

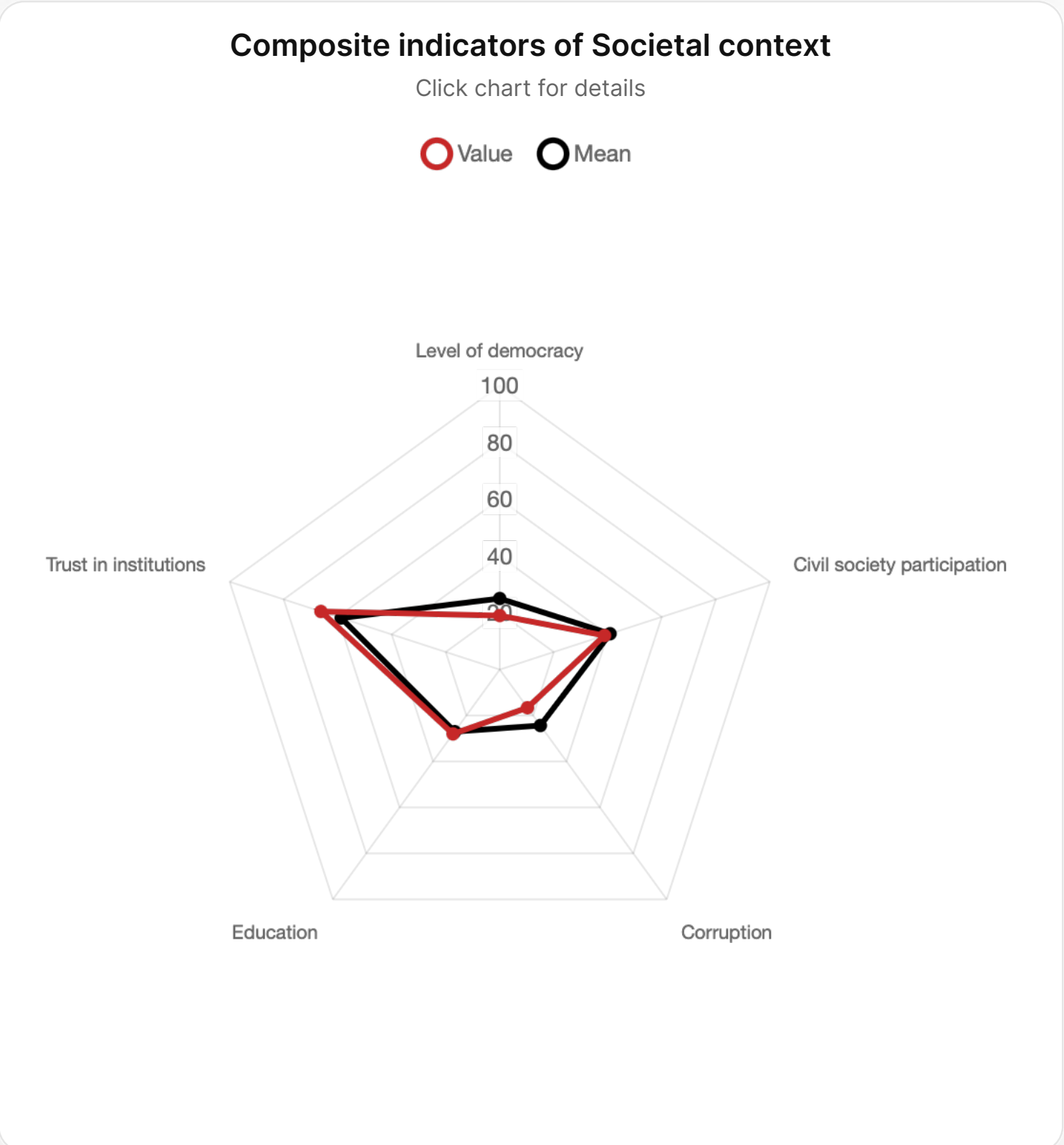
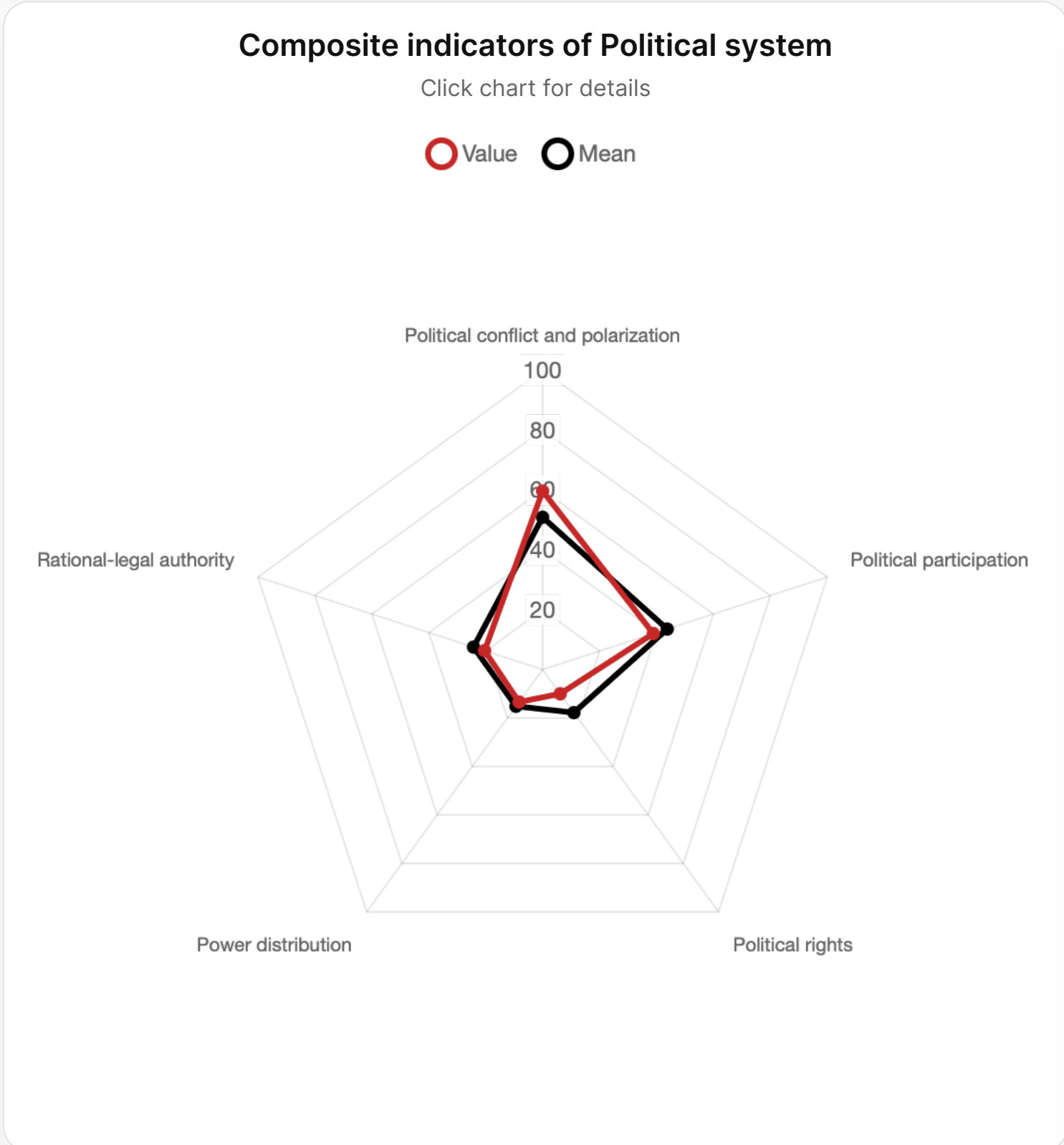
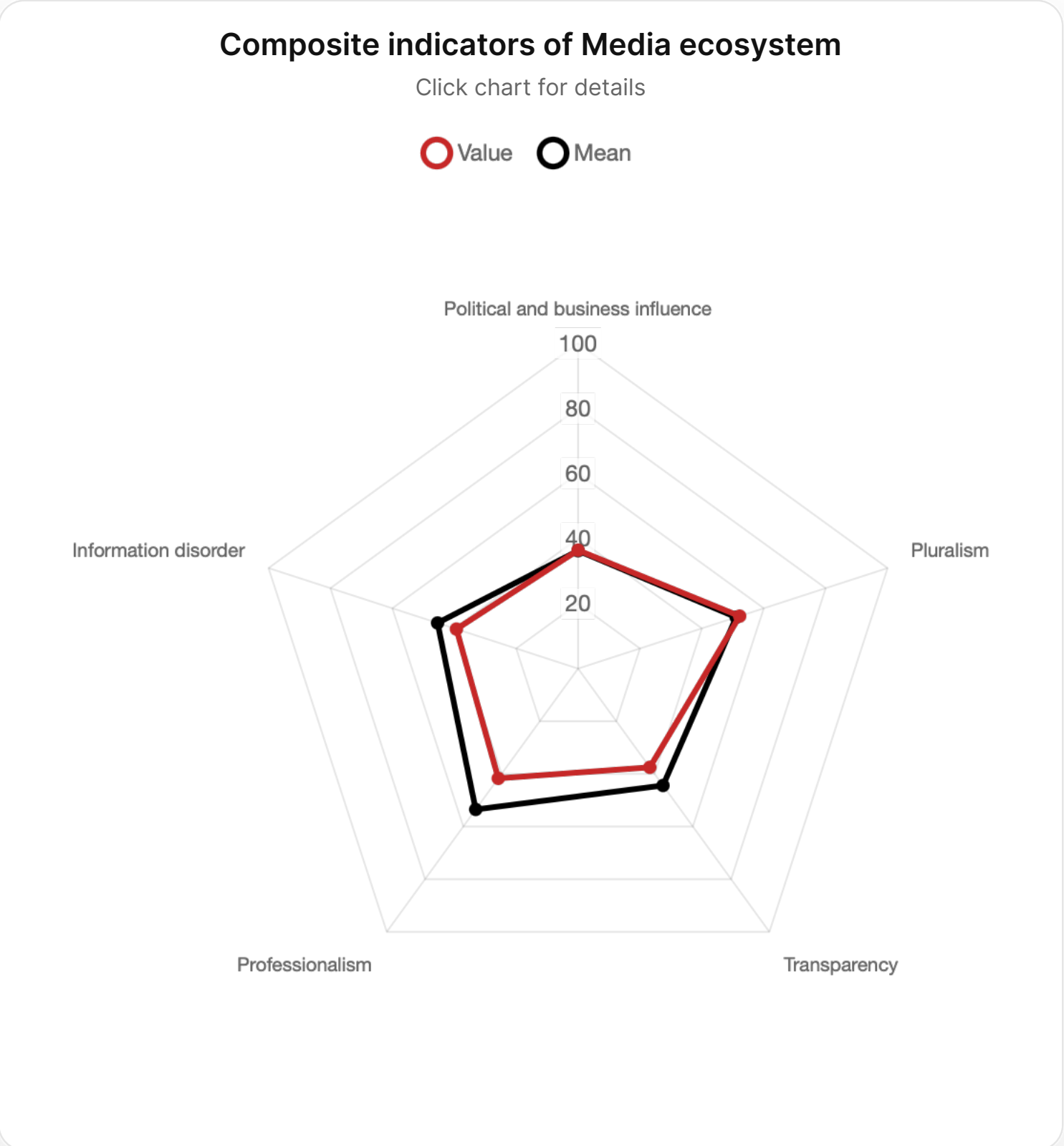
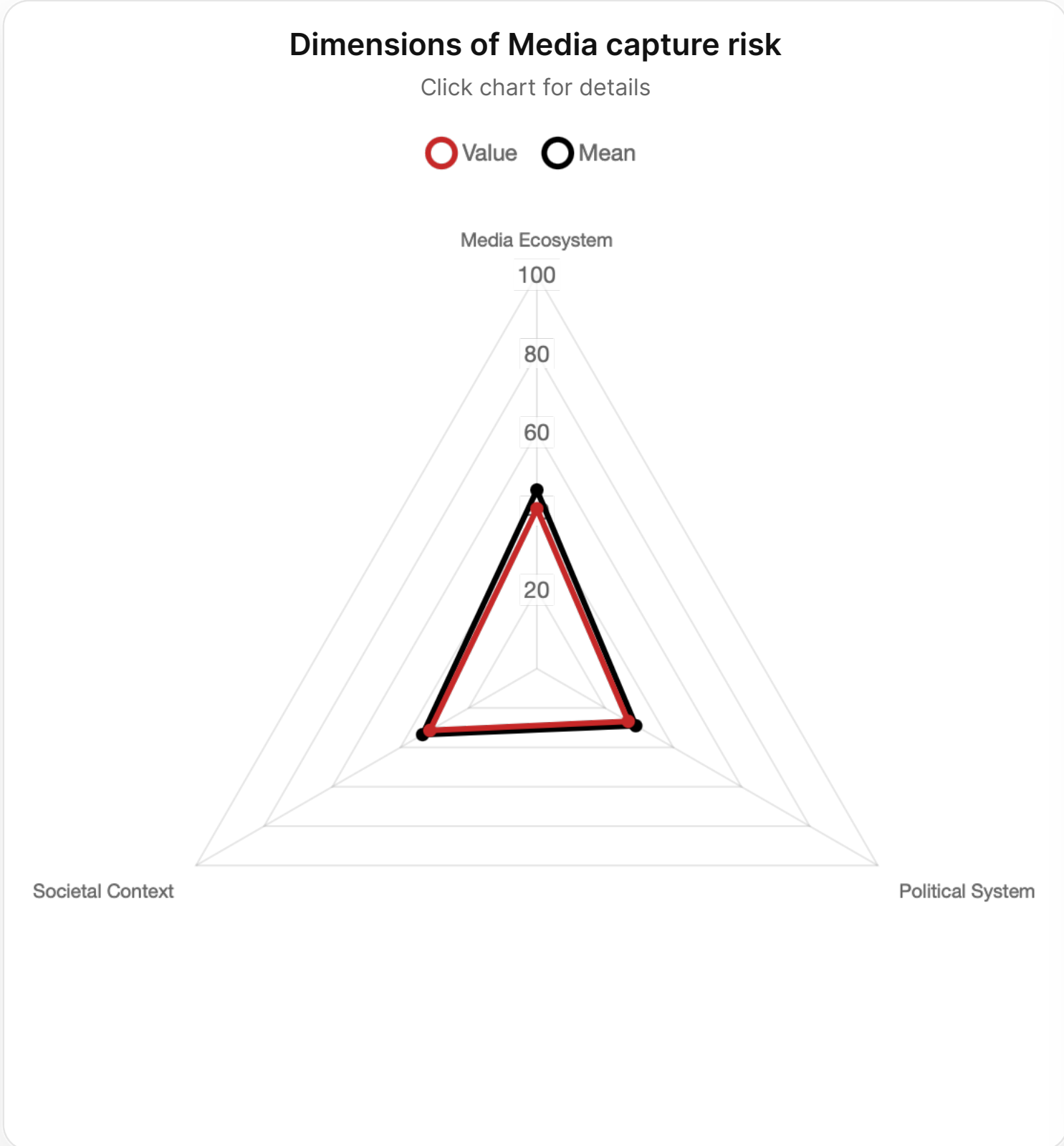
Spain



Population: 47.8m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 34.9

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



Country Overview

Spain is characterized by a medium risk of media capture across all three dimensions. Following the end of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, Spain began its democratic transition in 1978 under King Juan Carlos I, establishing a constitutional monarchy with competitive elections and a parliamentary system. Since then, the country has consolidated a stable democratic framework. This institutional solidity is reflected in relatively low levels of risk in the political and societal dimensions, particularly regarding political rights, power distribution, corruption, and the overall level of democracy. Nevertheless, recent years have been marked by increasing political polarization and declining trust in institutions, which represent the most significant scores in Spain's risk profile and indirectly affect the media environment.

Spain's media ecosystem presents medium levels of risk, broadly aligned with or below the cross-country average, though with important features linked to pluralism and market concentration. The national media market is dominated by a public broadcaster, *RTVE*, alongside two major private audiovisual groups, *Atresmedia* and *Mediaset España*. This concentration contributes to structural risks for pluralism. At the same time, Spain's media system is territorially differentiated in ways that are highly relevant for assessing media capture risk. Beyond the national-level ecosystem, a dense network of regional public broadcasters, particularly in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, and Andalusia, plays a central role in shaping political debate within their respective territories. In regions characterized by strong identity-based politics, media governance, funding, and editorial direction are often subject to heightened political contestation. This multi-level structure adds complexity to the assessment of pluralism and political influence, as media capture risks may vary significantly across territories and cannot be fully captured through national indicators alone.

Recent reforms of the public service broadcaster, approved by parliament, have modified its governance structure, strengthening the role of the president while reducing the influence of the editorial board. These changes have generated political controversy and concerns about potential politicization, although the overall level of political and business influence remains close to the comparative average. Such concerns should be understood within a longer-standing pattern of partisan contestation over public broadcasting governance. Successive governments have faced accusations of influencing appointments and editorial priorities, while internal journalistic bodies have periodically denounced political interference. Despite the presence of formal safeguards, this recurring politicization constitutes a structural vulnerability within the media ecosystem. Similar concerns emerge in the private sector, where media ownership is often intertwined with broader economic interests, raising questions about editorial independence. In addition, the distribution of institutional advertising at national, regional, and municipal levels represents a structurally relevant factor in the media ecosystem. Given the economic fragility of many news organizations, especially digital-native outlets, public advertising can constitute a significant source of revenue. While formal frameworks regulate its allocation, persistent concerns about transparency and criteria have raised questions about potential indirect leverage over editorial lines, contributing to structural vulnerabilities even in the absence of direct political control.

Media consumption patterns are undergoing a rapid transformation. While television remains influential, digital platforms and social media now play a central role in news access, with widespread use of messaging applications and online video platforms. This transformation has been accompanied by a significant expansion of digital-native outlets, many of which display explicit ideological positioning. This trend has contributed to increasing audience segmentation and the consolidation of parallel informational spheres aligned with partisan identities. While not necessarily indicative of direct political capture, these dynamics reinforce polarization and may limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, indirectly affecting trust in journalism and the deliberative quality of public debate. The digital environment has also enabled local journalism to survive due to lower production costs; however, economic pressures persist, and so-called “news deserts” affect a significant proportion of municipalities.

Transparency represents a relative strength, particularly due to regulatory oversight by the National Commission on Markets and Competition and recent government initiatives to establish a national media registry covering ownership and public funding. Nonetheless, gaps remain, as ownership disclosure obligations primarily apply to audiovisual media, and financial reporting requirements are limited for most private companies. Professional risks are present but not extreme. Journalists generally enjoy freedom of expression, although surveys indicate that economic and political pressures are widespread within newsrooms. Spain also shows comparatively lower risks related to information disorder, suggesting a certain resilience against disinformation, even in a polarized environment.

Medium levels of risk emerge also from Spain's political system, which demonstrates strong institutional safeguards and relatively low risks in areas such as political rights, power distribution, rational-legal authority, and corruption control. The country is currently governed by the *Spanish Socialist Workers' Party* (PSOE) under Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, within a fragmented parliamentary landscape characterized by coalition politics and frequent electoral competition. Despite this institutional robustness, the political dimension is strongly affected by medium levels of polarization. Ideological confrontation between major parties, territorial tensions (particularly those linked to Catalan independence debates), and contentious issues such as immigration have intensified political conflict. The rise of the far-right party *Vox* has further contributed to a confrontational political climate, including episodes of hostility toward journalists.

Spanish societal context too is characterized by medium levels of risk. While it is true that progressive legislation has expanded gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights, as well as linguistic and cultural diversity, at the same time the country faces enduring social and territorial divisions. Historical tensions between central and regional identities have occasionally produced political crises, most notably the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. These divisions contribute to broader political polarization and can indirectly affect media narratives and public discourse. At the same time, educational policies have increasingly incorporated media literacy, particularly through the LOMLOE reform, although implementation remains uneven and dependent on regional resources. Civil society's participation remains relatively strong, but the high level of distrust in institutions continues to represent a structural challenge for democratic cohesion.

Overall, Spain presents a media ecosystem facing structural challenges related to ownership concentration, economic sustainability, and newsroom pressures, but performs better than average in transparency, professionalism, and resilience to disinformation. The main critical scores emerge not from institutional weakness but from intense political polarization and declining trust in institutions, which shape both media perceptions and public debate. Spain therefore combines robust democratic foundations with a polarized political climate.