

MEDIA & POLITICS –

Mapping political information environments: Country Report FRANCE

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Introduction

The French media landscape is characterised by a rich history and a wide variety of media, ranging from traditional print media to public and private television channels and emerging digital media. This media landscape plays a central role in shaping public opinion and the way citizens engage democratically. Understanding the influence of the media on political life in France requires analysis of several key dimensions. We focus here on six key areas for understanding the construction of citizens' democratic engagement: the supply of political information, the quality of journalistic content, media concentration and diversity of information, fragmentation and polarisation of audiences, relativism in news coverage, and the degree of inequality in citizens' political knowledge.

Supply of political information

Since 1944, France has been committed to guaranteeing media pluralism, a central issue in the relationship between the media and politics. As Raymond Kuhn explains in the book *Media Plurality in France*¹, this pluralism has two dimensions: external, aimed at the diversity of sources of information through measures against media concentration and support for the press and public broadcasting; and internal, limited to the broadcasting sector, overseen by the Autorité de régulation de la communication (Arcom), the French public body responsible for regulating audiovisual and digital content in order to guarantee pluralism, freedom of expression and the protection of audiences.

According to a study published by the Arcom, television remains the main source of information for the French, with 66% watching it every day². Radio follows, then search engines and social networks. The press, whether online or in print, is consulted less on a daily basis. On average, the French use nine sources of information, although 13% only follow one or two sources, which can lead to information isolation. Share of attention, a measure developed by Andrea Prat, helps us to understand the relative importance of each source in information habits. Television channels, particularly TF1, capture the largest share of attention. The public media play a crucial role, occupying 20% of the total attention share.

¹ Kuhn, R. (2015). *Media Plurality in France*. In S. Barnett et al. (Eds.), *Media Power and Plurality*. Palgrave Macmillan, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137522849_11

² Elisa Mougin, "Not All Information Carries the Same Weight in Shaping Opinions", *Le Monde*, November 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2024/11/01/elisa-mougin-economiste-toutes-les-informations-n-ont-pas-le-meme-poids-dans-la-formation-des-opinions_6370648_3232.html



⇒ This graph, produced by Arcom, shows the speaking time given to each party on the four most-watched general-interest and news channels on television for the 2024 legislative elections (in minutes, between 11 and 25 June).

It is important to highlight that the way in which political news is covered in France varies considerably depending on the type of media and the editorial lines that drive them. Television, the written press, digital media and social networks do not cover political news in the same way, or for the same audience. Firstly, television channels, and in particular 24-hour news channels such as BFMTV, CNEWS, LCI and Franceinfo, play a major role in disseminating political news. Their treatment is often based on immediacy, the staging of debate and the search for “buzz”. This sometimes leads to over-mediatisation of certain subjects or a focus on polemics rather than in-depth analysis.

Editorial lines vary:

- Franceinfo is a public channel that seeks to preserve a form of neutrality.
- BFMTV adopts an approach more focused on live coverage and media spectacle.
- CNEWS, under the impetus of some controversial figures, is tending towards a conservative and identity-based line, with a right-wing or even extreme right-wing bias.

The print media, and in particular the national dailies, offer a more in-depth and structured treatment of political news. The editorial lines are clearly identified:

- Le Monde (centre-left) favours analysis and contextualisation.
- Le Figaro (centre-right) offers a conservative reading of the issues.
- Libération (left) focuses on social struggles, civil rights and civil liberties.
- Les Echos (liberal economics) focuses on economic and institutional policies.
- L'Humanité (far left) defends a Marxist and militant interpretation of political news.

Then there are independent media such as Mediapart, Blast and StreetPress, which adopt a critical investigative stance, focusing on scandals, abuses of power and issues of democratic transparency.

Finally, the new digital media (Brut, Konbini, Loopsider) have revolutionised the way political information is disseminated, particularly among young people. Their approach is based on short, visual formats tailored to mobile consumption, an educational and committed tone, often based on progressive values (ecology, inclusion, social justice) and a strong presence on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, where political news is often told through faces and personal accounts. Content creators such as HugoDécrypte embody this new form of political mediation, highlighting the issues at stake while maintaining a certain neutrality.

Two major studies shed light on these trends. The report entitled “Les Français et l'information” (“The French and Information”) published by Arcom in 2024 provides a detailed analysis of information behaviour and explains these changes in terms of growing concerns about misinformation and the

polarisation of opinions³. On an international scale, the Reuters Institute's "Digital News Report 2024" provides a comparative perspective: it notes that the French are among the most distrustful of the media, with a trust rate of just 31%⁴. These reports highlight the coexistence of a plurality of practices and the growing fragmentation of audiences, calling into question the content of news and above all its quality, as we shall see in the next section.

Quality of news

In France, the quality of information is regulated by a number of bodies, some of which are public, but which operate independently. One of the key players in this area is Arcom. This body ensures compliance with the laws governing television channels and plays an essential role in maintaining pluralist, balanced information that complies with democratic principles. When the rules on impartiality are not respected, Arcom also has the power to impose sanctions. In 2024, for example, it imposed a broadcasting suspension on the C8 channel (channel 8 of DTT), following multiple breaches of its obligations, marking an unprecedented and symbolic decision in media regulation.

Alongside Arcom's missions, a large amount of independent academic research is enriching the debate on the quality of information in France. These studies, conducted by university centres such as CARISM at the Université Panthéon-Assas and the Institut de la Communication at Lyon 2, analyse the plurality of opinions and media concentration from the point of view of their impact on the quality of content. Researchers such as Julia Cagé at Sciences Po are proposing innovative approaches to guaranteeing independent information, while critical bodies such as the Acrimed Observatory are studying media bias and the mechanisms by which information is produced.

For public service media such as France Télévisions and Radio France, the quality of information is a key issue, linked to their public service remit. These players rely in particular on the results of the annual La Croix/Kantar barometer on trust in the media⁵. For example, the 2024 edition reveals an overall drop in confidence, but a higher rate of reliability given to the quality of information in the public media compared to private 24-hour news channels. What's more, we are increasingly seeing the integration of fact-checking or solution journalism, which is also fuelling studies into changes in the quality of information and its reception.

On the academic front, a number of researchers have examined the criteria for journalistic quality. Jean-Marie Charon, in *Les médias à l'ère numérique*⁶, shows that digitisation has profoundly transformed professional practices, placing the emphasis on speed, adaptability and interactivity. These technical and economic developments tend to undermine traditional quality requirements, such as the verification, prioritisation and contextualisation of information.

Finally, the report of the Estates General on Information (2024) stresses that the impartiality and quality of information in France are being undermined by the rise in disinformation, the polarisation of opinions, the insecurity of journalists and the concentration of the media. All this is leading to a real

³ Arcom, *The French and News (2024 Edition)*, <https://www.arcom.fr/se-documenter/etudes-et-donnees/etudes-bilans-et-rapports-de-larcom/les-francais-et-linformation>

⁴ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>

⁵ Verian, *French Trust in Media Barometer 2024*, published January 2025, <https://www.veriangroup.com/fr/news-and-insights/barom%C3%A8tre-de-la-confiance-des-fran%C3%A7ais-dans-les-media>

⁶ Jean-Marie Charon, *Les médias à l'ère numérique*, *Les Cahiers du journalisme*, 2011, https://www.cahiersdujournalisme.net/pdf/22_23/01_CHARON.pdf

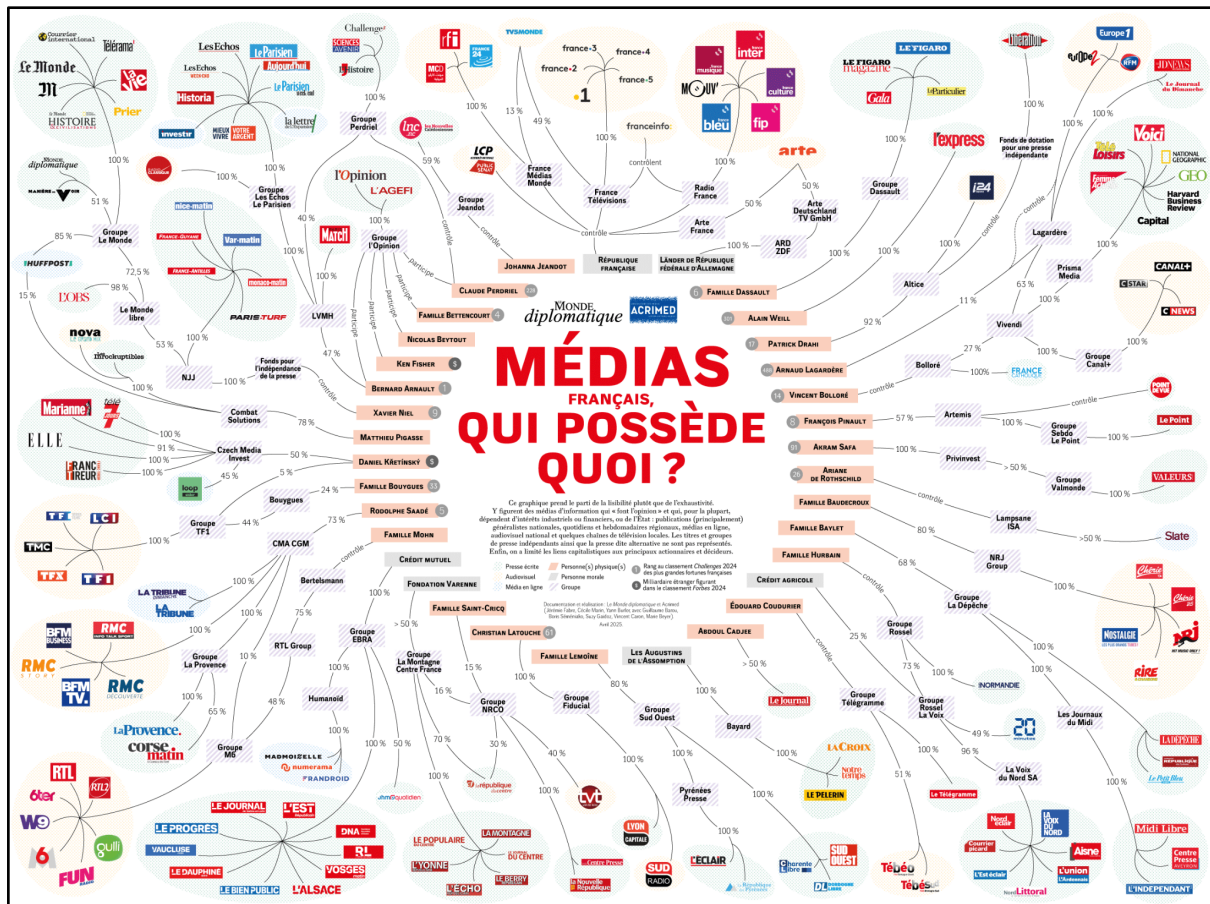
loss of public confidence. To improve the situation, the report proposes, among other things, providing more media education from an early age, setting up ethics committees in newsrooms, providing better protection for journalists, regulating the major online platforms and ensuring stable funding for the public media in order to guarantee more reliable, independent and pluralist news.

The current context in France sometimes leads to a preference for speed over thorough verification. Furthermore, as we will see in the next section, media concentration and commercial influences can limit the diversity of viewpoints, thereby affecting the plurality essential to complete and balanced information. This is why strengthening journalistic practices, in particular through quality indicators such as verifiability, contextualisation and plurality of sources, appears to be essential for restoring public confidence and guaranteeing reliable, high-quality information.

Media concentration and diversity of news

In France, almost all the traditional media (television, radio and the written press) are now owned by a small number of individuals or large private groups. The only exceptions are the few public television channels that are financed and owned by the state (France Télévision, La Chaîne Parlementaire, Arte). This extreme concentration of media ownership is the result of several decades of restructuring of the audiovisual and press landscape, often driven by commercial and industrial interests. The sector is now dominated by powerful economic players, mostly from outside the world of journalism.

This situation has been extensively documented by Acrimed (Action Critique Médias), a French association founded in 1996 on the initiative of academic Henri Maler and sociologist Patrick Champagne. Acrimed's mission is to observe, analyse and criticise the operation of the media from a democratic perspective, in particular by denouncing the conflicts of interest linked to the concentration of press titles and audiovisual channels.



| "French media, who owns what?" - Last updated in April 2025.⁷

This graph emphasises readability rather than exhaustiveness. It lists influential news media (national general-interest press, regional titles, online media, public and private broadcasters), most of which are linked to industrial, financial or state interests. The independent and alternative press is not included, and only the main shareholders and decision-makers are mentioned. This representation illustrates the growing concentration of the media in the hands of large fortunes, popularising the question of the link between media ownership and editorial control: to own is to direct.

This concentration of media ownership raises crucial issues in terms of pluralism of information, editorial independence and diversity of viewpoints. It reflects a worrying phenomenon: the media are increasingly tending to become instruments of political influence at the service of their owners. In response to this situation, the younger generations are turning to independent media, perceived as more transparent. These include structures based exclusively on funding from readers, such as Mediapart, or new formats distributed mainly via social networks, such as Frontières, which are seeking to renew the relationship with information.

Several studies confirm this change in media usage, particularly among young people. The INJEP study entitled *Young people's relationship to information in 2024*⁸ shows that 15-34 year-olds now favour social networks as their main source of information, to the detriment of traditional media. It also reveals a widespread distrust of the mainstream media and a marked preference for sources perceived as independent or alternative. From a quantitative point of view, data from *Médiamétrie* (2024)⁹ confirms

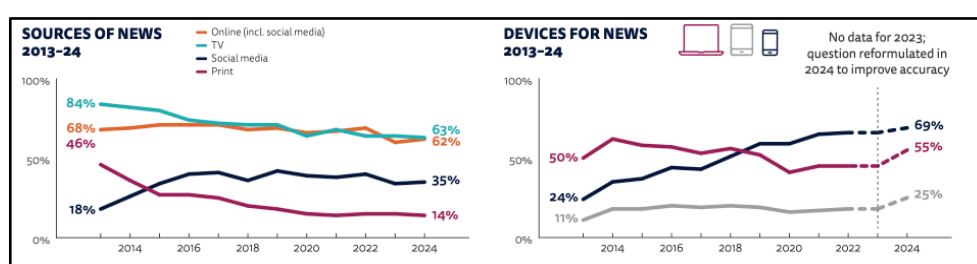
⁷ Acrimed. (n.d.). *Médias français : qui possède quoi ?* Retrieved May 17, 2025, <https://www.acrimed.org/Medias-francais-qui-possede-quoi>

⁸ INJEP (Institut national de la jeunesse et de l'éducation populaire), *Youth and Information Barometer – 2024*, November 2024, p. 50 https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Rapport-2024-17-Baro-jeunesse-2024-2_Information.pdf

⁹ Médiamétrie, *15–24 Year Olds: Intensive, Individual, and Connected Media Practices*, 2024 <https://www.mediametrie.fr/fr/les-15-24-ans-des-pratiques-medias-intensives-individuelles-et-connectees>

that 15-24 year-olds consume information massively on smartphones, with individualised and connected practices centred on social platforms. To reinforce this idea, the work of academics such as Éric George provides an in-depth analysis of the effects of media concentration on pluralism, and highlights the role of digital transformations in reshaping the media landscape¹⁰.

This trend is confirmed on an international scale by the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report 2024*¹¹, which devotes a detailed section to France thanks to the work of Alice Antheaume, Executive Dean of the Sciences Po School of Journalism. The study reveals that only 22% of French people still claim to access information via television as their first reflex, compared with 42% via their smartphone, often by consulting social networks. Among the under-35s, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are becoming the dominant channels for following the news, eclipsing the websites of the major traditional media. This paradigm shift in access to information is not just about formats or media, but reflects a more profound transformation in the relationship with institutional journalism. The Reuters Institute has also observed a strong distrust of the traditional news media, particularly among the younger generations, who are turning to more direct, embodied formats that are perceived as more authentic.



| Graph from the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2024

However, this logic can quickly drift towards a form of populism: these media depend entirely on their audience to exist and are therefore tempted to adapt their editorial line, or even distort information, in order to capture attention and retain their audience. This dynamic is intensified by the promotion of the idea, popularised by Elon Musk, that “the media are the people”, which tends to polarise audiences, as we shall see in the next part of this paper.

Fragmentation and polarization

France has a pluralist media landscape, with media outlets with a variety of political leanings that are often clearly asserted. This pluralism partly reflects the country's social and political divisions. However, the media landscape is becoming increasingly fragmented, with so-called “traditional” media on the one hand and more radical media on the other.

According to the academic study *Uncovering the Structure of the French Media Ecosystem*¹², the French media landscape is less ideologically polarised than that of the United States, but highly fragmented between a central core and peripheries. This core is made up of generalist media such as *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération* and *France Info*, which share many interconnections and represent a common reference base for much of the public debate. Around this centre gravitate highly politicised peripheral media, such as *Fdesouche*, *Égalité & Réconciliation* and *FranceSoir*, which are often suspicious of the mainstream media and have little connection with them. These media target specific audiences and often

¹⁰ Nikos Smyrniakos, “Media Concentration and Democracy: A Growing Threat,” *Questions de communication*, no. 33, 2018 <https://journals.openedition.org/questionsdecommunication/10963>

¹¹ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>

¹² Jean-Philippe Cointet, Dominique Cardon, Pascal Baroni, Yoann Julliard, Baptiste Renoust, *Uncovering the Structure of the French Media Ecosystem*, arXiv, 2021, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2107.12073>

offer readings of the world that break with the dominant narratives. This creates parallel universes of information, where facts, references and values are no longer shared.

This phenomenon was particularly illustrated during the *Gilets jaunes* movement, when many demonstrators said they no longer trusted the mainstream media and got their information via Facebook, YouTube or alternative sites. This is a form of fragmentation of the public sphere, in which individuals produce their own norms and narratives, often in opposition to institutional discourses. This segmentation calls into question the traditional role of the media in democracy. If citizens no longer share the same information, it becomes difficult to have a public debate based on shared facts.

This dynamic of fragmentation is also reflected in the plurality of editorial poles present in the French media landscape. While a range of political sensibilities coexists, these are increasingly structured into relatively distinct blocs.

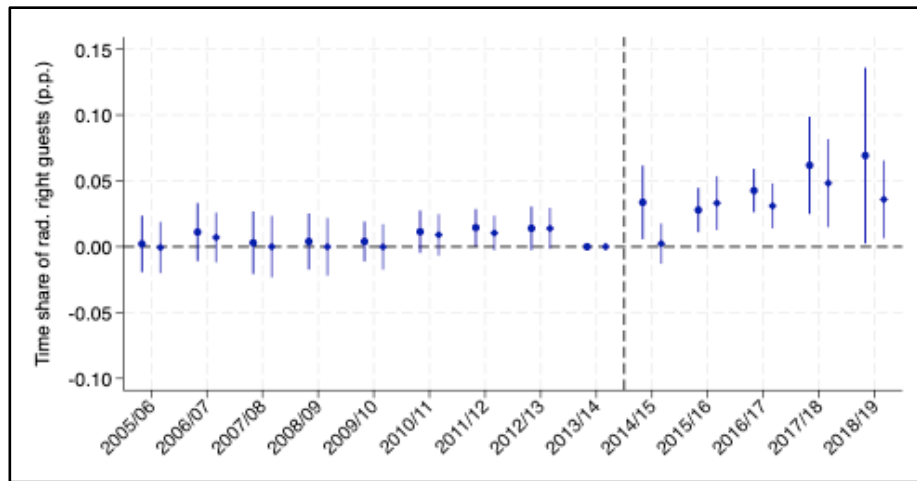
- On the left, media outlets such as *Libération*, *Mediapart* and *L'Humanité* adopt critical positions toward economic liberalism and conservative policies.
- At the centre, newspapers and broadcasters like *Le Monde*, *France Inter* and *France Info* seek to maintain journalistic balance and reach a broad audience, though they are sometimes perceived as favouring institutional perspectives.
- On the right and far right, outlets like *CNews* and *Valeurs Actuelles* promote a more conservative, security-focused, and occasionally nationalist vision. *CNews* is often compared to *Fox News* for its overtly right-leaning editorial stance.

This diversity of media in France reflects a certain pluralism, but it also contributes to reinforcing divisions between different audiences. Each media outlet often targets a group that is already convinced, which encourages what is known as confirmation bias: people tend to seek out and believe information that confirms their opinions, and reject information that contradicts them. As Larivée and her colleagues explain in a study of scientific research¹³, this bias can limit the questioning of ideas and impoverish debate. In the media, it can create increasingly inward-looking groups, making public debate based on shared facts difficult.

There has been a rise in nationalist-style discourse, largely linked to the growing influence of certain media owners, as mentioned above. These players use their media to promote their political ideas, thereby helping to shape public opinion. This is particularly true of Vincent Bolloré, whose group owns several of the most influential broadcasting channels in the French media landscape: the Canal+ group, with two of the most watched television channels, the Europe 1 group, one of the most listened-to radio stations, as well as several of the most read press titles. This concentration in the hands of a player with strong ideological convictions encourages the dissemination of polarising views and contributes to the radicalisation of public debate¹⁴.

¹³ Serge Larivée, Carole Sénéchal, Zoé St-Onge and Mathieu-Robert Sauvé, *The confirmation bias in research*, *Revue de psychoéducation*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2019, pp. 245–263, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1060013ar>

¹⁴ “How the ‘French Murdoch’ Carried Le Pen’s Far Right to the Brink of Power”, *France 24*, June 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240627-how-the-french-murdoch-carried-le-pen-s-far-right-to-the-brink-of-power>



| Event-study regression: radical-right timeshares around Bolloré takeover¹⁵

An independent study by academics entitled *Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States*¹⁶ assesses media pluralism through a series of precise indicators, such as editorial independence, diversity of opinion, concentration of media ownership and fair access to information. As far as France is concerned, the study highlights an ambivalent situation: while the legal framework offers apparently solid guarantees, the reality of the media landscape is marked by a high degree of concentration in the hands of a few major economic groups. This concentration limits the plurality of voices and encourages a homogenisation of content, thus restricting the diversity of opinions accessible to the general public. This phenomenon contributes to the fragmentation of the public arena and accentuates political polarisation, particularly on social networks, where algorithmic logics reinforce confirmation bias and informational confinement. What's more, media discourse remains largely monopolised by political, intellectual and journalistic elites, most of whom are Parisian, fuelling a feeling of marginalisation in outlying regions and reinforcing mistrust of the traditional media. The study underlines the urgent need to rethink public policies in favour of media pluralism, an essential condition for preserving a vibrant and inclusive democracy.

The arrival of the Internet and social networks has increased the number of forums for expression and debate, offering new opportunities for civic engagement. However, this proliferation of platforms has also fragmented audiences into closed groups, often polarised around strong convictions. These “filter bubbles” reduce the exchange of different ideas and encourage the dissemination of false information, weakening trust in the French media and making it more difficult to form a shared public opinion, as we shall see in the next section.

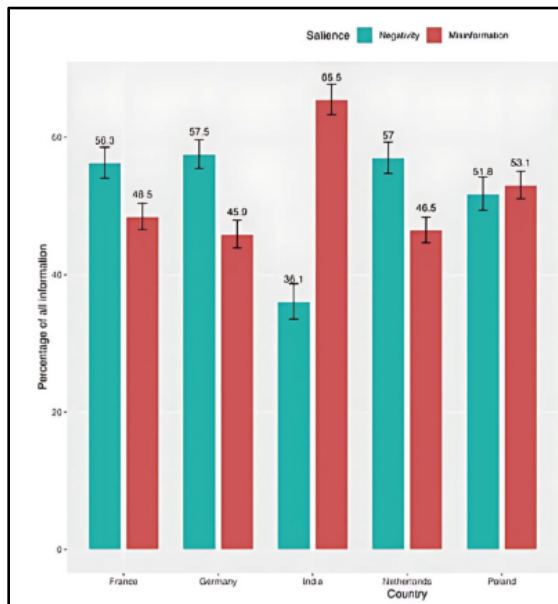
Relativism in news

Misinformation and fake news are widespread in today's French media. A lot of studies show that the public perceives a significant increase in these phenomena, particularly on social networks. However, perceptions vary according to social group, age, level of education and political preferences¹⁷. Some people tend to see any information that contradicts their beliefs as “fake news”, which reinforces relativism and distrust of the traditional media. As we saw in the previous section, the polarisation of the French media also contributes to blur the line between fact and opinion.

¹⁵ Jérôme Sainte-Marie, “The Political Economy of the French Far Right Media”, *SSRN*, May 2023, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4036211

¹⁶ *Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States*, commissioned by the European Commission, available at https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/studies/media-pluralism_en.pdf

¹⁷ Maftai, A., & Marchis, I., *Disinformation Perception by Digital and Social Audiences: A Theoretical Review*, *Journal of Intelligence and Terrorism Studies*, MDPI, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2023, <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/3/4/99>



The study conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School's Misinformation Review, *Misinformation Perceived as a Bigger Informational Threat than Negativity* and published in May 2024, examines how audiences perceive misinformation and negativity bias in the news¹⁸. Based on a survey conducted in seven democracies, including France, it reveals that individuals consider misinformation to be a greater threat than the prevalence of negative news, even in countries where the latter is perceived to be more widespread. The results indicate a generally cynical view of the media environment, with voters believing that more than half the news is marked by misinformation or negativity bias, with disruptive consequences for society.

| *Estimated percentages of negativity and misinformation in the news across countries*

In France, the main focus of research into disinformation is on analysing the mechanisms by which false information is produced and disseminated, particularly via digital social networks. Researchers are interested in how these platforms encourage the virality of misleading content, often to the detriment of verified information. This field brings together a variety of disciplines, including information and communication sciences, sociology, political science and computer science. The aim is to understand how algorithms, online communities and strategies for manipulating opinion interact to amplify misinformation, particularly in times of elections or crises (health, security, etc.)¹⁹.

Another important area of research concerns the reception and resistance of audiences to misinformation. Work is looking at the critical skills of citizens, their level of trust in the media, and media and information literacy (MII) initiatives. The aim is to identify the factors that make certain audiences more vulnerable to misinformation, while at the same time assessing the effectiveness of public policies and fact-checking initiatives²⁰. This dual focus, on the producers of disinformation and on the public, is now at the heart of French research in this field.

In the French context, misinformation research also focuses on three key areas: the technological mechanisms of dissemination, the cognitive vulnerabilities of audiences and the effectiveness of countermeasures. The government agency Viginum, established in 2021, investigates foreign digital interference and highlights how social media algorithms, particularly on platforms like Twitter, amplify misinformation by promoting engagement-driven content, often of foreign origin. Meanwhile, the Fondation Descartes emphasizes psychological factors, notably the “illusory truth effect”, whereby repeated exposure to false information increases its perceived credibility, even when accompanied by warnings. Finally, a report by the EU DisinfoLab outlines France’s extensive landscape of fact-checking initiatives and media literacy programs. However, it notes that these efforts often lack coordination and

¹⁸ Harvard Kennedy School, *Misinformation Perceived as a Bigger Informational Threat than Negativity*, 2024, <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/misinformation-perceived-as-a-bigger-informational-threat-than-negativity-a-cross-country-survey-on-challenges-of-the-news-environment>

¹⁹ Sorbonne University, *To counter fake news and propaganda, fact-checking is not enough*, 2023, <https://www.sorbonne-universite.fr/actualites/pour-contrer-infox-et-propagande-le-fact-checking-ne-suffit-pas>

²⁰ Université Gustave Eiffel, *Social media in the age of fake news and dishonest influencers*, Reflexscience, 2024, <https://reflexscience.univ-gustave-eiffel.fr/lire/articles/reseaux-sociaux-a-lere-des-fake-news-et-des-influenceurs-malhonnetes-un-expert-en-desinformation-nous-livre-trois-conseils-de-securite>

legislative support, reducing their overall impact. Research into misinformation is as much about understanding the causes of the phenomenon as it is about finding technical, social and educational solutions.

Degree of inequality in political knowledge

Political knowledge, or the ability to understand the issues, players and mechanisms of public life, is unevenly distributed across the French population. This inequality reflects deeper disparities, particularly in terms of cultural capital and level of education. In *Le Cens caché*, Daniel Gaxie develops the notion of “political competence”, which he defines as the ability to feel legitimate and capable of participating in political debates and decisions. In his view, abstention is not necessarily a sign of disinterest, but often a form of self-exclusion linked to a feeling of incompetence. Gaxie speaks of a “democracy of the incompetent public” in which a large proportion of citizens feel unable to understand the political issues at stake and therefore shy away from electoral participation. He also points out that this lack of competence makes certain individuals more vulnerable to manipulative discourse, sometimes prompting them to vote against their own interests for lack of critical analysis.

From this perspective, the media play a central role in shaping public opinion. As Patrick Champagne analyses in *Faire l'opinion. Le nouveau jeu politique*, the French media above all influence individuals who do not have a previously structured opinion. These people, who often have little political experience, rely heavily on media representations to form their opinions. Conversely, citizens with a more solid political culture are less permeable to the effects of the media, as their understanding of the issues is based on already constructed frameworks of analysis. A particularly revealing example of this dynamic is opinion polls: widely disseminated in the media, they tend to shape opinion rather than reflect it. By giving the illusion of consensus or highlighting certain electoral trends, they influence political behaviour, particularly among the least informed voters, who may adopt a majority position perceived as legitimate.

The French media are a major source of political information, but their ability to disseminate knowledge equally and in depth remains uneven. While some media, notably the leading print media (Le Monde, Libération) and political broadcasts on public service channels (France Inter, France 5), can help people understand the issues at stake, others, notably 24-hour news channels and general-interest television news, tend to favour simplification, the spectacular or conflicts of opinion to the detriment of in-depth analysis. This tension between information and entertainment limits the educational impact of the audiovisual media. In addition, a divide is emerging between citizens according to their degree of political involvement. The most politicised or educated tend to seek out more qualitative sources, such as in-depth investigations or expert debates. Conversely, less committed audiences are more exposed to short, sensationalist formats or those filtered by social networks, reducing the opportunities for critical political learning.

A study by the *Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po* (CEVIPOF) also highlights the decline in confidence in the traditional media, particularly among young people and those living in working-class neighbourhoods²¹. This mistrust further limits the educational impact of traditional media, even when they offer quality content. In other words, while the French media have the potential to nurture citizens' political learning, this potential is unevenly exploited depending on the media formats, the cultural capital of the audiences and their relationship of trust with the information. Learning is therefore neither automatic nor universal, but depends closely on the socio-media context and individual

²¹ CEVIPOF, *Barometer of Political Trust*, Sciences Po, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/fr/etudes-enquetes/barometre-confiance-politique/>

information practices. At the same time as confidence in the traditional media is declining, social networks are playing an increasingly important role in political information practices, particularly among the younger generation. YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter have become places where political content is circulated, sometimes on a massive scale. These platforms provide rapid, often personalised, access to a diversity of viewpoints, including those of counter-discourse or minorities that are poorly represented in the traditional media.

However, the impact of social networks on political knowledge remains ambivalent. On the one hand, some content creators manage to popularise complex issues in an accessible and engaging way, contributing to a form of informal pedagogy that can enrich political understanding. On the other hand, as shown in Tiziano Taillibert's master's thesis (Université de Lorraine, 2022)²², the predominance of “snack news” (very brief, simplified and often decontextualised content), encourages rapid consumption of information, which is detrimental to deepening political knowledge.

This “snack culture” on social networks can reinforce cognitive biases and limit young people's ability to construct a global and nuanced understanding of political issues, which is essential for informed and critical civic participation. In addition, this academic study highlights the fact that algorithms encourage the creation of information bubbles, where users are exposed mainly to content that confirms their pre-existing opinions, as we explained earlier. This phenomenon restricts exposure to a wide range of discourses, which is a necessary condition for genuine enrichment of political knowledge. In this sense, digital fragmentation represents a major challenge for political learning, which is traditionally based on diversity and the confrontation of ideas.

Conclusion

To understand how the media shape citizens' democratic engagement in France, we have used a variety of sources in this paper, including academic articles, university studies, books by experts, reports by public institutions, and research conducted by NGOs, in order to cover a wide range of issues related to the French media landscape. Through this research, we can conclude that the media constitute an essential pillar of democratic debate, primarily through the transmission and framing of political information. They play a central role in informing citizens and influencing political participation. However, their proximity to centers of economic and political power raises legitimate concerns regarding their impartiality, independence and ability to serve the public interest. In recent years, the growing concentration of media ownership have contributed to a climate of public mistrust. This erosion of confidence poses a real threat to democratic engagement, particularly among younger generations and marginalized communities. In this context, it becomes all the more crucial to promote a diverse and independent media ecosystem, enforce transparent regulatory mechanisms, and invest in media literacy education. Strengthening these dimensions is essential not only for restoring trust, but also for ensuring that media remain a true vector of democratic vitality in France.

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