# Hungary

**Population: 9.6m**

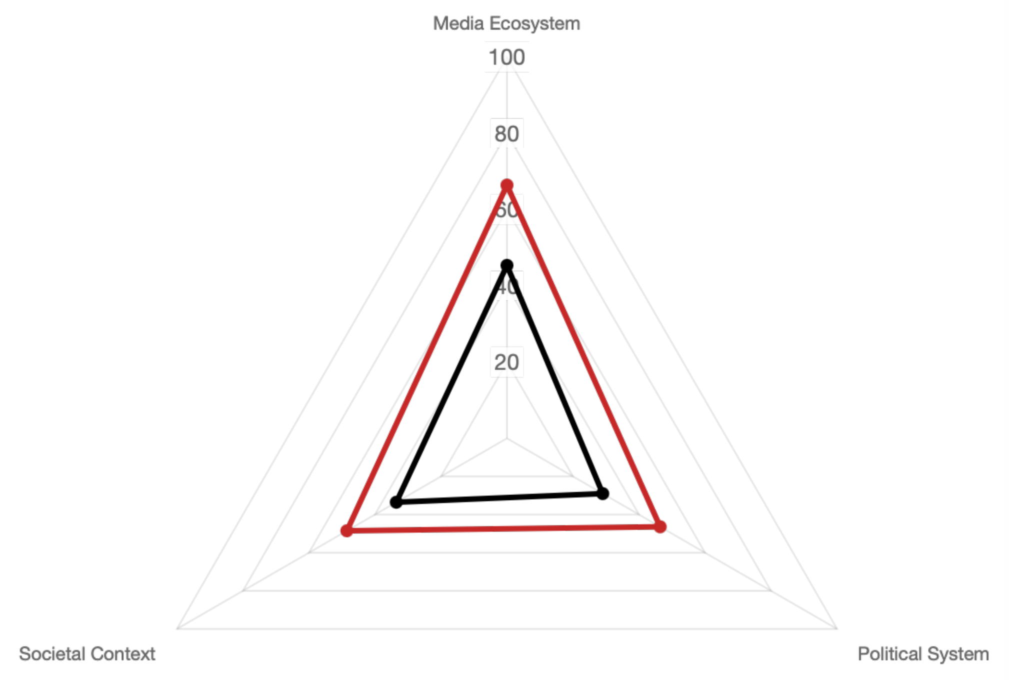
**Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 56.9**

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

**Dimensions of Media capture risk**

Click chart for details

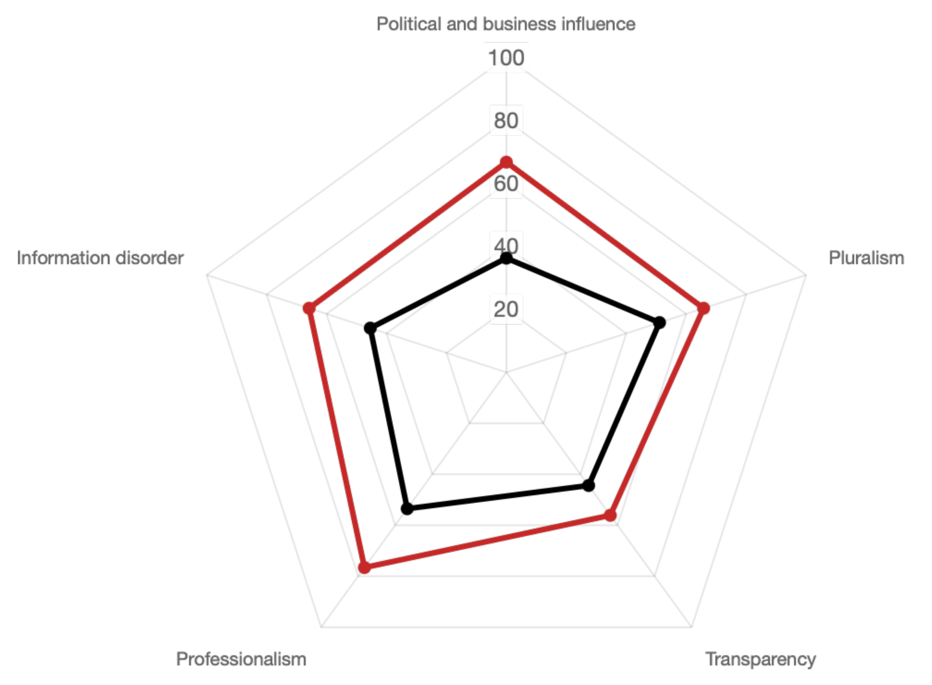
Value Mean




**Composite indicators of Media ecosystem**

Click chart for details

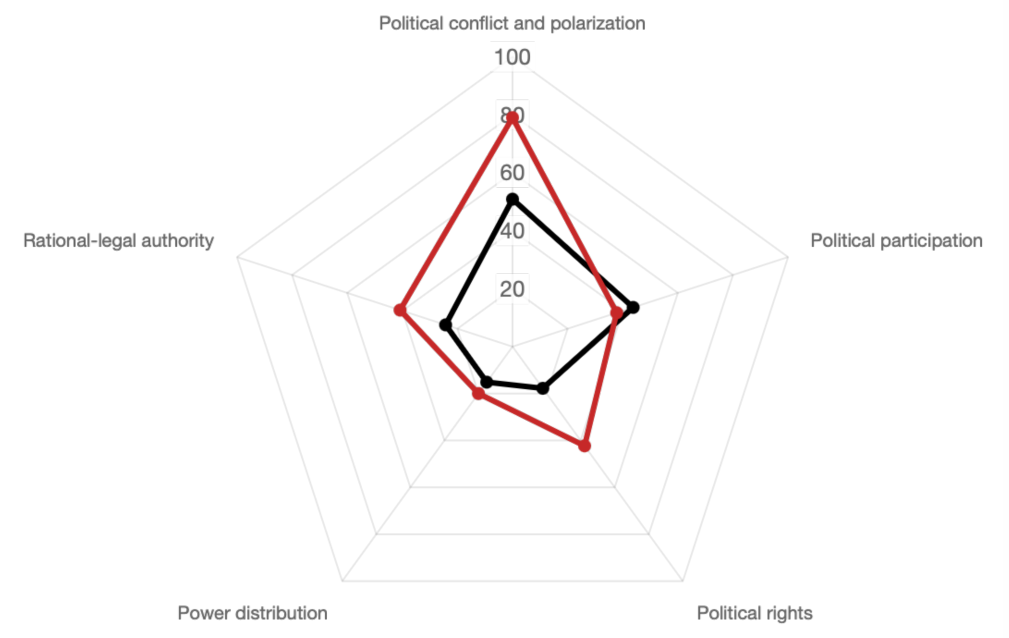
Value Mean




**Composite indicators of Political system**

Click chart for details

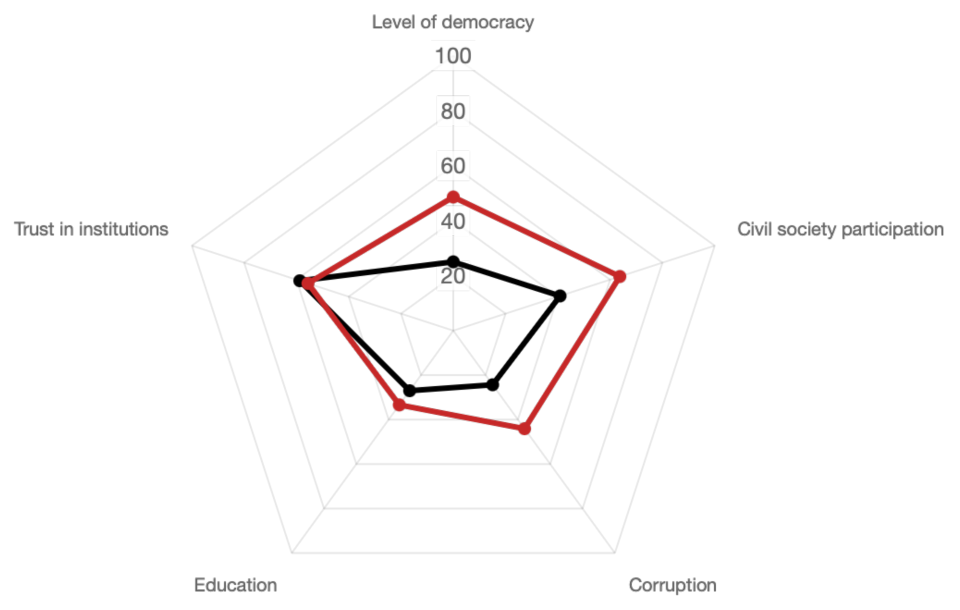
Value Mean




**Composite indicators of Societal context**

Click chart for details

Value Mean




**Country Overview**

Hungary records the second highest level of media capture risk among the countries examined, with critical scores across all three analytical dimensions. This outcome is closely linked to the country's political trajectory over the past three decades. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Hungary transitioned to a multiparty democracy and restructured its institutional framework. Until the late 2000s, it was generally regarded as a consolidated democracy. However, underlying patterns of political and economic concentration persisted beneath this formal stability. These structural features later facilitated the consolidation of governmental influence over key sectors, most notably the media following the constitutional arrangements that have been approved in 1989. A decisive turning point occurred in 2010, when Viktor Orbán returned to power after *Fidesz*'s electoral victory. Since then, the government has introduced a series of constitutional and legislative reforms that have progressively strengthened executive control over institutions originally designed to function independently. The 2011 constitutional amendment, which formally defined Hungary as a parliamentary republic, was part of a broader restructuring process that reshaped the balance of power. Over time, additional legal changes have affected the judiciary, civil society, academic institutions, and regulatory bodies, thereby reinforcing political centralization.

These institutional transformations have had profound implications for the media landscape. Over the past decade, ownership structures, licensing processes, and decision-making positions within the media sector have been substantially reconfigured. During the 2008 financial crisis, several private outlets were acquired by domestic investors, often with political connections. This trend culminated in 2018 with the creation of the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA), a conglomerate coordinating nearly 500 media outlets nationwide. A significant number of private outlets were donated to this foundation by various owners informally linked to the incumbent government, which indeed has been widely reported as promoting the government's political agenda. As a result, media ownership has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of actors aligned with the ruling party.

Although the Hungarian Constitution formally guarantees freedom of the press, the practical environment for media pluralism has narrowed considerably. National, regional, and local media markets are largely dominated by outlets supportive of *Fidesz*. Public broadcasting has progressively aligned with government narratives, and through a combination of political influence and market acquisitions by oligarchs connected to *Fidesz*, approximately 80% of the media landscape is now under pro-government control. However, this level of concentration varies across media segments. In some sectors – such as regional daily newspapers and local radio stations – ownership is almost entirely in the hands of pro-government actors. In others, including political weeklies and online news outlets, critical voices remain more prominent. At the national level, certain markets display a more balanced structure, as in the case of television broadcasting, where a pro-government channel (*TV2*) coexists with a major independent outlet (*RTL*). A similar pattern can be observed in the growing ecosystem of social media influencers, where pro-government and critical voices appear more evenly represented. These differences point to the coexistence of two partially distinct media systems and journalistic cultures: on the one hand, a state-aligned media sphere characterized by collaborative journalism, and on the other, a market-oriented sphere in which monitorial journalism continues to play a central role. While the government rejects allegations of undue influence, the 2025 Rule of Law Report notes that pressure on journalists and media professionals has intensified, with smear campaigns and derogatory rhetoric becoming increasingly common.

Independent media have faced sustained pressure through legislative initiatives, regulatory scrutiny, and official reports that portray critical journalists as agents of "foreign influence" or espionage. Beyond this discursive delegitimization, independent journalists have also been subject to direct threats and intimidation. Such narratives contribute to delegitimizing independent reporting in the public sphere. At the European level, successive Rule of Law Reports have raised concerns regarding threats to media pluralism, highlighting in particular the absence of safeguards regulating the allocation of state advertising, ensuring the functional independence of the media authority, and protecting the editorial and financial autonomy of public service media. Despite these concerns, no substantial corrective measures have been adopted.

The concentration of media power cannot be understood in isolation from Hungary's broader political environment. While opposition parties are legally permitted to operate, they face structural disadvantages, including limited access to media coverage, an advertising market skewed toward pro-government outlets, and recurring smear campaigns. Consequently, *Fidesz* has maintained political dominance since 2010, with opposition forces encountering significant obstacles in electoral competition. These dynamics unfold within a deeply polarized societal context. Post-communist Hungary has experienced increasing divisions structured around support for or opposition to the ruling party. Constitutional and legislative changes have weakened institutional checks and civil society organizations, reinforcing a system characterized by concentrated political authority. The 2025 Rule of Law Report further indicates that Hungary had 47 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation as of January 2025, underscoring ongoing concerns regarding compliance with European legal standards.

At the societal level, political discourse has frequently relied on anti-immigration rhetoric and has increasingly targeted minority groups, particularly the LGBTQ+ community. Women remain underrepresented in senior positions, and antisemitic incidents persist. The abolition of the Equal Treatment Authority in 2021 further reduced institutional mechanisms designed to address discrimination, thereby weakening protections for vulnerable groups. Attacks against universities and university personnel have been advanced as well. These developments are also reflected in transformations affecting the higher education sector, where several universities have been placed under the control of private foundations governed by politically appointed boards, with only a limited number of institutions – such as ELTE University – remaining outside this framework. In addition, the Central European University, founded by George Soros in the early 1990s, was effectively forced to relocate abroad and is now based in Austria, raising further concerns about academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Taken together, these developments illustrate how Hungary's elevated risk of media capture and the diffusion of misinformation emerges from the interaction between political centralization, extensive media market concentration, and a polarized social environment. This dynamic is further reinforced by the significant presence of pro-Russia disinformation campaigns, which have been reported as being supported or amplified by actors aligned with the Hungarian government. While formal legal protections for press freedom remain in place, the systemic predominance of government-aligned actors within the media sector, combined with institutional reforms that favor the ruling party, has substantially constrained pluralism and weakened journalistic autonomy. The Hungarian case thus demonstrates how media capture can evolve not through the outright abolition of formal freedoms, but through the gradual reconfiguration of institutional and market structures that limit effective independence in practice.



Contacts: *rita.marchetti@unipg.it*

This project is funded by the European Union's HE research and innovation programme under the grant agreement No. 101132483