



Media Report

Media Reporting

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2022

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Indicator

Media Reporting

Question

To what extent do media in your country analyze the rationale and impact of public policies?

41 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 = A clear majority of mass media brands focus on high-quality information content analyzing the rationale and impact of public policies.
- 8-6 = About one-half of the mass media brands focus on high-quality information content analyzing the rationale and impact of public policies. The rest produces a mix of infotainment and quality information content.
- 5-3 = A clear minority of mass media brands focuses on high-quality information content analyzing public policies. Several mass media brands produce superficial infotainment content only.
- 2-1 = All mass media brands are dominated by superficial infotainment content.

Canada

Score 9

Canada's main TV and radio stations produce a mix of infotainment and high-quality information programs. They are, for the most part, not enmeshed in partisan politics. Public broadcasters, including the CBC/Radio-Canada and provincial TV channels such as TV Ontario (TVO), provide extensive and often high-quality coverage of politics and news, with a minimum of five to seven hours per week of in-depth information on government decisions. Both CBC and Radio-Canada have their specialized news channels, CBC News Network and Réseau de l'information (RDI), as does the private broadcaster CTV with CTV News Channel. Examples of high-quality public affairs shows include TVO's *The Agenda*, CBC's *The House*, and RDI's *Mordus de politique*. Canadian media coverage is enhanced by international news channels such as CNN and BBC World News. There is little competition among public broadcasters. Private broadcasters, with the exception of the Canadian Parliamentary Access Channel, are generally focused primarily on infotainment, but also provide some analysis of government decisions. Print media such as the *Globe and Mail*, *La Presse*, and *Le Devoir* provide comparatively high-quality and comprehensive analysis of public policy.

The Liberal government revamped the Access to Information Act (ATIA) in 2019 to, among other things, enable the Information Commissioner to order government institutions to disclose requested records. The ATIA underwent a statutory review in 2021. The context of the pandemic further highlighted the value of open and accessible data on public health and other subjects.

Ireland

Score 9

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) aims to ensure that “the democratic values enshrined in the constitution, especially those relating to rightful liberty of expression, are upheld,” and that broadcasting services are “open and pluralistic.”

The largest TV and radio stations in Ireland are operated by Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), a state-owned public-service broadcaster financed by revenue from the mandatory TV license, as well as by advertising. Since 1988, RTÉ has faced competition from privately owned radio and television stations. RTÉ devotes a significant proportion of TV and radio airtime to news and commentary on current affairs and political issues. It also undertakes original investigative journalism. The privately owned TV and radio stations have to devote specified proportions of airtime to current affairs and public-service programs. However, in terms of listener hours, music and entertainment outweigh current affairs and analysis.

The main stations produce high-quality information programs, and programs devoted to in-depth analysis of government policy and decisions. They provide forums for the discussion of current affairs, as well as outlets for opinions and grievances. These programs elicit reactions and responses from politicians. The two largest-circulation daily newspapers provide ample information on and analysis of government decisions.

The Press Council of Ireland provides an independent forum for resolving complaints about the press. In 2012, the United Kingdom’s Leveson inquiry mentioned the Irish Press Council as a model.

Irish newspaper circulation (print and electronic versions combined) has continued to fall over the review period, but the main newspapers are devoting additional resources to improving the electronic dissemination of news and analysis.

The Future of Media Commission was set up by the government in September 2020 to examine the future of Ireland’s public service broadcasters, commercial broadcasters, and print and online media platforms. The commission is independent of the government and has nine members, who have been selected due to their expertise and experience in the media. Some of the major challenges identified by the commission include the need for sustainable funding models, changes in audience behavior and changes in technology. The commission produced a report with recommendations for the government in 2021 (FMC, 2020). At the time of writing, the commission’s report has yet to be formally shared with the Oireachtas media committee, the BAI, or the industry organizations that participated in the commission’s consultation process or virtual hearings (Slattery, 2022).

Citation:

FMC (2020) About the Commission, The Future of the Media Commission, available at:

<https://futureofmediacommission.ie/>

Slattery, L. (2022) Delay in publishing Future of Media Commission report branded 'bloody disgrace', The Irish Times, 23 March, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/delay-in-publishing-future-of-media-commission-report-branded-bloody-disgrace-1.4834397>

Norway

Score 9

The mass media's treatment of government decisions and policy is fairly accurate and informative. The two largest broadcast-television channels, the state-owned NRK and the private TV2, both produce broad-ranging evening news programs that typically devote considerable space and time to governmental and political affairs. Both channels also regularly (almost daily) broadcast debates and discussions on current affairs.

Statistics show that news programs and political debates have a high number of viewers/listeners. Both large television organizations have, over time, maintained and to some extent strengthened their news coverage, in TV2's case by having a separate news channel, and in NRK's case by developing a strong brand for news, documentaries and public debate. Political news is frequently featured on popular televised infotainment shows on Friday nights. The leading radio channels and major digital media publications also devote considerable coverage to political news.

Changes to the media economy – including digitalization, the need for new funding mechanisms and the increasing domination of Facebook and Google – has posed massive challenges to many Norwegian media outlets. Staff cuts have resulted in a reduction of news production, which will likely undermine reporting quality and the media's role as the fourth "pillar of government." At the same time, social media has become a key source of news. Powers and resources have therefore also shifted from the professionally edited media, to new digital media actors and to a more complex mix of edited and unedited news.

Sweden

Score 9

Sweden has dropped somewhat over the past couple of years in terms of newspaper circulation. Most newspapers are experiencing a gradual shift in subscriptions from conventional print to digital formats. The overall quality of the political coverage provided by Swedish media is good, if not extremely good.

Public service radio and television in Sweden is still central to the media system. There have been discussions and Commissions concerning the future of public service but thus far no major changes have been put on the agenda. The only reform worth noting is that public service radio and television is now funded through the tax system and not, as was previously the case, by annual fees.

According to a recent report, the state of media reporting in Sweden may be described as stable and positive. Ownership consolidation has increased in the past few years, income from advertising has dropped, and newspapers compete for the business of readers who are willing to pay a subscription fee, the number of which has increased. The focus on local news has increased. Finally, and perhaps unsurprisingly, young people tend to consume their news from social media than from traditional news sources (Carlsson, 2021).

Citation:

Carlsson, Kajsa. 2021. "Tillståndet för Nyhetsjournalistiken 2021 – en Översikt." <https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/arsbok2021-01-carlsson.pdf>

Switzerland

Score 9

Radio and television programs are of high quality in Switzerland. With very few exceptions, radio reports are reliable, and analyses are conducted by independent and professional journalists. Some television programs, however, are trending toward infotainment and the personalization of politics.

On 4 March 2018, voters rejected a popular initiative ("Ja zur Abschaffung der Radio – und Fernsehgebühren") aiming to eliminate per capita fees for the Swiss public broadcaster (SRF). A strong majority of 71.6% and all cantons voted against the initiative, signaling a strong commitment to public media. In spite of this strong showing, the SRF responded to the aggressive campaign with a downsizing project that aimed to dismantle the radio station in the Swiss capital, Bern. This, in turn, led to public protest faulting the SRF for violating its mission to cover the federalist cultural diversity of Switzerland. In November 2019, a decision was reached to keep the editorial desk for foreign and domestic politics in Bern.

In February 2022, a popular vote rejected a law increasing and enlarging subsidies for media, which might undermine information quality and diversity in the future. This law proposal was a response to declining revenues from advertising and a perceived need to provide media coverage even for smaller/regional groups of readers. The proposal was supported by the Social Democrats and Greens, but was opposed by the Liberal Party (FDP) and the Swiss People's Party.

Citation:

<https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/abstimmungen/20180304/volksinitiative-ja-zur-abschaffung-der-radio-und-fernsehgebueh.html>

<https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/votes/20220213/measures-to-benefit-the-media.html>

Denmark

Score 8

Media play an important role in the democratic process and, through editorial choice, the media has an important influence on agenda-setting. Among media outlets, there is an increasing tendency to catch the interest of the public by simplification or personalizing the stories reported, and emphasizing an element of conflict. There is also a tendency to favor senior politicians and government representatives. Weaker actors, such as representatives of immigrants or ethnic minorities, get less coverage, although immigration stories have become important in recent years and are now regularly reported.

In addition to daily news programs, some television and radio stations offer more analytical in-depth programs, which can be quite informative. It is worth mentioning that the education of journalists has improved in recent years. Overall, the Danish media focus more on national rather than international news, including EU issues.

Traditional media face increasing competition from alternative news sources (e.g., news websites and social media) and their financing is declining due to falling advertisement revenue. Policymakers are increasingly using social media (e.g., Twitter) to make policy statements and frame the debate.

Media access to internal government documents has been a sensitive issue because of changed legislation regarding the access to such documents (offentlighedsloven). The new law entered into force 1 January 2014. The two most critical aspects of the new law are the possibility of the government denying access to internal documents exchanged between a minister and experts (Article 24) and between a minister and a member of the parliament (Article 27). Despite criticism from the Danish Association of Journalists that the exemptions are too extensive, the law remains in force.

The funding of public TV and radio has been debated for some years, and – as a result the funding of the main operator Danmarks Radio (DR) – is being changed from a near-universal license fee to financing via general taxation.

Citation:

Peter Munk Christiansen og Lise Togeby, *Magten i Danmark*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

“Fakta om ny offentlighedslov,” <http://www.politiko.dk/nyheder/fakta-om-ny-offentlighedslov> (accessed 23 October 2014).

“Ny offentlighedslov – ny praksis for journalister,” <http://www.aabenhedstinget.dk/ny-offentlighedslov-ny-praksis-for-journalister-2/> (accessed 23 October 2014).

Dansk Journalistforbund, Udtalelse fra DJ’s delegeretmøde: Styrk offentlighedsloven, <https://journalistforbundet.dk/nyhed/udtalelse-fra-djs-delegeretmode-styrk-offentlighedsloven> (Accessed 7 October 2018).

Jørgen Grønnegård Christiansen and Jørgen Elklit (eds.), *Det demokratiske system*. 4. udg. Chapter 7. Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2016.

Estonia

Score 8 By providing a continuous flow of information and background analysis, the main daily newspapers, TV and radio stations offer substantive information on government plans and policies. There are three national daily newspapers, two main weeklies, two established online news portals, four general content TV channels and three public-radio channels. Together, these comprise the majority of the entire domestic media market (except for radio broadcasting, where music stations account for the largest market share) and provide adequate information and some analysis of government policy. Policy-related information takes different forms, including inserts in regular news programs, interviews with experts, debates between proponents of conflicting views, debates between representatives of government and opposition, regular broadcasts of parliament sessions and government press conferences.

However, there are two important challenges. First, the media tends to pay more attention to the performance of political parties as organizations than to parties' policy positions; media coverage can also be overly simplified or sensationalist. This is a particularly salient issue in the print media where the small market size means that journalistic competence can be rather low. Secondly, information on government activities is typically not provided in advance of government decisions, but only after decisions have already been made.

Finland

Score 8 The World Press Freedom Index 2020 ranked Finland second worldwide with regard to the freedoms and rights exercised by the media, just behind Norway, and ahead of Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands (Reporters without Borders 2020).

As with many other European countries, Finland has experienced polarization between political elites and nationalistic populist elements. This development became ever more pronounced after the establishment of a coalition government dominated by center-left parties, each led by a woman, in 2019.

Legislation in Finland does not prohibit the (deliberate) provision of misinformation. However, the Council for Mass Media (CMM) acts as a self-regulating organization; in doing so, it seeks to interpret and encourage good professional practices, and defends the freedoms of speech and publication. The CMM was established by publishers and journalists in the field of mass communication.

The council does not exercise legal power or public authority, but its decisions are closely followed and observed (Council of Mass Media 2020). The rules and practices of government supervision in Finland provide the publicly owned media

with sufficient independence. Privately owned media organizations are subject to licensing and regulatory regimes that ensure independence from government.

In Finland, the media has not been subject to the influence of government or actors associated with the government during the crisis. Finnish politicians do not orchestrate media reactions. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, media and politics became more closely entwined, and there was less critical distance between the media and the government than there had been before the outbreak of COVID-19.

Although news coverage of the coronavirus crisis was credible and news media proactively debunked coronavirus-related misinformation that circulated on social media platforms, the media uncritically reported the way the government communicated its response. During 2020, both the media and the government chose to strengthen the authority of medical experts.

Alternative perspectives were effectively given less credence and dismissed as “conspiracy theories.” The media has – apparently on its own initiative – published daily statistics about the spread of COVID-19 (Heikkilä 2020).

Citation:

Council of Mass Media, 2020. What is the CMM? Accessed, 28.12. 2020. <https://www.jsn.fi/en/>

Heikkilä, Heikki, 2020. Finland: Coronavirus and the media. Blog. Accessed, 28.12. 2020.

<https://en.ejo.ch/ethics-quality/finland-coronavirus-and-the-media>

Reporters without Borders, 2020. Ranking. Accessed, 28.12. 2020. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

Germany

Score 8

Public TV and radio broadcasters generally offer in-depth reports on political processes. Competition between the two main public television broadcasters, ARD and ZDF, has forced them to copy the private channels’ successful infotainment and politainment formats. Nevertheless, by international standards, ARD and ZDF in particular but also a number of high-quality radio programs offer citizens the opportunity to obtain a relatively deep knowledge of political decision-making, and their market shares have stabilized in recent years, although television as such is increasingly losing relevance among younger people. The plurality of the country’s television broadcast market is enhanced by the availability of programming from international broadcasters such as CNN, BBC World, CNBC Europe and Al-Jazeera.

There are a number of high-quality newspapers, too, including the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung or Süddeutsche Zeitung and weeklies like Die Zeit and Der Spiegel, all of them providing high-quality background information on domestic and international political developments. Detailed and nuanced information is thus widely available. Moreover, the public broadcasters and high-quality newspapers and weeklies also run websites featuring a considerable amount of information on politics.

Recent opinion polls demonstrate that public trust in the media has increased considerably during the pandemic. In 2020, 56% of Germans expressed trust in media, which marked a 13 percentage point increase over the previous year (43%) (JGU 2021). Trust differs depending on the type of media. High levels of trust are expressed for public television and radio as well as daily newspapers, with the exception of the tabloids. Trust in private TV broadcasters and the internet is low (Jackob et.al. 2019). Nonetheless, according to another recent study, there are differences in the degree of trust accorded to public television depending on respondents' political orientation. People on the left and the center of the political spectrum trust ARD and ZDF significantly more than do people on the right of the political spectrum (FAZ 2019). Trust also differs with respect to the topic; reports on the pandemic and climate change are met with high levels of trust, while reports on Islam in Germany are met with much lower levels of trust.

Citation:

FAZ (2019): Politikurs von ARD und ZDF: Links von der Mitte, available at: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/reuters-studie-zur-akzeptanz-von-ard-und-zdf-16389494.html>

Jackob, N., Schultz, T., Jakobs, I., Ziegele, M., Quiring, O. & Schemer, C. (2019): Medienvertrauen im Zeitalter der Polarisierung. In *Media Perspektiven* 5/2019, 210-220.

JGU (2021): Langzeitstudie Medienvertrauen, Forschungsergebnisse der Welle 2020, <https://medienvertrauen.uni-mainz.de/forschungsergebnisse-der-welle-2020-3/> (accessed: 15 January 2022).

Luxembourg

Score 8

In Luxembourg, multilingualism (Lëtzebuergesch, French and German, alongside other languages spoken by a multicultural population) influences the consumption of written and audiovisual media. In the written press, German is the most used language, while articles in Lëtzebuergesch are becoming more and more numerous. The 10 most important media outlets in the country are: RTL Radio, RTL Television, RTL Online, Luxemburger Wort, L'Essentiel (daily free newspaper), Lëtzebuurger Journal (online publication), Le Quotidien, Reporter.lu (online publication) Lëtzebuurger Land and the (state-funded) Radio 100,7. When it comes to special-interest publications, in particular magazines, the Luxembourg public generally turns to the foreign press. Under the authority of the Ministry of State, the Service des Médias et des Communications handles matters of media policy, as well as matters relating to telecommunications policy.

Journalists are mostly generalists with very little opportunity to specialize. On Saturdays, the daily Luxemburger Wort newspaper publishes a section called "Analysis and Opinion." Legislative plans are discussed on several pages in this section. Contributors include journalists, politicians and civil society representatives.

Media coverage is often reactive, in particular when issues have already reached the public in the form of draft legislation or through parliamentary debate. These latter discussions are public and are conducted in Luxembourgish, as a general rule. The

parliamentary sessions are broadcast on Chamber TV (also available online). Debates held by country's four largest local-government councils (Luxembourg City and Esch/ Alzette, Differdange, Dudelange) can also be followed online.

The public's degree of interest in political processes and legislative projects is progressing, but remains rather modest. However, the situation is better than in other small European states.

United Kingdom

Score 8

The main TV and radio stations in the United Kingdom – especially those like the BBC that operate under a public charter – provide an extensive array of high-quality news services. Government decisions feature prominently in this programming, and information and analysis on government decisions are both extensive and held to a high standard. There is substantial competition for viewers, in particular between the BBC, ITV, Sky and Channel 4. In addition to news programs, all provide in-depth analysis programs on politics and policy in a variety of formats. The Today Programme on BBC Radio 4 is well known for its highbrow political analysis and scrutiny, and often sets the tone for political debates. Meanwhile, several other political shows broadcast by leading TV channels provide political analysis and ministers taking part in them can expect robust scrutiny.

The style of interview on these programs is often explicitly not deferential and can even be quite confrontational, especially toward ministers. This is justified by the need to hold politicians and especially government ministers to account. Local radio and press also have a tangible influence within their localities, and an increasing number of people resort to online services, most notably BBC Online, as a source of information on government.

Scandals both in the private sector (News of the World) and the public sector (BBC) may have cost some credibility, but have so far had no recognizable influence on the functioning of the media system as a whole. Despite political pressure, The Guardian newspaper played a crucial role in the global surveillance disclosures of 2013 and was awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for its efforts.

During the pandemic, most media outlets have both held the government to account and ensured that the public are kept well-informed. Many key announcements were carried live, notably the frequent briefings on COVID-19 related matters.

Italy

Score 7

The space allocated to political themes in Italian media is quite significant in the most important mass media brands (the three main national newspapers, Corriere della Sera, la Repubblica and Il Sole 24 Ore, which have print and online versions; the state television channels, RAI1, RAI2, RAI3 and RaiNews; the three Mediaset

channels, Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4; and two other private TV channels, Skynews and La7). Television time (both public and private) allocated to political themes is substantial. For instance, the La7 channel alone averages approximately 10 hours per week of political content. A large part of this time is devoted to debates and talk shows involving politicians, journalists and experts, and to covering the most important aspects of current political controversies.

However, detailed, in-depth analysis of government decisions is much rarer, and debates tend to focus on the personality-driven dimensions of power politics. National newspapers provide more in-depth coverage of government decisions, often providing detailed dossiers on their content. Some radio and internet programming gives high-quality information in advance. The broader public has no access or does not seek access to these media.

Spain

Score 7

The main print periodicals provide a fairly significant amount of in-depth analyses of the policy process and sophisticated op-ed analyses of government decisions, despite their partisan preferences. The print-media readership is declining, and the impact of these publications is thus limited, but a growing number of readers follow online newspapers (either electronic versions of the mainstream print publications or standalone online and politics-themed blogs).

TV is the most important source of political information for the average citizen, since almost 70% of Spaniards watch TV news every day. However, a large portion of the time devoted to political information is given over to news and talk shows. A third of Spaniards also follow political news via radio stations, which devote many hours a week to political information. All main stations have early-morning and afternoon programs combining both background news and political debate, as well as a late-night news program. Privately owned radio stations are more ideologically biased than the major TV stations (with participants in the radio debates blatantly biased in favor of or against the government).

The political information provided via TV shows with larger audiences usually takes the form of infotainment, with an intensive focus on partisan disagreements and face-to-face debates. In contrast, detailed information on policy decisions is less frequently provided, and is not usually broadcast during prime-time hours. Studies show that new parties' voters tend to be more likely to follow new media and social networks.

The media played a key role in providing information about and making people aware of the emergency situation during 2020. Although both audiences and experts have appreciated the work done by Spanish public television, the majority opinion is negative. In this regard, critics argue that coverage has not been impartial and there

has been an excess of information. There is a high degree of public concern about the dissemination of false information. According to the 2020 Digital News Report, only 36% of Spanish users trust media news, the lowest level since 2015. The majority of Spanish citizens (49%) believe that the government, national politicians and parties are the main sources of disinformation.

Citation:

Universidad de Navarra (2021), Digital News Report <https://www.digitalnewsreport.es/resumen-ejecutivo-digitalnewsreport-es-2021-periodismo-de-calidad-y-cercania-para-combatir-la-infodemia/>

Austria

Score 6

In Austria, about one-half of the mass media brands focus on high-quality information content, analyzing the rationale and impact of public policies. While the marked share of the country's largest tabloid newspaper, Kronenzeitung, was down to less than 25% in 2021, two (free) tabloids, Heute and Österreich (the third and fourth largest Austrian newspapers), represent more than 15% of the combined market share. The latter two newspapers cannot be described as quality papers, as no serious analysis of policies is carried out and even some form of propaganda, not to say misinformation, is transported over these channels, as became clear during the investigation that ultimately led to the resignation of former chancellor Kurz. With a market share of 7.3%, the left-wing Standard is now the largest national quality paper. Generally, high-quality political information is available from several daily and weekly papers with more limited circulation, but these high-quality media face considerable financial difficulties.

The radio and television broadcast markets continue to be dominated by the publicly owned Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), although competition by foreign and privately owned media is growing. In response to criticism of this dominance, the ORF offers guarantees of internal independence and internal political pluralism. The ORF is impartial by law and fulfills its mandate reasonably well, making up for deficits existing elsewhere in the media environment. That said, the election of a new director-general of the ORF in 2021 was widely seen as an open political maneuver, in which the ÖVP as the country's current dominant governing party used its political clout to install its candidate. This episode apart, there was widespread concern that the coronavirus pandemic posed a serious threat to critical journalism.

Citation:

<https://www.leadersnet.at/news/53507,media-analyse-2021-42-millionen-leserinnen-bleiben-der.html>

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000128851631/pressestimmen-nach-orf-wahl-ein-sorgsam-durchkalkulierter-deal>

https://politische-akademie.at/userfiles/files/downloads/FFI_Report_112020.pdf

Belgium

Score 6

The country's main television-news programs and radio channels, both public and private, and the web-based extensions of these, provide a reasonable level of information, with a greater share of high-quality content and less focus on personalities than in Italy or France, for example.

For the rest, on the one hand, the economic crisis in the media sector is accelerating a trend toward sensational, lower-quality information, as well as a growing inability to conduct in-depth investigations or monitor policymaking, leading to a downward-trending public perception of media quality. On the other hand, the COVID-19 crisis improved media access to government information and the media's scrutiny of government decisions as the waves of infection progressed. Most mainstream media shifted from an attitude of automatic approval of government decisions in March 2020 to relatively constructive questioning of the consistency of various actions in December 2021. This proactive role has partially extended to other areas of concern, such as corruption in the former Congo colony, tax evasion, bribery and so on.

Citation:

<http://www.institut-solidaris.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/LaConfianceDansLesMedias.pdf>

Czechia

Score 6

The main TV and radio stations provide daily news programs and some more in-depth discussion and analysis programs weekly. The quality of information on government decisions has improved with the digitalization process. In addition, Czech TV established CT24, a channel dedicated to news, which also broadcasts online and offers a continual analysis of domestic and international events. In the second and third quarters of 2021, approximately 58% of the population between the ages of 12 and 79 were readers of at least one national-level daily newspaper (12 percentage points more than in the same period in 2019). The yellow press Blesk dominates the print media with the largest readership (0.7 million readers), followed by MF Dnes (0.44 million readers, MAFRA Holding). Overall, online media, covering a broad spectrum of views, peaked during spring 2020 due to the demand for information regarding the pandemic. Social media plays an essential role in increasing the visibility of policy issues, but has also significantly contributed to the spread of misinformation and polarization, especially on vaccines.

France

Score 6

Mass media, notably morning (radio) and evening programs, offer quality information concerning government decisions. As for print media, the crucial issue is the division between local and national media. A few high-quality daily papers and weekly papers provide in-depth information, but their circulation is low and on the decline. In many instances, the depth and magnitude of information is dependent

upon the level of polarization of the government policy. Instead, in local newspapers, information is often superficial and inadequate. The same division applies to private and public audiovisual channels (some private news channels offer only limited, superficial and polemical information), and to the emerging online media (only some of which offer quality information and analysis). On the whole, economic information is rather poor. News channels and social media networks are increasingly substituting for traditional media, but are very poor alternatives. Mobilization is becoming more important at the expense of providing fair and accurate information. This tough competition has contributed to a deterioration in the quality of traditional media. Rather than providing neutral information about an issue, media outlets tend to illustrate their points by relying on “man/woman on the street” interviews.

Rather than taking a neutral stance and trying to weigh the pros and cons of proposed reforms, media tend to take partisan stances – not in the sense of being leftist or rightist, but in objecting to change. Two recent examples may illustrate this point. The press (and even more so the social media networks) predicted that two recent governmental decisions would lead to disaster: first, a change in the way income taxes were paid (shifting from an annual payment by individuals to the state to a direct transfer from the employer to the state); and second, a change in the system of registering for university (a shift from a previously disastrous system). In both cases, the transformation turned out to work very smoothly. The same phenomenon was observable during the pandemic, at least during the initial phase of the vaccination process. Most of the press put the opinions of epidemiologists and of anti-vax gurus more or less on the same footing.

Iceland

Score 6

Iceland’s main TV and radio stations provide fairly substantive in-depth information on government decisions. Radio analysis typically tends to be deeper than that found on television since the small size of the market limits the financial resources of TV stations. However, in-depth analysis on TV increased significantly when the private TV station Hringbraut increased the weight of such analyses in their programs in 2016. In 2018, the TV station was struggling financially and aired sponsored programs. In late 2019, a merger between Hringbraut and the newspaper Fréttablaðið was announced. Further, Fréttablaðið then purchased DV, a smaller newspaper. That will probably strengthen the ability of all three media outlets to undertake in-depth analyses as well as their economic position. Critical analysis of government policies by independent observers, experts, and journalists is a fairly recent phenomenon in Iceland.

The Special Investigation Committee report had a separate chapter on the media before and during the 2008 economic collapse. The report criticized the media for not having been critical enough in their coverage of the Icelandic banks and other

financial institutions before the 2008 economic collapse. The report argues, on the basis of content analyses of media coverage of the banks, that the media was too biased toward the banks as was the case, for example, in the United States during the 1920s.

Israel

Score 6

Israel's media industry is adapting to the global trend of decreased consumption of print and radio news media and the increased dominance of television, the internet, and social media websites. While the Israeli media sector has been bolstered in recent years by the creation of strong independent investigatory websites and blogs that have gained considerable attention in professional and public circles, other new popular outlets such as the free daily Israel Ha'yom often fail to deliver in-depth news coverage.

Despite a frequent tendency to focus on prominent and popular topics of the hour, the Israeli press, public television channels, and radio shows do offer interpretative and investigatory journalism that informs the public regarding policy decisions and long-term strategies. Nonetheless, the growing rate of news consumption through social media websites, the decline in citizens' exposure to print media and TV, and the shallow nature of coverage in new media all significantly reduce the percentage of civilians exposed to in-depth journalistic information.

Citation:

Goldenberg, Roi, "'The seventh eye' website won the Israeli prize for critical media," *Globes* 28.1.2013: <http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000817765> (Hebrew)

Mann, Rafi and Lev-on, Azi, "Annual report: Media in Israel 2016 – agendas, uses and trends," Ariel University School of Communication: https://store.ariel.ac.il/downloadable/download/sample/sample_id/6/ (Hebrew)

Persisco, Oren, "Restraint and prudence," *The seventh eye website*: <http://www.the7eye.org.il/9774> (Hebrew).

"Freedom of the Press: Israel 2017," Freedom House, 2017 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/israel>

Japan

Score 6

The Japanese media system has historically been dominated by five major TV networks, including the public broadcaster NHK, along with a handful of major national newspapers. These publications remain widely read even though their circulation is declining, and provide information in a sober style. However, because of their close personal links to political figures, which finds its institutionalized expression in the journalist club system (*kisha kurabu*), these newspapers rarely expose major scandals while freelancers are often locked out. Investigative journalism is typically undertaken by weekly or monthly publications. While some of these are of high quality, others are more sensationalist in character. Personnel

changes at NHK after the Abe-led government took power produced a leadership that openly declared its intention to steer a pro-government course. The government's assertive approach has also been evident in other media areas. For these reasons, Japan is ranked 67th in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index.

In recent years, social media outlets such as YouTube, Line, Twitter and Facebook, along with the news channels based on them, have gained a considerable following. This also holds true for new online publications such as BuzzFeed Japan and the Huffington Post. While the impact of the new media on the overall quality of information remains unclear, they do seem to be contributing to the emergence of so-called partisan media in Japan.

Citation:

Tomohiro Osaki, Academics, TV journalists slam minister's threat against 'biased' programming, fear media self-censorship, The Japan Times, 2 March 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/02/national/tv-journalists-slam-ministers-threat-biased-programs-fear-media-self-censorship/>

Philip Brasor, Sticky bonds of the media and government, The Japan Times, 24 June 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/24/national/media-national/sticky-bonds-media-government/>

2021 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/japan>

Netherlands

Score 6

Dutch public media are not completely state-run. Rather, they are organized along different segments of the population, each with their own distinct set of beliefs, perspectives, convictions and paying members. The system has been modernized several times, most recently by limiting the number of media organizations to six (plus two task-oriented ones). Every five years the culture branch of the Department of Education, Science and Culture, advised by relevant commissions, judges on the basis of the number of memberships and (vague) substantive criteria which organizations are representative enough to claim broadcasting time and public resources (money, equipment) in this public media system. Every five years, two "aspiring" members are admitted on a temporary basis. To the astonishment of many, in 2021, Unheard Netherlands! (ON!) and Black (Zwart) were admitted. Both broadcasting organizations are rooted in vocal protest movements, and have been visible in Dutch public debate for some time thanks to demonstrations and provocative actions. ON! has frequently criticized Dutch media and journalists as disseminating biased news and for being too left-leaning. Since the public media are by law supposed to further "societal coherence," it is feared that by coopting these two organizations, the system will be damaged from within. Other recent changes to the system provided more time for regional news on national TV/radio, and devoted less time for commercials, with this falling all the way to zero around children's programs.

Several media-use trends appear to have reached tipping points. Digitalized media consumption is becoming dominant, even though during the lockdowns the

population of people aged 50 and older turned more to paper media and linear tv. This will be a structural change in media use, slowly moving from younger to older users. Streaming services have become mainstream. On-demand video- and audio-content is used by all age groups. All media organizations and enterprises are converging toward cross-media products. Consequently, they group all their content offerings under one and the same brand name. Even former paper-based media like Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant (NRC) and Algemeen Dagblad (AD) have transformed themselves into cross-media news enterprises. The shift from analog to digital media consumption implies that the advertisement incomes of traditional media are transferring to the digitalized cross-media organizations and firms. Since advertisement income is concentrated on big tech companies like Google and Facebook, national broadcasting and publishing companies worry about their economic sustainability. In the Netherlands, this has generated upscaling and acquisition initiatives; for example, the Belgian DPG bought Sanoma, and RTL (with Bertelsmann in the background) intends to become the Dutch media champion. With only two big players, the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021 reports for the Netherlands that: “News media concentration (85%) indicates a high risk. The market is concentrated both in terms of audience share as well as market share. There is no media legislation restricting ownership of media.” Yet the report also states that as yet, this has not resulted in a lack of pluralism or an impoverishment of news sources and varieties.

Citation:

Commissariaat voor de Media, 21 November 2021. Mediamonitor 2021.

NRC, van den Brink, January 23 2021. ‘Eigen signatuur’ pakt rampzalig uit

NRC, Nieher, 4 October 2021. ‘Het is ingewikkeld om deze omroepen af te wijzen’

NRC, Takken and Smouter, 14 November 2021. Mediaminister Slob: ‘Het huis van de publieke omroep is wel erg vol’

Portugal

Score 6

Portugal’s media landscape is comprised mostly of newspapers that focus on providing high-quality content analyzing the rationale and impact of public policies. Indeed, the country has only one tabloid newspaper (with a sister cable news channel). While these are respectively the most popular newspaper and cable channel in Portugal, it should be stressed that they are very tame compared to other tabloid media in Europe.

Reporting concerns stem from the media’s resources rather than from its structure. All media companies face significant financial constraints, which limits their ability to carry out systematic in-depth policy analysis. This often leads media outlets to delegate policy analysis to expert commentators, rather than focus on in-depth journalistic work into policy issues.

In a previous SGI report, we noted the large amount of commentary time allotted to former politicians, particularly on television, a pattern that generates potential conflict-of-interest questions and does not seem to have contributed to improving the quality of policy analysis. The most salient example of the confluence between politicians and television is provided by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, a former leader of the PSD and Portugal's most popular TV commentator, who was elected president of Portugal in January 2016.

Citation:

<https://vidaextra.expresso.pt/.../2019-03-02-Os-politicos-invadiram-os-media-portugu>.

South Korea

Score 6

South Korea's main media-related problem is the low quality of many outlets, which renders them unable to serve as facilitators of public debate or civic culture. Part of the problem here is the country's strong commercialism and associated weakness in the area of political journalism. Newspapers and TV rely heavily on advertising revenues. Most prominent TV stations produce a mix of infotainment and quality information about government policies. Information on international events in particular receives little coverage in the Korean news media. The major newspapers clearly lean to the political right, although alternatives do exist. Traditional media such as newspapers and broadcasting outlets are aggravating the situation by providing superficial, short-term-focused coverage, and by propagating extreme partisan content as a means of securing subscribers and viewers. The headlines given to newspaper editorials are becoming increasingly provocative, while broadcasters are treating current-affairs news into entertainment. People describing important social issues in conspiratorial terms are being given an increasing public platform in the media. The internet news sector is dominated by two major news portals, Naver and Daum, although there are alternatives such as Newstapa, an investigative journalism network. In general, political reporting tends to be framed in the context of personalized power politics, diverting attention away from important policy issues. The scandals surrounding former Justice Minister Cho Kuk illustrated this focus on personalities, as supporters and opponents of President Moon focused on personally attacking each other instead of addressing the underlying political issue of judiciary reform.

Citation:

Sang-young Rhyu, "McCarthyism in South Korea: The Naked Truth and History of Color Politics," East Asia Foundation Policy Debates, No.68 (March 28, 2017).

Newstapa, <https://newstapa.org/>

Han-yong Sung, "The Crisis in the South Korean Press: What Should Be Done?," East Asia Foundation Policy Debates, No. 127 (November 05, 2019).

United States

Score 6

For the interested citizen, it is easy to find a large volume of serious, high-quality reporting on government and policy, with balanced, reasonably objective treatment of issues – in print, on the internet or on television. But such qualities do not describe much more than half of major news outlets, nor the outlets used by large audiences. A majority of citizens obtain most of their news from television rather than newspapers or the internet, and the quality of the national news broadcasts has been declining. However, reputable news-reporting and news-analysis programs are available on radio and TV networks. The information quality of talk shows varies, ranging from “infotainment” to the serious discussion of policy issues with reputable experts.

During the 2020 presidential campaign, Facebook and other media companies faced more scrutiny than ever before but their slow response received generally low marks from media experts. For example, according to a recent report, “if Facebook had not waited until October to tweak its algorithms to stem false and toxic content amplified on the platform, the company could have prevented an estimated 10.1 billion views on the 100 most prominent pages that repeatedly shared misinformation on the platform ahead of the election.” (Bergengruen and Perrigo, 2021). In this context, the debate over the manipulation of social media for political influence is likely to continue in the years to come.

Citation:

Bergengruen, Vera and Billy Perrigo. 2021. “Facebook Acted Too Late to Tackle Misinformation on 2020 Election, Report Finds,” Time Magazine, March 23. <https://time.com/5949210/facebook-misinformation-2020-election-report/>

Australia

Score 5

Television and radio stations vary in the time they devote to substantive information on policy issues and government decisions. Commercial broadcasters devote relatively little time to such matters, but the state-owned broadcaster, which has one national television station and a number of radio stations, as well as a website, devotes a considerable amount of time to high-quality analysis of government decisions. Newspaper coverage is likewise variable, with the popular newspapers providing superficial coverage and the quality broadsheets providing more in-depth coverage and discussion. While Australia used to have more high-quality newspapers, market concentration has contributed to a decline in print media diversity and quality. The takeover of Australia’s respected newspaper publisher Fairfax by the television station Channel Nine will lead to greater concentration and may further weaken existing newspapers.

To some extent, the emergence of a number of online-only news and commentary providers has countered this decline. While the impact of these news outlets is as yet

difficult to assess, it is clear that at least several have risen to the status of widely read mass-media outlets. The emergence of online outlets has, however, also seen an increase in misinformation, which has had a substantial adverse impact on public perceptions of policies and their effects.

Citation:

<https://theconversation.com/the-death-of-newspapers-have-we-reached-the-tipping-point-54728>

<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2013/july/1372600800/eric-beecher/death-fairfax-and-end-newspapers>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2018/aug/03/the-fairfax-takeover-and-how-it-will-worsen-australias-media-industry-squeeze>

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/nov/19/fairfax-media-shareholders-approve-nine-takeover-bid>

<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/>

Croatia

Score 5

As a result of the rise of media conglomerates and the dominance of foreign owners, the Croatian media sector is highly commercialized. Though this does not necessarily mean that those media outlets sacrifice in-depth analysis due to excessive reliance on infotainment. In a society in which television is still the most important source of information, it is noteworthy that two leading commercial televisions enjoy significantly higher levels of brand trust than the public broadcaster HRT. The daily newspapers Jutarnji list and Vecernji list provide relatively broad coverage of Croatian political, economic and social affairs, although their quality is far behind world-class newspapers, such as Die Welt or The Guardian. Internet portals such as Index.hr and Telegram have made a large contribution to revealing corruption and the misuse of public funds. They command a rather significant audience, although newspaper circulation is on a downward trend.

Cyprus

Score 5

General analyses and policy assessment are weak points for the media. Poor issue knowledge, a lack of research, political bias and task overload are the main reasons for this weakness. A lack of respect for media ethics rules and self-censorship, along with increased dependency on financial interests, negatively affect media content.

Coverage of political issues generally offers little insight. Pluralism in public service broadcasting mainly offers mainstream views. Some analysis is the work of very few opinion columnists, while experts are invited by public service television. In 2020 and 2021, issues of corruption, the COVID-19 crisis and elections prevailed in the news, with little analysis on their deeper impacts.

Often, individual columnists question government policies. The main editorial line, however, is biased and demonstrates a leniency vis-a-vis the executive, apparently

founded on informal relations with the presidential palace, in exchange for appointing journalists or relatives of media owners and journalists to public office.

Highly polarizing and confrontational rhetoric dominated the 2021 parliamentary elections, with media reproducing information evidently provided by the government. The Cyprus Problem was the framing factor of the elections, with focus shifting from the problem of corrupted leadership to “benefits from disclosures for Turkey” (see source below).

The absence of a media audit body, legislation for online media and transparency of media ownership negatively affect scrutiny and the public’s capacity to properly evaluate the information they receive.

Citation:

1. Cyprus’ Spat With Al-Jazeera Takes on Geopolitical Overtones, 1 September, 2020, <https://www.imidaily.com/editors-picks/cyprus-spat-with-al-jazeera-takes-on-geopolitical-overtones/>

Greece

Score 5

While Greece ranks among the middle tier of OECD countries for newspaper circulation and quality newspapers, this outcome is linked more to long-term partisanship in the media landscape rather than to authoritarian government interventions in mass media, which is not observed in the country.

State media used to be openly pro-government in the previous decade, but state TV and radio channels adopted a more measured, if not balanced, tone in 2020 and 2021. In other words, compared to the past, the performance of state media has improved.

Private media is free, but large political parties periodically come to an understanding with private media owners so that selected party views or versions of events are broadcasted in a biased manner.

Nevertheless, there are at least four large Athens-based newspapers which regularly analyze public policies and their impact from different political standpoints (i.e., the center-right “He Kathimerini,” center-left “To Vima” and “Ta Nea,” and radical-left “Efimerida ton Syntakton”). Compared to the previous decade, when political polarization negatively impacted on the quality of printed media, the media landscape has consolidated, while – depending on newspaper contributors – the quality of analysis may be good.

The quality of information and analysis of private TV news programs is not as high, however. Most of privately owned TV and radio channels have popularized infotainment, while marginalizing professional and in-depth reporting.

To sum up, political debates in the electronic media tend to be rather general, along partisan lines, while in-depth analysis is available, but rare. The presentation of

issues is more sentimental and partisan (pro- or anti-government) than objective. Most people inform themselves through television programs or various news websites. Particularly younger citizens increasingly rely on unreliable sources of social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) for news and opinions. Indeed, in 2020 and 2021, despite the positive role of print and electronic mass media in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, there was widespread misinformation, diffused through social media, which has negatively impacted on the behavior of citizens during lockdowns and has held the rate of COVID-19 vaccinations back.

Latvia

Score 5

While in the past, only a minority of the 10 most important mass-media brands in Latvia provided high-quality information, the situation has improved somewhat in recent years, with Latvian Television, Radio and LSM, as well as weekly magazine IR and investigative journalism center Re:Baltica all providing timely and contextualized information and analysis concerning public policy.

The financial constraints on the media brought about by audience and advertising shifts to internet-based sources, along with the limited budgets for public broadcasting, have a negative effect on the provision of high-quality content in Latvia. Additional challenges include the proliferation of pro-Russian narratives in the media, which are broadcast by both Russian and Latvian outlets, and are shared through social networks.

Nevertheless, some media organizations have succeeded in meeting a high standard of quality. In particular, the weekly magazine IR, established in 2010, provides in-depth information on government policy plans and publishes leaked information of broad political significance. Similarly, sustained analytical focus on issues of public concern is provided by the non-profit investigative journalism center Re:Baltica, founded in August 2011, which has often fulfilled a watchdog function. It has focused on issues such as the social costs of economic austerity, corruption, consumer protection and drug-money flows. By cooperating with the mainstream media, it has succeeded in moving these issues onto the public agenda.

New concerns have arisen about the influence of Russia's "hybrid warfare" on the media environment in Latvia, especially for Russian-language media consumers. While a new LSM Russian-language multimedia platform has been established, Russian commercial media in Latvia can be described as stagnant. Misinformation from Russian media channels flows into the general information space, not just the Russian-language media.

The overall situation regarding media reporting in Latvia is not encouraging, due to a lack of funding and professionalism, and a general inability to adapt to the rapid changes in the media market. Even though there are some platforms producing high-

quality journalism, Latvian journalism generally lacks explanatory and analytical journalism, which is the main stumbling block in reporting on public-policy-related topics.

Citation:

1. Rožukalne A. (2010), Research Paper on Hidden Advertising Issues in the Media, Available at (in Latvian): http://providus.lv/article_files/2117/original/slepta_reklama_mediju_prakse.pdf?1343212009, Last accessed: 10.01.2022.

2. Vita Zelce (2018), The Diversity of the Media Environment in Latvia (in Latvian, with and annotation in English), Available at: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/mediju_politika/petijumi/Latvijas-mediju-vides-daudzveidiba-small.pdf, Last accessed: 10.01.2022.

Lithuania

Score 5

A minority of mass-media organizations, whether TV, radio, print or online, provide high-quality information content analyzing government decisions. Since it is quite expensive to provide high-quality analysis within Lithuania's small media market, the state-funded National Radio and Television is in the best position to undertake in-depth analysis of government decisions. Andrius Tapinas, a famous Lithuanian journalist and television host, launched a weekly political discussion show, which attracted thousands of viewers. Other mass-media brands tend to produce infotainment-style programming. Major internet news portals also provide fact checking with respect to policymakers' statements, but only a minority conduct deeper research into policy issues. New forms of media in the form of Facebook posts, YouTube videos and podcasts partly help to remedy this situation, but these channels are also often used to spread unsubstantiated claims and disinformation. Although the Lithuanian media are regarded as quite independent, they are not widely trusted by the public. Indeed, in November 2021, only 27% of respondents to a national survey stated they trusted the media, and 34% said they did not.

Citation:

<http://www.vilmorus.lt/en>

Malta

Score 5

Maltese media outlets often publish what can be described as "infotainment," or sensational or superficial content. Two reasons may explain this: First, in the country's highly polarized and very small society, media outlets tend to follow their owners' political lead, which here is often political parties or people with business and political connections to a political party. Second, the competition for readership and audiences is fierce, and revenue constraints restrict the quality of publications' output. High-quality analysis of government policies remains rare, but is on the increase. One such example of this is the detailed scrutiny of the Vitals case on government involvement in the privatization of government hospitals. Improvements

to the Freedom of Information Act in 2012 has improved media reporting, though numerous restrictions still exist and newspapers are often unable to obtain relevant data. The 2021 Media Pluralism Monitor has repeated much of its earlier criticism of the media in Malta, assigning Malta a medium-risk score for the fundamental protection of journalists, and a high-risk score for market pluralism and political independence. Media outlets in 2021 have been criticized for leaking information which may jeopardize the ability for several high-profile cases to receive a fair hearing. This includes the murder trial of Daphne Caruana Galizia. State media provides space to a diverse range of opinion and independent media programs. However, it has also come under criticism for increasing editorial control over content. Malta is one of the few countries in Europe in which there is no media-literacy policy aimed at giving citizens the critical skills needed for active participation in the contemporary exchange of information. Foreigners have been allowed to own a broadcasting media license since 2000.

Citation:

Aquilina, K Information Freedom at last, Times of Malta 22/08/12

<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180309/local/maltese-journalists-basic-protection-takes-a-dip-report.672768>Media

Media Pluralism Monitor 2021

Malta Today 06/03/2019 Editors Sound warning over future of the press

Malta Today 11/02/2022 From Vials to where...timeline of a privatisation gone wrong

Times of Malta 14/10/21 TVM's counter current affairs

Mexico

Score 5

The quality of the media is mixed. The quality of some Mexico City newspapers and magazines is high, but the majority of the press, and particularly radio and TV focus mainly on entertainment. This is particularly troublesome as there is a high degree of media concentration, with only two national TV companies (Televisa and TV Azteca) controlling 94% of commercial TV frequencies. These companies have similar programming and political inclinations, and account for 76% of the political news content consumed by Mexicans. The Mexican NGO Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social claims that the concentration of media ownership in only a few hands undermines media pluralism. On the supply side, producing high-quality journalism remains a challenge. Particularly on security-related issues, the increasing levels of violence against individuals and organizations producing critical and investigative journalism often results in self-censorship.

At the same time, media diversity has strongly increased in the last decade, largely thanks to online media, and Mexicans do have access to high-quality offerings if they are interested. Moreover, information on Mexican politics is easily accessible from U.S.-based and Latin American media outlets. However, this diversity in content and quality has little impact for the majority of the population, as only a very small minority of Mexicans use the internet and newspapers as their main sources of political information.

President López Obrador's government is critical of the media, with the president personally criticizing the mainstream media for condoning fraud in previous elections and allegedly treating him unfairly. Social media plays a more important role for the new government. With his daily press conference, broadcast on YouTube, López Obrador avoids critical questions and circumvents traditional media, while also establishing a direct link to the people in a typically populist manner.

Citation:

MOM (2018). Media Ownership Monitor Mexico: Who owns the media?. <http://mexico.mom-rsf.org/>

New Zealand

Score 5

The New Zealand media landscape is dominated by commercial companies, the largest of which are controlled by international conglomerates. While the newspaper segment, which is split between New Zealand Media and Entertainment (The New Zealand Herald) and Stuff (The Dominion, The Press), does generally provide high-quality content on New Zealand politics, the same cannot be said about television and radio. TV broadcasters mainly focus on entertainment, the only major exceptions being publicly owned Television New Zealand (1 News, Q+A) and Three (Newshub). However, in 2020, U.S. media company MediaWorks sold the Three network to Discovery. To date, Three's news and current affairs programs have been retained despite early concern (Jennings 2021). Meanwhile, among radio stations, it is essentially only publicly owned Radio New Zealand that produces programs on domestic politics (e.g., First Up, Five O'clock Report, The Panel). Alongside these mainstream outlets, a number of independent online news outlets (e.g., The Spinoff, Newsroom and The Conversation NZ) produce high-quality journalism and academic commentary that is often picked up by the mainstream media.

Citation:

Jennings (2021) Discovery's plans for TV3 revealed. Stuff. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/300335028/discoverys-plans-for-tv3-revealed>

Poland

Score 5

In Poland, the division of the media is less about information or entertainment than about political divides. Government decisions are widely covered by all main TV and radio stations, but there are few print outlets, and TV and radio stations that have been able to resist political pressure. Due to its biased approach, the public TVP is often referred to as TV-PiS. Jacek Kurski, a PiS party ideologist, is still the TV director, and he hired several party loyal journalists to be anchors for the news shows and other relevant positions. The leading news show on TVP – Wiadomości – has lost almost 20% of its viewers since 2015. In the private media, despite a tendency

toward infotainment, the quality of reporting, especially of the two major TV companies, POLSAT and TVN, has increased. Rzeczpospolita, the second-largest daily paper in Poland, has benefited from a change in ownership and editorial staff and has become less politically partisan. Generally, survey respondents' party affiliations continue to influence the level to which they trust public or private TV and radio organizations (CBOS 2020). In 2020, 86% of PiS supporters thought the TVP public TV station is "good," while only 8% of the supporters of the oppositional Civic Coalition (KO) held the same opinion. By contrast, 82% of KO supporters trusted TVN, for PiS supporters at least 45% supported that view.

Citation:

CBOS (2020): Opinie o stacjach telewizyjnych i radiowych. Komunikat z Bada, No. 147/2020, Warsaw (https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_147_20.PDF).

Slovakia

Score 5

The quality of media reporting in Slovakia is limited. The public TV and radio stations provide daily news programs and some analytical, critical programs on a weekly basis. However, much of the commentary is superficial, and debates usually serve as a vehicle for the views of the parliamentary parties. The commercialization of nationwide broadcasters, with a consequent negative impact on public-interest news and current-affairs coverage, has not left the public stations untouched. TA3, a private TV channel dedicated to news, is heavily influenced by its owner, who allegedly sponsors SNS and its leader. The commercial media sector tends to eschew in-depth analysis of current affairs and instead follows an infotainment or scandal-driven news agenda. As for the print media, the recent ownership changes have raised concerns about the political agenda of the new owners and the resulting decline in journalistic quality. A new risk is the growing popularity of conspiracy websites, many of which are sponsored by Russia. The Kuciak and Kušnírová murders have somehow united journalists and have fostered interest in investigative journalism, but have not changed the structural constraints on media quality. A positive development is the increase in quality, and broadening of readership, of the two news portals Aktuálny.sk and Denník N. The new Prime Minister Igor Matovič initially announced the publication of a government journal to inform the public, but the center-right government has wisely chosen not to pursue this idea.

Slovenia

Score 5

By facilitating a replacement of in-depth analysis by a preoccupation with scandals, whether real or alleged, the growing polarization of the media in Slovenia has infringed upon the quality of media reporting. The public media – especially television and radio broadcasters, which have traditionally provided high-quality information about government decisions – have under the influence of political and

even societal polarization become more biased and selective, especially since the Janša government took office. It must be critically noted that under the Janša government, media freedoms and pluralism are increasingly considered to be at risk due to increasing news media penetration and commercial or owner influence over editorial content.

The media was often criticized by academia, the non-governmental sector and political parties from both ends of the spectrum for not providing enough expert and high-quality information during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for giving too much media attention to anti-COVID-19 and anti-vaccine movements. Moreover, the government plays an important role in silencing critics, denying journalists access to accurate and relevant information, and proposed changes to media laws.

Citation:

MILOSAVLJEVIC, Marko, BILJAK GERJEVIC, Romana, 2021. Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era : application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, AALBANIA, MONTENEGRO, THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, SERBIA & TURKEY IN THE YEAR 2020. Country report : Slovenia, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Retrieved from Cadmus, European University Institute Research Repository, at: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/67818>

Bulgaria

Score 4

High-quality journalism is secondary to the owners' respective business interests in print media. However, high-quality investigative journalism and political commentary remained available in print, electronic and online media.

This seemingly small number of media outlets, which are subject to restrictions and at times oppressed, successfully changed public opinion in 2020 by providing timely information on the government's and prosecutor general's actions, thereby fueling the public discontent that eventually brought about political change.

Before 2021, most major media organizations tended to frame government decisions in terms of personalized power politics. They elicited comments from politicians only, which diverted attention away from independent opinion and the substance of policy toward entertainment or sensationalism. There was little coverage of the preparatory stages of policy decisions. When coverage began, basic information about a given decision or policy was provided, but typically without any deep analysis of its substance and societal relevance. In some cases in 2020, outlets were actively pressured not to cover substantive issues; in one particularly egregious example, one of the national radio service's stations was taken off the air for several hours with the aim of preventing a well-known journalist from asking questions and analyzing the ongoing process of selecting the new prosecutor general.

Media coverage of COVID-19 issues was atrocious and contributed to Bulgaria's failed vaccination campaign. Mainstream media regularly invited and left unchallenged numerous speakers who peddled fake news and misinformation.

Reporting on civil rights also does not meet high ethical standards. In many cases, NGO representatives have in the past been invited to discuss issues together with politicians from the far right who are then allowed to verbally attack the opponent. Citing the need to represent “both sides,” journalists have tolerated this kind of approach.

These kinds of things are on the decline thanks to the 2021 elections, improved pluralism and the new governing coalition that has replaced a government dominated by a single party.

The number of online media outlets is increasing, and their importance is growing. These outlets offer coverage of policy decisions that is in some cases timelier and provides more in-depth reporting on topical issues. The investigative reporting provided by the Radio Free Europe outlet for Bulgaria reestablished online in 2019 had an immediate impact on the two most serious corruption scandals of that year – the real-estate dealings of high-level officials and the violation of municipal construction regulations by the head of the anti-corruption agency.

Chile

Score 4

Legal norms are published in the Official Journal (Diario Oficial de la República de Chile), the state outlet dependent on the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública). Its print version was terminated on 17 August 2016. Since then, the Official Journal has been available only in an online edition.

In general terms, Chile’s newspapers and the main public TV stations report tabloid news, and employ bold headlines and techniques with strong popular and infotainment appeal. Furthermore, statistics released by the National Television Council (Consejo Nacional de Televisión, CNTV) show that, on average, TV stations and radio stations tend to broadcast less than five hours per week of in-depth discussions on political events and information. More than 50% of the news presented through publicly accessible channels is dedicated to sports and crime. Surveys indicate that the Chilean audience would prefer less sports news and more focus on national and international politics. Due to the biased media landscape, there is a strong ideological framing of political information and policy discussion.

A few alternative and independent online news media organizations offer positive exceptions to this rule, tending to be of higher quality and offering in-depth investigative journalism.

Chile’s largest free TV station (Televisión Nacional de Chile, TVN) is state-owned and required by law to provide balanced and equal access to all political views and parties – a regulation which is overseen by the CNTV. Although La Nación and TVN are state-owned, they must operate according to market rules; they have to fund

themselves by relying on advertising and high audience ratings. In 2018, the Senate approved additional \$47 million in funding for TVN in order to save the channel from bankruptcy.

During the mass protests of October 2019, misinformation regarding the backgrounds of allegedly involved actors was published even by large newspapers such as *La Tercera*. Following the intervention of a public prosecutor, a number of print publications offered a joint public apology.

Citation:

Official Journal of the Chilean Republic (Diario Oficial de la República de Chile), <https://www.diariooficial.interior.gob.cl>, last accessed: 13 January 2022.

Centro de Investigación Periodística (CIPER), “Reporte del Instituto Reuters incluye a CIPER como uno de los medios digitales más leídos de Chile”, 23 June 2021, <https://www.ciperchile.cl/2021/06/23/reporte-del-instituto-reuters-incluye-a-ciper-como-uno-de-los-medios-digitales-mas-leidos-de-chile>, last accessed: 13 January 2022.

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Romania

Score 4

Media coverage of government decisions and public policy continues to be highly partisan and emphasize political scandals and politicians’ personalities rather than in-depth policy analysis. Many journalists believe that their media environment is protected from outside threats, although Romania ranks first among EU member states in the spread of “fake news.” There is increased anxiety that Russia might exploit Romanian media’s limited ability to counter disinformation by fueling protests on the eve of the presidential election, funding fringe political parties, and spreading fake news to provoke civil unrest and divide society. These disinformation efforts are often helped by Romanian actors voluntarily or inadvertently. Romania has begun to fight disinformation and external media infringements, although many journalists claim that the Romanian government is the main threat to press freedom. Some journalists believe that pressures from western partners over Romania’s widespread corruption has prompted the Social Democratic party to be more critical of the West, which results in high levels of fake news that affect the uninformed citizens of rural Romania in particular.

Disinformation in Romania has had deadly consequences over the last two years, as false information circulating across the internet has hindered vaccine uptake to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Romania continues to struggle with high levels of corruption and a media environment dominated by wealthy individuals with political interests, which influences the quality of information available.

The media landscape in 2020–2021 was dominated by COVID-19-related restrictions on information flows and distortions of the media market created by government financing. The government’s public information campaign paid €1 million for ads about the pandemics and preventive measures. Mainstream channels applauded this massive aid, but some media groups turned down the money, and warned about attempts to buy off the silence or goodwill of channels and commentators. The sums were distributed according to ratings and/or readerships, with local media receiving only 5%. The bulk went to mainstream TV channels, which did not suffer much in the crisis, as their viewing figures went up during lockdown. Paradoxically, the winners were active sources of conspiracy theories about COVID-19 and vaccines. Thus, an ill-considered measure created a public subsidy for irresponsible propaganda and clickbait, in exchange for toning down criticism against certain parties, politicians and policies. In addition, municipal governments launched their own “information campaigns” paid for from local budgets. In Bucharest, for example, the outgoing mayor spent €400,000 on ads promoting “completed projects” (some fake), when she sought re-election. Across central and local governments, there are signs of media market distortion, press clientelization and illicit campaigning that are unlikely to be investigated since the media regulator (CNA) and electoral authority (PEA) are too weak and politically subordinated.

The state of emergency decree allowed authorities to block websites when content promoted fake news about COVID-19 and prevention measures. A Strategic Communication Group, consisting of government officials, decided on instances of trespass, while the telecom authority (ANCOM) implemented the decisions. There was no mechanism for appeal. However, the suspended websites could create clones on servers outside Romania. Moreover, authorities assured “recognized media channels” that they would not be blocked, which just increased the confusion and impression of arbitrariness. Eventually 15 websites of marginal importance were blocked but restored when the emergency situation was lifted in mid-May.

The activity of the CNA, the state media regulator, was interrupted between February 10 and May 11 as four senior positions were left vacant and could only be filled with parliament’s approval.

Citation:

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Hungary

Score 3

Fidesz’s increasing control over the media has gone hand in hand with a decline in the quality of media reporting. There is relatively little in-depth analysis of government decisions in the state-controlled public media, or in those private outlets

close to Fidesz. Instead, the pro-government media have waged a permanent war against the opposition, accusing the opposition of being traitors to the nation. This war has included the systemic “personality killing” of all kinds of actors on the opposition side. Since 2017, the government-controlled media has lost about 300 court cases for publishing fake news about opposition actors, while independent media outlets have lost only seven court cases for criticizing the Orbán regime.

Turkey

Score 2

A media-ownership structure based on industrial conglomerates (the so-called Mediterranean or polarized pluralist media model), the government’s clear-cut differentiation between pro and anti-government media, and the increasingly polarized public discourse make it difficult for journalists to provide substantial information to the public. News coverage and debates are mainly one-sided in the pro-government media, while self-censorship is common in the mainstream, neutral media. Media ownership, and direct and indirect government intervention in private media outlets and journalism obscure the objective analyses of government policies.

Broadcasts by the state-owned TRT heavily support the ruling party. RTUK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) as an oversight organization is neither independent nor impartial. During the review period, RTUK imposed harsh monetary penalties on voices critical of the government, while largely ignoring regulatory violations by pro-government channels. The rapid closure of OLAY TV in less than a month – as a result of government pressure – was the latest example of the limits of media freedom.

In this context, the free and independent media is a key nongovernmental check on governmental power. While small-scale digital brands continue to provide alternative perspectives, they have not managed to achieve significant reach. Many showcase stories from international brands (e.g., BBC Turkish, DW, and Euronews), as they lack the staff to generate substantial original content. Other perspectives are provided by foreign media outlets, such as the Russian-backed Sputnik and a new Turkish version of the (UK-based) Independent, which is financed and run by the Saudi Research and Marketing Group, which has close links to the Saudi royal family.

The strengthening of a few pro-government oligarchs in the media sector has further curtailed media freedom. In 2020, monetary fines were imposed in 57 cases on a large number of radio and TV channels. In addition, 24 programs were suspended. In October 2019, RTUK announced that it would silence any voice opposing the ongoing military operation in Turkey. The government seems to be taking further steps to undermine the already fragile state of media freedom. For instance, a new law passed in July 2020 (“Arrangement of Internet Publication and Combating Crimes Committed through These Publication”) introduced heavy fines and the potential of bandwidth restrictions for online content producers that do not comply

with regulations. This was widely perceived as a step toward eliminating opposition programming on YouTube. In addition, opposition journalists including Levent Gültekin and Erk Acarer have been frequently threatened and even physically attacked.

Citation:

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