

Why Participate? Youth, Politics and the Future of European Democracy



„EUYOUPART: Political Participation of Young People in Europe“

- 2003 - 2005
- Funded by the EU & national sources
- Managed by SORA (administrative & scientific coordination)
- 9 partners in 8 countries: Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, UK.
- Goal: to develop a high-quality measurement instrument that grasps political participation behavior of young people in the EU

www.sora.at/EUYOUPART

The research consortium of EUYOUPART

- SORA – Institute for Social Research and Analysis/ Austria
- ÖIJ – Austrian Institute for Youth Research/ Austria
- IISS - Institute of International and Social Studies at Tallinn Pedagogical University/ Estonia
- FYRN – Finnish Youth Research Network/ Finland
- FNSP – Fondation National des Sciences Politiques/ France
- DJI – German Youth Institute/ Germany
- Fondazione IARD/ Italy
- Centre for European and Regional Youth Studies at the University of St. Cyril and Method/ Slovakia
- The European Research Institute at the University of Birmingham/ UK

A general picture of the sample

- 8 countries
- 8.030 young people, 15-25 years old
- face-to-face survey

- 53% in educational system, 34% in paid work, 7% unemployed
- 69% still live with their parents, 11% with a partner
- 13% consider to have a low standard of living, 63% an average one, 23% a high one
- 68% live in an urban area, 32% in a rural area

Challenges for comparative research

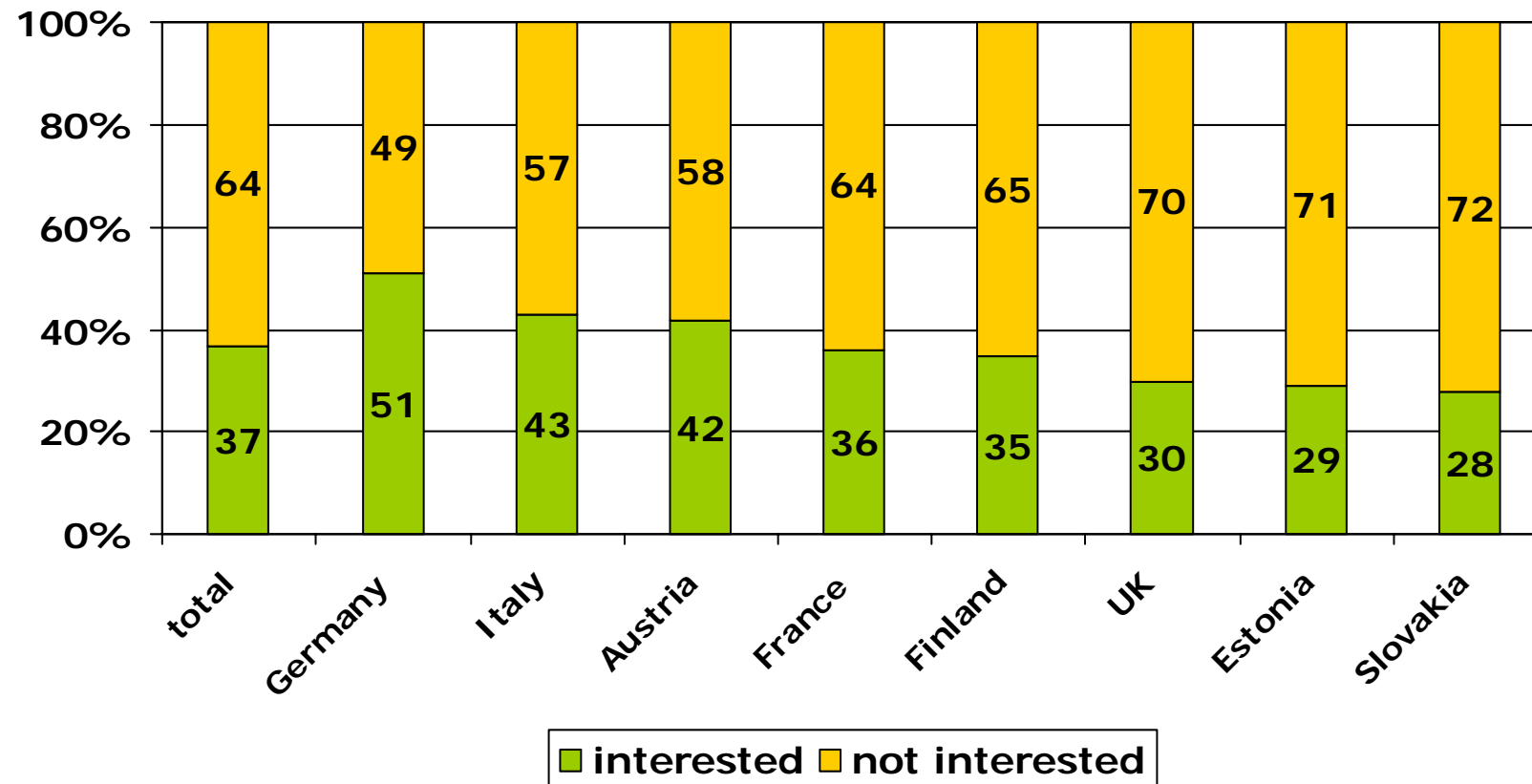
1. Different political cultures: Doing the same does not mean the same
2. Different opportunity structures
3. Translation: not same words but same meaning
4. Different survey cultures

Future Expectations: Optimists & pessimists in the EU

Youth in...	Income, Job & Social Security
Estonia	The enthusiasts: Everything will be MUCH better
Slovakia, Finland, UK	The optimists: There is reason for hope
France	Income & jobs will be fine – but social security goes down the drain
Italy	Polarized youth: about 20% skeptics
Austria & Germany	The pessimists: There is (too) much to lose

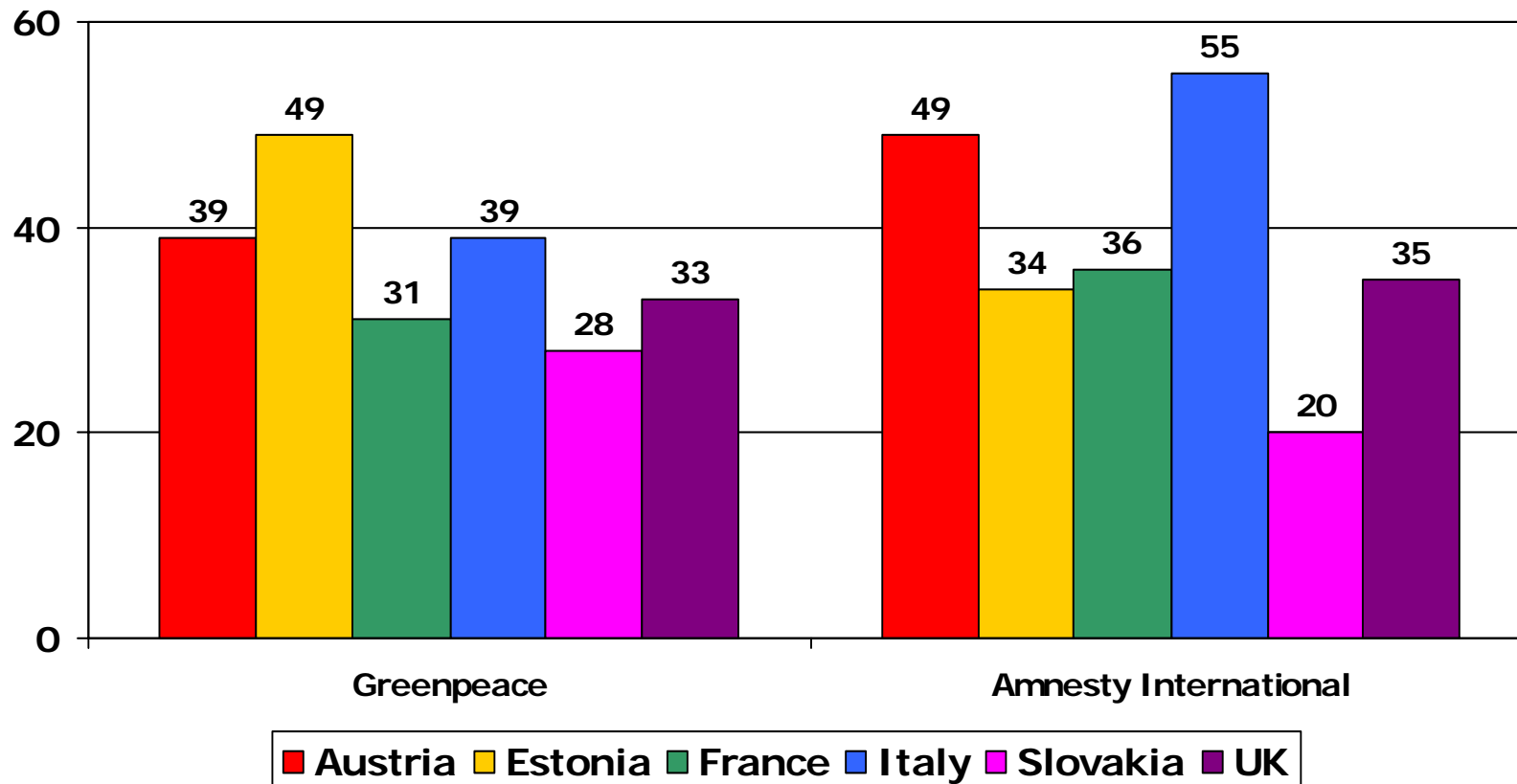
What do they think about politics?

Interest in politics varies greatly

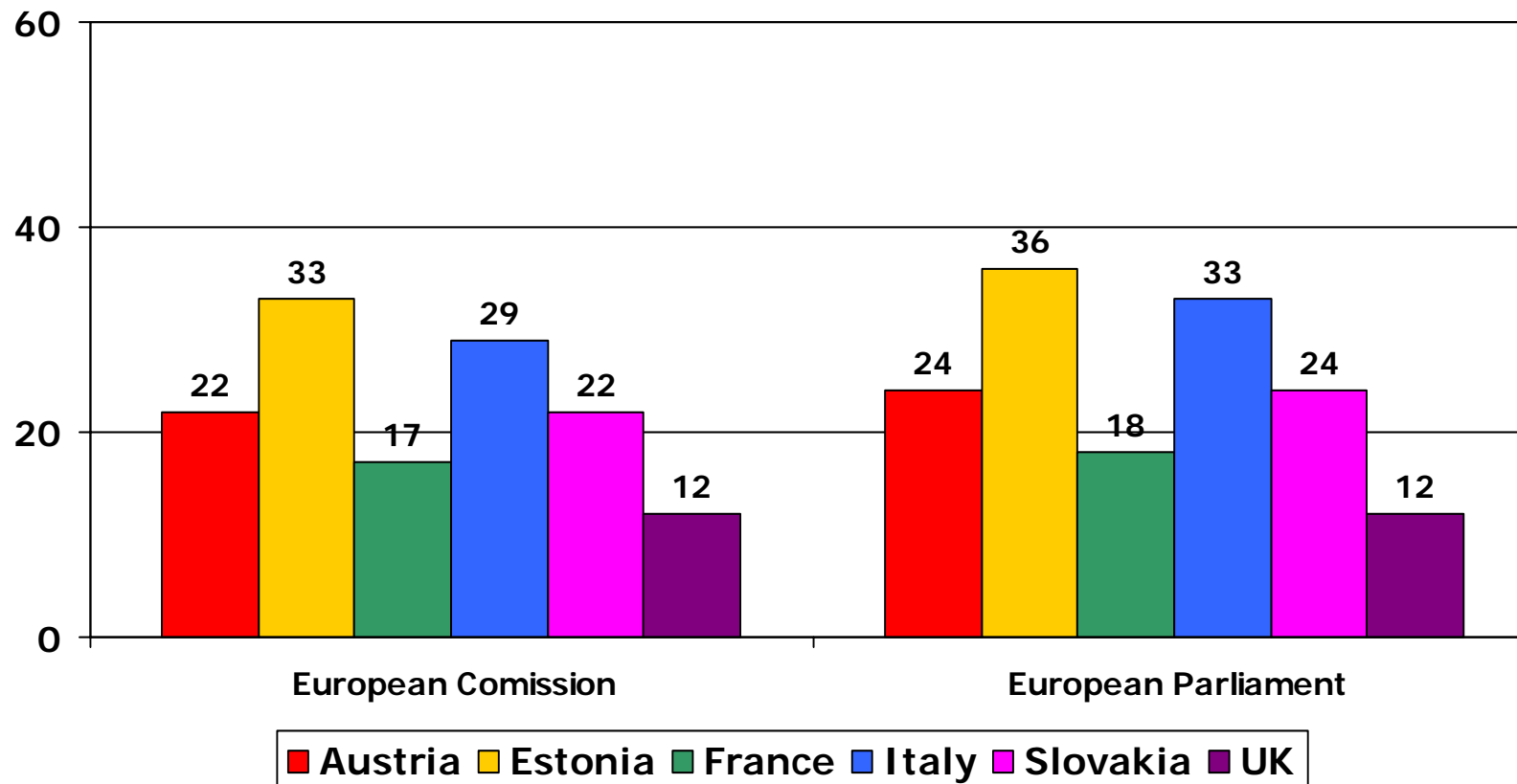


very/ fairly interested; not very/not at all interested

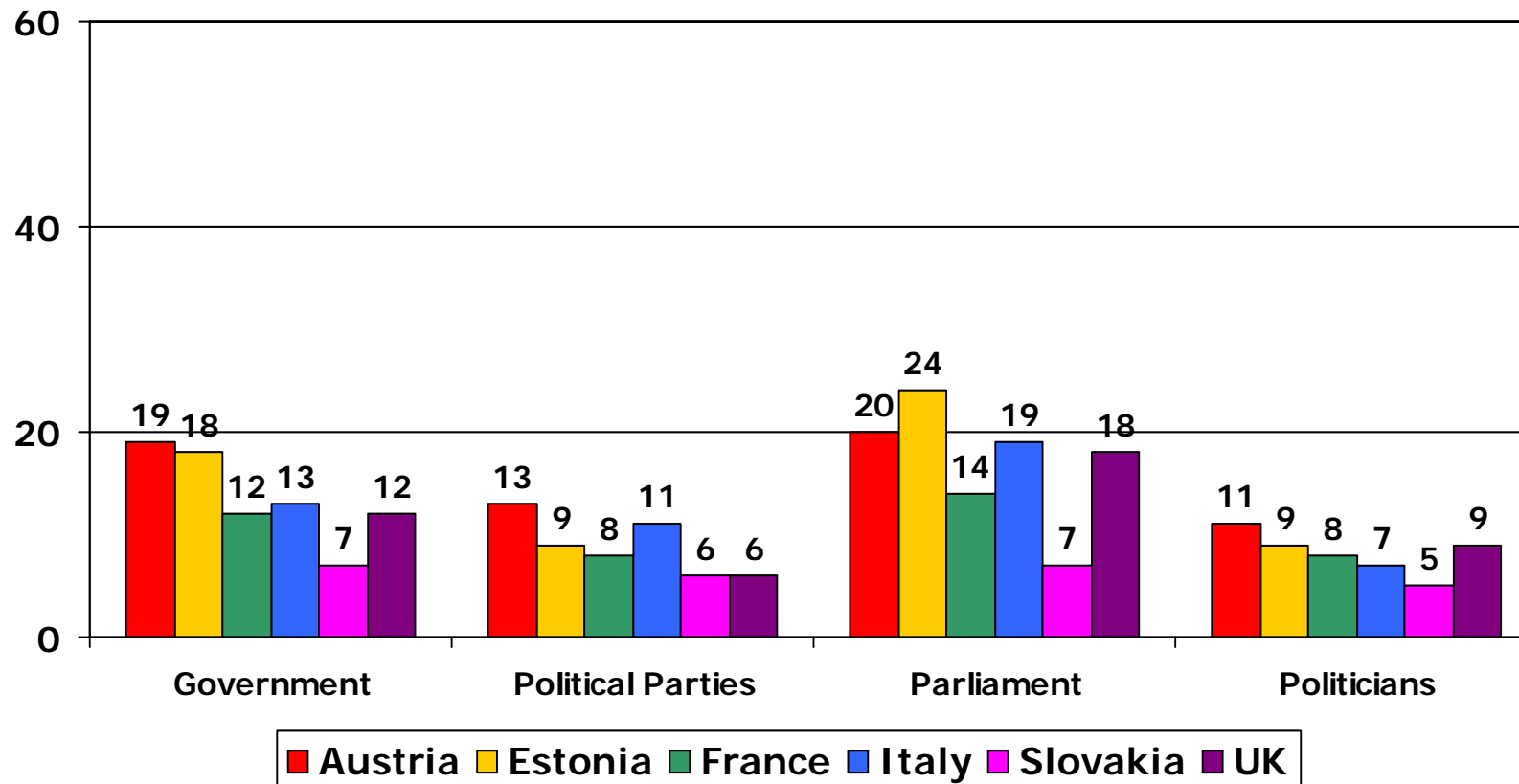
Highest Trust: NGO's



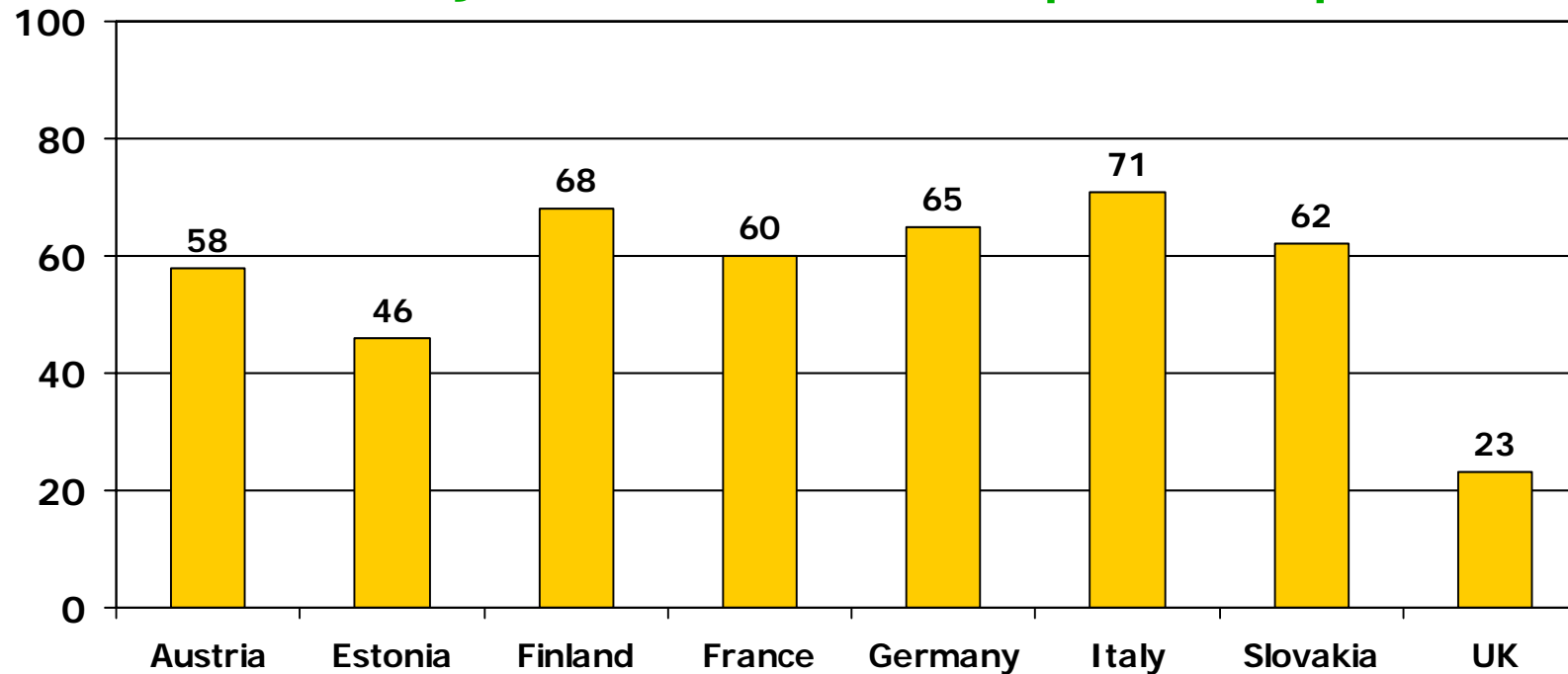
Medium Trust: European Institutions



Lower Trust: National Institutions



They don't trust parties in general
- but they feel close to specific parties



■ closeness to parties (very close+close)

Politics = idealism and cynicism

Politics is seen as a way...*

- to solve international problems (68%),
- social conflicts (67%)
- and to create a better world (42%).

But politics is also

- empty promises (46%)
- does not deal with things important to oneself (37%)
- “just corrupt” (35%)
- a game played by old men (30%).

The general idea of politics is good. Its realization on the concrete level, however, causes disillusionment.

*Question not asked in Germany

How do they engage in politics?

Five comparable factors:

Representative system: voting, party work

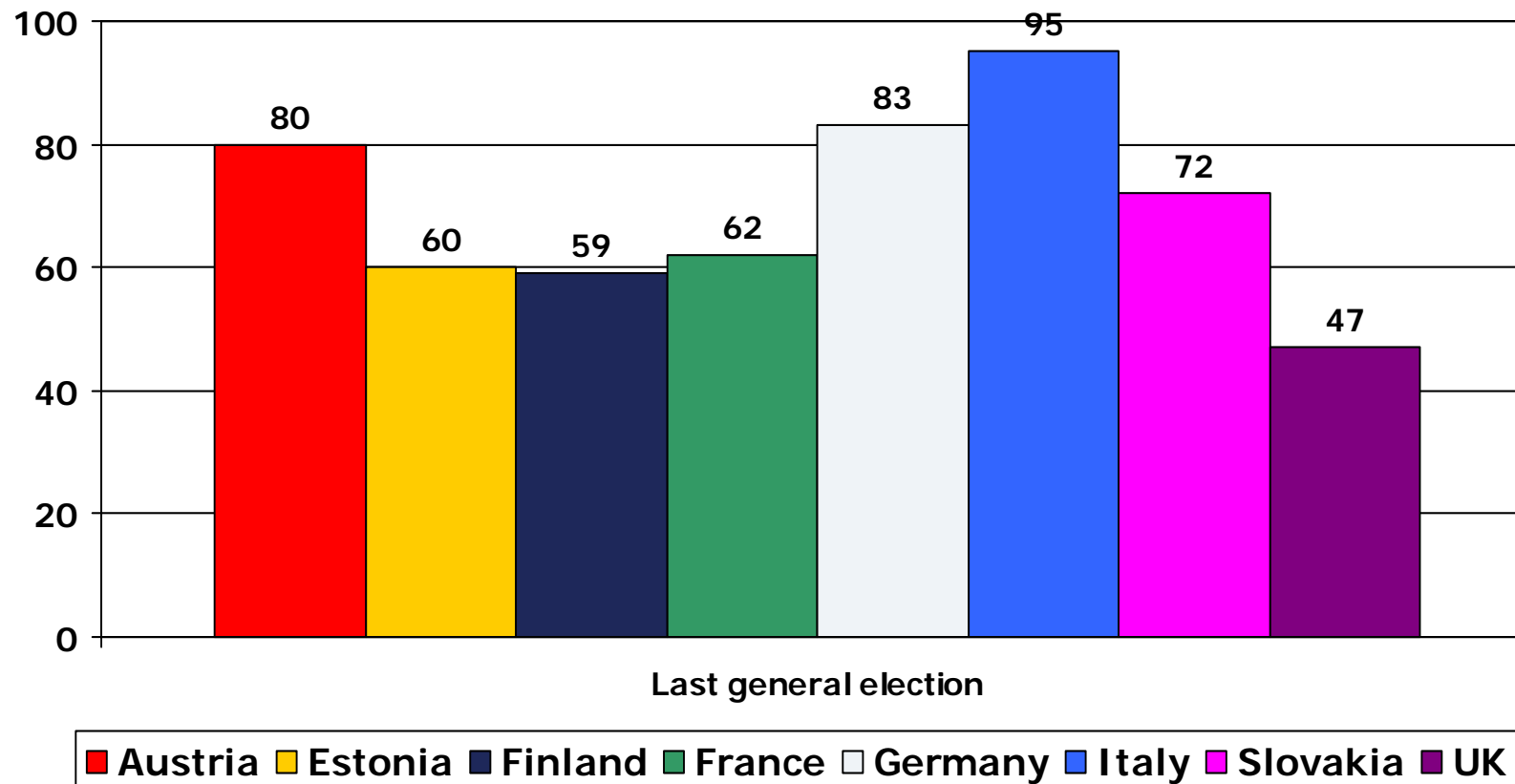
Political Consumerism

Political Discourse

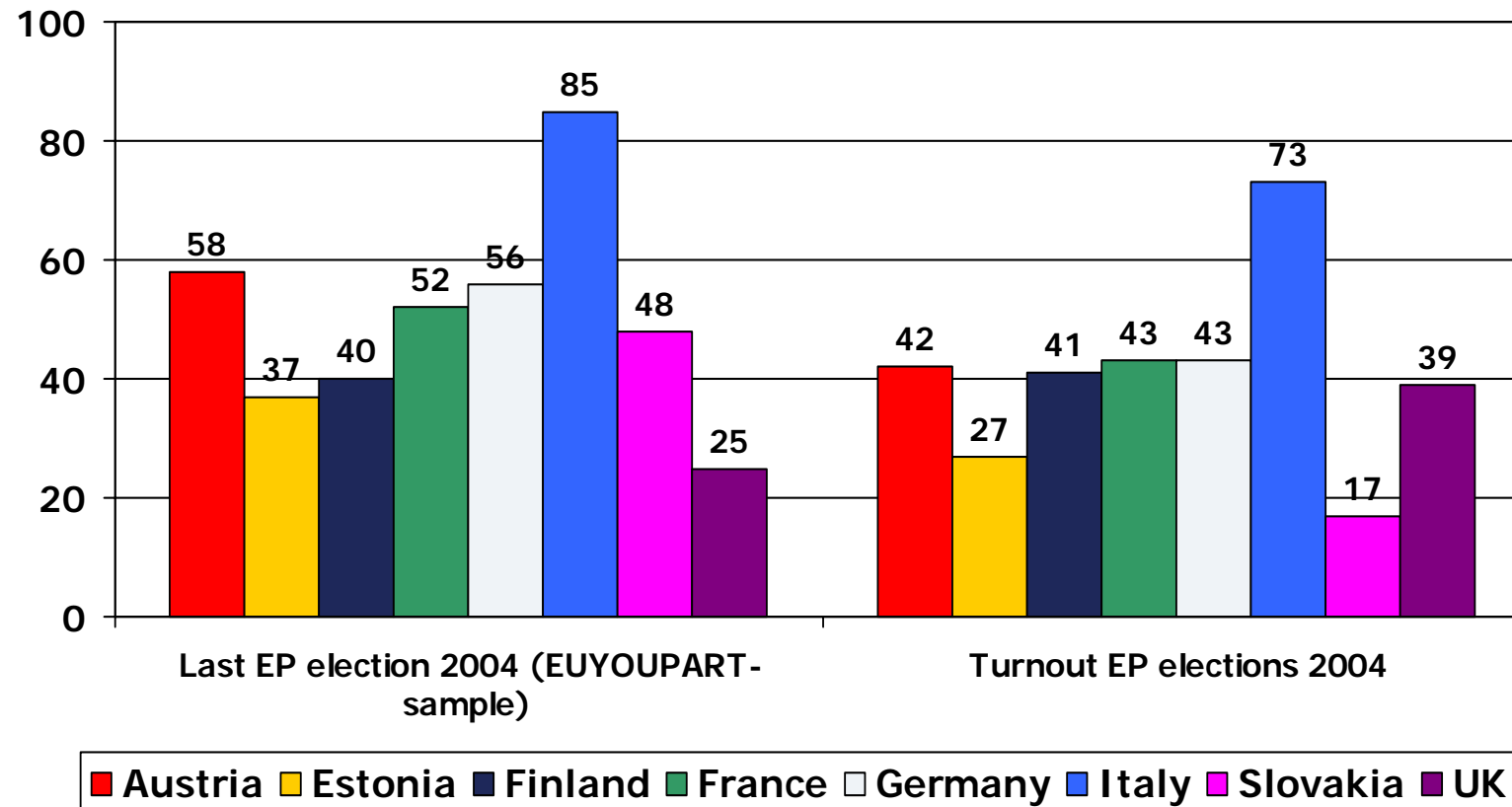
Political Protest

Illegal and violent forms

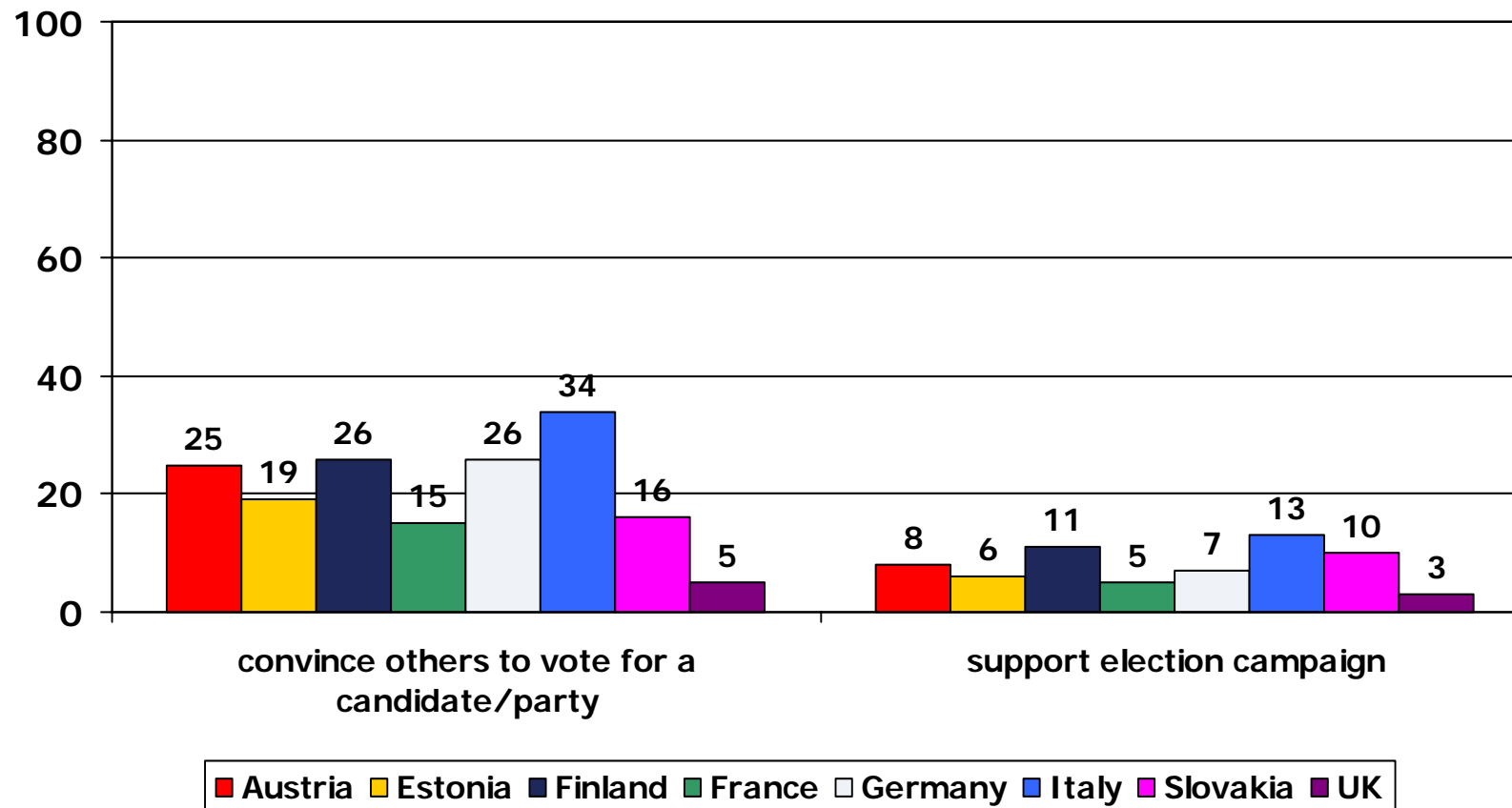
Voting in national elections



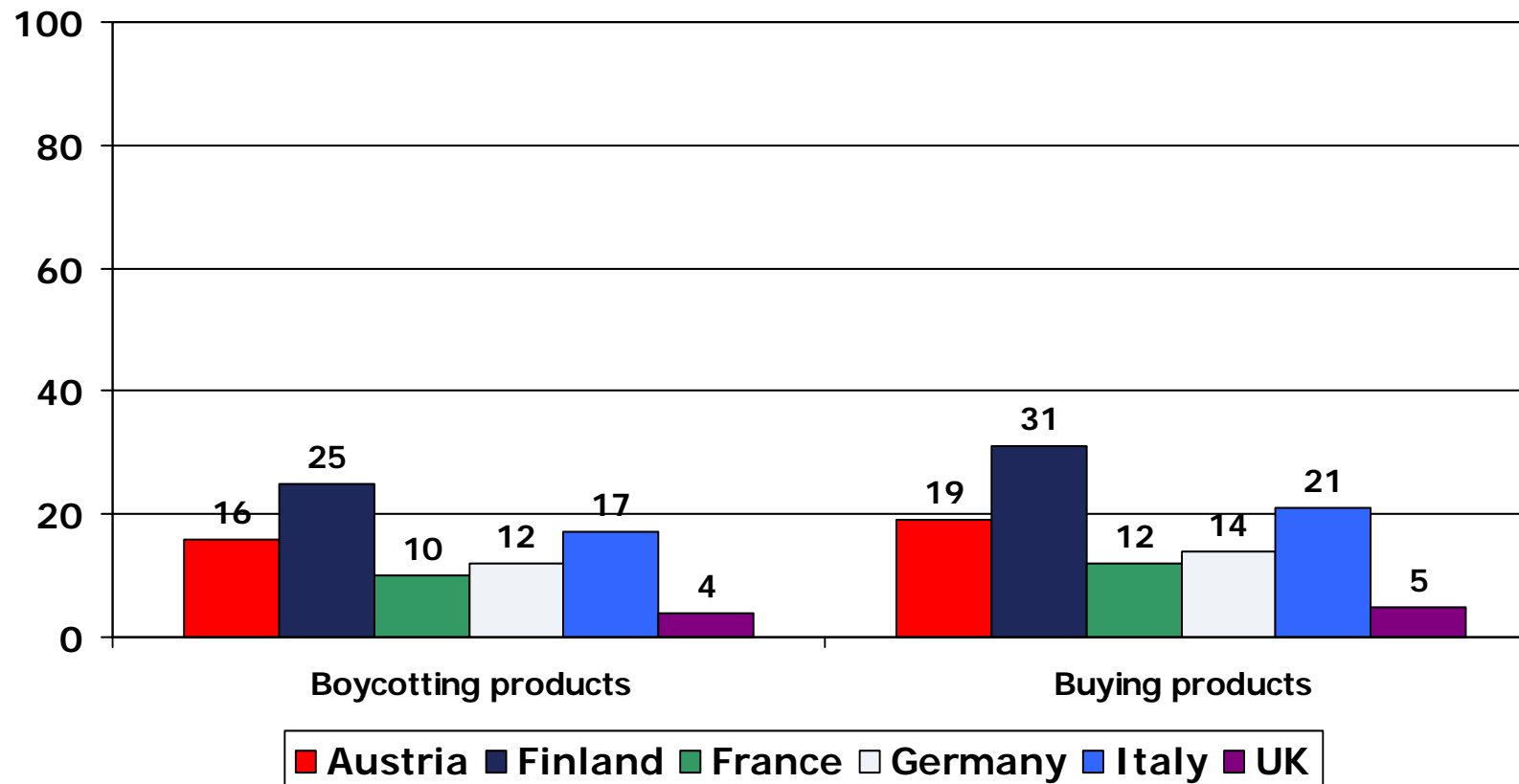
Voting in EP elections



Party work

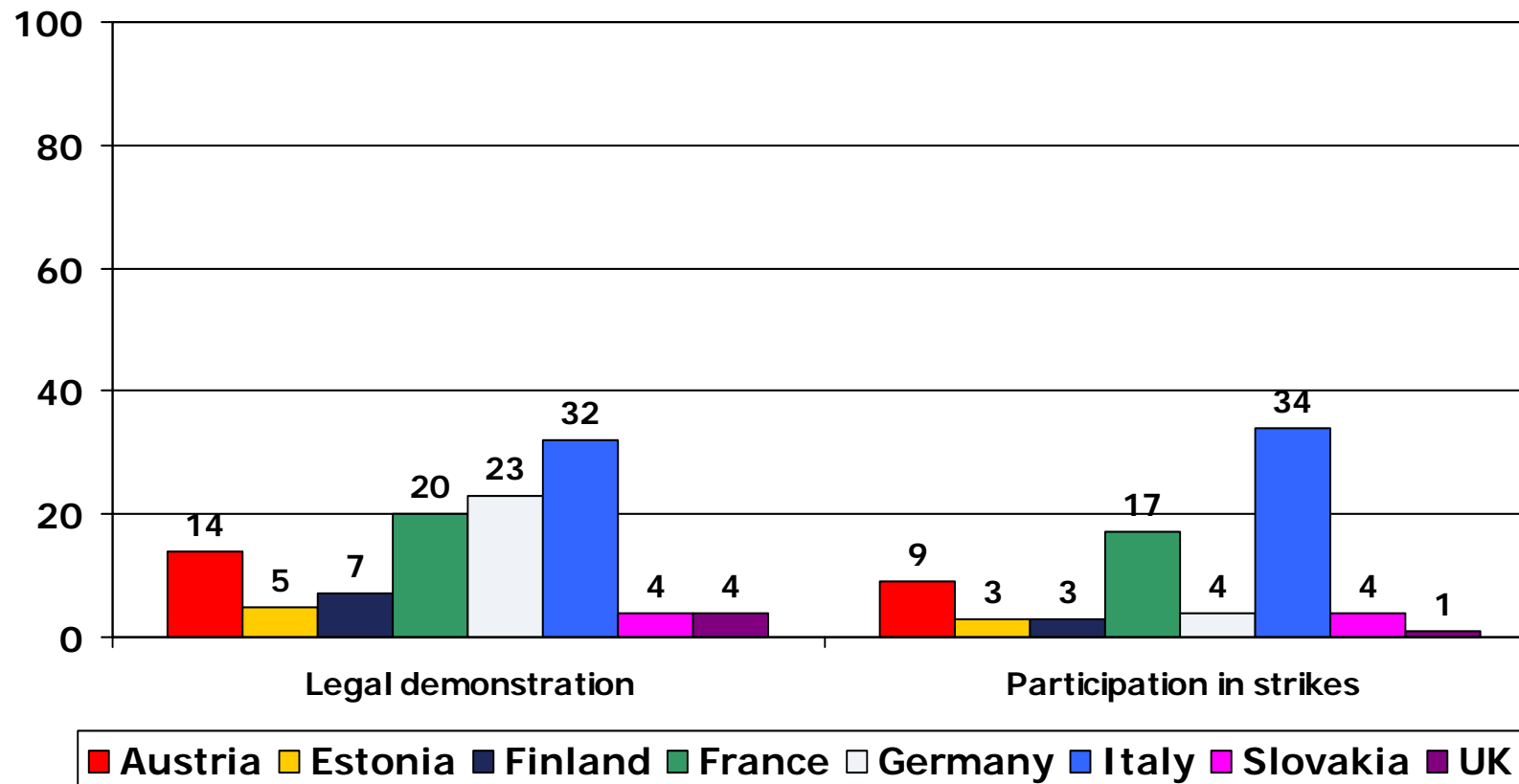


Political Consumerism

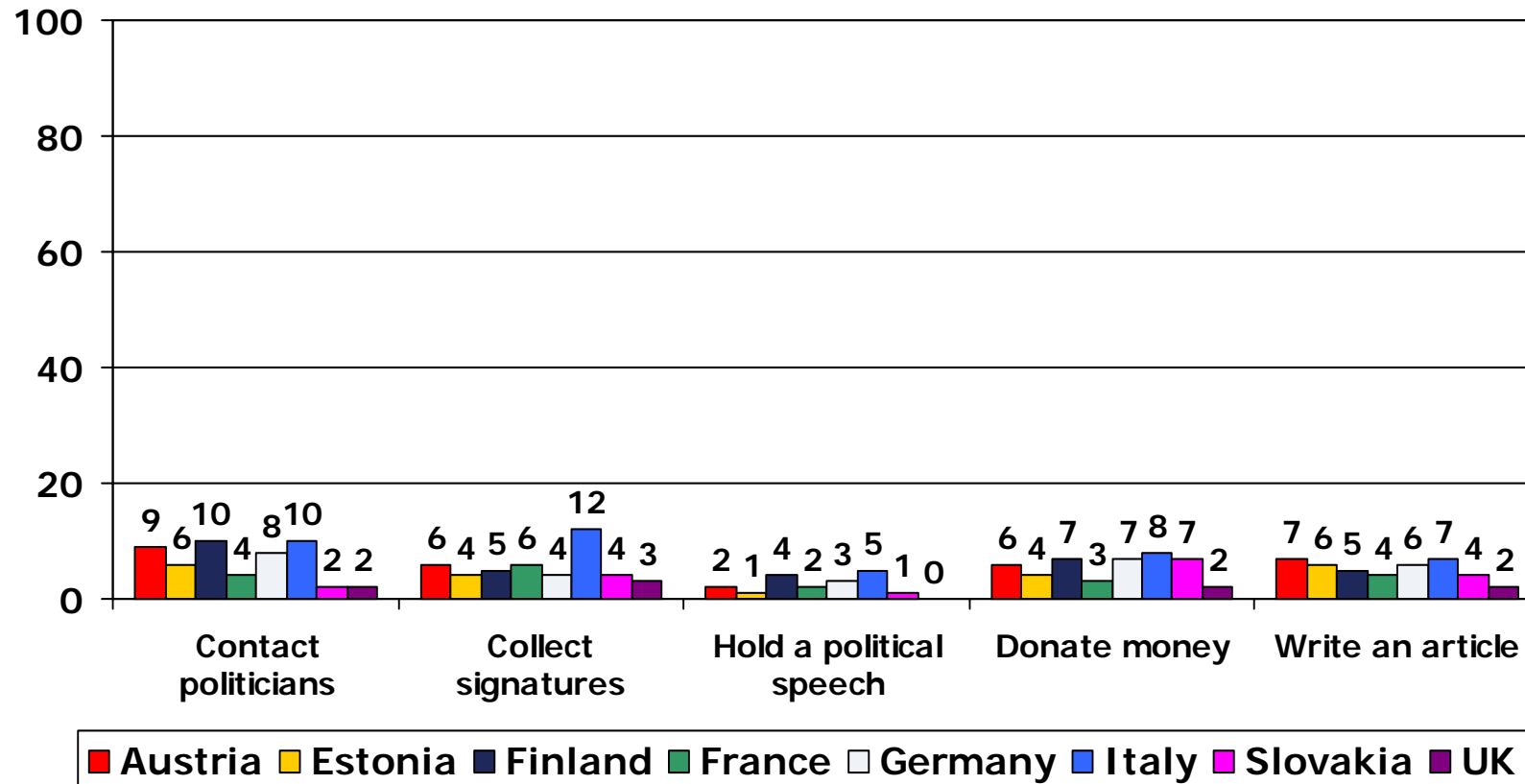


Not comparable: Estonia and Slovakia

Political Protest



Political Discourse



Non-comparable indicators

Frequent forms (20-30%)

- attending meetings
- signing petitions

New forms (8-10%)

- discussions @ internet
- writing and forwarding emails/letters with political content

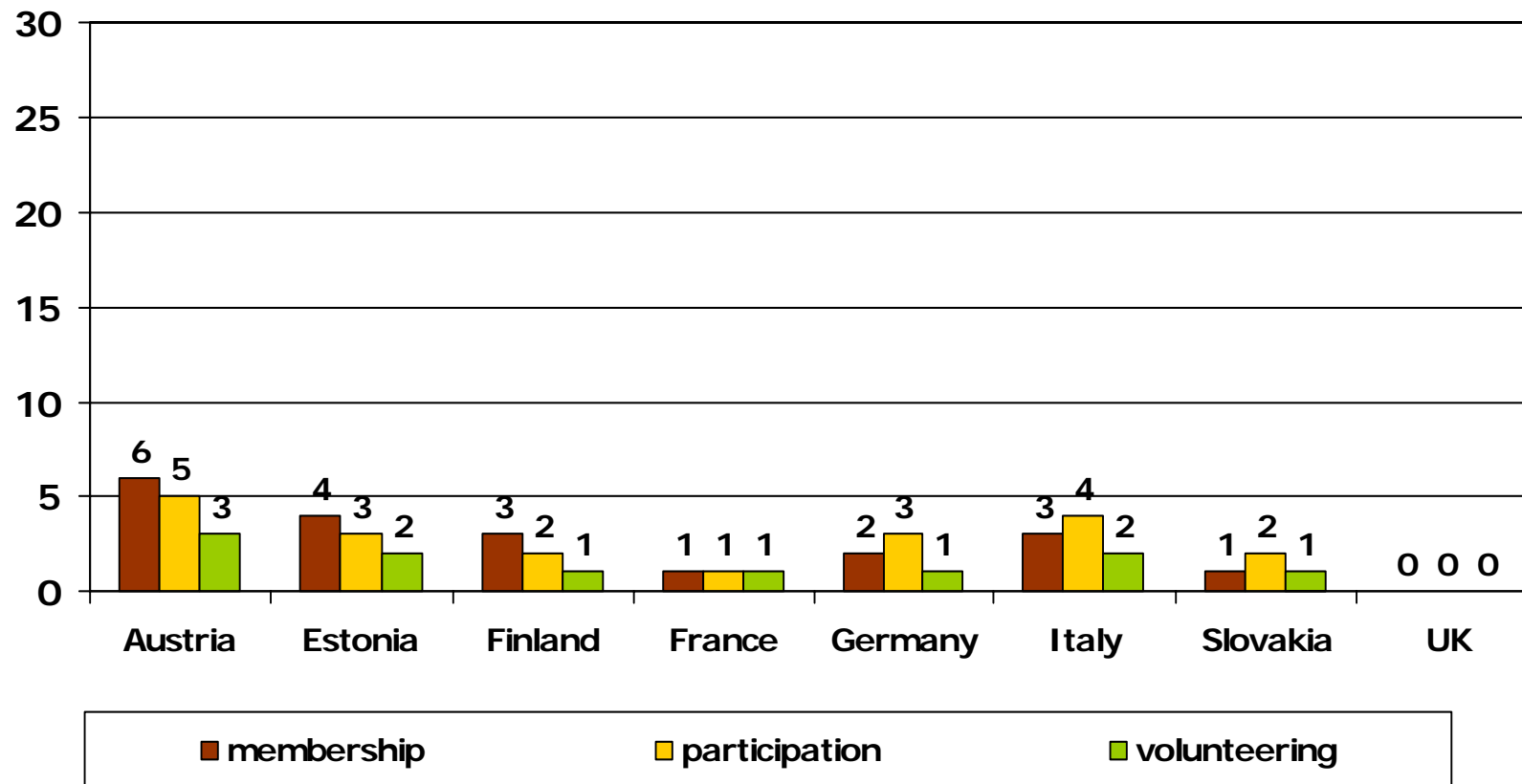
Rare activity (6%)

- distributing leaflets

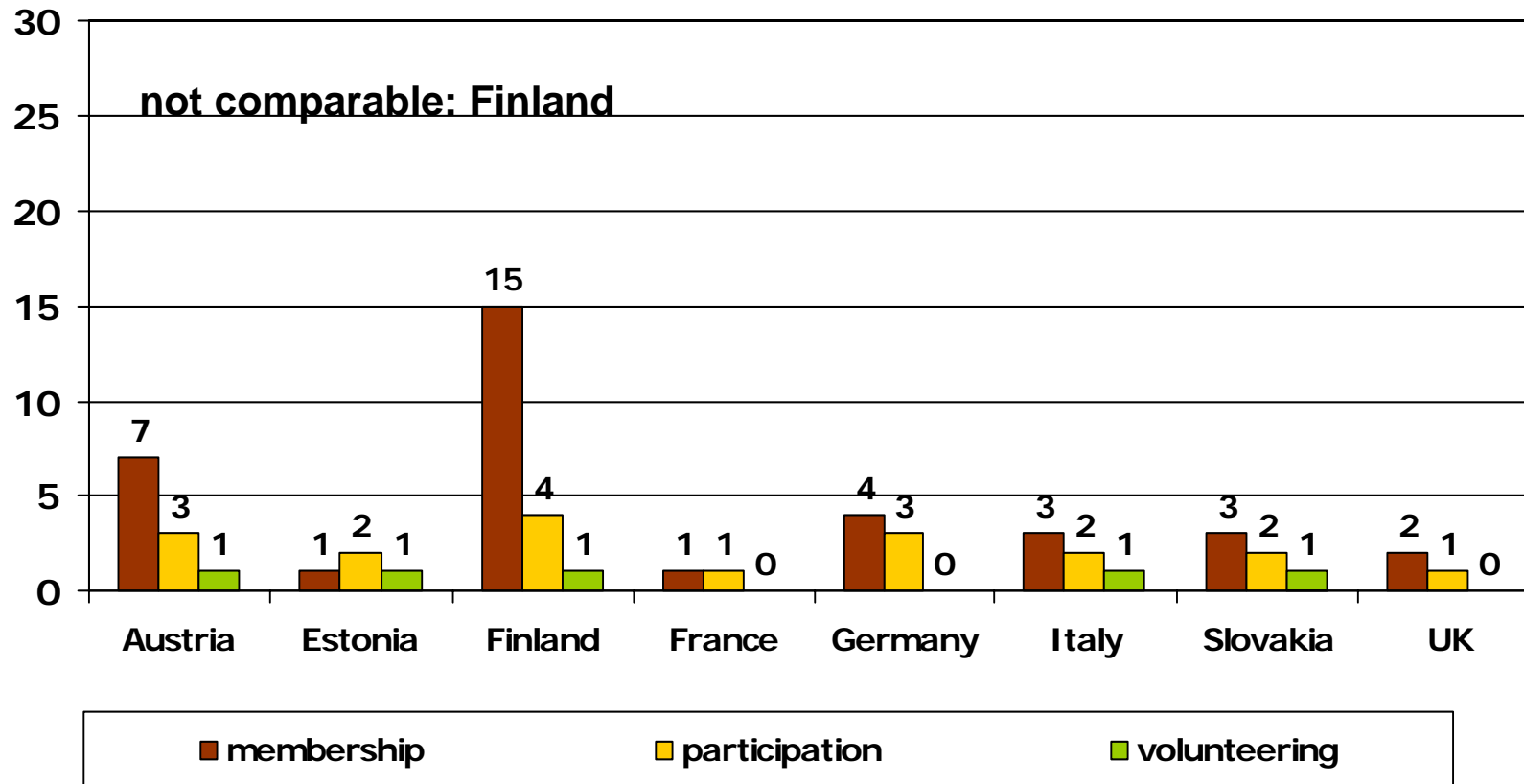
Huge differences in behaviour patterns across countries:
therefore the results cannot be compared!

Membership and activity

Youth organization of a political party

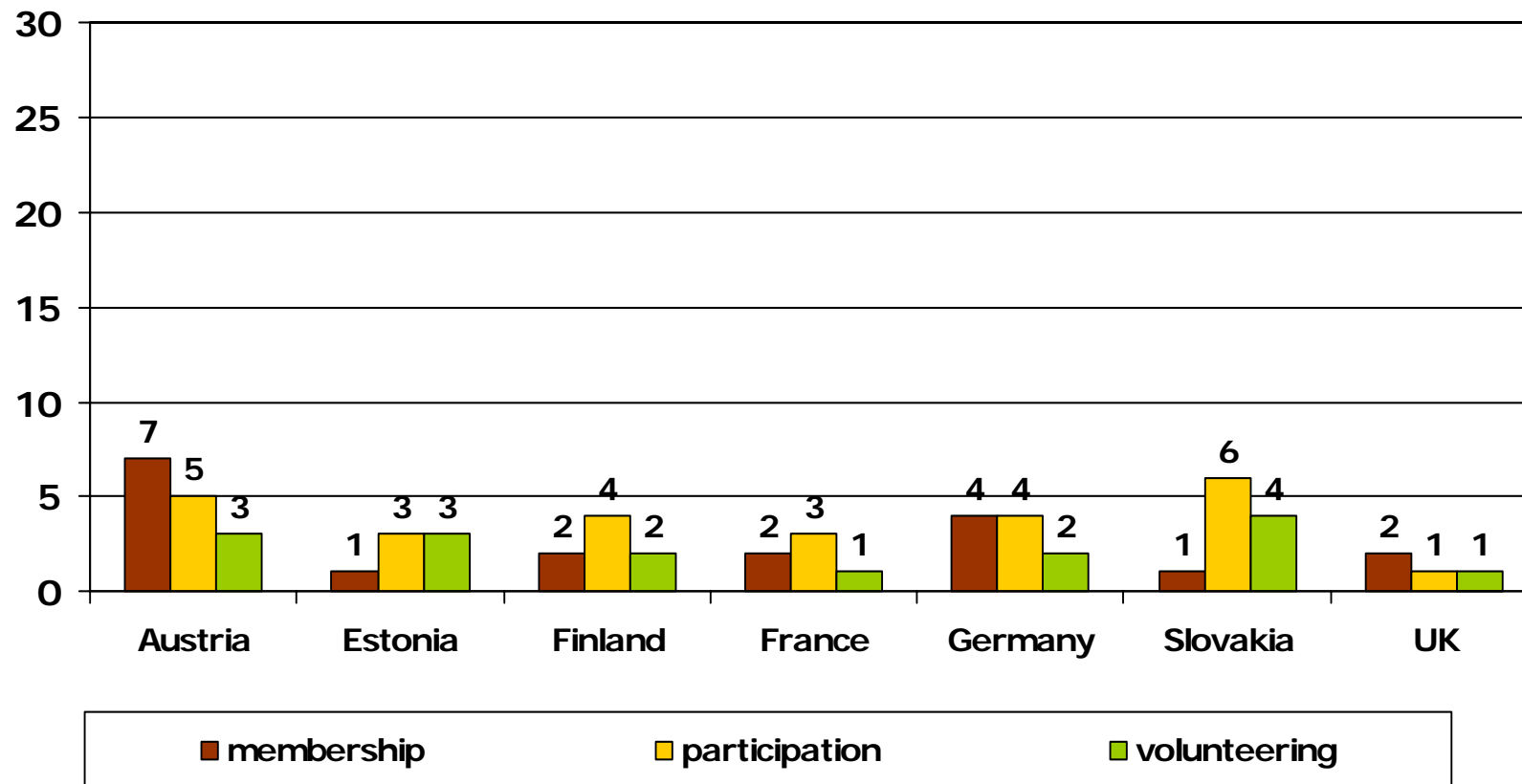


Membership and activity Trade Unions



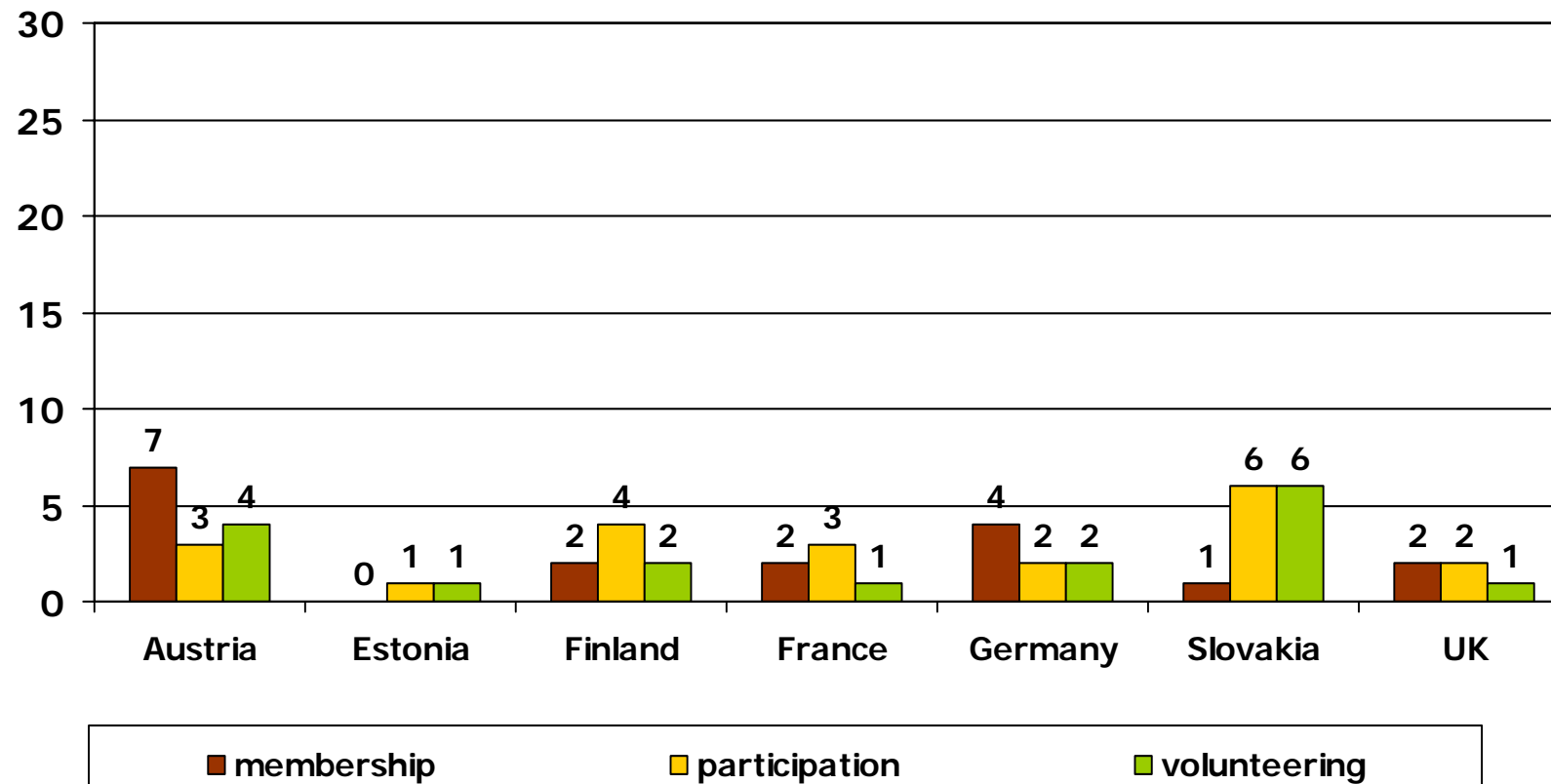
Membership and activity

Environmental organization



Membership and activity

Animal rights or protection group



In which ways of political participation
do they believe?

To influence decisions in society: How effective is it to...

1.	Vote	62%
2.	Work to get media attention	43%
3.	Work in voluntary organizations (NGOs)	40%
4.	Work in a political party	34%
5.	Demonstrate	28%
6.	Personally contact politicians	24%
7.	Boycott certain products	19%

⇒ Work in NGOs is considered more effective than working in a political party.

⇒ Illegal & violent forms of participation are considered to be least effective.

Summary

- European youth has a very different outlook into the future
- A majority is not interested in politics. But there is hope that interest increases with age.
- In most countries youth has an idealistic understanding of politics:
politics = problem solving
- Cynical attitudes (just corrupt/empty promises) are less frequent than idealistic ones (exceptions: France and Slovakia)
- Work for media attention and work in NGO's seems more effective than work in parties
- The significance of NGO work seems to increase

Conclusions for Representative Democracy

- Believe in effectiveness of voting
- Voting is the most frequent form of participation

- Young people don't trust parties in general
- But they feel attached to a specific party

- There is a minority of political activists
- A very small minority is involved in violent forms of participation, very few believe in violence

- The representative democratic system is not in danger - but a significant share of young people is not involved.