

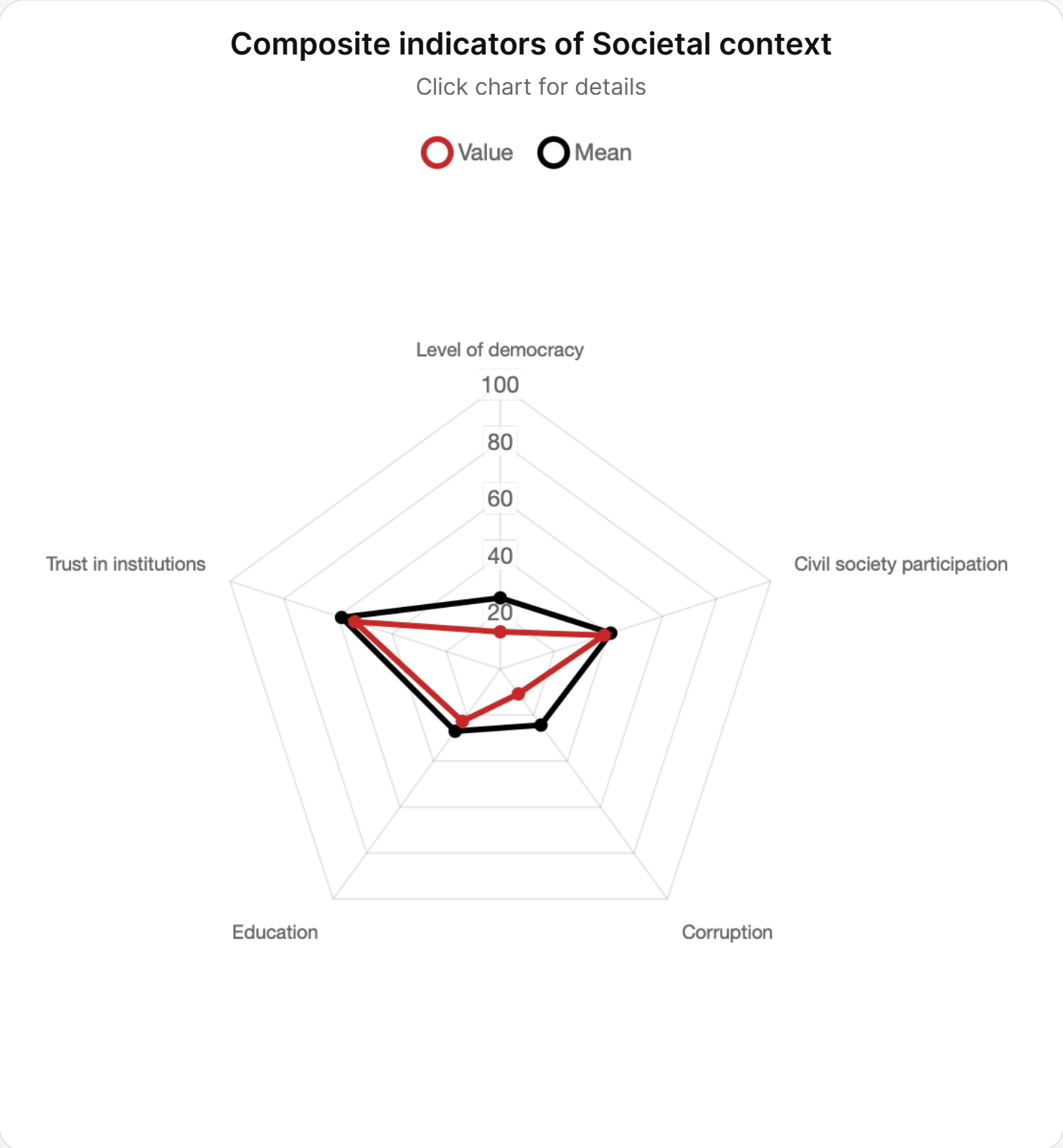
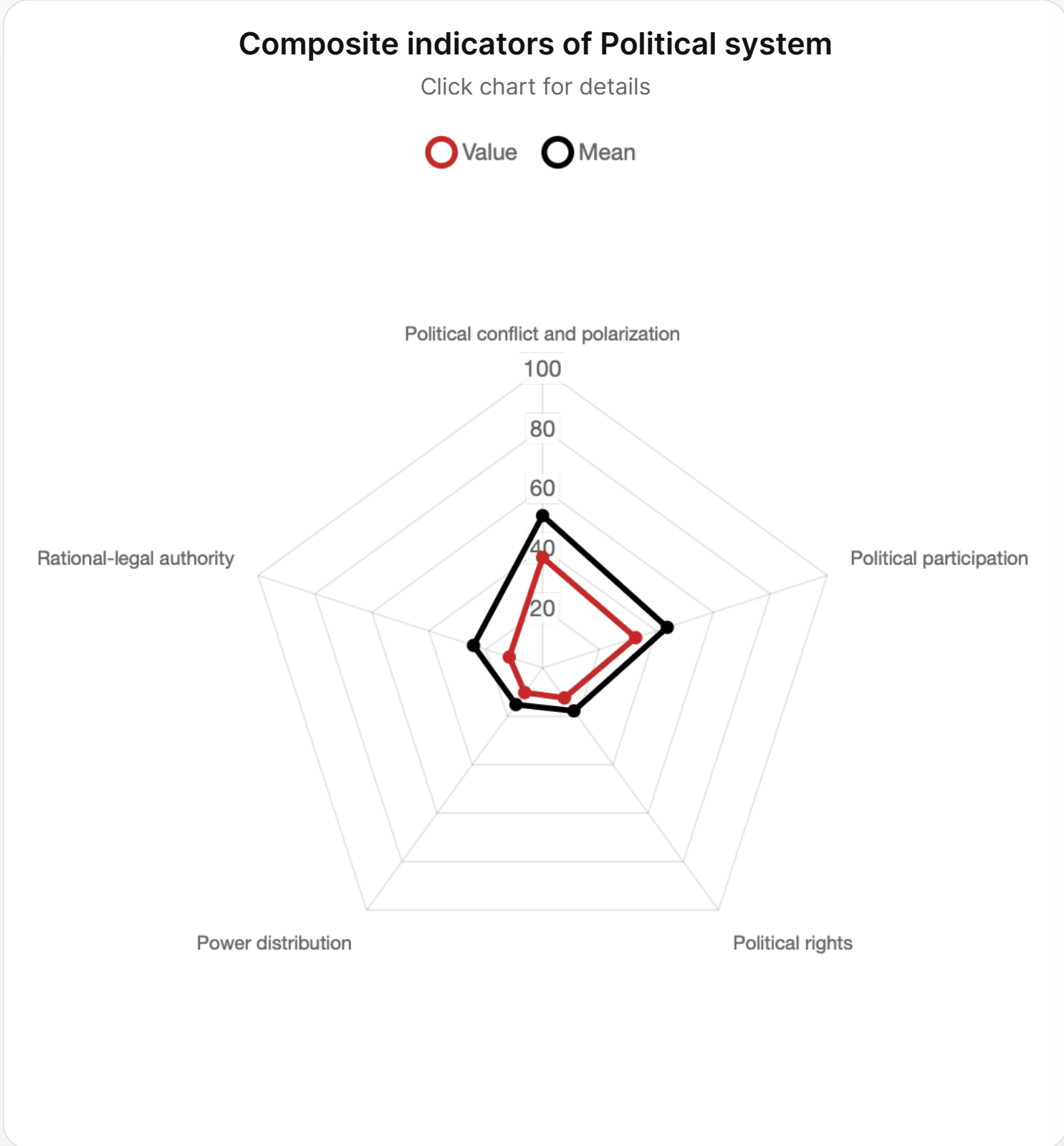
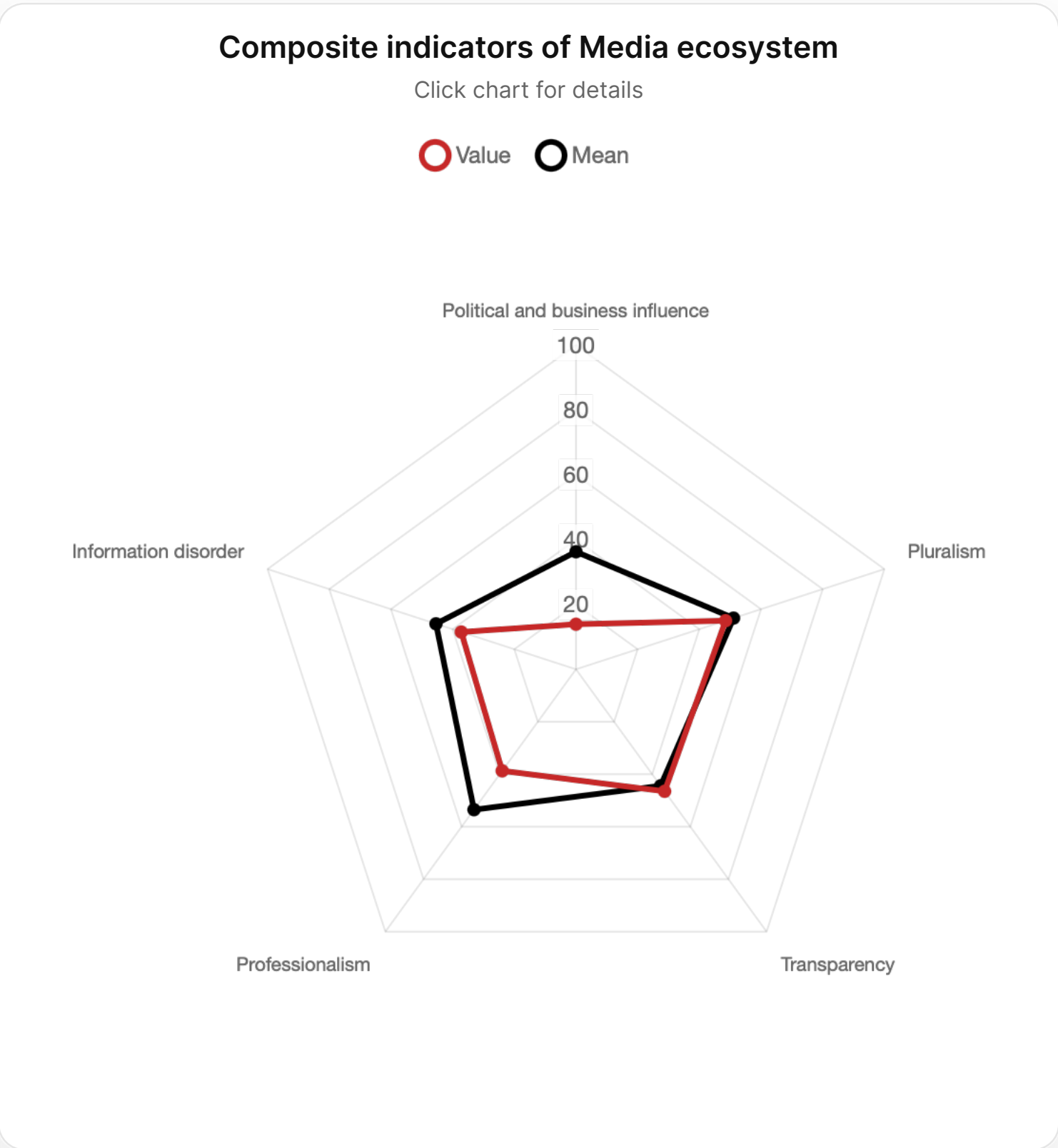
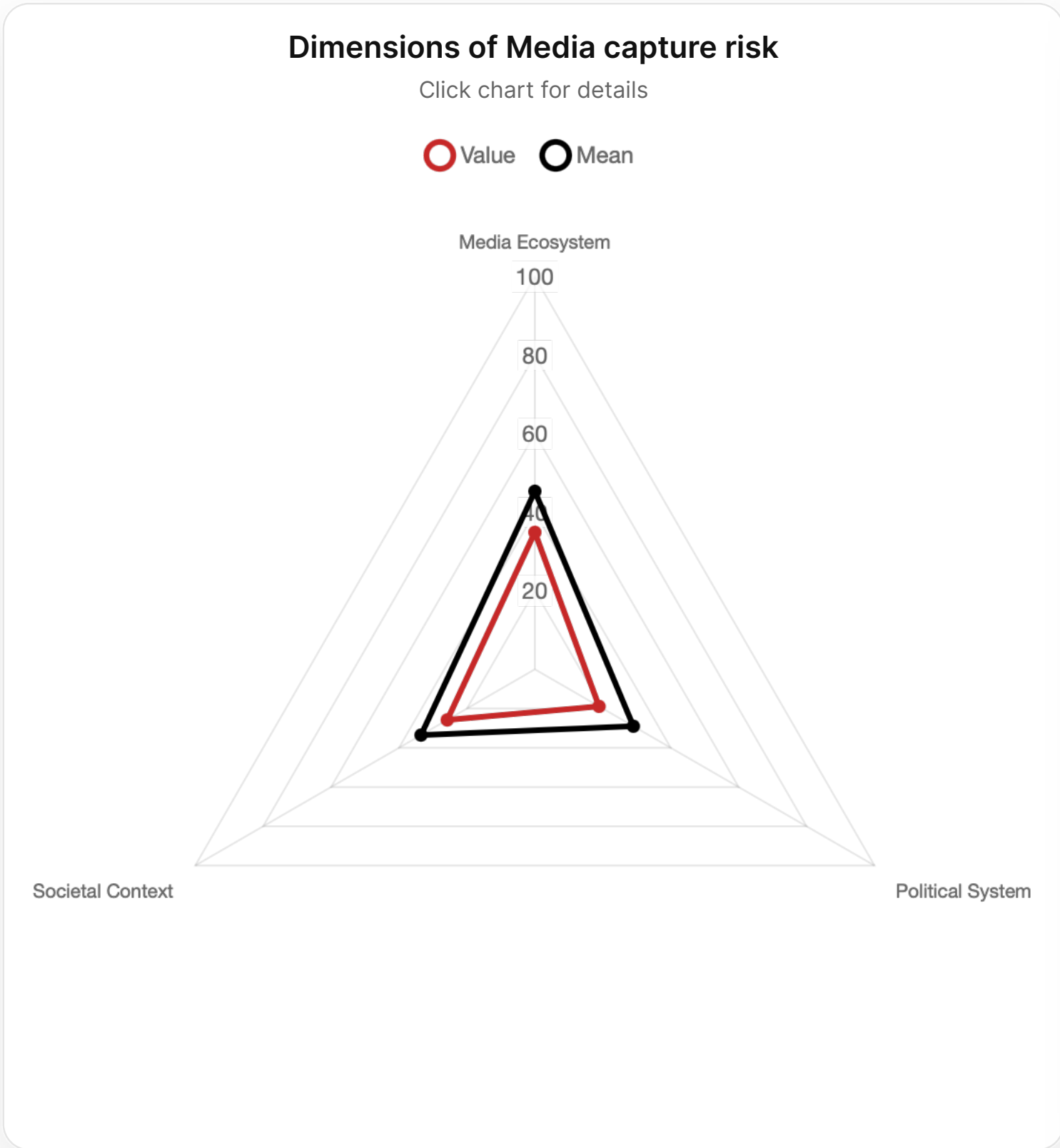
Belgium



Population: 11.8m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 28.6

Media capture risk average across countries (mean - %): 38.3



Country Overview

Belgium is characterized by a medium-low level of media capture risk overall, across all three dimensions (media ecosystem, political system, societal context). The score (28.6) is determined by the general features of the country, where the media ecosystem is protected and guaranteed freedom of expression, and political rights and civil liberties are legally guaranteed and largely respected.

The three linguistic Communities (Flemish, French, and German-speaking) play a crucial role in the institutional framework. Through successive state reforms initiated in 1970, Community authorities were progressively granted expanded powers over the regulation of radio and television broadcasting markets. As a result, each Community has developed its own audiovisual media legislation and operates as an independent media regulatory authority. Belgium's print media landscape reflects this broader linguistic segmentation and is characterized by a high degree of concentration within each market: *DPG Media*, *Mediahuis*, and *Roularta Media Group* (Roularta) dominate the Flemish print sector, while *Rossel & Cie* (Rossel) and *IPM Group* (IPM) are the key players in the French-speaking market.

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in Belgium, where the press enjoys a high level of public credibility, particularly in Flanders. Media consumption patterns show relative stability, as the growth of digital news audiences compensates for the long-term decline in print readership. Radio continues to play a significant role in the media landscape, supported by digital distribution and the expansion of podcast formats. Media education policies have also been strengthened, with the Wallonia-Brussels Federation adopting a dedicated media literacy plan in 2022. Regional public broadcasters, namely, *VRT* (Flemish Community), *RTBF* (French-speaking Community), and *BRF* (German-speaking Community), operate under formal management agreements with their respective governments and are funded through a combination of public subsidies, commercial revenues, and fees paid by television distributors. Commercial regional or local television channels do not fall under the same type of arrangements.

Transparency regarding the ownership and financial structures of digital-native news media is insufficient: while large, cross-media companies face transparency obligations, these measures do not systematically apply to purely digital news outlets. Consequently, ownership disclosure remains uneven, and the lack of clear oversight for online-only news media continues to be a concern. As there are no Belgian legal provisions on limiting vertical or cross media ownership, it could be argued that the result is an entanglement between actors who are looking for opportunities of economies of scope and scale. The Belgian media market over the past decades has become markedly concentrated, with a limited number of actors exerting significant control across both the Flemish and French-speaking regions.

Safeguards against political control and influence remain fragmented, and regulatory guarantees for editorial autonomy, particularly in the appointment and dismissal of editors-in-chief, are limited. However, this should not be taken to imply a generalized vulnerability of Belgian newsrooms: in practice, most operate under internal editorial statutes, and public service broadcasters follow formalized procedures that are designed to prevent political interference in senior editorial appointments. At the same time, recent developments suggest some asymmetries across linguistic communities, with more frequent instances of political pressure reported in the French-speaking public broadcaster compared to its Flemish counterpart. There is no specific legislation governing the allocation of state advertising to media outlets and online platforms, nor is there a public authority tasked with monitoring or reporting annually on its distribution.

The information disorder composite indicator remains below the medium-risk threshold, reflecting the presence of several initiatives aimed at countering disinformation. However, a comprehensive national public strategy, especially to address foreign information manipulation, has yet to be developed. Within this context, broadcasters are calling for stricter regulation of advertising practices by major technology platforms and for tax incentives, such as reduced VAT rates, to support regional media. At the same time, funding for investigative journalism remains contested, with the Association of Investigative Journalists (VVOJ) noting that investment levels in Flanders are significantly lower than in the Netherlands.

The characteristics of the Belgian media ecosystem are deeply rooted in the country's historical and political context. Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy in which the monarch plays a largely ceremonial role, while retaining a mediating function during government formation. The state is organized around multiple layers of subnational governance, with varying degrees of autonomy across its three main regions: Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels-Capital Region. This institutional structure is closely linked to a robust yet highly fragmented party system, divided along linguistic lines, with separate Flemish- and French-speaking parties spanning the left-right spectrum. As a result, Belgian politics is dominated by coalition governments, enabling parties to move relatively frequently in and out of power. Over time, this fragmentation has complicated coalition-building and driven Belgium's gradual evolution into a fully-fledged federal system. Since independence, periods of political stalemate have repeatedly led to constitutional and institutional reforms aimed at managing linguistic and regional tensions and rebalancing power among levels of government. These enduring divisions continue to shape contemporary political debates, including recurring calls, particularly from Flemish actors, for greater regional autonomy or a shift towards confederal arrangements. These long-standing institutional and political dynamics also shape Belgium's societal and cultural framework. Anti-discrimination legislation prohibits bias, hate speech, and incitement on grounds including gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation. Within this broader context, minority representation in the media has shown gradual improvement, though approaches differ across linguistic communities. The Flemish public service media management contract introduced specific diversity quotas, whereas the French-speaking Community's public broadcaster, *RTBF*, did not adopt comparable measures.

Overall, Belgium combines a solid commitment to democratic governance and media freedom with a structurally fragmented institutional and media landscape. Robust constitutional guarantees, well-established rights and a comparatively low level of corruption contribute to a generally pluralistic and resilient information environment. At the same time, growing market concentration and uneven transparency obligations, particularly affecting digital-native media, highlight areas where further regulatory reform remains necessary. However, this concern should be interpreted with caution, as it does not appear to be a major issue in public or policy debates across all parts of the country. It is more salient in the French-speaking media environment, while in Flanders it has received comparatively limited attention.