

Ireland



Population: 5.4m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 29.2

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



Country Overview

Ireland features low medium levels of media capture risk, with a particular low score in the political system dimension. This result is linked to the stability of democracy, in which political rights and civil liberties are respected and defended, reflecting an overall positive climate for press freedom, with journalists able to work freely and without interference. Concerns remain, however, about media ownership concentration, pluralism, and political participation.

Ireland's media landscape has historically been shaped by transnational ownership, content importation from English-speaking countries, and limited domestic competition: factors that today influence market concentration, transparency, and editorial independence, reflecting the structural constraints of a small market with historically high openness to foreign media. Ownership concentration peaked in the 2010s when businessman Denis O'Brien held major stakes across print and the largest private radio group, prompting a media-specific section in the 2014 Competition and Consumer Protection Act. O'Brien's subsequent exits, namely selling *Independent News and Media* to Belgian group *Mediahuis* in 2019 and *Communicorp* to Germany's *Bauer Media* in 2021, reduced domestic concentration but definitively shifted ownership beyond the state.

Despite much of the public having a strong interest in news, the sector faces significant economic pressures. Between 2005 and 2022, an estimated 271 local titles closed. Although news deserts remain rare, the financial precarity of local media persists. Funding issues, a politically and socially marginalized minority whose voices have lost influence in mainstream media, and the increase of online news consumption have led to an increased risk of market capture, specifically through the rise of fringe private media outlets. Currently, there is limited regulation ensuring financial transparency or scrutiny of potential private affiliations. In response, the regulator Coimisiún na Meán allocated some funds under new Journalism Schemes, creating over 100 journalist roles. Within this context, the media market remains highly concentrated, especially in terms of digital advertising, which is dominated by *Meta* and *Alphabet*. *Mediahuis*, the largest print player, has pursued a digital-first strategy aimed at reversing its current model by 2030, while the *Irish Times Group* aims to increase digital revenues. State advertising allocation lacks transparency, and the 2024 appointment of *RTÉ*'s chair bypassed the Public Appointments Service, attracting little scrutiny. Public service media funding has undergone restructuring: the *RTÉ* license fee decreased in the last years, and in August 2024 the Minister announced that the gap would be filled by direct exchequer funding.

In this regard, ownership transparency presents a structural challenge: the Central Register of Beneficial Ownership (RBO) is a statutory database requiring all Irish companies to list the “natural persons” who ultimately own or control more than 25% of their shares or voting rights. While this registry could support investigative journalism, Transparency International Ireland found that its restrictive interpretation of EU law, requiring proof that a company was already linked to a convicted money launderer or high-risk assets, effectively blocks access for civil society and journalists, creating a catch-22 that makes transparency difficult in practice. To address private media non-transparency, the Irish government is transposing the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) into domestic law through the Media Regulation Bill 2026. This legislation mandates that outlets publicly disclose ownership structures, beneficial owners, and revenue from both domestic and foreign state advertising. Unlike the RBO, which is restricted to those with a “legitimate interest”, the Media Registry established under EMFA will be freely and publicly accessible, significantly enhancing transparency and the ability of journalists and civil society to scrutinize media ownership and funding. Ireland's regulatory framework for media pluralism remains underdeveloped. The 2009 Broadcasting Act (revised in 2022) requires the Media Commission to ensure services are “open, inclusive and pluralistic” and mandates Commission permission for ownership changes in licensed broadcasting, though it provides no further detail. Key legislation is the 2014 Competition and Consumer Protection Act that considers “the undesirability of allowing anyone undertaking to hold significant interests within or across sectors”.

The political and business influence composite indicator shows low risk of media capture, though there are no legal bars on political party media ownership or safeguards guaranteeing autonomy from interference. Although 2024 saw work commence on several legal measures relating to media professionalism, few were implemented: a Defamation Act including anti-SLAPP provisions lapsed before the November 2024 election and hate speech provisions were removed from the Criminal Justice Act. In this environment, journalists work largely without cultural constraints following the 2018 abolition of blasphemy, though concerns remain about social media attacks, and the Garda Síochána Act (2005) effectively prohibits police from speaking to journalists without authorization. These developments interact with broader dynamics shaping journalistic practice. Audience expectations, demographic differences in trust, and the rise of alternative outlets influence how news is produced and consumed, while structural constraints such as funding, ownership concentration, and emerging transparency mechanisms determine the conditions under which journalists operate.

Lower risk is highlighted in the political dimension, but not without concerns. Irish politics has long been dominated by the centre-right, though a left-right divide has emerged, while immigration has risen as an issue area, prompting the National Action Plan Against Racism. Ireland's medium risk levels linked to political participation suggest that how such grievances are impacting.

Ireland combines a stable democratic framework with mounting pressures on media sustainability and transparency. The media system remains trusted yet is shaped by high market concentration, transnational ownership, and persistent data gaps. The political and social contexts remain broadly rights-protective, but declining political efficacy and polarization continue to impact on political participation, even though civil associations remain active.