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Introduction

With a population of approximately 18 million, the Netherlands is a mid-sized country in Western Europe, characterised by a mature parliamentary democracy and a well-developed welfare state. In the 2025 Global Freedom Report, the country scored 97 out of 100 on political rights and civil liberties, indicating a highly robust democratic framework in which these rights are largely safeguarded. The 3% deduction is primarily attributed to concerns related to ethnic discrimination, shortcomings in the asylum system, and the impact of organised crime on public safety.

The Dutch media sector is undergoing a profound transformation as traditional news outlets increasingly struggle to compete with global digital platforms, a challenge that has intensified since 2025 with the integration of AI into news consumption practices. These developments can be summarised along **four key dimensions** (CvdM, 2025).

First, media ownership has become increasingly concentrated. Following the approval by the Dutch Authority for Consumers & Markets (ACM) in June 2025 of DPG Media's acquisition of RTL Nederland, only four major media players remain active in the Dutch market: DPG Media, Mediahuis, Talpa Network, and the public broadcaster NPO (CvdM, 2025).

Second, 2025 marks the breakthrough of AI-driven answer tools such as ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews as emerging sources of news. Although only around 5% of Dutch users relied on these tools for news in early 2025, usage is expected to grow rapidly. This development further shifts power toward global technology platforms, which increasingly act as gatekeepers by shaping information flows through opaque, algorithmic systems (CvdM, 2025).

Third, traditional television news consumption is in structural decline, particularly among younger audiences. Only 10% of individuals aged 13-19 and 18% of those aged 20-39 still watch scheduled television news, representing a decline of approximately 60% compared to 2013 (CvdM, 2025).

Finally, despite relatively stable overall revenues, the traditional news business model remains under severe pressure. The growing dominance of platform companies continues to erode advertising income, while increases in digital revenue fail to fully compensate for ongoing losses in print media (CvdM, 2025).

News Provision Players Influencing Public Opinion within the Dutch News Market

Four traditional TV and radio broadcasting media players

The first major broadcasting actor is the **Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO)**, which operates within a distinctive public broadcasting system historically characterised by *pillarization* and grounded in the principle of external diversity. Although the traditional pillars (Protestant, Catholic, and Socialist) have largely blurred over time, the system continues to be designed to represent the social and cultural diversity of Dutch society. This structure is regulated by the Dutch Media Act of 2008 and coordinated by the NPO, which manages three primary linear television channels: NPO 1, NPO 2, and NPO 3. The current licensing framework runs until 2026, after which a comprehensive reassessment of the public broadcasting system is foreseen.

At present, six established member-based broadcasting associations and two aspirant associations are granted airtime on these channels. Together, they are expected to reflect societal diversity in terms of age, lifestyle, geographical and cultural background, and political orientation. In addition to

these member-based broadcasters, two task-oriented organisations play a central role within the public broadcasting system. **NTR** is responsible for producing informative, educational, and cultural programming aimed at promoting social diversity and lifelong learning, while **NOS** provides comprehensive and independent news coverage.

The NOS produces several digital and thematic channels, including *NPO Politiek en Nieuws*, a 24-hour channel offering live coverage of parliamentary sessions and debates, complemented by rolling news and live events when parliament is not in session. It also supplies a continuous news stream carried on *NPO 1 Extra*. The most prominent television news bulletin in the Netherlands, the *Achtuurjournaal*, is produced by NOS and broadcast daily at 20:00. Beyond television, the NPO also operates *NPO Radio 1*, a 24-hour radio station dedicated to news and sports (NPO, 2025; Rijksoverheid, 2025).

Secondly, the **RTL Group** is the largest commercial broadcaster in the Netherlands. It operates five television channels (RTL 4, RTL 5, RTL 7, RTL 8 and RTL Z) and its proprietary streaming platform, **Videoland**. RTL places a strong emphasis on news provision across television broadcasting, mobile applications, and online platforms, primarily through **RTL Nieuws**. Since RTL's launch in the Netherlands in 1989, RTL Nieuws has played a central role in informing the public about national and international developments, positioning itself as an independent and reliable news provider. Today, RTL Nieuws operates on a 24/7 basis via its website and app, in addition to daily television news bulletins on RTL 4. Its flagship broadcast is *Half Acht Nieuws* (19:30). In addition, RTL operates **RTL Z**, a channel dedicated to rolling news, breaking developments, and financial and economic reporting. The group also produces *EditieNL*, a daily current-affairs magazine on RTL 4 that offers an accessible and distinctive journalistic perspective on the news (RTL Group, 2025).

Thirdly, **SBS6** was added to the sample in a later round of data collection. Although SBS6 does not broadcast a conventional news bulletin, *Hart van Nederland* has functioned as its flagship news programme since its launch in 1995. In contrast to news programmes that primarily focus on political developments in The Hague or international affairs, *Hart van Nederland* adopts a deliberately different editorial orientation, centring on everyday news and issues relevant to ordinary Dutch citizens. The programme is broadcast three times daily (in the morning, early evening, and late evening) and is complemented by an online news platform at *hartvannederland.nl* (Kijk, 2025; Talpa Network, 2025).

Finally, **BNR Nieuwsradio** represents a distinct actor within the Dutch broadcasting landscape. While it initially operated as a niche outlet focused primarily on financial and economic news, its parent company, **FD Mediagroep**, has since consolidated its position as a major independent business publisher. Over time, BNR Nieuwsradio has evolved into a broader, news-oriented talk radio platform, with programming that spans a wide range of topics, including technology, mobility, sustainability, housing, and geopolitics (BNR, 2025; FD Mediagroep, 2025a).

Traditional print media: seven newspapers and two magazines

In the 2022 sample, four national newspapers were included in our analysis. **De Telegraaf** is the largest popular daily newspaper by nationwide circulation. It is characterised by a populist, right-leaning editorial stance and the use of sensationalist headlines, with a strong emphasis on crime reporting, celebrity news, and sports, alongside a substantial financial section.

de Volkskrant is the quality newspaper with the largest nationwide circulation. It has a progressive, left-liberal profile and is well known for its high-quality photography, innovative layout, and sustained attention to arts, culture, and social issues.

The second-largest quality newspaper, **NRC**, places a strong emphasis on economic reporting, current affairs, and in-depth analysis. Its editorial orientation is commonly described as classical-liberal.

Finally, **Het Financieele Dagblad** is a specialist daily newspaper primarily focused on economic and business news.

Three additional newspapers were included in the current sample. **Algemeen Dagblad (AD)** is the second-largest daily newspaper in the Netherlands and is particularly well known for its extensive sports coverage and its wide network of regional editions. This combination allows AD to combine national reach with strong regional embedding.

Trouw, the smallest of the national quality newspapers, has a highly loyal readership and has received multiple journalism awards, including *European Newspaper of the Year*. Its editorial profile is marked by in-depth reporting and a strong focus on ethics, religion, and social issues.

De Gelderlander is the largest regional newspaper in the Netherlands, primarily serving the province of Gelderland. While it also covers national and international news, often through content shared within the AD network: its core strength lies in intensive local reporting, with a particular emphasis on grassroots politics and community life within its region.

In the magazine sector, **De Groene Amsterdammer**, an independent magazine and the oldest weekly publication in the Netherlands, was selected (Bakker, 2019). In addition, **EW**, traditionally known as *Elsevier*, was included as the country's largest and most influential news magazine.

Three online-only news websites

First, **NU.nl** is the largest commercial news website in the Netherlands. It was among the first major Dutch news platforms to operate without an associated print newspaper and has established itself as a primary source for breaking news, live blogs, and brief updates across a wide range of topics, including politics, current affairs, and entertainment.

Second, **Follow the Money (ftm.nl)** is an independent digital news outlet specialising in financial and economic investigative journalism. Founded in 2010, it is known for in-depth reporting on corporate power, public finance, and governance.

Finally, **Metro (metronieuws.nl)** was formerly a widely distributed free daily newspaper but has operated exclusively as a digital news platform since 2020, focusing on accessible news and lifestyle-oriented content.

Nine relevant social media accounts

According to the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2024, p. 93), the four most widely used platforms for news consumption are Facebook (22%), WhatsApp (19%), YouTube (16%), and Instagram (13%). In addition, a study by the *Commissariaat voor de Media* (CvdM, 2024a, p. 127) mapped the follower numbers of news brands on social media, both for the general population and for young people aged 13-24, across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Based on these findings, we selected Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube as the platforms for analysis. The selection of specific social media accounts was informed by the CvdM report (2024a, p. 127). Follower numbers were verified on 20 March 2025 across the respective platforms, resulting in a final sample of nine accounts. Six of these were affiliated with the **public broadcaster (NPO):** *NOS*

Nieuws (Facebook), *PowNed* (Facebook), *NOS Stories* (Instagram), *NOS Nieuws* (Instagram), *BOOS* (YouTube) *and NOS Jeugdjournaal* (YouTube). One account was linked to ***RTL Nieuws*** (Facebook), and one to ***De Telegraaf*** (YouTube). Only one account, the Instagram page ***CestMocro***, was not associated with an established media organisation.

Outlets and Owners: Who Owns What?[1]

The **Commissariaat voor de Media** (CvdM, Dutch Media Authority) monitors media concentration in light of the need to safeguard a pluralistic and independent news supply. Its findings are published in the *Mediamonitor* reports (CvdM, 2024b; 2025). The publicly accessible website (*mediamonitor.nl*) documents the ownership structures of major media companies. As of 1 July 2025, following the approval of DPG Media's acquisition of RTL Nederland, the number of major media owners identified in the Mediamonitor declined from five—Talpa Network, NPO, Mediahuis, DPG Media, and RTL—to four, with RTL Nederland no longer operating as an independent ownership entity.

In the present wave of data collection, we identified a total of **ten distinct ownership structures** (see overview in Table 1). These include the four major media companies currently recognised by the Dutch Media Authority, as well as additional independent and specialist media organisations.

First, **Mediahuis** owns both the print and online editions of *De Telegraaf* and *NRC*, the website *metronieuws.nl*, and the *De Telegraaf* YouTube channel. Second, **Talpa Network** includes SBS6 and the news-oriented platform *hartvannederland.nl* in its portfolio. Third, the public broadcaster **Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO)** encompasses multiple news outlets, including *NOS*, *NPO Radio 1*, *nos.nl*, *jeugdjournaal.nl*, and six Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs), as discussed earlier. Finally, **DPG Media** owns the print and online editions of *de Volkskrant*, *De Gelderlander*, *Algemeen Dagblad*, and *Trouw*, as well as the digital news platform *NU.nl*. As of 1 July 2025, DPG Media's portfolio also includes RTL 4, *RTL Nieuws*, and *rtl.nl*, following the acquisition of **RTL Nederland**, which had been owned by the Luxembourg-based **RTL Group** since 1989.

In addition to these major ownership structures, the analysis also considers several independent and specialist media organisations. These include ***De Groene Amsterdammer, Follow the Money (ftm.nl)***, **FD Mediagroep**, which owns *BNR Nieuwsradio* and *Het Financieele Dagblad* and their corresponding websites; **Roularta Media Group**, owner of *EW* in both print and digital form, and finally the Instagram page *CestMocro*, which operates outside the structures of established media organisations.

The following section provides contextual background of the Dutch news and information media landscape. It outlines formal ownership structures, identifies ultimate owners where possible, and notes transparency limitations relevant to media pluralism.

Talpa Network

Legal ownership chain: Talpa Network B.V. is fully owned by Talpa Holding N.V., which is in turn 100% owned by Talpa Topco Holding B.V. A majority stake in Talpa Topco Holding B.V. is held by Talpa Topco Holdings II B.V., which functions as the Global Ultimate Owner.

[1] The Orbis database was used as a main source for data collection.

Ultimate ownership and control: The Ultimate Beneficial Owners (UBOs) of Talpa Topco Holdings II B.V. are not publicly disclosed. However, **John de Mol**, who is publicly presented as the founder of Talpa Network, is closely linked to the group through Talpa Service B.V., a company largely owned by him and listed as a member of the Board of Directors of Talpa Topco Holdings II B.V. (CvdM, 2024b; Talpa Network, 2025).

Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO)

Governance structure: Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO) does not operate under a conventional ownership model. It functions as a public governance and coordination body composed of three institutional pillars: a supervisory board, a board of directors, and the recognised broadcasting organisations.

Oversight and accountability: Day-to-day management is handled by the board of directors, while the supervisory board oversees strategic direction and accountability. Members of the supervisory board are appointed by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, reflecting the NPO's public mandate (CvdM, 2024a; NPO, 2025).

DPG Media

Legal ownership chain: DPG Media B.V. is owned primarily by the Belgian company DPG Media Services (84%). Minority stakes are held by *Stichting Democratie en Media* (14.3%), *Stichting ter Bevordering van de Christelijke Pers in Nederland* (1%), and Stichting de Volkskrant (0.52%). DPG Media Services is fully owned by DPG Media Group, which is itself largely owned (98.8%) by Epifin.

Ultimate ownership and safeguards: Epifin is designated as the Global Ultimate Owner, although its UBOs are not publicly identified. Members of the Van Thillo, Criel, and Convent families sit on the board of directors (CvdM, 2024b; VRM, 2024). Following the acquisition of RTL Nederland, editorial independence safeguards were imposed by the ACM. As a result, Stichting NU.nl (founded 29 September 2025) and Stichting RTL Nieuws (founded 1 October 2025) were established to protect the editorial identity and continuity of both outlets (Marketing Report, 2025).

RTL Nederland (pre-July 2025)

Legal ownership chain: Until 30 June 2025, RTL Nederland was owned by RTL Group SA, a Luxembourg-based company. RTL Group SA is majority-owned (76.3%) by Bertelsmann Capital Holding GmbH, which is fully owned by Bertelsmann Verwaltungsgesellschaft mbH; the remaining shares are publicly held.

RTL Group SA operates through UFA Film und Fernseh GmbH, which fully owns RTL Group Beheer B.V., the Dutch holding company that owned RTL Nederland Holding B.V. and RTL Nederland B.V. until the acquisition by DPG Media (CvdM, 2024b).

De Groene Amsterdammer

Legal ownership chain: De Groene Amsterdammer is owned by *Stichting 1877*. The publishing company *Weekblad de Groene Amsterdammer* is fully owned by Stichting Groene Beheer.

Transparency: Public information does not disclose shareholder identities or share distributions within these foundations (De Groene Amsterdammer, 2025).

Follow the Money

Legal ownership chain: Follow the Money operates under FTM Media B.V., which owns Follow the Money B.V., responsible for editorial activities.

Ultimate ownership: The highest entity in the ownership chain is Stichting Administratiekantoor FTM Media. Five individuals are listed as shareholders, including founders and editors-in-chief. However, information on share distribution is unavailable, and the most recent public data dates back to 2019 (Follow the Money, 2019).

FD Mediagroep

Legal ownership chain: FD Mediagroep owns Business Nieuws Holding and Het Financieele Dagblad, the publishers of *BNR Nieuwsradio* and *Het Financieele Dagblad*, respectively.

Ultimate ownership: FD Mediagroep is 99% owned by Hal Investments, which is fully owned by HAL Trust, a publicly listed company domiciled in Bermuda and traded on Euronext Amsterdam. The remaining 1% is held by a staff foundation representing employees of *Het Financieele Dagblad* (FD Mediagroep, 2025b).

Roularta Media Group

Legal ownership chain: Roularta Media Group NV is publicly listed, with 7.4% of shares publicly traded. The majority stake (81.2%) is held by Koinon, a Belgian company.

Koinon controls *Stichting Administratiekantoor Cerveteri*, whose beneficial owner is Joseph Maria Julius Hendrik de Nolf. Roularta Media Group NV fully owns Roularta Media Nederland B.V., publisher of *EW* (VRM, 2024).

CestMocro

Ownership transparency: No formal ownership structure is publicly available for the Instagram account *CestMocro*. The account aggregates content from legacy news media and provides news from a self-declared Palestinian perspective.

Known links and public debate: Investigative reporting in the HUMAN series *Rewind* linked the account to Social Agency Online (formerly Multimedia MY), an advertising company that issued invoices on behalf of *CestMocro*. Despite public controversy, legal experts argue that any assessment should be conducted on a post-by-post basis rather than through platform-level bans (HUMAN, 2024; Transfirm, 2025; Newman et al., 2025).

Table 1: Overview of Ownership Structures

Media actor	Immediate owner	Ultimate owner	UBO disclosed	Notes
Talpa Network	Talpa Holding N.V.	Talpa Topco Holdings II B.V.	No	De Mol-linked governance
NPO	Public governance body	State-appointed oversight	Yes	Public mandate
DPG Media	DPG Media Services	Epifin	No	Editorial foundations
RTL Nederland (≤ June 2025)	RTL Group SA	Bertelsmann	Yes (corporate)	Acquired by DPG
De Groene Amsterdammer	Stichting 1877	Foundation-based	No	Limited transparency
Follow the Money	FTM Media B.V.	Stichting AK FTM Media	Partial	Data outdated
FD Mediagroep	Hal Investments	HAL Trust	Yes (listed)	Staff foundation
Roularta / EW	Roularta Media Group NV	Koinon	Yes	Family control
CestMocro	Unknown	Unknown	No	Informal structure

Main insights and Concerns About Distribution

According to the 2025 *Reuters Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2025), the three news brands with the highest weekly offline reach in the Netherlands are **NOS Nieuws** (54%), **RTL Nieuws** (28%), and ***Hart van Nederland*** **(SBS)** (22%). In terms of weekly online reach, the leading platforms are **NU.nl** (39%), **NOS Nieuws online** (31%), and **Algemeen Dagblad online** (22%).

Weekly use of social media for news remains high, with between 50% and 60% of the Dutch population relying on social platforms as a news source. An emerging trend is the growing use of AI-driven chatbots for news consumption. In January 2025, 5% of the Dutch population reported using AI chatbots such as **ChatGPT** for news, rising to 11% among those aged 18–34 (CvdM, 2025, p. 40; Newman et al., 2025, pp. 94–95).

In response to these developments, the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM) emphasises the need for further research into the influence of platform companies on public opinion, in order to better understand shifting power relations and their effects on users. To support evidence-based policy

recommendations, the authority plans to develop and apply new measurement techniques in 2026 aimed at more accurately assessing platform power and its regulatory implications.

Media Concentration, Regulatory Gaps, and Transparency Challenges in the Netherlands

Increasing Concentration in the Dutch Media Market

Over the past two decades, the Dutch news and information media market has become markedly more concentrated, with only four major media players remaining. Legislative attempts to curb this trend have been limited. The Temporary Media Concentration Act of 2007—designed to prevent excessive concentration—was in force only between 1 October 2007 and 31 December 2010, after which no comparable sector-specific legal framework was reinstated.

A pivotal recent development is the acquisition of RTL Nederland by DPG Media, which became effective on 1 July 2025. This merger significantly expands DPG Media's market power, extending its already strong position in print and digital news into the core of commercial television broadcasting. As a result, a single Belgian-based media group now controls the largest digital news platform (*NU.nl*), the second-largest popular newspaper (*Algemeen Dagblad*), and the most prominent commercial television news provider (*RTL Nieuws*) (CvdM, 2025).

Regulatory Intervention and Its Limits

The Dutch Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) imposed several conditions to mitigate potential negative effects of the merger on media pluralism. Among these measures was the establishment of independent foundations for *NU.nl* and *RTL Nieuws*, intended to safeguard editorial autonomy and continuity (Marketing Report, 2025). The Dutch Media Authority welcomed the explicit inclusion of media pluralism in the merger assessment and endorsed these safeguards.

At the same time, the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM) has stressed a fundamental limitation of the current regulatory approach: assessing pluralism primarily through the lens of consumer welfare differs substantially from evaluating it as a democratic value embedded in the rule of law. From this perspective, competition-based remedies may be insufficient to capture the broader societal implications of concentrated media ownership, particularly with regard to agenda-setting power and democratic accountability (CvdM, 2025).

Regional Journalism and the Risks of Centralisation

Concerns about concentration are particularly pronounced at the regional level. The ongoing consolidation of regional newsrooms within large media groups has led to increasing centralisation of journalistic production. In the case of *De Gelderlander*, for example, the newspaper has retained its regional masthead, but national and international news coverage is now largely produced in the central newsroom of *Algemeen Dagblad* in Rotterdam.

While this model allows for cost efficiencies, it raises questions about the diversity of perspectives and the autonomy of regional journalism. Centralised production risks homogenising news agendas and reducing the capacity of regional outlets to reflect locally grounded interpretations of national and international developments.

Cross-Border Ownership and Transparency Deficits

Beyond Talpa Network and the public broadcaster NPO, the highly concentrated Dutch media market is dominated by two Belgian-based companies: Mediahuis and DPG Media. Together, these publishers own more than 90% of Dutch newspapers (Newman et al., 2025). Although both groups publicly disclose their immediate ownership structures, transparency diminishes at higher levels of the ownership chain.

Mediahuis is controlled through a complex network of subsidiaries largely linked to wealthy families, yet information on Ultimate Beneficial Owners (UBOs) remains incomplete. Similarly, DPG Media Group is owned by Epifin, whose UBOs are not publicly disclosed, despite widespread recognition of the role played by the Van Thillo, Criel, and Convent families. This opacity complicates systematic assessments of ownership influence and accountability.

Emerging Legal Frameworks and Ongoing Challenges

In general, Dutch media outlets disclose their direct ownership structures on their websites, but detailed mapping of ownership chains requires substantial additional research. Even then, information on share distribution and ultimate control often remains inaccessible. To address such transparency gaps, the **European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)** was formally adopted in **April 2024** and entered into force on **7 May 2024**. Most of its provisions became **directly applicable in Member States from August 2025**, following a transitional implementation period.

The EMFA obliges Member States to strengthen transparency requirements regarding media ownership and to enhance safeguards for editorial independence. In the Netherlands, however, the practical rollout of these obligations and the corresponding supervisory role of the Dutch Media Authority are still evolving. As a result, while the EMFA marks an important step towards improved ownership transparency at the European level, its concrete effects on national oversight, enforcement practices, and public accountability have yet to fully materialise.

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