

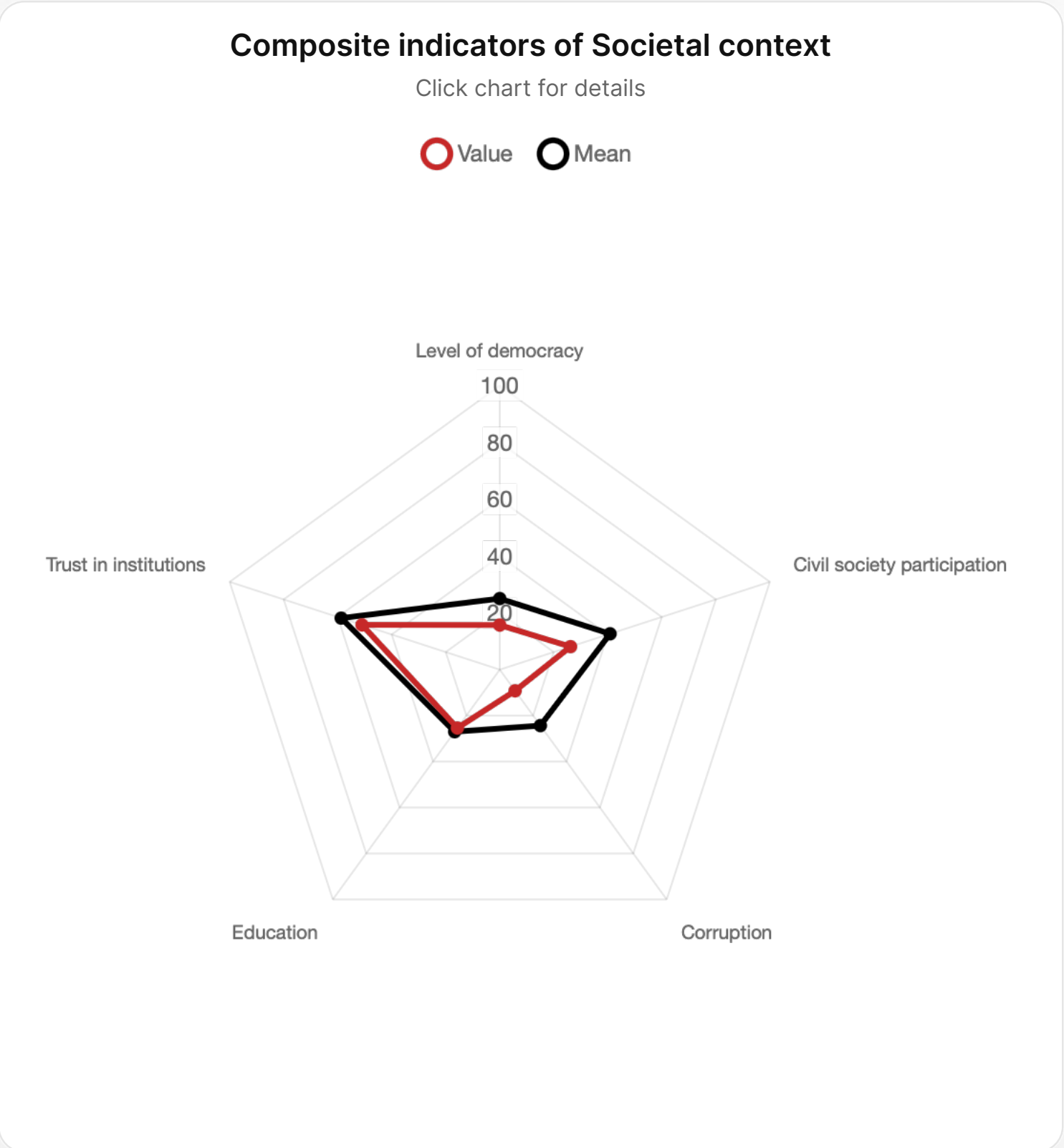
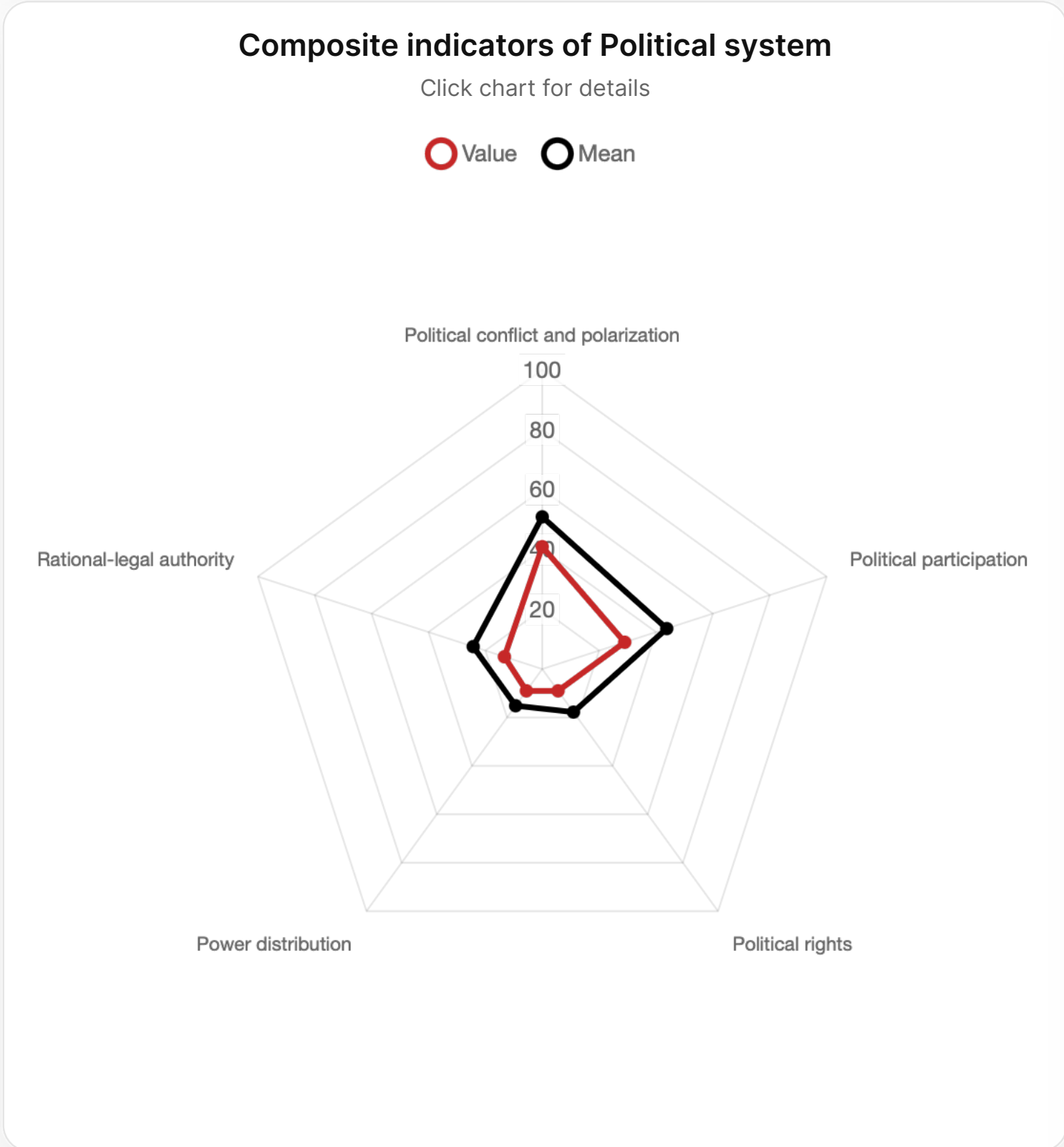
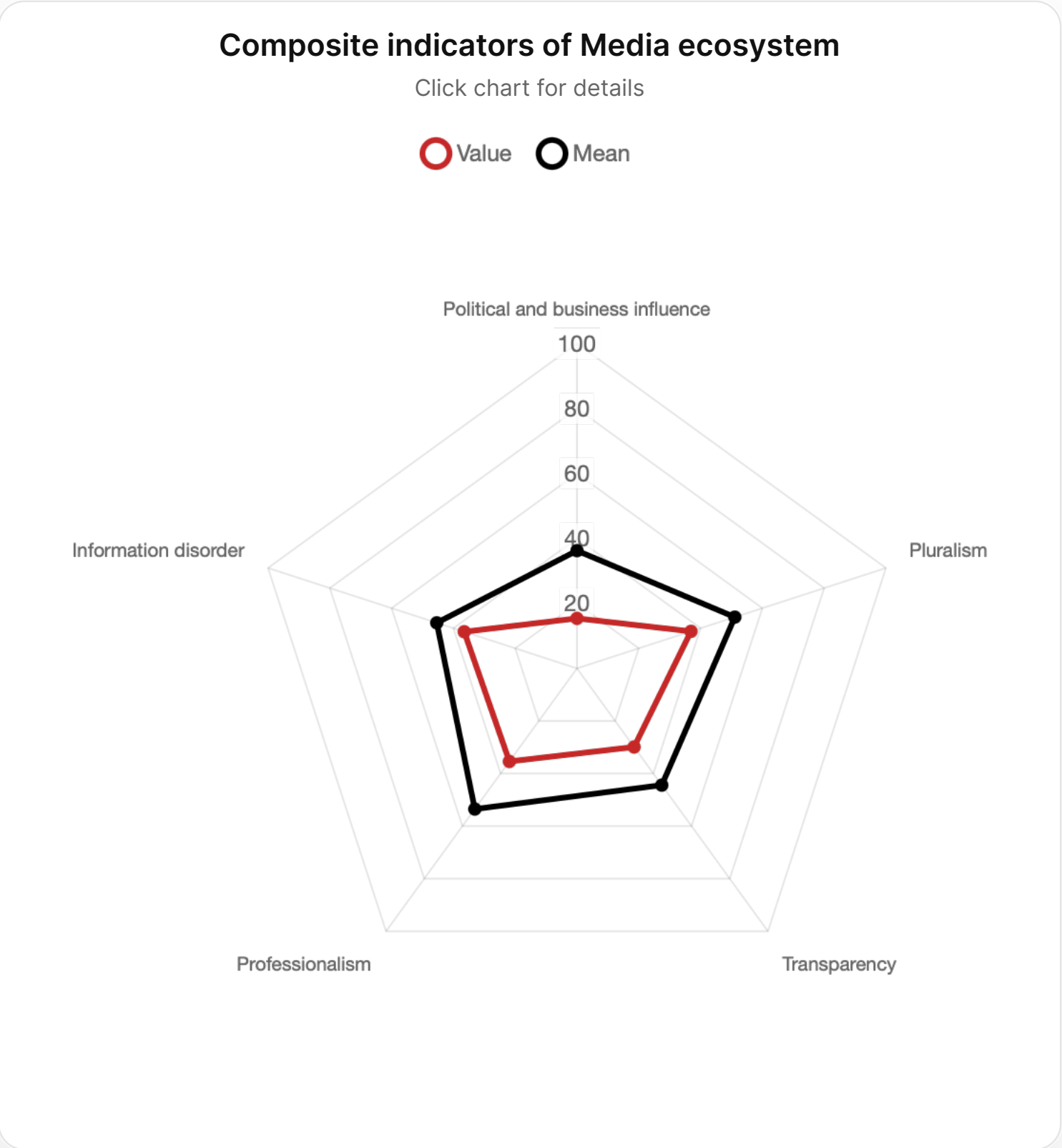
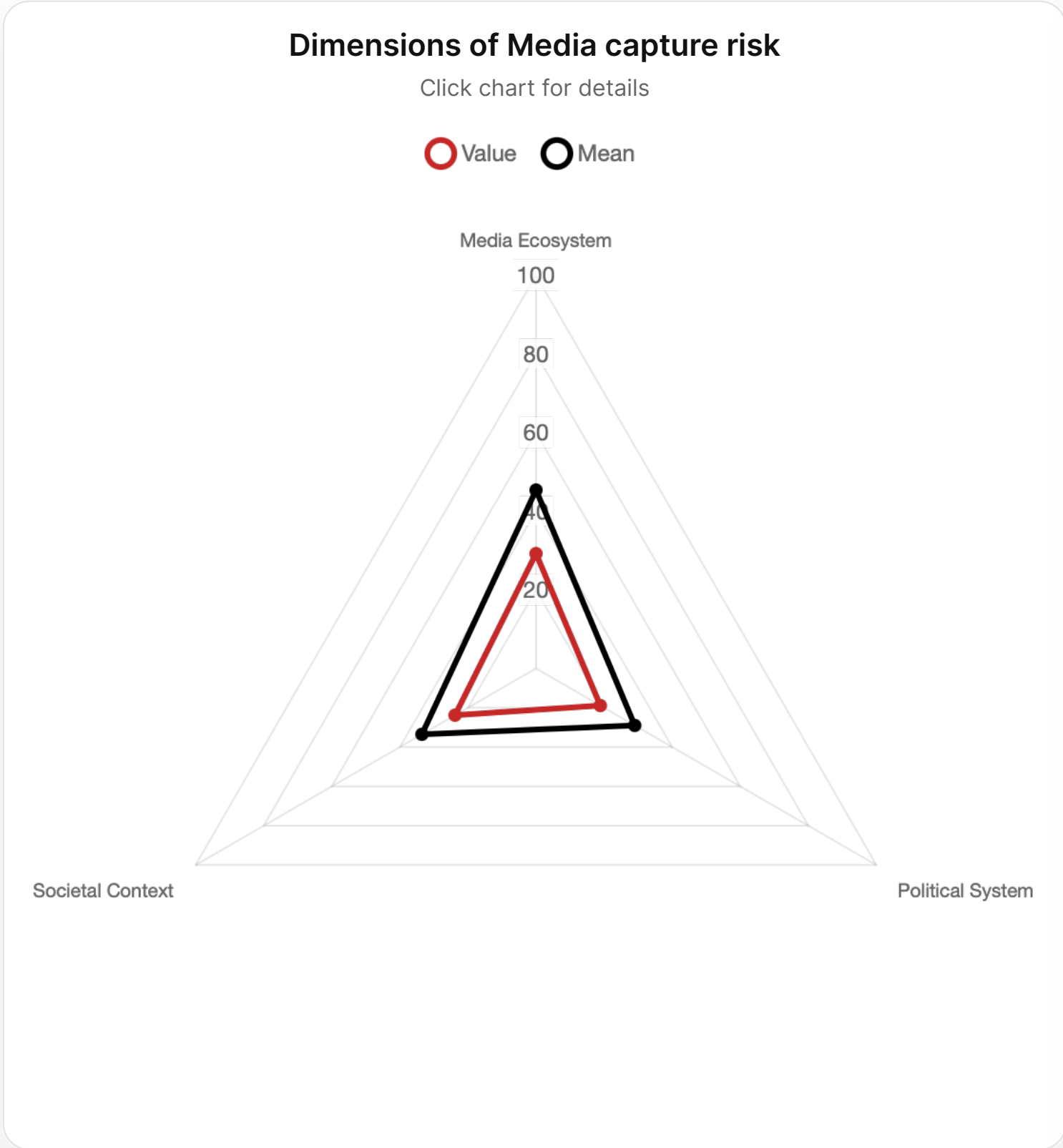
# Germany



Population: 83.6m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 25.3

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



## Country Overview

Germany displays one of the lowest levels of media capture risk across all three dimensions considered, ranking just below Denmark and Sweden. This favorable position is rooted in the country's long-standing democratic stability and strong constitutional safeguards, which have been in place since the mid-twentieth century. Political rights and civil liberties are broadly protected both in law and in practice. Nevertheless, in recent years Germany has experienced rising political and social tensions, largely linked to increased asylum applications and the growing electoral appeal of right-wing populist movements, which have contributed to higher levels of polarization. In this context, media responses to the far right have increasingly been shaped by the interaction of supply-side dynamics, demand-side pressures, and institutional constraints. On the supply side, the professionalization and normalization strategies of far-right actors, particularly the *AfD*, alongside external political pressures and internal editorial conflicts, have expanded their discursive opportunities and encouraged more reactive and risk-averse journalistic approaches. On the demand side, journalists' perceptions of societal radicalization and audience expectations, especially during critical events such as the refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, have contributed to greater visibility and normalization of far-right actors. At the institutional level, resource constraints, funding structures, and market pressures have limited the capacity of media outlets to consistently apply demarcation strategies, often incentivizing coverage driven by provocation and immediacy.

However, the German media system operates within a legal and institutional framework that is generally conducive to journalistic autonomy, a framework strongly shaped by the country's historical experience under National Socialism. Freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and access to information are constitutionally protected as closely interconnected rights under Article 5(1) of the Basic Law. This constitutional architecture reflects a deliberate effort to prevent authoritarian control over information and to secure the media's role as a pillar of democracy. At the same time, access to information remains fragmented in practice, media pluralism is under increasing pressure, and incidents of harassment and violence against journalists have risen. In addition, large corporations have increasingly resorted to strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), which pose a chilling effect on investigative reporting.

Germany's media landscape is characterized by a highly decentralized structure and a dual broadcasting system that includes both public and private actors. Public service broadcasters (*ARD*, *ZDF*, and *Deutschlandfunk*) play a central role in providing news and information at regional, national, and international levels. Despite their strong legal guarantees of independence, public broadcasters have faced growing criticism in recent years, particularly regarding their funding model and perceived political neutrality. These debates have unfolded alongside structural transformations in the media market, including the closure of several publications and significant job losses in major media companies, developments that have narrowed the range of available journalistic voices and weakened media pluralism.

Professional standards and editorial independence are reinforced through self-regulatory mechanisms, most notably the German Press Council. Its updated guidelines on conflicts of interest reaffirm the principle of strict separation between journalistic work and any additional roles in politics, business, or other spheres of influence. The guidelines emphasize that not only actual conflicts, but also the appearance of interest-driven reporting, can undermine public trust. Where objective indications of a conflict exist, journalists are expected to withdraw from editorial involvement unless full transparency towards readers is ensured.

Politically, the role of the media as a cornerstone of democratic accountability is widely acknowledged across the political spectrum, with the notable exception of segments of the far right. German media outlets maintain a strong tradition of scrutinizing both government and opposition actors, and many newspapers openly adopt editorial lines aligned with specific political camps. While this pluralism of viewpoints is a long-standing feature of the system, certain political decisions have occasionally raised concerns about indirect political influence on public service media, despite the formal safeguards in place.

Access to public information is regulated through the federal Freedom of Information (FOI) law, which applies to ministries, parliament, and the Chancellery, complemented by sector-specific legislation on environmental and consumer information. However, the practical implementation of FOI remains problematic. In 2025, coalition negotiations revealed a proposal, leaked by the transparency platform *FragDenStaat*, to abolish the FOI law altogether, a move reportedly linked to a *Christian Democratic Union* politician with prior involvement in lobbying activities. Although the proposal was withdrawn following media scrutiny, it was replaced only by vague commitments to administrative "reform", highlighting the fragility of transparency safeguards.

In practice, journalists and citizens frequently encounter obstacles when submitting FOI requests, including high administrative fees, broad claims of trade secrecy, restrictive court interpretations, and inadequate record-keeping by public authorities, particularly regarding digital communications. According to *FragDenStaat*, these shortcomings constitute persistent barriers to effective public oversight and limit the media's capacity to hold power to account. Despite these challenges, public service media continue to enjoy comparatively high levels of trust. Trust in public television has remained stable over the past decade and even increased slightly in 2023. Overall trust in news has also stabilized, although it has not returned to the exceptional levels observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In sum, Germany presents a largely resilient political and media environment underpinned by strong constitutional protections, a vibrant civil society, and a well-established culture of press freedom. While the overall risk of media capture remains low, emerging pressures, such as declining media pluralism, fragmented access to information, the strategic use of legal intimidation, and rising societal polarization, point to areas of vulnerability. These dynamics do not undermine the system's foundations but highlight the need for continued vigilance to preserve transparency, accountability, and the conditions for informed democratic participation.