

# Media Freedom and Pluralism

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024



Indicator

## Free Media

Question

To what extent are the media free from government influence and able to act independently?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = There are no disincentives, by law or in practice, for the media to criticize the government and public officials.
- 8-6 = Existing disincentives, by law and in practice, pose no significant obstacles to the media in criticizing the government and public officials.
- 5-3 = Existing disincentives, by law and in practice, pose some significant obstacles to the media in criticizing the government and public officials.
- 2-1 = Existing disincentives, by law and in practice, pose various significant obstacles to the media in criticizing the government and public officials.

### Canada

Score 10

In Canada, there are no barriers to traditional or social media reporting outside of traditional libel and slander laws, and criticism of the government is very common.

However, foreign companies are prevented from owning controlling stakes in Canadian media companies. Outside the government-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and its French-language counterpart, Radio Canada, traditional media ownership in Canada is concentrated in the hands of a small number of Canadian-owned and Canadian-controlled media conglomerates. There is also particularly strong media concentration in some parts of the country, such as the Irving newspapers in New Brunswick. This makes it difficult for new companies to break into Canadian media markets and limits competition (Murray 2007).

This trend accelerated following the shutdown of several dozen local newspapers, which occurred after a 2017 deal between two national newspaper corporations, Torstar and Postmedia Group, and the earlier demise of the Canwest-Global company.

The influence of mainstream newspapers has waned considerably in the last decade or so in favor of online sources of information and social media, where Canadians can find a greater diversity of opinions and political perspectives.

Citation:

Murray, Catherine. 2007. "The Media." In *Policy Analysis in Canada: The State of the Art*, eds. L. Dobuzinkis, M. Howlett, and D. Laycock, 286–97. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

## Denmark

Score 10

Denmark is a liberal democracy, and Article 77 of the constitution protects the freedom of speech: “Any person shall be at liberty to publish his ideas in print, in writing and in speech, subject to his being held responsible in a court of law. Censorship and other preventive measures shall never again be introduced.” Freedom of speech includes freedom of the press.

The penal code sets two limits to the freedom of speech: libel and racism. Independent courts interpret the boundaries of these exceptions. In December 2023, the Danish parliament endorsed a law to prevent the burning of religious texts, including the Quran (Bologna 2023). Technically, the law was enacted as an amendment to the penal code (Straffeloven 2023). The debate surrounding the enactment of the law has been intense because the law stipulates that it extends to artistic products. The law is so new that there is no information on how the legal system interprets potential transgressions.

Denmark was ranked third out of 180 countries in the Global Press Freedom Index for 2023. A recent report from Roskilde University found that a strong norm of noninterference and acceptance of media independence supports media freedom in Denmark (Schrøder et al. 2021).

There have been various reports indicating harassment of journalists, but self-censorship has not been identified as an issue. Furthermore, the Danish press holds both nationally and locally elected politicians and civil servants accountable.

Citation:

Bologna. 2023. “Folketinget stemmer ja til omstridt koranlov.” DR December 7. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/folketinget-stemmer-ja-til-omstridt-koranlov>

Ministry of Cultural Affairs. 2020. “Media Development in Denmark.” [https://mediernesudvikling.kum.dk/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dokumenter/medier/Mediernes\\_udvikling/2020/Overblik\\_og\\_perspektivering/Summary\\_and\\_discourse\\_2020.pdf](https://mediernesudvikling.kum.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/medier/Mediernes_udvikling/2020/Overblik_og_perspektivering/Summary_and_discourse_2020.pdf)

Straffeloven 2023. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2023/1554>

Schrøder, K. C., Blach-Ørsten, M., and Eberholst, M. K. 2021. “Denmark.” In N. Newman, R. Fletcher, A.

Schulz, S., Andi, C. T. Robertson, and R. K. Nielsen, eds. 2021. Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021. (pp. 74-75). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-newsreport/>

Reporters Without Borders. 2021. (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2021>)

Reporters Without Borders. “World Press Freedom Index.” <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

Zahle, Henrik. 2001. Dansk Forfatningsret 1.

<https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>

## Finland

Score 10

The independence of the media is ensured by the 2003 Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media, and is supported by the public and political discourse. A free and pluralist media is considered an important contributor to debate among citizens and the formation of public opinion.

The Council for Mass Media in Finland has successfully managed a system of self-regulation among media outlets.

Furthermore, as Finland is one of the least corrupt societies in the world, the government has generally avoided interfering with press freedoms, although a few exceptions to this rule have occurred in recent years.

The regulations regarding wiretapping, the protection of whistleblowers and “fake news” do not hinder media freedom in Finland.

There is no censorship of digital, print or broadcast media. The government and other public officials do not indirectly attempt to censor digital, print or broadcast media. The government does not censor online content. Public officials may be held accountable for instances of unlawful censorship; however, such cases are rare.

There is no research on the level of self-censorship among journalists. However, it is not considered a problem. Journalists do not face physical harassment. However, hate speech – especially on social media – and legal threats against journalists are common, particularly targeting those criticizing the True Finns party and its supporters.

Citation:

“Reporters without Borders, Finland,” <https://rsf.org/en/finland>  
[https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/supreme\\_court\\_upholds\\_legality\\_of\\_hs\\_journalists\\_home\\_search/1092036](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/supreme_court_upholds_legality_of_hs_journalists_home_search/1092036)

Manninen, Wille. 2017. “Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe 2017. Country Report: Finland.” [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61138/2018\\_Finland\\_EN.pdf](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61138/2018_Finland_EN.pdf)

## Norway

Score 10

The freedom of the media is protected within the general legal framework for free speech and by laws regulating commercials. An important institution of press self-regulation, the Ethical Code of Practice of the Norwegian Press, was first adopted by the Norwegian Press Association in 1936 and most recently revised in 2020. All traditional media outlets, both broadcast and print, operating under editorial oversight have committed to this set of normative principles.

The national public broadcaster, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), has been organized as a limited state-owned company financed through taxes since

1996. Its board members are appointed by the Ministry of Culture and by NRK employees. To provide authoritative public assessments of NRK publication policies and handle complaints raised by individuals, a separate independent body, “Kringkastingsrådet,” was established in 1992. This legal framework is intended to ensure NRK maintains sufficient independence from the state as its owner.

The financing of mass media through advertising is strictly regulated. Only one private actor is allowed to operate at a national level, and a license, granted for a six-year term, is awarded through a bidding process. Since the system’s introduction in 1991, one company – TV2 – has consistently won all the licenses, effectively functioning as a private monopoly.

All media are generally regarded as independent from political control. There are no institutional restrictions or cases of political interference in the work of journalists and media.

Citation:

Norwegian Press Association. 2020. “Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press.” <https://presse.no/pfu/etiske-regler/vaer-varsom-plakaten/vvpl-engelsk/>

NRK. 2007. “NRK’s Organization.” <https://www.nrk.no/organisasjon/nrks-eigar-og-styre-1.3911342>

## Sweden

### Score 10

Freedom of the media is protected in the Swedish constitution. Two of the four fundamental laws include the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, collectively ensuring freedom of the media and expression of opinion.

Sweden consistently scores high in all aspects of media freedom and freedom of expression. It has an effective framework for regulating hate speech. The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom reports that Sweden generally shows a very low risk for media pluralism, with indicators holding stable (Färdigh, 2022).

In 2023, the government issued a decision to formalize what had previously been practiced but not legislated. At the request of the foundation controlling Swedish media – Swedish Radio (SR), Swedish Television (SVT), and Swedish Educational Radio (UR) – it is now formally forbidden for any members of these organizations’ boards to hold political office (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Also in 2023, a parliamentary committee was assigned to assess Swedish public media and suggest changes if needed. This was framed as an attempt to ensure that public media keeps up with a changing media landscape and as a resource optimization issue (Sveriges Riksdag, 2023).

In 2023, against the background of spiraling costs due to inflation, Swedish Radio announced that they would have to make significant reductions in activities to run a

balanced budget in the coming years (SVT, 2024). This trend may weaken public broadcasting and media pluralism in Sweden in the future.

Citation:

Färdigh, Mathias A. 2022. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), 2022, Country Reports. <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/74707>

Government Offices of Sweden. 2023. "Regeringen säkerställer Public service-företagens oberoende från politiken" <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2023/10/regeringen-sakerstaller-public-service-foretagens-oberoende-fran-partipolitik/>

SVT. 2024. "Stora nedskärningar på Sveriges radio – 180 tjänster försvinner." <https://www.svt.se/kultur/organisationen-pa-sveriges-radio-gors-om>

## Czechia

Score 9

The Czech Republic has long been characterized by a significant degree of media freedom, partly due to the independence of public media and the foreign ownership of private media. However, the private media market has changed significantly over the past decade. The most critical changes have been the concentration of media ownership, the departure of several foreign media owners, and the expansion of media holdings to include print, online, radio, and television.

In recent years, print media readership has declined significantly, while online media has grown.

The MAFRA media group dominates the daily print media market, with an estimated 3.2 million readers. However, Prime Minister Babiš's ownership of MAFRA and other media outlets led to biased reporting and possible self-censorship among journalists.

In 2023, Babiš sold MAFRA, which owns two large dailies (Mladá Fronta Dnes and Lidové Noviny), to an investment group owned by billionaire Karel Pražák. This sale was effectively forced by the adoption of an amendment to existing conflict-of-interest laws in August 2023. Previously, Babiš had protected his media holdings by placing them under the control of a fund he claimed was independent. However, changes insisted on by the EU, despite Babiš's resistance, meant that as the ultimate beneficiary, he would still be judged the owner unless he could demonstrate otherwise. As an active politician, he could not own print media.

However, there is no equivalent restriction on a politician owning internet journals, which have more influence than print media.

The government does not censor media. Czech public TV is independent, overseen by an 18-member council chosen by parliament and intended to represent the country's political, cultural, and regional diversity. Its composition has broadly

fulfilled this aim. Public TV invites speakers and experts who represent independent views. When politicians or their proxies are invited to debate on public or private TV channels, they are mostly faced with representatives from the opposition. Current media, both private and public, are free to criticize the government and face no repercussions.

The government remains slow and ineffective in mitigating the spread of disinformation. The military intelligence service asked internet providers to block pro-Russian sites, but this was only a request and could be circumvented, although visits to those sites did appear to decrease. Chain emails and Russian-related bots remain a critical issue, contributing to polarization and radicalization, particularly targeting seniors. For example, during the second round of the 2023 presidential elections, a hoax that presidential candidate and eventual winner Petr Pavel had died was spread.

Formal protection for whistleblowers was mandated by an EU directive and should have been incorporated into Czech law by December 2021, but it faced opposition from parties within the government. The impact of such protection could be substantial, as survey evidence suggests that one-fifth of Czech citizens observe some form of corrupt practice or illegal activity. The law, as finally introduced, would provide protection only if a criminal offense was being committed that could result in a fine of at least CZK 100,000. Both ANO, the main opposition party, and STAN, a coalition member party, favored strengthening the law, while other government parties were swayed by arguments that it would create problems for businesses.

Citation:

Respekt. 2023. "Babiš se po deseti letech zbavil mediálního impéria." <https://www.respekt.cz/informacni-servis/babis-se-po-deseti-letech-zbavil-medialniho-imperia>  
<https://www.transparency.cz/vlada-slibila-zakrocit-proti-stretu-zajmu-zatim-se-odvazila-jen-k-dilcim-krokum/>  
[https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/whistleblower-zakon-prace-sikana-bossing\\_2302021150\\_bko](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/whistleblower-zakon-prace-sikana-bossing_2302021150_bko)

## Estonia

### Score 9

Estonia follows a liberal approach to media policy with minimal legal restrictions. The Estonian Public Broadcasting company (ERR) is constituted under the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act and governed by a 10-member council. Based on the principle of political balance, five members are specialists in the field, while the other five represent different political parties that hold seats in the national parliament. Members of the ERR Council are elected for five years; members of parliament serve until the next parliamentary elections.

The private media market is generally self-regulated. Audiovisual and radio services are governed by the Media Services Act (2010), which outlines procedures and principles for service provision. Amendments in 2022 clarify the principles of

content freedom and political balance during election campaigns. All providers of radio and TV services must apply for a fixed-term license from the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority. Issuing private newspapers, magazines or news portals is not specifically regulated; they operate on free-market principles. The umbrella organization Union of Media Enterprises represents its members' interests, including advocacy in policymaking initiatives.

The government does not censor digital, print or broadcast media directly or indirectly. The risk of government influence or political interference is considered low (MPM 2022). However, due to the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, government control has become stricter. On 25 February 2022, the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority (TTJA) ordered Estonian telecom service providers to stop broadcasting Belarusian and Russian TV and radio channels, and Russian websites that promoted war propaganda were shut down.

Freedom of the media is guaranteed by the constitution and specified in several legal acts. Currently, the Riigikogu is processing the Hate Speech Bill and the Whistleblower Protection Bill (related to EU Directive 2019/1937). Both processes have been lengthy and accompanied by criticism from conservative political parties and various interest groups, including the Union of Media Enterprises.

Instances of unlawful censorship are very rare. One such legal incident occurred in April 2022, when the Harju County Court fined two journalists following the publication of an article about alleged money laundering at one of Estonia's largest banks, Swedbank. The information was published without legally required prior approval from the prosecutor's office. The court ruling supported the prosecutor's office's argument that there was a "lack of public interest" and that the journalists' only motive was to "satisfy curiosity." However, the Supreme Court overruled this decision in January 2023, finding that the decision to impose fines on the journalists had insufficient legal grounding (Supreme Court of Estonia, 2023).

Compared to many countries, being a journalist in Estonia does not pose a risk to one's life or physical health. However, mental harassment and humiliation on social media do occur. When ideological controversies become heated, such as during the COVID pandemic or in debates over LGBTQ+ rights, journalists face a greater risk of humiliation.

Citation:

The Media Pluralism Monitor 2022 (MPM2022). Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Estonia. European University Institute.

Supreme Court of Estonia. 2023. <https://www.riigikohus.ee/et/uudiste-arhiiv/riigikohus-prokuratuur-peab-ajakirjanikele-trahvi-taotlemist-usutavalt-pohjendama>



## Lithuania

### Score 9

Lithuania's media are not subject to government influence or censorship. Private newspapers and independent broadcasters express a wide variety of views and freely criticize the government. Licensing and regulatory requirements do not expose media outlets to political interference. The media's independence is generally respected by the government, although there have been a few attempts in the past to restrict media freedom.

For example, the ruling coalition led by the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (2016 – 2020) was alleged to have interfered in the operations of the public broadcaster, Lithuanian Radio and Television. The coalition set up a special parliamentary inquiry commission to investigate the activities of the broadcaster. This commission found that the broadcaster's operations were ineffective and opaque, and suggested changes to its governance. These changes could politicize appointments to its council and a new board that the recommendations proposed to establish. Although the committee's conclusions were not approved by the parliament during its plenary vote in November 2018, new legislative proposals were later introduced to implement them.

In September 2018, Lithuanian authorities discontinued the practice of providing free data from the Center of Registers for requests from journalists. However, this decision was later reversed after reporters appealed to government officials.

In 2020, the courts ruled in favor of journalists' rights to access information in an important case. Skvernelis' government had refused to provide information about a government meeting and had deleted the recordings. According to Reporters Without Borders, "This set a very important precedent, giving journalists right of access to all nonclassified information" (Reporters Without Borders 2021).

In addition, media independence may be compromised because the government remains a key advertiser, and a large proportion of media outlets are owned by a small number of domestic and foreign companies. Similarly, regional media depend on local government for advertising and other types of support, which might restrict their ability to criticize local authorities. In its 2023 Rule of Law report on Lithuania, the European Commission noted that "following public discussions, legislation to improve the effectiveness and impartiality of media self-regulatory bodies was adopted. As of 2023, public institutions and bodies have to make public on their websites information about the funds they have used for state advertising."

In recent years, assessments of media freedom and international rankings have shown improvements in Lithuania. In Reporters Without Borders' 2023 Press Freedom Index, Lithuania was ranked seventh out of 180 countries in terms of press freedom, a significant improvement compared to 2021 when it was ranked 28th.

Similarly, the European Center for Press and Media Freedom’s 2022 report noted only one alert in the case of Lithuania – one of the smallest numbers among EU member states.

Citation:

European Commission. 2023. “Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter on the Rule of Law in Lithuania.” Brussels 5.7.2023. SWD (2023) 815 final. [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2023-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2023-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en)

Reporters without Borders. 2023. “The World Press Freedom Index 2023.” <https://rsf.org/en/index>

European Center for Press and Media Freedom. 2022. “Monitoring Report 2022.” <https://www.ecpmf.eu/monitor/monitoring-report-2022/>

Reporters without Borders. 2021. “The World Press Freedom Index 2021.” <https://rsf.org/en/lithuania>

## New Zealand

### Score 9

Media freedom is generally guaranteed and respected in New Zealand. In the 2023 World Press Freedom Index – published by Reporters Without Borders – New Zealand is ranked 13th, down two places compared to 2022 (Reporters Without Borders 2023).

The news media is considered free from political pressure and intervention. This assessment also applies to the state-owned broadcast networks, Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and Radio New Zealand (RNZ). These outlets operate independently and contribute to the diversity of opinions and information available to the public.

While New Zealand has a legal framework that supports media freedom, certain legal considerations may impact the work of journalists, including defamation and privacy laws. Additionally, regulatory bodies such as the Broadcasting Standards Authority and the Press Council oversee media content to ensure it aligns with ethical and professional standards.

The government does not engage in widespread censorship of online content. It is worth noting, though, that after the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack, the administration under Jacinda Ardern took steps to curb the spread of extremist and violent content on the internet – in particular, passing legislation to hold social media platforms accountable for the spread of extremist material (Roy 2019).

Journalists generally work in an environment free from violence and intimidation, although they increasingly face online harassment. The working conditions became tougher in early 2022 when, during protests against COVID-19 restrictions, journalists were subjected to violence, insults and death threats (Swift 2022).

Citation:

Reporters Without Borders. 2023. “New Zealand.” <https://rsf.org/en/country/new-zealand>

Roy, E. A. 2019. “Christchurch attack: New Zealand tries new tactic to disrupt online extremism.” *The Guardian*, October 14. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/14/christchurch-attack-new-zealand-tries-new-tactic-to-disrupt-online-extremism>

Swift, M. 2022. "Overwhelming Number of Kiwi Journalists Face Death Threats and Violence – Study." Newshub, May 10. <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2022/05/overwhelming-number-of-kiwi-journalists-face-death-threats-and-violence-study.html>

## Portugal

### Score 9

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed in Portugal (CRP, Article 38°, part I). Both private and public media in Portugal operate independently of the government, with strong constitutional protections for media freedom. The Entidade Reguladora da Comunicação Social (ERC) serves as the independent body regulating social communication activities and ensuring the autonomy of media entities (Lei n.º 2/99).

However, the election process for the ERC's Regulatory Body has faced criticism, particularly regarding the selection of its fifth member. The two predominant parties in parliament appear to retain significant influence in this process, even though the member should ideally be chosen jointly by the four ERC members appointed through a parliamentary majority (Público, 2017). Additionally, the ERC struggles with a funding model that compromises its financial independence and limits its ability to effectively intervene in various media issues (ECO, 2023).

The government, whether directly or indirectly, lacks the authority to censor any type of media. The 2021 Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Age aims to strengthen citizens' free speech online, enhance internet access rights, and combat disinformation. Although Article 6 of the charter sparked controversy for potentially enabling censorship, its content was largely revoked following a Constitutional Court inspection in 2022 (Lusa, 2022). Unlawful censorship hindering freedom of the press can result in a prison sentence of 3 months to 2 years or a fine of 25 to 100 days. For public officials involved, the sentence is aggravated, ranging from 3 months to 3 years of imprisonment or 30 to 150 days in fines (Lei n.º 2/99, art.33). Journalistic investigations and public scrutiny play a crucial role in holding offenders accountable by bringing visibility to such cases.

Portugal is globally recognized for its press freedom, as acknowledged by Freedom House, which assigns the highest score to Portugal for free and independent media (4 points). Despite this achievement, challenges persist, including occasional instances of journalists facing physical intimidation during their reporting and precarious labor conditions for many in the profession. Generalized low-income and financial instability may lead to a shift in priorities, prompting some to resort to self-censorship (Expresso, 2018). This scenario poses risks to the collective strength of journalists' voices. Additionally, there is a prevailing notion that journalists face increased violence and harassment, albeit sporadically. Since 2018, assaults on journalists carrying out their duties are considered a public crime, following an amendment to Article 132 of the penal code.

Citation:

CRP, Constituição da República Portuguesa (1976)

Law No. 2/99. 1999. Lei de Imprensa.  
[https://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei\\_mostra\\_articulado.php?nid=138&tabela=leis](https://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=138&tabela=leis)

Lusa. 2022. “Presidente da República promulga alteração à Carta de Direitos Humanos na Era Digital.”  
<https://expresso.pt/politica/2022-08-03-Presidente-da-Republica-promulga-alteracao-a-Carta-de-Direitos-Humanos-na-Era-Digital-55edd616>

Código Penal de 1982 versão consolidada posterior a 1995, DL n.º 48/95, de 15 de Março.  
[https://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei\\_mostra\\_articulado.php?artigo\\_id=109A0132&nid=109&tabela=leis&pagina=1&fica=1&so\\_miolo=&nversao=#artigo](https://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?artigo_id=109A0132&nid=109&tabela=leis&pagina=1&fica=1&so_miolo=&nversao=#artigo)

Expresso. 2018. “O romantismo do jornalismo acaba aos 30 anos.” <https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2018-05-03-O-romantismo-do-jornalismo-acaba-aos-30-anos>

Público. 2017. “A independência da regulação da comunicação social.”  
<https://www.publico.pt/2017/01/25/sociedade/opiniao/a-independencia-da-regulacao-da-comunicacao-social-1759480>

ECO. 2023. “ERC reforça necessidade de uma ‘verdadeira independência financeira.’”  
<https://eco.sapo.pt/2023/05/10/erc-reforca-necessidade-de-uma-verdadeira-independencia-financeira/>

Freedom House. 2023. “Portugal 2023.” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/portugal/freedom-world/2023>

## Switzerland

Score 9

Public- and private sector media corporations are free from government influence (Hänggli/Feddersen 2023). This is enshrined in Art. 17 of the Swiss constitution, which states: “Freedom of the press, radio and television and of other forms of dissemination of features and information by means of public telecommunications is guaranteed. Censorship is prohibited. The protection of sources is guaranteed.”

Although the federal government chooses the chairperson and some board members of the quasi-public nonprofit radio and television organization, it exercises no influence over the organization’s daily reporting or journalistic work.

Since 2014, journalists reporting on illegal financial activities have faced up to three years in prison if they use information that violates bank secrecy regulations. Hence, no Swiss journalists took part in the Suisse Secrets investigations (NZZ 2022).

The Swiss government subsidizes media in various ways. It subsidizes the delivery of subscription-based daily and weekly newspapers, as well as club and association magazines, so that all parts of the country and all language regions can be covered by the media. This applies in particular to daily newspapers in sparsely populated regions. Likewise, private local radio and regional television receive money from the government. More far-reaching subsidies were rejected in a recent popular vote on 13 February 2022. However, the government has no means of influencing the contents of these media. These subsidies are not considered to be linked to political interference, as they are granted indiscriminately to many outlets (Höchli 2008). To

the best of our knowledge, there have been no attempts to use these subsidies to influence the work of journalists. Likewise, no scandals or conflicts have become public regarding the government's choice of board members of the quasi-public media organizations.

To our knowledge, there is no substantial issue with regard to self-censorship or harassment of journalists in Switzerland.

Citation:

Hänggli Fricker, Regula, and Alexandra Feddersen. 2023. "Media and Political Communication." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics*, eds. Patrick Emmenegger, Flavia Fossati, Silja Häusermann, Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, and Adrian Vatter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 372–388. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192871787.013.19>

Höchli, Mark. 2008. *The Invisible Scissors: Media Freedom and Censorship in Switzerland*. Doctoral thesis, Brunel University London.

NZZ. 2022. "Suisse Secrets: Datenleck bei der Credit Suisse." <https://www.nzz.ch/wirtschaft/suisse-secrets-datenleck-bei-der-credit-suisse-ld.1670838#subtitle-warum-ist-kein-schweizer-medienhaus-beteiligt-second>

## United States

Score 9

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is regarded as a major legal protection for freedom of speech and the press. The United States has historically had a very pluralistic media culture, and news outlets typically operate without much evidence of direct or indirect government interference (Arcenaux and Johnson 2013).

There is limited censorship in the United States, with courts typically adopting a relaxed view about the content of materials published by private individuals and companies.

While the mainstream media in the United States generally operate free from government interference, many popular news outlets are owned by a few wealthy individuals. In a diverse global media landscape, local news has declined significantly in recent years. A growing interest in partisan media threatens objectivity, and public confidence in the media has fallen dangerously. After four years of President Trump constantly denigrating the press, President Biden signaled his administration's desire to see the U.S. reclaim its global status as a model of freedom of expression, reinstating regular White House and federal agency press briefings. Despite these efforts, many underlying chronic issues impacting journalists remain unaddressed by authorities – including the disappearance of local news, the polarization of the media, and the weakening of journalism and democracy caused by digital platforms and social networks.

Citation:

Kevin Arcenaux and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels? Partisan News in an Age of Choice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Matthew Levendusky. 2013. *How Partisan Media Polarize America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reporters without Frontiers. "United States." <https://rsf.org/en/country/united-states>

## Austria

Score 8

Media freedom in Austria is guaranteed by the constitution. There is no censorship, and new electronic or print media organizations can be freely established. Limits on the freedom of expression in the media are defined by law, and the courts ensure these limits are enforced.

Some media outlets are not completely free of government influence. Both federal and regional governments have used public money to promote specific policies during election campaigns and beyond in various print publications. Public money has also been used to pay fines for violating established rules. This tradition, repeatedly criticized by the Austrian Court of Audit and media organizations, reduces the credibility and freedom of the media.

One of the defining features of the Austrian media landscape is the existence of powerful public media. The Austrian Public Broadcasting (Österreichischer Rundfunk Fernsehen, ORF) company dominates both the television and radio markets. The ORF is legally mandated to operate independently and submit comprehensive reports on its activities. All parties in parliament are represented on the ORF's oversight body, the Stiftungsrat. Compared to the situation in Germany, for example, the majorities in the Stiftungsrat strongly reflect the respective majorities in the Nationalrat, with significant changes occurring after parliamentary elections.

Several cases of alleged political influence over the ORF by various political parties have been reported. However, the ORF generally fulfills its mandate very well, especially by international standards. There is an imbalance between the ORF and other TV and radio stations. The ORF is primarily financed by public fees, which must be paid by everyone who owns a TV or radio device. In contrast, other TV and radio broadcasters generate revenue through advertisements. The ORF and the government justify this imbalance by citing the ORF's specific educational mission, which private companies are not required to fulfill.

There are other imbalances in print media that reflect an uneven regime of direct media subsidies. Subsidies for print journalism generally went to high-quality journals like "Die Presse" or "Der Standard." Public money from advertising was twice as high in recent years, mostly benefiting the yellow press. This advertising is problematic because it leaves room for rewarding favorable journalism. Thus, popular tabloid titles benefit disproportionately from the existing funding regime. While regional weekly newspapers tend to face disadvantages (see Seethaler & Beaufort, 2022).

Many observers deemed the period of the ÖVP-FPÖ government to be the nadir for media freedom due to government intervention, highlighted by unusually aggressive

attacks from the FPÖ on the ORF for being “not objective.” However, the overall situation has not fundamentally improved under the new ÖVP-Green government, as evidenced by Austria’s position in international press freedom rankings. In the most recent Reporters Without Borders 2023 ranking, Austria was placed 29th among 180 countries worldwide, down from 17th in the 2021 report and slightly up from 2022.

The past year has been particularly marked by the resignations of several renowned editors-in-chief who maintained unreasonably close relationships with individual senior politicians. Additional recent developments – such as a house search at the newspaper “Heute” and the transformation of the “Wiener Zeitung,” the world’s oldest newspaper, into an online-only publication – were not yet accounted for in this recent assessment. Furthermore, Austria’s suggested involvement in the PEGASUS scandal, which concerns the distribution and use of spyware, has also cast an unfavorable light on media freedom.

In the Monitoring Report 2022 of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom/EUI (covering the EU, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey), Austria is highlighted as a country where “journalistic profession, standards and protection” have deteriorated, shifting from a low risk to a medium risk classification (with only three other countries in the same or a lower category). Regarding the sub-indicator on the “working conditions” of journalists, Austria is considered to be at a high risk (alongside thirteen other countries out of the 32 covered). Concerning the sub-indicator on the “legal protection of the right to information,” Austria, alongside Turkey, is the only country considered to be at a high risk.

At the same time, Austria is among the minority of countries (8 out of 32) that have rules aiming to ensure the fairness and transparency of political advertising on online platforms. Further, Austria is one of only five countries out of 32 that have a reasonably sophisticated and efficient regulatory framework designed to combat the spread of hate speech.

Citation:

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## Belgium

Score 8

Media freedom is enshrined in the Belgian constitution and widely respected in practice. Any news medium may be created and is free to express any political opinion unless it is reprehensible (e.g., open racism, calls to violence). Criticism of the government, even if unfair, is allowed. However, the Belgian market is narrow and divided between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking submarkets, limiting the entry of new media. For instance, some satirical/investigative media akin to the French *Charlie Hebdo* entered and eventually exited. The TV and radio market features large public players, partly managed by representatives of the main political parties. The head of the main French-speaking public-media organization is appointed by the government and holds a post comparable to that of a civil servant. Nevertheless, the media organization's journalists work largely free from direct control or political influence, even if some reporting may be a bit too uncritical of the government position.

The country's main newspapers are privately owned and run. There are also important private television and radio stations, which operate independently of political parties, though some interpersonal connections exist at the upper management level. The internet has enabled private citizen initiatives to scrutinize public action. Privately held press organizations are largely independent and do their best to scrutinize public activities despite increasing financial pressures. There is limited self-censorship to gain better access to highly visible politicians, but no outright censorship by the government or other public entities..

EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom – Media Pluralism Monitor MPM2022 Results – Centre for Media Pluralism and Freedom (eui.eu) - <https://cmpf.eui.eu/mpm2022-results/>  
European Centre for Press & Media Freedom: Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) <https://www.ecpmf.eu/monitor/monitoring-report-2022/>  
Freedom House. 2022. "Freedom on the Net Report." [freedomhouse.org/FOTN2022Digital.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/FOTN2022Digital.pdf)  
<https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/FOTN2022Digital.pdf>

## France

Score 8

The media system is lively and contributes positively to public debate. In principle, the legal framework sufficiently guarantees media freedom and even provides for pluralism. The reality is somewhat more complex.

Public media have a history of critical reporting, and again in principle, public authorities have little or no direct capacity to intervene. However, these services are today facing an uncertain financial future, and recent appointments have called the independence of the public media into question. Emmanuel Macron's administration abolished the "television tax" (redevance audiovisuelle) in 2022, possibly making public broadcasters more dependent on the good will of individual administrations. This adds to measures by the Sarkozy administration (2007 – 2012) that had curtailed those broadcasters' access to advertising markets.



Relatedly, recent decisions concerning public radio and in particular Radio France – France’s largest radio service in terms of national audience – raised criticism regarding their possible political motivation. Specifically, the recent appointment of Adèle van Reeth as CEO of France Inter led to controversy after she canceled a popular daily comedy show, “C’est encore nous!” That show had regularly been very critical of the incumbent administration.

This said, there is no evidence of effective censorship or any form of constraints on critical journalism, despite a growing number of attempts by politicians to use legal channels to prevent the publication of news that could be politically costly.

Citation:

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## Germany

Score 8

Media freedom in Germany is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Basic Law (Article 5), which includes freedom of speech and prohibits media censorship. The media is considered the fourth pillar of democracy, and this freedom extends to publicly owned media (Rundfunk).

Additionally, publicly owned media in Germany operates under a legally secured mandate based on the Interstate Treaty on the Modernization of Media (Medienstaatsvertrag), which provides a framework for both public and private broadcast media. According to constitutional requirements set by the Federal Constitutional Court, the government is prohibited from interfering with or influencing the selection, content, or implementation of programs (Grundsatz der Staatsfreiheit). However, public media often faces criticism for being too close to the government, primarily because the supervisory board, the Rundfunkrat, includes multiple former and active politicians. This raises concerns about the neutrality of public media (Grimberg, 2020).

Generally, censorship of print and broadcast media is rare and usually concerns only highly sensitive issues. If attempts at censorship are discovered, the responsible officials are typically punished (V-Dem, 2023). However, an incident in June 2023, where the Bavarian Federal Police wiretapped the climate activist group “Letzte Generation” and their press contacts, raised concerns about interference with press freedom. While the Munich public prosecutor’s office deemed the interception reasonable, experts viewed it as an infringement on press freedom (Brack, 2023).

A new law regulating whistleblower protection took effect in July 2023. While it prohibits reprisals against whistleblowers and obliges enterprises and organizations to establish secure channels for informants, the Whistleblower Netzwerk (2023) criticizes that these regulations only cover reports addressed to internal or external

governmental channels. Public whistleblowers are protected only in exceptional cases. Article 32 of the Whistleblower Protection Act (Hinweisgeberschutzgesetz, HinSchG) specifies that public whistleblowers are protected only when they did not receive an answer from external channels or if the relevant information relates to an immediate and obvious danger to the public. This complicates cooperation between investigative journalists and whistleblowers, particularly in cases of white-collar crime and illegal intelligence activities (RSF, 2023).

Media freedom in Germany has worsened in recent years, according to RSF's annual ranking, which assigned Germany 81.91 points out of 100. There were 103 recorded attacks on reporters in 2022, an increase from previous years (65 in 2020 and 80 in 2021). Many attacks go unreported, suggesting the actual number is higher. Most attacks are physical, with many journalists being kicked or hit. Approximately 84% of these attacks are attributed to the extreme right, conspiracy ideologies, or antisemitism. One-third of journalists reported that police did not help when attacks occurred, and in some cases, police carried out the assaults. Additionally, police often did not investigate, or journalists refrained from filing complaints due to fear of further attacks. Besides physical violence, populist politicians attempt to create mistrust toward the media, and hate speech and threats on social media are increasing issues, especially for people of color, women, or journalists reporting on gender issues.

The government seldom blocks websites, but it has blocked Russian state-owned media outlets following Russia's invasion of Ukraine due to an EU regulation. Additionally, Vodafone, following a regional court order in Munich, has blocked multiple streaming and file-sharing websites in response to complaints from rights holders (Freedom House, 2023).

To combat hate speech and the distribution of fake news and misinformation, Germany introduced the Network Enforcement Act (Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz). This law requires social networks to delete such content. According to Google's Transparency Report, German government agencies made 293 requests to take down content in the second half of 2022 (Freedom House, 2023). The lack of judicial oversight is problematic, as there is no judicial remedy if a social media network restricts an individual's freedom of speech or right to information.

The Digital Services Act, an EU directive that came into force in November 2022, aims to enable the deletion of illegal content and protect users' fundamental rights. Member states are required to implement this directive by February 2024 (Reporter ohne Grenzen, 2023).

Lastly, while journalists in Germany adhere to a self-binding code of ethics, self-censorship is not a prevalent or documented issue, either online or in other media (Freedom House, 2023). If self-censorship occurs, it is only on isolated, highly political issues (V-Dem, 2023).

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## Ireland

### Score 8

The media in Ireland is largely free from government influence and able to operate independently. Media freedom is guaranteed through the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), established on October 1, 2009, and renamed the Media Commission in 2023. Regulations governing publicly owned media ensure relative independence from government influence and political interference. Licensing and regulatory systems for privately owned media also promote independence, though ongoing debates persist about two major concerns: funding for public broadcasting and monopoly ownership in the private media sector. Economics heavily dominates public discourse in Ireland, influenced by neoclassical preferences for economic growth and free markets. Legal regulations do not hinder independent media from reporting freely, and there are restrictions on wiretapping and protections for whistleblowers, with no new regulations enacted between 2022 and 2024.

Regulations concerning the impact of "fake news" on media reporting are complex, especially given Ireland's role as a major EU regulator for international MNC-owned social media, which is also bound by international directives, political dynamics and practical imperatives. Government or public officials do not censor digital, print or broadcast media. However, the forthcoming Hate Crimes Bill in 2024 will introduce some legitimate limits on free speech. There are few controls over broadcast frequencies, influence on printing facilities, selective distribution of subsidies or advertising (with exceptions for alcohol and tobacco limits and time thresholds), imposing prohibitive tariffs or bribery. Excluding child pornography and similar content, the government does not censor online material. Blasphemy was abolished as a constitutional offense in 2013, although a censorship office still exists.

While Directive (EU) 2016/680, which prohibits the illegal monitoring of journalists by law enforcement authorities, has been transposed into Irish law, the 2011 Data Retention Act still allows the police to monitor the communications of all citizens, including journalists. “Journalistic privilege” is not officially recognized in Ireland, but in practice, the judiciary is reluctant to force journalists to surrender material to the police (Colfer et al., 2022). The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom’s 2022 report ranks Ireland joint 3rd among EU states and does not mention Ireland in relation to the 813 recorded incidences of press violations that year. Freedom House’s “Freedom on the Net” report does not mention Ireland’s potential role in overseeing EU-level social media regulation and enforcement.

The Office of the Press Ombudsman is self-regulated and funded by the press industry but is very poorly resourced, with only 2.5 staff members, including the Ombudsman. The office handled 302 cases in 2022, up 50 from the previous year, and is conscious of the need to address the culture of libel and court action associated with Ireland’s unlimited defamation laws. Self-censorship among journalists can occur due to concerns about the chilling effects of the strict 2009 Defamation Act (with no upper limits on awards) and related libel laws, as well as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). While journalists tend not to face direct harassment, there are increasing threats of libel, including from Sinn Féin politicians. A new defamation bill is due in 2024 and should address these vulnerabilities. There are few arrests, physical assaults and no murders since 1996, but there are concerns about spillover from Northern Ireland, where journalist Lyra McKee was shot dead in Derry in 2019. Perpetrators of crimes against journalists have been effectively prosecuted. Working conditions are increasingly precarious, with poor union engagement in significant media organizations and concerns about the digital safety of journalists.

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## Latvia

Score 8

In Latvia, the media operate with independence and freedom, allowing journalists to investigate cases without restriction. Analytical journalism is highly developed, enabling the media to hold politicians accountable.

The Public Electronic Media Council (Sabiedrisko Elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome, SEPLP) was established under the Law on Public Electronic Mass Media.

The council is an independent, autonomous public body representing public interests in the electronic media sector.

The Media Ombudsman was elected in 2021 and has been effective since March 2022. The Media Ombudsman monitors public electronic media and the services delivered by public electronic mass media. The monitoring covers the code of ethics and editorial guidelines of public electronic mass media. In addition, the Media Ombudsman – either upon its initiative or based on the submissions of individuals – provides an opinion on the conformity of public electronic mass media programs and services.

The legal framework ensures freedom of the press, confidentiality of journalistic sources, and access to public information. There is no censorship in any form – digital, print, or broadcast media.

Media licensing in Latvia is politically neutral and adheres to legal procedures. Many TV channels broadcasting from Russia, accused of spreading propaganda and violating Latvian laws, have been banned. According to the law, TV programs registered in a country (such as Russia) that threaten the territorial integrity and independence of another country are prohibited from operating in Latvia.

The legal framework distinguishes among political influences, differences, and media oversight. In addition, the oversight function of public media and the regulatory function within the industry have been separated.

Journalists work in a safe environment. However, they may be subject to verbal attacks online. At the end of 2022, the Riga Regional Court upheld a lower court's decision, sentencing an individual to two months' imprisonment for harassing a "re:Baltica" investigative journalist. This case marked the first time someone was imprisoned for harassing a journalist.

The government plans to merge the public television and radio entities into a unified public broadcasting company. Additionally, there is a plan to introduce a new public media financing model to enhance media independence.

While overt acts of media censorship or direct harassment of journalists are challenging to address, self-censorship presents significant obstacles within the media landscape, extending to both state and regional outlets (Ramāns 2020). Various factors contribute to self-censorship. While the lack of stable media financing stands out as a primary concern, an overdependence on state funding through Media Support Programs has also resulted in the promotion of pro-government narratives. Additionally, the consolidation of public media into a unified broadcasting entity has drawn criticism from media experts who argue that it undermines media independence by intensifying government influence.

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## Netherlands

Score 8

On the World Press Freedom Index (WPF) compiled by Reporters without Borders (RSF 2023), the Netherlands has made a strong comeback from 28th place in 2022 to sixth place in 2023 (out of 180 countries). This is specifically – and sadly – due in part to stepping up security measures for reporters following the killing of crime reporter Peter R. de Vries in July 2021. Ongoing dangers from organized crime as well as threatening behavior from supporters of populist parties toward journalists during demonstrations – cheered on by PVV political leader Wilders, who publicly called journalists “scum of the earth” – have resulted in somewhat improved police protection and an emergency number that journalists can use to report crimes and receive advice on what to do. Nevertheless, the Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF 2023) index sees the country as being low-risk with regard to the media’s fundamental protection, social inclusiveness and political independence. Although there are some signs of self-censorship, Dutch media feel free to question and criticize government ministers and members of parliament. Journalists have practically unlimited access to the parliament building, and may approach MPs and ministers after commission meetings, with the informal rule being that they will allow (short) interviews.

The Dutch media landscape consists of commercial media – owned by three large press conglomerates (one Dutch-German, two Belgian) – and public media, overseen by Dutch Public Broadcasting (NPO). The small number of media owners and the dominance of uncontrollable international mega-companies in commercial media is considered a plurality risk. The Dutch Authority on Consumers and Market (ACM) prohibited a merger between Talpa and RTL. There is no formal legislation to limit media concentration.

NPO is still structured to serve putatively different segments of the population, each with their own distinct set of beliefs, perspectives and convictions, along with a number of paying members. The system has been modernized several times; most recently by limiting the number of media organizations to six. Every five years, two “aspiring” members are admitted on a temporary basis. To the astonishment of many, in 2021, Unheard Netherlands! (ON!) – the mouthpiece of adherents of

extreme right-wing political parties such as PVV and FvD – and Black (Zwart) – which leans toward BIJ1 and DENK – were admitted. Both broadcasting organizations are rooted in vocal protest movements, and have played a prominent role in Dutch public debates for some time thanks to demonstrations and provocative actions. In 2022 and 2023, ON! was formally accused by the NPO board of engaging in biased reporting and interviewing, thus violating rules of good journalistic practice. However, the minister of culture, acting for a caretaker government after the PVV election win, declined to take punitive action. This is in line with the national culture of political noninterference, leaving freedom and pluralism issues to be dealt with by the editorial statutes of the media themselves.

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## Slovakia

Score 8

Media freedom in Slovakia is guaranteed by the constitution and upheld by a set of laws, including media law and election legislation. Censorship is prohibited, the judicial oversight system is functional, and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) serves as the final authority for free speech cases. While the press does not require a license to publish, radio and TV broadcasting operate under a state-regulated license regime (cf. Hanák, 2022).

Slovakia ranks highly in the World Index of Media Freedom, placing 17th in 2022 (RSF 2022). According to Urbániková (2022), while the legal regulation of media freedom is sophisticated, its implementation faces challenges. Public radio and TV broadcasting (RTVS) exemplifies media capture, partly because politicians in parliament elect the director. This issue is highlighted in the 2021 Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom report (2022).

Oligarchs influence some media outlets. For instance, Boris Kollár, leader of the Sme Rodina party and Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic from 2020 to 2023, owns two of the four most popular radio stations in Slovakia.

In the Media Pluralism Monitor 2022, Slovakia was rated as a low-risk country for the “Journalistic profession, standards and protection” indicator (Urbániková, 2022). However, the 2018 murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée remains partially unresolved. Two perpetrators and an intermediary were convicted, but the trial of the alleged instigator, Marian Kočner, and his accomplice continues. While direct physical attacks against journalists are rare, politicians frequently intimidate them (Urbániková, 2022).

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## Spain

Score 8

The freedom of the press is guaranteed in the Spanish constitution. Law 13/2022 of July 7, 2022, regulates the provision of audiovisual services, and Law 17/2006 of June 5, 2006, on State-Owned Radio and Television safeguards the independence, neutrality, and objectivity of the public media. Indeed, Spain has a diverse and free print, audio, digital, and TV media landscape.

In the past decade, some laws, such as the so-called gag law, placed constraints on media freedom and created difficulties for journalists. Although the government tried to repeal the most controversial articles of this law, the lack of agreement on this issue before the parliamentary elections in July 2023 constituted a serious breach of one of the government’s electoral promises. Reporters Without Borders reported on a climate of polarization, which is eroding society’s confidence in journalists and fueling hate speech against the media. According to the World Press Freedom Index, reporting is being replaced by opinion. Spain was ranked 36th in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index, down from 29th in 2021.

Certain media outlets have alleged that the government is declining to address questions during press conferences. Simultaneously, extremist parties engage in verbal assaults against journalists whose inquiries they deem problematic. Particularly, the far-right party Vox continues to spread false information and deny journalists and the media access to its press conferences and other events.

During the review period, the appointment of the public broadcast (RTVE) president continued to be a challenge. In February 2021, the PSOE and PP reached an agreement to renew the Board of Directors of RTVE, and a new president was



appointed in March 2021. Nevertheless, after losing support from the government coalition, the president resigned in 2022, and an “acting chair” with limited executive powers was nominated.

According to the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), editorial autonomy in Spain increased from a medium risk of 63% in 2020 to a high risk of 75% in 2021 because the appointment and removal of media editors-in-chief are not safe from political interference in practice.

The situation regarding regional public-broadcast groups is particularly concerning, as incumbent governments often openly promote their partisan political objectives. This has been notably evident in Andalusia, Madrid, and especially Catalonia, where public media has overtly supported the nationalist regional government’s pro-secession stance while limiting access for those with opposing or pluralistic perspectives.

In private broadcasting operations, there is no regulation guaranteeing autonomy in appointing and dismissing editors-in-chief. While media groups are formally independent, both national and regional parties in office have traditionally sought to support newspapers, radio, and television stations ideologically aligned with them. Various mechanisms enable political influence on media decisions, with licensing and institutional advertising being prominent among them. In 2021, the central government increased its allocation for institutional advertising by 86% compared to 2020. Independent media outlets have called on the government to safeguard information plurality and quality by ensuring a fair distribution of institutional advertising. However, there have been no new developments regarding the legal framework for institutional advertising during the review period.

The National Commission for Markets and Competition (CNMC) serves as the national-level audiovisual regulator, while regional audiovisual authorities oversee service providers at the regional level. Law 7 July 2022 advocates for better cooperation between the CNMC and regional audiovisual authorities to improve the supervision of online services, platforms, and providers. In 2023, the CNMC was allocated additional human and financial resources.

Despite attempts to exert influence, government or public officials do not censor digital, print, or broadcast media. Freedom House’s 2022 Freedom on the Net report does not include data for Spain, but there is no evidence of state censorship, self-censorship among journalists, or harassment of journalists beyond isolated incidents. A recent survey from the Center for Sociological Research (CIS) shows that the confidence of Spanish citizens in media information has slightly decreased, scoring 4.1 on a 10-point scale. Law 2/2023 establishes an authority to protect whistleblowers, aiming to enhance transparency and accountability in media practices.

Citation:

Reporters without borders. 2023. "World Press Freedom Index." <https://rsf.org/en/spain>

European University Institute. 2022. "Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era in the Year 2021." <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2870/74922>

## United Kingdom

Score 8

The UK government faces robust media scrutiny from both the press and broadcasters. Broadcasters are formally required to ensure political balance, with OFCOM, an agency tasked with monitoring and investigating complaints, overseeing this obligation. Despite regular criticism from politicians across the political spectrum, the main public broadcaster, the BBC, continues to be regarded as fair and uninhibited in its criticism of the government. In 2023, the BBC updated its social media guidance following complaints from the UK Conservative government about a tweet critical of government immigration policy by one of the BBC's most famous presenters. Similar debates occur in Scotland regarding media criticism of the SNP-led Scottish government.

The recent establishment of GB News, which takes a distinctly partisan (broadly right-wing) stance, has challenged the assurance of balance in media coverage. This challenge has intensified, especially as GB News has given programs to serving members of Parliament without providing corresponding opposition voices. However, GB News remains far from becoming a UK equivalent of Fox News.

Press freedom faced challenges in the late 2000s following hacking and other scandals, but the government largely resisted calls for restrictions. The print industry is regulated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation, which aims to "hold newspapers and magazines to account for their actions, protect individual rights, uphold high standards of journalism, and help maintain freedom of expression for the press."

The Online Safety Bill, aimed at regulating harmful content, became law on October 26, 2023, after a long and highly contested passage through Parliament. Media groups, not just those operating online, expressed concerns about whether its provisions would inhibit media freedom.

:

BBC News. 2023. "Gary Lineker: New rules for BBC flagship presenters after social media row," September 28. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-66940530>

## Australia

Score 7

Australia has traditionally had a lively media landscape, with internet platforms and social media greatly expanding the number and range of broadcasters (BBC 2023). Private operators maintain significant independence from government, while public operators rely on public funding but are operationally independent.

Governments occasionally attempt to pressure the influential ABC into slanting agendas in their favor, but such moves are strongly resisted by the organization, bolstered by its high public standing (Muller 2019). Media experts suggest that reforms to make the appointment of the ABC Board and its funding stream less manipulable by governments would reinforce its independence.

Various pieces of recently passed legislation impinge on media freedom. The Anti-Terrorism Act 2005 allows for control orders to restrict freedom of speech for individuals and the media (Murphy 2019). The National Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 restricts the ability of journalists to report on secret intelligence operations, allowing for up to 10 years of jail for exposing errors made by security agencies. In addition, the Data Retention Act makes it almost impossible for journalists to protect government sources. The Foreign Fighters Act potentially criminalizes media reports covering militant extremists, and the most recently passed measure, the Foreign Interference and Espionage Act, significantly broadens the scope of information defined as “classified.” Federal police raids on journalists’ homes and media offices have highlighted these issues, prompting a concerted campaign by journalists and media organizations for legislative changes to protect media and whistleblowers, with advocates arguing that the country’s democratic functioning is at stake (Meade 2021). In response to raids on a journalist’s home and the offices of the ABC, Australian newspapers appeared with blackened front pages in October 2019.

Despite these challenges, journalists generally work without significant government intimidation, and there is no evidence of censorship or self-censorship. Well-established norms of press freedom allow media platforms to criticize the government with legal protection. Threats to journalists (e.g., libel) are not uncommon but they are handled in a reasonably fair and peaceful manner through the legal process.

Citation:

BBC. 2023. “Australia Media Guide.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15675260>

Muller, D. 2019. “Australian governments have a long history of trying to manipulate the ABC – and it’s unlikely to stop now.” *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/australian-governments-have-a-long-history-of-trying-to-manipulate-the-abc-and-its-unlikely-to-stop-now-110712>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/call-to-scrap-security-laws-that-could-jail-journos/news-story/0b7b4d888751c0b11dc093ccb11c07bd>

<http://www.pressfreedom.org.au/press-media-alliance-freedom-report/introduction/foreword>

Murphy, P. 2019. “The Public’s Right to Know.” *Medium*. <https://pressfreedom.org.au/the-publics-right-to-know-3aee204f9036>

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/australia>

Meade, A. 2021. “Australia Needs to Strengthen Press Freedom Laws and Promote Transparency, Inquiry Finds.” *The Guardian* May 19. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/19/australia-needs-to-strengthen-press-freedom-laws-and-promote-transparency-inquiry-finds>

## Italy

### Score 7

Article 21 of the Italian constitution safeguards the fundamental right to freedom of expression, encompassing all forms of communication, including speech, writing, and other mediums. This right includes media freedom, as established by prevailing interpretations (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Beyond this constitutional safeguard, journalistic freedom of expression is regulated by a comprehensive network of legislative provisions and judicially produced rules. A significant recent development in this area is the Constitutional Court's ruling (Sentence 150/2021), which declared Article 13 of the Press Law (47/1948) unconstitutional. This article had imposed a prison sentence for defamation committed through the press. Now, imprisonment is limited to cases involving hate speech and the dissemination of fake news.

Legal limitations to freedom of expression exist but must be proportionate to the intended purpose and adhere to legal principles. Citizens have legal remedies in case of infringement. These rules formally extend to online information. The right to information is regulated by the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act, Legislative Decree 97/2016).

In practice, Italian journalists generally operate in a relatively open environment. However, they often self-censor to align with their news organization's editorial stance, protect themselves from lawsuits or other legal repercussions, or avoid potential retaliation from extremist groups or organized crime, as reported by Reporters sans Frontières in their 2023 press freedom dossier. Media Freedom Rapid Response (2022) notes that the main concerns about media freedom stem from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs; known as "querela temeraria" in the Italian legal framework) and other legal threats, especially following the establishment of the center-right government led by Giorgia Meloni (October 2022), leader of Brothers of Italy, who between 2020 and 2023 filed lawsuits against two journalists.

The Coordination Center for the Permanent Monitoring, Analysis, and Exchange of Information on the phenomenon of intimidation acts against journalists, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, registered 111 acts of intimidation committed against journalists in 2022, 52% lower than in 2021, and 46 in the first six months of 2023, 23% lower than in the first half of 2022 (see Ministry of Interior). Most of these incidents stem from social and political contexts or organized crime and result in verbal threats and physical assaults.

The most significant issue concerning media freedom relates to the political interdependence of public service media. Political parties and governments have

historically wielded considerable influence over Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI), Italy's public broadcaster and largest media organization. Governing parties frequently intervened in RAI's personnel decisions, dictated its organizational structure, and controlled resources. While opposition parties were granted some representation, their influence was limited.

The Renzi government's Law 220/2015 reshaped RAI's governance structure to curb excessive political influence by concentrating power in the hands of the CEO, the company's senior executive. This shift of authority from the board – traditionally composed of representatives from major political parties – to the CEO diminished direct political control over RAI. However, it simultaneously increased government influence, as the government proposes the CEO to the board. While the Draghi government prioritized meritocracy in appointing the CEO and other senior RAI officials, the Meloni government has prioritized ideological alignment, seeking to fill critical positions with individuals close to the center-right bloc.

This shift led to the Draghi-appointed CEO's resignation, whose term was scheduled to end in 2024, to facilitate new appointments aligned with the government's political leanings. Consequently, the change in editorial direction has prompted several anchorwomen and anchormen to depart RAI for rival media outlets.

Further elements underscore the close relationship between RAI and politics. RAI is publicly funded, and a bicameral parliamentary committee, proportionately reflecting the strength of the parties in parliament but usually chaired by the opposition, oversees RAI's activities.

Citation:

Media Pluralism Monitor 2022: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/74694>

Media Freedom Rapid Response 2022: <https://www.mappingmediafreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MFRR-Monitoring-Report-2022.pdf>

Ministry of Interior, Coordination Centre for the Permanent Monitoring, Analysis, and Exchange of Information on the phenomenon of intimidation acts against journalists, <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/stampa-e-comunicazione/dati-e-statistiche/atti-intimidatori-nei-confronti-dei-giornalisti>

Reporters sans frontières press freedom dossier: <https://rsf.org/en/country/italy>

## Greece

### Score 6

Media freedom in Greece is constitutionally guaranteed (Article 14). However, regulations governing public-owned media allow the government to appoint the Board of Directors and CEO of entities like the ERT television and radio company, including their regional branches. This appointment process grants the government considerable influence over media content. Despite this, opposition pressures and independent media reactions have led successive governments to gradually reduce their control over ERT.

In the 2010s, government control over ERT was particularly intense, highlighted by the abrupt closure of ERT in 2012 as part of economic austerity measures, followed

by its reopening under full government control from 2015 to 2019. Currently, such control is less stringent.

Private media in Greece operate without censorship. The licensing and regulatory systems ensure their independence from government influence and political interference. However, during the COVID-19 crisis (2020–2022), the government faced accusations of attempting to influence the press by directing budget funds to selected media outlets. This funding supported public awareness campaigns for anti-COVID measures, such as vaccination drives. While some opposition media also received funding, certain newspapers known for their personal attacks against government officials were excluded.

Journalists in Greece work in a relatively free environment but periodically face significant pressures. In the previous decade and after 2020, some government ministers sued journalists accused of slander. Unlike during the Greek economic crisis, when a few prominent pro-EU journalists faced threats or even physical violence from anti-austerity protesters and political party officials, physical harassment of journalists is now rare.

The unresolved murder of a well-known reporter investigating mafia crime in 2021 remains a troubling case. In 2022, it was revealed that the cell phones of several journalists reporting on immigration were wiretapped, with Greece's national intelligence service, the EYP, implicated in this surveillance case, which remains unresolved. During 2022–2023, the Greek justice system was slow to process these cases. Conversely, in the summer of 2022, some foreign journalists falsely reported the death of a young Syrian girl on the Greek-Turkish border, leading to accusations of government negligence, only for the story to later be debunked as a complete fabrication.

Overall, foreign correspondents have been less critical of the left-wing government in power from 2015 to 2019 compared to the center-right government since 2019. This shift has strained relations between the Greek government and the foreign press. As a result, Greece's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index dropped from 65th in 2020 to 107th in 2023. In 2024, concerns about media freedom were highlighted in a European Parliament resolution (Klosidis, 2024), which the Greek government dismissed as a partisan attempt to undermine its progress in this area.

Citation:

Reporters without Borders. 2023. "Greece." <https://rsf.org/en/country/greece>

Deutsche Welle. 2022. "Mystery around alleged death of girl on Greek-Turkish border." <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/45091/mystery-around-alleged-death-of-girl-on-greekturkish-border>

Klosidis, K. 2024. "Parliament concerned about very serious threats to EU values in Greece." <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17312/parliament-concerned-about-very-serious-threats-to-eu-values-in-greece>

## Israel

### Score 6

Freedom of the press is based on Supreme Court rulings and has no constitutional protection (Hanegbi 1995). This freedom is best demonstrated by the willingness of most media outlets to publicly and harshly oppose Israeli governments, particularly the current government's attempts to overhaul the judiciary.

In Israel, there is a single public broadcaster, which operates one TV channel and several radio channels. In recent years, it has become very active on digital media platforms. Prior to 2015, the public broadcaster was subject to political intervention. However, since 2015, it has operated independently, although there has been constant pressure from politicians to close it down or increase their control. These threats have increased under the current government, with the minister of communication submitting a reform to increase political control over the media and threatening to close the public broadcaster.

The press and most media outlets operate generally free from political intervention, although not completely. Prime Minister Netanyahu is accused of attempting to influence media coverage in two newspapers. The newspaper *Israel Hayom* was established by billionaire Sheldon Adelson and distributed for free to increase support for the prime minister, which it did (Grossman et al. 2022). Additionally, Channel 14, originally founded as a heritage channel, was transformed by politicians into a news channel to support the government and criticize its opponents. In his press conferences, Prime Minister Netanyahu consistently attacks the media, accusing it of being one-sided. According to the Israeli Democratic Index, public trust in the media is only 37% (Israel Democracy Institute, 2022).

Despite the attacks on the media, no legislation limiting freedom of the press was officially introduced to the Knesset. Hence, if there is self-censorship, it is the result of the stated intentions of the politicians and not their actions.

The 2023 World Press Freedom Index gave Israel a score of 57.7, which is categorized as problematic. Israel dropped 11 places to rank 97 out of 180 countries. The report said that press freedom in Israel decreased due to the current government's constant threats to press freedoms.

The private broadcasting channels are regulated by a public council. This council is not entirely independent, as its budget and personnel are dependent on the ministry and, therefore, the minister. The minister also nominates the chair of the council. The current council is relatively weak, fails to enforce violations and does not prevent the publication of fake news. Private broadcasting entities are controlled by powerful corporations and face the constant threat of closure due to a lack of funding. Consequently, journalists find it difficult to criticize the corporations that own the channels, resulting in self-censorship.

The government censors publications related to security issues. According to the World Press Freedom report, Palestinian journalists reporting from Israel are harassed and attacked. Crimes against Palestinian journalists are not prosecuted sufficiently. Self-censorship is especially prominent concerning security issues, particularly in the context of the war in Gaza, where mainstream press outlets have barely reported on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza (Somfalvi et al. 2024).

Citation:

2023 World Press Freedom Index [https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry?data\\_type=general&year=2023](https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry?data_type=general&year=2023)

Israel Democracy Index 2022 <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/47360>

Hanegbi, Moshe. 1995. *Freedom of Press in Israel*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute.

Somfalvi, Attila, David Siman-Tov, and Ofir Dayan. 2024. "The Israeli Media Mobilized for War: Interim Conclusions from the Conduct of the Israeli Media and Journalists after October 7, 2023" (Hebrew). *Strategic Update*, INSS. [https://www.inss.org.il/he/strategic\\_assessment/press](https://www.inss.org.il/he/strategic_assessment/press)

Grossman, G., Margalit, Y., and Mitts, T. 2022. "How the Ultra-Rich Use Media Ownership as a Political Investment." *The Journal of Politics* 719: 415. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719415>

## Slovenia

Score 6

During the third Janša government (2020 – 2022), the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) had a dispute with UKOM, the government's communications office, over public service tasks and state funding. This conflict was resolved in early 2022 when Igor Kadunc took over the agency and reached an agreement with UKOM, ending a period of uncertainty for the press agency and its employees.

Meanwhile, RTV, the public television and radio broadcaster, faced turmoil with significant staff turnover and appointments favoring individuals close to Janez Janša's administration. Critical programs and presenters were removed, and editorial changes were made due to their opposition to the government. The former UKOM director, who was responsible for withholding funding for STA, assumed the directorship of RTV in July 2022, while Ksenija Koren, a retired PR advisor in Janša's cabinet, was appointed chief editor of the country's nightly national news broadcast on October 2022.

Studio City, a politically critical program, was discontinued in March 2022, raising concerns about censorship ahead of elections. A petition with 40,000 signatures demanded its return, which happened in January 2024 with a new program. RTV employees went on strike in 2023 due to irregularities, violations of the journalists' code, and management's influence on news content. The Union of Journalists of Slovenia expressed concern about journalist overwork and burnout, particularly at RTV and newspapers.

After the elections, center-left parties proposed amendments to the law on public radio and television, aiming to reorganize the governance and supervision of RTV.



Critics warned of reduced openness and transparency, citing rushed legislative procedures. In a November 2023 referendum, citizens supported the changes, resulting in the appointment of 17 members to the new RTV Council. These members were selected by various organizations and institutions, with six representing RTV Slovenia employees. Zvezdan Martić, a longtime RTV journalist, was elected chairman of the management board.

Print media has suffered from declining circulation numbers and revenues, leading to journalist layoffs. These challenges have been attributed to politically motivated ownership changes. In response to workplace violations, the Whistleblower Act was passed in October 2022 and enforced in February 2023, providing protections for whistleblowers. This legislation aligned Slovenian law with the European Directive, although the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) criticized it as being too broad and exceeding public interest areas.

Citation:

Kaja Jakopič. 2023. "Največja težava novinarjev v Sloveniji niso več slabe plače ampak preobremenjenost (The biggest problem of journalists in Slovenia is no longer poor salaries but overwork)." MMC RTV SLO, January 4. <https://www.rtvlo.si/slovenija/najvecja-tezava-novinarjev-v-sloveniji-niso-vec-slabe-place-ampak-preobremenjenost/652915>

Krušič, Janez. 2023. "Križa tiskanih medijev: 'Sedanji lastniki večino tiskanih medijev upravljajo kot tovarne konzerv' [Print media crisis: 'Current owners run most print media like can factories']." MMC RTV SLO, January 15. <https://www.rtvlo.si/slovenija/kriza-tiskanih-medijev-sedanji-lastniki-vecino-tiskanih-medijev-upravljajo-kot-tovarne-konzerv/654407>

Marko Milosavljevic and Romana Biljak Gerjevic. 2021. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Slovenia. European University Institute. <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/74705>

## Japan

Score 5

Freedom of speech and press, guaranteed in Article 21 of the Japanese constitution, is generally respected by the government. Under the Abe cabinet (2012 – 2020), the government strengthened control over public broadcaster NHK through the controversial appointment of conservative figures to management positions and attempted to influence reporting in private media by repeatedly declaring the need to maintain political neutrality. However, since 2021, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio has not employed such practices.

There are concerns that Article 4 of the Broadcast Act of 1950, which stipulates that all broadcasters should ensure their programs are politically fair, could allow state interference in media content. This had long been understood to mean that the government would not censor broadcast programs. However, in 2014, Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications Takaichi Sanae stated that, under certain circumstances, evaluations of political fairness could be based on a single program, not only on the entirety of programs aired by a broadcaster. In March 2023, it was

leaked to the press that the government had put pressure on bureaucrats to reinterpret this regulation. Prime Minister Kishida did not explicitly retract the interpretation from 2014, but he dismissed the possibility of limiting the freedom of reporting.

Another problem is the Bill on Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, enacted in 2014, which introduced a punishment of up to five years of imprisonment for journalists who disclose information designated as “special secret.” In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the enactment of new regulations that can limit freedom of reporting. In 2020, NHK was added to the list of institutions obliged to follow government instructions in case of a major crisis. In 2021, the government designated 58 areas with restricted public access, punishable by up to two years in prison or a fine of up to JPY 2 million (about €12,400).

There is little active censorship, although some media practice informal forms of self-censorship. The so-called chrysanthemum taboo discourages media from reporting negative information about the imperial family. Journalists who violate this informal rule have occasionally been subject to violence from radical nationalist groups. Moreover, the system of exclusive reporters’ clubs severely limits the access of non-established news organizations, foreign media and freelancers to government events and press conferences.

Citation:

“A return to ideals of Broadcast Law would help end censorship trend.” The Asahi Shimbun, March 13. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14859972>

Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan. 1950. “The Broadcast Act.” [https://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_sosiki/joho\\_tsusin/eng/Resources/laws/pdf/090204\\_5.pdf](https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/joho_tsusin/eng/Resources/laws/pdf/090204_5.pdf)

Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. 1946. “The Constitution of Japan.” [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html)

Reporters Without Borders. 2023. “Japan.” <https://rsf.org/en/country/japan>

## Hungary

### Score 3

Since Prime Minister Orbán regained office in 2010, media pluralism in Hungary has faced significant challenges. The country has seen increasing government control over the public media and a concentration of private media ownership among companies close to Orbán’s party, Fidesz. The public broadcaster (MTVA) is under absolute government control, and many pro-government private TV channels and radio stations exist.

The remaining independent media have been pushed out of traditional broadcasting channels (radio, TV, newspapers) and have taken refuge on the web. Even online, they face growing challenges regarding reach, financing and administrative hurdles. If foreign sources finance them, they are subject to the “foreign agent” law or the “law on protection of Hungarian sovereignty,” risking high fines and potential self-

ensorship. Overall, independent media reach only a portion of Hungarians, primarily the educated, cosmopolitan urban population, but not the segments of society upon which Fidesz has built its support (the elderly and residents of rural areas).

Additionally, the government uses social media and internet-based channels to conduct disinformation and smear campaigns funded by taxpayer money. Public advertisement budgets disproportionately favor pro-government outlets, while market advertisers' fears of potential repercussions place independent outlets in a precarious financial position (see Bátorfy and Urbán 2019). The environment for journalists has become increasingly hostile, with harassment escalating since the "fake news paragraph" was included in the March 2020 Authorization Act adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provision threatens journalists producing fake news with prison sentences of up to five years for "scaremongering."

Cyberattacks on media outlets are not uncommon. Since 2022, and especially during the spring and summer of 2023, several attacks have been reported, rendering the webpages of critical media barely accessible. However, pro-government news sites have also been similarly attacked (Hungary Today 2022). Forensic studies show that these attacks were coordinated (International Press Studio 2023). Opposition parties' web pages were affected as well. The Sovereignty Protection Act, adopted in 2023, is extensive in scope but vague in detail, and may be used by the government to target critical journalists. It also emerged that the government employed Pegasus spyware in the lead-up to the 2022 elections to monitor opposition politicians, journalists and NGO workers. All international observers in the field have raised concerns about the situation in Hungary. The Freedom House Freedom on the Net Report 2022 categorizes Hungary as only partly free (Freedom House 2023).

Citation:

Bátorfy, A., and Á. Urbán. 2020. "State Advertising as an Instrument of Transformation of the Media Market in Hungary." *East European Politics* 36(1): 44-65.

Freedom House. 2023. "Freedom on the Net 2022." <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/FOTN2022Digital.pdf>

International Press Studio. 2023. "<https://ipi.media/ddos-ipi/>"

Hungary Today. 2022. "Several Pro-Fidesz Websites Hacked by Anonymous." 28 March. <https://hungarytoday.hu/several-pro-fidesz-government-websites-hacked-anonymous>

## Poland

Score 3

Until 2015, Poland had a diverse and robust media market featuring strong public media, private broadcasters and foreign investments. The National Broadcasting Council (Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji) oversaw the public media, ensuring compliance with laws and exerting indirect control over state-owned media. Despite rules against political affiliations or public activities by its members, the Council became politicized. Legal tools allowed interference with private media content, with political pressure most effectively applied through licensing processes and technical

standards. Journalistic confidentiality was protected under the Press Law, with additional protections for whistleblowers and against wiretapping outlined in the criminal laws.

Following the PiS government's victory, a new body, the National Media Council (Rada Mediów Narodowych), was established. This council took over the authority to appoint and dismiss public media officials from the minister responsible for state treasury matters. In December 2016, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that removing the National Broadcasting Council from these decisions was unconstitutional. Despite objections from Ombudsman for Civil Rights Adam Bodnar, the National Media Council continued to make key appointments at TVP (Telewizja Polska), often bypassing the constitutional body.

Both councils have faced criticism for bias in favor of the Law and Justice party, and Telewizja Polska and Polish Radio were transformed into propaganda platforms. The public media presented a one-sided, pro-government perspective, while attacking critics. Although private media encountered less direct censorship, they too experienced significant pressure. The National Broadcasting Council (NBC) misused its power, imposing arbitrary fines on critical broadcasters. The prevalence of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) against journalists, often funded by public money from ruling party politicians or state-owned entities, contributed to a hostile environment for independent journalism. These tactics and financial penalties were used to weaken critical media and encourage self-censorship.

The NBC also created business uncertainty by delaying licenses for private broadcasters like TVN and Radio Tok FM, and by excluding them from state advertising revenue programs. Print media, which has been transitioning to digital formats, faced financial strain, while the local press contended with financial, distribution and legal challenges. Consequently, Poland fell to its lowest-ever rank in the World Press Freedom Index, placing 66th in 2022 and 57th in 2023 (according to Reporters Without Borders). Upon taking office in December 2023, the newly elected government led by Donald Tusk immediately began implementing pluralistic reforms in the public media sector.

Citation:

Reporters without Borders. 2023. "Index 2023." <https://rsf.org/en/index>

see: Bachmann, K. 2024. *Die Geisterfahrer. Polen und acht Jahre PiS*. Berlin: Fototapete.

Indicator

## Pluralism of Opinions

Question

To what extent is a plurality of opinions in the media ensured?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = There are no barriers, by law or in practice, to a pluralistic media landscape that represents all existing political perspectives in society.
- 8-6 = Existing barriers, by law and in practice, pose no significant obstacles to the media in representing all relevant political perspectives in society.
- 5-3 = Existing barriers, by law and in practice, pose some significant obstacles to the media in representing all relevant political perspectives in society.
- 2-1 = Existing barriers, by law and in practice, pose various significant obstacles to the media in representing all relevant political perspectives in society.

### Czechia

Score 9

The electoral law guarantees parties access to state radio and television, allocating a total of 14 hours for all parties to express their views, with equal time regardless of the party's size or previous electoral performance. However, these presentations are often tedious and unlikely to capture viewers' and listeners' attention. Municipalities also provide billboards, and political advertisements appear in newspapers. Despite these provisions, there is a notable coverage bias toward larger parties, driven by their greater resources and perceived importance.

Coverage by private media is less balanced than that of public media. While oversight mechanisms exist for public TV and radio, such mechanisms are largely absent for private media, especially online. Private media are not explicitly attached to any particular political party, with the exception of *Halo noviny*, a newspaper linked to the Communist Party, which became a weekly publication in April 2022 and does not provide circulation figures.

Online media are even less rigorously controlled than print media, with no legal restrictions on ownership by an active politician. However, the number of outlets is large and the views covered are quite diverse. These outlets provide circulation figures in the form of page views and returning users. The most successful are *novinky.cz* – linked to the left-leaning daily *Právo*, which reported 47,082 daily sales in 2022 – and *iDnes*, linked to the Mafra group. Both recorded daily views and regular users in the millions.

Citation:

<https://rating.gemius.com/cz/tree/2>

## Denmark

Score 9

Denmark has roughly 35 daily newspapers. This includes six national dailies (Politiken, Jyllands-Posten, Berlingske, Børsen, Kristeligt Dagblad and Information), two main tabloids (BT and Ekstra Bladet), several smaller regional newspapers and an increasing number of online news sites. The dailies Jyllands-Posten (right-wing/liberal) and Politiken (social democratic/liberal) are managed by the same publishing house, but maintain independent editorial policies and are owned by separate foundations. Only one local paper, Skive Folkeblad, is owned by a political party, the Social Liberal Party.

Most newspapers tend to be either conservative or liberal in their political philosophies. Left-wing views are often underrepresented on editorial pages. Additionally, newspapers are facing financial pressure due to declines both in advertisements and paying subscriptions. It is also challenging to convince users to pay for news published online. As some newspapers disappear, the media landscape is becoming more concentrated. However, in practice, Danish newspapers maintain a high degree of pluralism in opinions. In their news reporting, most newspapers deliver fairly wide-ranging, balanced and diverse coverage. Private media, including the main newspapers, are open to all parties and candidates, regularly including letters to the editor that do not reflect the paper's own views. A vibrant civil society contributes to this.

Public media outlets – Denmark's Radio and TV2 – are independent, have editorial freedom, and are required by law to meet diversity and fairness criteria in their programming. All political parties planning to take part in elections have the right to equal programming time on radio and television. Satellite and cable TV are increasingly creating more competition for public media. Additionally, a number of locally oriented radio channels exist.

Internet access is widespread and not restricted. With 98.8% of individuals in Denmark having internet access in 2023, the country ranks among the European nations with the highest share of connected households (Eurostat, 2024). All newspapers are active online and are increasingly moving toward paid content. Danes are increasingly getting their information digitally via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. Specific interest groups are also producing their own online outlets. Although print media readership has declined substantially in recent years, these media and TV still play an important role in public debate and serve as a check on elected officials and authorities.

The legal framework surrounding media is rather vague and is based on two laws: the law on Radio and TV (Lov om Radio- og Fjernsynsvirksomhed) and the law on media subsidies (Lov om Mediestøtte). The first law sets the framework for TV, while the second law regulates media subsidies.

The Radio and TV law stipulates that the Danish Broadcasting Company has full independence and is run by a board to which political parties appoint members. The law on media subsidies requires that to obtain subsidies, media organizations must have their own editor in chief and permanent staff equivalent to at least three full-time positions annually. Additionally, the media must provide news to a broad, nonspecialized audience and cannot be owned by trade associations or political parties. Finally, the media must release a product to the market at least 10 times per year.

Citation:

Lov om mediestøtte. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/ta/2013/1604>

Lov om radio- og fjernsynsvirksomhed: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/ta/2022/1595>

Eurostat. 2024. "Digital economy and society statistics - households and individuals." [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Digital\\_economy\\_and\\_society\\_statistics\\_-\\_households\\_and\\_individuals](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals)

## Estonia

### Score 9

The plurality of opinion and the presence of different viewpoints in public broadcast programs are mandated by the Act on Estonian Public Broadcasting. For private media outlets, such regulations do not apply; instead, the plurality of opinions is ensured by the variety of outlets and channels. Although there are several national newspapers and TV channels in the country, media ownership is increasingly concentrated. In addition to Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), two large private media companies owned by domestic investors – Ekspress Group and Eesti Meedia Group – dominate the print and electronic media market, especially the news media.

Decreasing readership figures and the increasing expenses faced by printed newspapers have further facilitated the concentration of media outlets into two large media houses. Additionally, some media outlets, especially regional and local newspapers, have had to close down or move to online-only content. Some special weeklies, such as the Teachers' Gazette and the cultural weekly Sirp, receive government funds.

Digitalization and the rise of smart technologies like podcasts and streaming have expanded dramatically in both public and private media production. High internet and cable TV penetration rates ensure that most of the population can access a diverse range of media channels. However, the most vulnerable citizens, who often have low levels of digital literacy and fewer financial resources, can be disadvantaged by these technological and economic changes.

Another significant development has been the spread of independent blogs and portals that provide in-depth stories and analysis, which are increasingly rare in

mainstream media. These online publications, such as Edasi (edasi.org) and the blogs Levila and Poliitikaguru, enjoy an increasing number of followers and enrich the existing media landscape. Ideologically oriented portals, such as Uued Uudised run by the national-conservative party EKRE, also have numerous followers. These blogs and portals are funded by subscriptions or raise their own funding.

Criticism of government policies and state institutions is common in the media, including the public media. It is generally acknowledged that the private outlets of the Postimees group tend to skew toward conservative and traditional values, while the Ekspress group is considered more liberal. Thus, there is no political bias along government versus opposition lines, but rather along normative value orientations.

## Finland

### Score 9

Finland's media landscape is pluralistic and includes a variety of newspapers, magazines and social media sites. The conditions in which Finnish journalists operate are among the most favorable in the world. Despite a definite decline in circulation numbers in recent years, Finland still boasts an impressive newspaper readership, including online subscriptions. According to a recent report by Reporters Without Borders, Finland ranks fifth worldwide in terms of media freedom. However, newspapers face the prospect of long-term decline due to the rise of electronic media and increasing economic pressures from a loss of advertising share and rising costs.

Indeed, during the last decade, user-generated content and online social media platforms have revolutionized the media landscape. As a rule, newspapers are privately owned but publicly subsidized. The high level of concentration in the Finnish media market constitutes a significant risk for media plurality. Although regional newspapers remain comparatively strong, most local newspapers have been assimilated into larger newspaper chains. Still, it is fair to say that major media outlets encompass a diverse range of political perspectives.

The national broadcasting company, Yleisradio, operates several national and regional television and radio channels and supplies a broad range of information online. Although state-owned and controlled by a parliamentary council, Yleisradio has generally been viewed as unbiased. Yleisradio is complemented by several private broadcasting companies. Licensing and regulatory systems for privately owned media ensure freedom from government influence and political interference.

Anti-monopoly policies have not been activated to ensure transparency of ownership structures and a plurality of opinions in digital, print and broadcast media outlets in Finland. The licensing and regulatory regimes of privately owned media seek to ensure an adequate plurality of opinions.



A significant number of major digital, print and broadcast outlets consistently critique government policies and report on abuses of power. Major media outlets do not ignore or censor significant political perspectives. There is no significant media bias against particular opposition parties or candidates.

A report on media pluralism in Finland by Mäntyoja and Manninen (2021) concludes: “Finland’s area-level risk scores throughout the Media Pluralism Monitor instrument fall in and near the medium risk range. The market plurality area reaches the highest risk score, although still within the medium risk range. Fundamental protection is the only one remaining within the low risk range. No significant changes were seen in the overall risk levels of both political independence and social inclusiveness, both of which reach the lower half of the medium risk level.”

Citation:

Mäntyoja, Marianne and Ville Manninen. 2021. “Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Finland.”

## Norway

Score 9

A plurality of political and cultural views and expressions in the public sphere is valued by both the general public and political parties. This objective is pursued through three measures: first, a state scheme to financially support newspapers and magazines threatened by commercial competition; second, a self-binding commitment by the media industry to provide access to a plurality of views and interests; and third, funding the state-owned NRK through state grants to maintain at least one significant actor independent of commercial financing.

The increasing presence of digital and internet communication channels, along with broadcasting from abroad, enhances the pluralism of the media landscape. However, more intense competition may lead to content biased toward entertainment and commercial objectives rather than serving public debates, an important goal for the NRK. To address this, a separate public authority, the Norwegian Media Authority, was established in 2005 with two main tasks: first, through research and reports, to monitor the media market and address developments that may undermine ideals of media diversity and pluralism of political and cultural views; second, to administer an extensive system of state economic support to newspapers and other media channels from socially and economically disadvantaged groups and regions, promoting diversity.

In recent years, the issue of media illiteracy has been raised, focusing on the capacity of the population, particularly among the elderly and the young, to identify fake news and disinformation (Norwegian Media Authority, 2021; Wikipedia, 2024).

In sum, the Norwegian media landscape, with its significant state presence as a public service broadcaster and regulatory authority, provides a solid foundation for a

public sphere where all political parties and opinions have a fair and equal chance of expression. Criticism of political and other elites is commonplace, and any attempt by the government to limit the operations of a free media will likely be punished by voters.

Citation:

Norwegian Media Authority. 2021. "Organization." <https://www.medietilsynet.no/english/organzation/>

Wikipedia. 2024. "Norwegian Media Authority." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norwegian\\_Media\\_Authority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norwegian_Media_Authority)

## Sweden

Score 9

Media plurality and freedom of expression are protected from governmental abuse. In addition to the constitution, which automatically grants constitutional protection to internet publications, media and freedom of expression are regulated by the Radio and Television Act (SFS 2020:875) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020). The latter was updated in 2020 to include provisions for video recording platforms, regulatory changes regarding TV broadcasting, child protection (for example ads cannot target children under 12), and program accessibility for people with disabilities.

Sweden is rated high risk for news media concentration indicators (96%) and commercial and owner influence over editorial content (68%), while the score for transparency of media ownership is medium (50%). The EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom argues that the Swedish regulatory system is inadequate and cannot ensure transparency and prevent media concentration (Färdigh, 2022).

Citation:

Färdigh, Mathias A. 2022. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Sweden. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), 2022, Country Reports. <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/74707>

Government Offices of Sweden. 2020. Lag om ändring i radio- och tv-lagen. <https://svenskfattningssamling.se/sites/default/files/sfs/2020-10/SFS2020-875.pdf>

## Canada

Score 8

Canada is widely recognized as a country with a high degree of press freedom, often ranking prominently in global indices. For instance, the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders consistently ranks Canada among the leading nations for press freedom.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, part of the Constitution Act of 1982, guarantees freedom of the press as a fundamental right. Canada has a diverse media

landscape with a mix of public and private broadcasters, newspapers, and online news outlets. This diversity contributes to a plurality of voices and perspectives.

Traditional media are expensive to establish and operate and are controlled by large communication conglomerates. This results in very limited perspectives in national media. Local media, though more competitive, still exhibit a pro-business perspective on public affairs. Moreover, Canada has recently witnessed a series of local newspaper closures and layoffs within large media corporations, negatively affecting both local and national news coverage.

A strong case can be made that a lack of competition in the media industry has led to a lack of diversity in views and positions, as mainstream media companies tend to align with existing political parties and, for example, rarely support social-democratic or regional parties. The mainstream print media generally express a centrist to center-right political orientation but some, such as the *Globe and Mail* and *La Presse*, make an effort to bring in other perspectives to provide balanced coverage of issues. The CBC is very Central Canada-centric, and Radio Canada exists mainly for the French-language population in Quebec (Taylor and O'Hagen 2017).

Social media, on the other hand, is wide open and has no barriers to entry. Like many other countries, Canada faces challenges related to the impact of digital media on traditional journalism, including issues such as misinformation, disinformation, and the business model of online news, especially in terms of the provision and promotion of Canadian content.

The protection of journalistic sources is recognized as an important aspect of press freedom in Canada. Journalists may be protected from compelled disclosure of their sources under certain circumstances. Additional mechanisms also protect media activity, such as press councils and self-regulatory bodies like the National NewsMedia Council. These entities aim to maintain high journalistic standards and address public concerns about media practices. They operate independently of the government and the media organizations they oversee.

Citation:

Taylor, Lisa and Cara-Marie O'Hagan, eds. 2017. *The Unfulfilled Promise of Press Freedom in Canada*. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.

## Germany

Score 8

Pluralism of opinions within the media is an important aspect in Germany, especially in publicly owned media. Based on the requirements formulated by the Federal Constitutional Court, publicly owned media should portray the diverse existing opinions to support free and comprehensive opinion formation. In this regard, the government must ensure that the media content fulfills a minimum of objectivity, mutual respect, and balance in opinions (Deutscher Bundestag, 2007).

As explained earlier in our discussion on media freedom, there are supervisory boards for publicly owned media, namely a board of directors (Verwaltungsrat) and a Media Commission (Rundfunkrat). The board of directors oversees the operations of publicly owned media, excluding program design, while the Media Commission monitors the programs and their content, representing the interests of the general public (Deutscher Bundestag, 2006). The commission is intended to include representatives from various key institutions and social groups, including politicians. Based on a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court, the number of governmental and government-related members cannot exceed one-third of the total number of commission members.

As previously mentioned, since politicians are present on the commission, public-owned media has been increasingly criticized for a lack of neutrality. Critics claim it is too close to the government and does not fulfill the requirement for diversity. Further, it is criticized for reporting that is too one-sided. In fact, a study found that trust in the neutrality of public-owned media has decreased over recent years. In October 2023, 39%, compared to 25% in 2020, had no or very little trust in the credibility of the public-owned television stations ARD and ZDF (ZDF, 2023).

Still, derived from the V-Dem index for media, all major media outlets critique the government consistently. Additionally, based on a 2022 media bias score of 3.35, even though there is a focus on governing parties, the German media covers opposition parties more or less impartially (V-Dem, 2023).

According to the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), the transparency of ownership poses a low risk for print and broadcasting media. The Interstate Media Treaty mandates that privately owned media must disclose ownership information to maintain a broadcasting license and must report any changes. Additionally, the Political Parties Act requires political parties to disclose their holdings in media companies. Online-only media, which do not require a license, face lower requirements. For the digital media sphere, the CMPF indicates that pluralism is at a higher risk compared to print and broadcast media, criticizing the legislature for not adapting laws to media digitalization (Holznagel and Kalbhenn, 2022). A major problem is that the current instruments used to monitor media diversity primarily cover the supply side but largely ignore the actual usage behavior of citizens, especially in the digital sphere (Stark and Stegmann, 2021).

Issues concerning monopolies are primarily regulated by the Federal Cartel Office (Bundeskartellamt). Additionally, to prevent monopolies, a separate independent regulatory body, the Commission on Concentration in the Media (KEK), evaluates whether changes in ownership structures or new licensing procedures for privately owned media give a company a dominating influence on public opinion. The commission works to secure pluralism of opinion.

Media pluralism has, however, decreased in recent years, particularly affecting print media. The number of sold copies of newspapers decreased by around one million

from 2022 to 2023. Moreover, a small number of media outlets hold a large share of the market. For instance, in the second quarter of 2023, the Bild, the Süddeutsche Zeitung, and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung were the highest circulated newspapers nationally and held a significant share of readers (Statista, 2023). Likewise, as of September 2023, the top five broadcasters – ZDF, ARD Dritte, ARD Das Erste, RTL, and VOX – held over 50% of the market share (AFG, 2023).

Citation:

AFG. 2023. “TV-Daten.” <https://www.agf.de/daten/tv-daten>

Bundesverfassungsgericht. 2014. “Leitsätze, zum Urteil des Ersten Senats vom 25. März 2014.” [https://www.bverfg.de/e/fs20140325\\_1bv000111.html](https://www.bverfg.de/e/fs20140325_1bv000111.html)

Holznapel, B., and J. C. Kalbhenn. 2022. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Germany. European University Institute.

KEK. 2023. “Auftrag.” <https://www.kek-online.de/ueber-uns/auftrag>

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Statista. 2023. “Auflagenstruktur der Tageszeitungen in Deutschland im 2. Quartal 2022 und 2. Quartal 2023.” <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/382058/umfrage/aufgabenstruktur-der-tageszeitungen/>

Stark, B., and D. Stegmann. 2021. “Vielfaltssicherung im Zeitalter von Medienintermediären.” bidt Working Paper Nr. 3. [https://www.bidt.digital/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/bidt\\_Working-Paper\\_Vielfaltssicherung.pdf](https://www.bidt.digital/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/bidt_Working-Paper_Vielfaltssicherung.pdf)

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V-Dem, Varieties of Democracy. 2023. [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/VariableGraph/](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/)

## Greece

Score 8

There are no significant legal impediments preventing media outlets from representing the full spectrum of political perspectives in Greek society. Media outlets express views across the entire right-left political spectrum.

Currently, Greece has 21 newspapers with national circulation, along with dozens of regional and local newspapers. The left-wing opposition is supported by its party-controlled press and radio outlets, with at least three newspapers articulating the views of various left-wing opposition parties. Similarly, there are newspapers representing far-right political parties, often espousing traditionalist and chauvinistic views.

Approximately one-third of all national circulation newspapers can be classified as yellow press, frequently publishing unsubstantiated accusations against public figures such as celebrities, journalists, and government officials.

In addition to the three publicly owned TV channels (ERT 1, 2, and 3), seven private TV channels operate nationwide, supplemented by numerous private regional TV channels spread across Greece’s 13 regions. This landscape ensures that there is, in practice, pluralism in the private media sector.

A few large media conglomerates dominate the private media landscape, owning both nationwide TV channels and newspapers. These conglomerates also have

significant business interests in sectors such as construction and shipping, and they often own Greece's most competitive soccer and basketball teams. As a result, the largest private media outlets operate as part of an oligopoly with substantial economic influence (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021).

Media owners occasionally attempt to influence public policymaking. However, instances of policy capture are mitigated by fierce competition among business conglomerates, and Greek governments typically rely on strong single-party parliamentary majorities.

Citation:

Papathanassopoulos, S., Karadimitriou, A., Kostopoulos, C., and Archontaki, I. 2021. "Greece: Media concentration and independent journalism between austerity and digital disruption." In J. Trappel and T. Tomaz, eds. *The Media for Democracy Monitor 2021: How leading news media survive digital transformation* (Vol. 2) (pp. 177–230). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855428-5>

## Ireland

Score 8

Anti-monopoly policies in Ireland aim to ensure transparency of ownership structures and a plurality of opinions in digital, print and broadcast media outlets. Regulations for publicly owned media help maintain an adequate plurality of opinions. However, media ownership remains a significant concern, posing a high economic risk to media pluralism. While professional journalistic norms generally prevent editorial content from being shaped by commercial or owner influence, the lack of explicit rules mandating this remains problematic. A 2021 study found that fundamental protections for media pluralism in Ireland did not face significant risks, with the overall risk assessed at 23%. Nevertheless, power, wealth and economic resources are highly concentrated in Ireland. This structural reality of golden circles and state capture by domestic and international vested interests (Carrington, 2023) is a crucial context for those seeking transformational change, and media ownership must be understood within this framework.

In practice, many major digital, print and broadcast outlets consistently critique government policies and report on abuses of power. Ireland is rated as low risk for media pluralism, with fundamental protections and political independence also rated as low risk (23% and 30%, respectively) for the main media regulator, the Media Commission. Legal protections for the anonymity of journalistic sources and legislation permitting state access to metadata related to private electronic communications could be more definitive. Social inclusiveness is rated as medium (49%) and improving, with no proven media bias against certain opposition parties or candidates. However, there are gender, class, ethnicity and other equality grounds where some perspectives are less heard or validated. Internal guidelines aim to improve diversity, but the increasingly diverse nature of Irish society is not always reflected in media content. Without stronger regulation, initiatives to combat discriminatory, prejudicial, misleading and hateful content remain ineffective. The

awaited Criminal Justice (Hate Crime) Bill in 2024 may address some of these issues.

Regulatory challenges persist, particularly concerning social media. The Media Commission now oversees the entire audiovisual sector, including broadcasting, on-demand audio and visual services, and online platforms such as social media sites. An Electoral Reform Bill regulating political advertising, including online advertising, was passed in 2022. The Future of Media Commission reported in 2022, highlighting funding for public broadcasting as a central issue of public controversy, discussed in two parliamentary committee inquiries into state broadcasting in 2023.

Citation:

R. Flynn. 2021. *Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era; Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, 2021 Country Report: Ireland*. Florence: European University Institute.

Carrington, D. 2023. "Revealed: the industry figures behind 'declaration of scientists' backing meat eating."

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/27/revealed-industry>

[figures-declaration-scientists-backing-meat-eating](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/27/revealed-industry-figures-declaration-scientists-backing-meat-eating)

## Israel

Score 8

The ownership of private media is transparent, as stated by the media monitoring organization the Seventh Eye. Most media owners are businessmen with little involvement in the media. Consequently, they are significantly influenced by government regulation. Although almost all private media outlets criticize the government to some extent, the amount and type of critique depends on the personal interests of the owners (The Seventh Eye).

Public radio and television in Israel are highly committed to the plurality of opinions and the representation of different segments of the population. This commitment is evident in the diverse profiles of their journalists, who come from various minority groups and sectors. Additionally, there are channels dedicated to amplifying the voices of different groups.

Israeli media broadcasts and publishes in multiple languages, including Hebrew, Arabic, English, Russian, French and Amharic. There are also specific channels for different population groups. Moreover, in several major news programs, two hosts representing different political and partisan affiliations are featured to ensure a plurality of perspectives.

Private broadcasters also employ journalists from different groups. An examination of these journalists reveals that there are left- and right-wing journalists working for every channel.

However, private media programs present less plurality due to profit considerations. Although formal regulations require a specific amount of time to be dedicated to various groups and populations, this is rarely enforced in practice.

Over recent years, the media in general has been accused of being one-sided or leaning to the left. However, there is no empirical evidence of such bias. Research has found that perceived biases are a function of the political perceptions of the observer and have little to do with any actual bias (Yair & Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2018).

Citation:

The Seventh Eye, "Israel media ownership." <https://www.the7eye.org.il/198518>

Yair, Omer, and Raanan Sulitzeanu-Kenan. 2018. "When Do We Care about Political Neutrality? The Hypocritical Nature of Reaction to Political Bias." *PLoS ONE* 13 (5): e0196674.

## Latvia

Score 8

In response to the digitalization trend, the number of newspapers and magazines has decreased, with many media outlets shifting to online content. Privately owned print media have transitioned more quickly to online formats, although they face financial challenges. Online news portals, such as the public media outlet LSM and the privately owned Delfi, have successfully replaced newspapers as the primary sources of information. Regional media have experienced a similar transition. In contrast, printed media are now limited in scope and data. The role of digital media and social media in news consumption among residents is growing.

The licensing of electronic media in Latvia is politically neutral and follows the procedures outlined in the Law on Electronic Communication. The Media Ombudsman, elected in 2021 and in office since March 2022, oversees public electronic media and their services, ensuring compliance with the code of ethics and editorial guidelines.

The Media Pluralism Report 2023 indicated that Latvian media fall within the medium-risk zone regarding pluralism (65%). The primary risks in this domain stem from the low level of media market pluralism and the influence of advertisers and owners on editorial independence. Latvia lacks specific regulations for digital media companies to publish data on beneficiaries and owners. Since 2020, data on media owners has been available for free in the Enterprise Register database.

Latvian media regulation and self-regulation do not include mechanisms to protect journalists in the event of a change in media ownership or editorial direction, resulting in a high risk to editorial independence from commercial and owner influences (78%). Political autonomy is assessed at 37% due to potential influence from politicians and media owners.

The 2023 Media Pluralism Report showed improvement in the indicator for minority representation in the media (low risk – 22%), development in media literacy (53%), and better protection against disinformation and hate speech (66%) (Rožukalne, 2023).



The media in Latvia enjoy freedom, with no restrictions on criticizing government actions and policies. While the government has faced significant criticism in certain areas, the media's capacity for investigative journalism, particularly regarding the economy, is limited, resulting in milder criticism (Rožukalne, 2023).

Public administration is implementing strategic measures to combat disinformation. However, the only organization conducting sustainable fact-checking is the REBaltica initiative RE: Check of the Center for Investigative Journalism.

Citation:

Rožukalne, A. 2023. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in 2022. Country Report: Latvia. <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/75728>  
Elektronisko sakaru likums. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/334345-elektronisko-sakaru-likums>

## Portugal

Score 8

Portugal's media landscape demonstrates some degree of diversity. Media pluralism is a key aspect of the ERC's mandate, emphasizing "the range of expressions from various schools of thought," as stated in Article 7, Point A of its regulations.

This diversity is evident across various media platforms, including broadcast television networks, radio stations, and newspapers. In terms of television stations, there are four free-to-air channels: two public channels (RTP, with four channels, and ARTV, the official Portuguese Assembly's channel) and two private channels (SIC and TVI), owned by Impresa and Media Capital, respectively. In the realm of radio stations, a high degree of plurality is observed at the national, regional, and local levels, with public radio (affiliated with RTP), RFM, Rádio Comercial, and Rádio Renascença enjoying extensive coverage.

Portugal's media landscape is marked by a diverse array of large media groups, including the Global Media Group (which owns *Jornal de Notícias* and *Diário de Notícias*), the Impresa group (owner of *Expresso*), the Sonae group (controlling *Público*), and Cofina Media (holding *Correio da Manhã*), among several others. A notable trend is the emergence of independent and alternative journalism platforms like *Fumaça*, *Shifter*, and *Setenta e Quatro*, which offer distinctive perspectives and are funded differently from traditional media's reliance on advertising (*Média Alternativos*, n.d.).

However, challenges remain in the realm of media pluralism. Evidence suggests a continued limitation in the representation of smaller political parties and those without parliamentary representation, both in terms of visibility and access to media space (Silva et al., 2020).

Portuguese media universally enjoy the right to freedom of the press, allowing them to freely express societal discontent regarding the government and to frequently

report, investigate, and critically denounce any irregularities and potential abuses of power. Yet, two significant issues impact the media's capacity to scrutinize effectively.

First, there is a notable lack of resources dedicated to investigative journalism, a concern raised by Portuguese journalists themselves (Setenta e Quatro, 2021). Second, the profession is marred by precarious working conditions and instability. A recent study by the Observatory for Living and Working Conditions at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, which surveyed 866 journalists in April and May 2022, highlighted toxic work environments and identified a profession burdened by labor overload, ethical conflicts, declining work quality, challenges in balancing professional and personal life, low wages, and job insecurity (Antunes et al.).

Citation:

Antunes, J., Areosa, J., Rolo, D., Santa, R., Silveira, H., and Varela, R. (cord). 2023. Inquérito Nacional às Condições de Vida e de Trabalho dos Jornalistas em Portugal. Observatório para as condições de vida e trabalho. <https://jornalistas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Inquerito-Nacional-as-Condicoes-de-Vida-e-de-Trabalho-dos-Jornalistas-em-Portugal-03-11-2023-c.pdf>

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Média Alternativos. n.d. "Os projectos." <https://mediaalternativos.pt/projectos/>

Setenta e Quatro. 2021. "Os desafios do jornalismo de investigação: a responsabilidade do jornalista." <https://setentaequatro.pt/ensaio/os-desafios-do-jornalismo-de-investigacao-responsabilidade-do-jornalista>

Público. 2020. "Partidos e líderes políticos nos media: quem aparece mais?" <https://www.publico.pt/2020/09/20/politica/noticia/partidos-lideres-politicos-media-aparece-1931798>

## Switzerland

Score 8

The most important electronic media organizations in Switzerland in terms of coverage and intensity of citizen use are either online or publicly owned. Private sector television stations play only a small role in the country's media landscape. These are largely regional stations. A number of foreign radio and television stations can be received in Switzerland, contributing to the country's media plurality. The country has a high number of privately owned newspapers, with a highly decentralized system of regional concentration. However, a strong tendency toward centralization has weakened the regional newspaper market. This has been amplified by the strong growth of free papers for commuters such as 20 Minuten in the morning (which is distributed in three of the country's linguistic regions). These newspapers have crowded out the readership of traditional newspapers, which have collectively suffered from a decline in subscriptions. The number of independent newspapers has also been on the decline as media concentration continues. There are eight major publishing houses in the whole country; among these major publishing houses, the three largest – Tamedia, NZZ and Ringier – account for about 80% of all major publishers' newspaper circulation (calculated from FSO 2024; see also Hänggeli and Feddersen 2022; 2023). In parallel, online media consumption is

outgrowing print media consumption. A specialized website finds in 2024 that there is “no nationally dominant majority media that could determine the opinion and audience market alone, even in 2022.” Combining the perceived media quality by citizens and the quantitative “market power” of media in an index of “opinion power,” Medienmonitor Schweiz found that online information is most important (29%), followed by television (23%), radio (18%), social media 16% and finally print media (14%) (Medienmonitor Schweiz 2024).

Certain media are politically oriented. This is most evident in the leading national newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which has strong historical and ideological ties to the “*freisinnig*” or pro-free-market liberal party. There are other newspapers and television stations that have been criticized for a left-green bias. In general, however, it can be said that all political positions are adequately represented in the media. In a popular vote in March 2018, a proposal for a constitutional article relating to the public radio and television services was rejected by a large majority of 72%. The proposed article would have prohibited the federal government from subsidizing or running radio and television stations. This would have implied the abandonment of public radio and television. Although rejected, the debate on the initiative triggered reform processes within the public radio and television system – such as increasing efficiency and improving the use of resources.

In February 2022, a referendum that would have increased and expanded public subsidies for media was rejected. This aimed to ensure broad coverage of various media across the country. This represents a threat to smaller regional media channels, as well as to the pluralism of media and media ownership in Switzerland. Currently, right-wing politicians are making attempts to reduce state subsidies to public sector media. If these attempts are successful, the campaign will in all likelihood lead to reduced subsidies to public TV and radio. According to the public sector media, “(t)he reduction of the SRG budget would inevitably have a negative impact on the program, for example in the areas of regional information, sports productions, coproductions of Swiss films and music recordings, and major popular events” (Tageanzeiger 2023).

FSO (Federal Statistical Office, Bundesamt für Statistik). 2024. “Printmedien: Auflage- und Leserzahlen ausgewählter Tages- und Sonntagszeitungen, nach Sprachregionen.” Accessed on 2024 01 03.

Hänggli Fricker, Regula, and Alexandra Feddersen. 2023. “Media and Political Communication.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics*, eds. Patrick Emmenegger, Flavia Fossati, Silja Häusermann, Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, and Adrian Vatter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 372–388. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192871787.013.19>.

Hänggli, Regula, and Alexandra Feddersen. 2022. “Medien und politische Kommunikation.” In *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik*, eds. Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, Adrian Vatter, Silja Häusermann, Patrick Emmenegger, and Flavia Fossati. 7th ed. Zürich: NZZ Libro, 491–516.

Medienmonitor Schweiz 2024: <https://www.medienmonitor-schweiz.ch/>

Tageanzeiger. 2023. “Alternative zur Halbierungsinitiative. So funktioniert Röstis Plan für tiefere SRG-Gebühren.” <https://www.tageanzeiger.ch/fragen-und-antworten-zur-halbierungsinitiative-so-funktioniert-roestis-plan-fuer-tiefere-srg-gebuehren-935068662902>

## United States

Score 8

The fragmented nature of the American media landscape allows for a reasonably pluralistic environment across digital, print, and broadcast media. Citizens and media outlets regularly engage in criticism of the government, with little sense of formal or informal reprisal from government officials. Indeed, robust criticism of the government and debate are generally seen as valuable parts of the political culture (Reuning and Dietrich 2019).

Media pluralism is weakest in local journalism. Declining readership and viewership have eroded the profitability of local media companies. Consequently, most local broadcast and print media are owned by a small number of national networks (Hayes and Lawless 2015).

A major characteristic of the U.S. media landscape is the hyper-partisan nature of many media outlets (Iyengar and Hahn 2013). For the last several decades, cable television and talk radio have made little attempt to be neutral or balanced in their editorializing about politics (Levendusky 2013). These outlets create an echo chamber effect where viewers often choose media sources based on their politics, and then their views about current affairs are reinforced by these sources (Arcenaux and Johnson 2013). This is not new to the American media landscape. In the 19th century, local newspapers were often hyper-partisan and would, in some cases, actually advertise their political allegiances in the newspaper name. Hence, many older local newspapers contain the words “Democrat,” “Republican,” or even “Whig” in their names.

Citation:

Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless. 2015. “As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections.” *Journal of Politics*.

Kevin Arcenaux and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels? Partisan News in an Age of Choice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kevin Reuning and Nick Dietrich. 2019. “Media Coverage, Public Interest, and Support in the 2016 Republican Invisible Primary.” *Perspectives on Politics*.

Shanto Iyengar and Kyu Hahn. 2009. “Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use.” *Journal of Communication*.

## Austria

Score 7

The Austrian media system has a distinct lack of pluralism in both the broadcast and print media sectors. The TV and radio markets are still dominated by the public Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), though its market share has been shrinking. ORF’s television market share in 2022 was 34.6%, down from 35.5% in 2021, while its radio market share was 68%, down from 72% in 2021.

The ORF is required by law to follow a policy of internal pluralism, which in practice translates primarily into a reflection of the various political parties' current strength in parliament. Thus, interests and movements not yet established in the political system may occasionally face a disadvantage.

The print media sector is highly concentrated by comparative standards. For nearly 9 million inhabitants, there are just 14 daily newspapers, compared to Switzerland with a population of 8.7 million, which has more than 40 dailies, or Sweden, with a population of 10.4 million and more than 90 dailies. Regional monopolies also pose a threat to media pluralism in Austria. In some states, a single daily paper dominates the market.

One paper, the tabloid *Kronenzeitung*, dominates the print market, though its market share has been shrinking recently. The *Kronenzeitung*'s market share was 22.4% in 2022, or 1.7 million readers (down from 23.9% in 2021 and more than 40% in 2009). With a reach of 9.4 and 8.9%, the two daily newspapers "Kleine Zeitung" and "Heute" were the second and third most important papers in 2022, respectively. The *Kronenzeitung* carries particular political weight as politicians of various parties seek to please its editor and staff, eroding the fair and open democratic competition of ideas and interests. Further limits to media pluralism arise from close personal relationships between the chief editors of different major newspapers. For example, the editor-in-chief of "Heute" is the spouse of the editor-in-chief of the *Kronenzeitung*.

According to data published by the Media Pluralism Monitor 2022, media pluralism in Austria is at medium risk in all areas investigated, except for one – fundamental protection – which shows a low risk. The report indicates that risks to media pluralism in Austria arise primarily from horizontal and cross-media concentration, insufficient reflection on changes in the media landscape within competition law, threats to the independence of public service media governance and funding, endangered editorial autonomy, shortcomings in provisions on media ownership transparency, limited access to media for women and minorities, the lack of a policy or resources to promote media literacy, and a system of state subsidies.

There is a notable amount of news media concentration on online platforms. Those who control online news media also hold powerful positions in other sectors, such as Mediaprint, ORF, or Styria Media Group. However, for now, there remains a sufficient number of major digital, print, and broadcast outlets that are able and willing to consistently critique government policies and report on abuses of power.

Citation:

[https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr\\_2023/pk0875](https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2023/pk0875)

[https://kontrast.at/zeitungen-oesterreich/#Geringe\\_Pressevielfalt\\_bei\\_Tageszeitungen](https://kontrast.at/zeitungen-oesterreich/#Geringe_Pressevielfalt_bei_Tageszeitungen)

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000180498/oesterreichs-groesste-medienhaeuser-2023-vor-dem-umbruch>

<https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/74681>

## Belgium

### Score 7

Relatively few actors have an ownership stake in the major private-media companies, which is expected in a small economy with two submarkets (Dutch and French). As a result, the market is relatively concentrated. However, various media outlets (television, radio, print, and web) offer a diverse range of opinions, and most political positions are well represented. The boards of Belgium's two large public-media entities for radio and television (the Flemish VRT and the francophone RTBF) are composed of representatives from most political parties, including opposition parties (from among the main parliamentary parties). There is a "Cordon Sanitaire médiatique" in French-speaking Belgium, which prevents parties, representatives, or movements that do not respect democratic principles and values (including extreme right-wing and fundamentalist religious parties) from having free speaking time on live television. This excludes them from live talk shows and debates. However, journalists have the right and are invited to talk about the far-right and its program, provided they put this political current and its ideas into perspective (Biard 2021). This barrier impacts the diffusion of far-right political opinion on traditional media and can explain the lack of successful far-right parties in French-speaking Belgium.

One issue affecting media outlets is the growing financial stress on print media. Tighter budgets have restricted newspapers' ability to pursue in-depth investigations systematically and have generally diminished some of the public scrutiny a free press is supposed to exert. Most major print press groups, both Flemish and Francophone, face severe financial difficulties as print sales decline and web-based business models fail to sustain a broad pool of professional journalists.

#### Citation:

EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom – Media Pluralism Monitor : <https://cmpf.eui.eu/mpm2022-results/>

Biard, B. 2021. "La lutte contre l'extrême droite en Belgique: II. Cordon sanitaire médiatique, société civile et services de renseignement." *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* 2524-2525: 5-78. <https://doi.org/10.3917/cris.2524.0005>

## France

### Score 7

There is a substantial diversity of opinions expressed in French media. Like elsewhere, there is considerable debate on the issue of media ownership and its consequences for media pluralism.

One evolution that has sparked some concern in the media landscape is the increasing influence of billionaire Vincent Bolloré. Having made a fortune in marine transport, he started expanding into the media sector 20 years ago. He now owns the largest private radio broadcaster, Europe 1; the TV channels CNews and Canal+; and a host of weekly and monthly magazines since the acquisition of Vivendi in May

2021. These takeovers have regularly been followed by a significant reorientation of the editorial line. In particular, two of Bolloré's TV channels, CNews and C8, have regularly been accused of overrepresenting the far right or even actively promoting far right candidates like Eric Zemmour. In the summer of 2022, the takeover of the *Journal du Dimanche* (JDD), a Sunday weekly, was followed by the appointment of one of Zemmour's main supporters to head of the journal, leading to a months-long strike.

A more recent player in the media landscape is Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky, who bought a minority share of quality newspaper *Le Monde*. He has since acquired a minority share in the most important French TV network, TF1, and 45% of online media company Loopsider. He recently sold his stake in *Le Monde*. His motivations seem to be more commercial than political.

Public media are regularly criticized for their left-leaning orientation, while commercial media are supposed to be more conservative. A recent study has put these accusations into perspective. These differences are usually exaggerated, according to Cagé and colleagues.

Citation:

Claudia Cohen and Marie Bartnik. 2023. "Médias, distribution, informatique... L'empire tentaculaire de Daniel Kretinsky en France." *Le Figaro*, August 1.

"Comment Vincent Bolloré construit un empire médiatique par la force et l'argent." *Sud Ouest*, June 24.

Julia Cagé, Moritz Hengel, Nicolas Hervé, and Camille Urvoy. "Hosting Media Bias: Evidence from the Universe of French Broadcasts, 2002-2020." SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4036211>

## Italy

### Score 7

Media pluralism is legally guaranteed by Legislative Decree 208/2021. This decree incorporates the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive into the Italian legal framework. It replaced the previous Consolidated Act, TUSMAR (Legislative Decree 177/2005), with a new one named TUSMA (Testo unico sui servizi di media audiovisivi). TUSMA revised the media sector's anti-concentration rules to safeguard media pluralism and broadened the responsibilities of the media authority, *Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni* (AGCOM). It also expanded some regulations governing the audiovisual sector and video-sharing platforms (see *Media Pluralism Monitor 2022*).

Established in 1997 by Law 249, AGCOM is an independent authority tasked with safeguarding fair competition among market operators and upholding user interests. It exercises regulatory and oversight duties across various sectors, including electronic communications, audiovisual media, publishing, postal services, and more recently, online platforms. AGCOM is accountable to the Italian parliament, which has defined its powers, outlined its statutes, and elected its members. The president and four members of the AGCOM Board are appointed through a joint process involving the government and parliament. This mechanism protects the media

authority from being beholden to a parliamentary majority or aligned with the electoral cycle. However, it is only partially impervious to the risks of political bargaining (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

A key responsibility of AGCOM is to establish election regulations that guarantee equitable media access for all candidates. This is complemented by monitoring and enforcing compliance with the “par condicio” principle, as Law 28/2000 mandates. AGCOM’s responsibilities also include maintaining the Register of Communication Operators (ROC). The purpose of the ROC is to ensure transparency and publicity of ownership structures and enable the application of rules concerning anti-concentration discipline. Public access to the information provided by AGCOM, however, has substantial limitations that undermine transparency.

AGCOM submits an annual report on its activities to the prime minister. It also publishes a quarterly monitoring of media markets on its website and verifies compliance with political pluralism monthly by monitoring radio and television broadcasts.

The recent introduction of the TUSMA has failed to undermine the concentration of the traditional media market, which has historically been high, particularly in the audiovisual sector. The development of the digital environment has not sufficiently balanced this concentration due to the dominating roles of a few platforms in facilitating access to news and in the online advertising market (see Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Despite persistent concerns over media concentration, encouraging signs of growing plurality are emerging. The long-standing duopoly between RAI, the public broadcaster, and MEDIASET, the private media group controlled by the Berlusconi family, has faced significant challenges from new players such as Comcast/Sky, La7, and Discovery (see AGCOM 2022). This helps to ensure a greater degree of pluralism. Additionally, streaming services have witnessed a remarkable surge in market share in recent years, further diversifying the media landscape.

However, the radio and newspaper sectors have experienced a decline in plurality due to numerous mergers and acquisitions. This has led to a concentration of ownership and control, raising concerns about media diversity and the potential impact on editorial independence and the range of viewpoints available to the public (Media Pluralism Monitor 2022).

Citation:

Media Pluralism Monitor 2022: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/74694>

AGCOM Annual Report 2022: <https://www.agcom.it/documents/10179/27251843/Documento+generico+29-07-2022/c049d0cb-a8ae-4a07-8eb5-7389dd61c288?version=1.0>



## Lithuania

### Score 7

Lithuania's electronic and print media markets feature a mix of diversified and oligopolistic ownership structures. However, these ownership structures lack transparency. Regulations overseeing publicly owned media ensure adequate plurality of opinions. At the national level and in digital media, a diverse array of political perspectives is represented, with no censorship of significant political viewpoints. There is consistent critical evaluation of government policies and potential abuses of power.

Business conglomerates often own multiple newspapers and TV channels. Media ownership concentration has increased in recent years due to the purchase of media outlets by domestic and foreign companies. Six media companies – Delfi, 15min, LNK Group, All Media, Lietuvos rytas and Verslo žinios – dominate the media market.

On the municipal level, ownership links between decision makers and media outlets pose a risk to the plurality of opinions. For example, according to a study published on 22 June 2022 by Transparency International (the Vilnius office), 68 politicians, civil servants or their spouses owned one in every eight media outlets in Lithuania. Publicly owned electronic media – the state-funded Lithuanian Radio and Television – to some extent compensates for deficiencies or biases in private sector media reporting.

According to the Media Pluralism Monitor 2022, Lithuania ranked eighth among 32 European countries assessed. The situation in Lithuania was described as posing a medium risk to media pluralism, though it was close to the category of low risk. The highest risk was identified in the category of market plurality, with news media concentration seen as posing a very high risk. The lowest risk was identified in the category of fundamental protection, particularly the independence and effectiveness of the media authority and the protection of freedom of expression.

The risk to media freedom due to ownership concentration has been noted for a number of years by Freedom House. In its 2023 report, Freedom House stated that “increasing concentration of media ownership in the hands of a small number of companies raises the risk of editorial interference by powerful political and business interests. Journalists often engage in self-censorship when reporting on certain large companies. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic left the media more vulnerable to undue influence and affected the job security of journalists. Journalists also face online harassment and abuse.”

In addition to ownership concentration, another source of the risk of editorial interference from political and business interests is the business model of the largest privately owned media groups, which is heavily dependent on advertising revenues.

As noted by Freedom House, “Under the state of emergency declared after Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the transmission of any programs broadcast by Russian and Belarusian television and radio channels was suspended. The state of emergency also allowed for the restriction of Lithuanian media if they were deemed to spread disinformation or propaganda, incite war or breach Lithuanian sovereignty. On the other hand, state institutions, major media outlets and civil society groups stepped up their efforts to fight disinformation on the internet.”

The population displays relatively low levels of trust in the media. According to a representative survey conducted by the Vilmorus company from 22 November to 2 December 2023, 28.6% of respondents indicated they trusted the media, while 30.8% stated they did not. This represents a slight improvement compared to a Vilmorus survey conducted in December 2021, when only 25% of respondents expressed trust in the media and 34% indicated distrust. Despite this improvement, the share of the population that does not trust the media remains higher than the share that does hold this trust.

Citation:

Transparency International (Vilnius Office). 2022. <https://transparency.lt/pernai-68-politikai-ir-ju-sutuoktiniai-valdekas-astunta-ziniasklaidos-priemone-2/>

EUI Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom. 2022. “Media Pluralism Monitor 2022.” <https://cmpf.eui.eu/mpm2022-general-ranking/> (accessed 22.12.2023)

Freedom House. 2023. “Freedom in the World Report 2023: Lithuania.” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lithuania/freedom-world/2023>

Vilmorus. 2023. “Naujienos, Pasitikėjimas institucijomis.” <http://www.vilmorus.lt/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=2&cntnt01returnid=20>

## Netherlands

### Score 7

The arrival of commercial broadcasters made the media landscape much more diverse. The advent of social media had a major impact on both the reporting of debates and the behavior that politicians (parliamentarians and ministers) themselves exhibit. With Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, blogs on websites, etc., politicians were given the opportunity to deliver news themselves. Increased competition has resulted in a wider range of offerings, but at the same time, an impoverishment of content. This multiplicity ultimately detracted from a reliability that had previously been taken for granted. Paradoxically, this plethora of information has contributed to making the public worse rather than better informed about politics. “Fast” and “fun” became more appealing than “professional” and “reliable.”

There are no anti-monopoly laws, though in practice Dutch print media and commercial broadcast media are owned by just two-and-a-half international corporations (DPG, Mediahuis and RTL/Bertelsmann). These oligopolistic practices have kept newspapers financially healthy, while rendering the media sector as a whole vulnerable. For the time being, this does not endanger plurality of views in

the (inter)national media landscape, because the owners are “journalism-friendly” and allow for liberal editorial statutes. Local media do suffer from a lack of plurality due to “imported” reporting, because of affiliations with national media organizations, as well as due to a lack of resources. There are many municipalities that have just one or even no local newspaper. Radio and TV broadcasting organizations are being forced into regional cooperation structures to survive.

The real change in the media landscape is the fact that people are increasingly exposed to news through indirect access, for instance via news gathering sites, notifications or search engines. This change is particularly evident among young people. Thus, access to news is gradually becoming more and more determined by personalized notifications or by the intervention of a recommendation system. About 22% of young people target specific individuals rather than news brands when it comes to online news.

Confidence in the media has declined among all age groups, but especially among young people. About 19% of young people report difficulty understanding or following the news. Although Dutch people’s overall trust in the news has declined, trust in various news media does remain stable compared to previous years. The NOS receives the highest trust rating (7.4 out of 10 possible points), followed by RTL News (6.7). Podcasts also continue to rise in popularity, a trend that has continued in recent years. More than three-quarters of young people report listening to podcasts over the course of a month.

Dutch media consistently critique government policies, though some do so more than others. Special mention is deserved by crowdfunded investigative journalism initiatives (affiliated with and supported by some of the quality journals) like Follow the Money, the Correspondent and Investico. Moreover, some well-known TV anchors have said they have meticulously prepared interview strategies to expose leading politicians as habitual liars, frauds or truth evaders. It thus appears that many in the media see their primary task as critiquing government and revealing abuses of power and broken promises, especially certainly after the childcare benefit, Groningen gas exploitation and earthquake scandals. The logic of the media rejects the political practice of compromise that underlies a consensus democracy like the Netherlands. In that sense, the media have developed as distrust-producing machines.

Yet the Netherlands is not a mediocracy. The major media outlets encompass most political perspectives in a fairly unbiased way. Of course, major political parties draw more attention, but smaller parties (like Party for the Animals; DENK, a party focused on minority rights; and BIJ1, a left-wing social-justice-focused party) are regularly, though less frequently, covered. There is no media bias against opposition parties/candidates. Thanks to social media they have their own outlets, and they are sometimes able to enter the formal system. But such parties do get less attention than major political parties, as defined by ongoing polling results.

During crucial political periods, however, there is substantial distortion of the playing field. A media analysis of all NPO radio and TV programs during the 2021 campaign revealed a notable imbalance in the coverage of political figures, with a clear emphasis on right-wing ideologies and male politicians. The findings underscore the importance of considering media dynamics when evaluating political discourses and representation in the context of elections. Further analysis is warranted to explore the specific subjects discussed during the election campaign, as this would help provide a comprehensive understanding of media influence on political narratives.

Citation:

NRC-H. 2022. "Vrijwel alle dagbladen zijn in handen van twee concerns. Wat merkt de lezer daarvan?" August 21.

Parlement.com. 2022. "Misschien wel de grootste verandering: de media." <https://www.parlement.com>

Commissariaat voor de Media. 2022. "Digital News Report, Nederland."

NRC-H. 2022. "Vertrouwen in het nieuws weer gedaald na piek in coronatijd." *Fit*, July 15.

NRC. "Hoogtepunt voor Wollaars in prijswinnend Hoekstra-interview: 'Heb ik nou antwoord gekregen op mijn vraag?'"

Rob Wijberg. 2023. "Hoe onze mediocratie een wantrouwenmachine werd." *De Correspondent* September 23.

<https://mediasuitedatastories.clariah.nl/elections-2021-first-results/>

<https://nos.nl/artikel/2372814-onderzoek-rechts-domineert-de-verkiezingscampagne-op-radio-en-tv>

## Slovakia

### Score 7

According to the Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom's 2022 report (Urbániková 2022), Slovak anti-monopoly policies ensure the transparency of ownership structures and maintain a plurality of opinions in digital, print, and broadcast media outlets at low-risk levels. Regulations overseeing publicly owned media formally ensure an adequate plurality of views. However, the plurality of opinions in private media presents a risk. For the "Market Plurality" indicator, Slovakia is among the countries with the highest risk. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of Slovak, Czech, and other regional entrepreneurs has been increasing. The most profitable media outlets are currently divided among Czech-Slovak entrepreneurs whose core business lies outside the media (Godársky & Mračka 2023).

The 2022 Law on Media introduced the obligation to register all media outlets in the registry of public sector partners, increasing the transparency of the media market.

Many major digital, print, and broadcast outlets consistently critique government policies and report on abuses of power, which applies to both the 2020 – 2023 OLANO and 2023 – SMER governments. The legislation forces the broadcasting media to encompass a diverse range of political perspectives – paragraph 16, article

3a of Law 308/2000 directly requests the versatility of information and plurality of opinions.

Commercial and owner influence over editorial content is at a medium risk level in Slovakia. However, for the public broadcaster RTVS and most private media, the political independence of the media and the level of conflict of interest are at high risk. The political independence of local and regional media is also endangered due to their funding and ownership by local and regional authorities, resulting in content often blatantly skewed in favor of the current local and regional political representation (Urbániková, 2022).

Citation:

Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022

Urbániková, M. 2022. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Slovakia. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom.

Godársky, I., and Mračka, M. 2023. "Slovakia. Country Report 2023." Euromedia Ownership Monitor (EurOMo), <https://media-ownership.eu/findings/countries/slovakia>.

Zákon 452/2021 o elektronických komunikáciách. 2021. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2021/452/20220201>

Zákon 308/2000 o vysielaní a retransmisii. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2000/308/20201120.html>

## Spain

### Score 7

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and the right to information, ensuring a pluralistic media environment with various public and private television and radio stations, newspapers, and internet portals. According to Law 17/2006 on State-Owned Radio and Television, public media must reflect the social, ideological, political, and cultural diversity of Spanish society. The CNMC, together with regional audiovisual authorities, oversees public and private media to ensure a plurality of opinions. The licensing and regulatory regimes for privately owned media also support this plurality.

Spain's largest newspaper is the influential center-left El País, while other nationwide newspapers include the center-right El Mundo and the conservative ABC. In Catalonia, the moderate nationalist La Vanguardia leads the market. Progressive digital publications like Eldiario.es and Publico.es have large readerships, while significant center-right digital media sites include Elconfidencial.com, and right-wing sites consist of Elespanol.com and Okdiario.com. Despite the rise of digital media, the electronic versions of print newspapers remain the country's most widely read information websites.

The radio market is dominated by the center-left SER station, followed by Cadena Cope (owned by the Catholic Church), the center-right Onda Cero, and the Catalan

private station RAC-1. The publicly owned Radio Nacional de España also has a notable presence. In television, the market is largely controlled by the Italian company Mediaset (including Telecinco and Cuatro channels), Atresmedia Corporación (owning the right-wing Antena 3 and the leftist La Sexta), and the public broadcaster Televisión Española, alongside regional public-television networks and small private stations. The primary media groups collectively secure 80% of advertising revenue in television and 96% in radio, while the press sector's four major publishing groups reach 87% of audiences.

The CNMC has warned that this concentration could threaten media pluralism in the future. The concentration of the advertising market by Mediaset and Atresmedia has been confirmed by a CNMC sanction. According to the MPM 2022 Report, Spanish media pluralism faces a high risk of media concentration (67%). The widespread use of social networks has facilitated the proliferation of electronic newspapers and independent blogs, counterbalancing oligopolistic trends and ensuring a variety of opinions in public debate.

Although media criticism of the government varies in intensity and tone, all outlets report on government issues and acknowledge significant political perspectives. Some media exhibit bias toward certain political parties.

Citation:

Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación. 2023. "Audiencia de Internet." <https://www.aimc.es/>

Universidad de Navarra. 2023. "Digital News Report." <https://www.digitalnewsreport.es>

European University Institute. 2022. "Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union." <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2870/74922>

## United Kingdom

Score 7

Because of the requirement for broadcasters to be politically balanced, mainstream channels provide a plurality of views, despite the challenges from newcomers such as GB News. The regulator, OFCOM, does rule on complaints and, to give one example in relation to GB News, said "in light of the likely similarity of the views of the participants in this program on the major matter being discussed, the licensee should have taken additional steps to ensure that due impartiality was preserved." OFCOM has, however, acted decisively to remove the broadcasting licenses of channels such as CGTN (China) or Press TV (Iran) adjudged to have been too unbalanced.

The press is independent, but ownership has been concentrated in a relatively small number of groups, to some extent constraining its plurality (and skewing coverage toward center-right audiences). However, the power of News International – led by Rupert Murdoch – has manifestly waned and the profitability of the press has declined as citizens look to online sources.

## Japan

Score 6

Traditional newspapers are still popular in Japan. Japanese media represent a wide range of different points of view – from right-wing (Sankei Shimbun) to left-wing (Akhata, owned by the Japanese Communist Party) – both have a circulation of about one million copies. The two most influential newspapers – Yomiuri Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun – represent center-right and center-left stances, respectively. Other significant titles include Mainichi Shimbun, Tokyo Shimbun and Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei).

The Broadcast Act prohibits corporations in which 20% or more of voting rights are held by foreigners from conducting basic broadcasting operations. Cross-ownership between broadcasters and newspaper publishers or other media companies is not regulated, but owning all of the terrestrial television and radio broadcasting, as well as the newspapers in the same area is not allowed if there are no local alternative mass media. As a result, an oligopolistic media structure has emerged, comprising five leading media conglomerates: Nippon Television/Yomiuri, TV Asahi Network, Fujisankei Communications Group, Tokyo Broadcasting System/Mainichi, and the Nikkei, Inc., along with the public broadcaster NHK.

While public media tend to avoid excessive criticism of the government, private media sympathize with different political stances. Japanese journalists have generally performed well as the “fourth power” revealing scandals related to political elites. For instance, in February 2023, Prime Minister Kishida dismissed his executive secretary after the media disclosed the secretary’s discriminatory remarks on sexual minorities, even though the source of the information was kept secret. However, news media have been criticized as being reluctant to critically question government strategies and information during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tokyo Olympics and the Fukushima triple disaster. Powerful advertising agencies such as Dentsu are thought to have influenced reporting on the Olympics and nuclear power, using their large advertising budgets (NYT 2021; Honma 2012).

Although the high concentration of media ownership is detrimental to pluralism, the gradual decline in traditional media, and growing popularity of foreign and digital media has created opportunities for non-mainstream sources of information. However, this has also made it easier for extremist, mainly nationalist, stances to penetrate the public discourse. In the absence of any law prohibiting the promotion of radical views, xenophobic or historical revisionist content is widely available in books and other print publications.

Citation:

Dooley, Ben, and Hisako Ueno. 2021. “The Invisible Hand Behind the Tokyo Olympics.” *New York Times*, July 23. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/20/business/tokyo-olympics-dentsu.html>

Honma, Ryu. “Dentsû to genpatsu hôdô – kyodai kôkoku-nushi to ôte kôkoku dairiten ni yoru media shihai no shikumi” [Dentsu and nuclear power plant coverage: How giant advertisers and major advertising agencies control the media]. Tokyo: Aki Shobou.

Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan. 1950. “The Broadcast Act.” [https://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_sosiki/joho\\_tsusin/eng/Resources/laws/pdf/090204\\_5.pdf](https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/joho_tsusin/eng/Resources/laws/pdf/090204_5.pdf)

Reporters Without Borders. 2023. “Japan.” <https://rsf.org/en/country/japan>

Sawa, Yasuomi, and Reiko Saisho. 2023. “Japan.” Reuters Institute, June 14. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/japan>

## New Zealand

### Score 6

Concerns about New Zealand’s media pluralism, particularly due to high levels of media ownership concentration, have persisted for years (e.g., JMAD 2022; Reporters Without Borders 2023). In the TV segment, competition is mainly between Television New Zealand (TVNZ) – which, despite being publicly owned, operates on a commercial basis – and two international media giants, the U.S.-owned MediaWorks and Australian-owned Sky. Media pluralism faced further threats when MediaWorks sold its Three network, as well as the news and current affairs element under the Newshub banner, to U.S. media company Discovery in 2020. Despite the sale, the news and current affairs programming remained intact (Jennings 2021). In the commercial radio market, MediaWorks and New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME) dominate, while publicly owned and non-commercial Radio New Zealand serves as a third player with a loyal audience. In the newspaper and magazine publishing industry, a near-duopoly exists where the market is split between NZME and Stuff. NZME owns the leading daily newspaper, the New Zealand Herald, while Stuff controls the country’s second- and third-highest circulation daily newspapers, The Dominion Post and The Press. Stuff, one of New Zealand’s largest media companies, was sold by its parent company, Nine Entertainment, for \$1 to its chief executive, former journalist Sinead Boucher. This deal ended years of speculation about the company’s ownership after lengthy attempts by NZME to buy the company were blocked by the Commerce Commission, which had received submissions from various concerned groups and networks in civil society. Several online media outlets provide alternative sources of news and information (e.g., The Spinoff, Newsroom and The Guardian New Zealand). These outlets have fewer readers than the major news outlets but offer critical and evidence-informed analyses that are often picked up by the main broadcasting actors noted above.

The problem of media pluralism was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, which cost approximately 700 jobs in the sector. For example, the New Zealand Herald laid off 200 staff in 2020, while magazine giant Bauer – publisher of The Listener and the Women’s Weekly – was even forced to close down. The government announced a \$50 million aid package; however, this was met with widespread derision by the industry (in comparison, the racing industry received a \$72.5 million emergency support package) (Roy 2020).



In early 2023, the Labour administration under Chris Hipkins scrapped its plans to merge TVNZ and RNZ. This decision was welcomed by commercial media outlets, which had feared that the merger would have given the combined entity too much dominance. At the same time, the government announced that RNZ would receive an extra \$26 million a year, partly to develop a new digital platform (Pullar-Strecker 2023).

Citation:

JMAD. 2022. "Aotearoa New Zealand Media Ownership 2022." [https://www.jmadresearch.com/\\_files/ugd/a95e86\\_131d36c434db480fbbb90e84ed430b14.pdf](https://www.jmadresearch.com/_files/ugd/a95e86_131d36c434db480fbbb90e84ed430b14.pdf)

Pullar-Strecker, T. 2023. "More than \$16m Spent on TVNZ/RNZ Merger Before it Was Called Off." Stuff, February 8. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/131175405/more-than-16m-spent-on-tvznznz-merger-before-it-was-called-off>

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Roy, E. A. 2020. "New Zealand to Give \$50m to Help Ailing Media Groups During Covid-19 Crisis." The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/23/new-zealand-to-give-50m-to-help-ailing-media-groups-during-covid-19-crisis>

## Slovenia

### Score 6

Media pluralism in Slovenia is governed by the Mass Media Act, which allocates state funds to ensure pluralism, democracy, and freedom of expression. However, the small media market is marked by significant ownership concentration, often with unclear agendas favoring certain parties. Notably, outlets like Nova24TV and publications like Demokracija and Škandal24 tend to support one party (SDS) while criticizing others. Conversely, Necenzurirano.si leans toward center-left parties. Additionally, customer-friendly media are owned by Hungarian investors linked to the government, raising concerns about geopolitical influence.

The European Commission and Media Pluralism Report have highlighted challenges to media freedom, particularly in market plurality, political independence, and social inclusion. The Agency for Communications Networks and Services regulates the electronic communications market but faces criticism for not addressing ownership accumulation, leading to content homogeneity across outlets.

To address these issues, the Ministry of Culture proposed a new media law in December 2023 to enhance transparency in public funding usage, improve ownership disclosure, and bolster media pluralism. The law is slated for parliamentary discussion in April 2024.

Citation:

Simona Rogelj. 2023. "V razpravi o medijih v Sloveniji opozorila o koncentriranju lastništva in nezadostnem financiranju." MMC RTV SLO, July 9. <https://www.rtvsl.si/slovenija/v-razpravi-o-medijih-v-sloveniji-opozorila-o-koncentriranju-lastnistva-in-nezadostnem-financiranju/674571>

Marko Milosavljevic and Romana Biljak Gerjevic. 2021. Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application

of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the Year 2021. Country Report: Slovenia. European University Institute. <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/74705>

## Australia

### Score 5

Australia's technologically advanced media system presents contrasting agendas and positions on many policy questions. However, heavy concentration in the media market poses significant obstacles to representing all relevant political perspectives. The influential public broadcasters, ABC and SBS, contribute significantly to the diversity of the media landscape. ABC raises and explores issues of general interest without advancing a partisan view, while SBS provides distinctive programming appealing to niche and minority interests based on taste, culture, or language.

A critical weakness in the media system is the heavy market concentration of the newspaper industry. News Corp controls nearly 60% of the market by circulation, raising concerns about its influence on elite politicians, political discourse, and access opportunities for other media outlets. Influential political actors, such as former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, have called for measures to diversify media ownership.

In 2021, the government implemented a news media mandatory bargaining code requiring digital platforms, especially Google and Facebook, to pay news media companies for content they link to or display (ACMA 2022). This promotes media plurality by increasing the viability of a broader number of news media outlets. However, critics argue that the code does little for small and regional news media operators (Fisher et al. 2021). The value of payments from Google and Facebook under the code remains unknown due to confidentiality agreements.

Citation:

ACMA. 2022. "News Media Bargaining Code." Australian Communications and Media Authority. <https://www.acma.gov.au/news-media-bargaining-code>

Fisher, C., McCallum, K., and Park, K. 2021. "Is the News Media Bargaining Code Fit for Purpose?" The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/is-the-news-media-bargaining-code-fit-for-purpose-172224>

## Poland

### Score 5

Media plurality in Poland is legally protected under the Press Law and other regulations. However, the Media Pluralism Report rates Poland's media plurality at just 50%, a lower figure than in other Central and East European countries except for Hungary (Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom 2023). This low ranking is partly due to a media landscape divided between public and private broadcasters – both domestically and foreign-owned – with strong political polarization between the government and opposition influencing the most significant players.

Foreign investors such as the U.S.-based Discovery (owner of TVN), the Swiss-German Ringier/Axel Springer and the German Bauer have a notable presence, a fact that drew criticism from the governing PiS party as it advocated for the “repolonization” of Polish media. An early but unsuccessful attempt in this area was the 2021 “Lex TVN” law, which aimed to prevent owners outside the European Economic Area from holding more than 50% of a broadcaster’s shares. Further efforts included nationalizing and centralizing media assets by state-controlled entities like PKN Orlen, which acquired the largest regional media company, Polska Press, from the German Passauer Neue and the major press distributor RUCH. This consolidation led to national control over 90% of regional media and the replacement of independent editors-in-chief.

The use of abusive litigation and financial penalties has been a key strategy to weaken critical media and encourage self-censorship. The business environment has been destabilized by delays in granting licenses to private broadcasters like TVN and Radio Tok FM, and private media have been excluded from state advertising revenue programs. Print media, already struggling to transition to digital formats, faced significant financial strain.

Local media in particular faced financial and distribution challenges and legal threats. Despite this, the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKIK) did not intervene in the significant consolidation of the local newspaper market.

However, UOKIK did block Agora’s (owner of Gazeta Wyborcza) acquisition of Radio Eurozet in 2021, citing concerns about the creation of a harmful duopoly in the radio market. In 2023, Agora successfully appealed this decision, challenging the lack of a legal definition of “duopoly” (Media Freedom Rapid Response 2023).

Currently, no public authority is empowered to assess market concentration in the press sector regarding media pluralism, a fact that has raised concerns from the Commissioner for Human Rights.

Citation:

Media Freedom Rapid Response. 2023. “Media Freedom at a Crossroads: Journalism in Poland Faces Uncertain Future Ahead of Election.” <https://www.ecpmf.eu/media-freedom-at-a-crossroads-journalism-in-poland-faces-uncertain-future-ahead-of-election>

Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom. 2023. “Media Pluralism Report 2023.” <https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor-2023/>

Reporters without Borders. 2023. “Index 2023.” <https://rsf.org/en/index>

## Hungary

Score 4

The competition of opinions in Hungary is distorted. The regulatory agency is not independent but is de facto bound to the government’s political will. Even the competition agency, long a beacon of Hungarian democracy and market economy, has become ineffective in combating the concentration of the media landscape. In

June 2020, the Constitutional Court upheld a controversial 2018 government decree that prevented the Hungarian Competition Authority from examining the centralization of leadership and financing of about 500 media outlets under the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA), a pro-government media conglomerate. Media surveillance by the responsible authority, the Nemzeti Média- és Hírközlési Hatóság (NMHH), is criticized as biased. The head of the agency serves an extensively long nine-year term and also heads the Media Council, an institution criticized for lacking proper controls. The Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom of the Robert Schuman Center, in its 2022 report, ranks the risks for Hungary as “high” (66%). Biased reporting by pro-government outlets and public media primarily affects older and rural residents with lower education levels. At the same time, some of the most-visited news sites operate independently and reach large segments of urban young and middle-aged readers who consume little legacy media.

According to Eurostat data, 87% of the population regularly reads news on the internet (Hungary Today 2022). Online media remain plural, and some of the highest-quality independent outlets have shifted toward subscription-based models, alleviating their dependence on advertising income. Recognizing the challenges of reaching online populations, the governing party has increased its spending on social media, partly by outsourcing its campaign messages to a social media agency called Megafon that distributes content on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

Citation:

Hungary Today. 2022. “Hungarians Are Hooked on Online News.” 26 August. <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungarians-are-hooked-on-online-news/>

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