

PUBLIC OPINION ANALYSIS:

Report from research of citizens' **ability to discern and deal with disinformation**

Content



I. Methodology	3
II. Introduction	4
III. Research results	5
A. SOURCES AND LEVEL OF INFORMATION	5
B. EXPOSURE TO DISINFORMATION	8
IV. Demographic distribution	14
V. Annex 1 - Questionnaire for surveying the ability of citizens to discern and deal with disinformation	16

I. Methodology

Total questions: 13

Sample: N=1010 (18+ respondents nationwide)

Method: Telephone research

Time period: October 17th -25th , 2022

Statistical error: $\pm 3\%$.

II. Introduction

This report includes the findings of the public opinion research that refers to identification of citizens' ability to discern and deal with disinformation. The research has several goals: determine the awareness of citizens about the threats posed by disinformation and their respective techniques, sources, financing, motives and impacts; determine the knowledge and skills for discerning disinformation, the behavior of citizens in relation to disinformation, and aims to identify the practices of creating media content. The research is part of the **"Use facts"** project, which will be implemented by the Institute of Communication Studies in the period from 2022 to 2025, with the support of the British Embassy in Skopje. The project aims to strengthen the resistance of the general public and vulnerable groups in Macedonia to disinformation.

The main findings of the research indicate that the majority of citizens is informed about events that are happening in the world several times a day. The older population is mostly interested in politics, while young people are most interested in music. Television is the most used source of information, followed by Facebook and Internet websites. Citizens aged 18 to 44 are mostly informed through Facebook, while television is the most popular source among the group of citizens aged 45 to 64 and for those over 65 years of age.

In terms of trust in media, more than half of the respondents stated that they doubt all the news they read. Almost a third of them checks how the news was reported in other media, while only 4% of citizens have complete trust in the media and in the news they read. In terms of who, in their opinion, spreads mostly disinformation, almost half of the respondents answered that the political parties spread the most disinformation in the country, followed by the media outlets.

More than half of the citizens think that they can sometimes discern disinformation and also think that sometimes they themselves disseminate disinformation. In terms of gender, men are more confident that they can always discern disinformation than women. Citizens are less susceptible to disinformation on topics related to climate change and environment, and are more susceptible to disinformation and conspiracy theories related to the European Union.

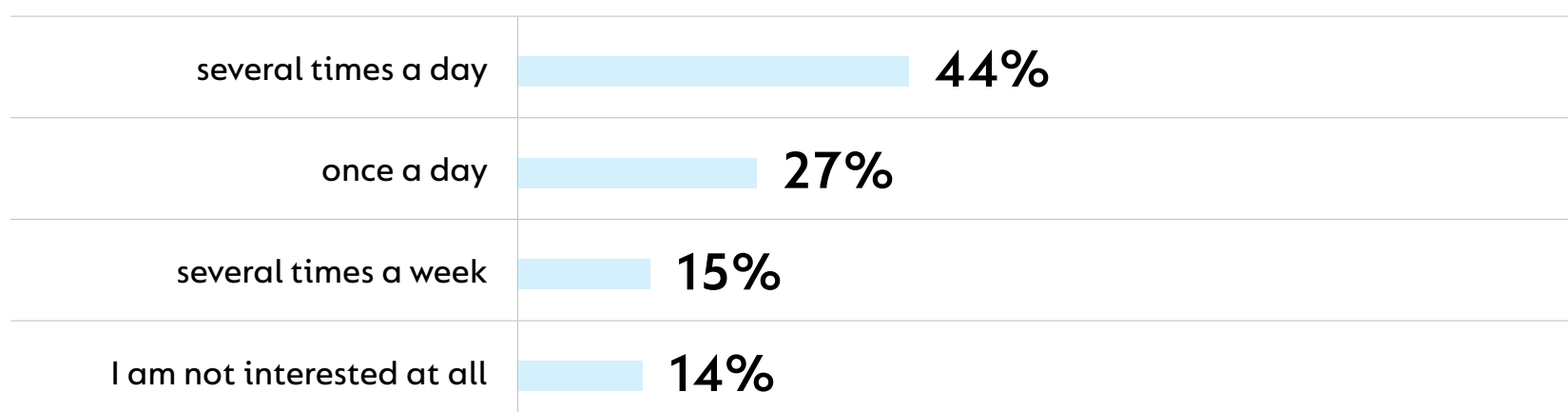
III. Research results

A. SOURCES AND LEVEL OF INFORMATION

Most of the citizens (44%) are informed about what is happening in the world several times a day, 27% once a day, 15% several times a week, while 14% of the citizens are not interested at all in what is happening in the world. Within the group of citizens who are informed several times a day about world events, the largest number are people over 65 years old (63%). On the other hand, in the younger groups of citizens, those who answered that they are not interested at all in world events are the ages 18 to 24 years (23%) and 25-34 years (24%), who are represented the most. In terms of ethnic affiliation, there is no big difference in the level of awareness, that is, 48% of Macedonians and 36% of Albanians and other ethnic communities answered that they are getting information about world events several times a day.

Chart 1:

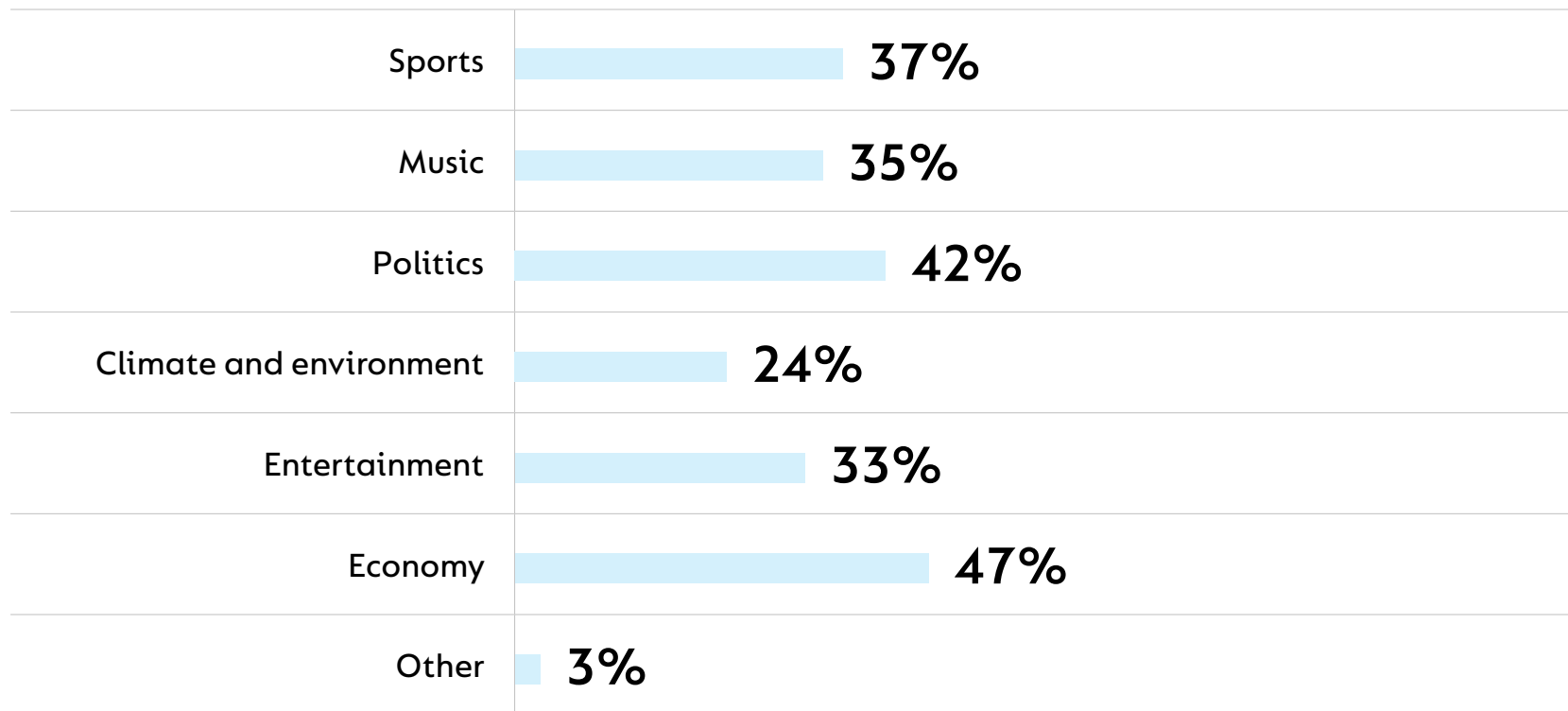
How often do you get yourself informed about world events?



In terms of question "Which subjects are you most interested in?", the majority of respondents chose economy and politics, followed by sports, music and entertainment, and finally climate and environment. Almost half of the young people between the age of 18 and 24 are most interested in music (48%), while in the group of people over 65 years of age, there is majority of people who are most interested in politics (55%). By gender, men are mostly interested in sports (52%) and politics (45%), while women are interested in economics (50%) and music (42%). In terms of ethnic affiliation of the respondents, there are no big differences in interests – Macedonians (47%), Albanians (51%) and other ethnic groups (38%) chose economy first, and politics second. In terms of job status of the respondents:

Chart 2:

What topics interest you the most?

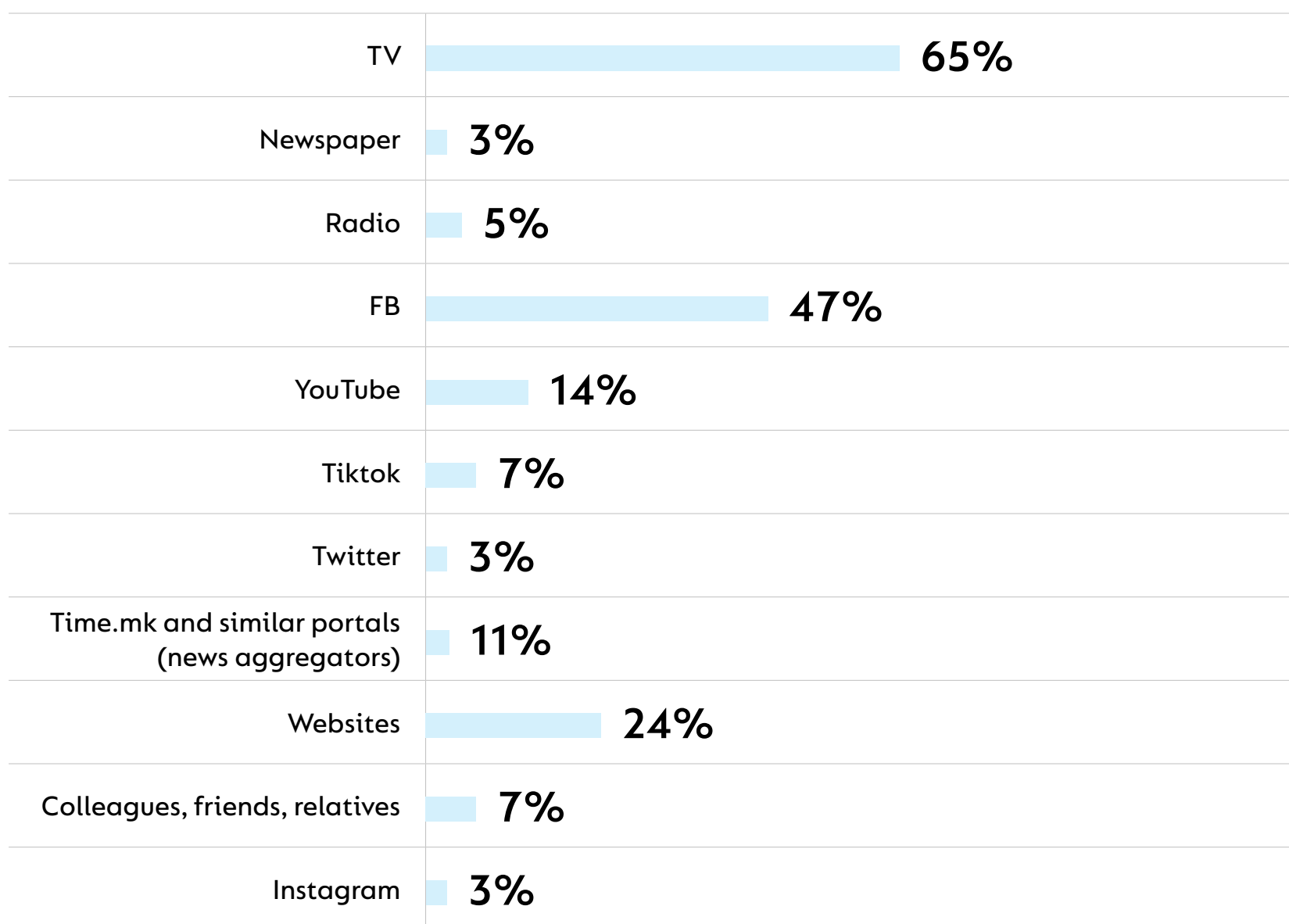


The majority of respondents are mostly informed about world events through television. Facebook is second and websites are third. Television is the most popular source of information among citizens aged 45 to 54 (68%), 55-64 (86%) and those over 65 (94%). On the other hand, Facebook is most used among the age groups of 18 to 24 (55%), 25-34 and 35-44 (64% each). In the group of young people aged 18 to 24, there are more people who use other social media as sources of information i.e. YouTube (29%) and TikTok (23%).

In terms of how often they are informed, television is the most popular among citizens who are informed about world events several times a day or once a day. Facebook is second and websites are third. Citizens who get information several times a week usually do so through Facebook, followed by television, although the difference between these two categories is almost insignificant.

Chart 3:

From which media do you get the most information?

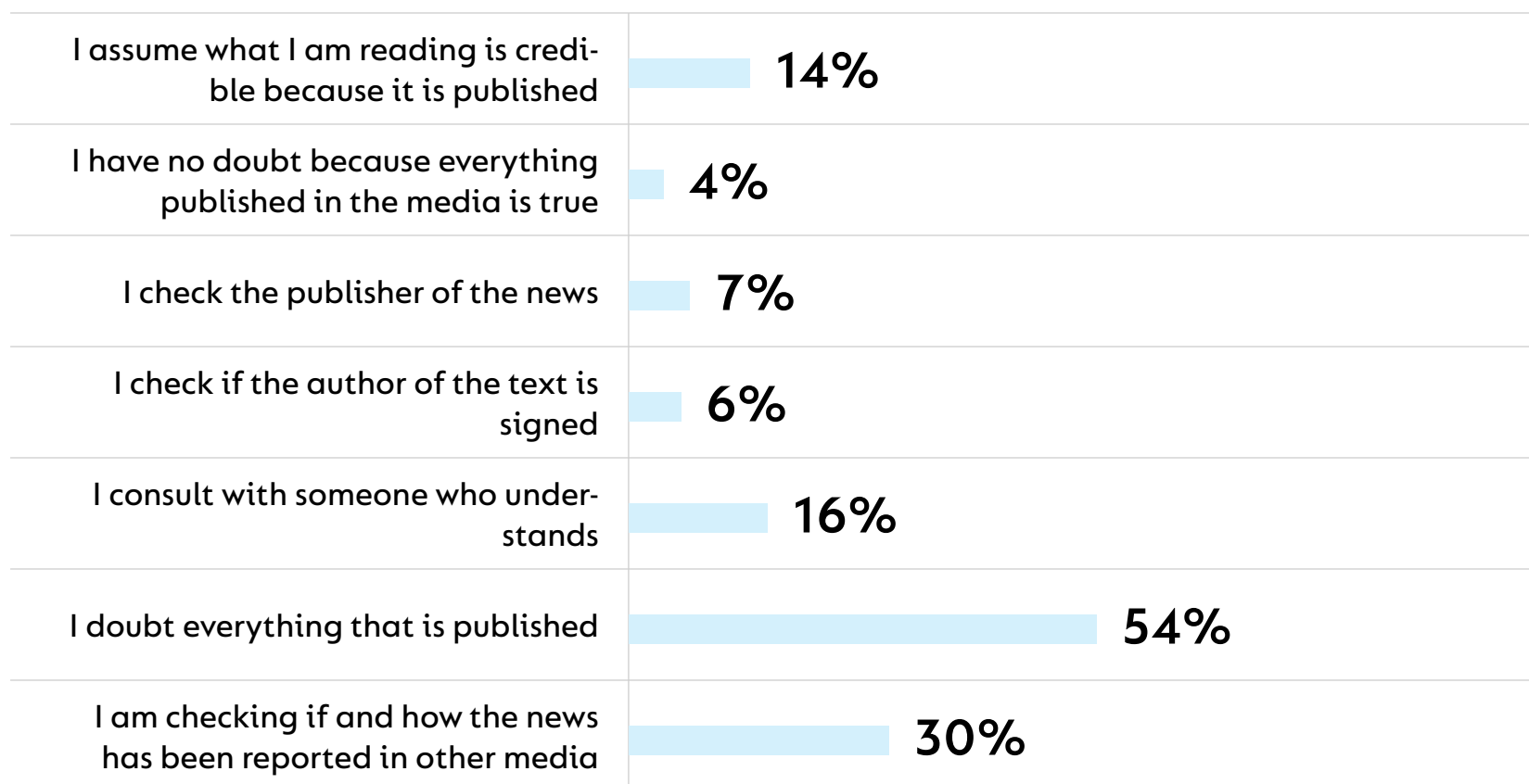


When asked about the level of trust in the media from which they receive information, more than half of the respondents answered that they doubt all the news they read, while 30% check whether and how the news was reported in other media. 16% of citizens consult someone who is knowledgeable about the topic/media in terms of reliability of the news, while 14% start with the assumption that the news must be reliable as soon as it is published, that is, the facts have been verified before publication. Only 7% of citizens check the publisher, and 6% the author of the news, while 4% of citizens have full confidence in the media and the news they publish.

In terms of monthly income, a larger percentage of those with monthly incomes between 42,001 and 60,000 denars doubt everything that is published (48%) and check whether and how the news was reported in other media (45%). The majority of citizens with monthly incomes above 75,000 denars doubt everything that is published, while 31% of them check how the news is reported in other media.

Chart 4:

How do you know that the media from which you get information can be trusted?

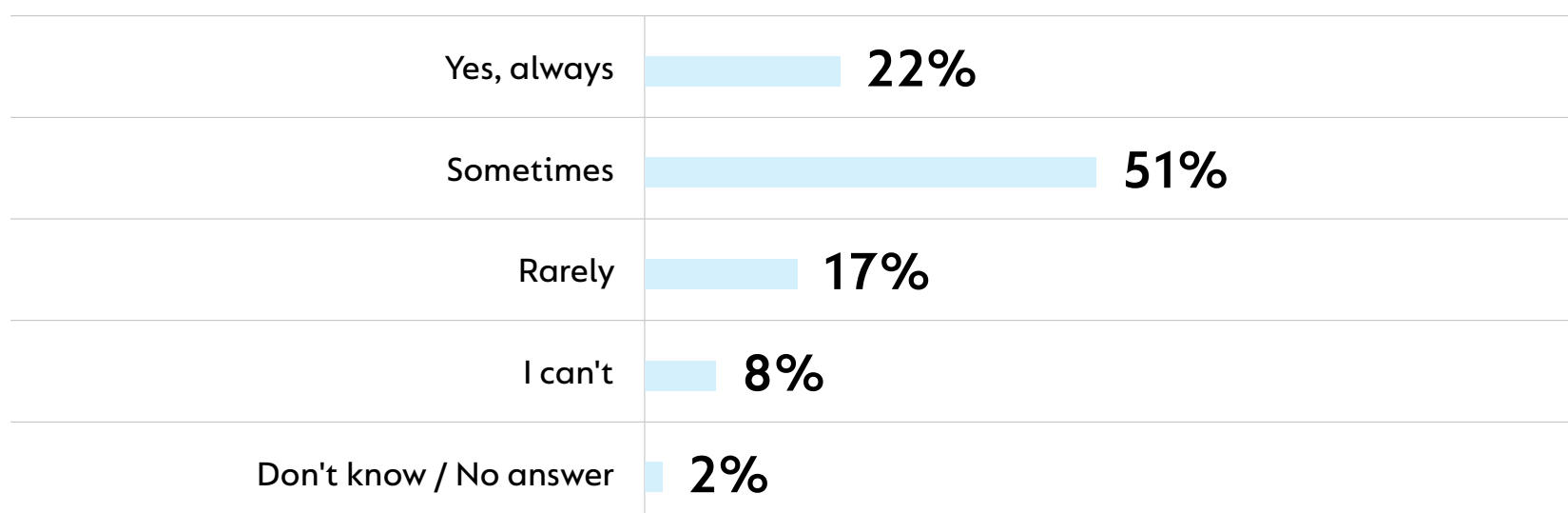


B. EXPOSURE TO DISINFORMATION

When asked if they think they can discern disinformation, more than half of the respondents answered that they can sometimes discern them, while 22% are sure that they can always discern when some news is not true, 17% answered "rarely", and 8 % feel that they cannot discern disinformation. In terms of gender, men (26%) are more confident that they can always discern disinformation than women (19%), while the percentage of men and women who think they can sometimes discern disinformation is the same.

Chart 5:

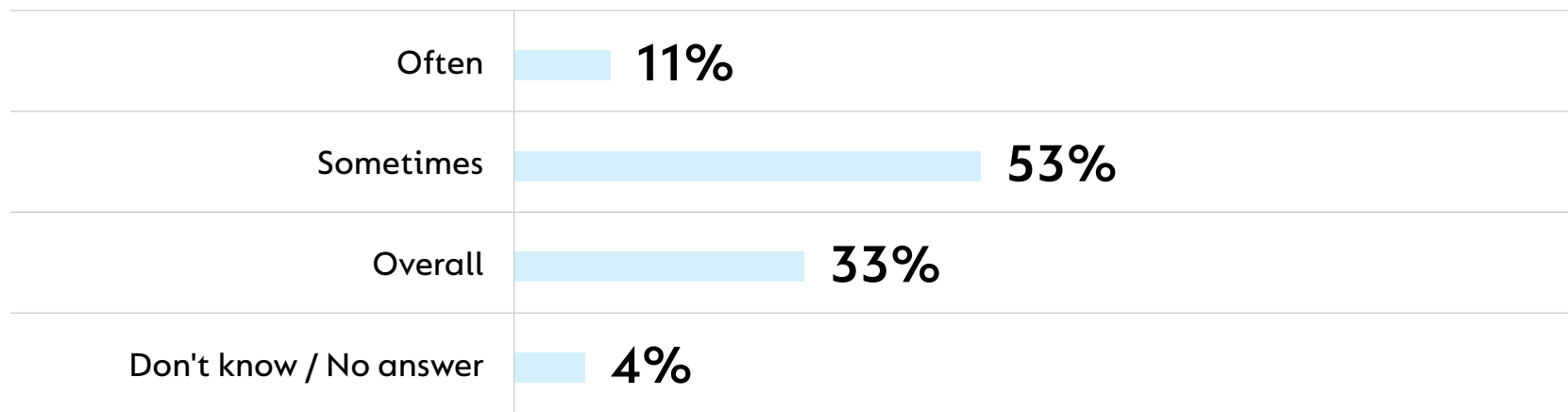
Do you think that you personally can discern when a news story is disinformation?



In terms of sharing disinformation, one third of the citizens answered that they have never shared disinformation, a smaller portion believe that it happens to them often, while the majority believe that they sometimes share news that is incorrect.

Chart 6:

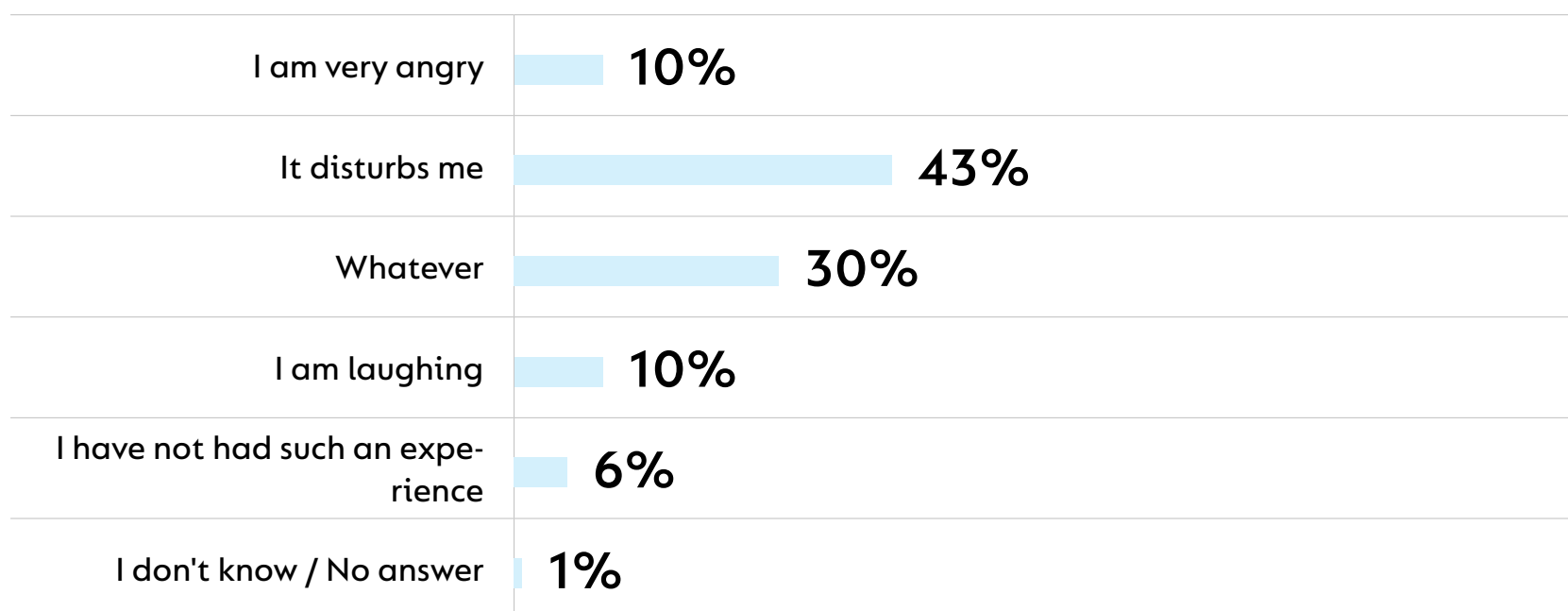
How often have you shared information that you later discovered was incorrect?



Citizens often feel anxious when they realize that they have read disinformation. 30% of respondents don't care, while 10% answered that they are very angry/laugh in such cases. The feeling of anger and anxiety is more prevalent among older groups of citizens, compared to others, where 54% of citizens older than 65 years of age stated that they feel anxious when they discover that they have read disinformation. In terms of monthly income, the majority of respondents with the highest monthly income do not care if they realize that they have read disinformation (40%), while other groups of citizens are usually disturbed in such cases.

Chart 7:

How do you feel when you realize that something you read is disinformation?

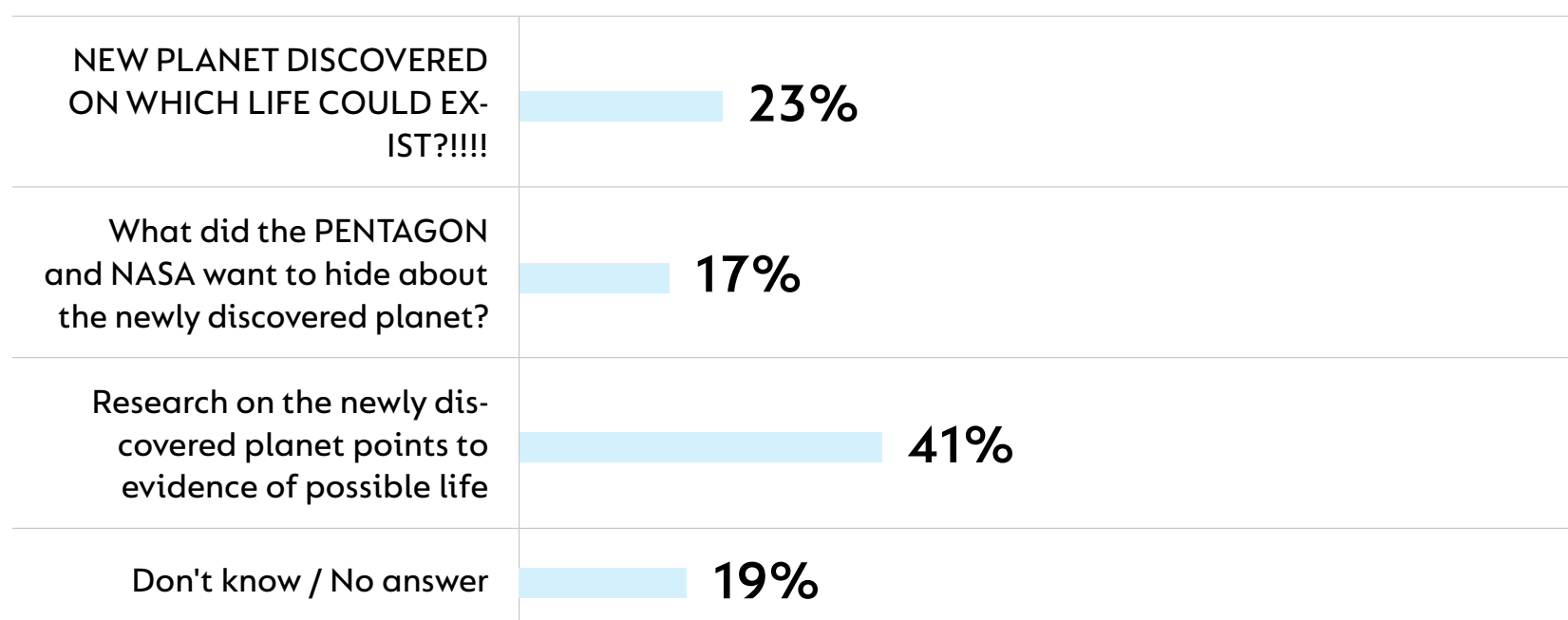


When offered several headlines for the same news story, most of the respondents would choose to read a news story with a neutral headline. 23% of the respondents would choose a sensationalist/fake headline, 17% would read a conspiracy news, and 19% do not know or did not answer the question. In terms of trust in media and in the news they publish, the neutral headline would be chosen by the majority of respondents who answered that they check who is the author of the news, 41% of those who assume that everything published is reliable, followed by 45% of those who believe everything published in the media, those who check the publisher of the news and those who check how the news is reported in other media, and 42% of respondents who doubt everything published and those who consult someone who is knowledgeable.

In terms of level of education, the majority of respondents with postgraduate studies, doctorate or specialization would read news with a sensationalist/fake headline (43%). On the other hand, citizens with completed primary (38%), secondary (39%) or higher (49%) education would first choose to read news with a neutral title.

Chart 8:

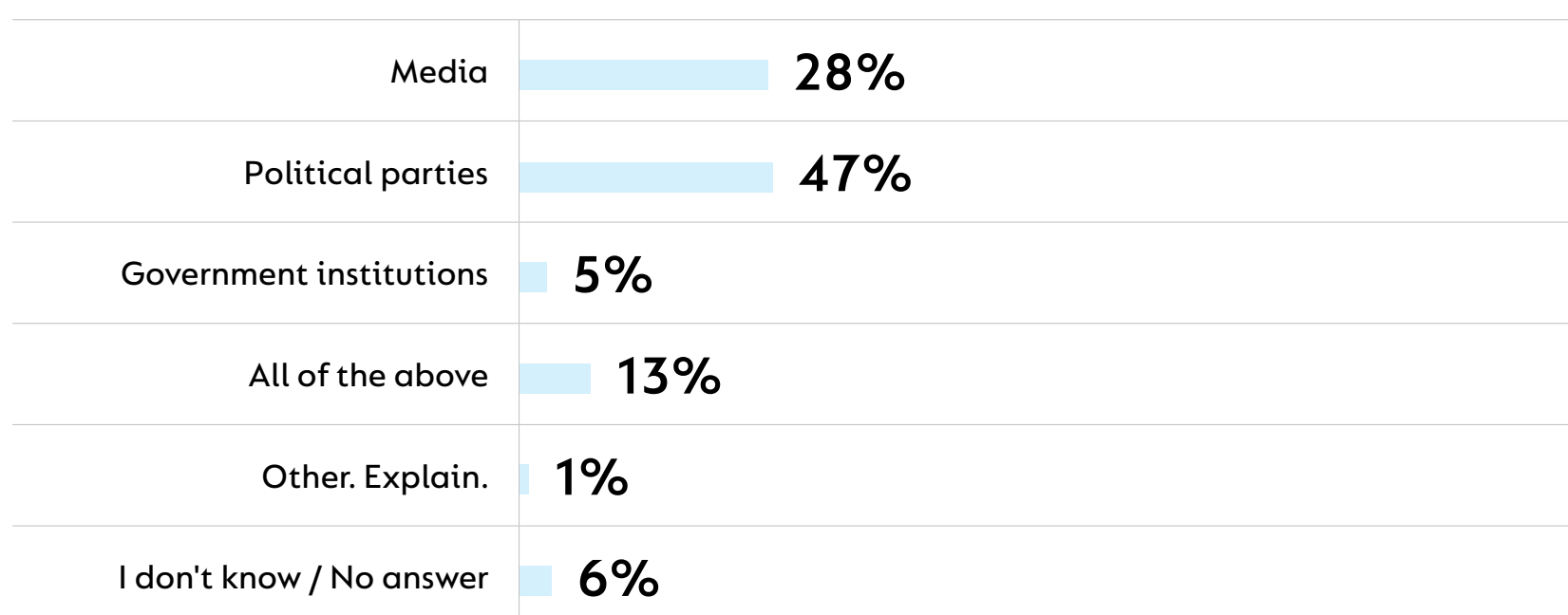
Of the following news items, which one would you choose to read first?



Almost half of the respondents believe that the political parties mostly spread disinformation in the country, followed by the media. A smaller number of citizens think that government institutions mostly spread disinformation, and 13% answered that political parties, the media and government institutions equally spread disinformation. The view that political parties mostly spread disinformation is prevalent among more than half of the population over the age of 55. On the other hand, the most common answer among young people is that it is done by the media (39%), although political parties are also mentioned often (34%). In terms of level of education, the majority of citizens who have completed primary (48%), secondary (49%) or higher (43%) education believe that political parties mostly spread disinformation, while those who have completed highest level of education (42%) think that this is done by the media.

Chart 9:

Who spreads the most disinformation in Macedonia?

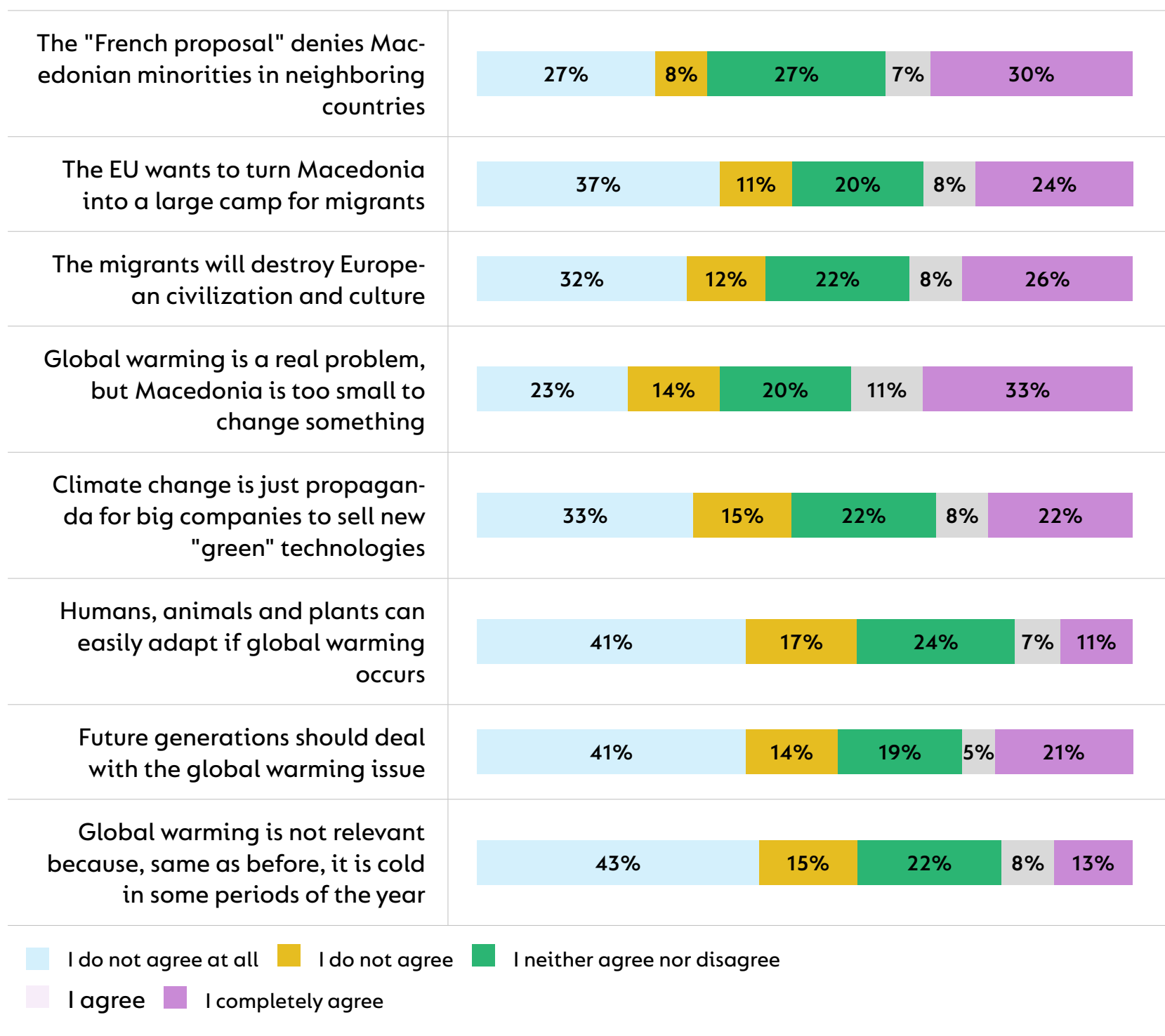


When it comes to topics related to climate change and environment, most citizens are not subject to disinformation. More than half disagree that global warming is not relevant and that that problem should not be solved now, and that humans, animals and plants can easily adapt to global warming. At the same time, less than half of the respondents do not think that climate change is propaganda of big companies.

Citizens are more divided in their views on disinformation related to the European Union. There are no major differences between those who agree or disagree that migrants will destroy European civilization and that the EU wants to turn North Macedonia into a camp for migrants. The biggest division in the attitudes is related to the French proposal, where the difference between those who think that the French proposal denies the Macedonian minorities in other countries and those who think the opposite is insignificant.

There are also greater differences between the ethnic groups in attitudes about EU-related disinformation. A majority of Macedonians (40%) agree that migrants will destroy European civilization and that the EU wants to turn Macedonia into a camp for migrants, while the majority of Albanians and other ethnic communities do not agree with these views. Furthermore, almost half of the Macedonians (48%) believe that the French proposal negates the Macedonian minorities in the neighboring countries, while the majority of the Albanians and most of the other ethnic communities do not agree with this statement.

Chart 10:
A bias towards disinformation

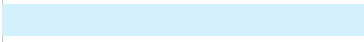
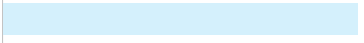
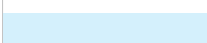


Citizens are also divided on their views on conspiracy theories related to the European Union. The difference between those who agree that the EU came up with vaccines during the coronavirus times as a manner of controlling the people and those who disagree with that statement is negligible. On the other hand, 27% of women and 17% of men answered that they are not familiar with this news and should check its reliability. In terms of age, the majority of citizens aged 25-34 (52%) answered that they do not agree with the statement, while in other age groups the differences between those who agree and disagree with the news are not large.

In terms of monthly income, 25% of those in the group of citizens with lower monthly income (up to 30,000 denars) would check the news, while only 9% of the respondents with monthly income over 75,000 denars would check the reliability of the news.

Chart 11:

EU invented vaccines and quarantine during corona so they can easily control people?

Yes	 39%
No	 38%
I don't know, I have to check	 22%

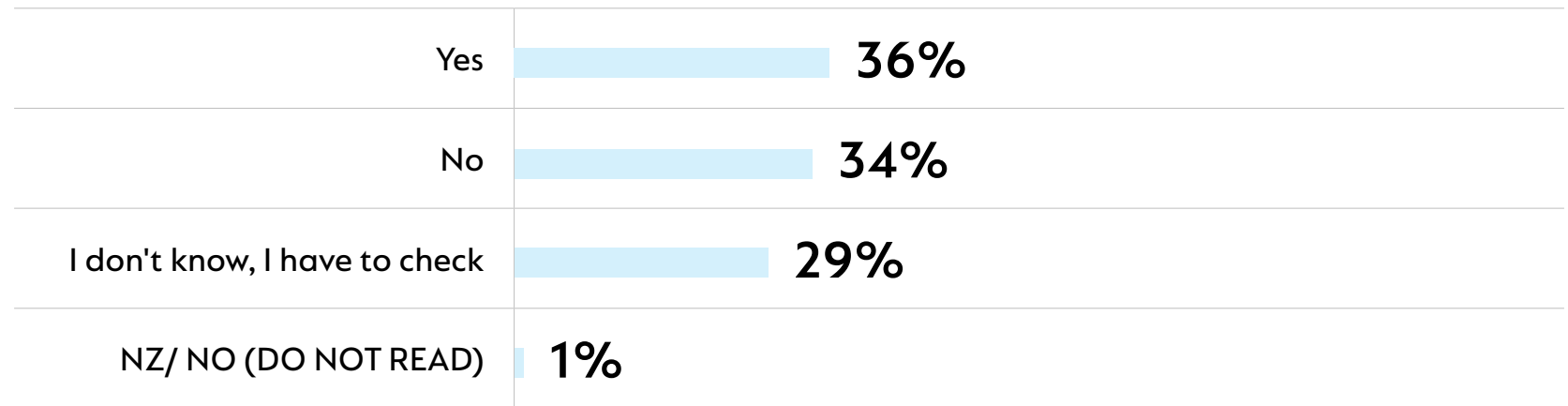
A larger number of citizens believed in fake news, that is, they answered that they agreed or disagreed with the news that the former American President Obama said that the European Union will soon dissolve (70%). Only 29% answered that they were not aware of the news and that they should check it.

If these answers are compared with the level of citizens' trust in the media, it can be seen that the majority of citizens who assume that the news they are reading is reliable because it has been published, answered that they are not familiar with the news and that they should check it (42%). Furthermore, 31% of those who do not doubt the accuracy of the news would also check the disinformation, 20% of the citizens who check the publisher of the news, 25% of the citizens who check the author of the news, 36% of those who consult with someone who has knowledge of the subject, 26% of those who doubt everything that is published and 31% of those who check how the news is reported in other media.

In terms of employment status of the respondents, the majority of housewives (61%) and students (38%) answered that they would check the statement, while the other groups said that they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Chart 12:

Do you agree with former US President Obama's statement that the European Union will soon dissolve?



IV. Demographic distribution

Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Age	18-24	10%
	25-34	17%
	35-44	17%
	45-54	17%
	55-64	17%
	65+	22%
Ethnicity	Macedonian	63%
	Albanian	26%
	Other	11%
Employment status	Full time employee	50%
	Part-time employee	2%
	Unemployed	16%
	Student	5%
	Pensioner	25%
	Housewife	2%
Region	Vardar	8%
	Eastern	9%
	Southwest	8%
	Southeast	11%
	Pelagonia	12%
	Polog	13%
	Northeast	8%
	Skopje	30%

Place of residence	Urban	62%
	Rural	38%
Education	No formal education	1%
	Completed primary education	14%
	Completed secondary education	54%
	Completed college/high school	28%
	Completed postgraduate studies, doctorate or specialization	3%
Total monthly income in the family	Up to 18,000 denars	19%
	18,001 to 30,000 denars	24%
	30,001 to 42,000 denars	18%
	42,001 to 60,000 denars	15%
	60,001 to 75,000 denars	7%
	Over 75,001 denars	6%
	Doesn't know/ Doesn't have answer	11%
Marital status	Married	70%
	Widowed/Divorced	14%
	Not married	17%
Total family members	1 member	7%
	2 members	17%
	3 members	16%
	4 members	30%
	5+ members	29%

V. Annex 1 - Questionnaire for surveying the ability of citizens to discern and deal with disinformation

1. How often do you get informed about world events?

1. Once a day
2. Several times a day
3. Several times a week
4. I'm not interested at all
5. Don't know/ No answer

2. What topics interest you the most? (multiple answers are possible)

1. Sports
2. Music
3. Politics
4. Climate and environment
5. Entertainment
6. Economy
7. Other _____

3. Which media do you mainly use to get information (multiple answers are possible)

1. TV
2. Newspaper
3. Radio
4. Facebook
5. YouTube
6. Tiktok
7. Twitter
8. Time.mk and similar portals (news aggregators)
9. Websites

10. Colleagues, friends, relatives
11. Instagram
12. Other_____

4. How do you know that the media from which you get information can be trusted?

1. I assume what I am reading is credible because it is published
2. I have no doubts because everything published in the media is true
3. I check the publisher of the news
4. I check if the author of the text is signed
5. I consult with someone who understands
6. I doubt everything that is published
7. I check whether and how the news was reported in other media

5. Do you think that you personally can discern when a news story is disinformation?

1. Yes, always
2. Sometimes
3. Rarely
4. I can not
5. I don't know/no answer

6. How often have you shared information that you later discovered was incorrect?

1. Often
2. Sometimes
3. Overall
4. I don't know/no answer

7. How do you feel when you realize that something you read is disinformation?

1. I am very angry
2. It disturbs me
3. Whatever
4. I am laughing
5. I have not had such an experience
6. I don't know/no answer

8. Of the following news items, which one would you choose to read first? (instruction to the respondent "there is no wrong answer, choose the first thing that comes to your mind")

1. NEW PLANET DISCOVERED WHERE POTENTIALLY LIFE CAN EXIST?!!!!
(sensational, fake news)

2. What did PENTAGON and NASA want to hide about the newly discovered planet? (conspiracy)
3. Research on the newly discovered planet points to evidence of a possible life (neutral news)
4. Don't know/no answer

9. Who spreads the most disinformation in Macedonia?

1. The media
2. The political parties
3. Government institutions
4. All listed
5. Other
6. I don't know/no answer

10. How much do you agree with the following statements (agree / disagree)

	I do not agree at all	I do not agree	Neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I fully agree
Global warming is not significant because it is still cold in some part of the year	1	2	3	4	5
Future generations should care about the global warming issue	1	2	3	4	5
Humans, animals and plants can easily adapt if global warming occurs	1	2	3	4	5
Climate change is just propaganda so that big companies can sell new "green" technologies	1	2	3	4	5
Global warming is a real problem, but Macedonia is too small to be able to change anything	1	2	3	4	5

11. How much do you agree with the following statements?

	I do not agree at all	I do not agree	Neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I fully agree
Migrants will destroy European civilization and culture	1	2	3	4	5
The EU wants to turn Macedonia into a large camp for migrants	1	2	3	4	5
The "French proposal" denies Macedonian minorities in neighboring countries	1	2	3	4	5

12. Do you agree with former American President Obama's statement that the European Union will soon dissolve? (do not read the answers)

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know, I have to check
4. I don't know/no answer

13. "The EU came up with vaccines and quarantine during the coronavirus so they can easily control people"

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know, I have to check
4. I don't know/no answer



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