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 Trust, Facts and Democracy

In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology

France, Spain and Italy are more fragmented in their news sources and more negative toward the news media than other countries

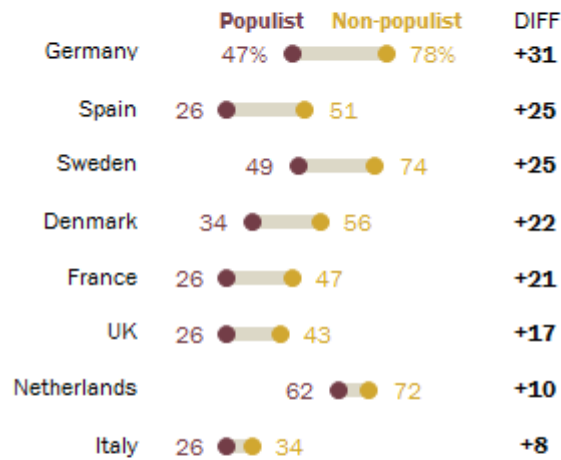
BY AMY MITCHELL ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/AMY-MITCHELL/](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/amy-mitchell/)), KATIE SIMMONS ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/KATIE-SIMMONS/](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/katie-simmons/)), KATERINA EVA MATSA ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/KATERINA-EVA-MATSA/](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/katerina-eva-matsa/)), LAURA SILVER ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/LAURA-SILVER/](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/laura-silver/)), ELISA SHEARER ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/ESHEARER/](http://www.journalism.org/author/eshearer/)), COURTNEY JOHNSON ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/CJOHNSON/](http://www.journalism.org/author/cjohnson/)), MASON WALKER ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/MWALKER/](http://www.journalism.org/author/mwalker/)) AND KYLE TAYLOR ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/KTAYLOR/](http://www.journalism.org/author/ktaylor/))



(Nicholas Page/Getty Images)

Trust in news media in Western Europe varies widely between those with and without populist views

% of adults in each country who hold ___ views and trust the news media at least somewhat



Smaller, if any, divides between those on the political left and right

% of adults in each country in each ideological group who trust the news media at least somewhat



Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**. Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials." See Appendix C for details on classification. Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

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(http://www.journalism.org/2018/05/14/in-western-europe-public-attitudes-toward-news-media-more-divided-by-populist-views-than-left-right-ideology/pj_2018-05-14_western-europe_o-01/) In Western Europe, public views of the news media are divided by populist leanings – more than left-right political positions – according to a new Pew Research Ce

feedback

opinion survey conducted in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Across all eight countries, those who hold populist views value and trust the news media less, and they also give the media lower marks for coverage of major issues, such as immigration, the economy and crime.¹

Trust in the news media dips lowest in Spain, France, the UK and Italy, with roughly a quarter of people with populist views in each country expressing confidence in the news media. By contrast, those without populist leanings are 8 to 31 percentage points more likely to at least somewhat trust the news media across the countries surveyed.

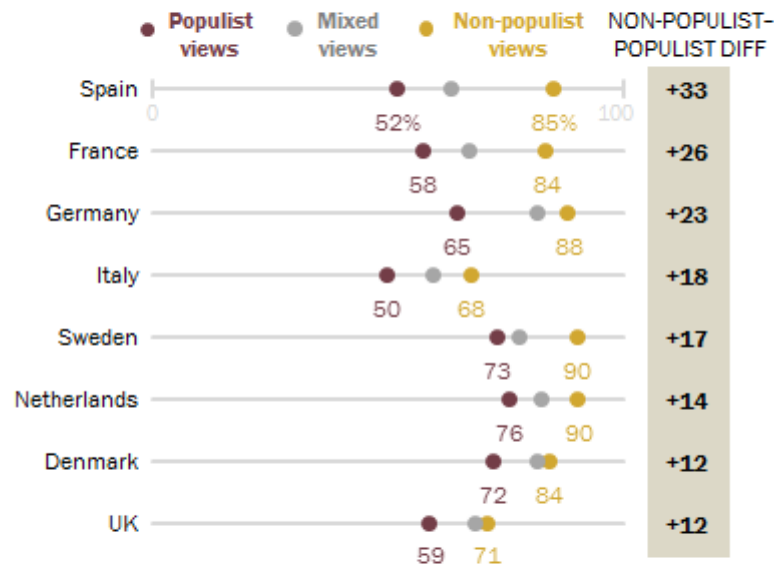
In Spain, Germany and Sweden, public trust in the media also divides along the left-right ideological spectrum, but the magnitude of difference pales in comparison to the divides between those with and without populist leanings.

When it comes to how the news media perform on key functions, broad majorities of the publics rate the news media highly for generally covering the most important issues of the day. This includes majorities of both those who do and do not hold populist views, though there are still significant differences in the magnitude of those ratings. More substantial divides between those two groups occur around how the news media do in covering three specific issues asked about here: the economy, immigration and crime. (See detailed tables (<http://www.journalism.org/2018/05/14/media-western-europe-detailed-tables>) for more information.)

► **Measuring populist views**

Wide gap between Western Europeans with populist views and those without in how well the news media cover the economy

% of adults in each country who hold ___ and say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering the economy



Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**. Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials." See Appendix C for details on classification.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

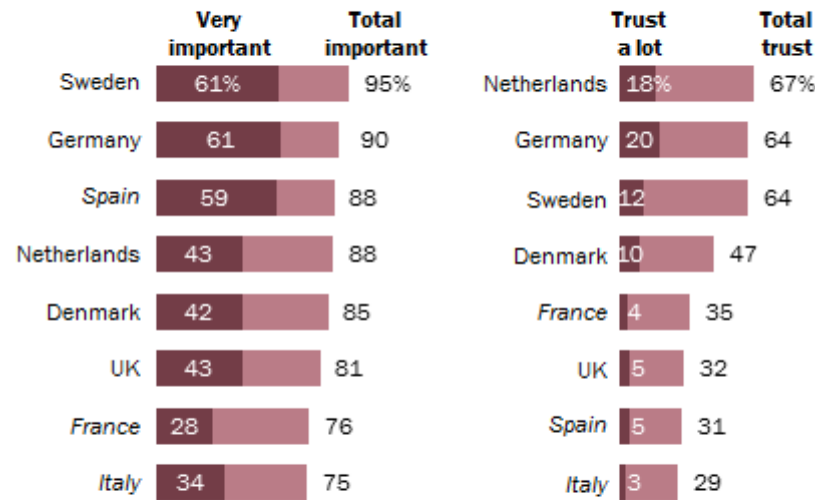
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(http://www.journalism.org/pj_2018-05-14_western-europe_o-02/) People who embrace populist views express much less satisfaction with news coverage of these issues. In Spain, for example, those with populist leanings are 33 percentage points less likely than those without such leanings to rate the news media's coverage of the economy as good. And in Germany, people with populist views are 29 to 31 percentage points less likely to applaud the news media's coverage of immigration and crime than people who do not hold populist views.

Southern European countries express low trust in the news media

% who say the news media are ...

% who trust the news media



Note: Southern European countries are in italics. Total important is the sum of "very" and "somewhat" important. Total trust is the sum of "a lot" and "somewhat" trust.
 Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
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(http://www.journalism.org/2018/05/14/in-western-europe-public-attitudes-toward-news-media-more-divided-by-populist-views-than-left-right-ideology/pj_2018-05-14_western-europe_o-03/) In addition to within country differences, public attitudes toward the news media also diverge along regional lines. This is most evident when it comes to trust in the media, with public confidence considerably higher in the northern European countries polled, as opposed to the southern countries.² The UK is somewhat anomalous, resembling southern, more than northern, Europe in its low level of public trust in the media (32%).

And while majorities in all eight countries say the news media are at least somewhat important to the functioning of society, there are large differences among the countries in the portions who say that their role is *very* important.

In a question asked in a Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults about trust in information from national news organizations (<http://www.journalism.org/2017/05/10/democrats-republicans-now-split-on-support-for-watchdog-role/>), Americans display similar levels of trust as those in the Netherlands and Germany. About seven-in-ten Americans (72%) say they trust the information they get from national news media at least somewhat, with 20% saying they trust it a lot.

(http://www.journalism.org/2018/05/14/in-western-europe-public-attitudes-toward-news-media-more-divided-by-populist-views-than-left-right-ideology/pj_2018-05-14_western-europe_o-04/) Despite the fact that people with populist views are much less satisfied and trusting of the news media, they often rely on the same primary source for news as those without populist views. This is the case in five of the eight countries surveyed: Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and the UK. In four of these five countries, a single news provider dominates as the main source for news.

In southern Europe, the media landscape is more fragmented, with no single news provider named as the main news source by more than 21% of adults. It is also the case that in this part of Europe, left-right political identity is more aligned with people's choice of main news source than their populist leanings.

In Italy, for example, 27% of those on the left turn to national broadcaster Rai News as their main source for news, compared with just 14% of those on the right. Italians on the right (30%) are more likely to turn to private broadcaster Mediaset News than left-aligned adults (6%). While there are some differences by populist views in Italy, the divide tends to be smaller when compared with those along the left-right political spectrum.

Here again the UK stands apart. Even as the BBC dominates as the top main news source for British adults –by both populists and non-populists – there is still a large difference between the portions of these two groups who name it as their primary source. Just 42% of those with populist views name the BBC as their main news source, compared with six-in-ten among those who do not hold populist views. Left-right ideological differences do not emerge: roughly half on both the left (48%) and the right (51%) name the BBC as their main news source.

These are some of the key findings of a major Pew Research Center survey of 16,114 adults about news media usage and attitudes across eight Western European countries – Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – conducted from Oct. 30 to Dec. 20, 2017. Together, these eight European Union member states³ account for roughly 69% of the EU population and 75% of the EU economy.

Publics in Western Europe view news outlets as more partisan than what is reflected in their audiences

In each country, in addition to volunteering their main news source, respondents were asked about eight specific news outlets. These were selected by researchers to capture a range of news platforms, outlets with different funding sources, and diversity in their ideological leanings. Generally, people tend to describe outlets that they turn to for news as being relatively close to their own left-right political identity.⁴

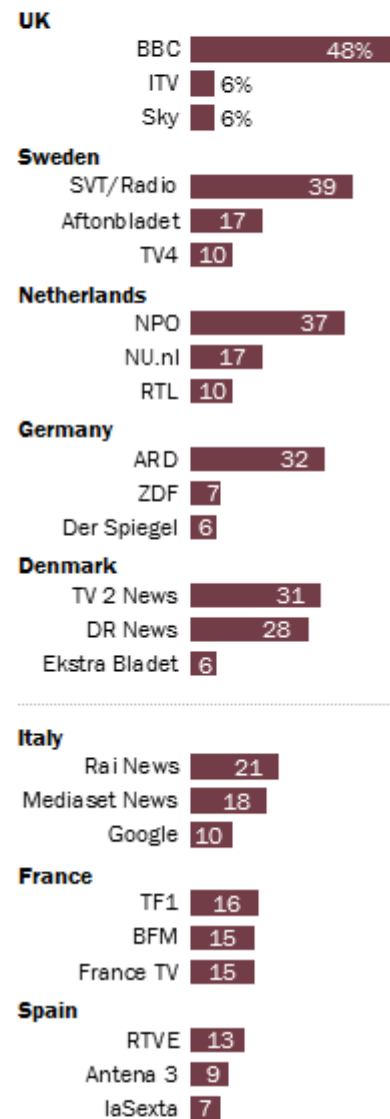
This differs, however, from where the average audience actually sits politically. When asked whether people regularly turned to each of the eight outlets for news, the self-reported audiences of those outlets tend to cluster around the ideological center.

► How the eight outlets were chosen for each country

In general, people who have heard of the outlets tend to place them either farther to the left or farther to the right than the self-reported audience results, showing that perceptions of polarization exist in the countries surveyed even though the audience figures reveal smaller divides.

Southern Europeans less likely to share the same main source for news

% of adults in each country who name each outlet as their main news source

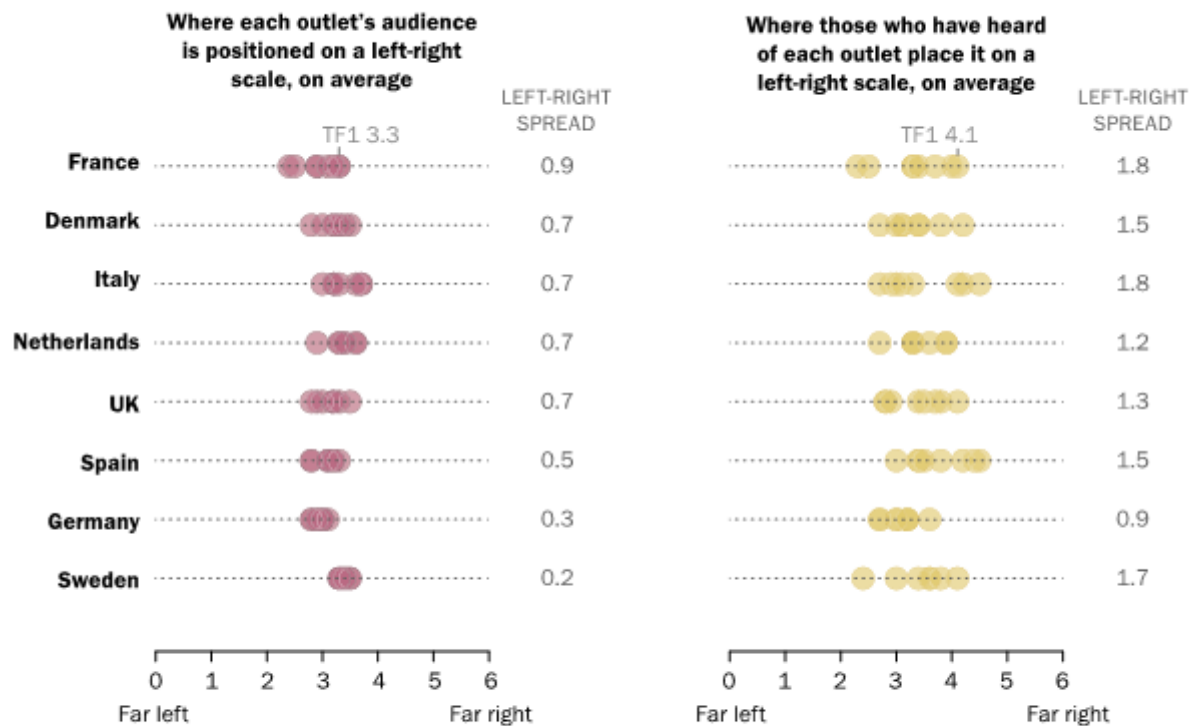


Note: Respondents in each country were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news, and the top three outlets are shown. These outlets listed here may differ from the specific news outlets asked about separately in this survey. Major brands were grouped into their larger news organization. For example, in France, France 2 is part of France Télévisions (France TV).
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

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Take, for example, the French private TV channel TF1. As shown in the accompanying graphic, TF1's audience – those who say they rely on it regularly for news – is at about the middle of the left-right continuum (3.3 on the 0-to-6 scale.) Yet, when people in France who have heard of TF1 are asked to place it on the same left-right scale, they place it significantly farther to the right (at 4.1).

News outlets' audiences concentrate near the ideological center, but Western Europeans perceive their country's media environment as more partisan



Note: Each dot represents one of the eight outlets for each country. An outlet's audience is defined as respondents who say they regularly get news from that outlet. Nya Tider in Sweden and Joop.nl in the Netherlands are not included in this graphic, because their audience sample sizes are too small to analyze. Left-right spread is the difference between the outlet farthest to the left and the outlet farthest to the right. Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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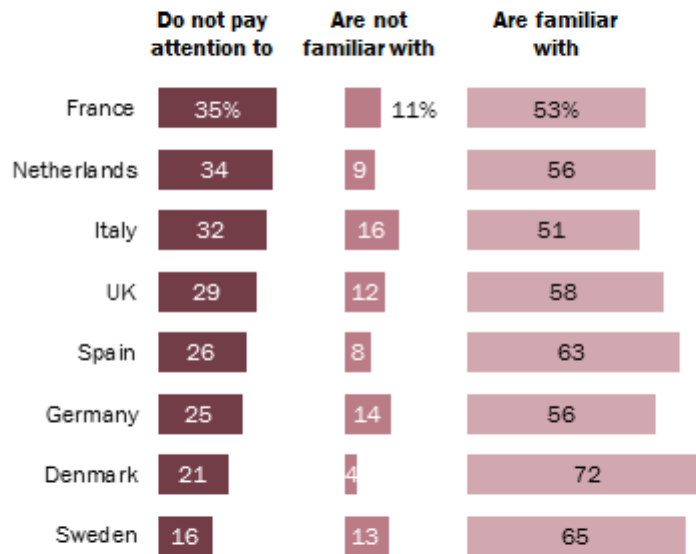
Many Western Europeans get news through social media, with Facebook being used most often

In seven of the eight countries polled, a third or more of adults get news at least daily from social media. The share that does so is highest in Italy, where half of adults get news daily via social media. In France, Spain, Italy and Germany, people with populist leanings are more likely to report getting news from social media platforms than those without such views.

Across all eight countries, Facebook is by far the most-frequently mentioned social media news source. More than 60% of social media news consumers in each country name Facebook as the social media platform they turn to most often for news. In some countries, Facebook is named as the main source for news overall by roughly 5% of adults, such as 6% of Italians and 5% of Spaniards.

Substantial minorities of social media news consumers don't pay attention to sources there, still about half or more are familiar with sources they encounter

% of social media news consumers in each country that say most of the news they see on social media come from news sources they ...



Note: Don't know responses are not shown. The question asked was: "In general, does most of the news you see on social media come from news sources you are familiar with, sources you are not familiar with, or do you not pay attention to the sources?"
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

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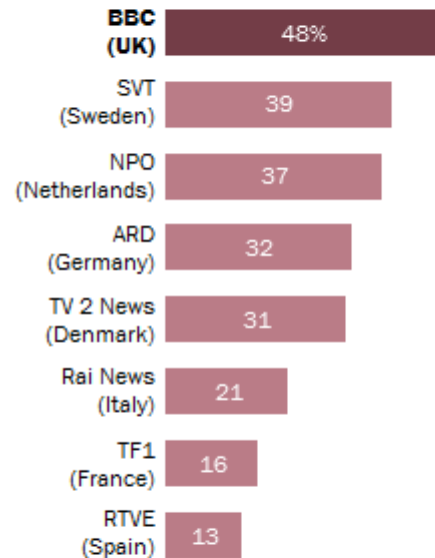
(http://www.journalism.org/2018/05/14/in-western-europe-public-attitudes-toward-news-media-more-divided-by-populist-views-than-left-right-ideology/pj_2018-05-14_western-europe_o-06/) Given recent concern about misinformation online, it is worthwhile to note that social media news consumers are not always discerning about their sources of news and information.

Although most social media news consumers in Western Europe say they are familiar with the news sources they encounter, sizable minorities in each country say they don't pay attention to where news on Facebook or other social media platforms comes from. The share of those who say they do not pay attention is roughly three-in-ten or more in France (35%), the Netherlands (34%), Italy (32%) and the UK (29%).

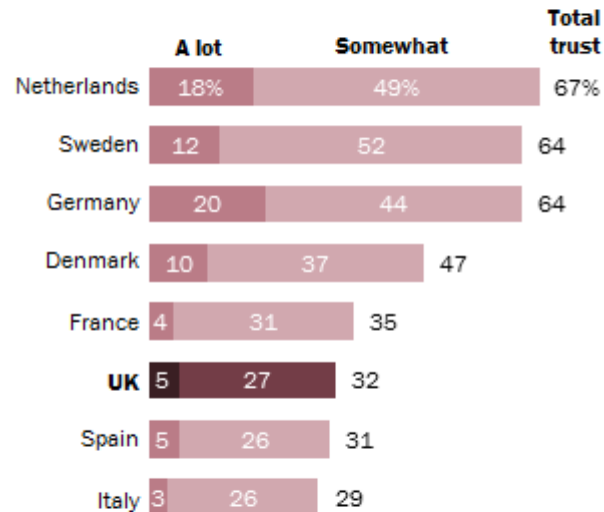
Further, whether or not the news seen on social media comes from sources people vet, few describe the news they see on social media as mostly aligned with their own political views.

UK similar to northern countries in sharing a common main news source but closer to southern countries in lower levels of trust of the news media

% of adults in each country who name each outlet as their main news source



% of adults in each country who trust the news media overall



Note: Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news, and only the top source for each country is shown. Major brands were grouped into their larger news organization. For example, in the Netherlands, NOS is part of NPO.
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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Country-specific dynamics of the news media in the UK

The UK stands out as unique from the patterns we see in the other seven countries studied. On one hand, British adults are the most likely to have a common news source: 48% say the BBC is their main source for news. This level of clustering around a single main news source is similar to the other northern countries surveyed, such as Sweden or the Netherlands.

On the other hand, the British express low levels of trust and approval of their news media overall, similar to what the survey finds in the three southern countries surveyed (Italy, Spain and France). Just 32% of adults in the UK say they trust the news media at least somewhat, and roughly half or fewer say their news media do a good job of getting the facts right (48%), provide coverage independent of corporate influence (46%), or are politically neutral in their news coverage (37%). And when it comes to outlets besides the BBC, there are notable left-right political divides in usage. The magnitude of those differences in the UK looks similar to what occurs in the more ideologically divided southern countries studied.

1. Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: “Most elected officials don’t care what people like me think” and “Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials.” See [Appendix C](#) for details on classification. ↩
2. For this study, southern Europe refers to France, Italy and Spain. These three countries have somewhat similar news media environments, relationships between the press and the government, and political histories (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Brüggemann et al., 2014). ↩
3. In June 2016, citizens of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. At the time of this survey, the UK had formally notified the bloc of its intentions to withdraw from the union but was still an EU member state. ↩
4. Respondents were asked to place each outlet on a left-right ideological scale from 0 to 6, with 0 indicating far left and 6 indicating far right. Respondents could choose to not place the outlet by volunteering “don’t know” or “refused” as responses. ↩