



“Silent assassins” and “slick HR”. A Study of Anti-union Tactics in Ireland

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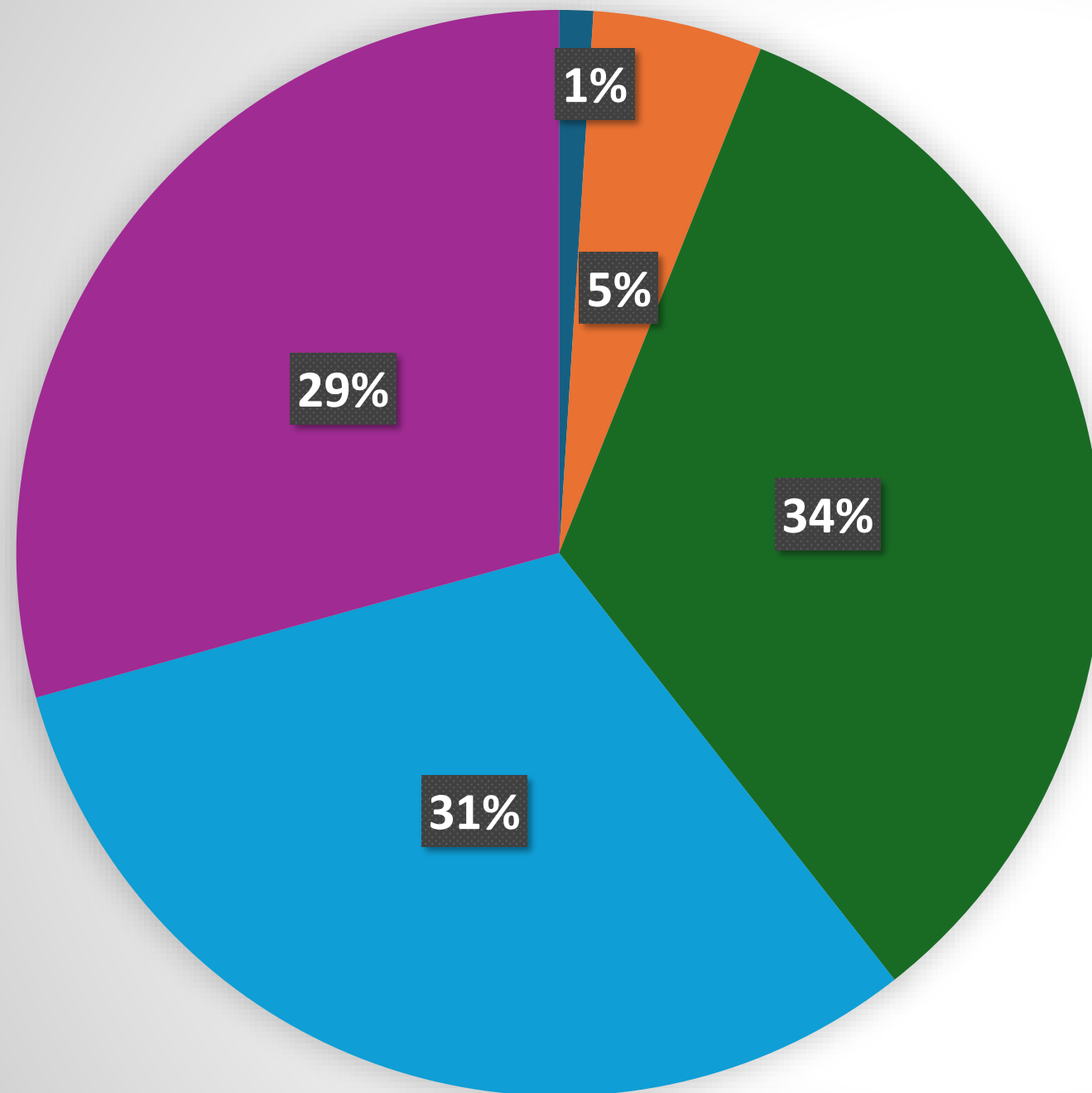
Background

- Role of union representation for workers, economy & democracy
- EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages
 - “traditional collective bargaining structures have been eroding during recent decades, due, inter alia, to structural shifts in the economy towards less unionised sectors and to the decline in trade union membership, in particular as a consequence of **union-busting practices...**”
- D’Art & Turner (2005)
 - 63% of union officials reported union recognition had become difficult to secure

Methodology

- Aim: To examine the experiences & views of union officials on organising, bargaining & representing workers
1. Survey to ICTU affiliated union officials
 - extended version of D'Art & Turner survey (2005)
 - 179 responses; 61% response rate
 - Funded by FES
 2. Interviews with 32 union officials in 11 unions
 - all except one had at least 10 years' experience

Ability to secure union recognition



- Recognition is much easier to secure
- Recognition is easier to secure
- No change
- Recognition is more difficult to secure
- Recognition is much more difficult to secure

Anti-Union tactics

Category (Roy, 1980; Gall, 2004)	Most common forms
Awkward stuff	Stonewalling Preventing union official access to workplaces
Sweet stuff	Improving pay/conditions Resolving employee grievances Employers established union alternatives
Fear stuff	Victimisation of union members Management consultants Monitoring employee communications
Evil stuff	Line managers briefing workers against the union

The dominance of Fear

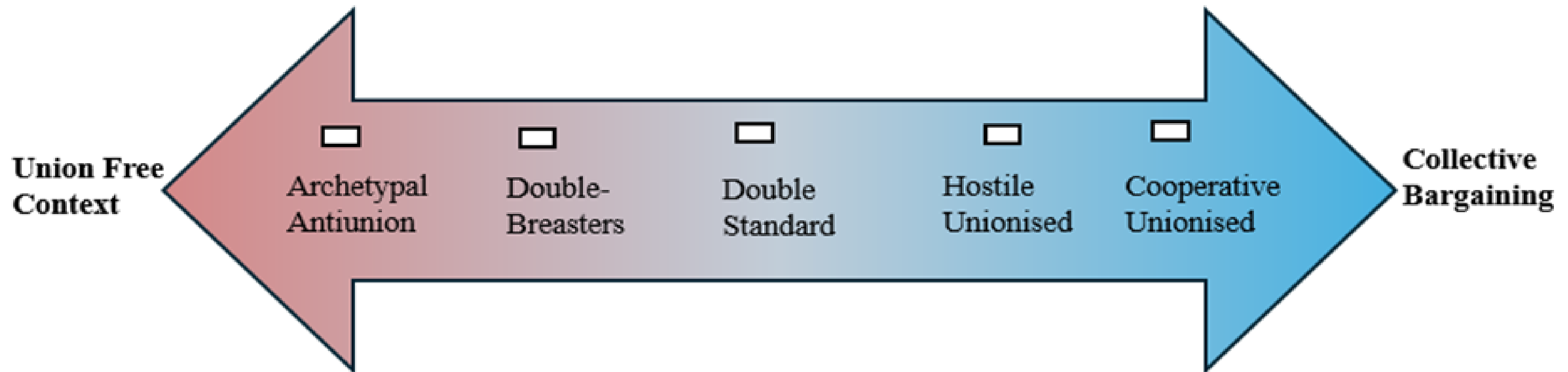
“Worker dismissed, unfair dismissal case settled but had chilling effect!”

“Language barriers and racism, sponsoring of work visas, provision of company accommodation as leverage”

“Home working threatened for following union instruction”

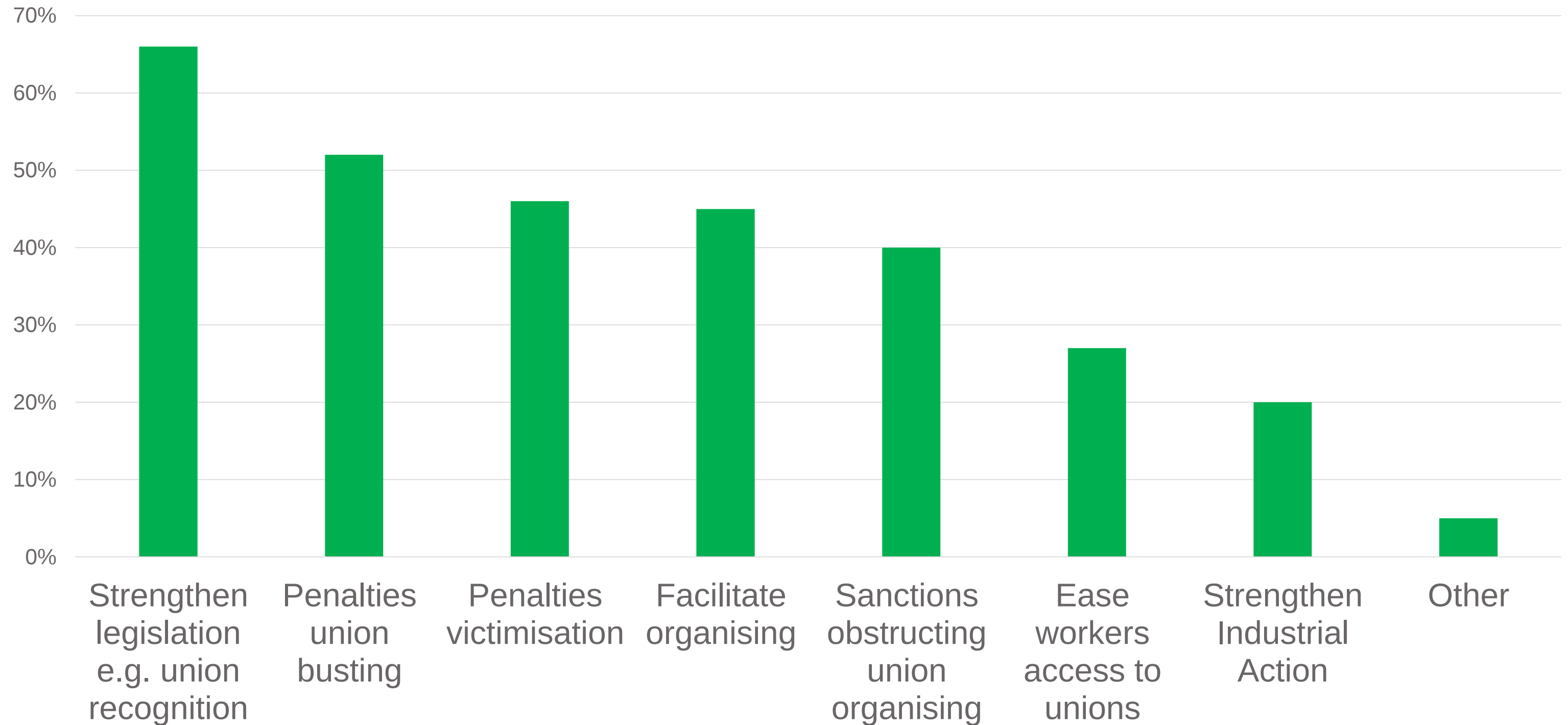
“...use of power and control (over working hours, access to annual leave etc) used against union reps”

A typology of employer approaches to unions

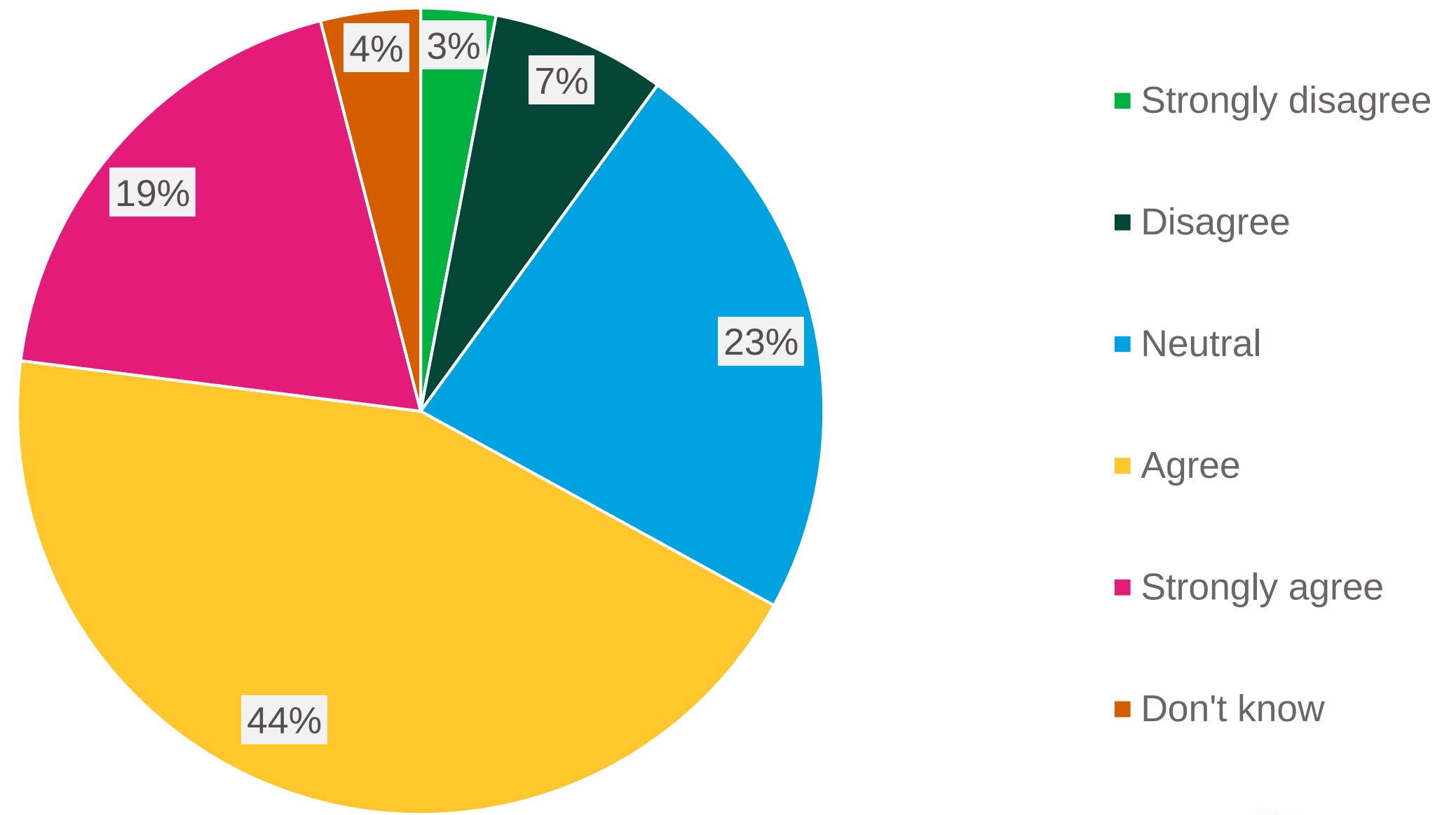


Employer approach to unions	Characteristics
Archetypal antiunion	<i>'Silent assassins'</i>
Double-breasters	MNCs with varying approaches to unions within a country (Gunnigle et al., 2009)
Double standard	Corporate position diverges from individual managers CB engagement at some levels Exclusion of some groups of workers
Hostile unionised	CB & marginalising the union <i>'slick HR'</i>
Cooperative unionised	Unproblematic union recognition

Union officials' preferences for change



The EU Directive AMW will facilitate increased union recognition



Conclusion

- Little positive change in approaches to unions in 20 years
- Union/non-union dichotomy doesn't capture nuanced employer approaches to unions
- Union effort to maintain presence & power in unionised organisations
- High hopes for the AMW Directive
- Level of institutional support for unions doesn't match growing concerns about democratic consequences of weak worker representation

Thank you



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