

Italy



Population: 58.9m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 40.0

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



Country Overview

Italy has and is currently facing a transition period in judicial independence, media pluralism, press freedom, and the implementation of human rights decisions. These areas underscore an overall medium level of media capture risk. Such level of risk reflects the country's long-standing structural and political complexities. Despite gradual reforms in governance and transparency, significant vulnerabilities persist at the intersection of media ownership, politics, and public trust. The overlap between business and political interests, combined with an enduring concentration of media power, undermines full pluralism and editorial independence. Political polarization and limited institutional credibility further contribute to a media environment where public discourse is often shaped by vested interests.

Up until 2024, television remains the dominant force in Italy's media landscape, for most of traditional media revenues, while print and radio continue to decline. Even the most read print outlets, such as *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*, account only for the 20% of overall weekly news share. In the digital sphere, *Fanpage*, *Il Post*, and other native outlets are expanding through membership models, though only 9% of Italians pay for online news.

Italian media configuration cannot be understood without reference to its historical interdependence between media, politics, and business elites. In accordance with such background, Italy's media system shows persistent vulnerabilities concerning political and business influence, with particularly high risks related to conflicts of interest and the autonomy of public service media (PSM). These risks are rooted in the country's long-standing political culture, characterized by clientelism, i.e., a network of interpersonal exchanges, stable over time, between actors of unequal power, yet bound by ties of interest and trust. In the political sphere, such networks have historically linked the distribution of resources to the exchange of votes and political support. These dynamic fostered practices such as "lottizzazione", the partisan allocation of key positions within the public broadcaster *RAI*, limiting its editorial independence and reinforcing political control. In this context, the governance structure of *RAI* continues to reflect political balances, as key managerial and editorial positions are often influenced by the composition of parliamentary majorities and opposition forces. This arrangement has direct implications for editorial autonomy, frequently resulting in cautious or limited criticism of the government in office and, at times, in greater visibility for ruling parties' perspectives. Comparable patterns can be observed in the private media sector, where connections between economic interests and political actors remain significant. The convergence of political, economic, and media power reached its peak during the rise of Silvio Berlusconi, in the 1980s and 1990s. As both a media mogul (*Mediaset*) and political leader (*Forza Italia*), Berlusconi's dual role amplified conflicts of interest, shaping not only the media landscape but also public perceptions of political legitimacy. Following the death of Silvio Berlusconi, the Berlusconi family continues to control the *Fininvest* group, which retains a major presence in the Italian media market, while also maintaining financial links with Forza Italia, a party currently in government. More broadly, overlaps between political office and economic interests persist, as some members of parliament hold roles or financial stakes in sectors connected to media and business, thereby increasing potential risks of political influence over the media environment.

The presence of both *RAI* and *Mediaset* in the Italian television market makes it impossible up until today to break through the established duopoly, even if new players such *Sky* and *La7* have increased their audiences. At the same time, the conditions of the journalistic profession remain a critical issue. Italy records a high and increasing number of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), often initiated by political actors. Journalists – particularly freelancers – face precarious working conditions and low incomes, which weaken professional independence and increase vulnerability to external pressures. Recent restrictions on reporting on ongoing judicial proceedings, although formally justified, have raised concerns about potential limitations on access to information.

From a regulatory perspective, recent developments also point to attempts to address market concentration and pluralism, including new guidelines adopted by the communications authority (AGCOM) to assess significant market power in the media sector. At the same time, emerging issues related to digitalization and artificial intelligence have raised additional concerns, particularly regarding data protection and the use of personal data, highlighting further regulatory challenges.

The political system presents its most critical aspect in the political conflict and polarization, rooted not only in Italy's background, but also in recent events: the use of spywares against journalists, the suppression of peaceful resistance and instances of censorship and intimidation.

Italy's societal context presents low trust in political and institutional actors. Confidence in the justice system and regional authorities remains moderate, while trust in parliament, political parties, and the national government is persistently weak. Frequent episodes of corruption, slow judicial processes, and uneven public service delivery have reinforced scepticism toward formal institutions. As a result, civic engagement is selective and highly polarized, with limited confidence in collective decision-making and in the impartiality of state institutions.

Italy's overall risk profile reflects the interplay of enduring structural, political, and cultural factors. Historical patterns of clientelism, media-politics convergence, and partisan influence continue to affect governance, pluralism, and institutional trust. Despite ongoing reforms, conflicts of interest, polarization, and limited public confidence in institutions show critical levels of risk.