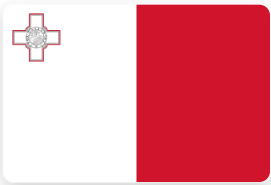


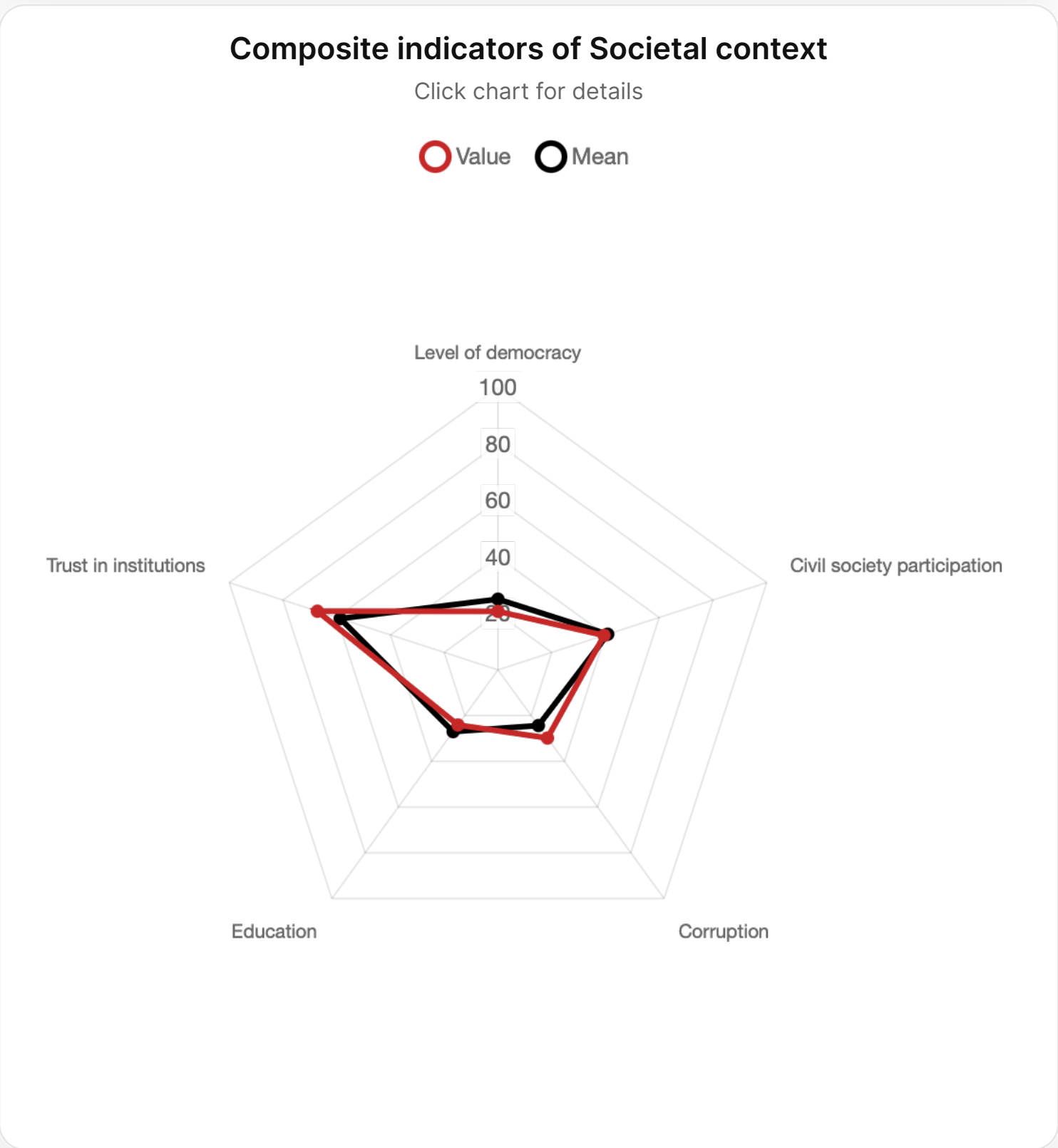
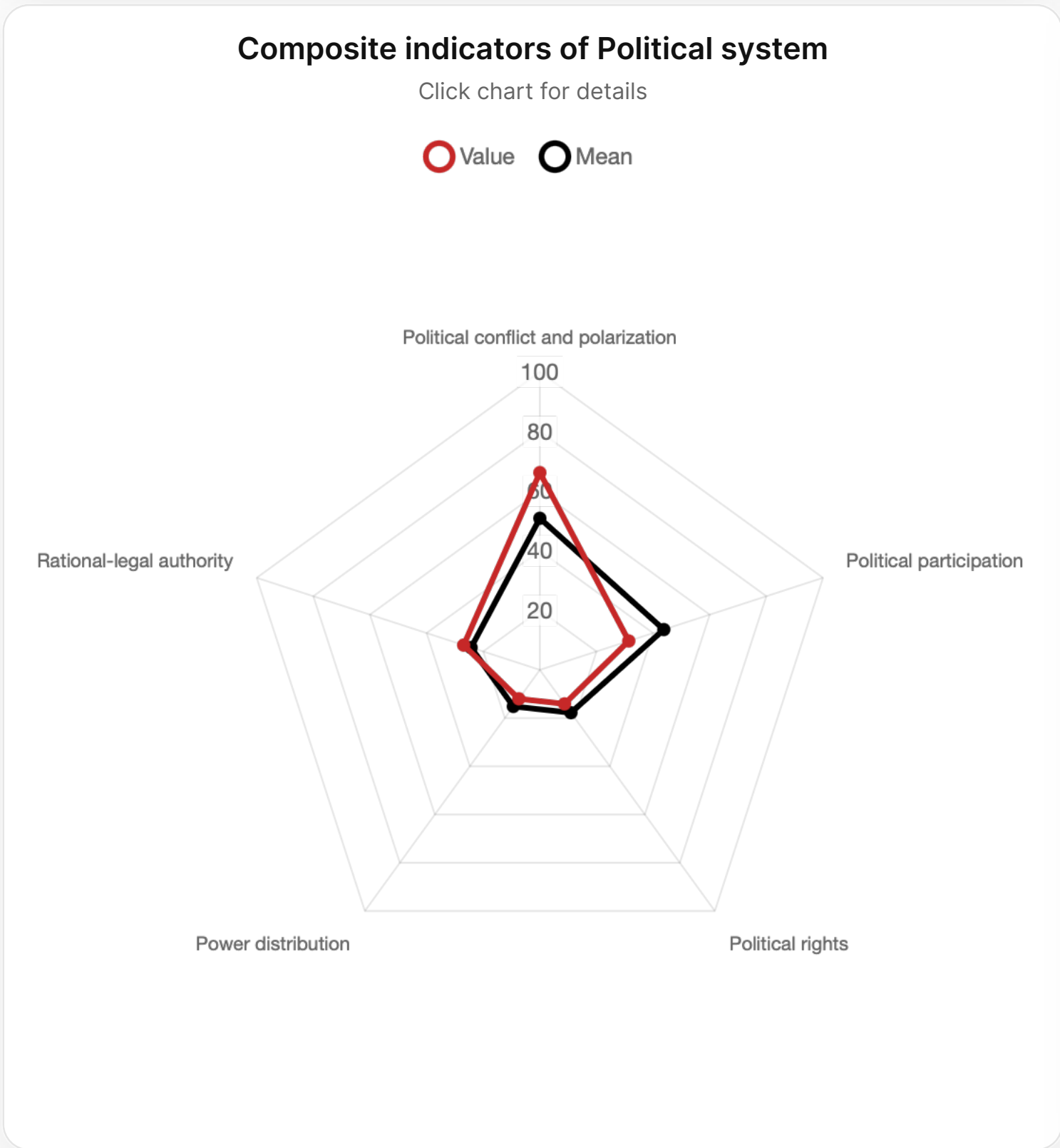
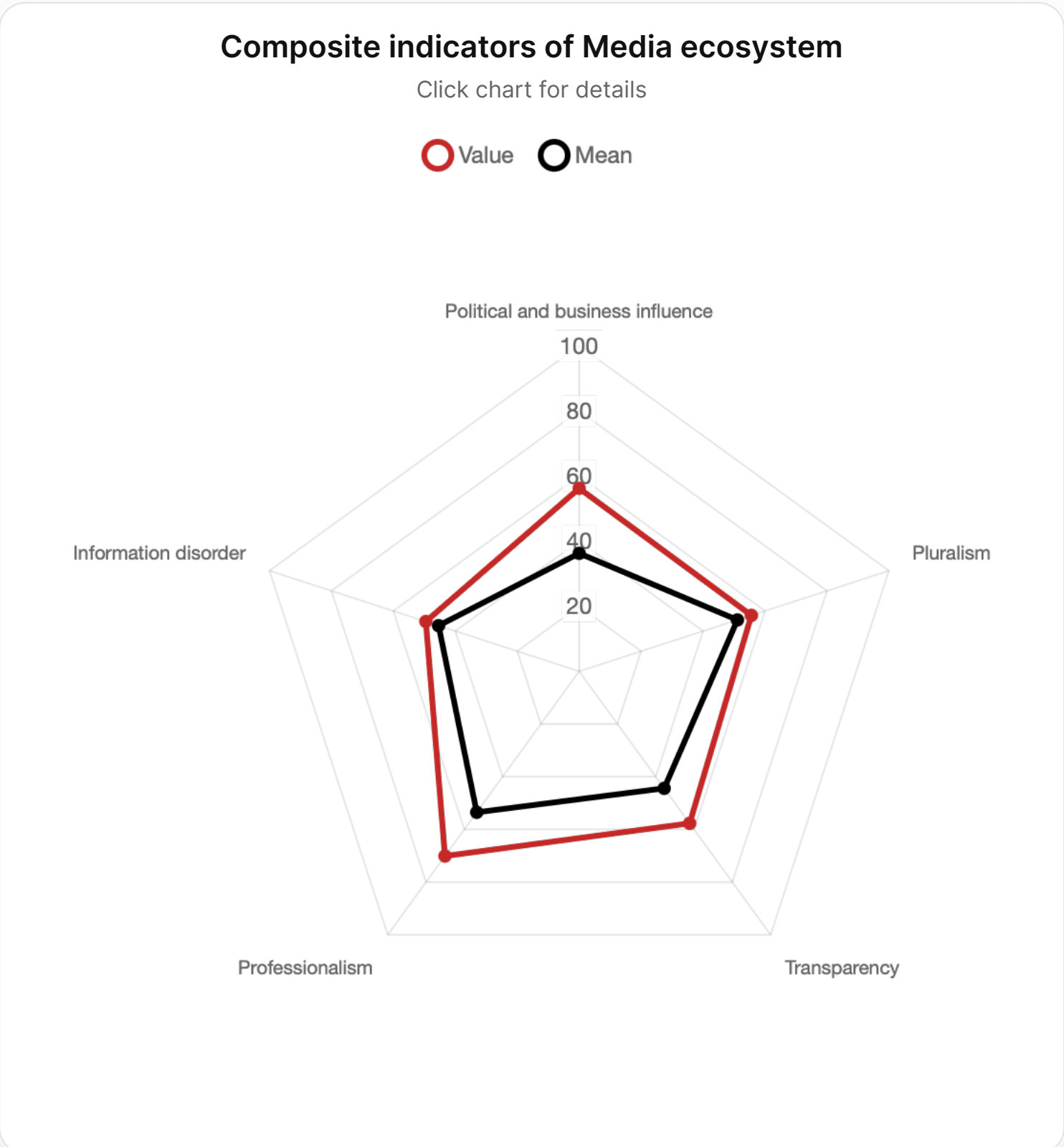
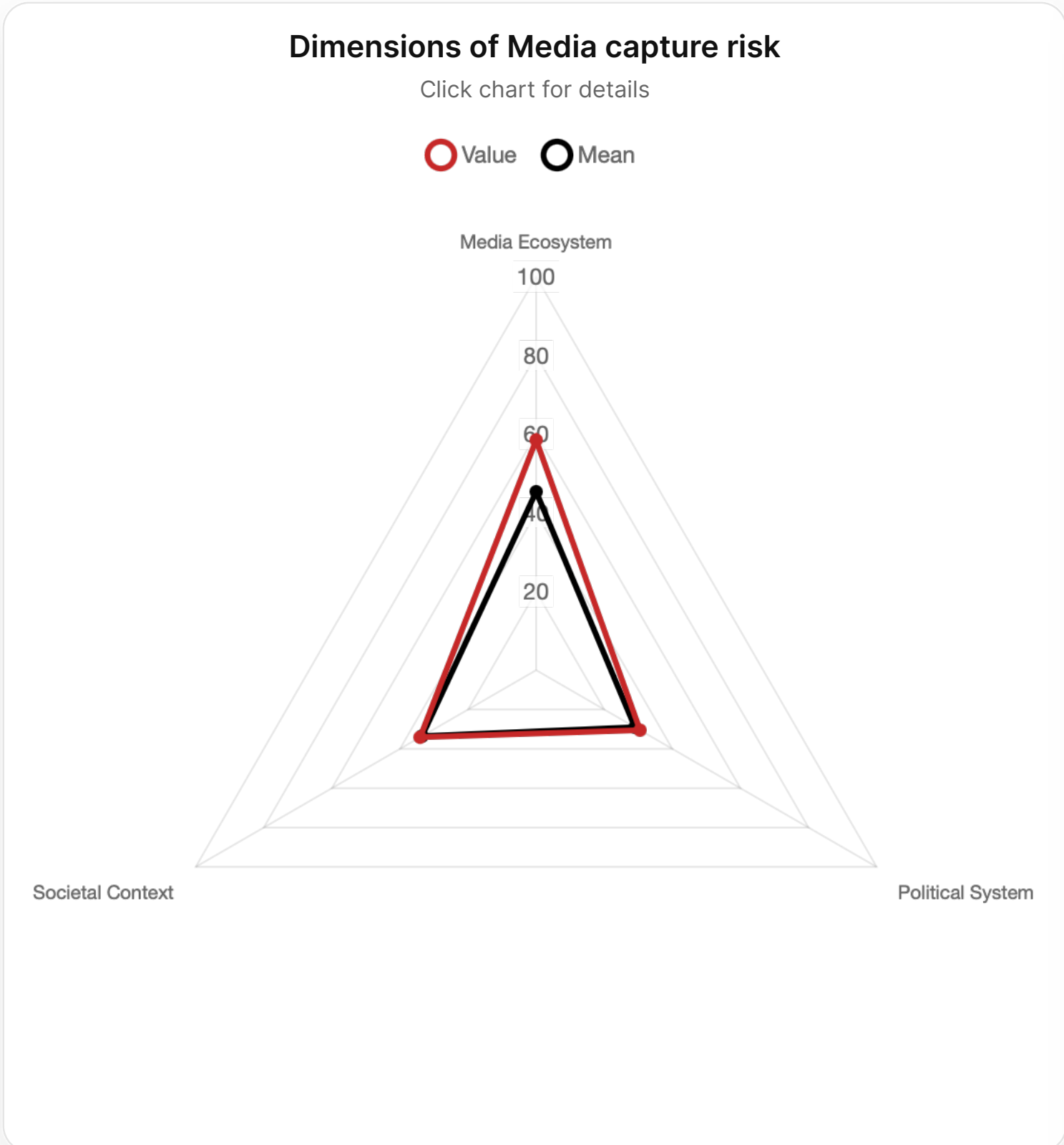
Malta



Population: 0.5m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 45.4

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



Country Overview

Malta is characterized by a medium-high risk of media capture, mainly linked to the media ecosystem, which shows high levels of risk, specifically in political and business influence, professionalism, and transparency. Moreover, even though the societal context performs mid-range, it is featured by high levels of risk in the composite indicator regarding trust in institutions.

Malta is the smallest and most densely populated country in the European Union and has experienced the highest population growth among EU member states, largely driven by immigration. This demographic evolution intersects with a highly polarized political culture and a dense, historically rooted media landscape, which is unusually rich and diverse given the country's small size, reflecting a long historical trajectory. In fact, since the nineteenth century, Maltese media have been closely intertwined with political power and financial capacity. This legacy continues to shape the contemporary media system, which remains deeply polarized.

The media environment comprises print, broadcast, and digital outlets with nationwide reach, as Malta's size eliminates any distinction between local and national media. Print media remain linguistically divided, with an almost equal number of Maltese and English language outlets, while broadcast media mainly operate in Maltese. Digital and online media favor English, reflecting demographic and generational preferences. Media ownership in Malta exhibits distinctive features. A significant proportion of outlets are directly owned or controlled by political parties, organizations, or the Catholic Church. Alongside partisan media, privately owned legacy outlets remain influential, while the public broadcaster continues to dominate television viewership despite persistent concerns regarding its editorial independence. These concerns are linked to governance and appointment procedures that allow direct political influence over management and potentially over editorial direction, which is particularly consequential given the broadcaster's wide audience reach and agenda-setting role. Online platforms and investigative portals have gained significant followings, often relying on community funding and subscriptions. However, many of these outlets deliberately avoid formal registration, complicating assessments of ownership transparency and financial structures.

Transparency is weakest regarding government funding and state advertising, particularly for party-owned media. In a small media market such as Malta, the discretionary allocation of state advertising represents a significant economic lever that can affect the financial sustainability of outlets and create incentives for editorial alignment, thereby reinforcing structural pressures within the media ecosystem. Malta lacks comprehensive regulation of media concentration beyond broadcast services, and no official data on media concentration are collected, making systematic oversight difficult. There are also no legal provisions preventing holders of public office from owning media outlets.

Journalists operate in a highly polarized and hostile environment. Malta has the highest number of SLAPP cases per capita in the EU, and journalists face legal harassment, denial of access to information, targeted disinformation campaigns, and, in some cases, threats to personal safety. Beyond their immediate legal impact, SLAPPs produce a significant chilling effect by imposing financial risks that may discourage publication in advance, thereby constraining investigative journalism. Access to public information is further limited by the systematic obstruction of freedom-of-information requests through refusals and protracted appeal procedures, which significantly restrict journalists' ability to obtain primary documentation and verify information. The legacy of the 2017 assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia continues to shape the media environment, with key reforms recommended by the public inquiry remaining unimplemented and judicial proceedings still ongoing.

To better understand the media features, it is necessary to look at the country's political system. Malta is a parliamentary democracy with a long-standing two-party system dominated by the *Labour Party* and the *Nationalist Party*. Smaller parties face significant structural barriers to representation. Political life is characterized by strong partisan divisions rooted in historical class cleavages and reinforced by clientelist practices. While civil liberties are generally respected, corruption remains a serious and persistent issue affecting public trust in institutions. In 2024, prosecutors filed charges against former Prime Minister Joseph Muscat and other senior officials following an inquiry into the fraudulent privatization of state-owned hospitals. These criminal proceedings were made possible through citizen-initiated magisterial inquiries, a legal mechanism that allowed private individuals to request investigations in cases where law enforcement authorities failed to act. This mechanism has since been restricted by parliamentary reform, which is currently subject to constitutional litigation, raising concerns about the future capacity of citizens to trigger accountability processes and bring information into the public domain. Additional investigations related to public procurement, energy contracts, and social-benefits fraud remain ongoing.

Transparency in party financing is limited, with investigations revealing that the vast majority of political donations originate from undisclosed sources. At the same time, institutional accountability mechanisms face mounting challenges. In April 2025, Parliament adopted reforms restricting citizens' ability to request magisterial inquiries directly, prompting widespread criticism and public protests over reduced access to justice and whistleblower protections.

In conclusion, Malta combines strong formal democratic institutions with persistent challenges related to corruption, political polarization, and declining public trust. The media system is dense and diverse, characterized by partisan ownership and risks to editorial independence. This structure contributes to segmented informational environments in which citizens tend to consume politically aligned sources, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and increasing the risk of being insufficiently informed despite the formal plurality of media outlets.