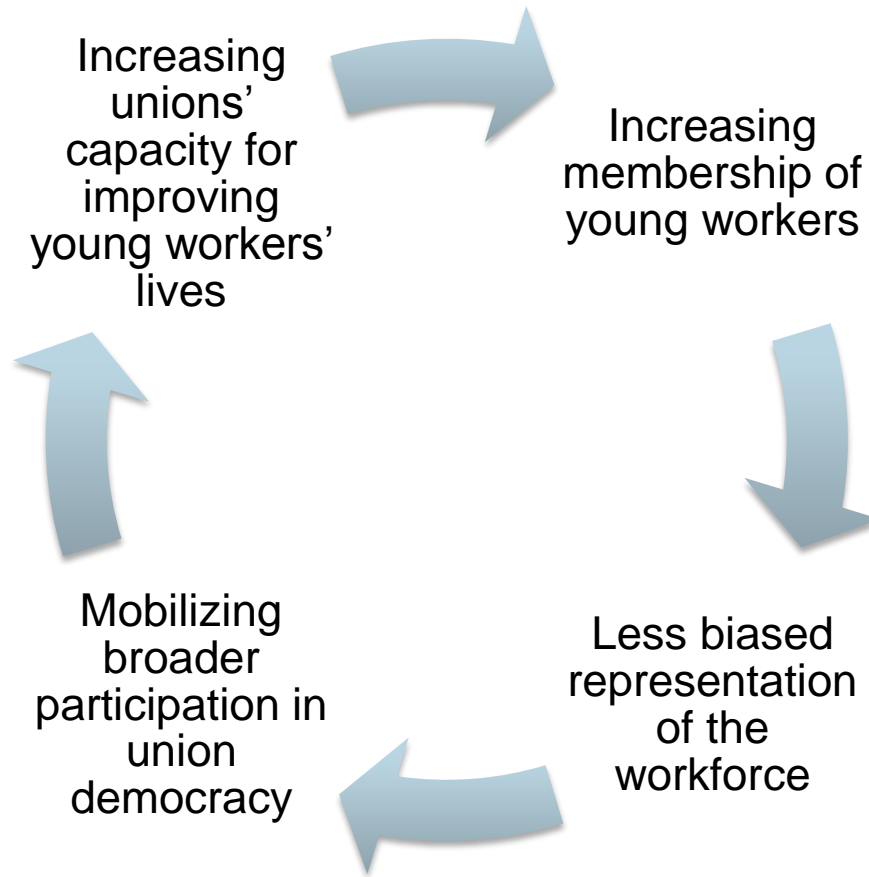


Trade unions' 'deliberative vitality' towards young workers: survey evidence across Europe

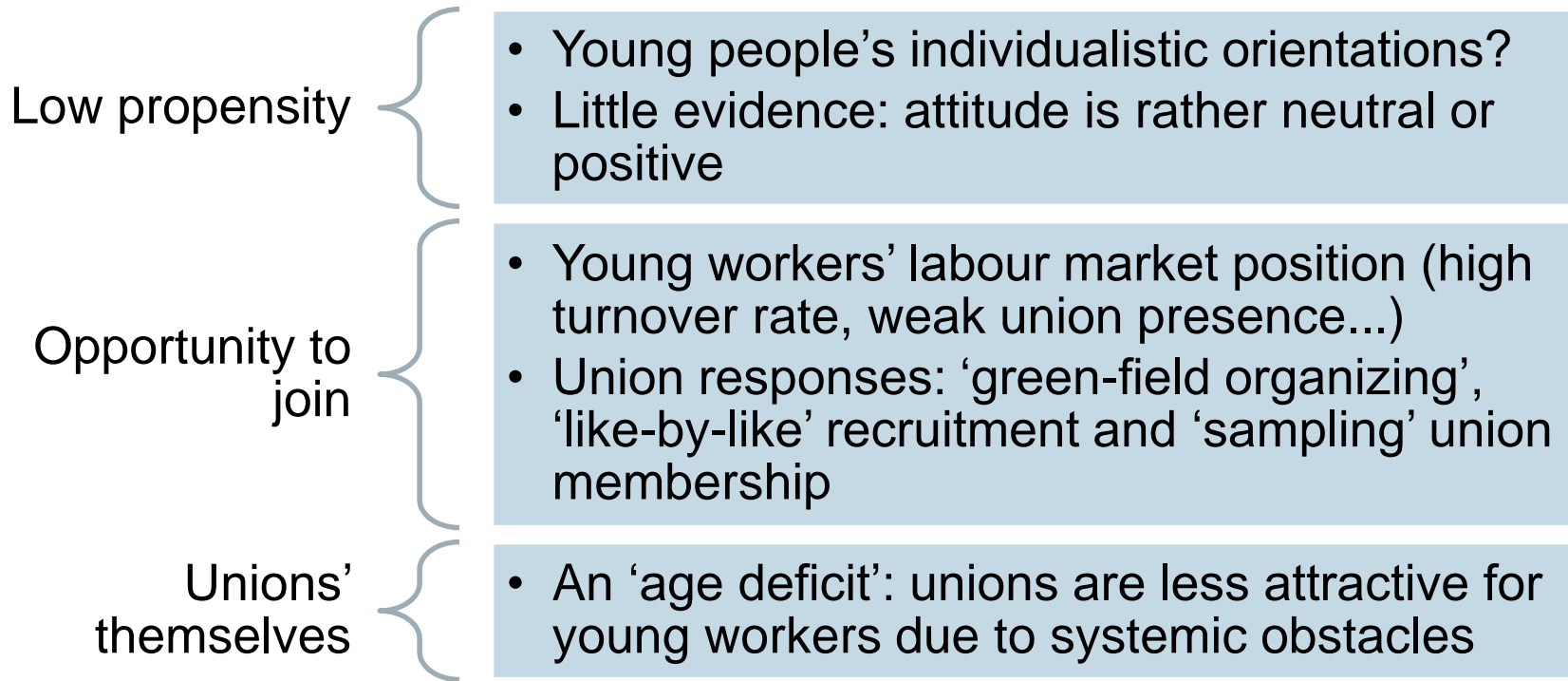
Kurt Vandaele, ETUI, Brussels

European Social Dialogue Academy, Brussels, 23 February 2015

Union revitalisation: young workers in need of unions and young workers being crucial for union revitalisation



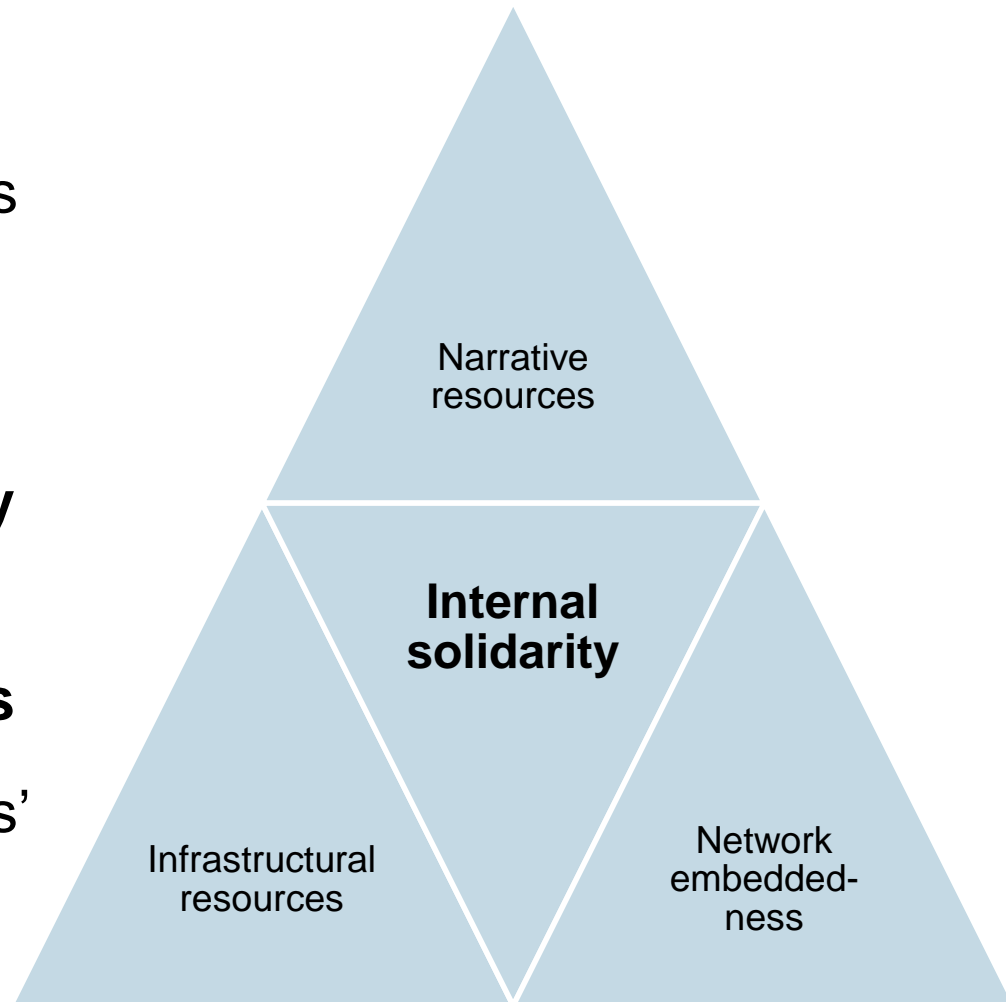
Low youth unionization: little evidence of an inter-generational shift in attitude towards unions



Trade unions' 'deliberative vitality' towards young workers

Union power resources

- = integration and participation of young members in union life and the internal union structures
- Together with collective identities, it underpins one of the power resources available to unions, **namely internal solidarity**
- Focus on **union structures** for promoting and representing young workers' interests and needs



Why need young workers *special treatment* in unions?

- **Distinct constituency?** Young workers have some common employment concerns and needs on the labour market
 - Job insecurity, age discrimination, illegal underpayment...
 - Youth unemployment rate in EU28: 5.101 million young workers or 21.9% (November 2014)
- Young workers face **systematic obstacles** to participation in union democracy and action
 - ('conservative' and 'hierarchical') attitudes, ('paternalistic') culture and 'gerontocratic' tendencies associated with the dominant model of aggregative democracy within unions
 - Stereotyped views of young workers held by older unionists hampering an adequate engagement with their younger co-unionists

An 'age deficit': unions are less attractive for young workers

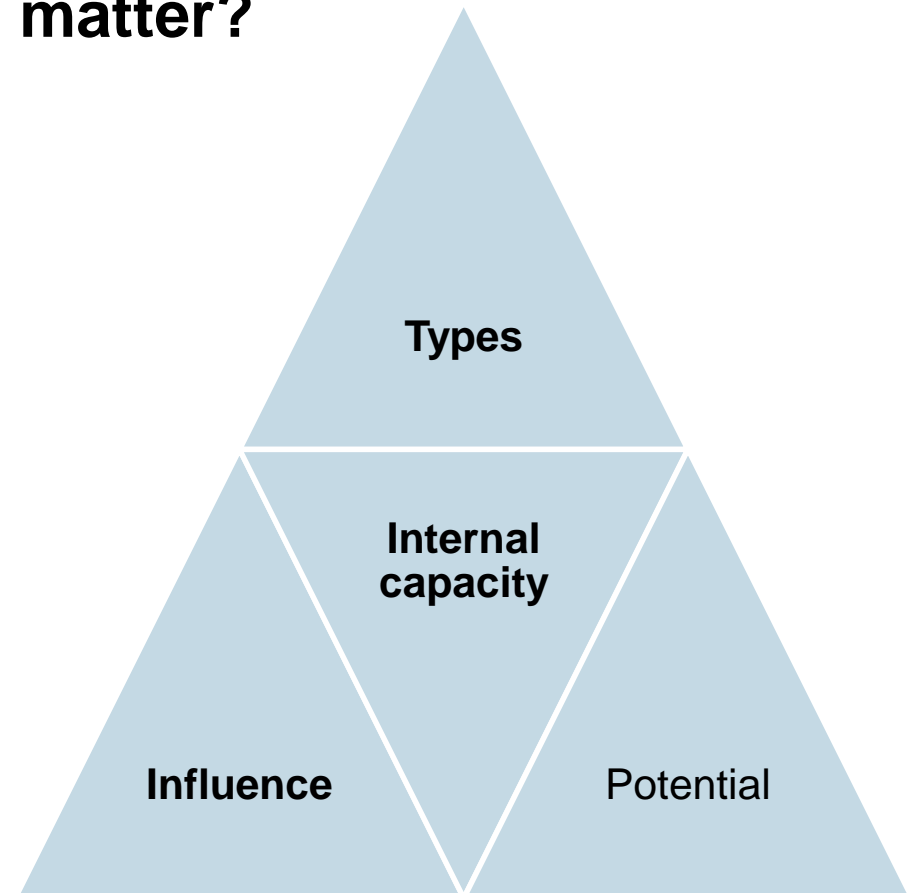
- Australia: Union officials most frequently frame the reasons for youth membership decline in terms of **'the individualistic nature of youth and their high levels of self-belief and "independence"'** (Esders et al. 2011:121)
- Belgium: **Older union activists are often perceived** by their young counterparts as **'paternalistic' and not willing to alter old routines and ideas** (Cultiaux and Vendramin 2011)
- Canada: "It's really great that there are young people on the executive, but **we can't disturb the habits (of the older members) too much** and we have to stay in line" (Laroche and Dufour-Poirier 2012:7)
- UK: "The problem for young workers (...) is not primarily with the trade union agenda, but with the people that deliver it" (Waddington and Kerr 2002:314)
- USA: "The most common tension felt by the young worker side is simply apathy – or **a lack of active engagement** – from many union leaders who may express support for activism as a general concept, but **do not have the time or energy** to invest in it." (Bielski et al. 2013:244)

'Special treatment': youth-only spaces for improving unions' 'deliberative vitality' towards young workers

Organizing spaces for young workers: potential

- Providing fresh energy to the union and a laboratory of innovative ideas and helping unions to experiment with new practices
- Developing a youth-specific knowledge and agenda
- Educating young unionists to better understand the inner workings in union
- Stimulating generational renewal in terms of leadership development
- Bridge between labour movement and potential allies
- Challenging the existing predominantly (paternalistic) union culture
- Transformative potential: promoting a participatory model of union democracy

Do youth-only spaces matter?



Research method: a survey across Europe



Members of youth bodies of 6 ETUFs

- Youth bodies: differences in aims, structures, statutory position and (geographical) membership composition and size
- Members: assumption of educated view



Mixed-mode survey in late 2013, early 2014

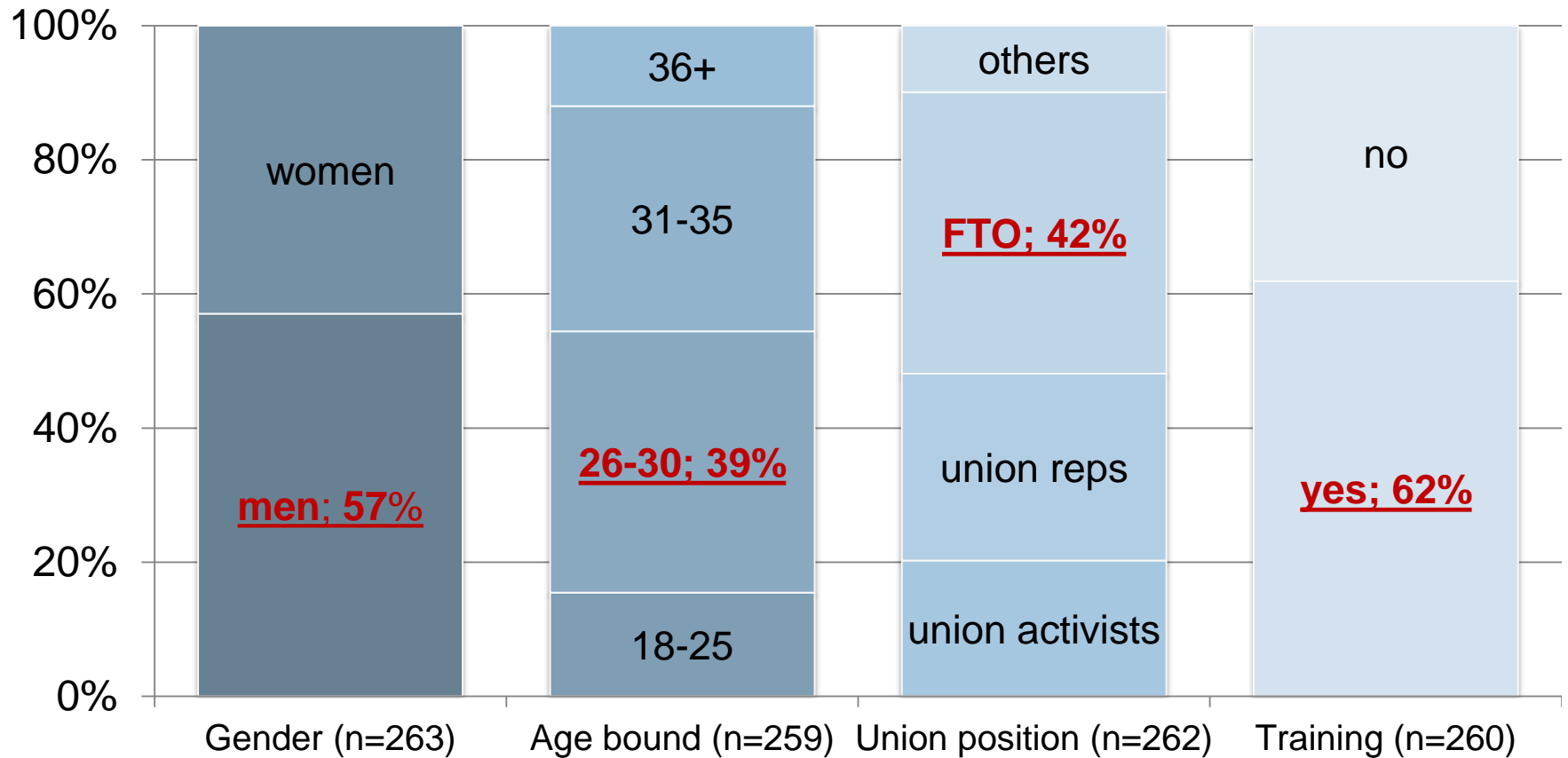
- Web-survey + questionnaire survey at events organized by youth bodies
- n=263; response rate of 34%
- Representative in terms of gender



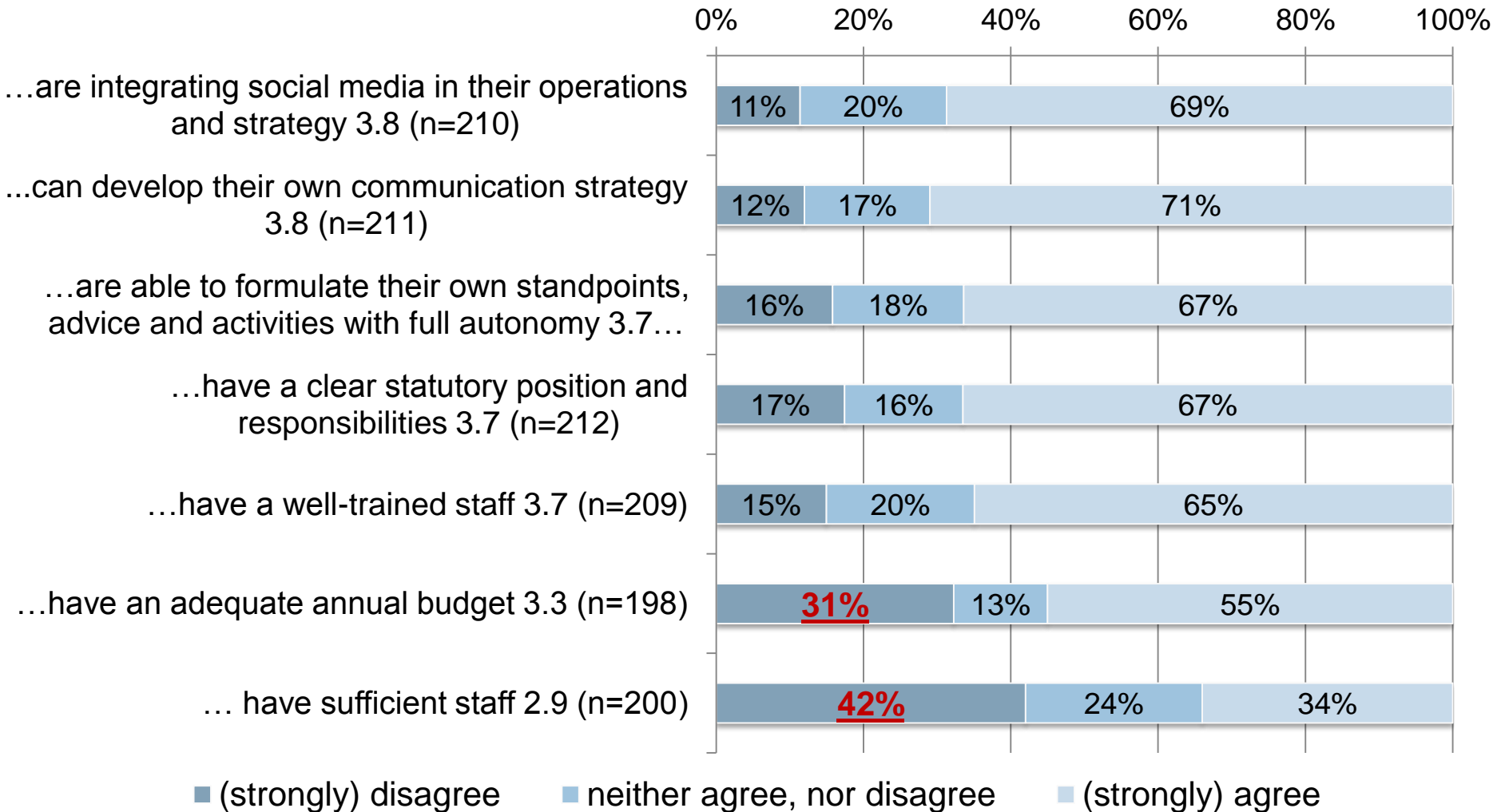
Remarks

- 'Varieties of unionism' across Europe
- Representativeness = ETUFs youth bodies
- Offering insights rather than generalisations

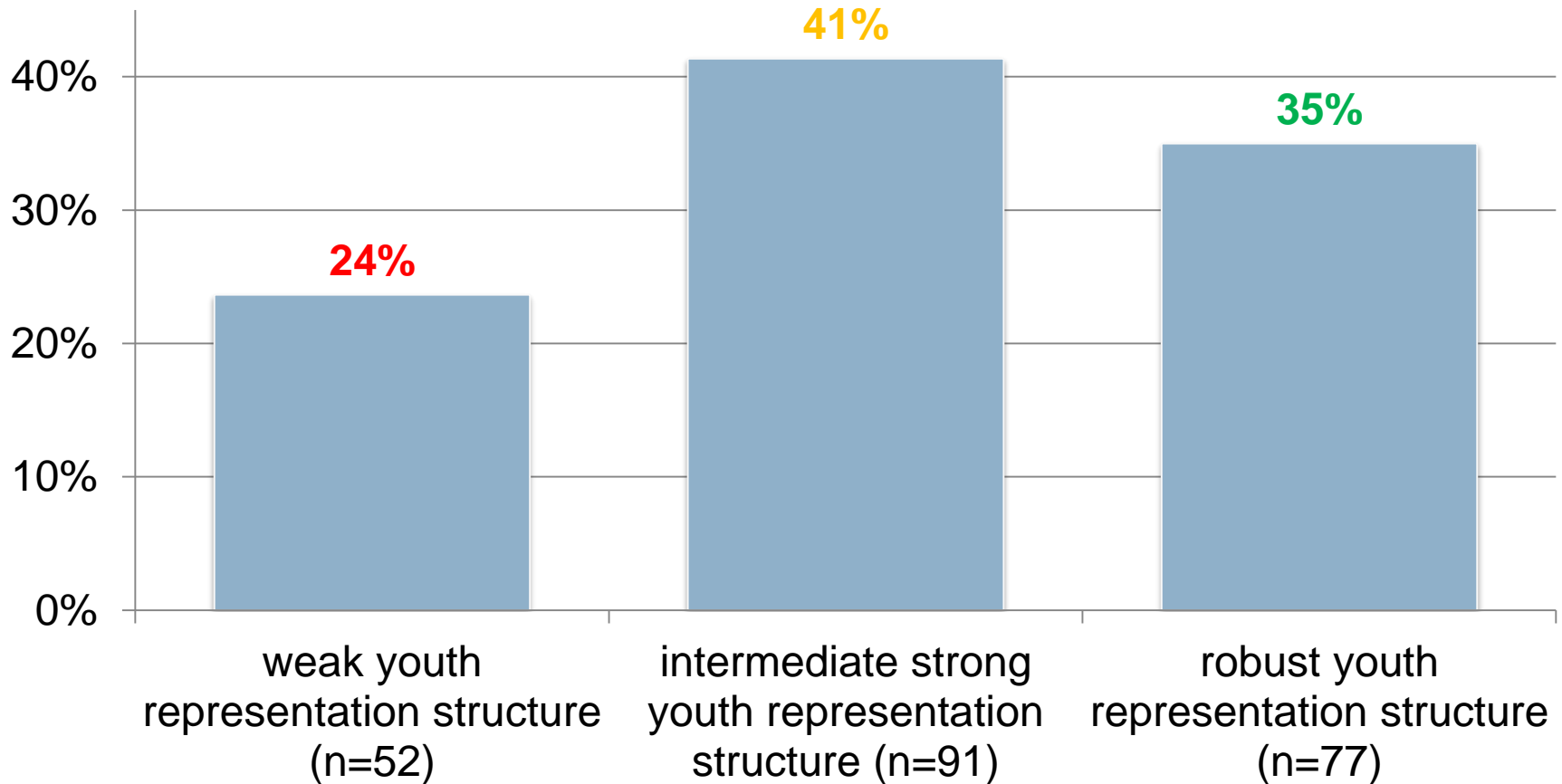
Most respondents are male; aged between 26-30 years; full-time officers; and have received training on youth issues



A low budget and understaffing are the problem of youth representation structures; less their communication power

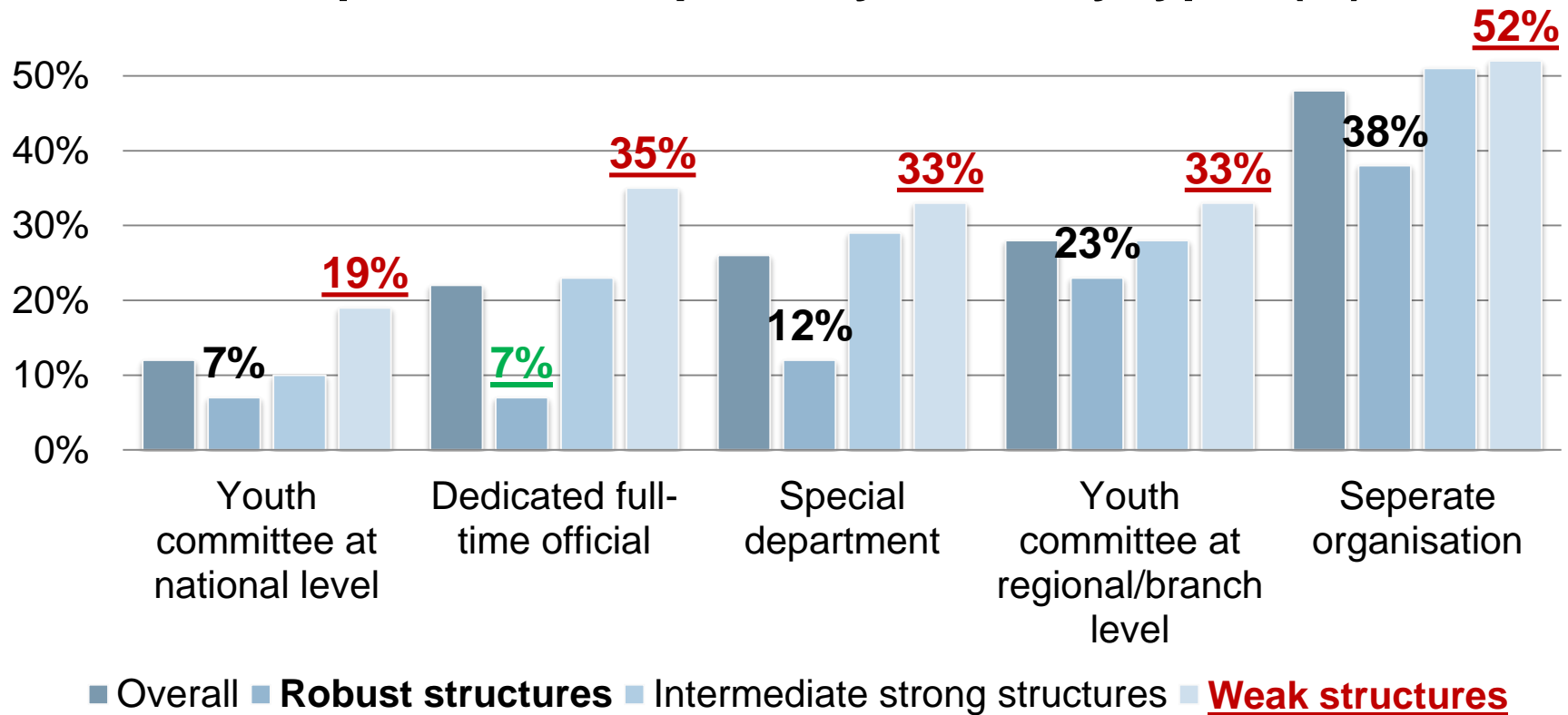


Cluster analysis based on internal capacity: weak, intermediate strong and robust youth structures



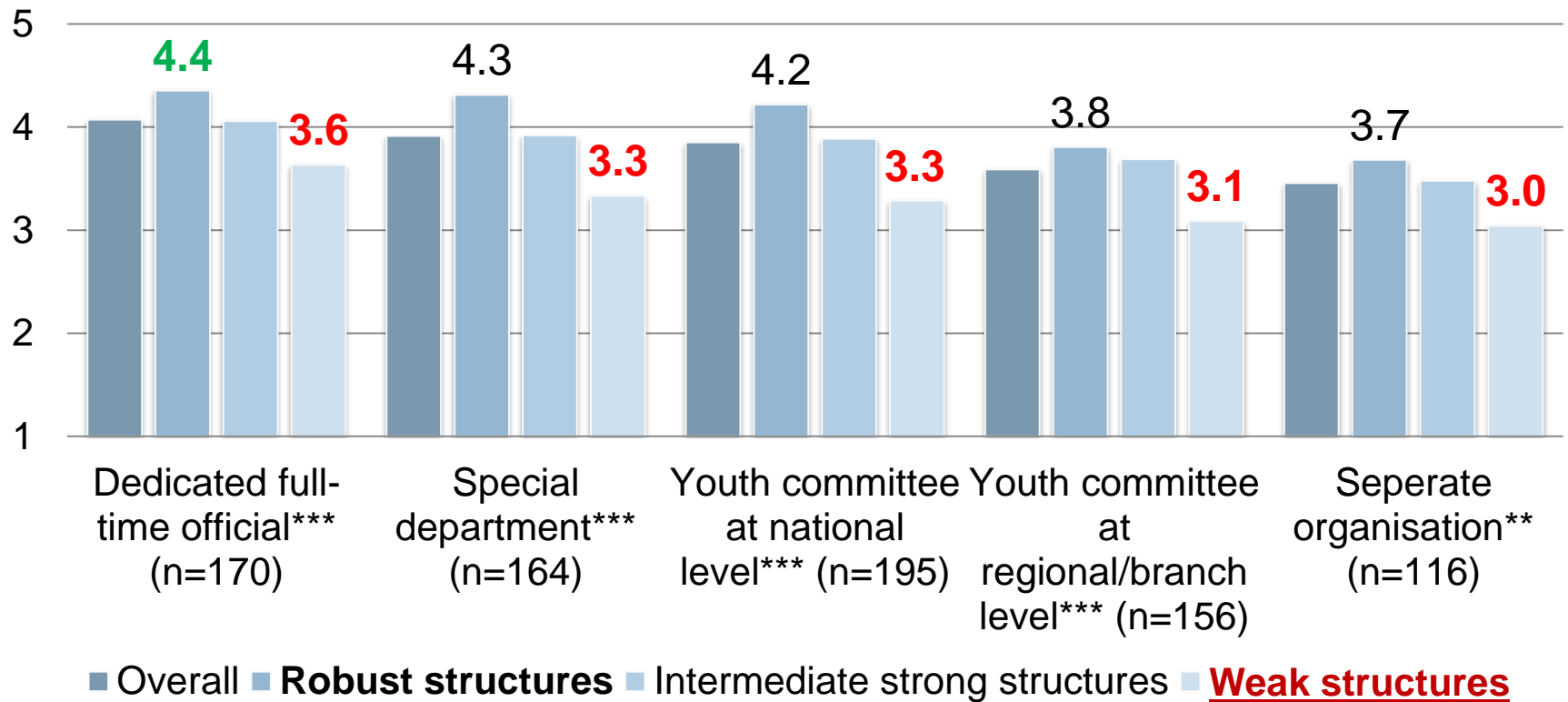
FTO is particularly absent in weak youth structures

Non-presence of specific youth-only types (%)

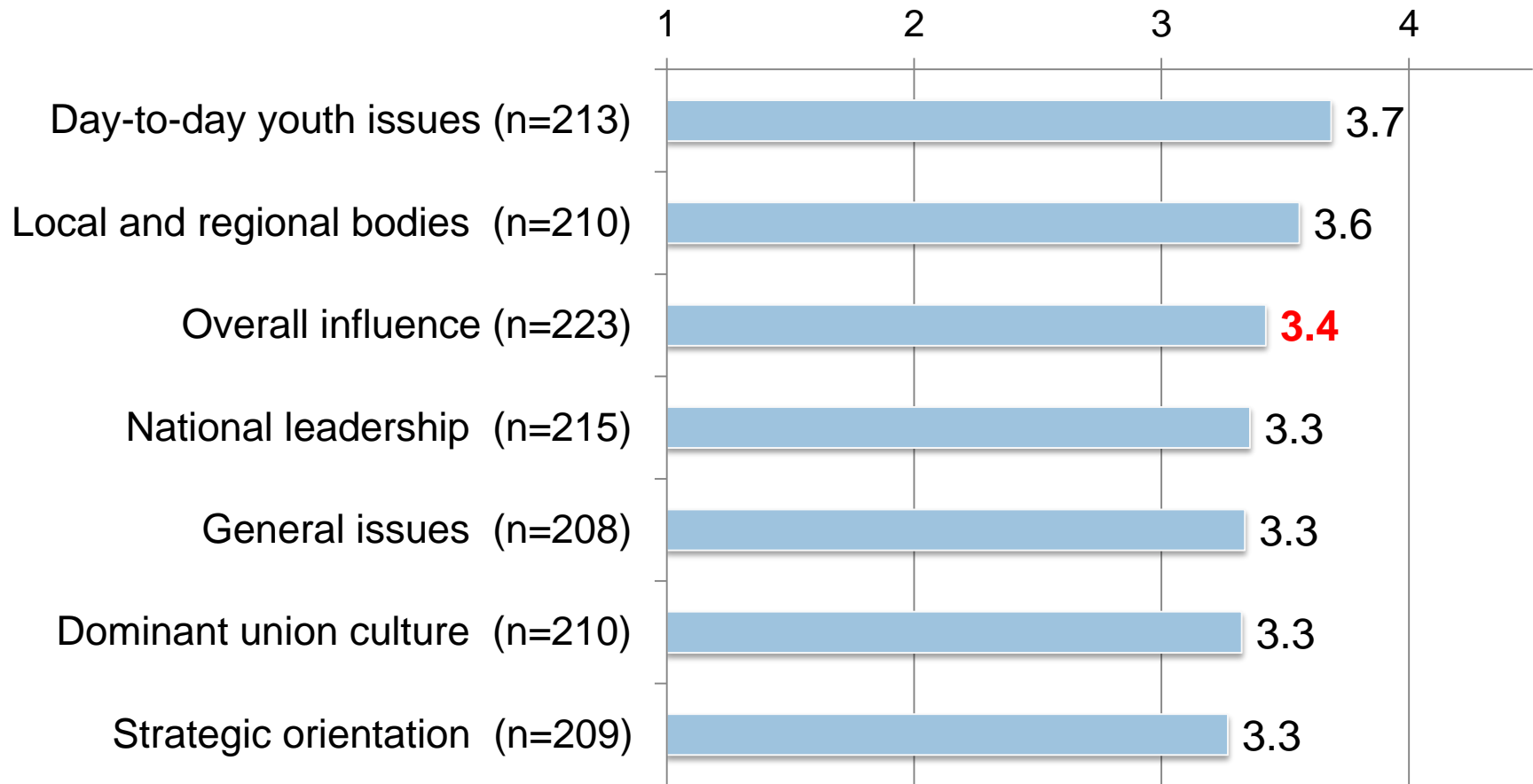


FTO is the most effective type; all types are significantly underperforming within weak youth structures

Effectiveness of various types (mean scores)



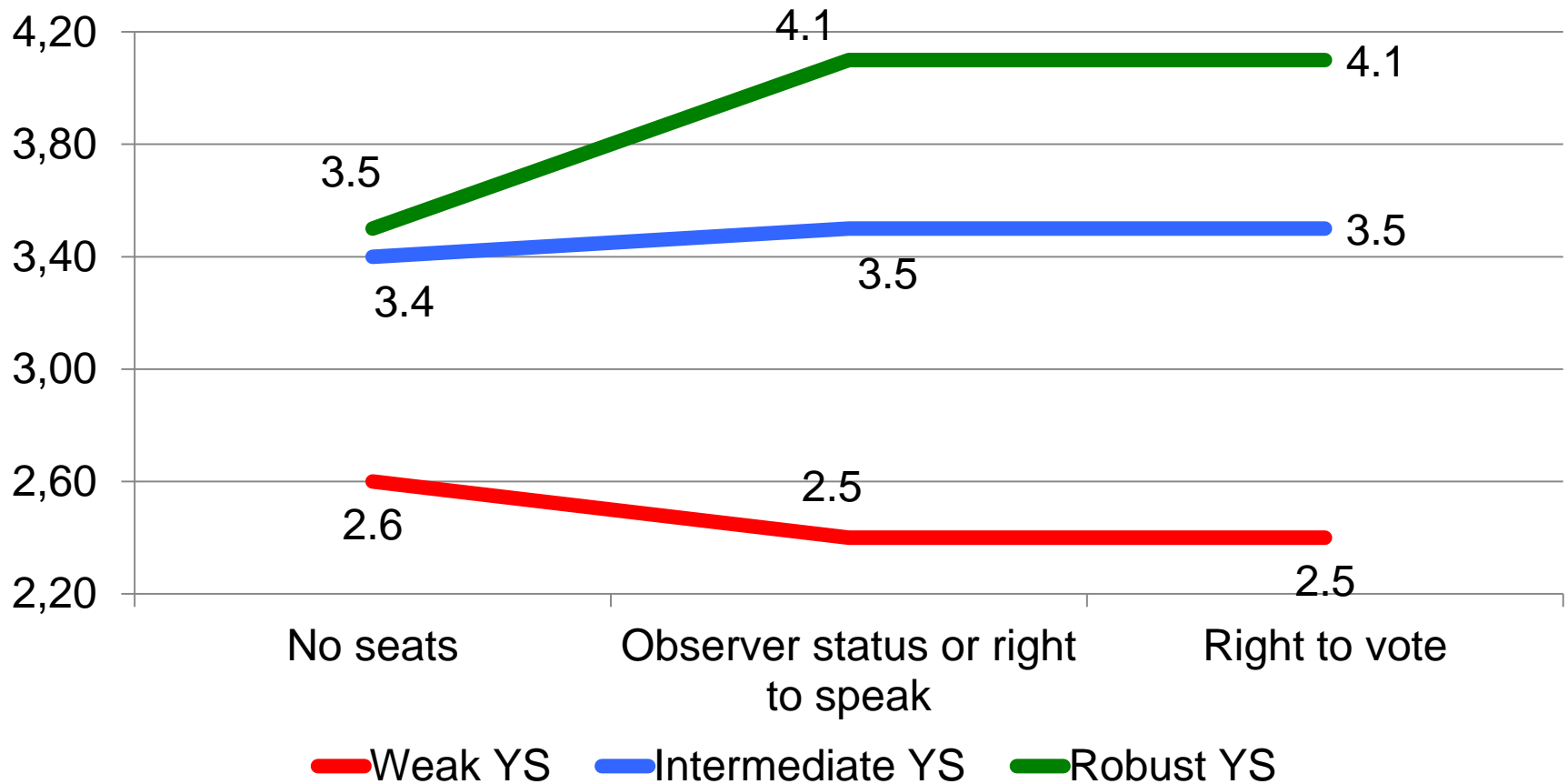
Youth structures' influence is more outspoken on decision-making on day-to-day youth issues and within local and regional bodies (mean scores)



Youth committees and formal networks are perceived as influential in strong youth structures

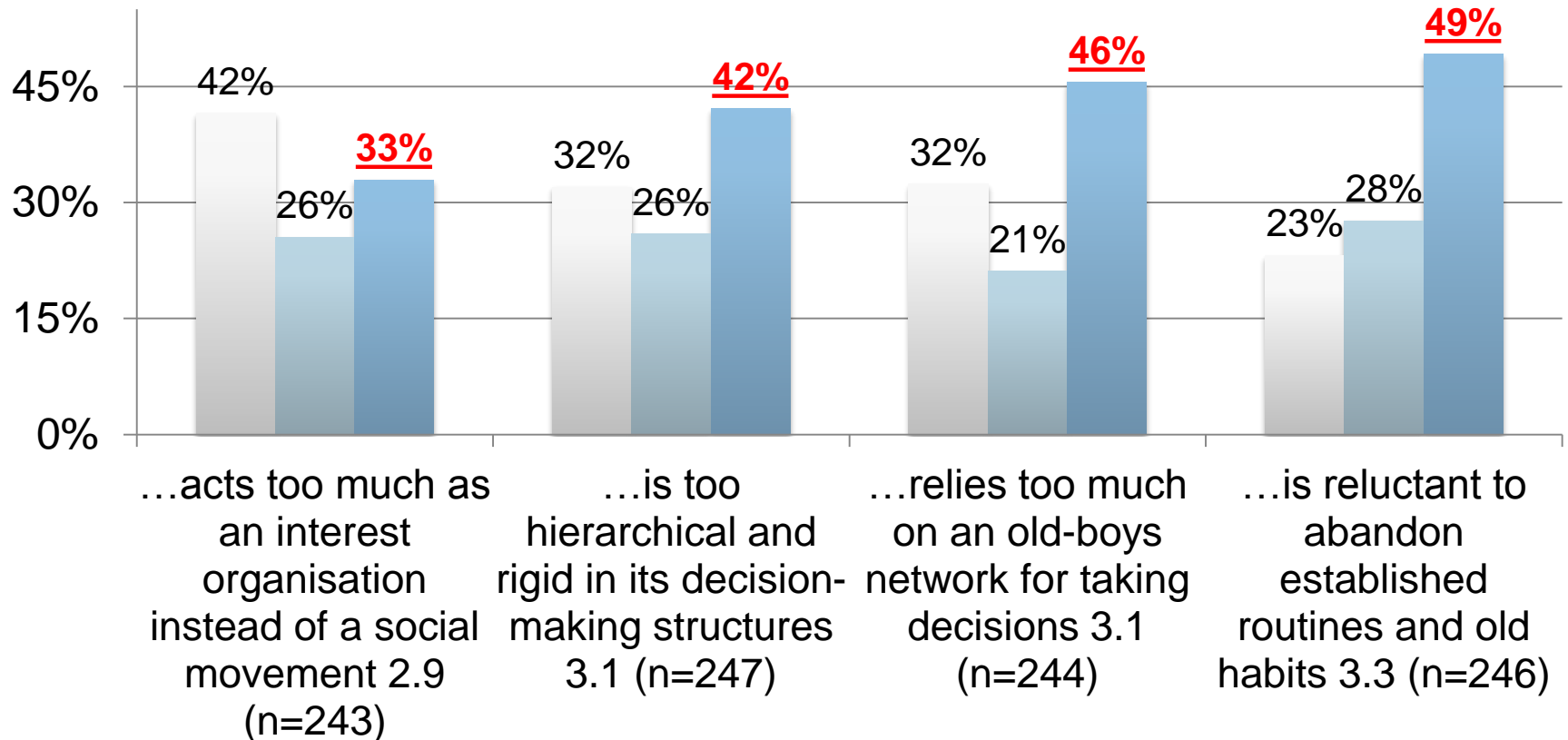
Youth-only type	Type		
	Weak	Intermediate	Robust
Youth committee at national level	0.21	0.35***	0.25**
Special department	0.28	0.27**	0.14
Formal network	-0.05	0.27**	0.25**
Dedicated FTO	-0.15	0.22*	0.22*
Youth committee at branch/regional level	0.20	0.22*	0.07
Separate organization	0.03	0.26*	0.13
Virtual network	0.20	0.15	0.03
Informal network	0.19	0.11	0.14

The influence of the executive status of young workers is dependent on the internal capacity of the youth structure



Unions' decision-making culture is marked by an 'age deficit': my union...

(strongly) disagree
 neither agree, nor disagree
 (strongly) agree



Factors influencing respondents' opinions about YS' influence...

- Decision-making culture marked by an 'age deficit' (i.e. less 'critical mass')**

- Training** (compared to *no* training)

- Unions in Nordic countries** (compared to unions in CEE-countries)

- **Intermediate strong and robust YS***** (compared to weak YS)

- Interaction effect: **right to vote in executive committee and robust YS**** (+ right to speak or observer status and robust YS*)



- Creating specific youth-only types is not enough
 - ▶ Only intermediate and robust spaces are influential
 - ▶ Shift of resources is needed in case of 'cosmetic' spaces
- Importance of educational and awareness-raising activities and mentoring programs
 - ▶ Reducing risk of self-fulfilling prophecy?
 - ▶ Trained respondents are more positive about the capacity and influence of YS



"OK, all those in favour of delegating decision-making, shrug your shoulders"

- Dedicated FTO = young workers are taken seriously
- Reserved seats in executive committee, regardless of the status, is most effective within robust YS
- Influence 'critical mass': unions less hierarchical and rigid?



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The executive committee status is not dependent on the youth structures' internal capacity

YS' internal capacity	Executive committee status		
	No seats	Observer or right to speak	Right to vote
Weak (n=46)	35%	26%	39%
Intermediate (n=83)	24%	27%	49%
Robust (n=68)	19%	19%	62%
Total (n=197)	25%	24%	51%

Respondents from unions with an increase in the share of young workers think more positive about the union's decision-making culture

