

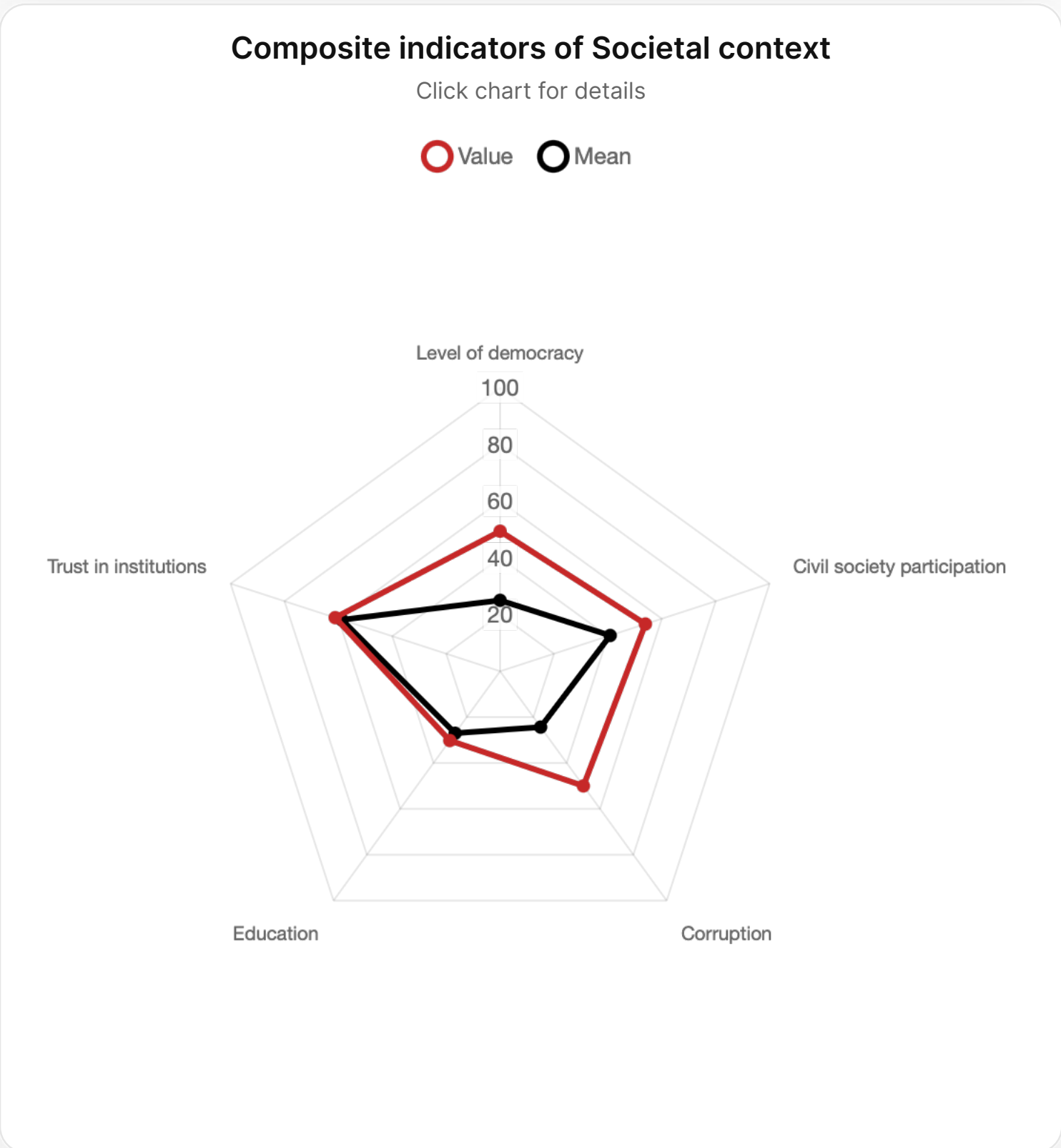
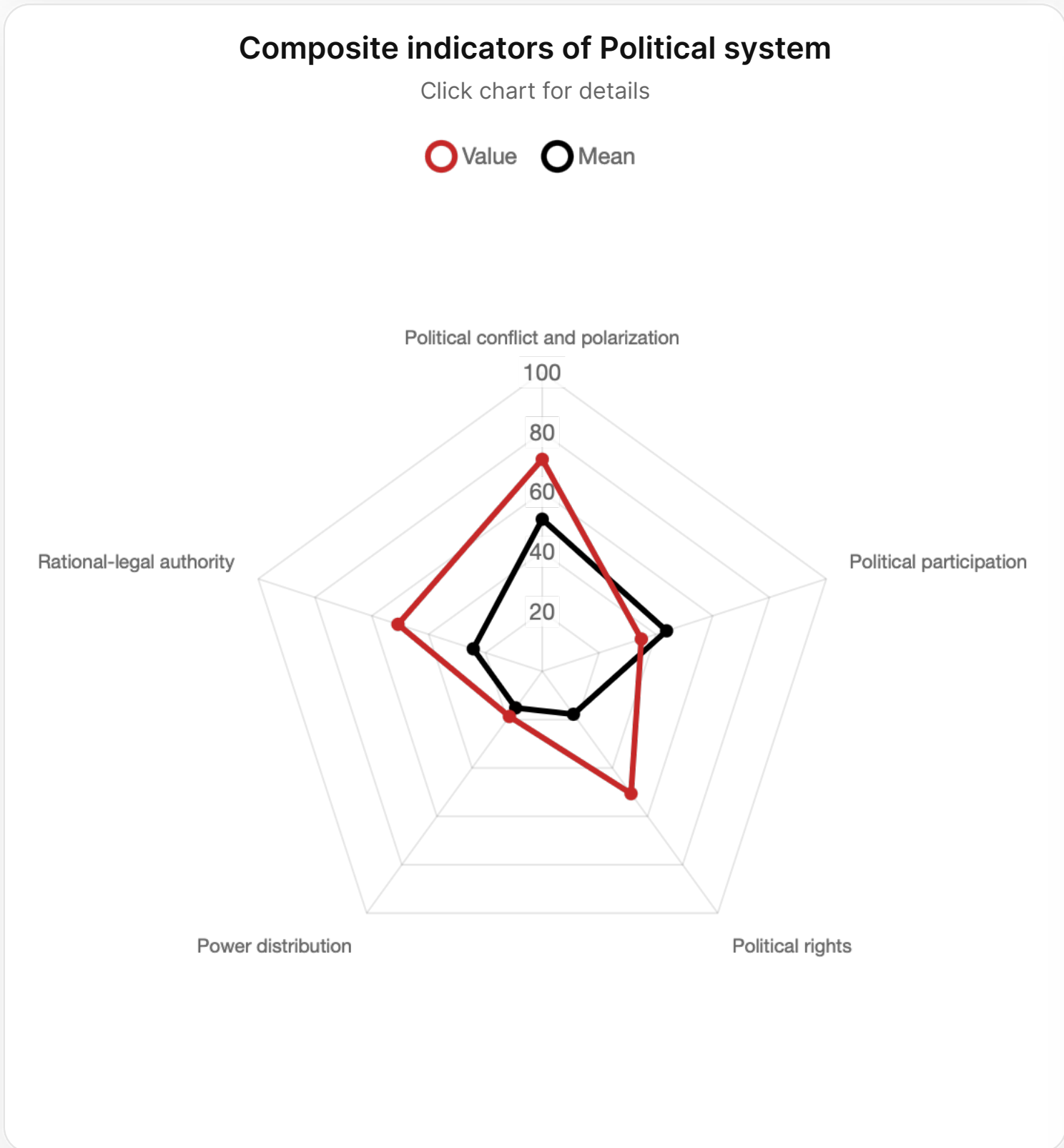
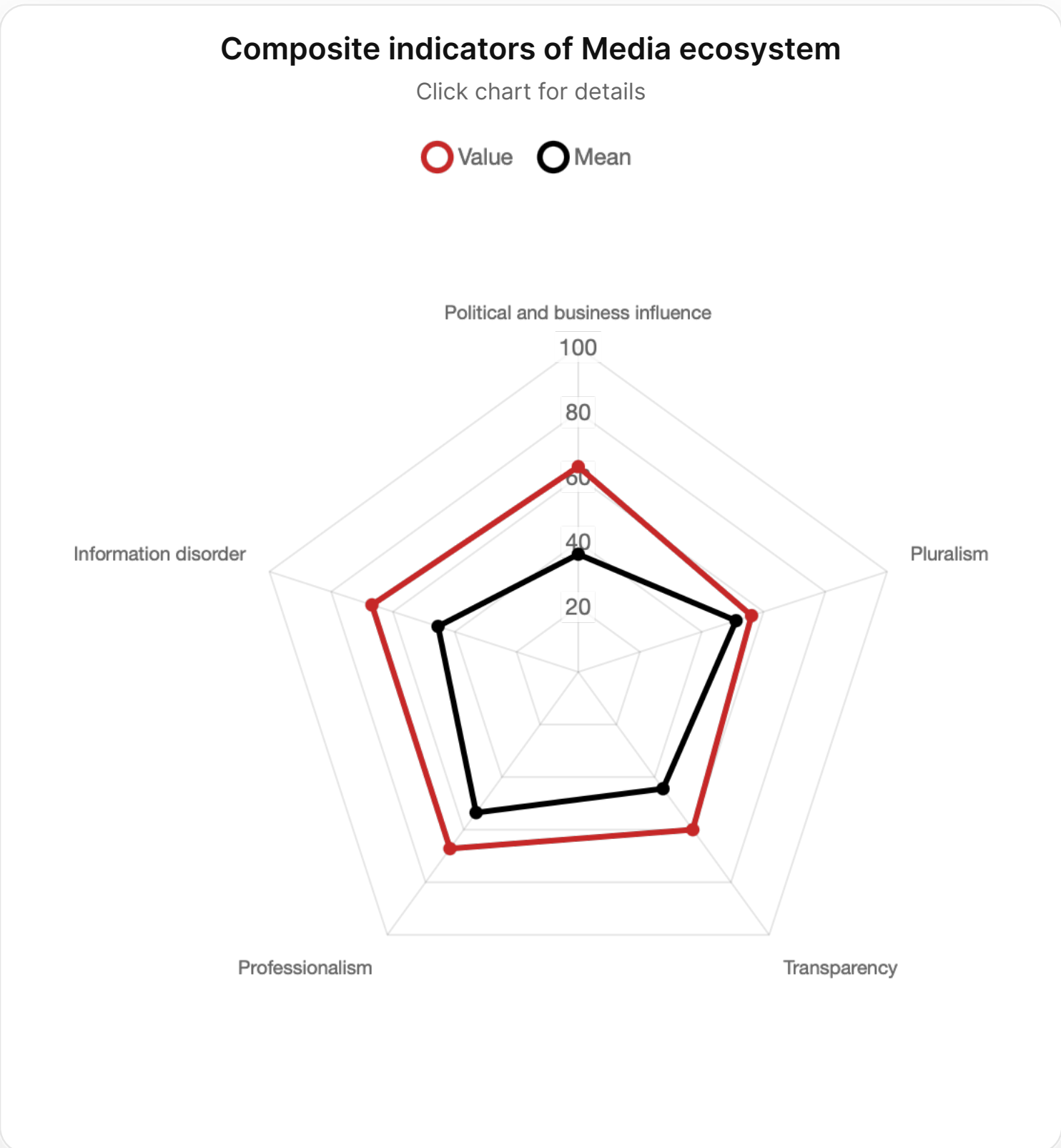
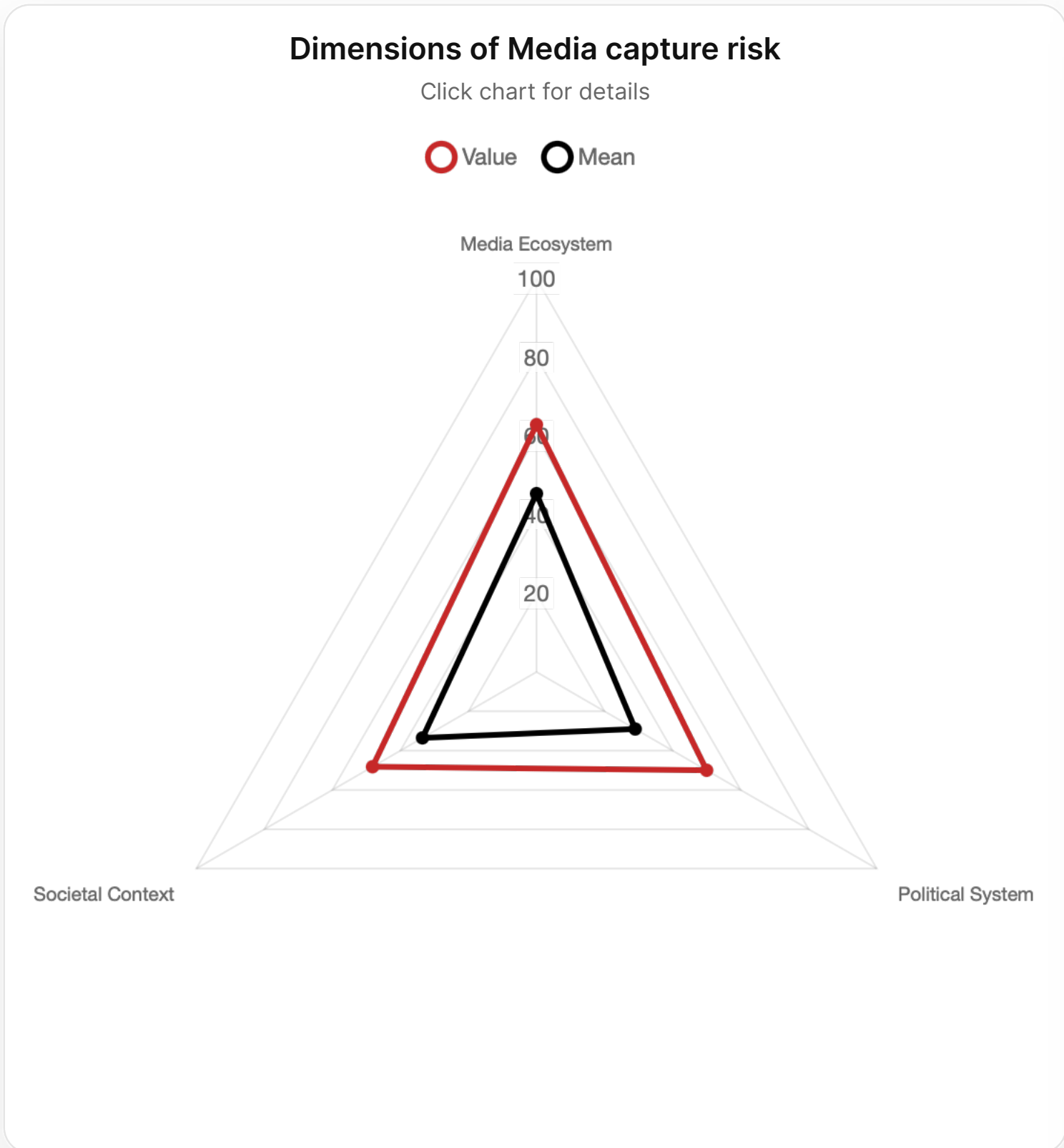
Serbia



Population: 6.6m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 56.0

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



Country Overview

Serbia is characterized by the third highest levels of media capture risk across all three dimensions, with critical scores regarding the political system.

Over the past decade, the government's executive branch has exercised strong influence over the legislature and judiciary, contributing to democratic backsliding, weakening of the rule of law, and pervasive corruption. Between 2023 and 2025, Serbian society has been marked by contested elections, widespread protests, and heightened political polarization. These critical features are reflected also in the media ecosystem: the market is highly fragmented, oversaturated, and politically controlled. With over 2,000 registered media outlets, television remains the dominant source of news, followed by online portals of traditional media, while social media play a particularly significant role, especially among younger audiences. Media credibility is low, with 65% of citizens reporting that they often or occasionally avoid the news. The public broadcaster *Radio Televizija Srbija* (RTS) is consistently cited as the most trusted outlet, despite being perceived as closely aligned with the government.

Mainstream terrestrial television strongly supports the political agenda of President Vučić. *RTS* and four national commercial broadcasters (*TV Pink*, *TV Happy*, *TV Prva*, and *TV B92*) dominate the market, all of which are owned or controlled by entities with close political or personal ties to the ruling elite. Independent journalism is primarily provided by cable channels *N1* and *TV Nova*, owned by *United Media Group*, which are widely trusted but frequently targeted by smear campaigns and political attacks.

Media ownership concentration and state influence have increased further following legislative changes in 2023 that enabled the state-owned telecommunications operator *Telekom Srbija* to establish and acquire media outlets. *Telekom Srbija* has since expanded its media presence, including the acquisition of *Sport Klub* and *Total TV*, reinforcing concerns about the emergence of a state-party media conglomerate and unfair competition in both media and advertising markets. Transparency of media ownership and state advertising remains insufficient, showing the second highest score, after Cyprus; and many online platforms operate without registration and frequently disseminate disinformation. In fact, the most evident risk indicator for Serbia is specifically the one of information disorder, reporting the highest score of all countries considered.

Moreover, editorial independence is heavily compromised by political, commercial, and ownership pressures, and there are no effective legal or internal safeguards separating newsroom decisions from management or ownership interests. In addition, journalists operate in a hostile environment characterized by frequent verbal and physical attacks, harassment, and legal pressure. The number of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) has increased, and no specific anti-SLAPP legislation is in place. Such pressure reflects the level of democracy of the country, reporting the second highest score of risk of all countries considered after Türkiye. Indeed, Serbia formally holds multiparty elections, but political rights and civil liberties have been steadily eroded through legal and extralegal pressure on opposition parties, civil society, and independent media.

Electoral integrity has been a central concern. The 2023 elections were marked by serious irregularities, prompting international condemnation and sustained protests. In 2024, the European Parliament called for an independent investigation into alleged electoral fraud, manipulation, and misuse of administrative resources. Civil liberties have been further strained by police violence, arrests, home searches, and online threats targeting protesters, activists, and journalists. The high risk linked to political rights emerges also when considering gender equality indicators: women are underrepresented across sectors, while domestic violence and femicide remain widespread; women journalists face gender-based harassment and attacks. Finally, the LGBTQIA+ community is frequently targeted by hate speech and attacks and faces hostility from both political authorities and traditional social norms. These features are very well reflected in the societal context, which is marked by deep political polarization, low institutional trust, and unresolved historical and geopolitical cleavages. Key divisions revolve around EU accession, relations with Russia, and the legacy of the Yugoslav wars, as well as the unresolved status of Kosovo. Protests since 2024 have reflected widespread dissatisfaction with corruption, captured institutions, and lack of accountability, with students and young people playing a central role in civic mobilization.

In conclusion, Serbia's risk profile is shaped by the accumulation of vulnerabilities across the political system, media ecosystem, and societal context, resulting in consistently high levels of media capture risk. Executive dominance, weak institutional checks, and pervasive political influence over the media significantly constrain pluralism, editorial independence, and citizens' access to reliable information. At the same time, widespread polarization, low trust in institutions, and a hostile environment for journalists and minorities further exacerbate these risks. Against this backdrop, political participation stands out as a relative exception. Despite contested elections and shrinking civic space, levels of participation score below the cross-country average, indicating a comparatively lower risk in this specific dimension.