Audiences’ Media Practices in Ten European Countries

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Executive summary

This report provides a contextual and methodological overview of the transnational qualitative study conducted within WP.5 - *Demand Side*, Task 5.3 - *Ethnographic research on media practices in ten European countries*. Specifically, the report refers to **D5.4 - *Media practices of the public in ten European countries***, with the collection of information on the socio-political contexts and activities carried out by the ten research teams.

In order to thoroughly explore the political and media meanings and expectations of the European citizens, it was necessary to adopt techniques that were sufficiently flexible to ten different social contexts and as many research teams. As outlined in D5.3 - Methodological protocol for ethnographic research, the transnational study, conducted between June and October 2024, therefore proceeded with two primary qualitative research techniques: semi-structured interviews and focus groups, encompassing a total of over 400 respondents (**see Table 1**).

Table 1. Focus groups and interviews overview

TEAM	FOCUS GROUPS	INTERVIEWS
OEAW & COMMIT (Austria)	4	/
OEAW & COMMIT (Germany)	4	/
CU	4	/
IULM	4	40
JU	4	/
Lusofona Uni	4	10
TLU	4	15
IMT	4	11
MIC	5	/
MI	4	/
TOTAL	**41**	**76**

The decision to conduct a qualitative study on such a large sample is quite unusual, as confirmed by the extant literature, or rather the lack thereof (Wendt, 2020). The considerable technical and organisational difficulties, as well as interpretative discrepancies and the risk of ethnocentric bias, do not encourage its application (Martinus & Hedgcock, 2015).

Consequently, a series of strategies were adopted to address the qualitative study (**see Table 2**). With regard to data collection, IULM (WP5 coordinator) developed a methodological protocol, providing guidelines on the topics and activities to be carried out in each country.

Secondly, due to the differing resources allocated to each team for this task, data analysis – based on a Grounded Theory perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and a horizontal reading of European data – was centralised exclusively within the IULM team. This approach was adopted in order to minimise the impact on each partner's material resources, thereby facilitating a more equitable distribution of tasks, taking into account the different capacities and availability of each team.

In addition, in order to assist the IULM team in reading the data and avoiding cultural misunderstandings, it was decided to use D5.4 as an interpretative and methodological support tool. This decision involved creating a clear framework that included both contextual and methodological elements. This framework ensured that the collected data was systematically recorded and analysed, thereby facilitating an accurate and consistent interpretation of the results.

To facilitate coordination, our team provided partners with tables to complete, covering both the cultural and political context of their national landscapes, as well as the technical and methodological aspects related to the interviews and focus groups. This allowed to:

- Understand the contextual scenario in which the data were produced;
- Track the research techniques adopted by each team;
- Create a space for dialogue where researchers could share their reflections;
- Reflect on the potential and limitations of transnational qualitative research, particularly from a methodological perspective.

The following report is therefore a collection of these contextual and methodological tables, organised by research group. It is important to note that the IULM team did not modify the tables in any way, leaving each group free to report the data as they preferred. IULM team was responsible for writing the descriptive introductory summaries, which are available at the beginning of each national section.

Table 2. Methodological Summary Table

Section	Description
Adopted Strategies	Development of a common methodological protocol (D5.3) and centralization of qualitative analysis at IULM, using a Grounded Theory approach.
Challenges	Ethnocentric bias and linguistic-interpretative differences identified as key issues in transnational qualitative research.
Tools and Support Instruments	Use of D5.4 as methodological support tool; standardized tables for contextual and methodological data collection.
Context Tables	To understand national contexts, document local research methods, enable cross-team dialogue, and reflect on transnational qualitative approaches.
Preliminary Findings	No major issues reported; all teams followed the protocol. Technical feasibility confirmed. Full assessment pending final data analysis.

Although it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions about the research's impact, the insights gathered in this report suggest the feasibility, at least from a technical point of view, of incorporating qualitative research into transnational research as well.

No team reported problems in complying with the general guidelines of Methodological Protocol D5.3, both in terms of topics covered and methodological approaches, confirming that the established pre-conditions ensured that all teams, despite their differences, could properly adapt to the research criteria.

With careful coordination and cooperation between the partners involved, it seems therefore possible to minimize the epistemological differences among scientific actors, ensuring a balance between shared goals and contextual specificities. Nevertheless, as previously indicated, the validity of this project's qualitative approach, especially from an interpretative perspective, should only be confirmed at the end of the data analysis, thereby assessing the efficacy of the adopted contextual methodologies in ensuring a valid cross-cultural analysis.

Austria

TEAM: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (**OEAW**); Community Media Institute for Continuing Education, Research and Consultancy (**COMMIT**).

Authors: Maren Beaufort, Tania Napravnik.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

The 2024 elections resulted in a **fragmented parliament**. The FPÖ leads coalition talks, but hesitancy from other parties (ÖVP, SPÖ) may delay government formation. Key national debates involve **economy, immigration, and EU relations**. A minority government or new elections in 2025 remain possible[1].

Austria features strong **regional diversity**: Vienna is a cultural center; the west has Alpine influences; the south reflects Slovenian ties. German is the official language, with various dialects and **minority** languages. Catholicism is dominant, though secularization is increasing

ORF dominates the **public media space**, alongside a few politically aligned newspapers. Despite digital growth, traditional outlets like Kronen Zeitung hold significant sway. Concerns persist over **media bias** and political influence through government advertising.

Key insight: *Austria faces political fragmentation, regional diversity, and challenges in maintaining media impartiality, all of which will shape its future direction.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS
Number of sessions	4
Participant Distribution	50% Vienna (urban), 50% Lower Austria (rural). Clear urban–rural divide observed.
Observations	The groups expressed significantly lower trust in the existing democratic system and traditional mass media as a reliable source of information, with public broadcasting also facing notable skepticism—despite some acknowledgment of its role

Key Insight: *The fragmented political context, combined with Austria's structurally imbalanced media ecosystem, presents a complex environment for democracy and media trust.*

[1] FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl attempted to form a coalition with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), but talks broke down in February 2025 due to disagreements on key issues such as the distribution of ministries, relations with the EU and migration policy. On 27 February 2025, a government coalition between ÖVP, SPÖ and NEOS was announced. Currently, no new elections are expected in 2025, except for unexpected events.

1.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country[2]
Austria is in the midst of complex coalition negotiations following the National Council elections held on September 29, 2024. The election results confirmed Austria's political landscape, with no party securing an outright majority. Coalition talks are expected to extend for months, as political leaders struggle to form a stable government. **Election Results and Party Positions on the Political Spectrum** • Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ, far-right): 30.1% • Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ, center-left): 25.4% • Austrian People's Party (ÖVP, center-right): 20.3% • The Greens (left/green politics): 9.8% • NEOS (liberal/pro-market centrist party): 8.5% The FPÖ has emerged as the strongest force, mainly due to its tough stance on immigration, Euroscepticism, and anti-establishment rhetoric. Its leader, Herbert Kickl, now seeks to form a government, but potential coalition partners are hesitant. Both the SPÖ and the ÖVP have expressed reluctance to collaborate with the FPÖ due to its controversial positions and confrontational leadership style. If no coalition agreement is reached in the coming months, Austria could face either a fragile minority government or new elections in early 2025. **Austria's Political Spectrum Compared to Italy** To help Italian colleagues understand Austria's political situation, here is a comparison to Italy's party landscape: • FPÖ (far-right, nationalist, anti-immigration, Eurosceptic) → Comparable to Lega (under Salvini) or Fratelli d'Italia (under Meloni) but with an even stronger anti-establishment and confrontational stance. • ÖVP (center-right, conservative, pro-business, EU mainstream) → Similar to Forza Italia, though more socially conservative in certain aspects. • SPÖ (center-left, social democratic, pro-European) → Comparable to Partito Democratico (PD) but with a stronger focus on welfare state policies. • Greens (left/green politics, pro-EU, climate-focused) → Similar to the Italian Greens (Europa Verde). • NEOS (liberal, pro-market, pro-EU, reform-oriented) → Most similar to Azione/Italia Viva.

[2] Government, recent elections or upcoming elections, predominant political currents, possible political crises to take into account

Key Political Challenges and Potential Crises

- Coalition Gridlock: Austria's proportional representation system has historically led to complex coalition formations. The FPÖ's rise makes this even more difficult, as other parties remain hesitant to collaborate with it.
- Economic Concerns: Inflation, rising living costs, and energy prices were dominant campaign themes. The next government must address economic stagnation while managing public spending.
- Immigration and Integration: A central issue of the campaign, with the FPÖ advocating for stricter policies, while the Greens and SPÖ push for more integration-oriented approaches.
- EU Relations: Depending on the government's composition, Austria's traditionally moderate EU stance could shift. A coalition with the FPÖ might lead to a more confrontational approach toward Brussels, similar to Hungary's or Poland's policies.
- Party System: Austria's traditional parties (SPÖ and ÖVP) have weakened while the rise of the FPÖ reflects a broader European trend of right-wing populist parties gaining traction.

Update as of February 28, 2025: Austria's New Government Formed

After months of intense negotiations following the September 29, 2024 elections, Austria has now finalized its new governing coalition. The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), and the liberal NEOS have reached an agreement to form a centrist coalition, excluding the Freedom Party (FPÖ) despite its position as the largest party in the elections.

Specific cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics[3]

Austria is a country with a rich cultural heritage and regional diversity, shaped by its federal structure of nine states (Bundesländer) and its historical role as a multinational empire. Each region maintains distinct traditions, dialects, and cultural influences, reflecting Austria's complex history and geographical position at the crossroads of Central Europe.

There are significant differences between the eastern and western parts of the country:

- Vienna, the capital, is a cultural hub known for its classical music legacy, coffeehouse tradition, and a cosmopolitan atmosphere shaped by centuries as the center of the Habsburg Monarchy.
- Tyrol and Vorarlberg in the west have strong Alpine traditions, with influences from Switzerland and Bavaria.
- Styria and Carinthia share strong links to Slovenia, with local customs and cuisine reflecting cross-border influences.

[3] Autonomous communities, regional/linguistic minorities.

- Burgenland has historically been home to Austrian-Hungarian influences and maintains cultural traditions tied to its historical Hungarian and Croatian communities.

Austria is historically a Catholic country with approximately 55-60% of the population adhering to the faith. The Catholic Church has played a significant role in shaping Austria's cultural traditions and public holidays. However, secularization is increasing, and the percentage of practicing Catholics has been declining in recent decades.

Other religious communities in Austria include: Protestants (3-4%); Muslims (around 8%), with higher concentrations in urban areas like Vienna; Jewish communities are relatively small today, primarily centered in Vienna; Buddhists, Hindus, and other religious minorities also have a presence, reflecting Austria's growing multicultural society.

The official language of Austria is Standard German (Hochdeutsch), but regional dialects and minority languages play a significant role in cultural identity. Austrian German has distinct vocabulary and pronunciation differences from the German spoken in Germany, influenced by historical Habsburg-era multilingualism. Dialects are spoken across most of Austria, with strong regional variations between western, central, and southern forms. Recognized minority languages include Hungarian and Croatian, Slovene and Romani.

In summary, Austria's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is a result of its historical legacy as a multicultural empire, its geographical location in Central Europe, and its modern identity as a federal state. Still, Austria's growing multicultural society continues to shape its national identity in the 21st century.

Traditional and digital information landscape[4]

Austria has a diverse and highly developed media landscape, characterized by a strong public service broadcasting system, a range of national and regional newspapers, and a growing digital media ecosystem. While Austria's media enjoys high press freedom, political influences remain significant.

Austria's public broadcasting system is dominated by the Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF), the country's public broadcaster, which plays a crucial role in news, culture, and entertainment programming. Like in Germany, ORF is primarily funded through a mandatory broadcasting fee, ensuring a degree of independence from commercial pressures.

ORF operates multiple television and radio stations, some of which achieve very high audience ratings.

[4] Overview of the main public broadcasters, national newspapers, public/private media, degree of politicisation of traditional media

ORF's flagship news program, *Zeit im Bild (ZiB)*, is widely regarded (and still, while declining) as one of Austria's most trusted news sources. However, ORF often faces accusations of political bias, particularly from right-wing parties like the FPÖ, which have criticized it for having a left-liberal editorial stance.

Austria's print media landscape is highly concentrated, with a small number of newspapers dominating the market. Unlike in Germany, where newspapers have a broader ideological spectrum, Austrian newspapers are often politically aligned, and some rely on government advertisements, raising concerns about editorial independence.

Conservative/Center-Right:

- *Die Presse*: Known for its economic focus and conservative-liberal editorial line.
- *Kronen Zeitung (Krone)*: Austria's largest tabloid, politically fluctuating but often leaning nationalist-populist.

Center-Left/Progressive:

- *Der Standard*: A left-liberal newspaper with a strong online presence.
- *Falter*: Investigative journalism with a progressive, often critical stance on the government.

Mainstream/Neutral:

- *Kurier*: Centrist, but historically closer to the ÖVP.
- *Profil*: Weekly political magazine, similar in style to the German *Der Spiegel*.

Austria's tabloid media (especially Kronen Zeitung) plays an outsized role in shaping public opinion, with the Krone reaching millions of readers daily and influencing political discourse.

Austria's private television market is significantly smaller than in Germany, as ORF still dominates. However, commercial broadcasters have grown in influence:

- ATV and Puls 4: Private broadcasters offering entertainment and some political debates.
- Servus TV: Owned by Red Bull, increasingly aligned with right-wing and nationalist viewpoints, often criticized for spreading populist and anti-establishment narratives.

Private radio stations cater to regional audiences, while Germany-based broadcasters like RTL Austria and ProSieben Austria also have a presence.

Austria's digital media ecosystem is growing rapidly, with traditional newspapers expanding their online platforms and new digital-only outlets emerging, however, less than in other European countries. However, Austria has a high degree of media concentration, limiting the diversity of online news sources.

In summary, Austria's information landscape is diverse but highly concentrated, with ORF playing a dominant role and a strong print and tabloid culture shaping public discourse.

Digital media is expanding, yet traditional outlets remain highly influential. However, the politicization of Austrian media is more pronounced than in Germany, raising concerns about press independence and journalistic impartiality. While Austria continues to uphold strong press freedom, the financial and political influence of the state on media outlets remains a contentious issue.

Any other information related to the national political/social/media landscape that, from your point of view, may be useful for the analysis.

Austria follows EU-wide legislation, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), while also implementing national regulations, for example against hate speech. Unlike Germany's NetzDG, Austria has introduced its own regulatory framework with the Communications Platforms Act (KoPl-G), which requires online platforms to remove illegal, etc. content within specific timeframes. This law closely resembles Germany's NetzDG but is tailored to the Austrian legal system. Additionally, the Austrian Media Act ("Mediengesetz") plays a crucial role in content liability, ensuring the accountability of media outlets.

A growing concern in Austria's media landscape is the role of government-funded advertisements in media outlets, as they may influence editorial independence.

1.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number focus groups	4
Time period	10/2024

Locations

50% of the participants were from urban Vienna, while the remaining 50% came from the surrounding rural areas. Vienna and the surrounding rural region of Lower Austria represent an insightful regional constellation that reflects pronounced structural contrasts.

Vienna, Austria’s capital and largest city, has a population of approximately 2 million and serves as the country's political, economic, and cultural hub. It is characterized by a high density of students, a strong service-oriented economy, and a well-developed infrastructure, particularly in the areas of education, research, and public administration. With an above-average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of around €65,000, Vienna stands as an economically thriving metropolitan region that continues to attract a dynamic influx of residents.

In contrast, the surrounding rural areas of Lower Austria display predominantly rural structures, often marked by demographic challenges such as population decline and aging, lower economic dynamism, and infrastructural disparities, particularly in terms of digital connectivity and public transportation.

The GDP per capita in these areas, at approximately €38,000, is significantly below that of the urban center. To counteract these imbalances, Lower Austria benefits from national and EU-funded regional development initiatives that aim to enhance economic diversification and infrastructural improvements.

(While the structural conditions between Vienna and Lower Austria and those of Germany`s Würzburg and its surrounding rural areas differ in scale, comparable dynamics emerge. Both cases illustrate the contrast between a prosperous urban center and a rural periphery facing economic and demographic challenges).

Recruitments

In addition to the predefined criteria of political interest and age, we paid attention to the balance of the following indicators during recruitment:

- Gender
- Urban/rural residency
- Highest level of education achieved

Review of activities carried out[5]
The politically interested groups were generally more active and adept, including in understanding and addressing the guiding questions. However, in the less politically interested groups—provided the participants were open and managed to gradually immerse themselves in the topic—interesting developmental processes occasionally emerged, leading to remarkable contextualization efforts. The focus groups varied in quality, with differences in engagement, group dynamics, and depth of discussion. Political interested participants were highly engaged and built on each other's points, while less interested participants required more facilitation to sustain dialogue. Recurring challenges included the need for clarification of key terms, frustration with media and politics, and difficulties in articulating complex thoughts. Additionally, facilitators had to intervene more frequently in the groups with lower political interest to maintain focus, whereas the groups with politically interested participants unfolded more organically. Despite these variations, all sessions provided valuable insights into perceptions of democracy, political participation, and media.
Additional elements to report
Compared to Germany, the Austrian groups expressed significantly lower trust in the existing democratic system and traditional mass media as a reliable source of information, with public broadcasting also facing notable skepticism—despite some acknowledgment of its role.

[5] Possible differences in the quality of the focus groups, recurring problems.

Czech Republic

TEAM: Charles University **(CU)**
Authors: Karolina Šimková, Jeffrey Wimmer, Nico Carpentier.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

The Czech Republic is led by a center-right coalition under Prime Minister Petr Fiala, with President Petr Pavel elected in 2023. The government faces **key challenges**, including economic recovery, the fallout from the war in Ukraine, and internal political tensions. Regional and Senate elections are slated for September 2024, while **populist opposition** figure Andrej Babiš remains a major player.

Czech society is largely **secular and linguistically uniform**, with Czech as the official language. Key minority groups include Slovaks, Roma, and a growing Ukrainian population since 2022. Though the country lacks autonomous regions, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia preserve strong regional identities.

The media landscape is a dynamic mix of **robust public broadcasters** and competitive private outlets, with a clear shift toward digital news platforms like Seznamzpravy.cz and Novinky.cz. However, media ownership remains heavily concentrated, often linked to political figures, raising concerns over editorial independence and media freedom.

Key Insight*: The Czech Republic's center-right government faces economic, political, and post-Ukraine war challenges. Despite regional identities, the country remains largely secular and linguistically uniform. While digital media is on the rise, concerns over media concentration and political influence persist.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS
Number of sessions	4
Participant Distribution	50% Prague (urban), 50% Olomouc (rural)
Observations	Sessions outside the capital ensured a **mix of urban and regional viewpoints**. Olomouc, a mid-sized city in Moravia, helped capture perspectives beyond the Prague-centric view. Participants from rural areas brought additional nuance on social and political engagement. Older groups (35+) were **more critical** and less structured, while **younger groups** were more focused and optimistic.

Key Insight: *Older participants showed greater scepticism toward politics and media. However, all participants felt safe expressing their views and many showed interest in further discussion.*

2.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
Government and Political Landscape: The Czech Republic's political scene is currently dominated by a coalition government led by Prime Minister Petr Fiala, representing the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The coalition, known as the SPOLU alliance, also includes the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and TOP 09. This centre-right coalition governs in partnership with the liberal Pirate Party and the centrist Mayors and Independents (STAN). The government faces challenges related to economic recovery post-COVID-19, the ongoing impact of the war in Ukraine, and addressing the rising cost of living. The president of the Czech Republic is Petr Pavel who won the elections in 2023 to Andrej Babiš. **Recent and Upcoming Elections:** The most recent elections were the parliamentary elections held in October 2021, which led to the formation of the current coalition government. The next significant elections in the Czech Republic will be the regional elections and Senate elections, which are scheduled to take place on September 20-21, 2024. Also, in or before October 2025 will take place the next parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic. Additionally, the Czech Republic will have its next presidential election in 2028, although no major developments or candidates have been confirmed for this distant election. **Predominant Political Currents:** The predominant political currents in the Czech Republic reflect a spectrum of centre-right to centrist ideologies, particularly within the ruling coalition. However, there is also significant influence from populist and nationalist elements, particularly within the opposition, led by former Prime Minister (and entrepreneur) Andrej Babiš's ANO 2011 movement. **Potential Political Crises:** The Czech political landscape could be susceptible to several potential crises. Key among these is the ongoing debate about the Czech Republic's role in the European Union, especially concerning its response to the Ukraine conflict and energy dependency on Russia. Additionally, the economic challenges of rising inflation and energy prices could strain the coalition, potentially leading to fractures within the government. The influence of media ownership by powerful business figures with political ties remains a significant issue, as it could affect public trust and media independence. In summary, the Czech Republic's political environment is stable but characterised by underlying tensions that could escalate, depending on economic developments and the handling of key foreign and domestic policy issues. The coalition government’s ability to manage these challenges will be crucial in maintaining its grip on power amidst an evolving political landscape.

Specific cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics

Cultural and Religious Landscape: The Czech Republic is characterized by a largely secular society, with a significant portion of the population identifying as non-religious. According to the 2021 census, less than 19% of Czechs reported belonging to a religious group, with the Roman Catholic Church being the most prominent among those who do. The cultural landscape is heavily influenced by the country's history, with a strong emphasis on traditions linked to Czech folklore, literature, and the arts.

Linguistic Characteristics: The official language of the Czech Republic is Czech, which is spoken by the vast majority of the population. The country is relatively linguistically homogeneous, but there are notable linguistic minorities. Slovak, which is closely related to Czech, is spoken by a small percentage of the population, largely due to historical ties between the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Regional and Linguistic Minorities: Despite its overall homogeneity, the Czech Republic is home to several regional and linguistic minorities. The largest minority groups include Slovaks, Roma, and Ukrainians. The Roma community, while dispersed throughout the country, has a distinct cultural presence and faces ongoing social challenges. The Ukrainian minority has grown significantly due to the influx of refugees following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Other notable minorities include the Vietnamese, Polish, and German communities, each contributing to the country's multicultural fabric.

Autonomous Communities: The Czech Republic does not have autonomous communities. However, there are three regions with distinct cultural identities that are Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, where local traditions and dialects are preserved. These regions maintain their own cultural practices and have a strong sense of regional identity, even though they do not possess political autonomy.

In conclusion, while the Czech Republic is predominantly Czech-speaking and secular, it is home to a variety of cultural and linguistic minorities that enrich its social fabric. These groups contribute to the diversity of the nation, each bringing unique traditions and languages to the broader Czech culture.

Traditional and digital information landscape

Public Broadcasters: The Czech Republic's media landscape is characterized by a dual system of public and private media, with public broadcasters playing a significant role. The main public broadcasters are Czech Television (Česká televize) and Czech Radio (Český rozhlas).

Czech Television operates multiple channels, including ČT1, ČT2, and the 24-hour news channel ČT24, which is a key source of news and current affairs for many citizens. Czech Radio, with its flagship stations such as Radiožurnál and ČRo Plus, provides extensive news coverage and cultural programming. Both institutions are regulated by the Radio and Television Broadcasting Council (RRTV) and are funded primarily through license fees.
A key player in the Czech media landscape is ČTK (Czech News Agency), the national news agency, which provides news content to a wide range of media outlets across the country.

National Newspapers: The print media sector in the Czech Republic is dominated by a few key players. The most widely read daily newspaper is Blesk, a tabloid owned by Czech News Center (owned by a media company in which Czech entrepreneurs Daniel Křetínský and Patrik Tkáč have the biggest share), followed by Mladá fronta DNES, a quality daily owned by the Mafra media group (Karel Pražák). Other significant newspapers include Právo or Hospodářské noviny. Many of these newspapers also have a strong digital presence. The Czech print media has seen a decline in readership in recent years, with many newspapers increasingly relying on their online platforms to reach audiences.

Public and Private Media: In addition to the robust public broadcasting sector, the Czech Republic has a diverse range of private media outlets. Major private television broadcasters include TV Nova and Prima, which together account for a significant share of the television audience. These stations, like their public counterparts, offer news programming but are primarily driven by entertainment content. The private radio sector is also well-developed, with stations like Radio Impuls and Radio Blaník enjoying large audiences.
In the Czech Republic, the media are significantly concentrated in the capital Prague and regional media do not have a very strong position.

Digital Information Landscape: The digital media landscape in the Czech Republic is vibrant, with a significant shift towards online news consumption. Platforms such as Seznamzprávy.cz, Novinky.cz, and iDnes.cz are among the most visited news websites, reflecting the importance of digital media. These platforms are often affiliated with traditional media companies but also include digital-only outlets. The most visited news websites, Seznamzpravy.cz and Novinky.cz, are owned by Seznam.cz, a company that operates a search engine of the same name. In addition to news, Seznam.cz offers various services on its website, which helps drive traffic to these news platforms. Additionally, Parlamentní listy, known for its controversial and populist content, also attracts a considerable online audience. As in other countries, social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok are increasingly popular sources of news, especially among younger demographics while Facebook is popular among older users.

Degree of Politicisation of Traditional Media: The traditional media in the Czech Republic has a complex relationship with politics, marked by significant ownership concentration among a few influential business figures. For example, the Mafra media group, which owns several major newspapers, was between 2013 and 2023 controlled by Agrofert, a company in a trust fund owned by former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.

This ownership structure has raised concerns about the potential for political influence over editorial content. Such concentration of media ownership has led to a degree of politicisation within the media, where the interests of media owners may influence the framing and coverage of news stories. In summary, the Czech Republic's media landscape is a blend of traditional and digital platforms, with public broadcasters maintaining a strong presence alongside a competitive private sector. However, the concentration of media ownership and the potential for political influence remain critical issues, impacting the overall independence and diversity of the media.
Any other information related to the national political/social/media landscape that, from your point of view, may be useful for the analysis
The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have become strong topics often used by populists. As a result of (not only) this, but Czech society is also characterised by low trust in institutions such as politics and the media.

2.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number of focus groups	4
Time period	June 18, 19, 25, 26 2024

Locations

- **Prague (2 FGs), Olomouc (2 FGs), at university premises.**

  We chose to hold half of the focus groups outside the capital to ensure we captured the perspectives of people from other regions, which might differ. We chose Olomouc which is the sixth most populous city in the Czech Republic and has about 100 thousand inhabitants. It is located in the Moravia region. Additionally, we asked the recruitment agency to include participants from smaller towns and villages near the two cities, allowing us to gather insights from both urban and rural areas.

Recruitments

- **By proxy (recruiting agency Resolution based in Prague with recruiters around the country).**

  We hired an external recruitment agency, providing them with a screening questionnaire to select participants. They received the guidelines in advance and then recruited participants in the area around Prague and Olomouc. Before each focus group, they also provided us with an overview of data about each participant, which we updated and uploaded to disk as an Excel spreadsheet called "Focus groups_Participants Overview_Charles Uni".

  The focus groups were sufficiently diverse in terms of participants. They were balanced in terms of age, gender, as well as education, income and more, as we specified to the agency. There were also participants from both rural and urban areas. Additionally, one participant was a member of the Vietnamese minority (P5) and one participant people with health conditions or impairments (P24).

Review of activities carried out

There was one brainstorming activity in each focus group - Participants named different activities they could take part in social/political events and the moderator wrote them down on a sheet of paper (photos of the sheets are attached in the folder). There were no significant differences in the quality of the focus groups.

However, in the two focus groups with participants over 35 years of age, it was more common for participants to interrupt each other, talk over one another, or stray off-topic. They also seemed less satisfied with the political situation and the media than the younger participants so the conversations were more negative and skeptical.

Despite the high temperatures during all four focus groups and the lack of air conditioning, which made it challenging for participants to remain engaged for the full two hours, the overall quality of the discussions was not significantly impacted.

We did not encounter any major issues throughout the focus groups. The recruitment of participants and the organization of the sessions went smoothly both before and during the events. On two occasions, one participant did not attend, resulting in two focus groups with ten participants and two with nine. Nevertheless, participants felt secure during the discussions and, despite a general sense of dissatisfaction, they were open and unafraid to express their views. No one left during the focus groups and at the end several expressed interest in the topic.

Estonia

TEAM: Tallinn University **(TLU)**
Authors: Alessandro Nanì, Kristiina Raud.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

Estonia's liberal government—led by the Reform Party, Estonia 200, and the Social Democrats—is approaching the 2025 local elections in a climate of political and social tension. A central issue is the voting rights of non-EU residents, particularly the sizable Russian-speaking community, many of whom hold Russian passports or lack formal citizenship.

The media landscape, though small, is dynamic: three major private groups and the public broadcaster ERR dominate the scene. Political leanings are generally muted due to the market size, though *Postimees* is seen as more conservative. Meanwhile, public dissatisfaction is rising over consecutive tax increases, and the political map is shifting.

Key Insight: *Estonia's upcoming local elections are not just about governance—they reflect deeper societal fractures over identity, citizenship, and geopolitics, with media consumption and political realignments playing a pivotal role in shaping public opinion.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS	INTERVIEWS
Number of sessions	4	15
Observations	A diverse range of participants was included, representing various sociodemographic backgrounds such as Russian-speakers, LGBT+ individuals, and people with disabilities. While recruitment was generally successful, some challenges were encountered in engaging Russian-speaking participants and individuals from the Nursipalu region due to trust issues and local tensions.	

Key Insight: *The qualitative research highlighted significant sociopolitical divides, particularly between Estonian and Russian-speaking communities, as well as the challenge of engaging marginalized groups, such as those from conflict zones or with differing views on sensitive issues like the war in Ukraine.*

3.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
The current government consists of the Reform party, Eesti 200 (Estonia 200), and the Social Democrats. Overall, it is a liberal government. The last national elections took place in 2023, European elections took place last year, and this year, in 2025, there will be the local elections. A prominent subject around the upcoming local elections has been the right to vote of non-EU citizens. Estonia has a large population of Russian-speaking people, some of who have a Russian passport or an undetermined nationality. This is a remnant of the time when Estonia regained its independence from the Soviet occupation and people were able to choose their citizenship or remain without one while retaining the right to live in Estonia and travel to Russia. After the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, there emerged a political discussion about whether nationals of hostile countries (Russia, Belarus) should have the right to vote (all non-citizen residents can vote in local elections). The current state is that they will still be able to vote this year. The war in Ukraine has also demonstrated the diverging worldviews among Estonian and Russian-speakers, as most Estonian-speakers support Ukraine while many Russian-speakers are on the side of Russia. Estonia has closed down official access to Russian media channels and supports sanctions. However, people are still able to access Russian media through different means. More widely, people in Estonia have been upset by several and consecutive recent tax raises which have caused dissatisfaction with the government. There have also been significant changes in the political landscape in the country, with the Center Party and the far-right EKRE losing many members, including prominent people, who have then joined other parties (causing some questions of their worldviews) and some of whom have even created a new conservative party. Essentially, these losses have largely diminished the current role of these parties.
Specific cultural, religion and linguistic characteristics
About a third of the population of Estonia consists of ethnic Russians or Russian speakers, many of whom consume media in Russian, including media from Russia. The north-eastern county of Ida-Virumaa which shared a border crossing point with Russia is largely populated by Russian-speakers, especially its biggest town Narva, which is predominantly Russian-speaking. The capital city Tallinn has the other highest concentration of Russian-speakers.

Traditional and digital information landscape
Three private groups (mostly with domestic owners: Delfi, Postimees, Õhtuleht) and one public broadcaster (ERR) dominate the market. Their portfolios include daily and weekly papers, local media, news portals, and radio and TV stations. Due to the small size of the market, it is not possible to have strong explicit political leanings, although Postimees is considered to be more conservative.
Any other information related to the national political/social/media landscape that, from your point of view, may be useful for the analysis
Despite a small country with a small language and a small market, the media landscape in the Estonian language is quite diverse, at least in terms of content if not pluralism. However, people often add foreign media to their media diets for a wider selection of topics and approaches. English and Russian are most accessible to a large number of people.

3.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number focus groups	4
Time period	June 2024
Locations	
All focus groups were conducted at Tallinn University. Tallinn was chosen as the only location after discussions with the recruiting agency for ease of organisations and likelihood of success. Geographic diversity was addressed in the interviews.	
Recruitments	
Participants were recruited by an agency as they had access to a large panel of people.	
Review of activities carried out	
The focus groups took place at Tallinn University as it was convenient for us to book rooms, order catering, and manage the recording of the discussions. The university is also located in the city center so it was thought to be a generally convenient option of participants. There were no issues with the organising or conducting of the focus groups	

Communication with the recruiting agency was also quick and effective. However, a few participants experienced issues with their Amazon gift cards which required additional communication with the agency to resolve.

3.3 General methodological notes: Interviews

<table>
<tr><th>Total number Interviews</th><td>15</td></tr>
<tr><th>Time period</th><td>July 2024 - February 2025</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Locations</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and in a few cases at Tallinn University. Zoom was chosen by participants who did not live in Tallinn or preferred an online meeting.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Recruitments</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interview participants were recruited as a convenience sample, with the aim to also include a variety of sociodemographic, including people from marginalised or vulnerable groups. For this reason, interview participants include people whose native language is Russian, LGBT+ people, Estonian citizens living abroad, a sign language user, a disabled person. The interviews also allowed for some geographic diversity within Estonia.

Recruitment was mostly easy, with a few exceptions. We did not succeed in recruiting someone from the Nursipalu region in south Estonia as that has recently been a place of disputes between the locals and the state in relation to a military training ground expansion.

We initially wished to include someone from the area due to democracy and media being relevant issues there. Another difficult demographic were Russian-speakers. As one contact said, they don’t trust enough to talk about their views on political issues. This is at least partially likely related to the different perceptions of the war in Ukraine among many Russian and Estonian speakers.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Review of activities carried out</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The main difference is in the length of the interviews. While some lasted for about an other, others lasted for 30-40 minutes. It depended on how much people had to say in response to our questions: how confident they felt in their views and whether they had any specific opinions on the matter.</td></tr>
</table>

France

TEAM: IMT – Atlantique **(IMT)**
Authors: Morgane Le Guyader, Inna Lyubareva , Romain Billot.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

Recent political turmoil in France has been shaped by the far-right RN party's rise in the 2024 European elections, prompting the dissolution of the National Assembly and a legislative election in July, which failed to produce a majority. Social unrest in territories like New Caledonia and Mayotte, coupled with the death of Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2025, highlights deep ideological divides.

France's commitment to a secular, indivisible republic contrasts with the recognition of regional languages and the colonial legacy of its overseas territories.

The French media landscape is characterized by a mix of public and private outlets, with growing concerns over media concentration and political bias. Independent digital platforms like Médiapart offer alternative voices, contributing to a more pluralistic, yet fragmented, media environment.

***Key Insight**: France's political instability, driven by the rise of the far-right and unrest in its overseas territories, underscores deep societal divisions, while the media landscape is increasingly fragmented, with concerns over concentration and political bias influencing public discourse.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS	INTERVIEWS
Number of sessions	4	11
Observations	The focus groups revealed unexpected political engagement, with participants expressing strong interest in the themes discussed, while the interviews – especially with individuals from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds - provided valuable insights into political contexts, both in France and their countries of origin. Participants across various political affiliations (from far-left to far-right) shared contrasting views on democracy, revealing diverse and complex political engagement across different groups.	

***Key Insight:** The focus groups and interviews revealed unexpected political engagement, with diverse participants offering unique insights on democracy, shaped by their personal and social backgrounds.*

4.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
In the European elections held in June of 2024, the far-right RN party emerged as the leading party in France. In the aftermath of these elections, the President of France chose to dissolve the National Assembly, a decision that led to the organization of legislative elections at the beginning of July. To counter the rise of the RN, several left-wing parties strategically aligned to form the New Popular Front. This union initially secured 182 seats. Nevertheless, no political group attained a majority (a majority is defined as 289 seats). Indeed, Citizens interviewed during our research appeared notably affected by the fact that they had been called to vote twice in such a short period of time last June, which is rare. The nation experienced a period of governmental absence from July through August, a time coinciding with the organization of the Olympic Games. On September 21st, Michel Barnier was named prime minister and he formed a new government. Moreover, from May to October of 2024, the national political context experienced considerable tensions due to the emergence of two social movements within two overseas territories. In May 2024, riots erupted in New Caledonia, a French overseas territory, precipitated by discontent over a proposed initiative aimed at revising the status of the island. In October 2024, an important social movement arose against the cost of life especially high in Caribbean French overseas department. It is imperative to acknowledge both movements, as they are indicative of the prevailing tensions with the central and mainland government. On December 4th, the National Assembly cast its vote, determining a censure of the government and, consequently, its subsequent resignation. On December 13th, François Bayrou was named prime minister and he formed a new government. The peculiarity of this political context lies in the fact that the National Assembly does not have a majority. On December 15th, a terrible hurricane hit the French overseas department of Mayotte. Since then, the government's handling of the aftermath of the hurricane has often been at the forefront of the news, highlighting the new administration's position in this context. The passing of Jean-Marie Le Pen on January 7, 2025, the founder of France's far-right National Front party, has elicited a wide range of reactions across the country, underscoring not only the deep divisions rooted in his political legacy but also the broader ideological fractures within French society.

Specific cultural, religion and linguistic characteristics

Based on the 5th republic constitution, the French nation is defined as indivisible, secular, democratic and social. France stands in contrast to certain nations that formally acknowledge their ethnic minorities and the heterogeneity of their populations. In contrast to these nations, France does not make distinctions based on ethnicity or race within the national context. For instance, the institutions are prohibited from producing ethnic statistics that would introduce racial or religious variables. Nevertheless, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) is permitted to generate data concerning immigrants and their descendants[6].

The French Republic has formally acknowledged the presence of regional minority languages within its borders. Prominent examples include Breton, Corsican and Basque. However, France is officially considered as a monolingual country. Consequently, immigrant communities' languages are not officially recognized. With regard to the matter of territory, among the French regions located in Europe, Corsica holds a specific status. Outside of the European perimeter, a variety of overseas French departments and regions are classified into three political statuses. These include departments and communities, as well as the special case of New Caledonia[7].

The relationship between these overseas territories and mainland France is part of a colonial and postcolonial political history, the continuity of which is illustrated by the governmental management of different events (climatic, economic, political) that have occurred in recent months in Mayotte, New Caledonia and Martinique as mentioned above.

Traditional and digital information landscape

The French media landscape is characterized by a diverse and multifaceted structure that reflects both historical traditions and contemporary dynamics. A distinctive feature of France's media system is the presence of an "opinion press" that does not strictly adhere to the principle of internal pluralism.

Instead, the French press landscape operates under a model of external pluralism, where publications with varying political orientations coexist. Left-leaning outlets such as Libération, L'Humanité, and L'Obs share the market with center-right and centrist newspapers like Le Figaro and Le Monde.

[6] https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/2108548.

[7] Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Reunion Island and Mayotte are overseas departments. French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna Islands, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Saint-Barthelemy, Saint-Martin, New-Caledonia, Austral and Antarctic lands and the Passion-Clipperton islands are overseas communities.

This ideological diversity ensures a broad representation of political viewpoints, although concerns persist about the balance of voices and the influence of media ownership on editorial lines. Additionally, regional daily newspapers play a significant role, with Ouest-France leading in circulation (201,024,776 copies in 2022), highlighting the importance of local journalism in the national media ecosystem.

The audiovisual media sector in France is regulated by the independent authority ARCOM, which enforces internal pluralism among broadcasters. The public service media include major institutions such as France Télévisions, Radio France, France Médias Monde, TV5 Monde, Arte France, and the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA). These outlets are publicly funded and are mandated to provide balanced and diverse content. In contrast, the private media sector is dominated by a few powerful industrial groups. The TF1 Group (owned by Bouygues) holds the highest audience share (23.4% in 2022), followed by the Vivendi Group (6.1% in 2022) - controlled by Vincent Bolloré - and Altice Media (3.3% in 2022), which was acquired by CMA CGM in 2024. Television remains a highly consolidated market, with TF1 and M6 leading in audience share. Notably, in 2024, ARCOM chose not to renew the DTT licenses for two Vivendi-owned channels due to violations of legal obligations, including the duty of internal pluralism. This decision intensified public debate over media concentration, particularly concerning Bolloré's growing influence and the editorial direction of channels like CNews, which has been compared to Fox News for its increasingly right-wing and polarizing content.

The print and digital press sectors are similarly dominated by large conglomerates. According to ACPM data, the most widely circulated newspapers in 2022 were 20 Minutes (86 million copies), Le Monde (144 million), and Le Figaro (108 million). Weekly publications such as Paris Match, Le Point, and L'Obs also maintain significant influence. However, concerns over media independence have led to the rise of alternative and independent media outlets, particularly digital-native platforms. Investigative outlets like Médiapart and socially driven media such as Brut, Konbini, HugoDécrypte and StreetPress provide alternative perspectives, often countering narratives dominant in mainstream media. These independent actors emphasize editorial freedom and seek to address issues of media consolidation and financial pressures that may compromise journalistic integrity. Digital-native media, in particular, remain fragmented and diverse, contrasting with the more consolidated traditional media groups.

Another essential component of France's media environment is the community and associative media sector, especially within local radio. These outlets are often structured as non-profit associations and are predominantly funded by state subsidies. They play a vital role in fostering local democratic debate and enhancing social cohesion by providing information tailored to regional audiences, sometimes broadcasting in regional dialects or overseas languages like Creole or Basque. Furthermore, the French media landscape encompasses ethnic minority media, reflecting France's colonial history and immigration patterns.

These outlets cater to immigrant communities and diasporas, contributing to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the media space. Similarly, religious media in France—predominantly Catholic—mirror the country's religious demographics, offering faith-based content to specific audiences.

The French media landscape is marked by a complex interplay between public and private ownership, political orientations, and varying degrees of media consolidation. While public service media are tasked with ensuring balanced information, the private sector faces criticism for increasing concentration and politicization, particularly in the audiovisual domain.

At the same time, the emergence of independent digital media and the resilience of local and community outlets contribute to a dynamic and pluralistic information ecosystem. However, ongoing debates over ownership concentration and editorial independence highlight persistent challenges in maintaining a truly diverse and democratic media environment in France.

4.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number of focus groups	4
Time period	July, 2024

Locations

IMT-Atlantique, Nantes campus. Given that focus group participants are generally unwilling to travel long distances, the choice of Nantes as the primary location for recruiting and conducting focus groups was motivated by the aim to obtain a diverse and representative sample of respondents under the given conditions.

Nantes is the sixth largest city in France, located approximately 380 kilometers west of Paris, and offers a balanced mix of rural and urban environments, making it well-suited for capturing a wide range of perspectives.

Recruitments

Due to temporal limitations and in order to preserve neutrality (no personal contacts) in the recruitment process, we were required to enlist the services of a recruitment agency based in Nantes.

As prescribed by the methodology protocol, the criteria of age groups, political side heterogeneity, and interest in politics were respected: FG1: 3 left-wing, 4 right-wing /FG2: 3 left-wing, 2 right-wing, 1 center, 1 far-right, 1 prefers not to say /FG3: 4 left-wing, 3 right-wing, 1 center, 1 prefers not to say / FG4: 4 left-wing, 3 right-wing, 1 far-right, 1 prefers not to say).

Despite the diversity of participants, the recruitment process was conducted in the city of Nantes, and all participants were from the same region, including both urban and more peripheral areas.

Review of activities carried out

The initial expectation of over 40 participants was not fully met, with a final turnout of 33 participants (7 for FG1, 8 for FG2, 9 for FG3, and 9 for FG4). The lower turnout can likely be attributed to the timing of the focus groups, as the summer break typically leads to reduced availability. Additionally, the ongoing complex political situation may have contributed to participants' reluctance or difficulty in committing to the sessions.

Additional elements to report
It has been observed that the focus groups, initially expected to show minimal interest in politics, actually demonstrated a notable level of engagement, not only with the questions posed but also with our research project as a whole. Beyond the monetary compensation for participation, all participants expressed positive surprise at the themes discussed and the quality of the conversations, stating their satisfaction with the experience. This suggests that focus groups can serve as an effective platform for dialogue among citizens, with participants seeming to genuinely appreciate the opportunity.

4.3 General methodological notes: Interviews

Total number of focus groups	11
Time period	July-October 2024
Locations	
Out of the 11 interviews, 8 were done on line and one by phone. Two others were conducted face-to-face: one at IMT-Atlantique and the other one at the interviewee's home. The decision was made to prioritize the distance modality in order to ensure territorial heterogeneity, both in terms of rural and urban areas and in terms of the plurality of regions within the French territory.	
Recruitments	
In contrast to the focus group recruitment process, the French team directly selected and contacted the interviewees, who were not compensated. The initial methodological criteria necessitated that the interviewer be unaware of the interviewee. However, we ensured that the interviewer was introduced with confidence to facilitate the dialogue. We tried to respect a level of sociological (age, gender, social class, ethnical background) and political heterogeneity: 5 women, 1 transgender woman, 5 men. One woman is living in an overseas French department and is afro. Two immigrants are included in the group, one of whom does not have the right to vote, and one of whom is from an ethnic minority. 4 are left-wing, 1 is right-wing, 1 is center, 2 are far left-wing, 1 prefers not to say, 1 is far-right, one identifies with all wings with the exception of the far-right.	

Review of activities carried out
Some participants were surprised by the questions related to democracy and expressed feelings of inadequacy in answering them. Depending on the interviewee's social background, it was sometimes necessary to encourage them to share their personal experiences, reassuring them that their level of knowledge was not being evaluated. However, it is important to note that two of the three interviewees from disadvantaged backgrounds had prior experience expressing their circumstances in public forums through media participation, which made them particularly comfortable during the interview - contrasting with the earlier observation. The two interviews conducted with immigrants were unique in that participants reflected on the questions in relation to at least two national contexts: comparing the French context with that of their country of origin. Additionally, the interviewer's familiarity with one interviewee's native country positively influenced the flow and depth of the conversation.
Additional elements to report
One interviewee (PE) was a journalist a few years ago. This close relationship with the media sphere introduces a potential bias in the interview, as her perspective is heavily influenced by her professional experience.

Germany

TEAM: Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften (**OEAW**); Community Media Institute for Continuing Education, Research and Consultancy (**COMMIT**).
Authors: Maren Beaufort.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

Germany is entering 2025 in a state of political transition. The collapse of the SPD–Green–FDP coalition has led to early elections, with traditional alliances under strain and the far-right AfD gaining momentum. Economic stagnation, energy insecurity, and social tensions—particularly over immigration—are shaping an increasingly polarized public discourse.

Despite these challenges, Germany's federal system continues to reflect deep-rooted cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity.

Its media environment remains robust, anchored by trusted public broadcasters (ARD, ZDF) and a dynamic digital sphere, though rising concerns over political influence and platform regulation signal a shifting information order.

Key Insight*: Germany is navigating political instability and rising polarization ahead of early elections, with traditional parties under pressure and far-right support growing. Strong public media and regional diversity offer key stabilizing elements.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS
Number of sessions	4
Observations	The focus groups were diverse, considering factors such as political interest, gender, urban/rural residency, and education level during recruitment. One key was the higher trust in the democratic system and traditional mass media, especially public broadcasting, in Germany compared to Austria. This trust remained despite some criticism, highlighting a unique aspect of the German media landscape.

Key Insight: *The focus groups and interviews revealed unexpected political engagement, with diverse participants offering unique insights on democracy, shaped by their personal and social backgrounds.*

5.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
Germany is currently navigating a complex political landscape marked by the recent collapse of its governing coalition and the approach of early federal elections. In November 2024, the "traffic light" coalition, comprising the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), disbanded due to internal conflicts over economic policies and budgetary constraints. This dissolution has led to the scheduling of snap federal elections on February 23, 2025, advancing the original date from September 2025. The forthcoming elections are anticipated to be highly competitive, with significant implications for Germany's future direction. Key candidates include incumbent Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), Friedrich Merz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), and Alice Weidel (Alternative for Germany, AfD). Recent polls indicate the CDU leading with approximately 31% support, followed by the SPD at 17%, the Greens at 12%, and the AfD at 20%. Notably, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) is polling at 4%, below the 5% threshold required for parliamentary representation. The rise in support for the AfD, now polling at 20%, indicates a shift in the political landscape, with potential challenges for traditional coalition formations. The FDP's position below the 5% threshold further complicates potential coalition scenarios. **Predominant Political Currents:** Germany's political environment is characterized by a spectrum of ideologies: • Center-Left (SPD): Advocates for social welfare policies, economic stability, and progressive reforms. • Center-Right (CDU/CSU): Emphasizes economic liberalism, fiscal conservatism, and traditional values. • Far-Right (AfD): Known for nationalist, anti-immigration stances, and Euroscepticism. • Greens: Focuses on environmental sustainability, climate action, and social justice. Germany faces several significant challenges on its political horizon. The country is grappling with a prolonged economic recession, characterized by debates over strict fiscal policies, high energy costs, and stagnating industrial output. These issues place considerable strain on both businesses and households. Intense discussions are also underway about how to achieve Germany's climate goals amidst these economic difficulties. Polarized public opinion on immigration and asylum laws is further fueling tensions, affecting both political discourse and societal cohesion.

At the same time, widening social inequality is raising concerns over public safety and highlighting disparities between urban and rural areas. These issues underscore the multifaceted nature of Germany's current political landscape.

Adding to these complexities is the fragmentation of the party system. Traditional parties are struggling to maintain their position, while the liberal, pro-business FDP risks failing to secure parliamentary representation. Meanwhile, the far-right AfD plays a contentious role in coalition formation.

Specific cultural, religion and linguistic characteristics

Germany is a culturally diverse country with a rich history of regional, religious, and linguistic characteristics, shaped by its federal structure of 16 states (Bundesländer). Each state maintains its own cultural identity and traditions, reflecting diversity in festivals, cuisine, dialects, etc..Bavaria, for example, is known for its distinct traditions and dialects, while northern regions like Schleswig-Holstein show Scandinavian influences, and areas near the French border, such as Saarland, incorporate French cultural elements.

Religious diversity is rooted in Germany’s historical role in the Protestant Reformation. The country is predominantly Christian, divided between Roman Catholicism in the south and Protestantism in the north and east. It also has a growing Muslim population due to immigration and smaller but historically significant Jewish communities.

Linguistically, Standard German is the official language, but numerous regional dialects and minority languages, such as Danish, Sorbian, Frisian, and Romani, are recognized and supported. Germany’s decentralized system empowers its states to preserve their cultural and linguistic uniqueness through legislative autonomy. While the country actively promotes the preservation of different cultures, challenges like globalization contribute to cultural homogenization.

In summary Germany’s cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity underscores its historical complexities and modern multicultural dynamics, forming a mosaic of identities.

Traditional and digital information landscape

Germany has a diverse and well-established media landscape that includes traditional public service media, private media outlets, and a rapidly growing digital information ecosystem.

The country’s media is characterized by a strong commitment to press freedom and plurality, although some degree of politicization exists.

Germany’s PSM-system is a cornerstone of its media landscape. The two main public broadcasters, ARD (a consortium of regional broadcasters) and ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen), play a critical role in providing news, cultural programming, and entertainment. These suppliers are funded primarily through a mandatory household fee (Rundfunkbeitrag), ensuring independence from government or commercial interests.

- ARD: Operates several regional stations, such as BR (Bayerischer Rundfunk) and WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk), and offers national programming, including the flagship news program *Tagesschau*.
- ZDF: Focuses on national coverage and is known for its detailed reporting and documentaries, such as *heute* news.

Germany`s PSMs are all in all highly trusted by the public, although they occasionally face criticism for perceived biases, particularly regarding their editorial stance on some contentious issues.

Germany boasts a wide range of national newspapers that cater to different political and social audiences, for example:

- Conservative/Center-Right:
- *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*: Known for its in-depth analysis and conservative stance.
- *Die Welt*: A more business-oriented, right-leaning publication.
- Center-Left/Progressive:
- *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*: Popular for investigative journalism and its progressive views.
- *taz (die tageszeitung)*: A smaller, explicitly left-leaning newspaper.
- Mainstream:
- *Der Spiegel*: A weekly magazine renowned for its investigative journalism and balanced reporting.
- *Bild*: A widely-read tabloid with a populist slant, focusing on sensationalist news but also influential in shaping public opinion.

Germany’s private media landscape includes commercial television networks such as RTL, ProSiebenSat.1, and VOX, which primarily focus on entertainment but also produce news segments. Private radio stations and online platforms contribute significantly to regional and national information dissemination. However, their reliance on advertising revenue raises concerns.

The digital information landscape in Germany is rapidly expanding, with a shift towards online news platforms, podcasts, and social media:

- Online News Portals: Most traditional media outlets have established strong digital presences (e.g., *FAZ.net*, *SZ.de*), while platforms like *Tagesspiegel Online* and *Focus Online* cater to younger, tech-savvy audiences.

- Social Media: Platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram are widely used for news, particularly among younger demographics.
- Public Broadcasting in Digital Spaces: ARD and ZDF have launched digital platforms like *Mediathek* and *funk* to engage younger audiences with on-demand content and news tailored for social media.

Germany's media landscape is also shaped by international outlets like *BBC*, and others.

Younger audiences in Germany increasingly use news through unconventional means, such as YouTube channels, TikTok, and podcasts. Influencers and independent content creators play an outsized role in shaping public opinion among these demographics, often bypassing traditional media entirely.

While Germany's media landscape is widely committed to journalistic independence, varying degrees of politicization are evident:

- Public Broadcasters: Generally regarded as neutral but occasionally criticized for editorial biases.
- Print Media: Reflects a broad spectrum of political ideologies, with newspapers aligning with specific political orientations.
- Private Media: Less rigorous in maintaining impartiality and independence, particularly in digital-only outlets.
- In summary, Germany's information landscape is offering a wide array of perspectives. Public broadcasters remain a trusted source of information content, while national newspapers and digital platforms cater to diverse audiences. However, several challenges such as trust in news, etc. continue to shape the evolving media environment.

Any other information related to the national political/social/media landscape that, from your point of view, may be useful for the analysis

Germany has stringent regulations governing information content, such as the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG), which requires social media platforms to remove illegal content promptly and report it to the Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt). However, critics argue that these regulations may inadvertently limit democratic freedoms. The balance between combating so called harmful content and preserving democratic freedoms is a central debate in Germany.

5.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number focus groups	4
Time period	11/2024

Locations

Approximately 50% of the participants were from urban Würzburg, while the remaining 50% came from the surrounding rural areas. Würzburg and its adjacent rural region represent an intriguing regional constellation characterized by striking structural contrasts. The city of Würzburg, a larger city (Regiopole) in the federal state of Bavaria with approximately 130,000 inhabitants, is distinguished by a high density of students and dynamic population influx. It is considered an economically thriving urban region with well-developed infrastructure and a strongly service-oriented economy, particularly in the fields of education, science, and IT. The above-average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of approximately €75,000 underline the city's economic strength.

In contrast, the surrounding rural districts are characterized by predominantly rural structures marked by population decline, lower economic dynamism, and specific infrastructural challenges, such as the comprehensive provision of broadband internet. The GDP per capita in these areas, at approximately €38,000, is significantly below the level of the urban center. To mitigate these disparities, the rural districts benefit from EU regional development programs aimed at fostering both economic and infrastructural improvements.

Although the structural scales between Würzburg and its surroundings and those of Vienna and Lower Austria differ significantly, some comparable dynamics can be observed, highlighting the combination of urban and rural regions, as also in the Austrian context, the urban center of Vienna and the rural region of Lower Austria present a stark contrast in terms of economic performance, infrastructural development, and demographic dynamics.

Recruitments

In addition to the predefined criteria of political interest and age, we paid attention to the balance of the following indicators during recruitment:

- Gender
- Urban/rural residency
- Highest level of education achieved

Review of activities carried out
The politically interested groups were generally more active and adept, including in understanding and addressing the guiding questions. However, in the less politically interested groups—provided the participants were open and managed to gradually immerse themselves in the topic—interesting developmental processes occasionally emerged, leading to remarkable contextualization efforts.
Additional elements to report
Compared to Austria, the German groups reported a significantly higher level of trust in the existing democratic system itself and in traditional mass media as a valid source of information (particularly public broadcasting)—despite the criticism expressed in Germany as well.

Ireland

TEAM: Mary Immaculate College (**MIC**)
Authors: Rosemary Day, Jude McInerney

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

In 2024, Ireland held general elections with a voter turnout of just 49%, which confirmed the continued dominance of the center parties. That same year, the country held European and local elections, alongside the first-ever direct election of the Mayor of Limerick.

Ireland's population stands at around 5.1 million, with the majority identifying as "White Irish." However, the immigrant population has been steadily growing, now making up about 12% of the total. While Irish is an official language, English is predominantly spoken in daily life.

When it comes to media, Ireland has seen a shift towards digital, with online news now surpassing television as the primary source of information. Radio remains highly popular, with 81% of the population tuning in regularly, while traditional print media continues to decline. Despite a recent scandal affecting its reputation, RTÉ, the public broadcaster, still holds a key position as one of the most trusted sources of news. The country is highly connected, with 93% of households having access to the internet.

Key Insight*: In 2024, Ireland sees political stability, growing diversity, and a shift towards digital media. Online news now outpaces TV, and radio remains popular. Despite recent challenges, RTÉ continues as a trusted news source, while traditional print media declines.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS
Number of sessions	5
Observations	The discussions revealed that many participants were surprised by their own level of political interest and the contributions they made. A notable insight was the lack of public spaces for political discussions outside of personal circles, with some participants even continuing their conversations at a local pub. In one group, two participants with differing views on democracy highlighted the diversity of perspectives even among those with high political interest. Overall, the focus groups showed that participants, regardless of their political engagement level, were eager to discuss and share their views on democracy and politics.

Key Insight: *Participants expressed a lack of opportunities for public political discussions outside their close circles. Despite differing political views, all participants contributed equally to the discussions.*

6.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
The most recent Irish general election was held on the 29th of November 2024. General elections are usually held every 5 years in Ireland, and this is an opportunity for the Irish public to directly elect a representative to the Dáil (the lower house of the Oireachtas/Irish Parliament- the upper house is known as the Seanad). In this election the status quo was maintained and people voted centre to centre and those elected are seeking to form a government. In Ireland European election and local elections were held on the 7th of June 2024. The contest for the countries first directly elected Mayor was also held in Limerick on this day, the 7th of June 2024. There was a disappointing turnout of 49% of the population voting on the day, however there was a rise in females elected with 31.4 % of those elected were females, seeing the ratio of females as 248 to 949 males. To vote in elections in Ireland those eligible must be over 18 years of age and registered to vote. A polling card and information is posted to each person in every household that is registered and this card plus photo id must be produced at the polling station when voting. Political parties wishing to be elected generally start to canvas their constituency by going door to door literally asking people for their vote. The candidates also canvas by strategically putting up posters with headshots promoting their political party name and logo attached. These posters remain in place for 7 days after polling day. Polling venues are usually located in primary schools or local clubhouses, and this can cause problems for those wishing to vote who no longer live in these areas. Electronic voting is not an option in Ireland; due it having been unsuccessfully trialed in 2004 when the government bought 7,500 of the machines from Dutch firm Nedap at a cost of €51 million to the state.
Specific cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics
The population of Ireland is 5,149,139 according to the Census of 2022 (CSO, 2022a) and has been rising consistently in recent decades, primarily due to a drop in emigration and a rise in immigration. 4.3 million of these were born in Ireland and 77% of these identify as “White Irish”, with 6% identifying as members of Ireland’s only indigenous ethnic group, “Traveller Irish”. One in four of the workforces in 2023 was not born on the island and 12% of the overall population are immigrants (CSO, 2022a).

The overwhelming majority of people resident in Ireland speak English, with three quarters of a million speaking another language at home. The first official language of the state, Irish, is spoken by only 71,968 people on a daily basis although 1,873,997 people claim that they can speak the language (CSO, 2022a). The most commonly spoken languages other than English are usually Polish and Romanian (CSO, 2022a) but with over 100,000 refugees from the Ukraine currently in the country (UNCHR, 2024), their languages must be considered also.

Traditional and digital information landscape

The media landscape in Ireland is changing. The Irish section of Reuters' Digital Media Report for 2024 found that, for the first time, the main source of news for the Irish public is online rather than television. The public service broadcaster, RTÉ News [Radio Teilifís Éireann] is the most used news source across all platforms and it retains very high trust levels amongst the public (Morrell et al, 2024). The report found that 88% of respondents are interested in news this is 36% increase on the Reuters Institute's annual report of 2023 which recorded that 52% of Irish people are very interested in news and has surpassed a high of 70% of those surveyed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2023 (Morrell et al., 2023).

In 2024 a total 46% of the public trust the news they are accessing, indicating a 1% drop from 2023 when those surveyed reporting that they believe that "they can trust most of the news most of the time" (Morrell et al., 2023). Although 71% of respondents report having real concerns about what is real news and what is fake. The report highlighted an increase in the number of Irish news consumers paying to access news in 2024 (from 15% in 2023 to 17% in 2024) and this was even higher in the 18 – 24-year-old age group (up to 26% from 19%). This may indicate a trend where people are prepared to pay for news that they can trust.

Irish media are generally, reasonably independent and the Media Pluralism Monitor reports that the regulatory frameworks are working well (2022). Irish people have good access to a variety of media. The protection of the rights to information of freedom of expression and protections for journalism standards and freedoms are reasonable; the Eurobarometer puts these at a level of moderate risk (Media Pluralism Monitor, 2022).

Internet connection is very high with 85% of all Irish households have a broadband connection (CSO, 2022b) while 93% of people have access to digital platforms (Morrell et al., 2023). This level of access to highspeed digital connections makes a difference in terms of how people go about getting their news.

Like most other countries in the EU, printed publications have suffered the most negative impact as people move to online platforms for information as well as for their entertainment.The decline in numbers of Irish people buying and reading newspapers is so startling that most publishers stopped engaging the services of the Audit Bureau for Circulation (ABC) to audit their circulation figures around 2018.

The Irish government reduced VAT of 9% on the sale of newspapers to 0% in 2023 to provide aid to the sector but it is unlikely that this can reverse or stem the decline.

Almost all newspapers have an online edition, as do all television and radio stations. Irish people appear to have made the transition to consuming their news online, but it is a struggle for news outlets to get Irish people to pay for content online, with only 15% of those surveyed by Reuters in 2023 reporting that they do so and this number had fallen by 1 percentage point from the previous year (Murrell et al., 2023). The public service broadcaster, RTÉ, is the most popular on-line source of news with 35% consulting it daily (Murrell et al., 2023). This is followed by a stand-alone, start up, on-line news magazine at 30%, The Journal.ie (Morrell et al., 2023).

Irish people are particularly fond of and loyal to radio as a medium. 81% of the population listen to radio regularly. More than half of all adults (52%) listen regularly to their local radio station (Ipsos, 2023) proving that proximity and relevance are drivers of listenership. 45.1% listen to a national station; 20% of these listen to the main PSM radio station (RTÉ Radio One) and just under 10% listen to the most popular national commercial station regularly (Ipsos, 2023). (Please note that all percentages given in the datasheets are for all adults over 15 nationally, regionally or locally depending on the context.)

However, a recent scandal within the public service broadcaster, RTÉ, has tarnished its reputation and consequently its revenue and the level of trust the public has in it as an institution. The initial scandal related to non-disclosure of payments made to a celebrity broadcaster and further revelations of poor accountancy practices and poor governance issues followed. Income from television licence fees dropped by 13% in 2023 as a result of the scandal (Reuters, 2024) and RTÉ has also complained of a loss of advertising revenue to digital media.

Questions about the need for RTÉ and about the value of an expensive public service broadcast institution, were raised by the press, by members of the public on social media and also by media analysts and politicians in many fora.

Private, commercial media have been vocal in pointing out that they also produce public service content, and they are staking a claim on any state supports that may be available for public service content, including for the provision of news and current affairs.

A recent government commission tasked with reviewing RTÉ's funding mechanisms and reflecting on the future of media in Ireland (The Future of Media Commission, 2024) proposed six funds to support the work of the media in Ireland. These schemes will fund local democracy journalism; reporting on courts; support for digital transformation for media; a community media scheme and a scheme for media access and training. The first two of these schemes that fund journalism to the tune of €6,000,000 were established in 2024 and attracted huge interest (Burns, 2024).

Public Service Media: Ireland’s public service media consists of RTÉ (4 FM radio stations and two television channels) and TG4 (2 Irish language television channels). Both are editorially independent of government and are regulated by Coimisún na Méan (The Commission for Media). Both are funded through a hybrid of television licence fees and of advertising and commercial activities.

RTÉ retains its leading position with Irish adult audiences at 35% on-line; 32.9% for three of their radio stations and 25.17% for terrestrial television (Medialive, 2022). Private commercial television and radio stations and news outlets on-line are all staking claims for a portion of any funding for PSM, whatever funding mechanism is chosen. This will diminish the primary position of RTÉ as Ireland’s PSB and its capacity to retain the quality journalism and consequent audience trust and share that it enjoys. RTÉ launched its on-line news service in 1999, and this has achieved first place in market share at 35% (Medialive.ie, 2022). It is the most trusted source of news of all Irish media at 71% of all adults surveyed in 2023 (Morrell et al., 2023) although this appears to be dropping.

TG4 is an Irish language service with its own independent board. Established in 1996, it launched a children’s channel in 2023. It shares its news and news staff with RTÉ.

Content is generated by both entities and shared as appropriate. Audience figures for the station are low but hard to verify and it is included in the report as it is important culturally. Both RTÉ and TG4 carry advertising under the hybrid model for PSM funding in Ireland. Both share information about their news gathering and editorial practices. Both would consider themselves to be left of centre in their political orientation but RTÉ seems to have become more right of centre in recent years.

A third public service broadcaster, BBC Northern Ireland, is received in most homes in the Irish Republic via broadband or satellite packages, with an audience of less than 5%.

The Press: Sales of print media in Ireland were valued at 291 million euro in 2022 (Curran, 2023). As in all jurisdictions, sales of hard copy, print media are in decline but almost all Irish news publications have an on-line edition, and some have moved entirely online in recent years.

Stand alone, Irish owned print media are becoming more rare. They survive in local areas, some are still owned by single families, but national publications are increasingly owned by international conglomerates.

For example, Mediahuis owns Ireland’s most read newspapers, “The Irish Independent”, “The Sunday Independent” and “The Sunday World”. The Irish Times Trust is a private, non-profit entity that owns the paper of record, “The Irish Times”, another national newspaper, “The Irish Examiner”, and a number of smaller local and some online publications.

“The Irish Times” is the most trusted newspaper in Ireland in 2023 with 70% of those surveyed by Reuters in 2023 ranking it highest, followed closely by “The Irish Independent” at 67%. Local papers are also trusted, with Reuters finding that 68% of those surveyed trust in them overall (Murrell et all., 2023)

British newspapers are popular in Ireland, with some having Irish editions. This has been the case for decades given the close proximity of the UK, the shared language and the significant influence of British culture and markets in Ireland. All of these have on-line editions, and most are owned by global companies such as NewsCorp. Freesheets delivered to people’s doors are still popular in cities and towns but contain less news and more advertisements, obviously.

Audiovisual: Virgin Media is the terrestrial, private commercial television provider of four television channels. Although the penetration of broadband (85%) (CSO, 2022b) and smart TVs mean that most households have access to a huge number of foreign stations, there is a requirement for all multiplexes in Ireland to carry licensed Irish television stations on their platforms and to place the indigenous Irish stations first in all listings. The television set is still the most popular device for viewing television at 81% (TamIreland.ie, 2023) however access to streaming services and internet channels such as YouTube account for nearly one third of all time spent on television in 2022 (TamIreland.ie, 2023)

Radio: Ireland has a thriving commercial radio industry. First licensed in 1989, local radio has proven durable and popular with more than half of all listeners tuning into their local station regularly (Ipsos, 2023). A large majority of Irish adults – 81% – listen to the radio on an average day. Twenty-nine local radio stations serve rural Ireland with 5 more local stations in the capital city of Dublin.

Almost all independent, commercial radio stations in the country were included in the quantitative report (32 out of a total of 34). More than half of all adults listen regularly to their local radio station (52%) (Ipsos, 2023). 17.3% of all adult listeners tune in to the two national, independent, commercial stations regularly (Today Fm 9.7%, and Newstalk 7.6%; see accompanying datasheet). Trust in local radio is high in Ireland with 70% of those surveyed by Reuters in 2023 saying that they trust their local radio station (Morrell, 2023).

All stations are required by law and by their licensing contracts to provide at least 20% news and current affairs programming of during prime time (Oireachtas na hÉireann, 2009 and 2022).

However, the regulator has begun acceding to requests for less time to be spent on news and current affairs by regional youth stations and music focussed Dublin stations in recent years. This trend looks set to continue as stations cut back on journalists and newsrooms. Independent local radio stations are actively campaigning for state funding for news and other services (Radio Today, 2023).

Commercial radio stations generally produce their own local news but share national and international news with others in their chain or another commercial news provider.

Bauer Media's national station, Newstalk, is the primary supplier of national and international news to independent commercial stations in Ireland today. This means that the diversity of news producers is not as wide as a head count of radio stations might lead one to presume. For national and international news, Irish radio stations have two main newsrooms – the public service broadcaster and Bauer Media.

Eleven of Ireland's commercial radio stations are owned by three international corporations i.e. Bauer Media; News Corp and Wireless with some smaller indigenous chains also leading to the predominance of chains rather than as initially envisioned in 1988 a series of locally owned and managed radio stations.

Internet / Digital: 93% of all Irish homes have access to the internet, with 85% of all homes having a fixed broadband connection (CSO, 2022b).

On-line access to news by Irish adults is now at 79%. Access to television is at 58%, social media is at 48% with access to print newspapers dropping to 23% (from nearly 59% in 2015) (Morrell et al., 2023).

Non-Profit Media: Twenty-one community radio stations and one of the two community television stations were included in the data collection. These are the total number of licensed, full time, community radio broadcasters but a further twenty community radio stations broadcast on restricted licences, usually on weekends.

Community media are legally recognised by law and are regulated by Coimisiún na Méan who also issues licences. These are issued on an irregular basis to groups who wish to serve local geographic communities or communities of interest.

Community on-line magazines or newspapers with a circulation of more than a few thousand are extremely rare. Some sectoral interests issue newsletters on an irregular basis but most groups seem to depend on Facebook and Instagram which they use for social, personal and community news and networking rather than as more formal and recognisable news publishing enterprises. This is not to say that they do not exist and the same is true for internet radio and television channels that may operate on YouTube or on different platforms but none that provide news as understood in this research project came to light. Radio Maria is available on-line and was included as it is well known but again, the number of listeners is not known.

All of the community radio stations belong to the association or network Craol. The Community Television Association (CTA) works closely with Craol and represents the two community television stations.

Audience figures are not available for any of these stations and indeed, community media insist that participation and the delivery of social benefit are more appropriate measures of their success however, it is fair to say that most of these stations do not cover news as understood in this research project. They cover very local news stories of interest to their communities and usually have current affairs/magazine programmes also.

6.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number of focus groups	5
Time period	June – September 2024
Locations	
The focus groups were held between June and September 2024 and the venue used was a room on the college grounds. Because it was the Summer, students were on holiday and many staff were on leave, as a result the college was quiet but very welcoming. (Due to ethical protocols students and employees from the college were not allowed to participate in the research). The room was bright, and the windows were open, so the space was very airy it also had air purifier in the corner. The chairs (with tables attached) were placed in a circle, and each one had a name badge (with first names only) stuck on the table. Participants were welcomed at the main door of the building and walked the short distance to the room. Inside the room a table with refreshments was strategically placed in view and participants were encouraged to have tea, coffee, and to help themselves to a selection of cookies while they waited for others to arrive. We also had a supply of bottled water and glasses. These were available to the participants throughout the focus group session.	
Recruitments	
We the Irish partners, decided early in the research process not to use an agency to recruit participants for the focus groups. The research group decided that there would be a wider variety of participants if we reached out to diverse groups in an urban, suburban and rural community of Limerick and Co. Limerick. This decision was very beneficial.	

To start the process, we had a brainstorming session and harvested a list of potential group to engage with, these were:

- 2 GAA -Gaelic Athletic Association- one local and one in county Limerick/18 to 35 and 35+
- 3 Soccer teams - Two from the city and one county
- Two Choirs – one 35+ and one -18 +
- The Limerick Youth Services -18 to 35 and 35+
- The local Brass and Reed Band -18 to 35 and 35+
- Pipe Band -18 TO 35 AND 35+
- The Association for Men's Sheds (a government funded organisation that supports men of all ages to socialise and develop new skills)
- The Association for Women's Sheds (a government funded organisation that supports women of all ages to socialise and develop new skills)
- Local college
- A Gym
- A Library
- Book Clubs
- Mother and baby groups

The first step was to send an email introducing the projects and our requirements or wish list to the relevant governing bodies that we were hoping to recruit from A date and time was arranged with those who responded, and a researcher called and spoke about the research with members who were there at the time and using the snowball technique. Those present were advised to speak to any members who they thought might be interested and ask them to email the researcher (contact details in the form of an email address and information on the project was left with the organisers and those present). The idea of a Thank You Voucher was welcome by all participants but didn't appear to be the main incentive to participate.

When participants emailed and expressed their interest, they were sent information, and the screening sheet was either emailed or personally handed to the participants (where possible). There was a 90% success rate with this type of recruitment and this researcher believes it is because participants could identify and connect with the researcher. Snowballing was also successful.

The MeDeMap project had specific screening requirements, and all of these were taken into consideration when recruiting. The importance of socio-demographic characteristics was also considered, and groups were approached from different areas and age groups to ensure internal heterogeneity among the participants. Every effort was made to ensure that each group would be balanced with respect to gender and education using the information supplied.

The two homogeneity variables that were suggested and used were, one being age, 2 groups from the 18 to 35 and 3 groups from the 35+ age group. The other variable was political interest, this was rated as being either high or low interest.

The five focus groups recruited, consisted of three from the 35 + range and two from the 18 to 35 ages group. In the 35+ groups, one group identified in pre-screening as having medium to highly political interests. The other two 35+ groups were scored as having medium to low political interest.

There were sixty participants recruited from those who expressed an interest in taking part. Two days before the date selected and agreed upon between participants and researchers, the participants received an email as a reminder of the time, venue, parking arrangements and a warm welcome to the research.

However, on the day of all five focus groups it was really a lottery as to who shows up, particularly when not using an agency. Naturally, we did have a number of no shows, but this did not affect the rich content. We only had to turn one participant away from one of the focus groups and this was because we had started and had accepted a full quota of participants. This participant returned for the next focus group.

Two 18 to 35 years old focus group were recruited, one focus group was identified as having medium to high political interest and the other was identified as having medium to low political interest. However, during the 5 focus groups discussions it was less obvious as to which group was highly political or held low political interest, all contributed and shared views that others respected.

At the end of the focus groups as we said our goodbyes and participants were guided towards the exit, the majority of the participants commented on how they were surprised by the level of political interest they had and how much they had to say. All topics that arose during the 5 groups were discussed in a cohesive manner and generally reached a consensus, so the screening process appears to have been a success.

We had two facilitators for each focus group, one to facilitate the discussion and one to write comments on a white board during the discussion. Both took notes of contextual information - such as body language or power and psychological dynamics between participants. This made more sense because the second facilitator had to turn towards the board a lot of the time.

After an introduction to the facilitators and an introduction as how the focus group session would work, the participants were given the paperwork and took time to complete this. This process worked really well and because the participants had moved around the room, had a drink, and an introduction they quickly began to relax, and were chatting amongst themselves and with the facilitators.

To encourage them to relax even further, we introduced an ice breaker, and this worked really well for 4 of the groups. Only one group the high political 18-35 group had a couple of minutes of silence.

Review of activities carried out

- The prompts provided worked really well to keep the flow of conversation going and were useful for encouraging the discussion.
- The most surprising finding from the recruitment process was that it was easier to recruit female participants in the 18-35 age group than it was to recruit females in the 35 + group. This affected the gender balance slightly in two of the focus groups but not the participation or contributions.
- Another finding and this was expressed as the groups were getting ready to leave was the lack of spaces and opportunities to sit and discuss politics and democracy with people face to face outside of your close family or friend group.
- Five people from one group organised to continue the conversation in a local pub.
- In one focus group 35+ high political - two male participant knew one another but hadn't meet in over twenty years, the discussion to allow them to stay in the same group was arrived at because they hadn't meet in a very long time and they were delighted to meet, but they very quickly realised they were very different people with very different political views and ideas of democracy. This was interesting to observe.
- Seven participants expressed an interest in taking part in the citizens parlements.

Italy

TEAM: Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM (**IULM**)
Authors: Andrea Miconi, Giulia Ferri, Elisabetta Risi, Nello Barile

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

The current Italian government, led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, is focused on key issues such as immigration control, economic reforms, and strengthening Italy's role within the European Union, while maintaining a sovereigntists stance. Meloni heads a right-wing nationalist coalition that includes Lega and Forza Italia. Despite facing challenges, including economic difficulties and internal tensions, the coalition remains in power with a stable majority.

In the media landscape, traditional TV remains the most popular source of news, with 77% of Italians using it to access information, while internet portals and social media are gaining ground. Public broadcaster RAI, though the main source of information, has faced criticism for perceived bias and political interference. On the commercial side, online media, particularly those connected to traditional TV networks, is growing, and younger audiences are increasingly consuming news through digital platforms. The country also has a variety of non-profit media that serve minority linguistic and cultural communities.

***Key Insight**: While traditional TV remains the dominant news source in Italy, digital media is rapidly growing, especially among younger audiences, highlighting a shift in how Italians access information. This shift also reflects broader changes in public engagement and the evolving landscape of democracy, as people increasingly turn to diverse media platforms to participate in political and social discourse.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS	INTERVIEWS
Number of sessions	4	40
Observations	Discussions were rich and respectful, with even less politically engaged participants offering thoughtful, critical insights—often driven by informed skepticism rather than apathy. Aside from occasional language barriers and one group showing limited interaction, the overall process fostered meaningful dialogue and revealed a broad, reflective awareness of Italy’s political and media landscape.	

***Key Insight:** The focus groups and interviews revealed a widespread critical awareness of politics and media, even among those with low political engagement. Rather than apathy, participants expressed a form of informed distrust, showing active participation and analytical capacity across different age groups and social backgrounds.*

7.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
The current Italian government is led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who took office on October 22, 2022. She is the leader of Fratelli d'Italia, a right-wing nationalist party and she heads a coalition that includes political parties as Salvini's Lega and Forza Italia. The current government has focused on issues such as immigration control, economic reforms, and strengthening Italy's role within the European Union while maintaining a *sovereignist* stance. The coalition has faced challenges, including economic difficulties, tensions within the EU, and internal disagreements, but remains in power with a stable majority.
Specific cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics
Italy has a population of 58,851,000 inhabitants. The population decline, which began in 2015, accelerated in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2022 recorded 713,000 deaths and 393,000 births, with a fertility rate at 1.24. The negative natural balance was only partially mitigated by the migration flow (the net migration reached 299,000 persons). As a result, there was a decrease of 179,000 residents (3% less than the previous year) (ISTAT 2023). A number of foreign residents in Italy stands at 5,050,000 (8.7% of the population). The main nationalities among these are: Romanian (21.5% of the total resident foreigners), Moroccan (8.3%), Albanian (8.3%), Chinese (5.9%) and Ukrainian (4.4%). Since 2022, Italy has welcomed a significant number of refugees from Ukraine: a considerable number of refugees from Ukraine following the war were added to the Ukrainian community which has long had a significant presence in the country (ISTAT 2022, p. 155). According to UNHCR data, at February 2023 there were around 145 thousand registered Ukrainian refugees (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). According to Ipsos statistical findings, in 2023 61% of Italians (equal to approximately 35 million people) declared themselves Catholic; 7% (about 4 million) affiliated with other Christian denominations; 2% to other religions; 28% (about 16 million) atheist or agnostic; while 2% did not declare (Ipsos, 2023).

Traditional and digital information landscape

According to Eurobarometer 2023 results, Italians use mostly TV to access news (77%). The second most popular source are internet portals (46%). Then come: radio (30%), social media and blogs (36%) and the printed press (26%). TV is the most popular source of information for all age groups, except for people between 25-39 years, who are most likely to choose social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, etc., 63%).

According to the Digital News Report 2023 Reuters studies, Italians prefer online media (including social media) to other forms of news – in 2023, 70% of respondents chose this option. TV was chosen by 69%, social media alone by 42%, and print media by 16% (Reuters Institute, 2023). Similar results can be found in the Censis Report (with Ital Communications): 83% of Italians said they get information via the web (news sites and social media) and 74% on traditional media (TV, radio, press).

Public Sector Media

In Italy, according to article 59 par. 1 of Legislative Decree 8 November 2021, n. 208 (Consolidated Law) - and with implementation of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 14 November 2018[8] - the public radio, television and multimedia service is given in concession to a joint-stock company: RAI - Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.A.

RAI currently operates 13 channels, including news, entertainment, sport, kids' channel etc. The sample included 5 channels: Rai News 24 (news channel in Italy), RAI Italia (former RAI International, news channels in English), RAI3 (regional news channel), RAI1 and RAI2 (general channels broadcasting news programmes).

The public media in Italy have been criticized for their programming (judged too similar to commercial TV) and information, considered partial and non-objective (European Commission, 2023, *Rule of law report 2023 - Chapter on the situation of the rule of law in Italy*). Added to this is widespread public hostility towards the subscription fee (Carlini, Trevisan, Brogi, 2023). In June 2023, the European Commission (Thierry Breton, European commissioner for the internal market and commission services) spoke about the risks of political interference affecting the independence of public service media in Italy[9].

The Italian Press Agency - ANSA - is not officially recognized as a public service media. It was the first Italian information agency formed in 1946 and cooperatively owned by 24 publishers of the main Italian newspapers.

[8] Legislative Decree 8 November 2021, n. 208 Implementation of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States, concerning the text unique for the provision of audiovisual media services in consideration of the evolution of market realities. GU General Series n.293 of 10-12-2021, Ordinary Supplement n. 44. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/12/10/21G00231/sg

[9] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-001911-ASW_IT.pdf - E-001911/2023, Answer by Thierry Breton on behalf of the European Commission (2.8.2023)

Commercial / private media

In Italy, weekly newspapers reach better sales than daily newspapers.

Most of the papers in Italy have digital editions. In general, companies still sell more paper versions than digital versions. However, there are cases in which the sale of digital versions is near or even exceeds that of the paper version, for example (data for 2022) the financial daily “Il Sole 24 Ore” 73.507 digital copies compared to 47.774 paper copies (and it is the second most read online newspaper in Italy), and “Il Fatto Quotidiano” (the fourth most read) with 26.278 digital edition copies compared to 24.416 sold paper copies.

According to the Reuters’ Digital News Report Italy is below the European average (12%, compared to 17% average) when it comes to the proportion of people that paid for online news in the last year.

Audiovisual

The most important players on the TV market in Italy are two groups: Mediaset (61% of the Fininvest, holding registered to members of Silvio Berlusconi's family), Discovery Italia (Discovery Group) and Cairo Communication. These TV groups deliver free general and/or entertainment channels as well as the news ones. The largest provider of pay television channels is Sky Italia S.r.l.

Internet / digital

Following the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Cornia, 2023) the Internet penetration in Italy is around 90%. This data is also confirmed by "We are social" (2023): the report shows that in 2022 there were over 50.7 million Italians connected to the Internet, i.e. more than 87% of the population. Italians use the Internet essentially to inform themselves (over 72% of those interviewed by We Are Social).

The online news market is dominated by legacy players. The websites with the greatest consumption are those of the main commercial television broadcasters (e.g. Mediaset's TgCom24, La7), of the Italian public service RAI (Rainews.it), of the Italian news agency ANSA and of the main newspapers (La Repubblica, Il Corriere della Sera and Il Fatto Quotidiano).

Fanpage, a newspaper born digitally and with a strong presence on social media, maintains its position among the top Italian newspapers. The Post is another digital only outlet that achieves decent results (6%). These sites are particularly popular with young audiences, with Fanpage reaching 26% and Il Post reaching 13% of users under 35s online.

Non-profit media

There are several non-profit media related to the autonomous and minority instances of the Italian regions. Some examples are: the German-language newspaper “Dolomiten” from Alto Adige, which aims to defend the ethnic-cultural identity of the German-speaking and Ladin-speaking South Tyrolean population; the “Neue Südtiroler Tageszeitung” (second German-language daily newspaper in Alto Adige);

"Le peuple valdôtain" the weekly newspaper - in French - of the Aosta Valley Union; the Primorski dnevnik (literally Coastal Daily), the newspaper published in Trieste in the language of the Slovenian minority of Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

In Italy, there are also a few examples of fact-checking portals, most of them function as non-profit initiatives. An example is Open's fact-checking, an independent journalism project that aims to monitor false or misleading news. It's a member of the IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network).

7.2 General methodological notes: Focus groups

<table>
<tr><th>Total number focus groups</th><th>4</th></tr>
<tr><td>Time period</td><td>June – July 2024</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Locations</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The focus groups were held at the Milan and Rome campus of the IULM University. The choice was based on the need to have spaces that suited the needs of the focus groups and that were easily reached by the participants.

Milan and Rome, being the two major Italian metropolises, are centres that are easily reached by citizens of both cities and provincial areas.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Recruitments</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Participants were recruited via an external agency, which was informed of the criteria for the composition of each focus group, previously described in the methodological protocol. No criteria other than the standard ones were considered:
• homogeneity by political interest and age;
• heterogeneity by gender, political preference and school grade.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Review of activities carried out</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">No problems emerged in any of the focus groups. All participants always maintained correct and respectful behaviour, both among themselves and with the moderators.</td></tr>
</table>

The activities lasted two hours in all focus groups. Although sometimes it was difficult to deal with all the topics in the set time because the participants were very interested in the discussions and always brought out new ideas.

In one group [18-35 year old with a strong political interest] based in Milan, the group had more difficulty in interacting and presenting the topics. The moderator had to intervene often to stimulate the discussion, which tended to remain one-sided.

In addition, a high level of participation by people with low political interest emerged. This demonstrates two things:

- The difficulty of inscribing people's interest in quantum metrics, such as the questionnaire.
- When people are not politically informed, it does not mean that they are not aware of the landscape in which they live. It is often a critical distrust, a lack of confidence that stems from an awareness of the inadequacies of politics and the media, rather than disinterest per se.

7.3 General methodological notes: Interviews

Total number Interviews	40
Time period	June – October 2024
Locations	
The interviews were mainly conducted online, which facilitated the recruitment and inclusion of people. By using the online method, it was possible to interview people from different parts of Italy (North – Centre and Sud), as well as meeting the needs of the interviewees themselves. At the same time, when necessary, the research team conducted the interviews face to face. An example of this is related to 10 people belonging to a very isolated and complex reality in the suburbs of Rome, where meeting face-to-face was crucial in order to establish a trustworthy connection with the people.	
Recruitments	
Recruitment took place both through an agency and independently, through contacts with associations and socio-cultural organisations in Italy.	

In both cases, we tried to recruit people with different socio-demographic profiles (age, gender, educational level, political interest) also taking into account minorities and disadvantaged groups within the national context.
Review of activities carried out
The main problems emerged in relation to the language barriers in some interviews with foreigners, with whom it was very difficult to have in-depth conversations about the topics of the research. Furthermore, the quality of the interviews improved over time. As the researcher became more familiar with the outline of the questions and the interviewees' answers, she adjusted her research approach, improving data collection. In general, apart from this detail, no other obstacles emerged.

Poland

TEAM: Jagiellonian University (**JU**)

Authors: Beata Klimkiewicz, Monika Szafrańska, Katarzyna Vanevska.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

In 2023, Poland saw a political shift as the liberal Civic Platform, led by Donald Tusk, replaced the right-wing PiS after eight years in power.

Polish society is culturally homogeneous, with 71% identifying as Catholic and minorities including Ukrainians, Silesians, and Germans. Polish is spoken by 99.5% of the population, with English and Silesian also present.

The media landscape remains polarized. Public media are under liquidation, while private broadcasters TVN and Polsat dominate. Print media is declining, led by tabloids, and regional press remains largely under the control of state-owned Orlen, affecting editorial independence.

Key Insight: *Poland is undergoing a period of political transition and media restructuring, marked by a shift in government leadership, and a deeply polarized information environment where state influence and internal tensions challenge institutional independence and public trust.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS
Number of sessions	4
Observations	The focus groups ran smoothly, with participants generally engaged and respectful. Levels of involvement reflected prior political interest, and all activities were completed as planned. While some participants tried to dominate or remained quiet, moderation ensured balanced input. One additional activity in the first group was dropped in later sessions due to similar outcomes in other tasks. Overall, the discussions produced consistent and usable results despite occasional off-topic moments.

Key Insight: *The focus groups confirmed that political interest strongly influences engagement levels, but with proper moderation, even diverse groups can produce consistent, meaningful input aligned with the discussion objectives.*

8.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
Last parliamentary elections in Poland took place in October 2023. After eight years of the rule of the conservative, right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), the power was taken over by the coalition of so far opposition parties under the leadership of the liberal Civic Platform (PO). Other parties included in the so-called 15th October Coalition are: the Third Way (an alliance of the centrist Poland 2050 of Szymon Hołownia and the agrarian Polish People's Party - PSL) and The Left. The Prime Minister is Donald Tusk, the leader of the Civic Platform and former President of the European Council. After one year, the government is rather stable, however conflicted. The example of this is a conflict about liberalization of the abortion law opposed by the PPS, or the current dispute over reduction of health insurance contributions for employees and entrepreneurs, being opposed by the Left. The Left itself is also divided into smaller fractions which are being tarnished by internal conflicts. The survey conducted in September 2024 shows 32% of Poles support the current government, 40% oppose it, and 25% are indifferent about it[10]. Around May next year, there will be held presidential elections in Poland. The current President, Andrzej Duda, will not be a candidate as it his second term, and in Poland one cannot be the President more than twice. Duda represents the Law and Justice party, which leads to conflicts between him and the government. The Polish Presidents does not have strong prerogatives, he can, however, veto any act that gets voted by the Parliament (although, in most cases, Parliament might reject this veto). There is no one dominant topic in the Polish debate right now (maybe except the upcoming presidential campaign which slowly starts to evoke more and more emotions). The Polish political stage is divided when it comes to results of the American presidential elections. The ruling coalition is not satisfied with the election of Donald Trump. In February 2023, Tusk called Trump "a politicians dependent on Moscow", but shortly after announcing the election results, he told at the press conference that he never said these words, which led to controversies. The Law and Justice is satisfied with Trump's victory. MPs of this party applauded Trump's election in the Sejm's plenary chamber day after the election results announcement. During the period of the study, an important social issue was the great flood that destroyed large areas of southwestern Poland. This issue also became another ground for political conflict between the government and the opposition.

[10] The Polish Press Agency, *Czy Polacy popierają obecny rząd? Sondaż CBOS*. https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/czy-polacy-popieraja-obecny-rzad-sondaz-cbos (accessed 24th October, 2024).

Specific cultural, religion and linguistic characteristics
The ethnic and cultural structure of the Polish society is rather homogenous. There are, however, some relevant minorities, mainly: Silesian, Kashubian, German and Ukrainian. Poland has also welcomed a significant number of refugees from Ukraine. The vast majority of the Polish population (99.5%) uses Polish at home. The most frequent languages other than Polish include English and Silesian. Around 71.3% of the Polish citizens belong to the Catholic Church. The biggest religious minority are Orthodox believers.
Traditional and digital information landscape
The PSM include the TV broadcaster (TVP), Polish Radio and Polish Press Agency. Each of these outlets has been placed it in liquidation since the end of 2023, after the change of the government and President's veto on the financing of all three companies. The most relevant private TV companies are TVN and Polsat – both deliver 24-hour news channels and everyday news program on their general channels. The readership of the paper press in Poland is declining. The most popular daily are the tabloids "Fakt" and "Super Express". The quality newspapers have much lower readership. Most of the newspapers in Poland have also digital editions. Up to 2023, the media landscape in Poland was extremely polarized. The PSM sector openly supported the then government, meanwhile the most popular commercial TV station, TVN, was pro-opposition. After the change of the government, the PSM's standards were changed into more neutral content. There are, however, other news outlets promoting the extreme and polarizing views, like the right-wing Republika TV to which a lot of former TVP's viewers flowed. The local media market was devastated when Polska Press was taken over by state-owned PKN Orlen in December 2020. Orlen's ownership virtually consolidated almost the entire regional press market, taking over 20 of Poland's 24 regional dailies and 120 regional weeklies, drastically depriving them of political independence. After PiS lost the elections, Polska Press remains owned by Orlen, although its management has changed.
Any other information related to the national political/social/media landscape that, from your point of view, may be useful for the analysis.
More data on the Polish media landscape can be found in our country report for D 4.2.

8.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number focus groups	4
Time period	October 5–12, 2024

Locations

Institute of Journalism, Media and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University, Kraków: The Institute provides the necessary equipment (projector, flipchart, etc.). The administration worker who was responsible for providing vouchers and supplies also works in the same building which made the whole organizational process easier. The participants were informed about how to get to the building. We also provided them with a map showing the location of the room where the discussion took place.

Recruitments

The recruitment took place via social media (Facebook, Messenger and Reddit): Most of the participants were recruited on Facebook. The invitations were posted in different groups, dedicated to: local announcements and adverts in Kraków, to recruitment for social and market studies as well as to communities (e.g. LGBT+ community in Kraków) and also by the University of the Third Age.

On Reddit, the invitation was posted on the forum dedicated to local news from Kraków. Due to organizational and financial limitations, we could not afford arranging the focus groups in other cities in Poland.

Whenever it was possible, we tried to keep a balance of origin, gender, education, etc. However, because we conducted all the recruitment on our own, we were not able to find such a number of participants in each group that would allow us to collect four fully representative samples.

Review of activities carried out

We did not face major problems. The level of participants' involvement corresponded to the level of interest in politics occurring from the results of the recruitment survey. We managed to keep the discussions polite and engaged. There were no major conflicts between the participants, and everyone carried out the proposed activities with a commitment. There were participants trying to dominate the discussion as well as participants shying from speaking too much, but we made sure everyone had an equal amount of time to express their views.

In some groups, the participants tended to get side-tracked and depart from the main topic, but still we managed to fulfill the provided scenario with all groups. During the first group (18-35, low political interest), there was conducted one extra activity. Later, the moderator gave it up because the results were similar as in another task.

Portugal

TEAM: Universidade Lusófona (**Lusofona Uni**)

Authors: Tatiana Chervyakova, Manuel José Damasio, Nuno Cintra Torres.

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

In December 2023, Portugal's Prime Minister resigned due to a corruption scandal. In March 2024, early parliamentary elections were held, with the centre-right AD coalition winning, but struggling with a fragile majority. The economy showed improvement in 2023, with GDP growth of 2.3% and decreasing public debt.

Portugal's media landscape is shifting, with print media in decline and private broadcasters like SIC and TVI leading TV ratings. Online news consumption is growing, with streaming and pay TV becoming more popular. Despite financial difficulties, key media players like RTP, Impresa, and Media Capital remain influential.

Key Insight*: Portugal faces political instability with a fragile government, while its economy shows slow improvement. The media landscape is shifting, with declining print media, rising online news, and dominant private broadcasters like SIC and TVI.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS	INTERVIEWS
Number of sessions	4	10
Observations	Focus groups provided key insights into participants' backgrounds and experiences. Despite recruitment challenges, a specialized agency helped ensure diverse representation in terms of gender, age, education, political views, and financial stability. Many participants identified as disadvantaged, with factors like migration status, ethnicity, and financial hardship influencing their views. The online interviews, conducted via MS Teams in Portuguese, also prioritized a balanced representation of disadvantaged groups.	

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Key Insight: *The focus groups and interviews revealed a diverse mix of participants, with balanced representation across gender, age, political views, and socio-economic backgrounds. The inclusion of disadvantaged groups—especially those with intersecting challenges like migration status and financial instability—provided deeper insights into societal issues, political engagement, and media attitudes.*

9.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
The prime minister of the Socialist Party majority government, re-elected on 2022 for a new four-year period, presented his resignation in December 2023 following a corruption judicial case involving his chief of staff and others. The PM was not accused of involvement and in June 2024 he was elected President of the European Council. On March 11, 2024 Parliamentary early elections were held. Results: Centre right coalition AD (Democratic Alliance, PSD, CDS, PPM) wins with 28,02% of the vote. PS (Socialist Party) is second with 28%. Radical right Chega gets 18,07% from only 7.19% in the 2022 elections. The IL (Liberals) 4,94%, BE (radical left) 4,36% and PCP (communists) 3,17%. The AD formed a minority government. Its proposed 2025 budget was approved but the opposition promised to change many legislatative provisions into its liking. The government's flimsy majority obliges it to repeatedly enter into parliamentary agreements with the opposition, leading to lame duck governance. But the opposition parties have no electoral interest in bringing down the government leading to new early elections as polls show strong voter's opposition to new elections so early due to instability fears, while the parties are apprehensive that Chega, the radical right party, might again increase its share of the vote. Presidential elections will take place in January 2026. There are yet no formal candidates presented as usual by the parties, but a fearsome independent contender has appeared in the form of an admiral who resigned from Navy chief to become a candidate. He is very popular due to the competent management of the Covid vaccination effort. His political views are so far unknown, but he has been building the image unforgiving doer. Portugal is slowly improving its financial and economic situation. The GDP grew by 2.3% in 2023, above the eurozone average, but still below the growth impetus necessary to reach the eurozone average. Public debt decreased from 131.6% of GDP in 2016 to 97.4% in September 2024 (2024, Bank of Portugal). High indirect taxes account for much of the improvement. Real GDP per capita increased from a record low of EUR16030 in December 2023 to a record high of EUR19250 in December 2023. This contrasts with the Euro Area average of EUR39644 (2024, Eurostat). Parliament recently approved the government's proposal to reduce the top corporate tax from 21% to 20%. Tourism reduced its share of exports. Manufactured goods such as machines and electronic equipment increased and account for much of the exports, but the balance of trade is still negative. The main objective of economic policy is to improve salaries and investment (2024, AICEP, Bank of Portugal).

Specific cultural, religion and linguistic characteristics

The Portuguese Republic includes two autonomous regions, Madeira and the Azores that elect their own regional parliaments. There are two official languages, Portuguese spoken by around 250 million people all over the world, and Mirandês (a remnant of the ancient Leonese language, spoken by a few thousand in Northeastern Portugal).

The Portuguese population totalled 10 639 726 (2023, INE). It is still very homogeneous. Total population is growing thanks to immigration. Around 25% of the babies born in 2022 had a foreign mother. In the last decade immigration has been changing the ethnic composition of the country. There are now 800,000 foreigners, the double of ten years ago, making up almost 10% of the total population. 76% come from non-EU countries, mostly from Brazil (29.3%), United Kingdom (6%), Cape Verde (4.9%), India (4.3%), Ukraine (3.9%) and from many other countries (Angola, China, Nepal, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Bangla Desh). The most represented EU countries are Italy (4.4%), Romania (4,1%), France (3.8%) and others (Spain, Germany, Netherlands) (2022, Eurostat, Pordata). No numbers exist for the Russian diaspora.

Most immigrants are employed in services, construction and agriculture. Brazilians account for over 70% of restaurant employees.

Most immigrants learn to speak Portuguese while the large Brazilian community easily mixes with the indigenous population. In recent years Brazilian organised crime established its activities in Portugal (and in other European countries).

Portuguese emigration was of around 70 000, a slight increase from 2022. Destination countries were Spain, France, Switzerland. The UK was traditionally the prime destination but since Brexit there was a decrease of over 40% (Vidigal, 2024). Many emigrants are highly educated, such as doctors (over 2 000 in five years), nurses, engineers.

Freedom of religion is a constitutional right. Portugal is a non-confessional State. There is no official religion. In 2022, 80% of those over 15 years of age considered themselves Catholic, a slight decrease from a year before (2021, INE). The number of practicing Catholics is much smaller. Most young people (56%) consider themselves as Catholics, but only a third are practicing Catholics (2023, CEPCEP). To self-consider as a Catholic has become mostly a cultural identification. Other Christian faiths represent around 5%. Non-Christian faiths, including Islamism, represent around 1.14%. Without religion 14.09% (2021, INE).

In November 2024 there were for the first time “France style” serious riots (bus burning, Molotov cocktails) in one neighborhood in the outskirts of Lisbon involving immigrants related with gang infighting, not racially motivated. Police are the main target of protests and aggressions.

Traditional and digital information landscape

The media sector is composed by six major actors: Private commercial ad financed groups: *Impresa controled* founded in 1973 by Francisco Pinto Balsemão, the deacon of independent democratic media in Portugal, and a former prime minister in the early eighties of last century, *Impresa* is involved in publishing, broadcast TV, international TV, streaming TV, and other activities.

The capital is EUR84 milion.

Media Capital Group has a capital of close to EUR90 million and is controlled by Pluris Investments, S.A. in turn controlled by Mário Ferreira, a tourism entrepreneur, with 37.05% of the shares. Triun, SGPS, S.A. holds 23%, BIZ Partners, SGPS, S.A. and CIN both have around 11% shareholding. Its assets include broadcast TV, international TV, streaming TV, radio.

Pubcaster RTP, financed directly by the citizens via a tax incorporated in the electricity bill plus a share of the ad market.

Global Media Group is now 100% owned by businessman Marco Galinha, owner of group BEL a diversified conglomerate. Its mains assets in publishing and radio. The group is facing serious financial difficulties (as of December 2024) highlighted by Lusa's unilateral termination of the news feed contract to the group's media assets.

Other actors are multinational Bauer Media Audio Portugal and Observador a right of centre liberal online newspaper founded in 2014 by a group of businessmen. The largest shareholder (49.95%) is Amaral & Hijas Holding S,L controlled by Luís Amaral. In 2019 it launched Rádio Observador broacasting over the air and online.

Although not a media group, conglomerate Sonae (super and hyper markets, telecoms, health and wellbeing, eletronics, real estate, etc) plays an important role in the media market with its ownership of quality newspaper Público, a centre of left daily founded in 1990 on the initiative of a group of former Expresso journalists.

Sonae is controled at 53.1% by Efanor, the controlling vehicle of the Azevedo family. Sonae is also the major shareholder NOS, the second largest pay TV and telecoms operator, with 37.37% of shares, followed by ZOPT, GSPS, S.A., owned by Unitel International Holdings and Cento Holding Limited, two companies owned by Angolan Isabel dos Santos, with 26.07%. The free float is 31.56%.

Medialivre is the successor of Cofina group that was sold in 2023 by EUR56,8 million in a MBO financially supported by CR7, S.A. owned by Cristiano Ronaldo to a group of its journalists, former owner and new shareholders. It is active in print (newspapers, weekly, magazines), radio and two cable news channels. Medialivre is owned by Sorolla, SGPS, S.A., with 32%, in turn owned by a group of individuals, and by CR7 with 30%.

Trust in News is the owner of weekly magazine Visão and of business magazine Exame bough from Impresa in 2018 for over EUR 10 million. It has an accumulated debt most of it to the State (social security and taxes) of over EUR32 million.

Trust in News proposed to the court paying the debt over a period of ten years.

Print and digital: In 2002 there weas a record of 2107 titles. In 2022 only 840 subsisted In 2004 over 1800 ere printed on paper. In 2022 only about 400 remained printed while less than 100 were online. From close to two million in 2008, circulation is down to around 250 thousand. (2022, INE). Annual readership is down from a record of 40% for all publications to 16,8% in 2021 (Marktest).

Print daily newspapers market share were in 2023: Público 14,6%, Correio da Manhã 55,7%, Jornal de Notícias 27,2%, Diário de Notícias 2,5%. Share of the economy and finance dailies: Jornal de Negócioo: 100%.

Share of the economy and finance weeklies: Vida Económica 76.2%, Jornal Económico 23,8%. Share of weeklies and newsmagazines: Expresso 51,4%, Sábado 21.1%, Visão 27.5%. Destak free newspaper has 100% share.

Digital daily newspapers share: Público 85,2%, Correio da manhã 5,0%, Jornal de Notícias 7,3%, Diário de Notícias 2,6%. Share of digital economy and finance dailies: Jornal Económico: 100%. Share of digital weeklies and newsmagazines: Expresso 85,3%, Sábado 9,3%. Visão 5,4%.

Digital dailies "relevant" paid subscriptions: 132376. Público 47813, Correio da manhã 2785, Jornal de Notícias 4075, Diário de Notícias 1478. Digital weeklies and newsmagazines: Expresso 51214, Sábado 5613, Visão 3231.
Not shown digital daily Observador and economy and finance daily Eco.

News agency: LUSA is a public service operator and the only newsagency. In July 2024 the Portuguese State had 95.86% of the capital after acquiring the 45,7% paying EUR2,48 million for the share of Global Media and Página Civilizadas.

The public broadcaster is Radio e Televisão de Portugal (RTP). It broadcasts eight TV channels (RTP 1 generalist, RTP2 cultural, RTP 3 news, Memória archive, regional channels Azores and Madeira, international channels RTP Africa and RTP International) and seven radio channels (Antena 1 generalist, Antena 2 culture, Antena 3 youth, regional channels in the Azores and Madeira, and international channels RTP Africa and RTP International.

Streaming RTP Play is fast becoming a channel in its own right, specialy among young audiences. RTP is directly financed by the citizens via the electricity bill and from a small share of advertising on RTP1. The government proposed a gradual cut of RTP's ad share over several years but the parliamentary opposition voted against in fact killing it.

There are two main private television operators: Impresa group that owns SIC, its main broadcast channel, and several pay TV only channels: SIC Notícias (news), SIC Novelas (soaps), SIC Mulher (woman), SIC Radical (youth), SIC Caras (lifestyle), SIC K (children), and SIC Internacional, Opto (streaming) owns the broadcast channel TVI, V+TVI (soaps), TVI Internacional, TVI Reality (streaming reality shows), TVI Player (streaming).

TVI and SIC alternate the leadership of the ratings race in fierce competition. The most recent data (3Q 2024) puts SIC on top after a spell on the second spot. The average share rating audience in the 12 months from November 2023 to October 2024 were: RTP1: 10,9%; RTP2: 0.9%; SIC: 13.1%; TVI: 14,9%; Other: 0.8%; Pay TV: 40.7%; Time shift, DVD, etc: 17.2% (2024, CAEM).

In the second quarter of 2024, pay TV had 4,6 million subscribers, of which three million via optical cable. This represents 96% and 65.2% penetration respectively. Operator MEO, an Altice Group brand, represented 41.8% of subscribers, NOS 36.2%, Vodafone 19.3% and NOWO 2.7%. In 2022 streaming accounted for 42.3% of Internet users (#16 in UE27).

In the second quarter of 2024 fixed broadband had a penetration of 92% of families (4.7 million), an increase of 2.7% to same period in 2023. 92% had a download speed of at least 100 Mbps (#4 in Europe). Total internet traffic reached a new historic record with 309 GB. Social networks usage is above the EU27 average. Reading news online accounted for 79.7% of usage, followed by music online (72.6%), Internet banking (68.6%), health information (63.6%). Ecommerce is below EU27 average (2024, ANACOM, Eurostat).

Radio: Grupo Média Capital (seven national radio stations) had in 2023 the largest audience share with 31,5%. Grupo Renascença Multimédia, the Catholic owned group of radios (four national stations) with 25,3%. Public service broadcaster RTP (three national stations).

It has an audience share of 6,9%, followed by TSF, a news outlet founded by journalists was bought by Global Media Group in 2024, with 3,6% audience share. Last was Rádio Observador is a pioneer of subscription radio and online paper, was launched on the back of online newspaper Observador had 1,2% audience share. The most favoured days for listening to radio are the weekdays. Average listening time was 3:09 hours. Listening habits have stayed constant since 2003 (2023, Marktest).

9.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

<table>
<tr><th>Total number focus groups</th><th>4</th></tr>
<tr><td>Time period</td><td>From 1/07/24 till 13/11/24</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Locations</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The focus groups took place at the university's facilities in Lisbon due to the availability of rooms and equipment. All focus groups took place in Lisbon due to resources capacity. However, people participating in the groups were born in different parts of the country, not only in Lisbon.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Recruitments</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Initially the team relied on their own networks to recruit participants, and the first group was conducted through dissemination of the extended screening survey Base from the Task Methodological protocol provided by WP leader with some additional questions to secure the heterogeneity of the survey and the involvement of disadvantaged groups. However, the team faced difficulties with own recruitment and the next three groups were recruited with the help of a specialised agency with the same screening survey.

All participants lived in urbanized areas. All spoke Portuguese (European and Brazilian).
The profiles of participants were selected to provide the possible heterogenity and balanced representation from different characteristics: gender, age, education, financial stability (1), political views

The team also allowed the potential participants to answer whether they consider (2) themselves as a disadvantaged group member not to be led by the categories but by audience understanding of this and the next question asked to specify.

We noticed that people were claiming their disadvantage in different ways often intersected: migration status, financial stability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, chronic illness.

• Sometimes people realise that their income fully covers their cost of living. Has this happened to you in the last 12 months?
• (2) Do you consider yourself a member of a disadvantaged group?</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Additional elements to report</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The participants were granted 50 Euros of shopping voucher.
Transcription has been done with Nvivo, translation with Deepl Pro and revised by the team.</td></tr>
</table>

9.3 General methodological notes: Interviews

Total number Interviews	10
Time period	From 26/09/2024 till 15/11/2024
Locations	
All interviews were conducted online via MsTeams to respect the time of participants and because some people are living not in Lisbon	
Recruitments	
Initially the team relied on their own networks to recruit participants, and the first group was conducted through dissemination of the extended screening survey (Base from the Task Methodological protocol provided by WP leader with some additional questions to secure the heterogenity of the survey and the involvement of disadvantaged groups. The first 4 interviews were conducted based on own recruiting while the rest of the participants were recruited with the help of agency. The team paid attention to balance of genders, political positions, level of interest in politics. As required, the team paid attention to disadvantaged people to be represented in the interviews. The team also allowed the potential participants to answer whether they consider themselves as a disadvantaged group member not to be led by the categories but by audience understanding of this and the next question asked to specify. This information is contained in methodological note on each participant. Most interviews were conducted in Portuguese. All interviewees were from urbanised areas.	
Additional elements to report	
The participants were granted 50 Euros of shopping voucher Transcription has been done with Nvivo, translation with Deepl Pro and revised by the team	

Slovenia

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DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA PANORAMA

Since June 2022, Slovenia has been governed by a center-left coalition led by Robert Golob. The previous government, led by Janez Janša's SDS, was marked by illiberal policies and protests. The current government faces criticism for slow reforms and compromising with business interests. SDS is gaining support, focusing on "traditional values" and restricting "left-wing" media. The next elections are in 2026.

Slovenia, with a population of 2.1 million, is one of Europe's smallest countries. Slovenian is the official language, but Italian and Hungarian are co-official in areas with these national minorities. Roma are recognized in the Constitution, but their protection is limited. Ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia have no official minority status. The Constitution and laws protect the use of Italian and Hungarian in certain regions, including in media.

Slovenia's media landscape is dominated by PRO PLUS, a foreign-owned group, which holds the most popular TV and news portal. TV is the main news source for Slovenians, followed by online portals. Public service media remain vital despite political challenges.

***Key Insight**: Since June 2022, Slovenia is governed by a center-left coalition led by Robert Golob. The previous SDS government was marked by illiberal policies. The media is dominated by PRO PLUS, with TV as the main news source. Minority languages are protected in some regions, but Roma and other ethnic groups lack full recognition.*

QUALITATIVES DATA COLLECTION

Activity	FOCUS GROUPS
Number of sessions	4
Observations	Four focus groups were conducted across Slovenia to ensure regional and demographic diversity: two in Ljubljana, one in Maribor, and one in Koper. Recruitment was done ensuring gender balance and geographical representation. While participants varied in engagement, all groups were generally balanced by age and gender. Some sessions faced dominance by certain participants and a drop in energy toward the end.

***Key Insight:** Focus groups in Slovenia revealed diverse regional and demographic insights, with some challenges in participant engagement and group dynamics.*

10.1 Contextual notes

Current political situation of the country
Since June 2022, the government is composed from three center-left political parties, including the Freedom Movement (liberal-democratic party) as the main party with largest number of MPs, as well as Social Democrats and the Left. The coalition has stable majority in the parliament (53 out of 90 MPs). The Prime Minister is dr. Robert Golob, previously a successful businessman in the energy sector (particularly solar energy). In the previous term, 2020-2022, the government was composed of the right-center political parties, with the right wing party, Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), being the main party in the coalition. The party, led by three times Prime Minister, Janez Janša, has been described by some political analysts in Slovenia and abroad also as far right political party, having close political and financial connections with the ruling party in Hungary, Fidesz, and Hungarian PM Orban. The party and its leaders are strong supporters of Donald Trump. Despite these connections, SDS remains in the EU Parliament Group of the European People's Party although their MEPs did not support Von der Leyen for the EC President. In the term of the Janez Janša government, in 2020-2022, there was an illiberal turn in Slovenia introducing illiberal authoritarianism, violations of the rule of law and media freedom, attacks on independent institutions, journalists and non-governmental organisations, misuse of power, restrictions and violence against citizens protests, revision of history (particularly WW2), restrictions on migrations and asylum etc. There were major protests of citizens and legal actions and campaigning by civil society to protect rights and freedom and democratic standards, and to mobilise citizens for defending democracy. As a result, the voter turnout at the 2022 elections was high and the center-left parties won the elections. The winning party, the Freedom Movement, was a new party, formed just before the elections, and their leader was a new face in politics, with both elements contributing to the enthusiasm among left-center voters traditionally dominating in Slovenia. The current center-left government has been criticised for being slow, not very operational, making compromises with interests of the business/capital instead of protecting interests of the people and environment, and not successful in fulfilling the election promises, given formally to the large coalition of civil society (Voice of the People). It has prompted some social and left-liberal values, and also in foreign policy supporting multilateralism and UN policy (being a member of the UN Security Council in this period), also recognizing Palestine as an independent state, but has not introduced expected reforms in public health system, affordable housing, environment protection etc.

And also not introducing sanctions against Israel. Particularly the reform of public health system, expecting to clearly separate public and private health system, and protect public health systems has been a major policy issue since the government was appointed.

According to the opinion polls, at the beginning of 2025, the ruling party has lost large portion of support, and the Janša's party SDS is leading the polls. The later is intensifying the campaign of own promises to return Slovenia to "traditional values" and to introduce restrictive measures against "leftist" media and civil society.

The next elections are expected in Spring 2026.

Specific cultural, religion and linguistic characteristics

Taking into account the size of the population - 2,120,937 (Statistical Office Republic of Slovenia, 2023), Slovenia belongs to the smallest nations in Europe. The official language is Slovenian, however in the areas traditionally settled by the protected Italian and Hungarian national minorities (near the borders with Italy and Hungary), the co-official languages are Italian and Hungarian.

The Roma are recognised in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia as an ethnic group, but the level of this minority protection is lower.

Moreover, in Slovenia, there are also ethnic communities from the nations of former Yugoslavia (Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Kosovo Albanians), significant by size, cultural and historical connections. However, their minority status is not officially recognised and only minimum minority protection is granted to them. This hierarchy in protection of minority communities is reflected in the channels and programmes of the public service broadcaster – Radiotelevizija Slovenija – devoted to national minorities.

The use of Italian and Hungarian as minority languages is protected by the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. Article 11 of the Constitution specifies: "The official language in Slovenia is Slovene. In those municipalities where Italian or Hungarian national communities reside, Italian or Hungarian shall also be official languages". (The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021).

The use of the minority languages are also regulated by two other acts. Firstly, in the Act on the Public Use of the Slovene Language, Article 3, stipulates: "In the areas of the municipalities in which the Italian or Hungarian national communities live, the public use of Italian or Hungarian as official languages shall be ensured in the manner in which this Act regulates the public use of Slovene and in accordance with the provisions of the respective sectoral laws" (Zakon o javni rabi slovenščine, 2004).

Secondly, also relevant to the use of minority languages in the media in Slovenia, Article 5(7) of the Mass Media Act, specifies: "If the programme is intended for the Hungarian or Italian ethnic communities, broadcasters may disseminate the programme in the language of the ethnic community" (Zakon o medijih, 2001).

Traditional and digital information landscape

The news media landscape in Slovenia is dominated by a media group PRO PLUS, owned by international CME Media Enterprises B.V., with the most watched TV channel (and TV news programme) and most visited news portal in the portfolio; it has foreign ownership and was established in 1995. This is a particularly significant position having in mind that, according to Eurobarometer 2022, the most popular source of news for Slovenians is TV (76%), followed by online news portals (44%). The third place is shared by radio and social media platforms (both 36%), while the print media (18%) are the last on the list of sources of news for Slovenians.

Public service media, including both the public service broadcaster and the press agency, are persistently important news providers, despite periodic political attacks aiming to diminish their financial stability and overall independence (Splichal,2020).

Print media, particularly traditional daily newspapers, remain a crucial source of quality news production while experiencing sustainability crises. At the same time, a variety of online news media, including non-profit outlets carrying investigative journalism and fact-checking, contribute to the diversity of news sources.

In the print and radio market, there is dominance of the media group Media24, owned by the Slovenian businessman Maritn Odlazek family. According to the recent research based on the 2022 data, Media24 consist of a network of twenty interconnected companies that are horizontally, cross-sectorally, and vertically concentrated. These twenty companies print or broadcast a total of 121 media outlets (34 print editions – dailies, weeklies and lifestyle magazines), 73 radio stations, 12 online portals, and two television stations).

Based on data from several research projects, the media outlets taken over by this beneficiary owner routinely experience depletion and downsizing both in terms of finance and staffing. Even though the valid Mass Media Act stipulates that the publisher of a daily newspaper cannot simultaneously be the publisher or co-founder of a radio or television programme, such practices have persisted. This is largely due to the ease of circumventing media law, stemming from inadequate regulation and oversight.

In addition, dozens of media outlets, owned by or affiliated with the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), currently the largest opposition party operate at both national and local levels, including seemingly unconnected network of regional online media.

These outlets predominantly function as propaganda tools rather than genuine media entities. In most cases, identical content is disseminated through these media outlets and platforms.

Any other information related to the national political/social/media landscape that, from your point of view, may be useful for the analysis

The composition and development of the news media landscape in Slovenia are strongly affected by outdated and inefficient regulatory frameworks, including several media laws and regulatory bodies with overlapping yet not implemented powers, failing to restrict concentration and impose transparency.

However, the new Media Act, currently (in February 2025) in the parliamentary procedure, introduces new safeguards regarding media concentration, and there are high expectations for the new media law to effectively address and restrict media concentration. The proposed regulation, which aligns with the principles of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), includes a specific media concentration assessment procedure and assigns anti-concentration regulatory powers to AKOS, a regulatory authority already tasked with regulation of audiovisual media services, but also telecommunications, post, digital service, and railways.

There is a state aid scheme providing financial support to the media in Slovenia for content production in public interest, administered by the Ministry of Culture, but allocating rather small total amount of less than 3 mio EUR to the media on annual basis.

In the new Media Act, subject to adoption procedure in the parliament, two additional state aid schemes are further set out, one supporting the digital transition of print media, and the other providing for assistance to digital media. The new law lays down the eligibility criteria for all types of state financial support to the media, including respecting the transparency requirements regarding the ownership data, data on state advertising, and the disclosure of conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, the schemes exclude the media that are public entities or are under the predominant influence of public entities. The media directly or indirectly owned or founded by political parties are also excluded from funding. Additionally, media outlets whose responsible editors or their substitutes have been convicted in the last two years of the criminal offense of public incitement to hatred, violence, and intolerance under Article 297 of the Penal Code are also excluded. The measure follows the policy of demonetising hate speech in the media.

10.2 General methodological notes: Focus Groups

Total number focus groups	4
Time period	20 June 2024 – 5 September 2024

Locations

We conducted four focus groups. Two were conducted in **Ljubljana** - the capital of Slovenia, located in the Central Slovenia region.

In order to have a broader geographical representation, but also to take into account the demographic and cultural differences of the regions, we conducted one focus group in **Maribor** - the second largest city in Slovenia (Eastern Slovenia) and one in **Koper** (South-Western Slovenia, Primorska region). This ensured a broader coverage, as Ljubljana as the main urban centre provides insights into specific urban challenges, while Maribor and Koper represent regions with different socio-economic dynamics.

Recruitments

The recruitment of the participants was conducted by Valicon, a marketing, consulting and research company. Valicon also carried out a survey, using the screening questionnaire designed by the WP5 coordinator, and recruited participants on the basis of the results.

For each focus group, a day before the focus group, Valicon provided a list of participants (name, gender and age) and data from the survey. In order to have reserve, the list always included one or two more names, in addition to the standard of 8 participants. In none of the focus groups all 8 recruited participants on the list made an appearance, so there was no need to " turn anyone away".

In setting the recruitment conditions, we followed the guidelines in the methodological protocol received from the WP5 coordinator. We specified as a condition to Valicon that each recruited group should be gender balanced. All participants spoke Slovene, but we did not make this a concrete condition. Geographical representation was ensured by conducting focus groups in three different regions/cities of Slovenia.

Review of activities carried out

All of the focus groups generally represented diverse age and gender, though in some cases, gender imbalances were present. However, at the end the whole sample was gender balanced.

In all of the cases some participants dominated the conversation, while others remained more passive. Moreover, a common issue observed was a decline in energy and motivation towards the end of the session, leading to shorter answers or more passive agreement.

In FG1 (high political interest), most participants demonstrated high political interest, while there was a discrepancy with one participant, who claimed not to follow the media or participate in political activities, despite indicating in the screening questionnaire that he/she was politically engaged. And in FG2: After 15 minutes of the focus group, one participant decided to leave the discussion. As he was a bit arrogant during his presence, the other participants did not dare to talk. After his voluntary departure, the atmosphere became more relaxed - this was confirmed by the other participants afterwards. As he did not sign the consent form, all his statements and references to them by other participants were deleted in the transcription of the focus group.
Additional elements to report
The participants have signed a declaration of participation (informed consent). They have signed two copies. One is kept by each of them and the other by the Peace Institute.

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