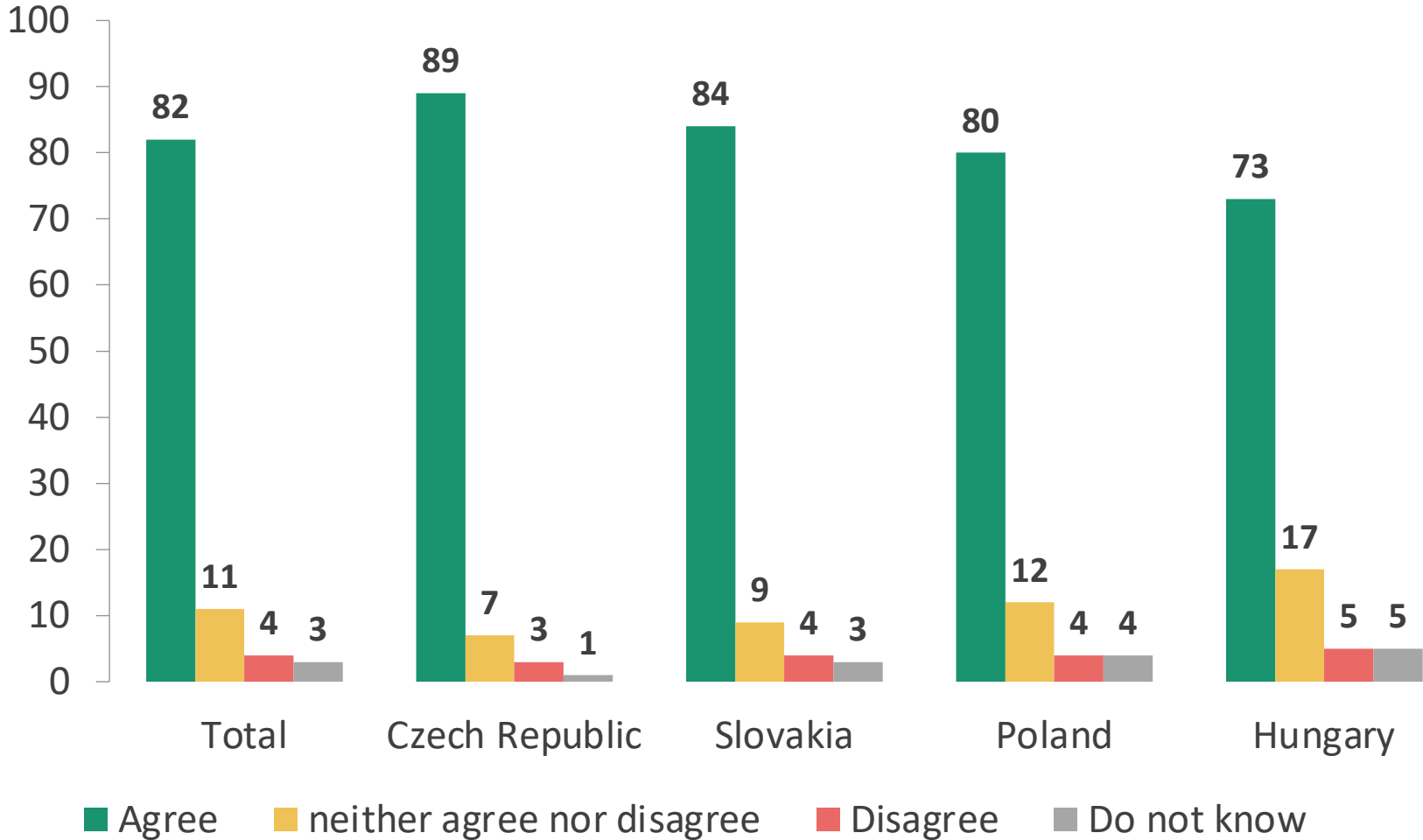
Q16A. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: Public service media in COUNTRY should be impartial and free from political interference.

Diversity of views on public service broadcasting



Q16B. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: Public service broadcasting should ensure a range of views are reflected in news reporting.

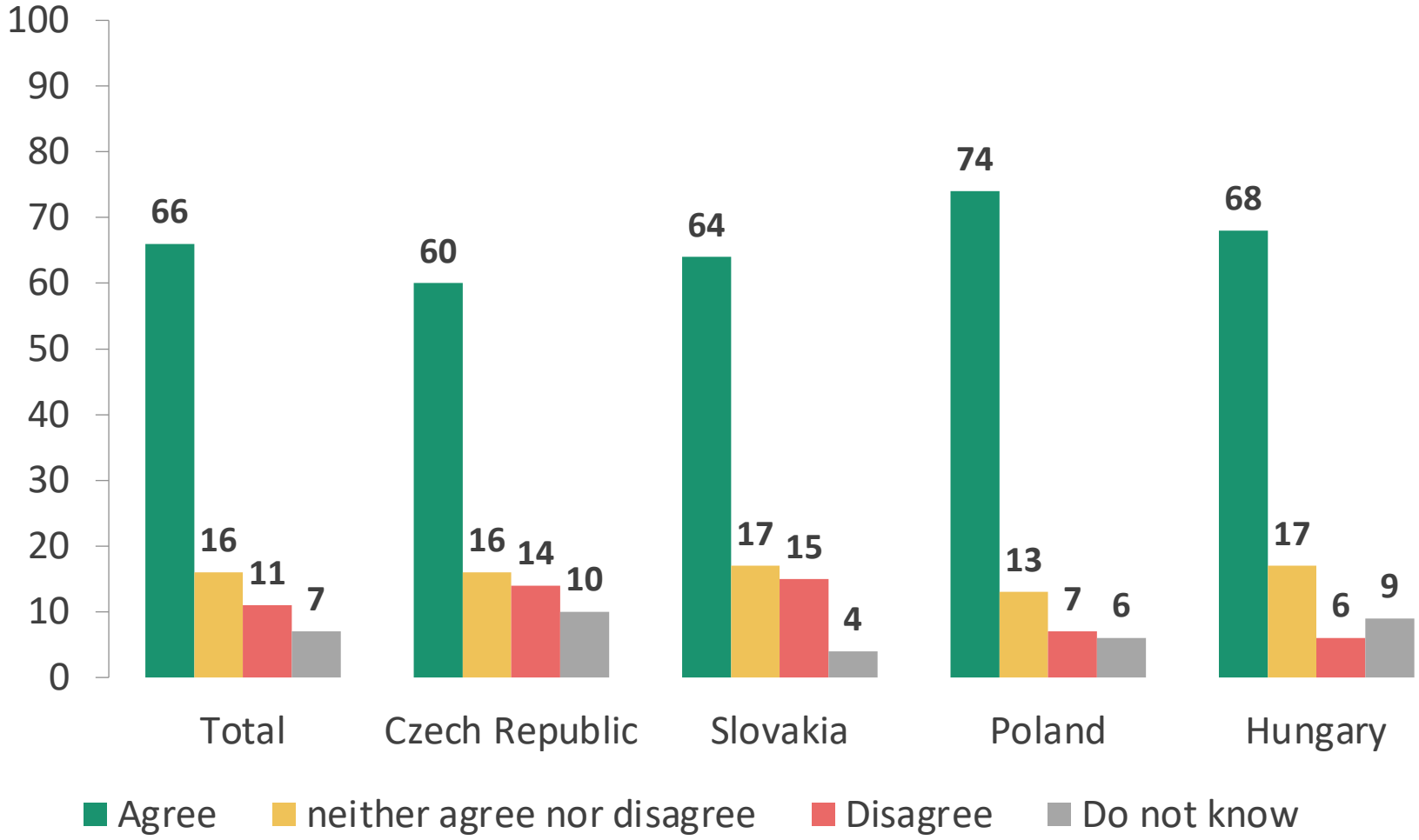
Equal space for parties on public service broadcasting



Q16C. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: Public service broadcasters should give equal space to all relevant political parties during elections.

Opinions on regulation of online content

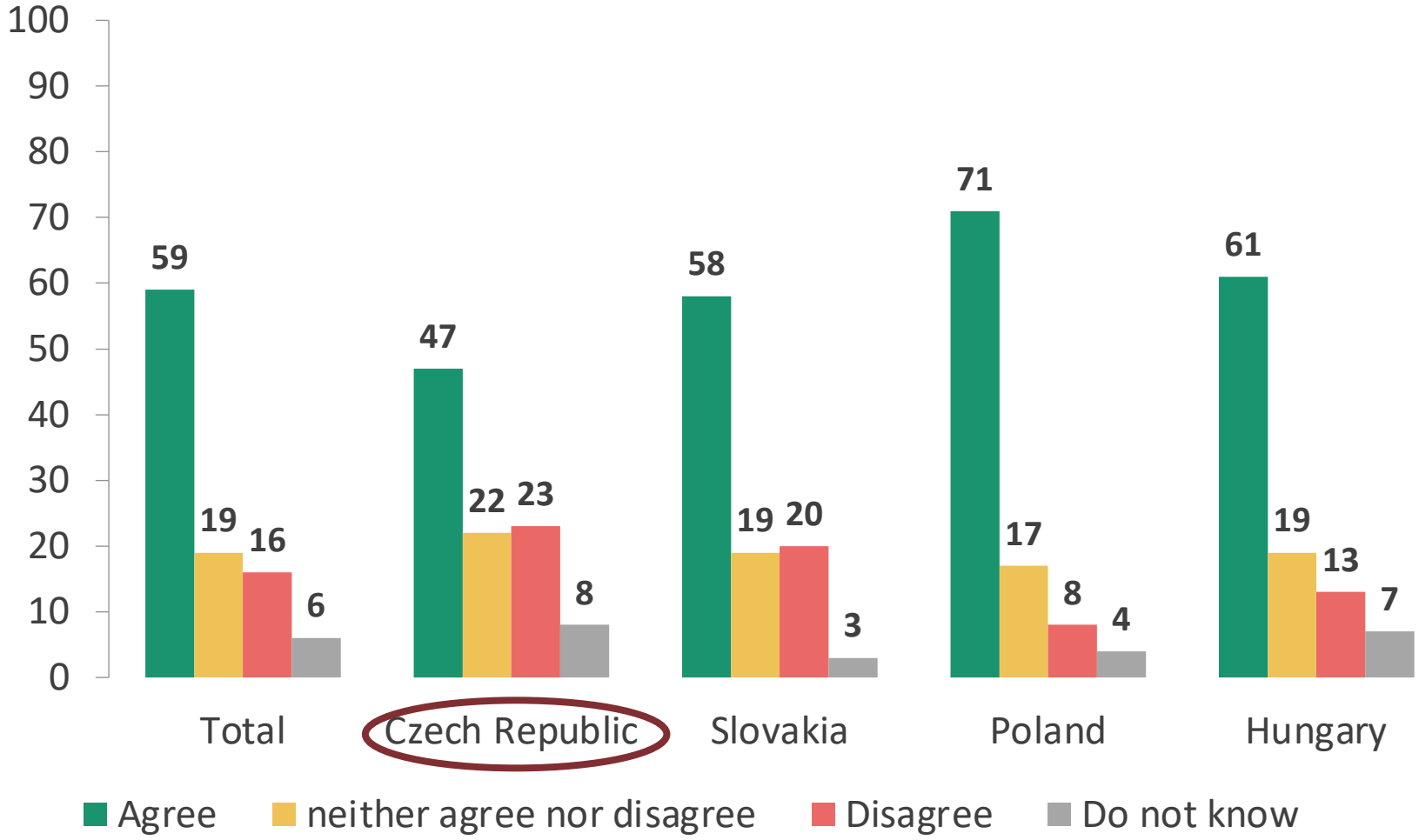
Promoting trustworthy sources by platforms



Majority of people think that platforms should boost visibility of trustworthy information sources.

Q15A. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: Digital platforms should ensure trustworthy sources of information are more visible than those that are known to spread disinformation.

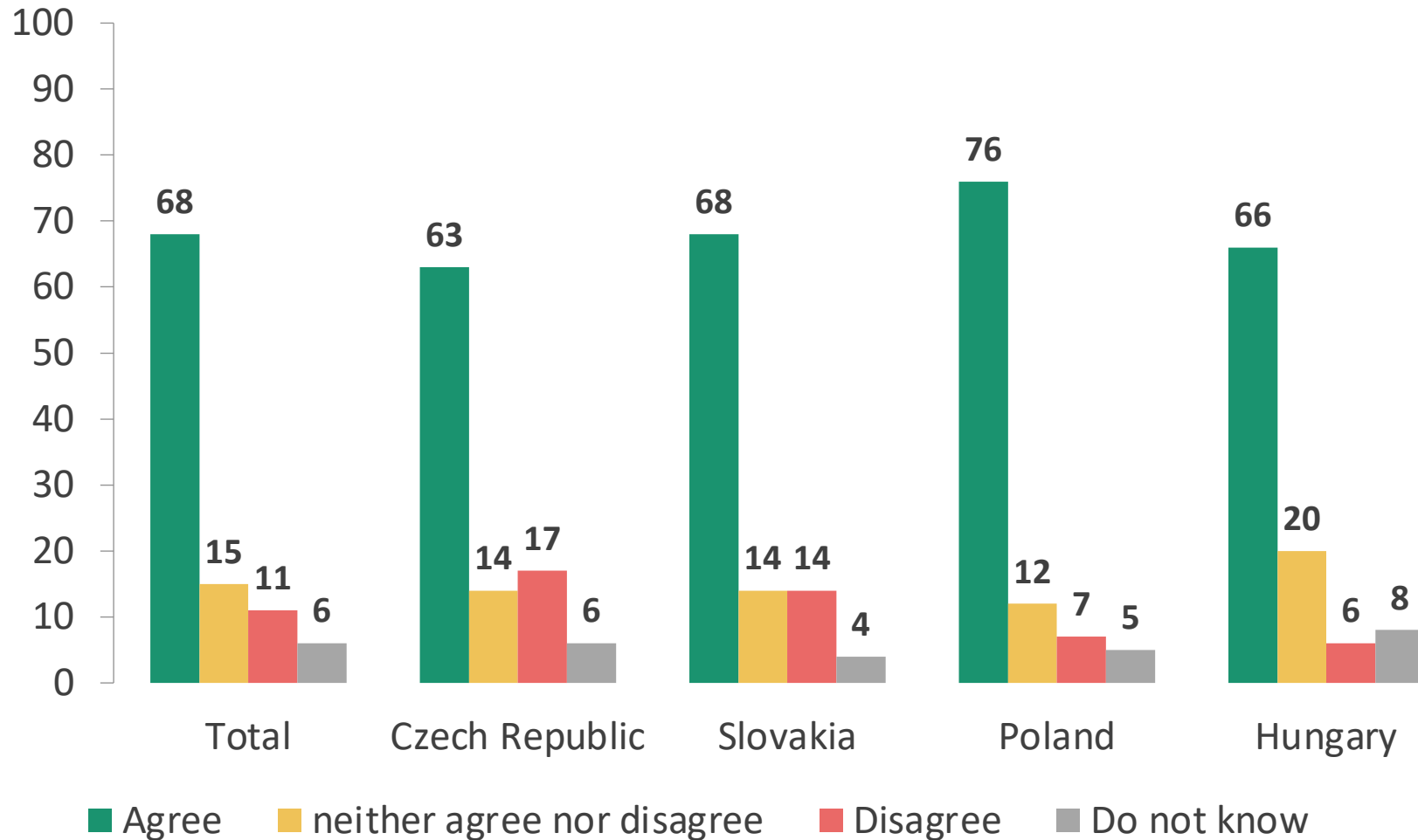
Regulation of online content



Most people believe that online media should be regulated to prevent from spreading hate speech or harmful content. % of agreement significantly lower in the Czech Republic.

Q15B. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: It is appropriate to regulate the content of online media to prevent the spreading of hate speech or harmful content.

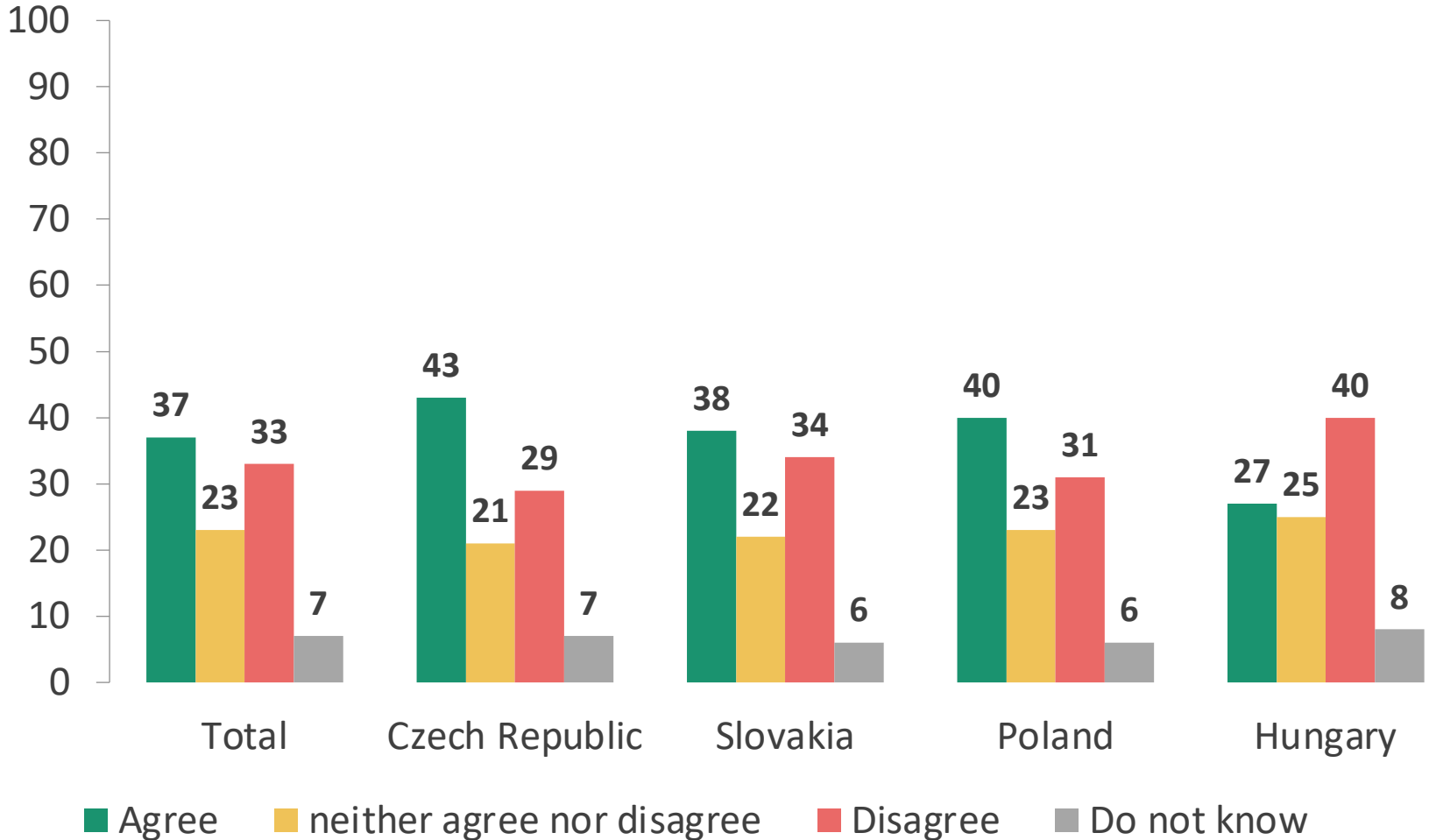
Action against spreading disinformation



Most people believe that a stronger action should be taken against the spreading of online disinformation.

Q15C. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: Stronger action should be taken against the spreading of online disinformation.

Blocking of online content for security reasons

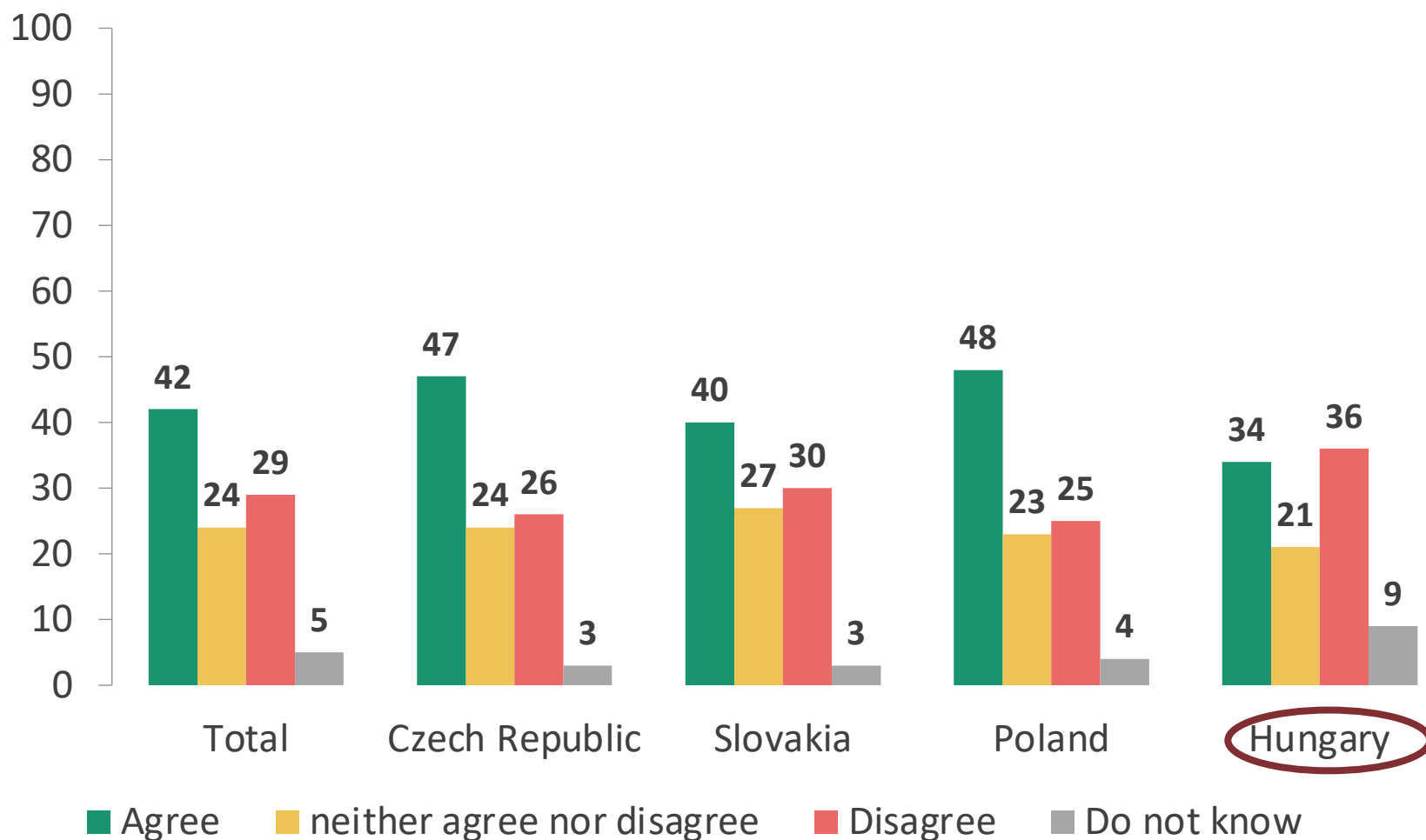


People are divided about blocking online content for reasons of national security. In most countries, more people agree than disagree, except for Hungary, where disagreement prevails.

Q15D. Please tell us whether you disagree or agree with following statements: Government has a right to block access to online content in the interest of national security.

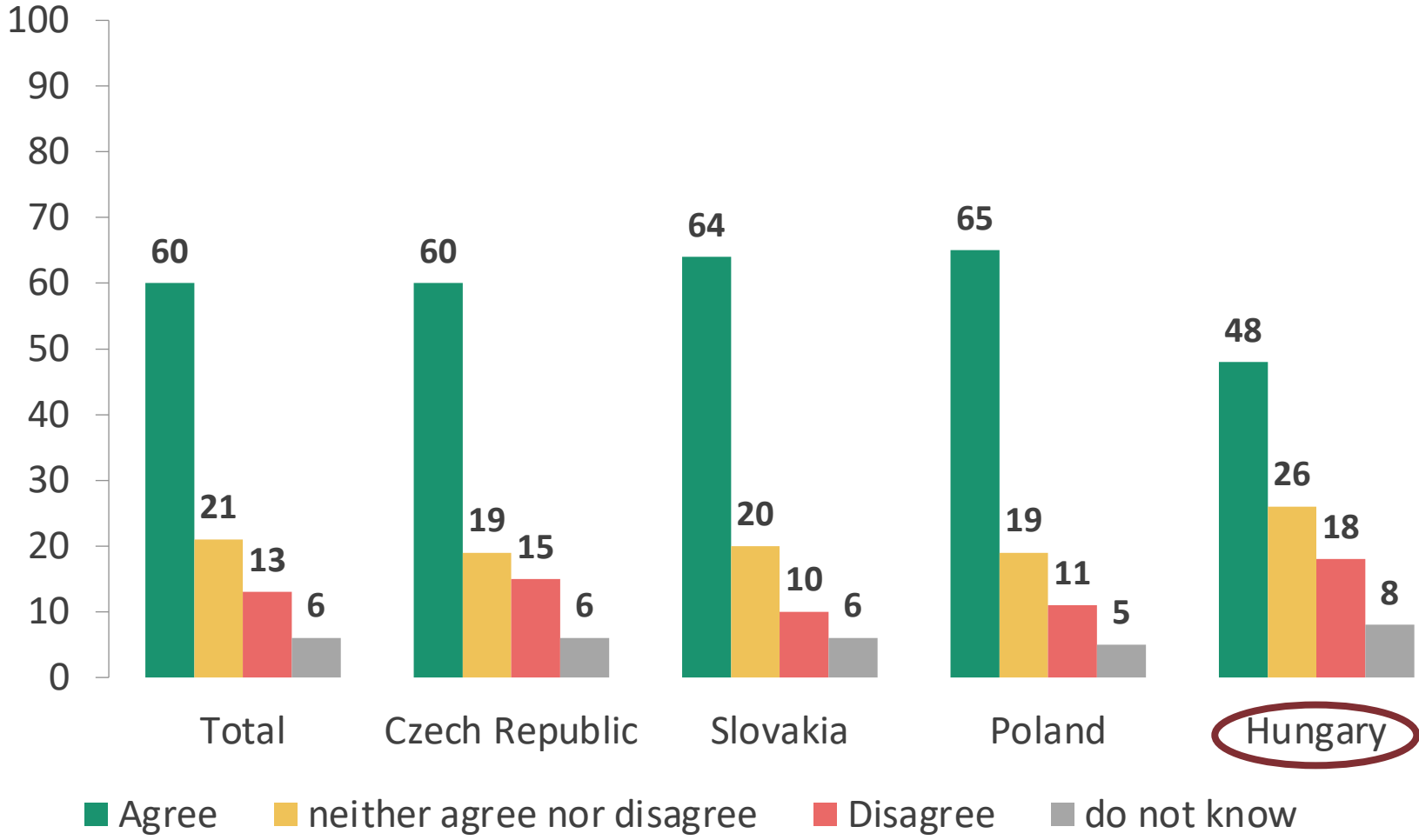
Perceived media diversity
(% of agreement with a statement)

“Media offer a broad choice of diverse political viewpoints and perspectives”



In all countries but Hungary, people tend to rather agree than disagree that media offer a broad choice of perspectives.

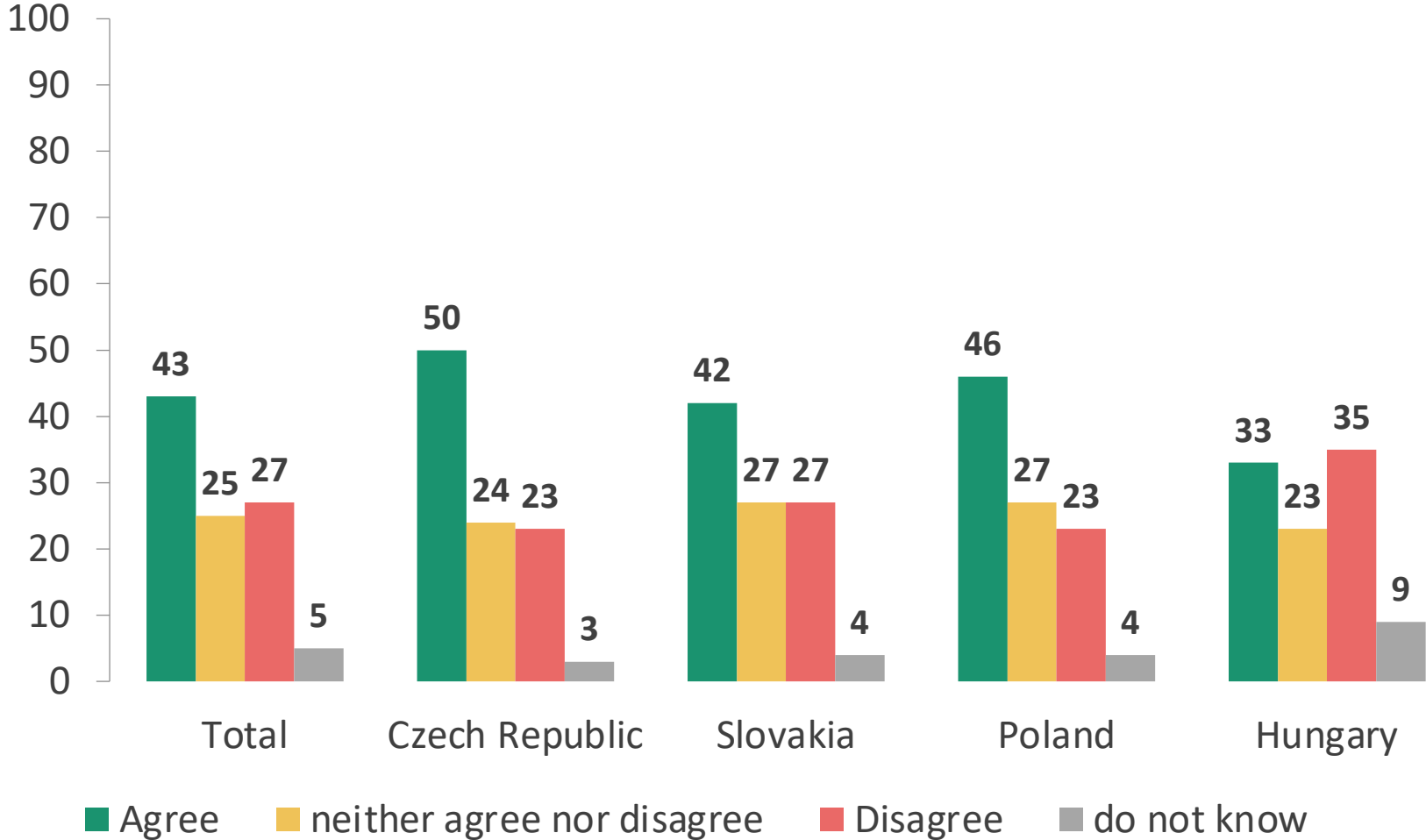
“There is sufficient number of quality news media to choose from”



Majority of people think they have a choice from sufficient number of quality news media; in Hungary the % is significantly lower.

Q11B. Thinking about news media in your country, do you agree or disagree with following statements?

“There is sufficient number of quality news media bringing information about the region where I live”



More people tend to agree rather than disagree about the availability of quality regional/local media; the exception is Hungary, where more people disagree than agree.

Summary – key takeaways

- People's concerns about media freedom have significantly increased across V4 countries compared to last year
- Most people in Poland and Hungary see the government as the biggest threat to media freedom; in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it is the media owners and business interests
- The perceived importance of political independence media has grown (and PSM in particular), as well as support for media autonomy from owners
- The public highly supports transparency in media ownership and limitation of media ownership concentration
- People are in favour of the state strengthening legislation to safeguard media freedom and independence, and for the EU imposing penalties on governments that interfere with media freedom
- People support regulation of online content to prevent from spreading disinformation or harmful content, but they are divided about blocking content for security reasons

Thank you!

rada@economia.cz
v.stetka@lboro.ac.uk