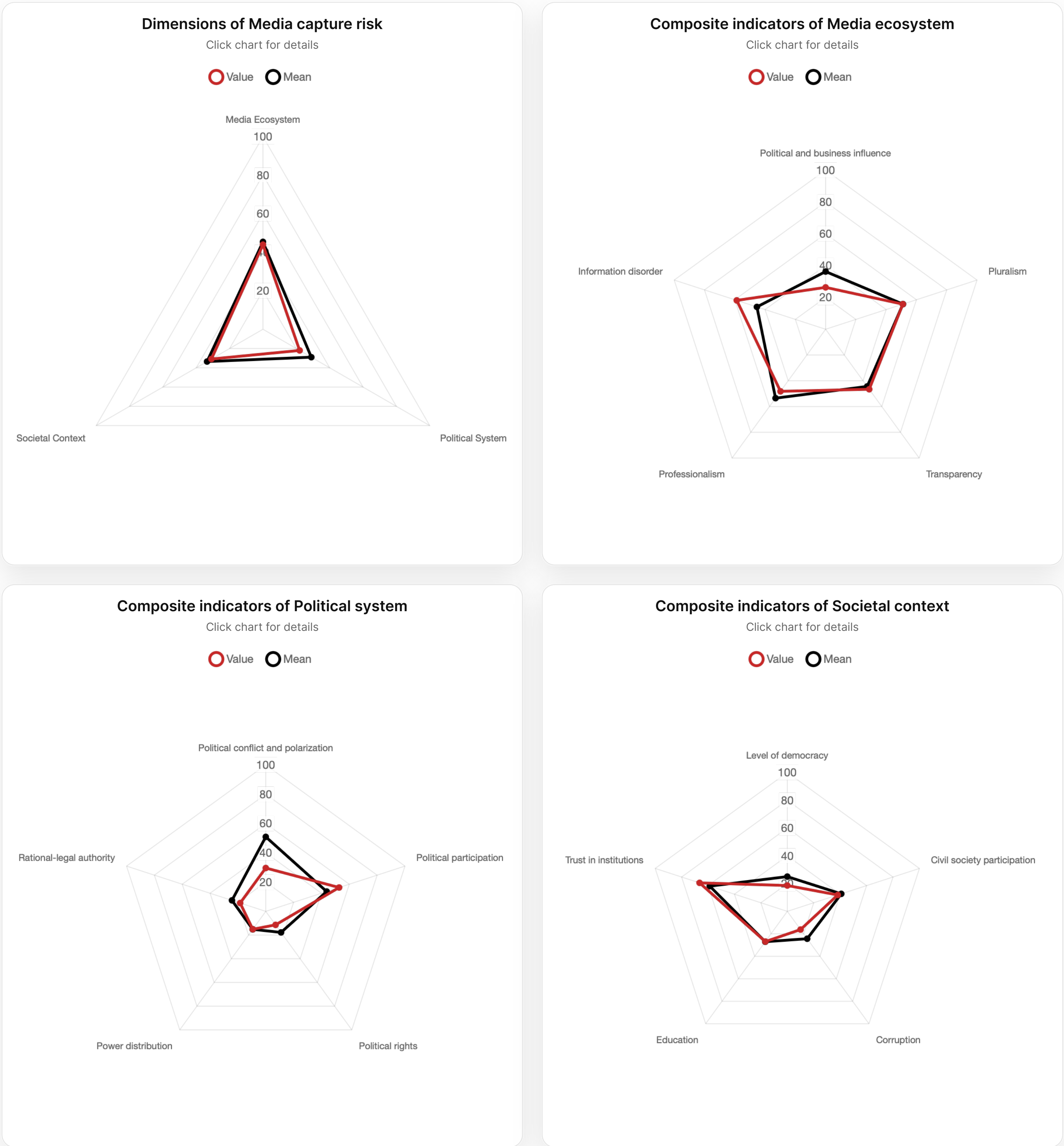


Latvia

Population: 1.8m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 35.2

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



Country Overview

Latvia shows medium levels of risk of media capture across all three dimensions, especially in the media ecosystem one, which reflects transformations following the restoration of independence in 1991. The country's media ecosystem is shaped by historical legacies as well as contemporary political, economic, and security dynamics. Media consumption is linguistically segmented: while Latvian is the sole state language, around 35% of the population uses Russian daily, resulting in divided media audiences. The media landscape is dominated by digitally born online outlets and audio-visual media, which attract the largest audiences and advertising revenues. Public service media (PSM) plays a central role, with public TV and radio among the most-used news sources nationwide. Commercial television channels, many owned by foreign media groups, also hold substantial market shares. By contrast, the print sector has steadily contracted, with many newspapers reducing publication frequency or moving online-only, leaving just three daily newspapers published five times a week.

Media ownership is highly concentrated, as shown by the pluralism composite indicator score, and it is so particularly online, with concentration increasing in recent years. While ownership information is available through official registries, media outlets rarely disclose ownership, management, or editorial governance details on their own platforms. In fact, medium risk levels related to transparency emerge from data. Some media studies underline patterns of political influence by owners, political parallelism, and clientelist relations with information sources, alongside challenges related to ethics and digital transformation. Moreover, media ownership and market entry are regulated through general commercial and competition law, with limited safeguards for editorial independence in cases of ownership change. State support includes funding for public service media, Media Support Fund grants, reduced VAT for print media, and press delivery compensation, while information on state advertising remains incomplete due to regulatory gaps.

Journalists generally operate in a relatively free and safe environment, and investigative journalism remains active. However, access to pluralistic information, particularly for Russian-speaking audiences, has narrowed following bans on Russian-based outlets and increased security-driven regulation after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nonetheless, foreign countries' influence on the national media is significant: the risk level of media capture of this sub-indicator for Latvia is the highest of all the countries considered, hence impacting on the score of the information disorder composite indicator, that shows a high level of risk.

Latvia's media ecosystem features are significantly linked to its political and societal dimensions. The country is shaped as a multiparty democracy, holding free and fair elections. Between 2019 and 2024, the country recorded improvements in access to justice and predictable law enforcement, alongside electoral reforms in 2024 that expanded voting access and accommodations for voters with disabilities. Despite this strong institutional performance, political participation and trust remain limited. Voter turnout has remained between 55 and 59 per cent over the past decade, and public confidence in institutions is relatively low. Corruption scandals, even though are not a risk factor for Latvia, have affected politics and the judiciary, illustrated by investigations into public procurement and financial misconduct, including the 2024 resignation of the foreign affairs minister following allegations of misuse of public funds, a provision that is closely linked to the low-risk score pertaining to the rational and legal authority indicator. Latvia's political environment is also shaped by security concerns linked to Russia's war in Ukraine. In fact, Latvian society is ethnically diverse, with ethnic Russians comprising about one quarter of the population alongside Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities. Language policy plays a key role in national identity formation and contributes to divisions between Latvian- and Russian-speaking communities, a dynamic intensified by the geopolitical consequences of the war in Ukraine. Overall, civil society remains active, while broader societal challenges include depopulation, income inequality, and low institutional trust linked to corruption scandals and disinformation.

In conclusion, Latvia demonstrates a media environment that faces structural pressures related to market concentration, ownership transparency, financial sustainability, and linguistic segmentation.