

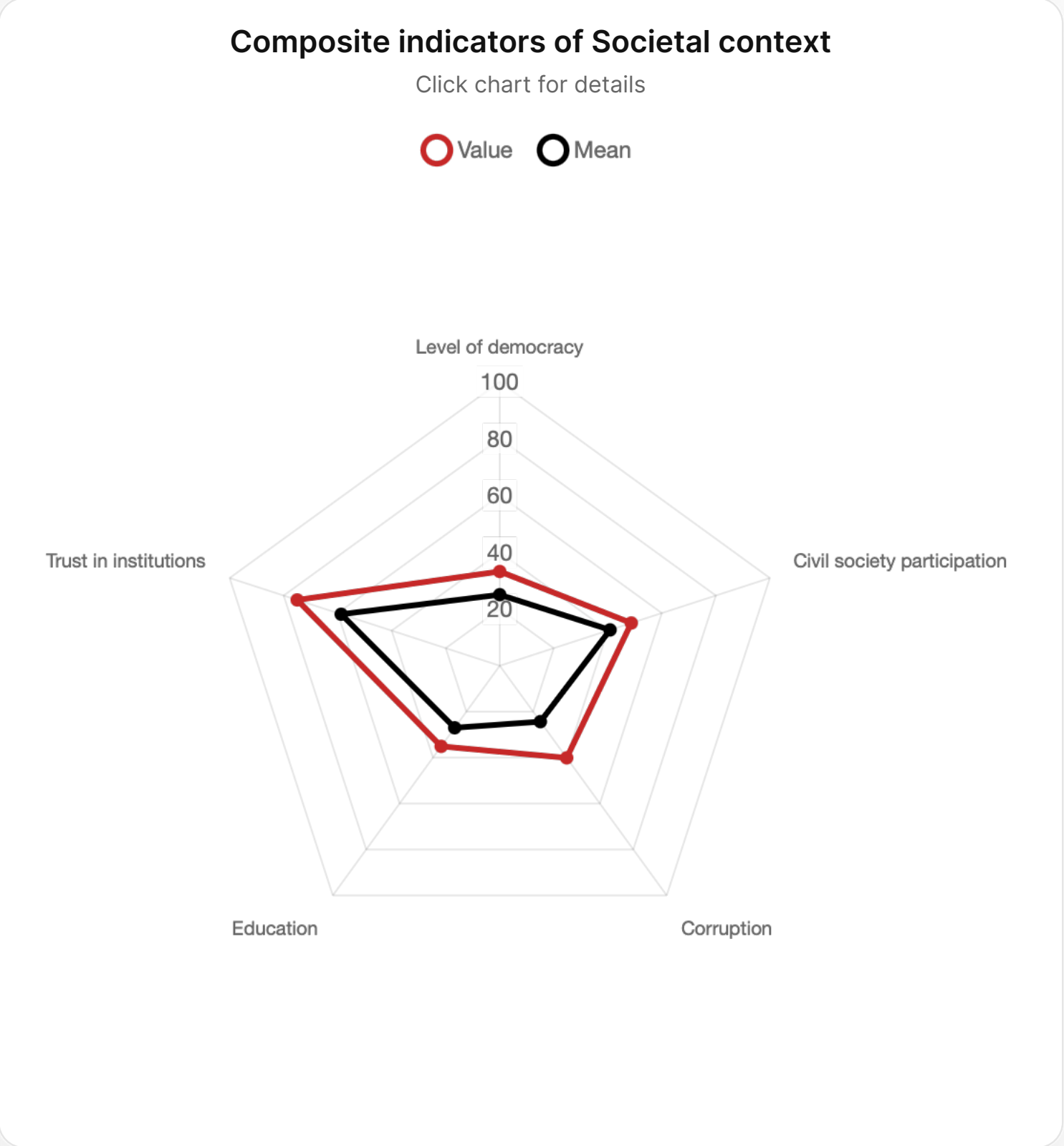
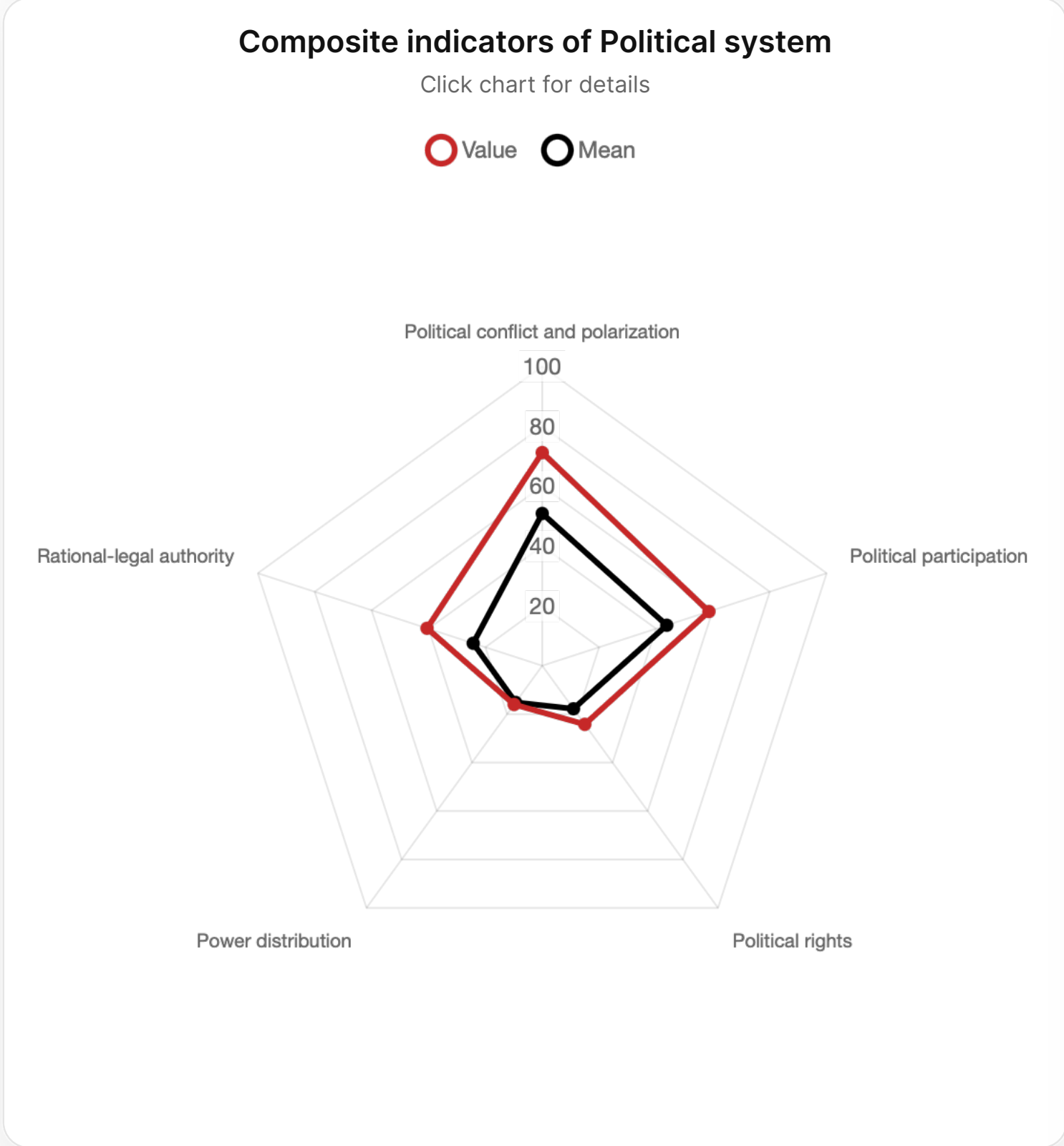
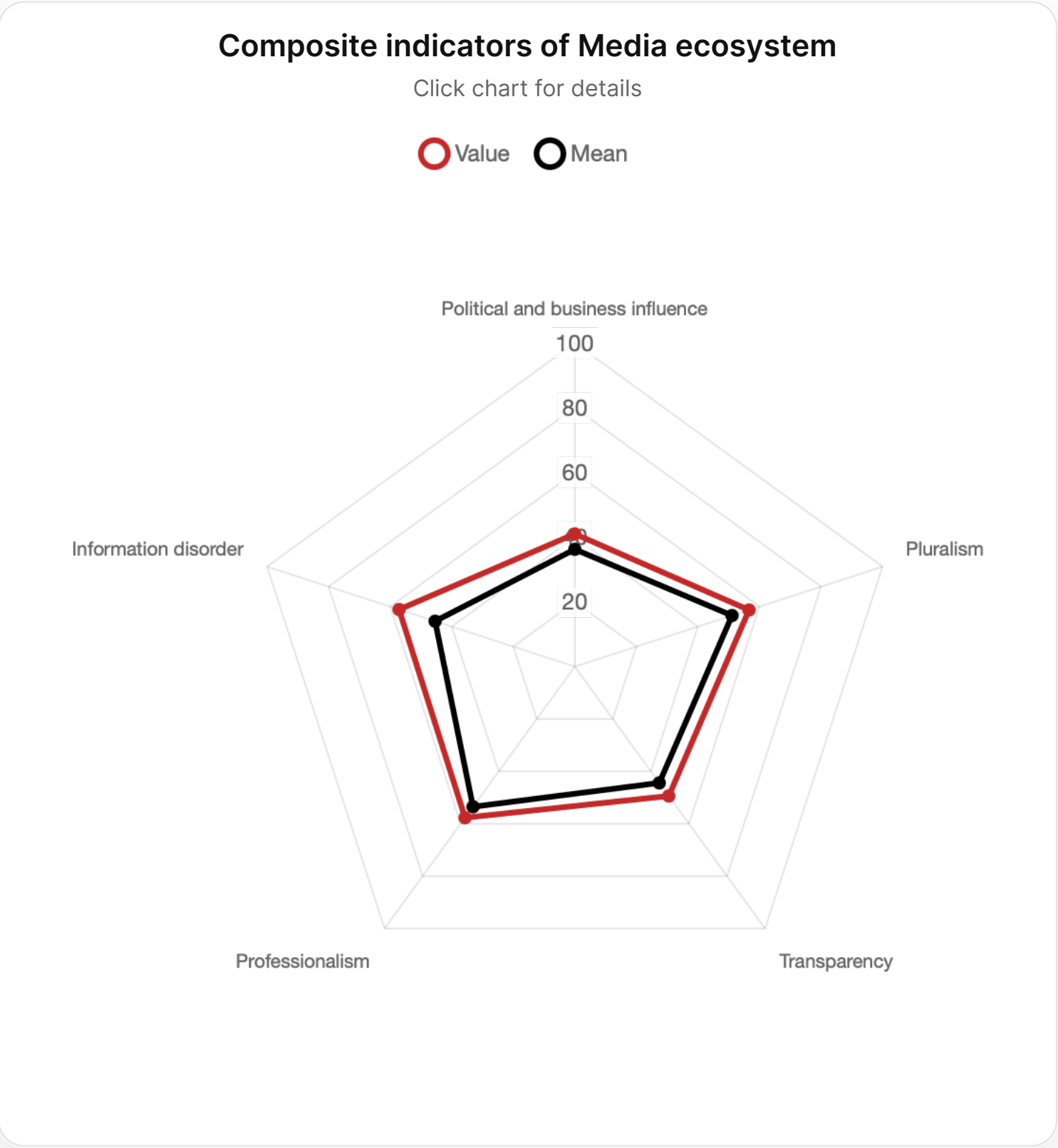
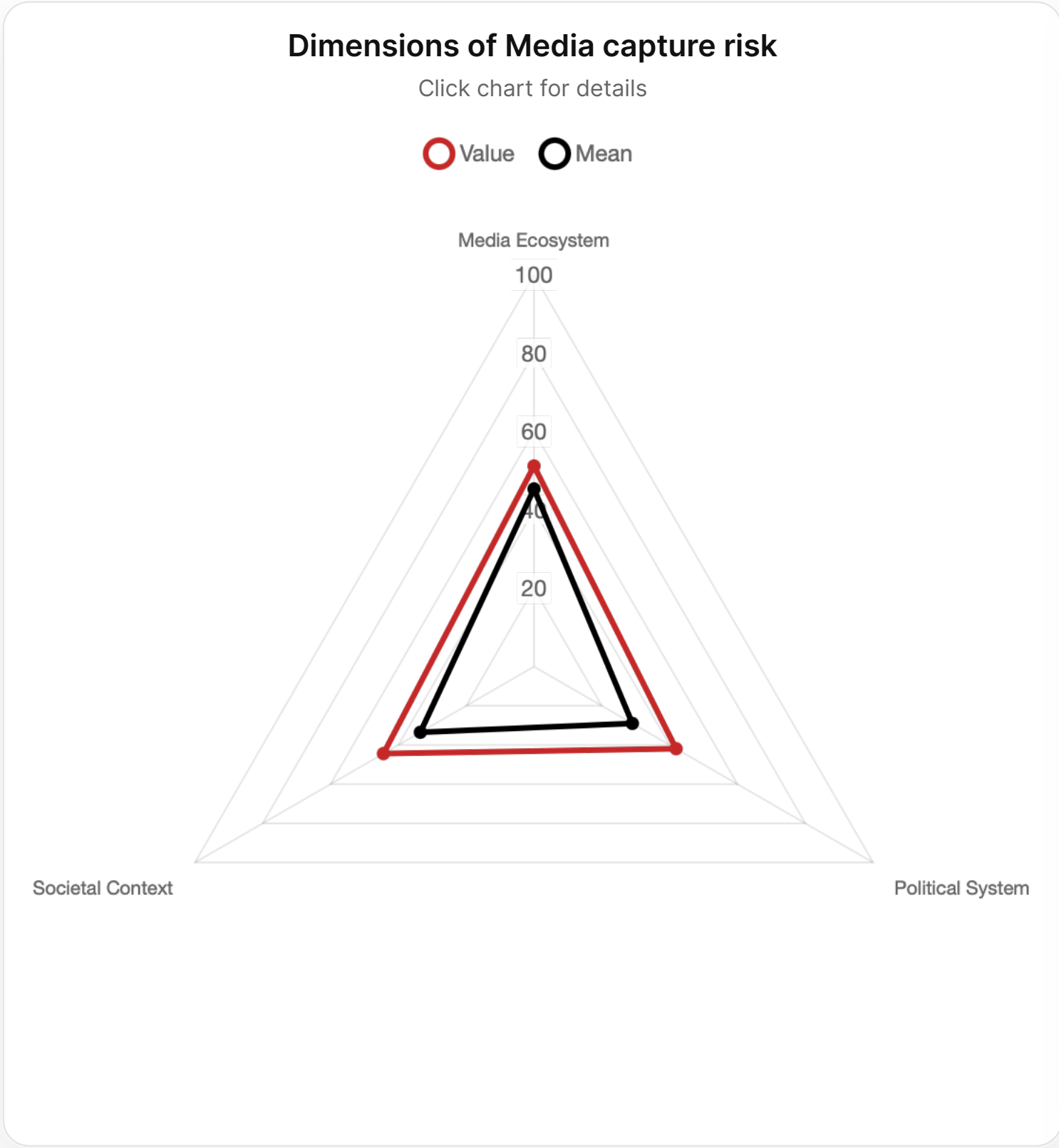
Bulgaria



Population: 6.7m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 47.2

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



Country Overview

Bulgaria presents high levels of risk of media capture, across all dimensions. The media ecosystem shows critical levels in information disorder, pluralism, and political and business influence; the societal context performs at high risk in corruption and trust in institutions; but, overall, the highest risk is shown by the political system, specifically in participation, rational and legal authority, and above all in political and conflict polarization.

These features are strictly intertwined amongst all three dimensions. The media system is featured by political interference, limited pluralism, and low levels of credibility. The political instability of the country has delayed the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act, aiming to address the lack of transparency of media ownership, the state interference in public service media (PSM) and control over media regulators.

Political parties and party leaders can legally own media companies, often providing positive coverage of the respective political subject. In parallel, local and regional media content does not meet the information needs of local communities, primarily because of the close ties of the local press with local governments. Political and economic dependencies of local outlets prevent them from sufficiently protecting the public interest and undermine readers' trust.

Journalists' safety is heavily threatened in a context of increased use of SLAPPs by public officials to silence critical journalism. In addition, and somewhat unusually within the Central and Eastern European context, concerns have also been raised about the physical safety of journalists: for example, Viktoria Marinova was murdered in 2018, although prosecutors stated that the crime was not related to her work. Nonetheless, independent journalists like Lyubomir Zhechev, Mirolyuba Benatova and Genka Shikerova are building strong digital audiences to offer unconstrained viewpoints.

Revenues in the media sector are decreasing, both because there is a declining number of media outlets and a decrease in the number of points of sale for newspapers. The state does not support local and regional media, other than public service media, through specifically dedicated subsidies or other policy measures. At the same time, although the state has often been regarded as one of the largest advertisers, raising concerns about potential indirect influence over the media market, its actual role appears more limited. In 2022, state advertising accounted for approximately one third of television advertising and a considerably smaller share of online advertising. Television remains a central component of the advertising ecosystem, representing around 50% of the overall advertising market, with leading actors such as *Nova TV* and *BTV News* attracting the majority of both television and online advertising revenues. Meanwhile, the print sector has experienced a significant decline, including a 10% drop in advertising revenues. Despite the broader contraction of the media sector, total advertising revenues have increased in recent years, largely driven by private advertisers, including sectors such as gambling. Regarding online outlets, *Dvenik.bg* and *Capital* are among the few combining digital subscriptions with advertising income. Platforms such as *Facebook*, *Telegram*, *TikTok* and *YouTube*, on the other hand, are increasingly populated by influencers promoting anti-establishment, nationalist, or pro-Russian viewpoints and representing a primary news source for younger audiences.

Finally, the Bulgarian media ecosystem faces high levels of risk regarding the information disorder composite indicator. Specifically, this score is heavily influenced by the highest performance of the sub-indicator regarding the monitoring and impact of dis- and misinformation, implying that there are low or even absent mechanisms of safeguarding the quality of the information.

The media features are surely explained by the Bulgarian political context. The country's contemporary politics are shaped by long-term historical legacies, including its Ottoman past, decades under Soviet influence, and a post-1989 transition marked by incomplete institutional reform. Persistent political instability, combined with corruption and weak judicial accountability, has contributed to declining public trust in democracy, even as formal democratic structures remain in place. Since 2021, repeated electoral cycles and fragmented parliamentary outcomes have prevented the consolidation of stable governments, culminating in seven parliamentary elections within three years by October 2024. Voter turnout has steadily declined, reaching a historic low of 34 percent in the June 2024 elections, reflecting widespread political fatigue and disillusionment. Concerns over the rule of law and judicial independence intensified in 2024. In July, the Constitutional Court struck down key constitutional amendments adopted in late 2023 that had aimed to reform judicial governance, including limiting the powers of the prosecutor general. These reforms had been welcomed by the European Commission, and their reversal raised fears of stalled progress in addressing corruption and oligarchic influence.

Bulgaria's political landscape is increasingly polarized along a cleavage between European integration and nationalist, pro-Russian forces. While the country is advancing toward deeper EU integration, far-right and anti-establishment parties, particularly Revival, have gained visibility and influence. The high level of polarization has had tangible effects on rights and freedoms. In 2024, parliament adopted legislation banning so-called LGBTQIA+ "propaganda" in schools, despite public protests and international concern. The law has contributed to social intimidation and reflects broader conservative and nationalist pressures, reinforced by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Minority rights also remain contested, particularly regarding Roma communities and migrants, amid reports of forced evictions and pushbacks at external borders.

Overall, Bulgaria presents a political and media environment marked by persistent instability, weak institutional safeguards, and a high risk of media capture. The media system remains constrained by limited pluralism, declining revenues, and strong dependencies on political and business actors, especially at the local and regional level.