

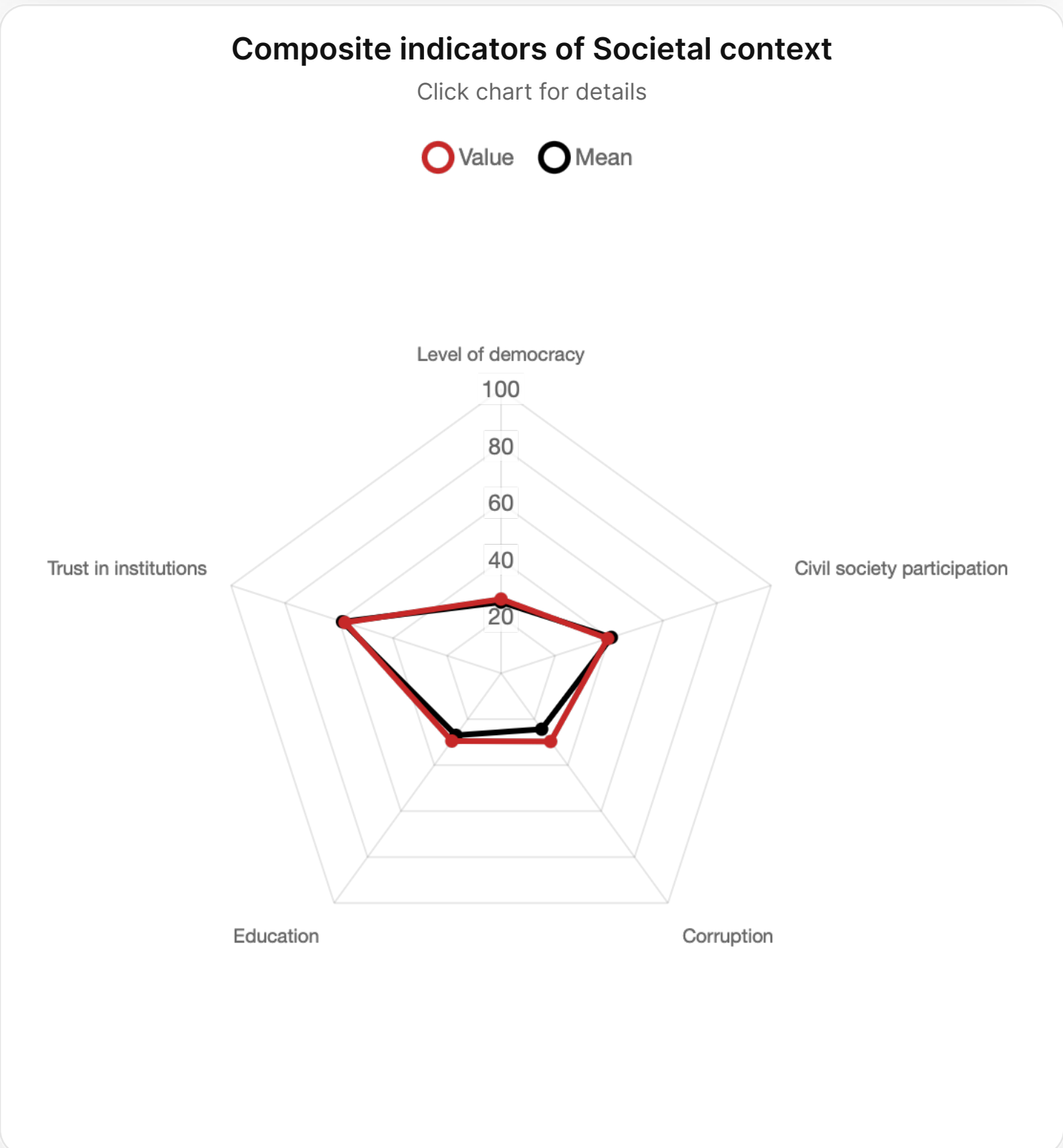
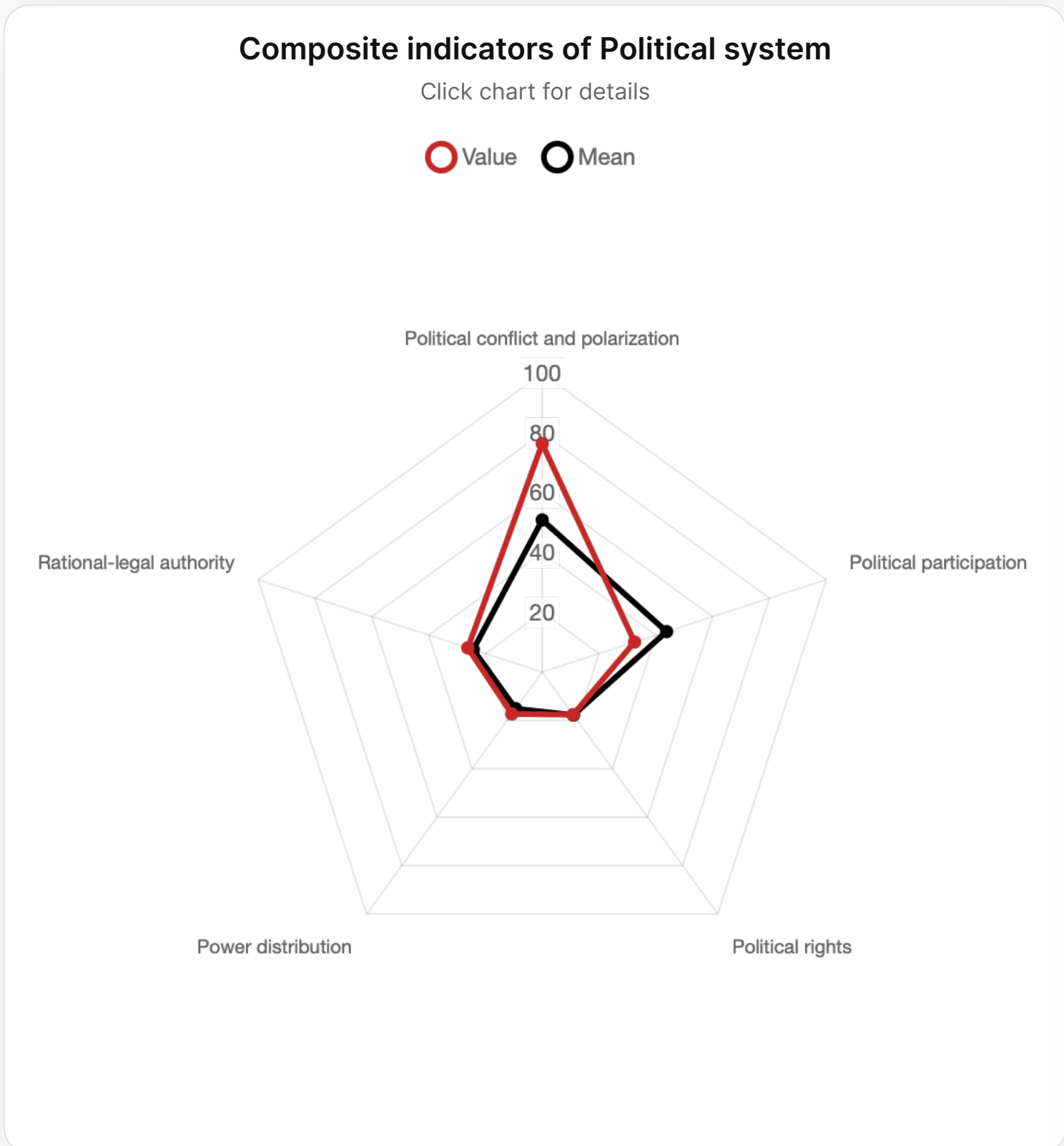
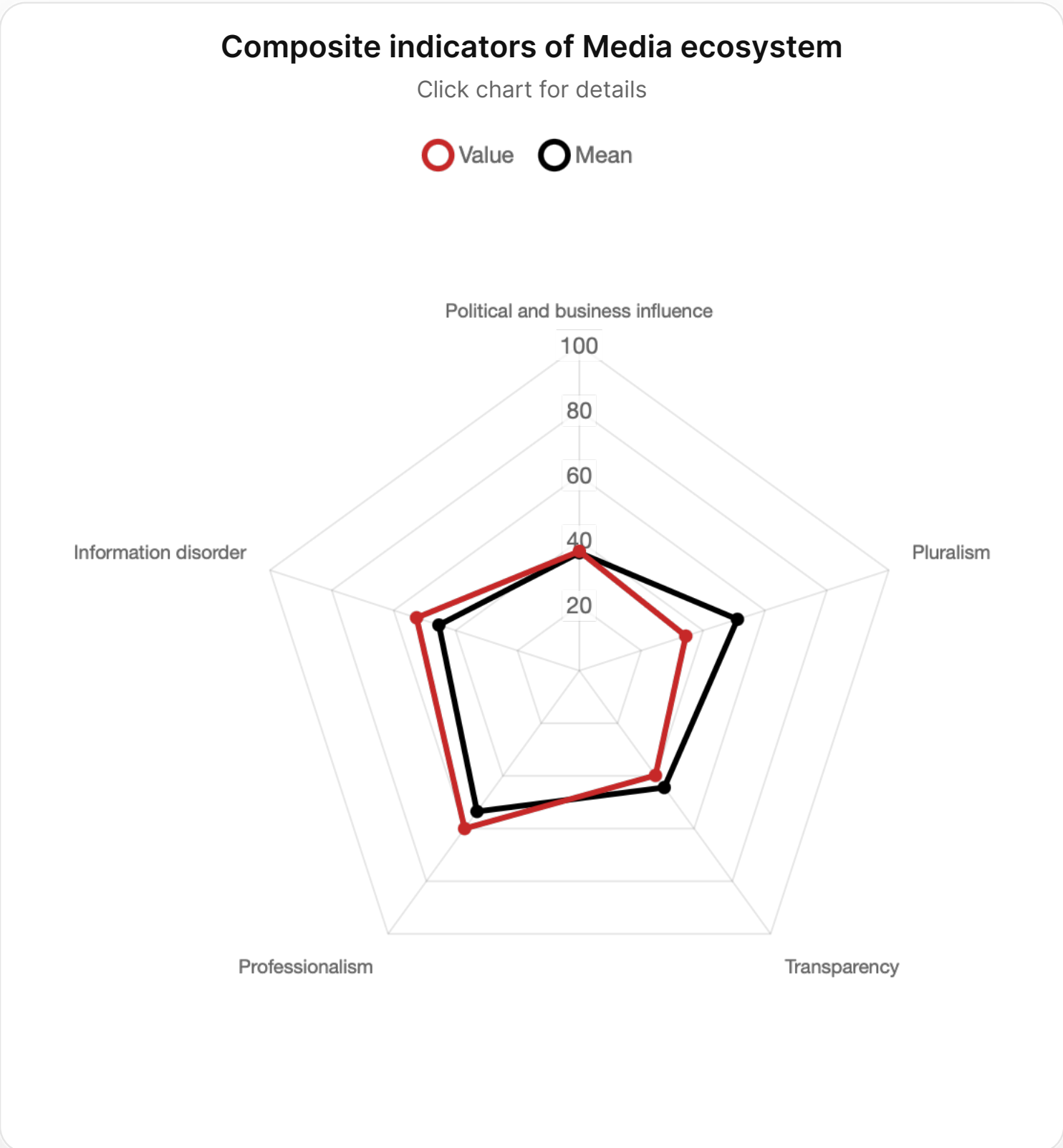
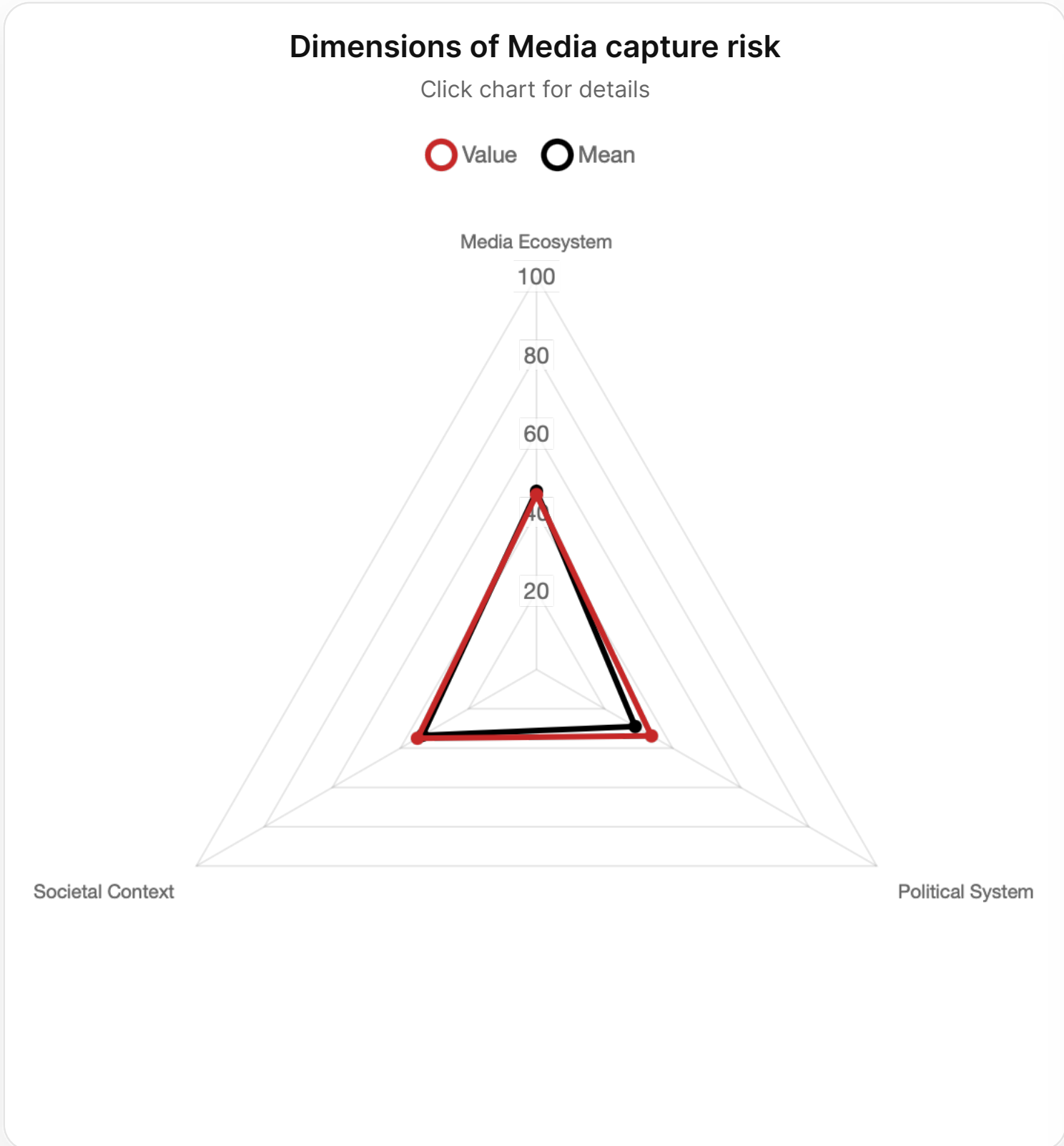
Slovakia



Population: 5.5m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 39.5

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



Country Overview

Slovakia presents a medium level of media capture risk across all three dimensions, especially linked to the political and societal ones. As a relatively young parliamentary democracy, Slovakia emerged from decades of centralized information control under the socialist regime. In its early years, the country relied heavily on foreign investment, particularly from German media groups, to structure and stabilize its media market. This phase of external consolidation lasted until approximately 2008, when domestic actors progressively strengthened their presence. However, structural challenges persisted, especially in terms of ownership concentration and political interference, dynamics that intensified during the political ascent of Robert Fico.

Despite the formal plurality of outlets, the Slovak media market shows a clear tendency toward concentration. Three major conglomerates (*PPF/CME*, *Penta/NMH*, and the *JOJ group*) control strategically significant segments of the market. These actors operate as “impure publishers”, combining media ownership with broader business interests, which increases the risk of political and economic influence. At the same time, transparency regarding formal ownership has improved substantially due to legislative reforms requiring the disclosure of media proprietors. Nevertheless, disclosure requirements do not extend to detailed information on financing structures or budgetary flows, leaving room for uncertainty regarding the effective autonomy of media outlets and their exposure to external pressures. The broadcasting sector illustrates these tensions. Public service media, formerly *RTVS* and recently restructured and renamed *STVR*, underwent significant institutional reform in 2024. The new appointment procedure, now involving both the Minister of Culture and Parliament, has been implemented, and the previous board was dismissed as part of the reform process. These changes have raised concerns about political influence, although formal constitutional guarantees remain in place. In the private sector, the leading broadcaster TV *Markíza* (owned by *PPF/CME*) has experienced internal restructuring following sustained criticism from governing political actors, including changes in management and editorial orientation. Such developments reflect not so much overt censorship as rather subtle forms of editorial pressure, which directly affect journalistic professionalism.

Professionalism represents one of the most evident indicators of medium risk levels. Journalists operate in a context where defamation retains criminal relevance, editorial interference is recurrent, and specific anti-SLAPP protections are lacking. These structural weaknesses are compounded by the enduring impact of the 2018 murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová, an event that profoundly shook Slovak society and highlighted the risks associated with investigating political-business networks. While the country has not experienced systemic violence against journalists, the combination of legal vulnerability and political pressure contributes to a medium level of risk in the professionalism dimension.

Information disorder constitutes another significant indicator, closely intertwined with political polarization. Slovakia has traditionally been a television-centered media environment, but consumption patterns are increasingly shifting toward online platforms and social media, particularly *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram*. While these platforms allow broader pluralism and coverage of sensitive topics beyond traditional gatekeepers, they also facilitate the circulation of unverified or polarized content. In the absence of comprehensive media literacy policies, and amid limited institutional promotion of media education, exposure to disinformation remains a structural challenge.

The most critical indicators of risk, however, are found in the political and societal dimensions. Following the parliamentary elections of 30 September 2023, the social-democratic *SMER-SSD* party formed a heterogeneous governing coalition including nationalist and conservative actors such as the *Slovak National Party* (SNS). Robert Fico was subsequently appointed Prime Minister on 25 October 2023. This political configuration has coincided with increasing polarization, which culminated in an assassination attempt in May 2024. Discussed acts, such as the transformation of public service media (PSM), accelerated parliamentary procedures and high levels of influence over private media outlets are the traits that most of all contributed to fragment political debate and public opinion. In addition, corruption remains a significant structural concern. Political-business entanglements, the influence of oligarchic networks, and opaque financial practices contribute to sustained risks within the political system. These dynamics, combined with polarized public discourse, have deepened societal divisions and eroded trust in institutions.

From a societal perspective, polarization extends to issues of minority rights and cultural values. Slovakia retains a socially conservative profile, with limited recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights and ongoing marginalization of Roma communities. While civil liberties are formally protected, recent constitutional amendments affecting LGBTQIA+ and reproductive rights reflect a contested normative environment. However, these developments do not amount to a systemic erosion of core democratic rights, which remain institutionally safeguarded.

In sum, the Slovak case thus illustrates a context in which media capture risk does not stem from outright authoritarian restructuring, but rather from the cumulative effects of concentrated ownership, political pressure, corruption networks, and polarized public discourse within an otherwise formally democratic framework.