Netherlands

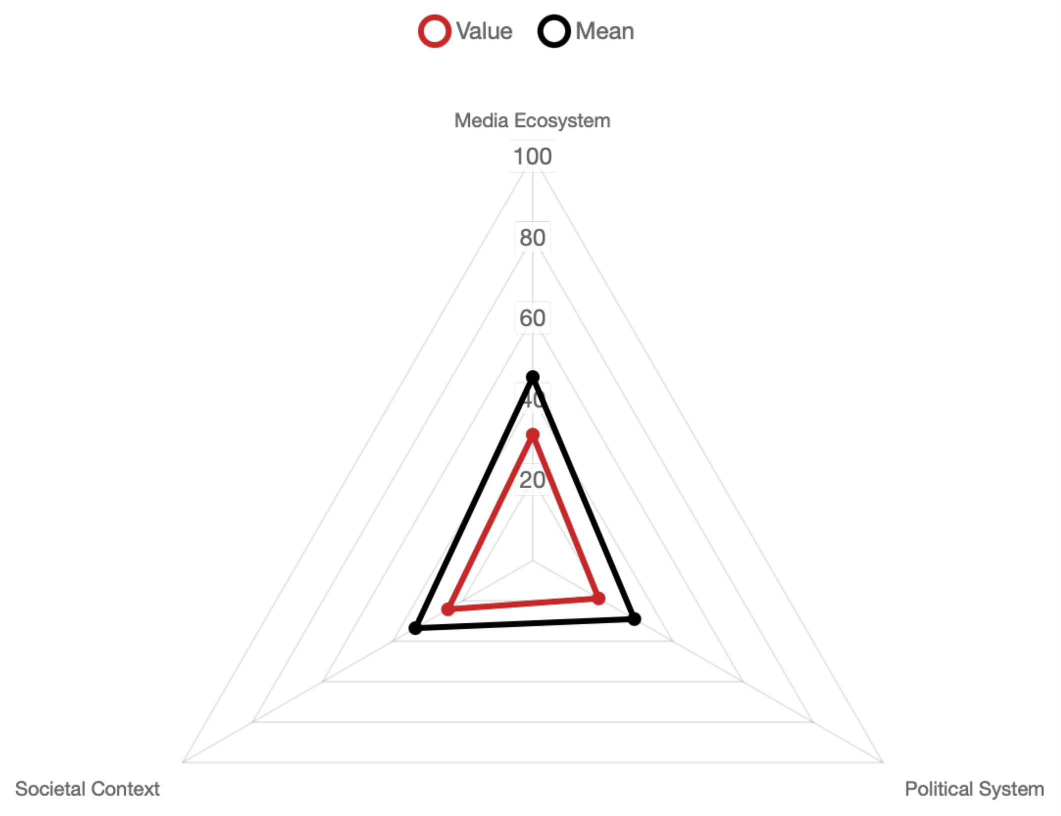
Population: 18.4m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 26.3

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

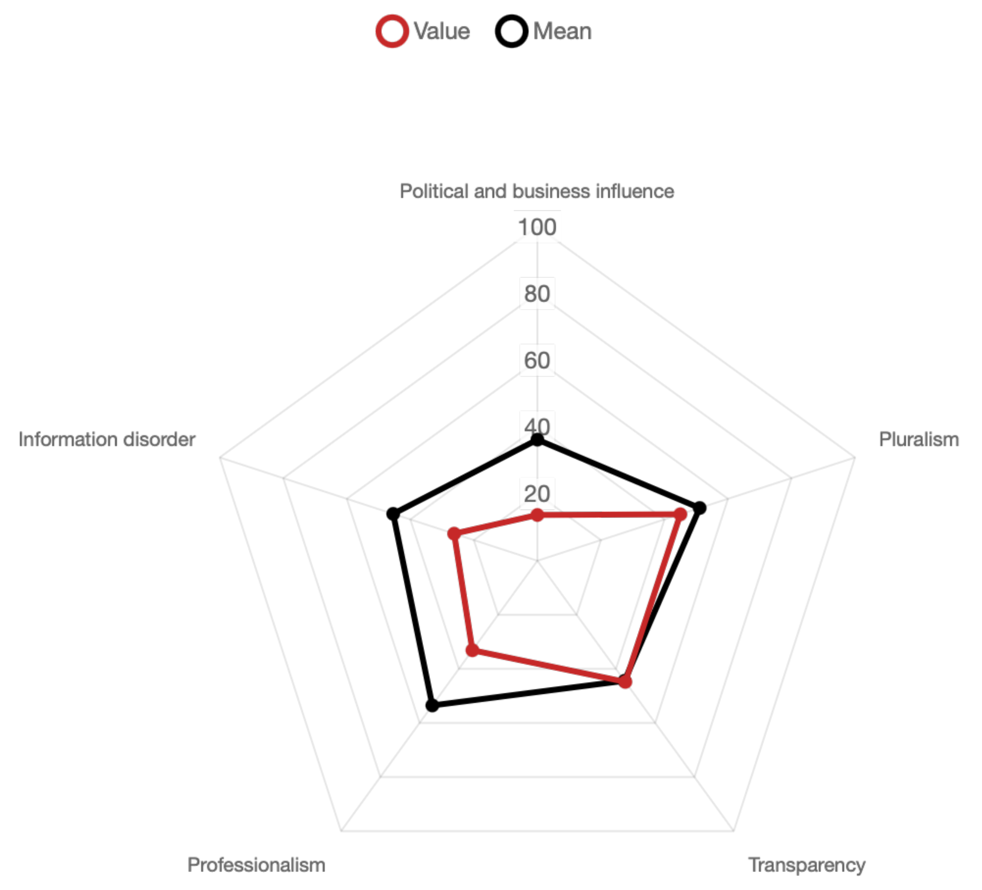
Dimensions of Media capture risk

Click chart for details



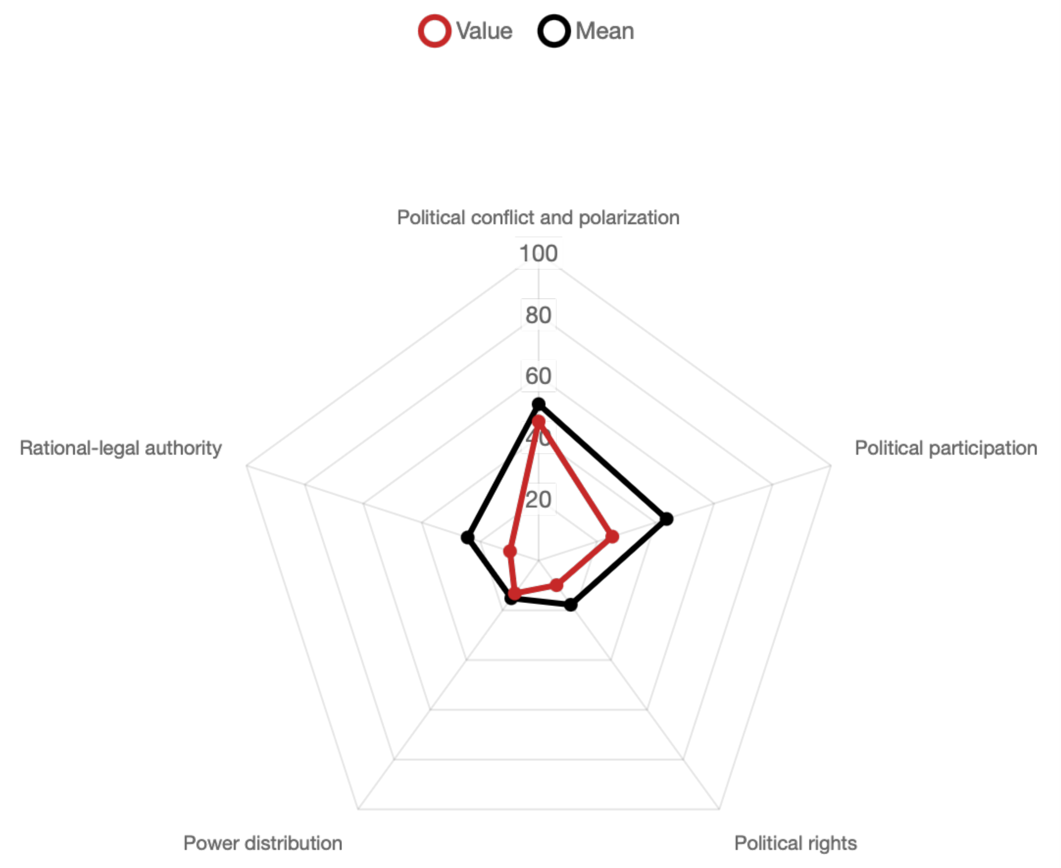
Composite indicators of Media ecosystem

Click chart for details



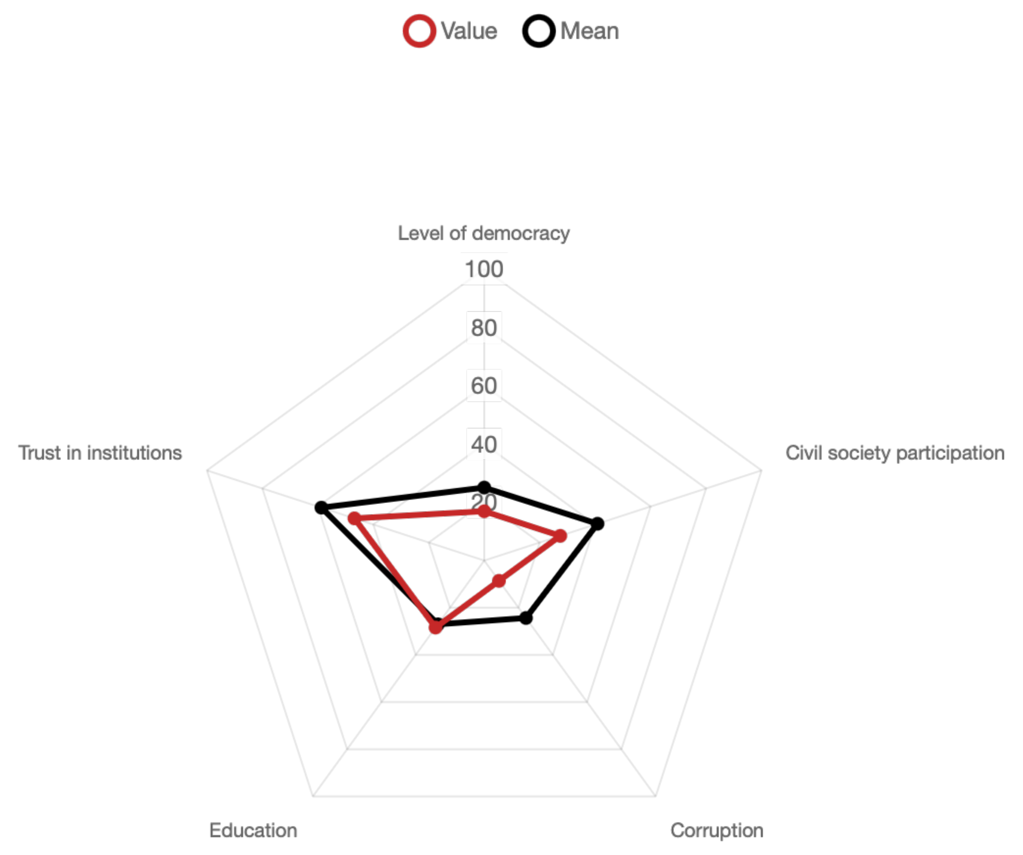
Composite indicators of Political system

Click chart for details



Composite indicators of Societal context

Click chart for details



Country Overview

Netherlands shows amongst the lowest levels of media capture risk across all countries considered, especially in relation to its political system. Netherlands is a long-established parliamentary democracy with strong institutional safeguards for political rights, civil liberties, and press freedom. Recent years have been marked by political fragmentation, polarization around immigration and climate policy, and successive government changes.

The Dutch media system has developed within a long tradition of pluralism rooted in the country's historical system of *pillarization* (*verzuiling*), under which religious and ideological groups maintained their own media outlets throughout much of the twentieth century. This legacy shaped a strong culture of editorial autonomy and professional self-regulation, particularly within public broadcasting. Over time, the pillarized structure evolved into a coordinated public broadcasting system under the *Nederlandse Publieke Omroep* (NPO), which today brings together multiple broadcasters while preserving internal diversity of perspectives.

In the contemporary period, the Dutch media market is characterized by high ownership concentration, with five major organizations dominating newspapers, broadcasting, and online news. This concentration intensified following the decline of print advertising revenues and successive waves of consolidation. However, ownership concentration has not translated into systematic political influence over editorial content, largely due to strong professional norms, the absence of partisan media ownership traditions, and active oversight by independent regulators such as the Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM), which continues to assess major mergers, recently including the rejected *Talpa-RTL* merger, and the accepted *RTL-DPG Media* merger. While evaluating the latter, the ACM did not only take economic/competition-related elements into account, but also plurality of content. This resulted in several, quite unique conditions for the merger, safeguarding editorial independence and pluralism of the media market as much as possible (e.g. by involving a powerful foundation watching over the editorial independence and survival of existing news outlets withing the merger). It deserves to be noted, though, that while in practice there is not really a problem of lack of transparency of ownership information at this point, Netherlands does not have a legal framework in place to guarantee transparency of ownership and financial information of media owners. Dutch media organizations have adapted relatively early and successfully to digital transformation, developing subscription-based and freemium models that support financial sustainability. At the same time, international digital platforms exert growing pressure on visibility, advertising revenues, and audience attention, raising long-term questions about competition, discoverability of Dutch journalism, and regulatory capacity under EU digital frameworks, including the Digital Services Act.

The media ecosystem's features are deeply linked to Netherlands' political and societal dimensions. On the one hand, power-sharing, coalition governments, and consensus-oriented decision-making have historically limited executive dominance and reduced incentives for political control over the media. Media institutions developed primarily as watchdogs rather than instruments of political power, benefiting of both legal protections and informal democratic norms. Contemporary Dutch politics is more fragmented, with coalition governments formed among multiple parties across the ideological spectrum. This fragmentation continues to act as a structural safeguard against media capture, as no single political actor is able to consolidate lasting control over key institutions. While recent years have seen the rise of populist and right-wing political forces and increased polarization, formal mechanisms for political interference in the media remain weak, and direct partisan control over media ownership is largely absent.

On the other hand, Dutch society has historically been characterized by relatively high levels of institutional trust, civic engagement, and tolerance of social diversity, shaped by a long-standing culture of consensus and accommodation. These features supported a media environment in which journalism played a central role in public accountability and informed public debate. The country's experience with multiculturalism, social liberalism, and minority rights fostered expectations of inclusive representation and open discourse, including in the media. In recent years, however, societal polarization has increased, driven by debates over immigration, climate policy, housing shortages, and economic uncertainty. These divisions have contributed to declining political trust and heightened tensions between journalists and segments of the public.

Harassment and intimidation of journalists, particularly online, have risen significantly over time, with 262 incidents reported in 2025, affecting perceptions of media legitimacy and safety even as institutional protections remain comparatively strong. News consumption patterns are also changing. While traditional media continue to reach large audiences, younger generations increasingly rely on social media platforms, influencers, and alternative digital channels for news.

In conclusion, Netherlands combines strong democratic governance and a highly professional media environment with one of the lowest risks of media capture in Europe. Despite high market concentration, editorial independence is largely preserved through self-regulation, institutional norms, and limited political interference.

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