

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

Kurt Vandaele, ETUI, Brussels

Youth and Trade Unions: Is this Relationship Possible? Final conference of the European Project YOUnion – Union for Youth, Brussels, 12 December 2014

etui.

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

Low propensity

- Young people's individualistic orientations?
- Little evidence: attitude is rather neutral or positive

Opportunity to join

- Young workers' labour market position (high turnover rate, weak union presence...)
- Union responses: 'green-field organizing', 'like-by-like' recruitment and 'sampling' union membership

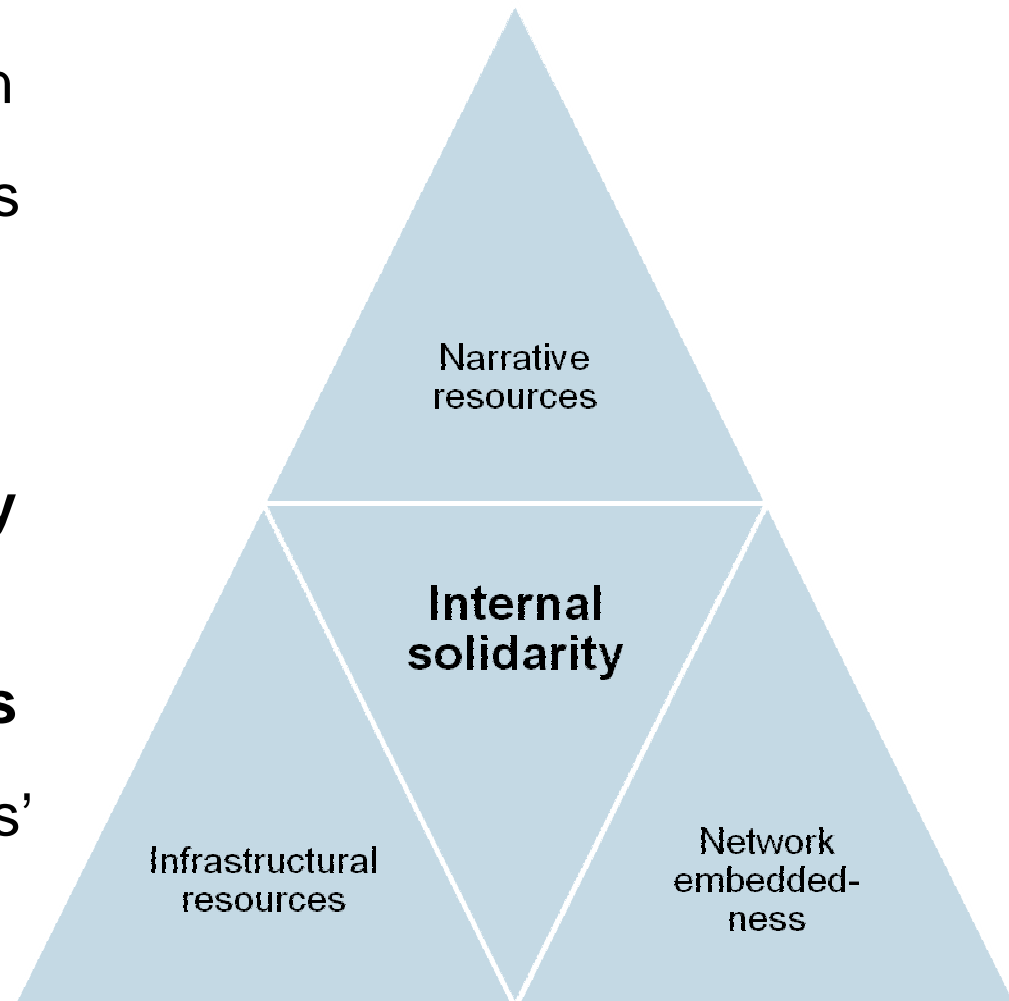
Unions' themselves

- An 'age deficit': unions are less attractive for young workers due to systemic obstacles

Trade unions' 'deliberative vitality' towards young workers

- = integration and participation of young union 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 **youth structures** for promoting and representing young workers' interests and needs

Union power resources



Why need young workers *special treatment* in unions?

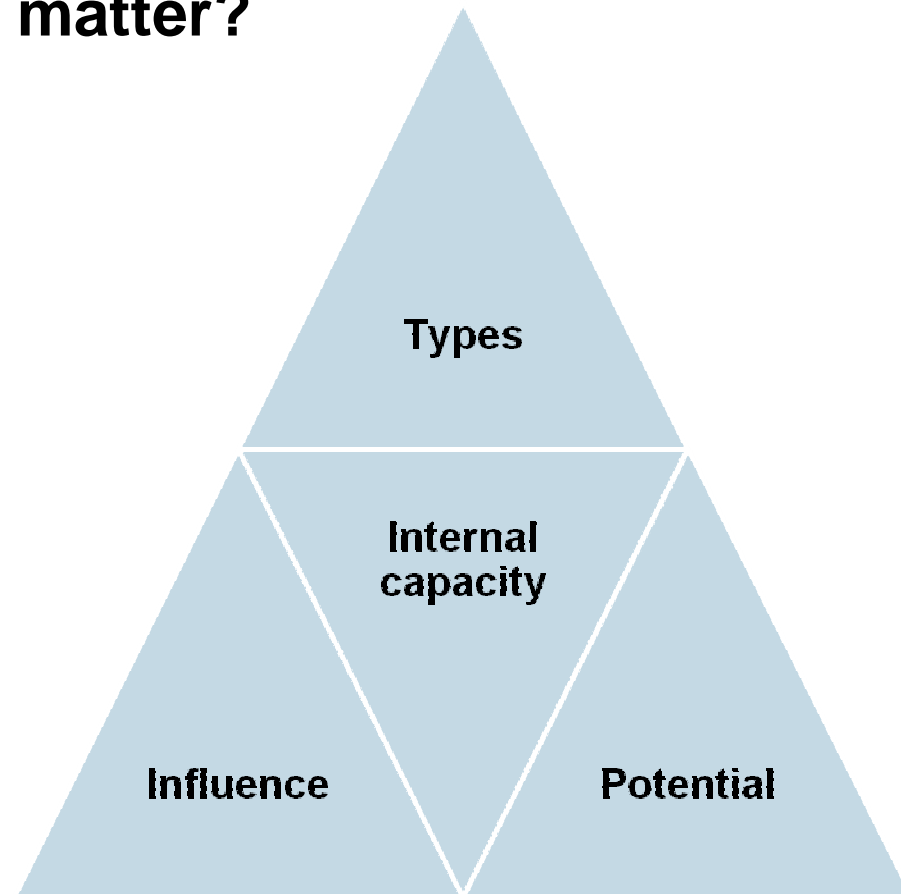
- **Distinct constituency?** Young workers have some common employment concerns and needs on the labour market
 - Job insecurity, age discrimination, illegal underpayment...
 - Youth unemployment rate in EU28: 4.983 million young workers or 21.6% (October 2014)
- Young workers face **systematic obstacles** 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

'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 and networks of 6 ETUFs

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



Mixed-mode survey in late 2013, early 2014

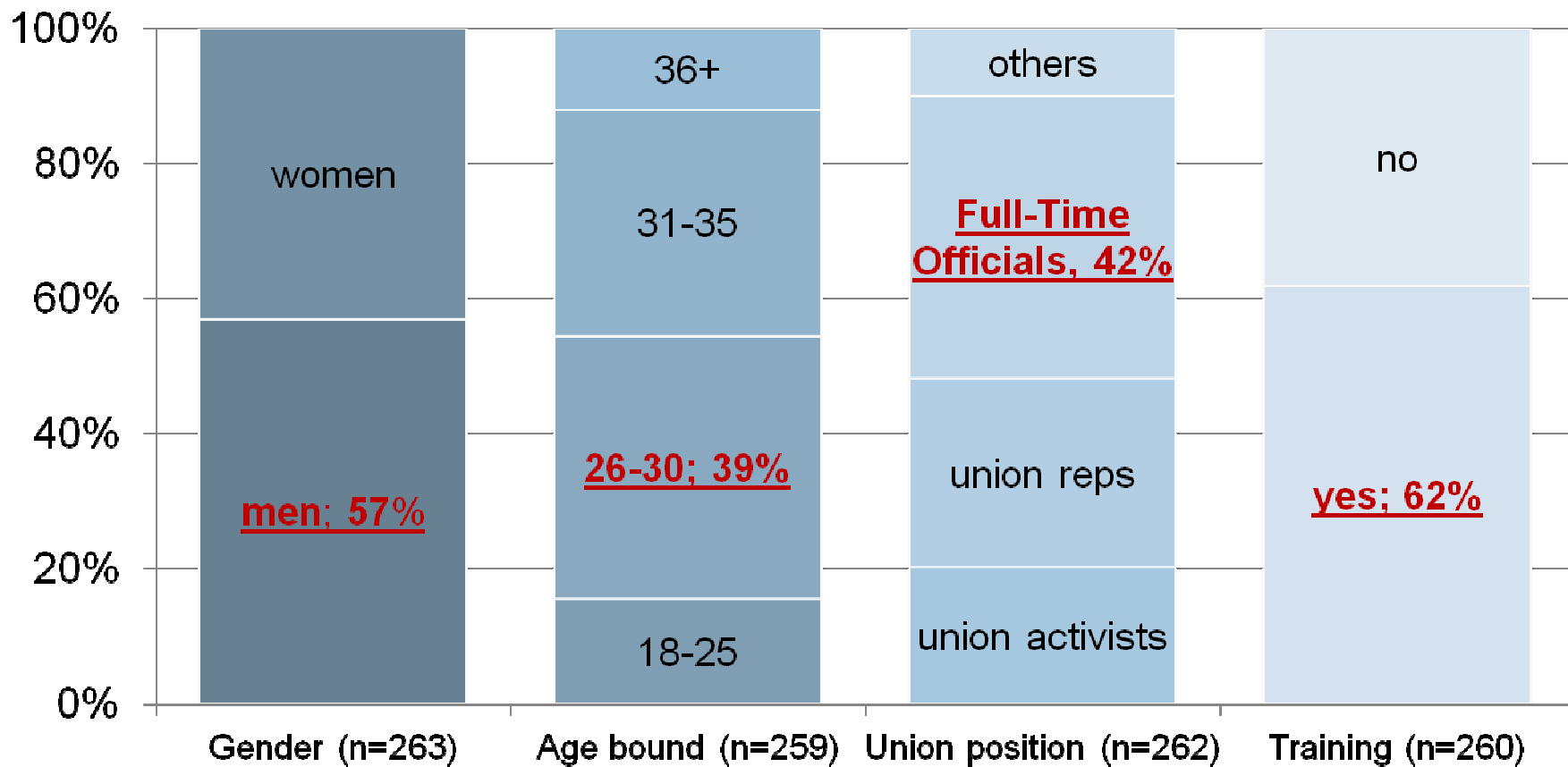
- Web-survey + questionnaire survey at events organized by youth bodies
- n=263; response rate of 34%
- Representative in terms of gender



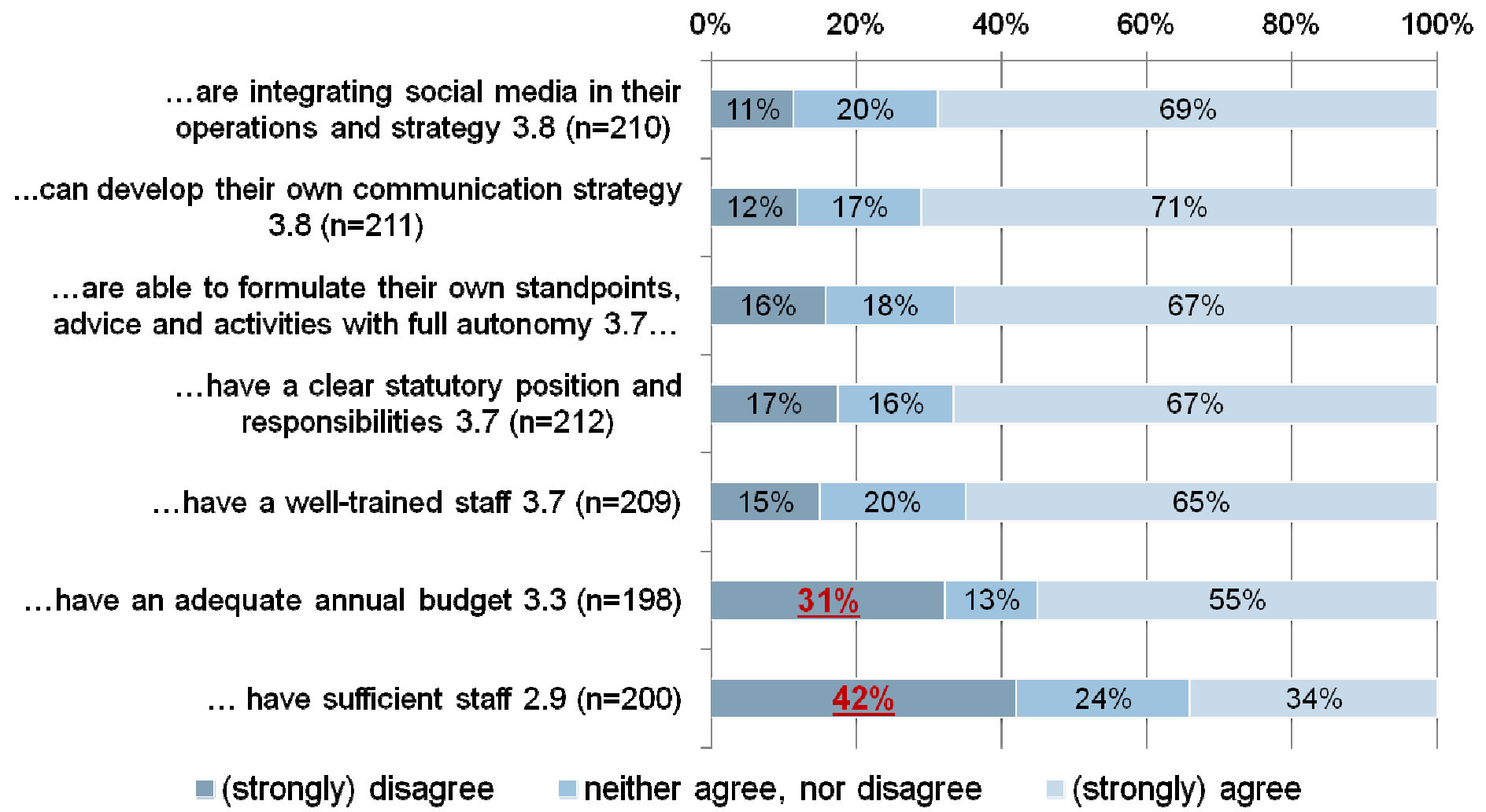
Remarks

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

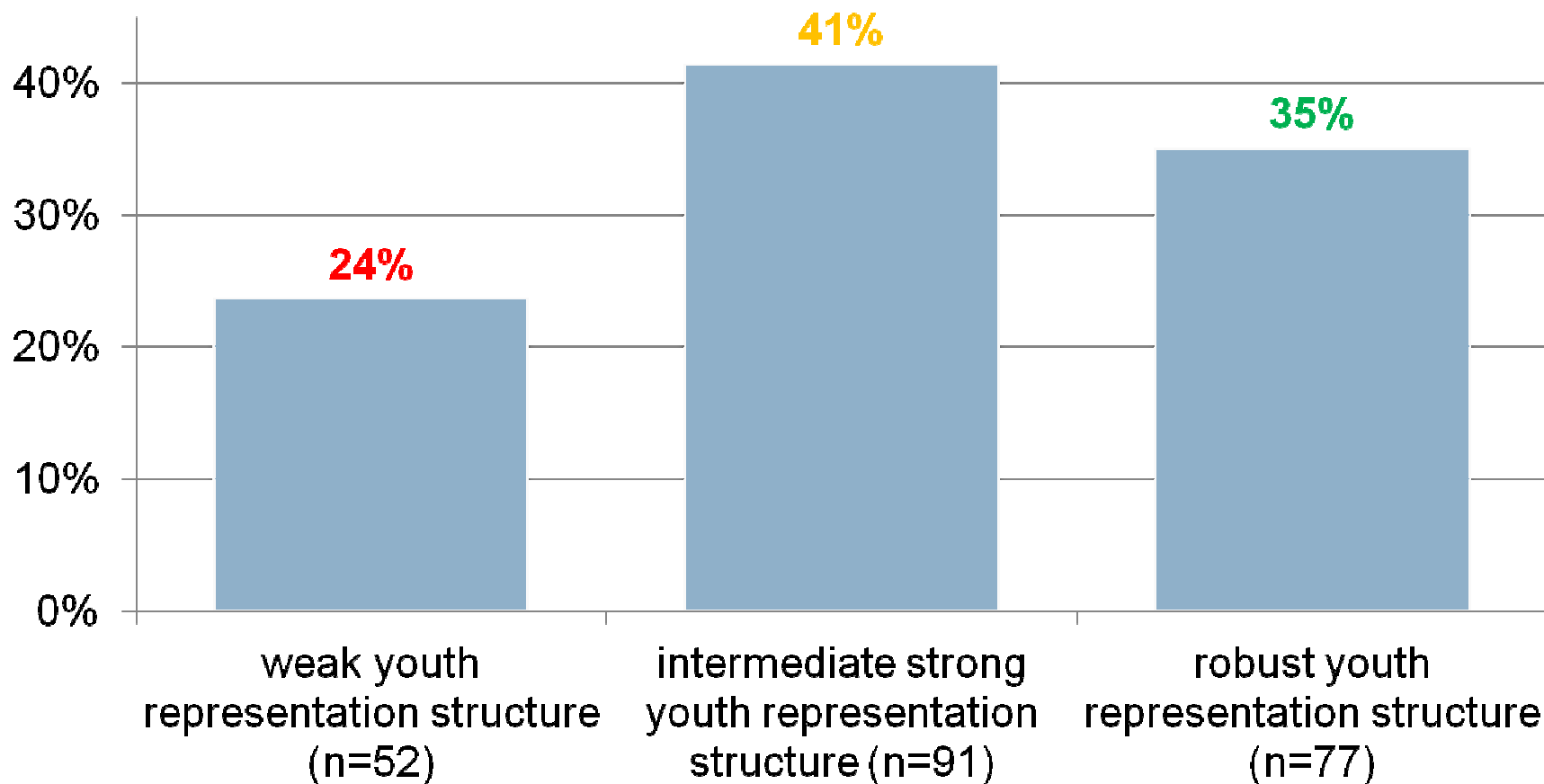
Most respondents are male; aged between 26-30 years; full-time officers; and have received training on youth issues



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

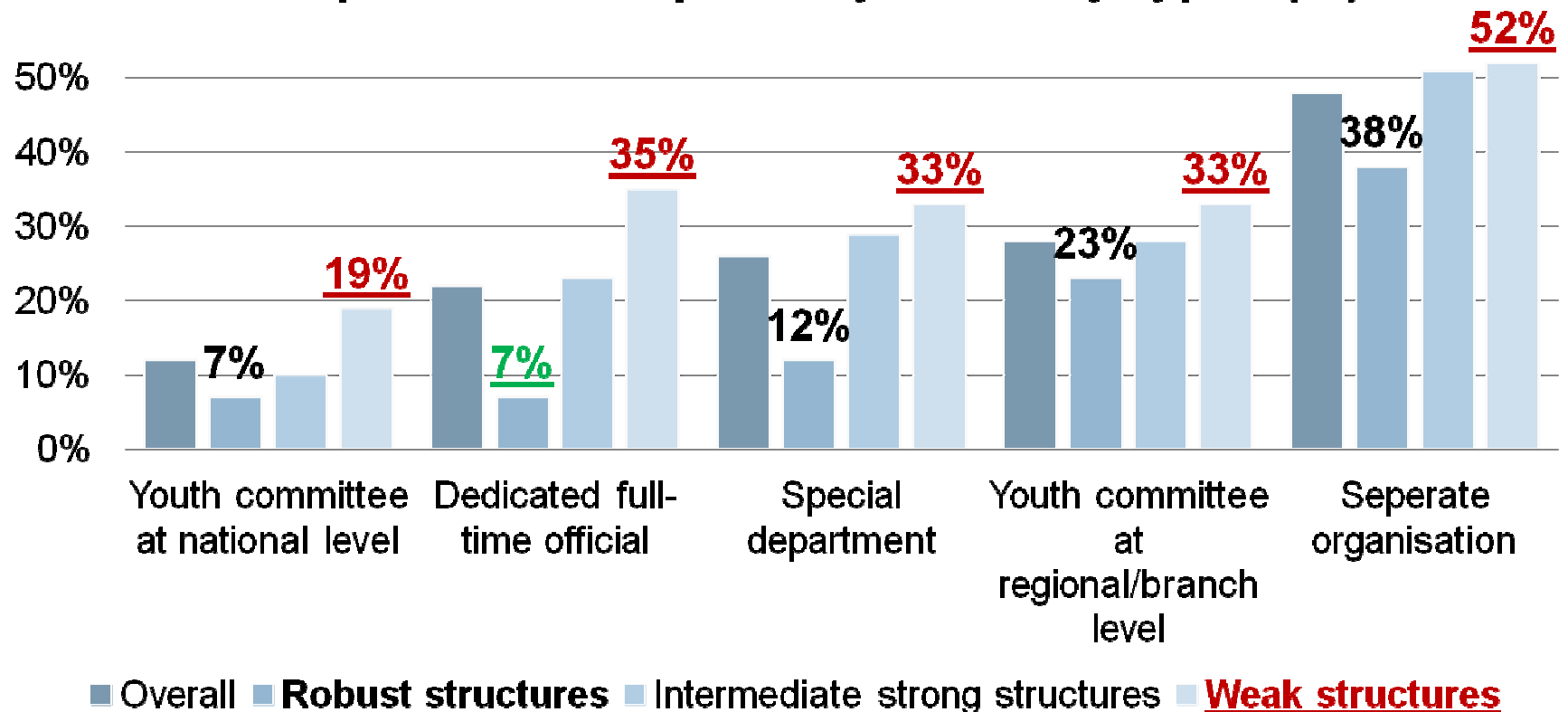


Cluster analysis based on internal capacity: weak, intermediate strong and robust youth structures



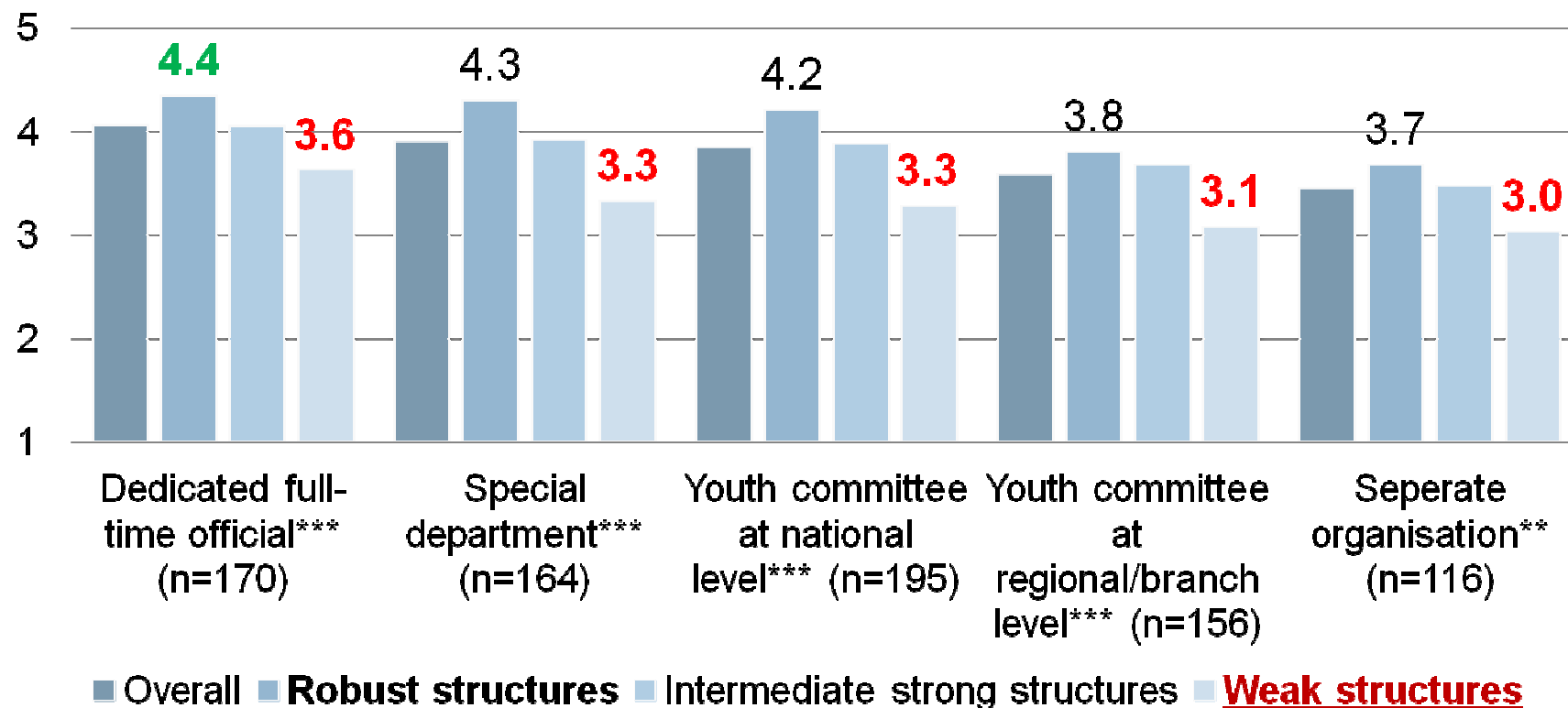
FTO is particularly absent in weak youth structures

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

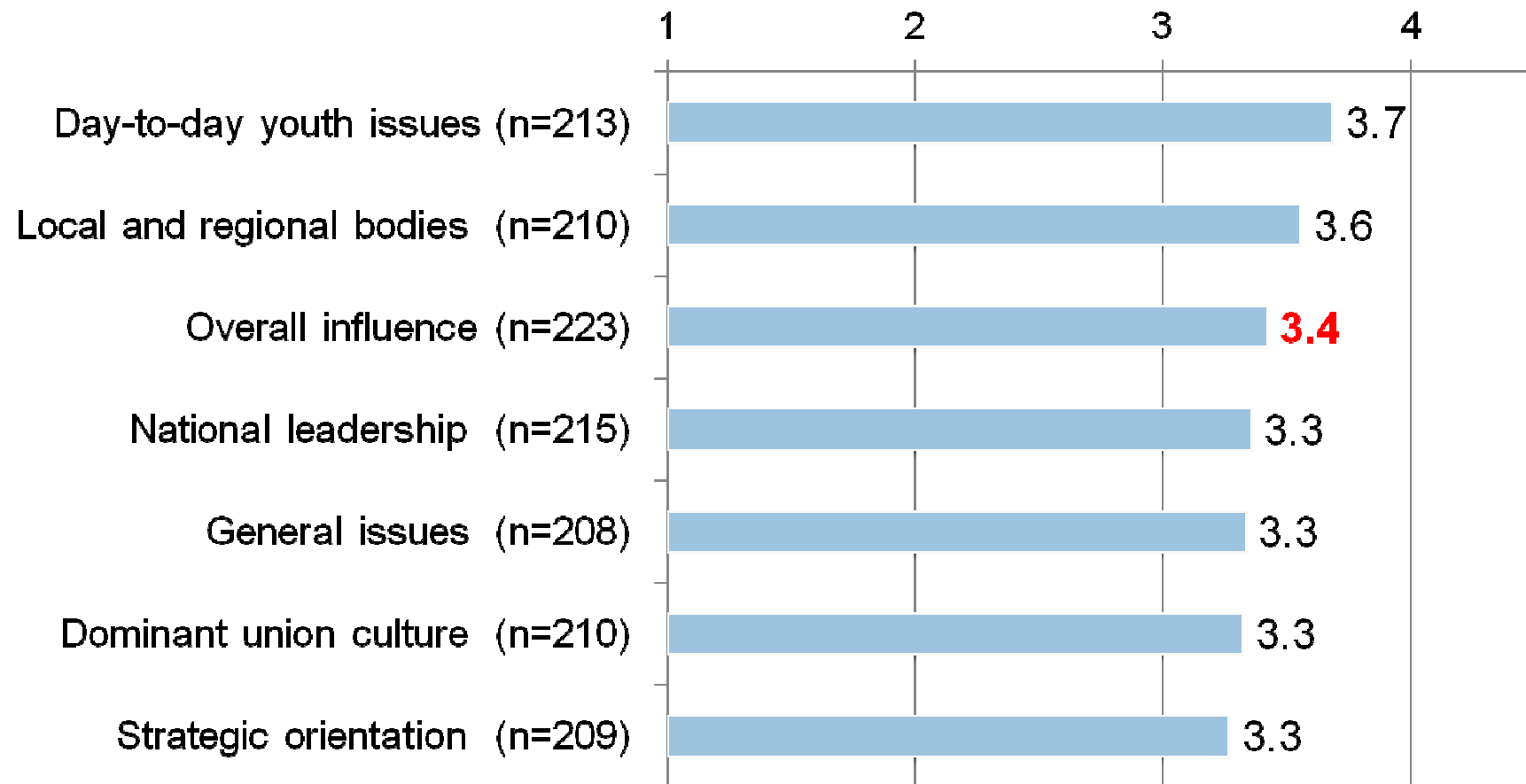


FTO is the most effective type; all types are significantly underperforming within weak youth structures

Effectiveness of various types (mean scores)



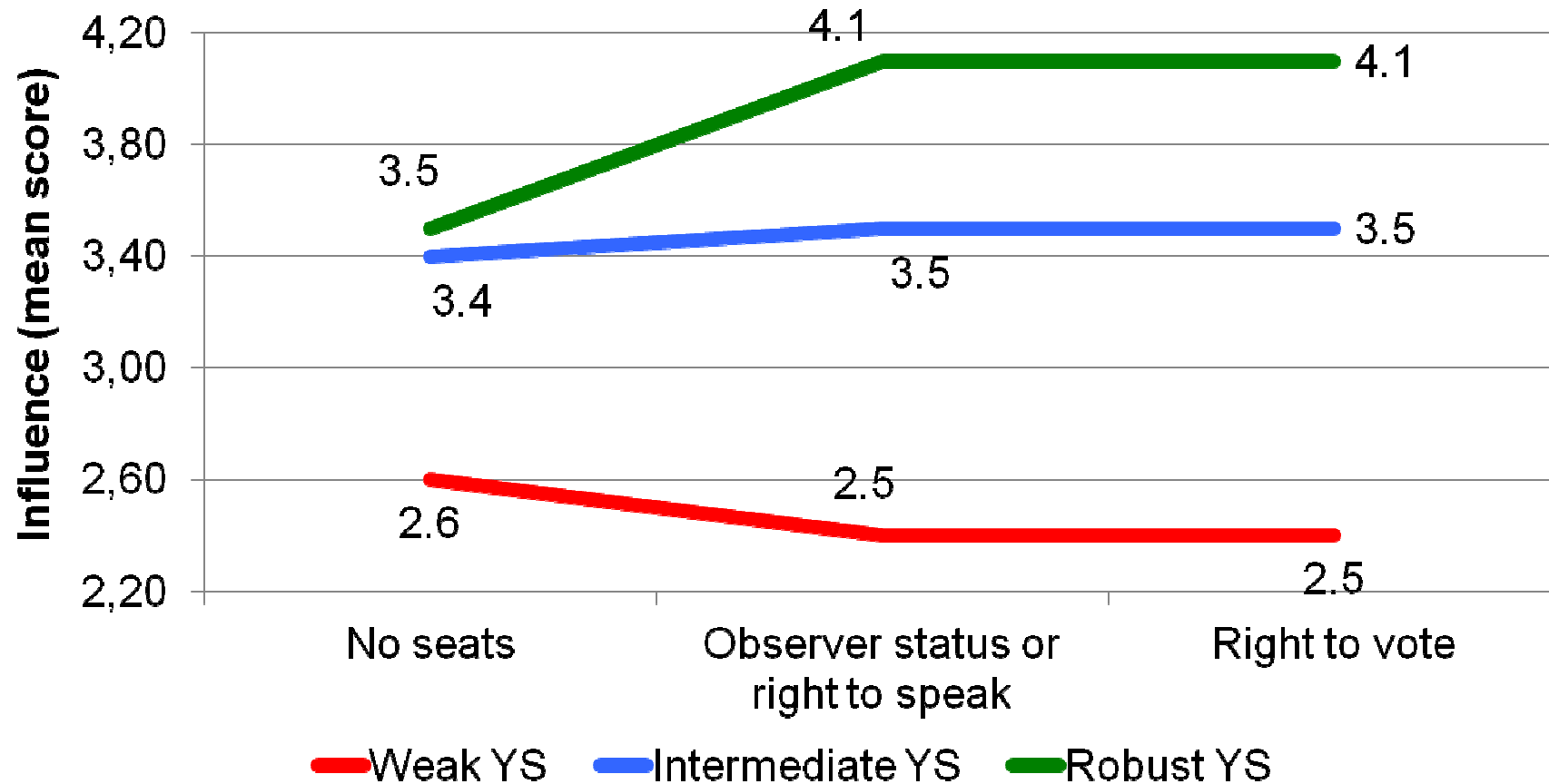
Youth structures' influence is more outspoken on decision-making on day-to-day youth issues and within local and regional bodies (mean scores)



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

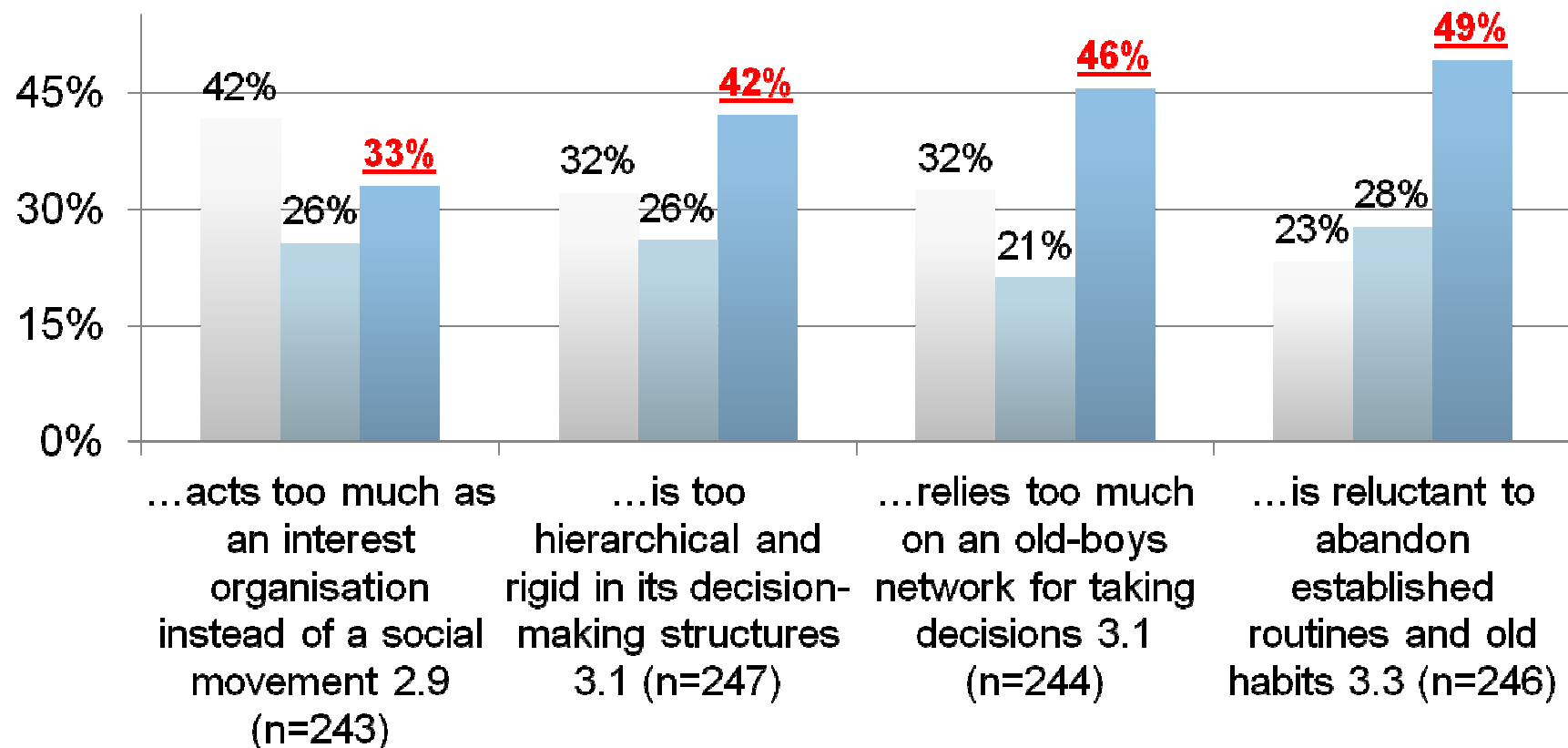
Youth-only type	Internal capacity		
	Weak	Intermediate	Robust
Youth committee at national level	0.21	0.35***	0.25**
Special department	0.28	0.27**	0.14
Formal network	-0.05	0.27**	0.25**
Dedicated FTO	-0.15	0.22*	0.22*
Youth committee at branch/regional level	0.20	0.22*	0.07
Separate organization	0.03	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' of young unionists)**

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

- Unions in Nordic countries** (compared to unions in continental Europe)

- **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*)

© Original Artist
Reproduction rights obtainable from
www.CartoonStock.com



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

- Only intermediate and robust youth structures, marked by sufficient infrastructural resources and communicative power are influential
- Youth-only types: youth committees, formal networks and FTO are perceived as effective and influential
- FTO = young workers are taken seriously
- Reserved seats in executive committee is most effective with voting rights and intermediate and robust youth structures



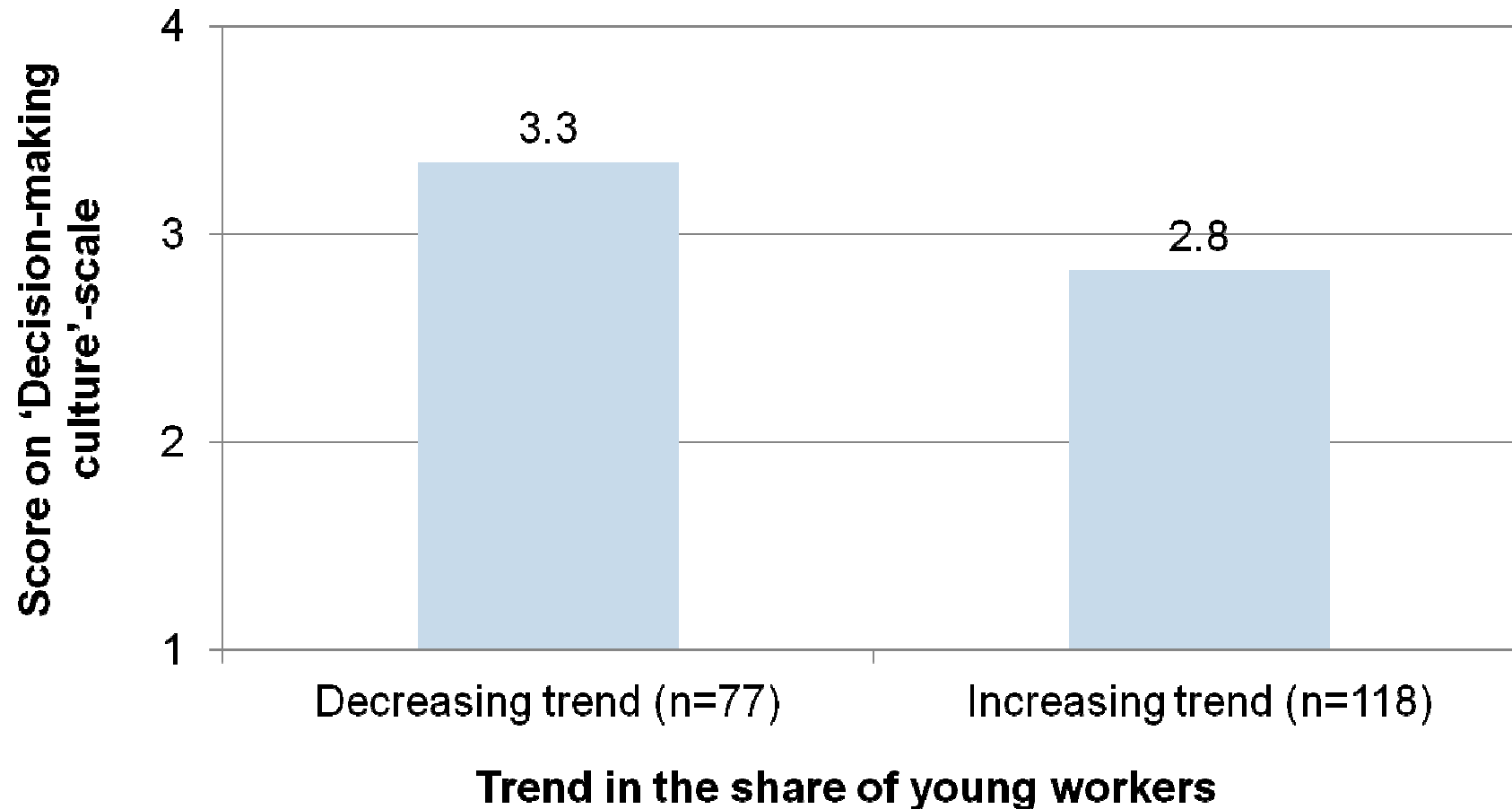
- Creating specific youth-only types is not enough: a shift of resources is needed in case of 'cosmetic' spaces
- Importance of educational and awareness-raising activities – trained respondents are more positive about the capacity of the YS
- Influence 'critical mass': unions less hierarchical and rigid?
- Rethinking of priorities and shift in resources



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



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

