

YouthRightOn: Resilient youth against far-right messages online

Insights from Bulgaria

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The context

- **Need to address far-right narratives**
 - severely underestimated, mainstreamed, amplified by toxic media environment and polarized public/political debate
 - Lack of counter/alternative narrative campaigns for youth
- **Need to focus on youth**
 - perpetrators of hate crimes in Bulgaria mostly young people 18-23
 - recruitment / receptiveness starts earlier
 - lack of critical thinking skills a major vulnerability
- **Need for multidimensional responses**
 - combine offline and online tools (social media campaign with essential skills built in school)
 - engaging target group + parents + teachers + wider society

The YouthRightOn project – objectives

- **Understand** far right extremist narratives online most appealing to youth (**14-19yo**) in Bulgaria; push and pull factors attracting youth to far right narratives; delineate youth groups particularly vulnerable to far right extremist influences online
- **Develop** alternative narratives and implement an **online campaign** as active tool for radicalisation prevention and resilience
- **Design** pragmatic **off-line activities** for vulnerable youth groups to maximize the impact of the online campaign (tools for teachers)

YouthRightOn – milestones

Diagnostics

- **Social media study** of main far-right narratives (FB)
- **Representative f2f survey** (1019 respondents 14-19yo)
- **10 focus groups** with students and teachers

Online campaign

- Alternative narrative **campaign on social media** (FB, Instagram, YouTube, Vbox)
- Influencers engagement, videos, comics, games

Offline activities

- **Lesson plans, trainings** for teachers
- Adapting and **piloting lessons** in 70 schools

Testing risk indicators for far-right influences among youth

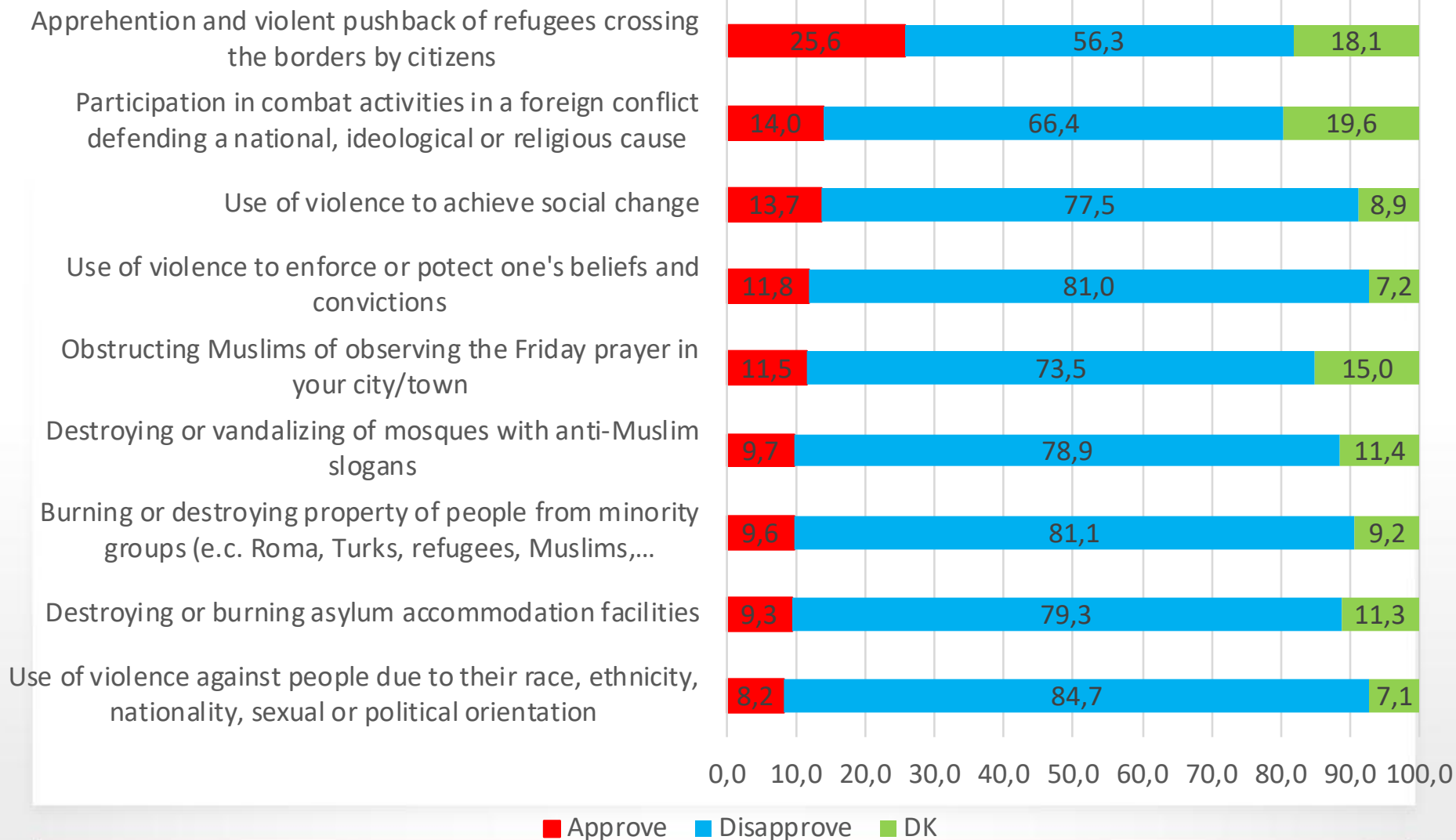


Survey results – highlights

- **Wide acceptance of far-right narratives** - demonizing “others” as major threats and urging for (violent) action:
 - Anti-Roma – 70%
 - Anti-migrant – 63+%
 - Anti-Islam, pro-Orthodox Christianity – 46-63%
 - Anti-EU/NATO, anti-systemic narratives – 30%
- **Approval of far-right actions / political violence** ranges 8%-26%
- **Far-right activism readiness** – 7%

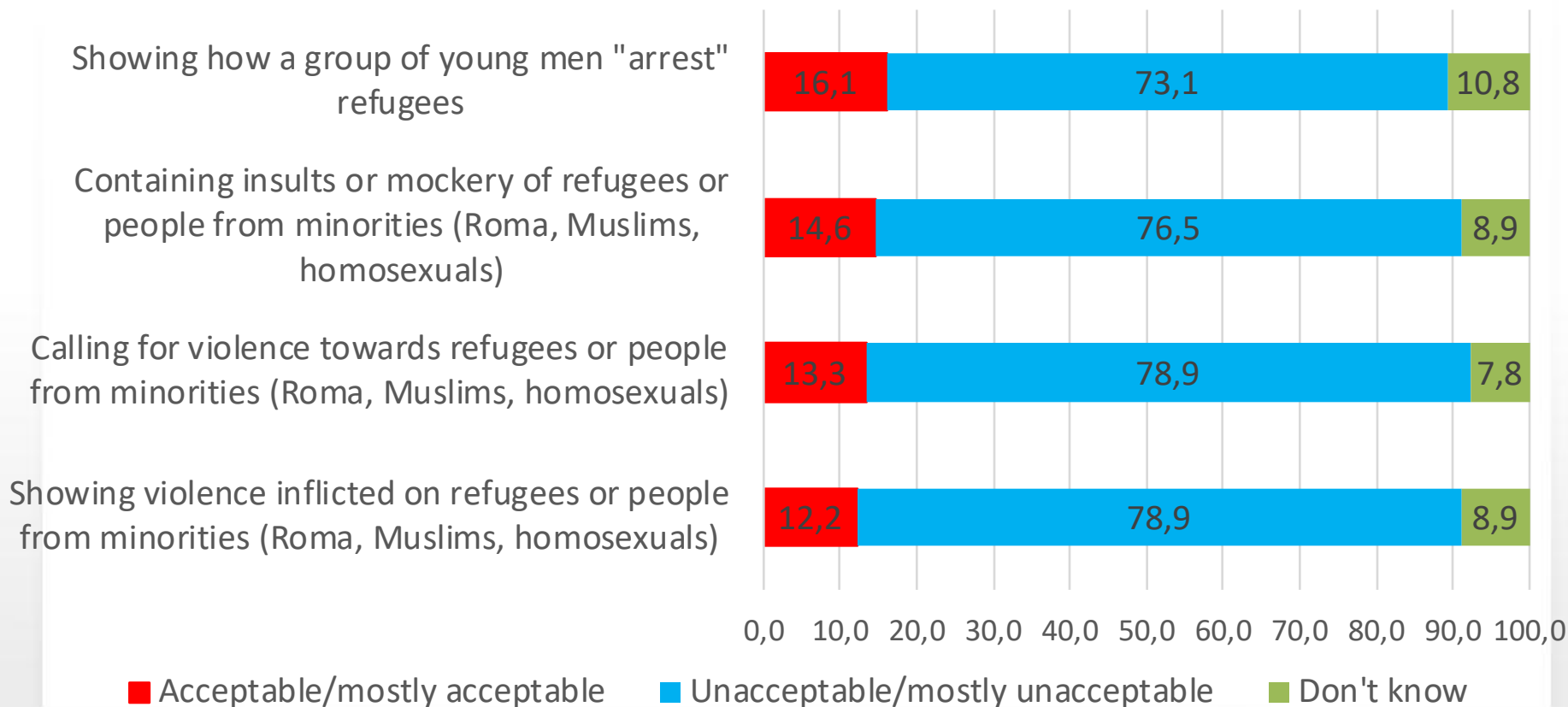
- → Broadly accepted narratives are **not deeply internalized** by the majority, subject to change via critical thinking, reflection

Approval of political violence and hate crime

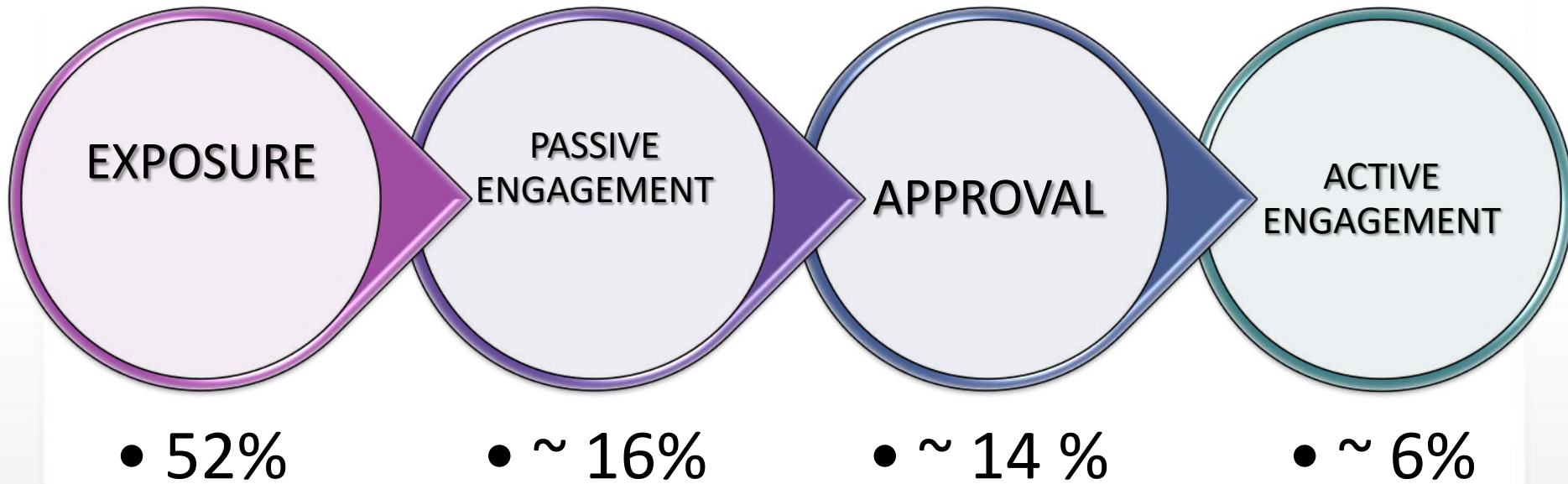


Acceptance of hateful or violent online content

How would you describe the following types of materials or information (content such as posts, videos, pictures, gifs, memes, etc.) that can be found on the internet and social media



Engagement with specific far-right content online



Far-right activism readiness

- Between **20% and 25% would participate** in actions with anti-Roma or anti-migrant agenda (such as a protest against Roma criminality or anti-migrant vigilantism).
- **7,2%** of all respondents would participate even if an anti-Roma protest goes **violent**
- **8%-9%** would **actively support** such initiatives (promoting, sharing, convincing others, etc.).

Risk group 1: Passive “endorsers”

- **Demographics:** Boys 16-19 | from vocational schools | middle class families (doing ok financially)
- **Lower political awareness** (time spent getting informed) | express **political dissatisfaction** (“*politicians don’t care about youth*”)
- Greater **exposure to violence** (school, neighbourhood)
- Informed by **social media and influencers** (rather than by family and narrow social circle)
- Low level of previous **civic engagement** (civic apathy)
- **External locus of control**, but **positive image** of self and social relationships

Risk group 2: The “activists” (approving violence, activism readiness)

- Boys 15-16 | from Burgas, Vidin, Kyustendil, Yambol, Sofia
- Engage actively with **violent/hateful** online content | **approve far-right narratives**
- Reject liberal values | express **political discontent** | more **informed about politics** (time spent reading news)
- Lower level of **trust in family**
- **Negative image** of self and social relationships (belonging)
- Greater exposure to **violence** (school, neighbourhood)
- Higher level of **previous civic activism**

“Find Another Way” campaign goals



ONLINE CAMPAIGN

- Reduce support for anti-minorities narratives
- Reduce support for use of violence
- Increase awareness of alternative perspective on “others”
- Increase engagement with resilience-building activities (positive civic action, educational activities on critical thinking)
- → **CHALLENGE → EDUCATE → INSPIRE → ACT**

OFFLINE ACTIVITIES

- → **Building essential life skills and competences** (e.g. critical thinking, emotional intelligence, conflict management, digital literacy, tolerance – via interactive school lessons)

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Thank you

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