

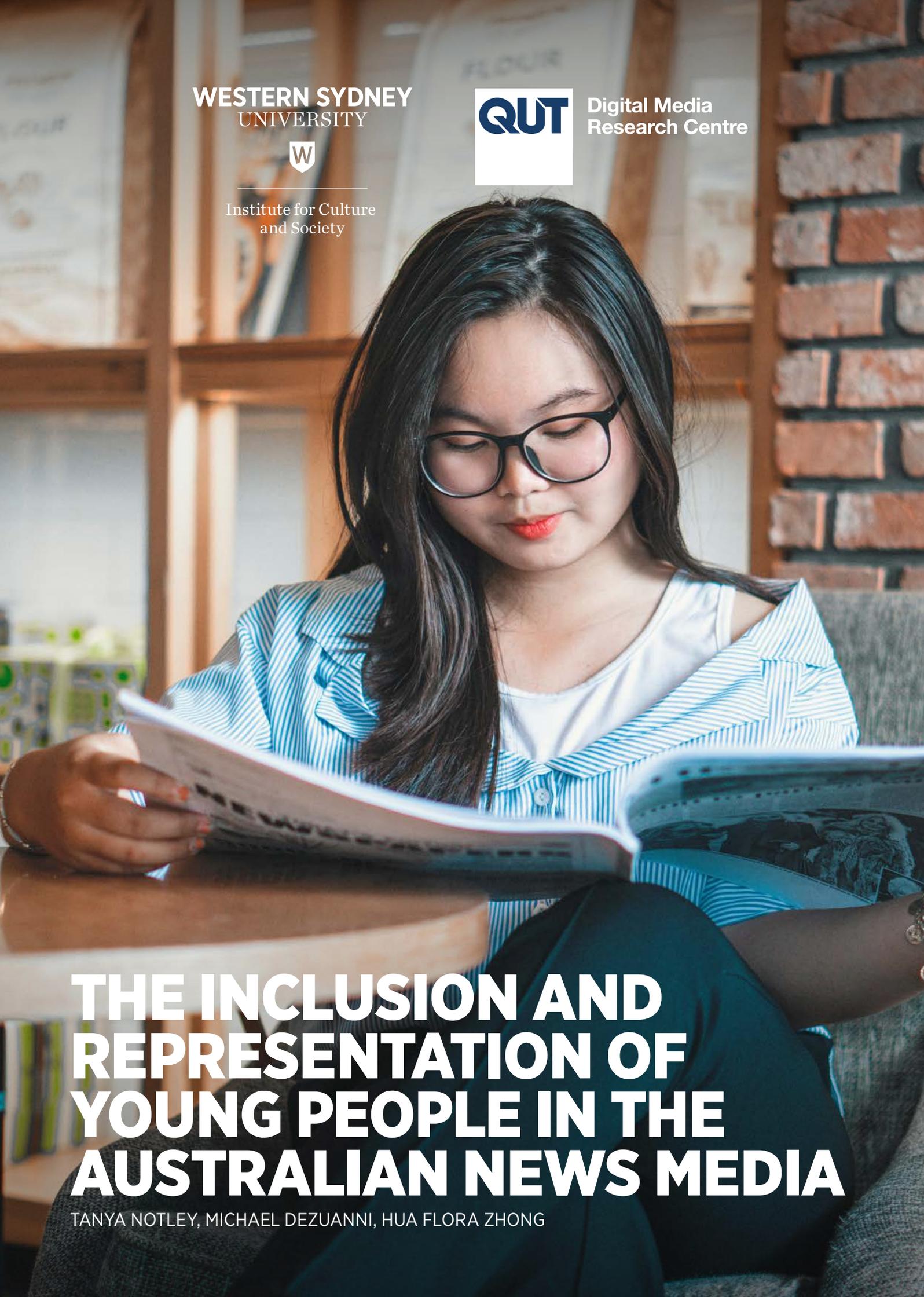
WESTERN SYDNEY  
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# THE INCLUSION AND REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AUSTRALIAN NEWS MEDIA

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian news media provide an important lens through which we see ourselves and our nation: they both reflect and influence public discourse and priorities.

This snapshot study of news media critiques the inclusion and representation of young Australians (aged 4-18 years) in the news. To achieve this, we have analysed a sample of national, state and regional Australian news media from April 1st, 2019, a day we consider to be an 'unremarkable' day in the news cycle. In total, we analysed 276 news stories across 8 newspapers and 4 television news bulletins.

The findings from this study suggest that young people are seldom given the opportunity to speak for themselves in the news. At the same time, young people as a social category were given almost no attention. In our study, when young people did appear in the news, the most common focus for these stories related to accidents and social welfare. Young Australians were not represented in stories about the economy, politics, environment and climate change. Too often, young people appear in news stories only as victims or family members; or they are spoken about, but not listened to.

If news media do not adequately include and represent the views of young people – especially on the issues that most affect them – this may increase and support their lack of interest in the news and their low levels of trust in news media. While including young people in the news is not always easy – benefits, risks, ethical issues and consent all need to be considered – news media organisations could find ways to include young people more often and in more meaningful ways.

For example, in our study young people are 10 times more likely to appear in news images than they are to be quoted in the news story. This highlights a missed opportunity to allow young people to speak for themselves in situations where consent has already

been provided to include them in the news. Another way to include young people would be for journalists and news editors to build better relationships with youth-focused organisations who are well connected to young people and are more familiar with their experiences, needs and issues as well as with relevant research.

We hope that this study provides some initial insights into the (lack of) inclusion of young people in the news media, but also that it encourages further investigations about their inclusion and representation.

To support this, we are releasing our study's methodology as a toolkit with this report. In doing so we want to encourage researchers, teachers, students, youth-focused organisations and young people to use this toolkit to carry out their own analysis of news media in local, regional or national contexts.

Our toolkit can be used by researchers, teachers, young people, youth organisations or news media organisations to study one specific news media or many different news media. It can be used for newspapers as well as for news media on radio, TV or online. We hope further studies like our own will increase our understanding of the impact of young people's (under) representation in the Australian news media but also that they can provide an opportunity for dialogue – with news editors, publishers and journalists. At a time when so much of the focus on news and young people is centered on addressing the issue of 'fake news', this is an important conversation to be had. As the findings from this study suggest, the content of news – and the absence of young people's experiences and perspectives – requires far more scrutiny as well.



# KEY FINDINGS

## 1 Stories about young people's needs and the key issues that affect them were under-represented in the news

- Young people were the principal focus of 15% of all news stories. But most of these stories were about specific young people involved in accidents or crimes.
- Only 3% of stories were about issues which affect large numbers of young people.
- The most common topics for stories including young people were accidents (5% of all stories), followed by social welfare (4%). Young people were absent in stories about the economy (0%), politics (0%) and the environment (0%).

## 3 Issues that affect young people, and society more broadly, were included in the news, but young people were rarely consulted on these issues

- 34% of news stories were about topics or issues that are likely to impact young people
- Only 11% of news stories included a young person's view or experience
- Television news included the experiences and views of young people far more often (17% of all stories) than did newspapers (9% of all stories)

## 2 Young people's voices were almost completely absent from the news. Their needs, experiences and views were more likely to be relayed by adult mediators

- Just 1% of news stories directly quoted a young person
- 11% of news stories included an adult who mediated young people's needs, experiences and views (including parents, experts and police)

## 4 Young people were included in images far more often than they were included in the written or spoken substance of the story.

- 11% of news stories included photos or video footage of a young person or young people
- Photographs with young people were often included for emotional appeal. For example, they were fun and colourful and young people appear to be used to create atmosphere and to create interest in the news.

# BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

This snapshot study of news media critiques how young Australians (aged 4-18 years) are included and represented in the news. To achieve this, we examined a sample of national, state and regional Australian news media from April 1st, 2019, a day we consider to be an 'unremarkable' day in the news cycle. In total, we analysed 276 news stories across 8 newspapers and 4 television news bulletins. This comprised all news stories included in these news media, but excluded explicitly labelled 'international' news sections.

This study builds on our 2017 national survey, which examined young Australian's news practices and experiences<sup>1</sup>. Our survey analysis found that around half of all young Australians consume news regularly from multiple media sources. However, we also found that most young people do not trust news media organisations, and just 23% of young people trust news media organisations 'a lot'.

To critique the inclusion and representation of young Australians in the news we focused on newspapers in this study since they are still regarded to set the news agenda. We added television since our national survey showed it remains teenagers' preferred news source (aged 13-16), despite the availability of social media. Television is also the second most preferred news source for children (aged 8-12), after family.

Our national survey also found that young Australians perceive significant biases in the news and, importantly for this study, they believe young people are not adequately represented in the news: 63% believe news media organisations have no idea what their lives are like while 34% believe young people don't appear often enough on the news on issues that affect them.

We believe that the issue of young people's engagement with news media warrants far more public attention: from news media organisations, journalists, researchers and educators. Democracy requires citizens to be both included and well informed. Since news media provide a key way for citizens to engage with public discourse and to stay informed, very low levels of news engagement coupled with low levels of trust in news media potentially signals a serious threat to our democracy.

We therefore hope that this study can support a public discussion about young people's inclusion and representation in the news.

1. Notley, Tanya M., Dezuanni, Michael L., Zhong, Hua Flora, & Howden, Saffron (2017) *News and Australia's children: How young people access, perceive and are affected by the news*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and Crinkling News 2017, Sydney Australia

# METHODOLOGY

To undertake our research, we used a snapshot news analysis methodology. This was largely adapted from the *Who Makes the News* global study which supports teams of volunteer researchers around the world to examine how women are represented in the news by examining a diverse sample of news media on one 'unremarkable day'.<sup>2</sup> This study looks at how women are represented as newsreaders, reporters, experts, witnesses and news subjects.

We adapted the model used by this study for three key reasons. First, by taking a single day as a unit for analysis, researchers can consider the different ways a single day has been presented and represented across different news media: a capacity often lost when using other kinds of media analysis methodologies. Second, the methodology is credible and well-tested. Third, it allows people without research training to carry out the study and to adapt it.

We believe the methodology we have used, available in a toolkit form for others to use<sup>3</sup>, can be included as a teaching resource to support critical news literacy activities in classrooms.

To carry out this study, eight newspapers published on Monday 1 April 2019 were selected for analysis. The newspapers were selected to provide a mix of national, state and regional news as well as a mix of media ownership. This resulted in the analysis of 201 newspaper stories and 75 television stories.

Newspapers included:

- The Australian – 24 articles
- Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) – 20 articles
- Australia Financial Review (AFR) – 15 articles
- Daily Telegraph – 35 articles
- Newcastle Herald – 19 articles
- Courier Mail – 41 articles
- Cairns Post – 29 articles
- The Guardian Australia – 18 articles

In addition, four TV News bulletins were selected. These were selected to include both a national and state focus and a mix of commercial and non-commercial. These included:

- 10 News First – half hour – 16 stories
- Seven Network News – half hour – 23 stories
- National 9 Network News – half hour – 24 stories
- ABC News NSW – half hour – 12 stories

In this study a 'news story' was defined as any article or TV bulletin that reports news (including photographs with a headline, caption or short text/broadcast). Articles not considered 'news stories' are story listings, editorials, commentaries, cartoons and jokes, letters to the editor, advertisements or weather reports or material that appears in a sport section or broadcast or international news section or broadcast.

'Young person' was defined as someone appearing to be between the ages of 4 and 18 years. We acknowledge that an age focused category that includes young people from pre-school to early adulthood is a very wide one, however, we wanted to keep this broad since we believe that many young people in this age range already engage with news media, while they also have the capacity to be engaged by news media organisations.

A coding sheet (included in our toolkit) was provided to the research team. All data were then entered on a spreadsheet to support further analysis.

2. See [whomakesthenews.org](http://whomakesthenews.org)

3. See [westernsydney.edu.au/medialiteracy/research/snapshot](http://westernsydney.edu.au/medialiteracy/research/snapshot)

# OUR FINDINGS

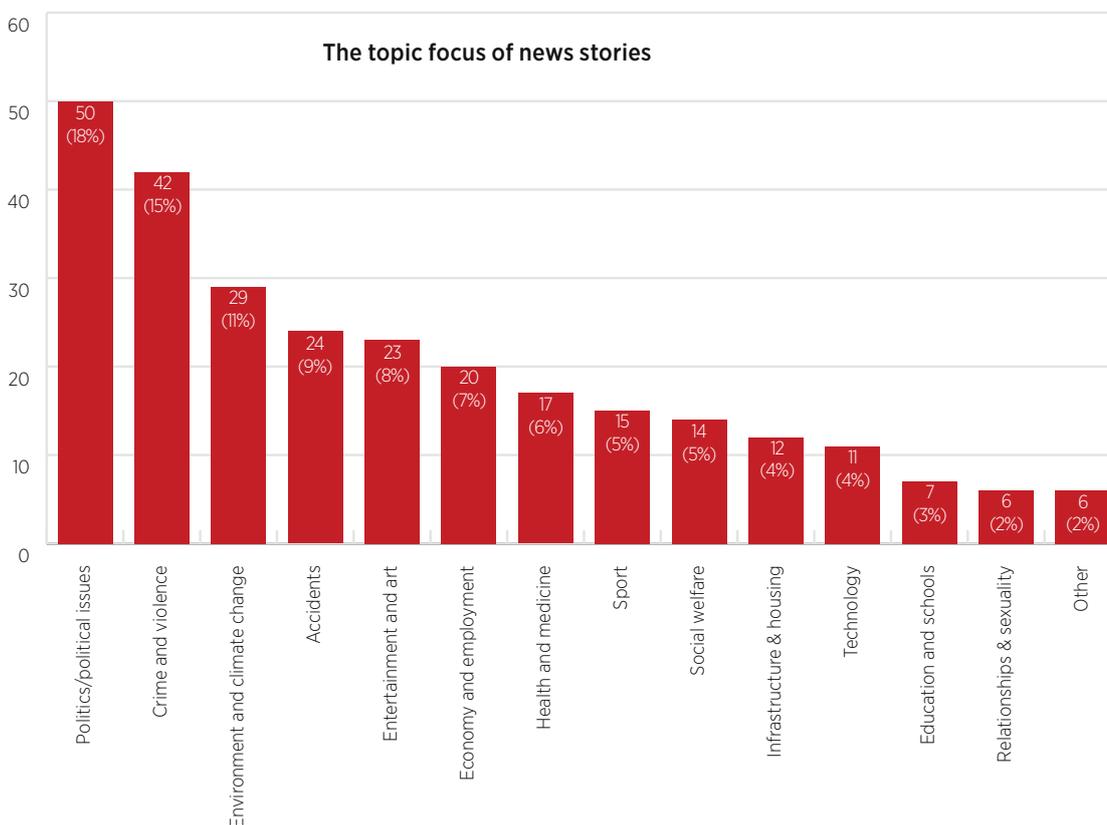
## A SNAPSHOT OF AN 'UNREMARKABLE DAY'

Our snapshot study examines news media from one single day: April 1, 2019. This day was identified as being 'unremarkable', in that no particular event dominated the news on this day or made it unusual. A consideration in choosing this day was its proximity to national events, particularly the political cycle. We were aware that we were on the eve of the government's budget announcement, after which we would soon be entering the 2019 Federal election period. This would mean the news would become even more focused on politics than it ordinarily is.

Figure 1 shows us that 18% of all news stories analysed were primarily focused on politics or political issues. This was in part the result of most news media covering a story about Labour's proposed electric car policy, early releases of the government budget and the announcement of New South Wales Premier, Gladys Berejikian's new cabinet. Crime and violence was the

focus for 15% of news stories, followed by the environment and climate change (11%) and accidents (9%).

It is useful to compare Figure 1 with our 2017 survey of young Australians aged 8-16 years which found that 39% of young people believe that the news does not cover issues that matter to them. The news topic rated most important by young Australians in that survey was technology (52% rated it important or very important). This was followed by news about events and issues in their local community (43%) and news about education and schools (39%). By far, 'news about politics including what happens in parliament' received the least number of 'important' ratings across the 9 news topics we asked young people about. Although the topics we provided young people within our national survey are slightly different to those used in this study, these findings suggest news organisations are not focused on the news stories that matter most to



**FIGURE 1:** The topic focus for all news stories analysed (n=276)

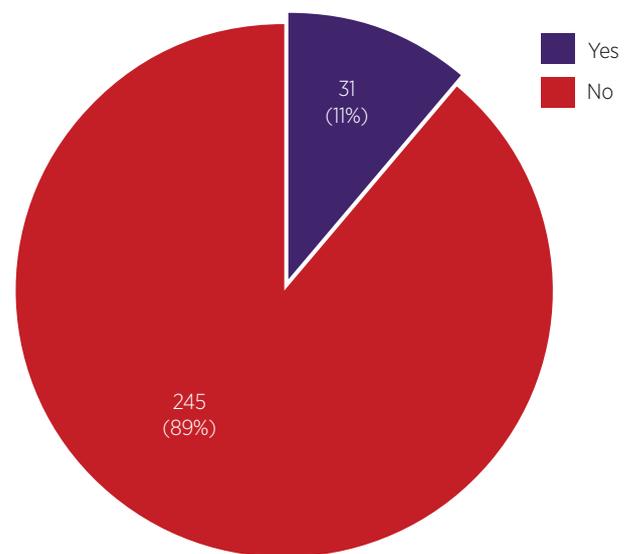
young Australians or they are not framed in a way likely to generate significant interest. There were very few stories about technology, schools or education in this snapshot news study, while the topic most covered was primarily framed as stories about politics and political issues.

Below, we list the key focus for the national news agenda on the selected day of our study. Those items coloured blue included the views and experience of young people across at least one news media outlet.

### **NATIONAL NEWS FOCUS FOR APRIL 1 2019**

- Government budget announcements, particularly focused on roads spend and tax cuts
- Labor's climate change targets, including 50% electric cars by 2030
- Proposed road infrastructure improvements
- **The repatriation of children of Australian ISIS terrorists from Syria**
- Announcement of the NSW government new ministerial line up
- Discussions about the need for new global Facebook laws for live streaming
- **Scaffolding workplace accident killing teenager**
- Crows AFL women's team win
- Development of new stroke technology
- Archibald art prize
- **Sudden closure of a sport and recreation centre**
- Danger warning for children on roads
- **Various individual work place incidents, crime and traffic accidents**

### **Did the story include a young person's view or experience?**



**FIGURE 2:** The inclusion of young people's views or experiences in the news (n=276)

## THE INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

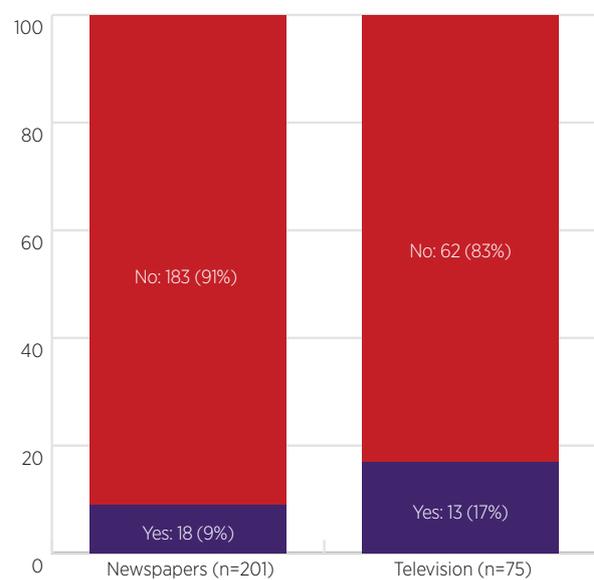
Of the 276 news stories analysed, 31 (11%) were regarded as including a young person's view or experience (see Figure 2). For the purposes of this study, 'a young person's view or experience' was taken to mean a young person's experience, opinion, attitude or perspective and this could be provided directly or indirectly. Examples included:

- a quote from a young person (1% of stories, see Figure 3),
- relaying the views or experiences of a young person/people via an adult mediator (such as a parent, police officer or teacher), and/or
- Reporting on facts or statistics about young people.

Of the 201 newspaper stories analysed, approximately 18 (9%) included a young person's view or experience in some way. Of the 75 TV news stories, 13 (17%) included a young person's view or experience (Figure 3). Therefore, TV included young people's views or experiences almost twice as often as newspapers.

Young Australians were rarely quoted in the news media (Figure 4). Across 276 news stories they were quoted just four times, representing 1% of all news stories. Two of the four young people quoted were estimated to be aged 17-18 years, one was 9-12 years and one was 13-16 years (Figure 5).

**Did the story include a young person's view or experience? (television vs newspapers)**

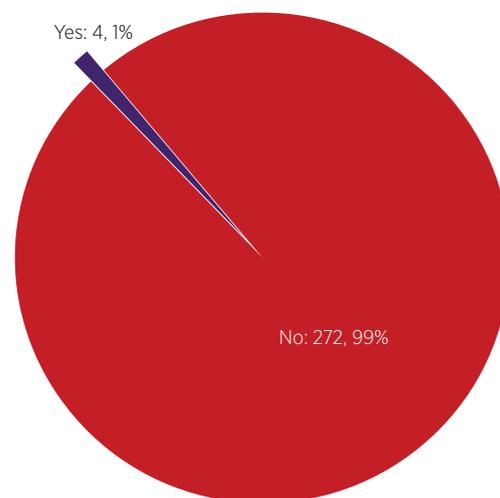


**FIGURE 3:** The inclusion of young people's views or experiences: newspapers versus television news (n=276)

Publication	Number of stories	% of all stories that included young people's views/experiences
10 News First	2	6%
7 News	4	13%
ABC News NSW	4	13%
Cairns Post	3	10%
Courier Mail	4	13%
Daily Telegraph	4	13%
Financial Review	0	0%
Guardian	1	3%
Newcastle Herald	1	3%
Nine News	3	10%
Sydney Morning Herald	3	10%
The Australian	2	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>

**TABLE 1:** Which news media organisations included young people's views or experiences?

**Was a young person directly quoted in news story?**



**FIGURE 4:** When young people are quoted in the news media (n=276)

### TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT



“I feel special that I actually have a life and that I was able to be saved.”

KYLA, TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT, AGE 11.

### SCAFFOLD COLLAPSE



“He was a really nice kid, helpful around his family, pretty much a nice mate.”

DAMON, FRIEND OF DECEASED APPRENTICE, ESTIMATED AGE 17-18.

**FIGURE 5:** Four young people were directly quoted in news stories

### YOUNG MUSICIAN



“Through playing around I developed a deeper understanding of how I wanted my music to sound in the future.”

OSHEN, MUSICIAN, 18.

### WATER PARK SHUTDOWN



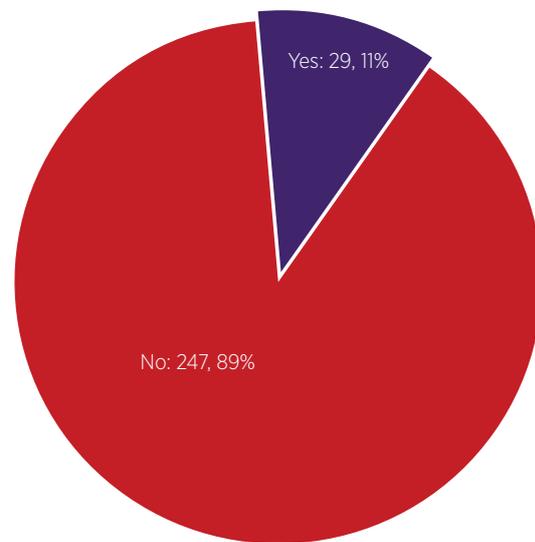
“My favourite activity was the giant swing because I never thought I was going to go on it.”

UNNAMED SPORTS CENTER USER, ESTIMATE AGE 13-15

When young people’s views or experiences were included in a news story (n=29, Figure 6), this usually occurred via adult mediators: people who spoke on behalf of young people (Figure 6). These mediators included adult family members, industry experts, politicians, police and education or club representatives. In Figure 7 we show the primarily mediator who spoke on behalf of young people for each story.

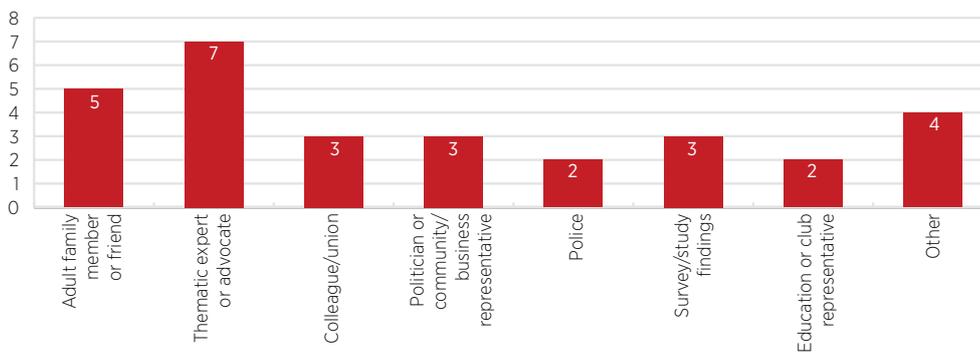
We acknowledge that it is often difficult for journalists to find young people to interview for stories, particularly at short notice. Despite this, the use of mediators as ‘stand ins’ representing young people’s voices is at times problematic. Obviously, adults could misunderstand or misrepresent young people’s perspectives, or they may not have the necessary experience or authority to speak on behalf of particular young people. Young people may be rightly justified in not trusting adults to speak on their behalf. Furthermore, the over reliance on mediators to speak on behalf of young people increases their lack of visibility in the news and may implicitly suggest they are not seen as worthy or capable of speaking for themselves. In some instances, it is baffling as to why a mediator was used to speak for a young person. For example, young people were photographed or filmed in many stories when they were not quoted in the story. Given they were there and consent was provided for them to be filmed or photographed, it would not have been difficult to include their view via a direct quote or by paraphrasing what they said when more appropriate to do so.

**Did an adult mediator speak on behalf of young people in the news story?**



**FIGURE 6:** When adult mediators speak on behalf of young people (n=276)

**Who is the primary mediator quoted or referenced in the story?**



**FIGURE 7:** News stories where young people’s views or experienced were relayed by a mediator (n=29)

## MEET THE MEDIATORS

### “GUTTED AND EMPTY”



“It was just a weird turn of events for everybody. It's really left myself, and the members of our club down there, with an empty feeling.”

Neil O'Toole, organiser of water ski tournament, which was cancelled due to government sudden shutting down of a water recreational centre. Pictured here with teenage participants who were not quoted. *Newcastle Herald*

### “MOST VORACIOUS READERS”



“The State Library has been very prestigious, to some people a very intimidating institution, and a lot of parents who have come here with children haven't known what to do with them, which I think is a real shame given children are some of the most voracious readers in our community... I'd be delighted if it became a destination for children and their carers.”

NSW State Librarian, Dr John Vallance, announcing a new children's section, *Sydney Morning Herald*

### “DEATH SENTENCE”



“Leaving those kids in the camps is close to being a death sentence”

Paul Ronalds, Save the Children Fund, discusses the potential for return of ISIS fighter's children from Syria and advocated on their behalf, *Channel 7*

### “A VERY LUCKY BOY”



“It's really important for drivers to be aware during the school holidays there's going to be lot of kids around... To children too who are watching this, please, remember what you've been taught, remember the road rules you've been taught”

NSW Police Assistant Commissioner, Michael Corboy, speaking following historical footage of young boys 'lucky escape' after being hit by car when running over road from school gate. *Channel 7*

### “WANTED TO HELP”



“She said to me 'it would be awful not being able to see mum' so she wanted to help... We've just created an Everyday Hero fundraising page and her school is getting involved to help her fundraising... It's just about teaching kids to be a bit community-minded”

Lisa Mathieson, mother of 7 year old Skylar Williams who is raising money for charity. Mother Lisa also does marketing for the charity. Skylar is not quoted, *Courier Mail*

### “NEW TO INDUSTRY”



“New to this industry, early in his working life, losing his life doing a job, it's atrocious”

Darren Greenfield, Union Delegate, responds to the workplace accident that killed a teenage apprentice, *Channel 7*

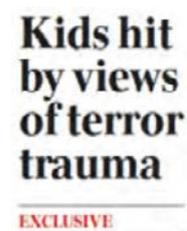
### “TRYING TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING”



“They're trying to show you something, they could be showing you they're not interested in your subject”

Monica Monevski, teaching student from University of Queensland, discussing how children's misbehaviour in class may be an attempt to communicate something about their experience in an article about trainee teachers. *Daily Telegraph*

### “TRULY TERRIBLE CONTENT”



“When we were making our response to Christchurch [in the NSW Education Department]... one of the issues we had to work through was how many young people had seen (a video) that nobody would have wanted them to see.”

NSW Education Department Secretary, Mark Scott, calls for social media to make efforts to ensure harmful content is not distributed, *The Australian*

### “A QUIET WORD”



“Sometimes not focusing on the kid is important, just leaving the kid alone... quite often, a quiet word after class works”

Professor Debra Hayes, Lecturer in Teacher Training at the University of Sydney is quoted in story about trainee teachers being trained in 'behavioural support' rather than 'behavioural management', *Daily Telegraph*

**FIGURE 8:** A selection of the mediators who relayed young people's experiences and views in the news

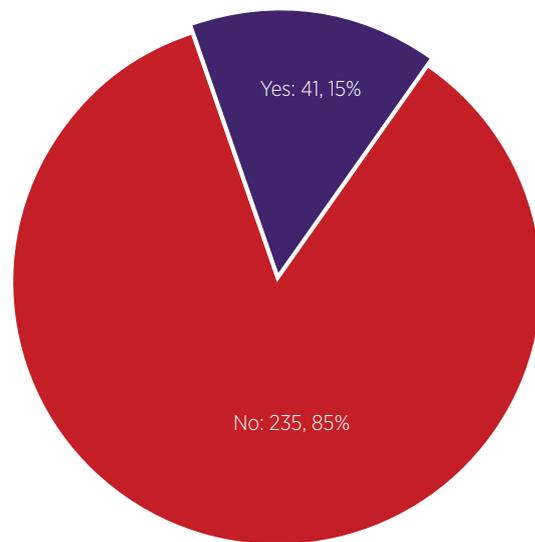
## NEWS STORIES THAT FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

There were 41 news stories where a young person or young people were the main focus of the story (Figure 9).

Stories were classified as having a principal focus on young people if:

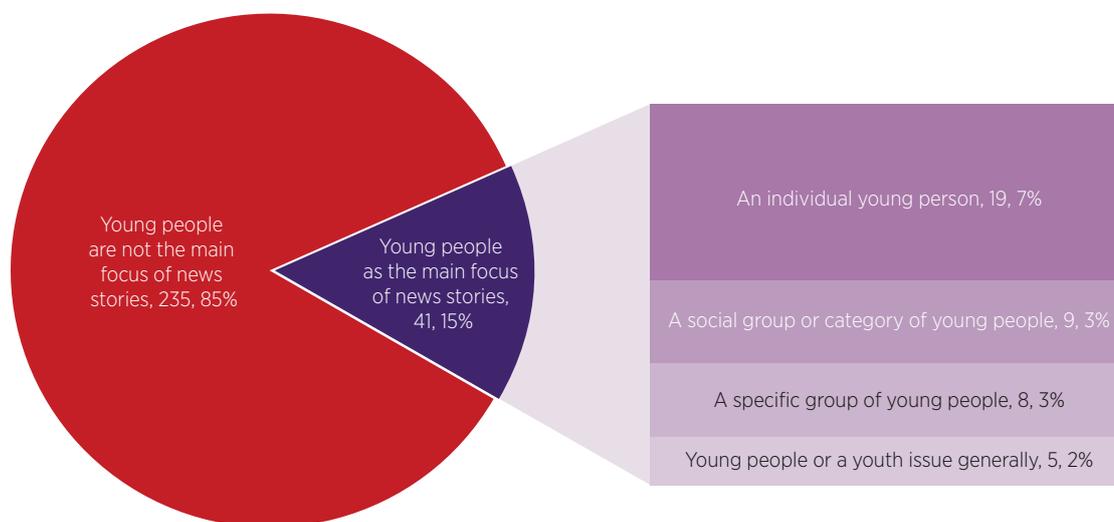
- The subject matter centred around a young person;
- There was a prominent photograph that profiled a young person (this person didn't need to be specifically referred to in the text, as the photo was considered part of the story); and/or
- The subject matter includes young people as a social category.

Were young people the principal focus of the story?



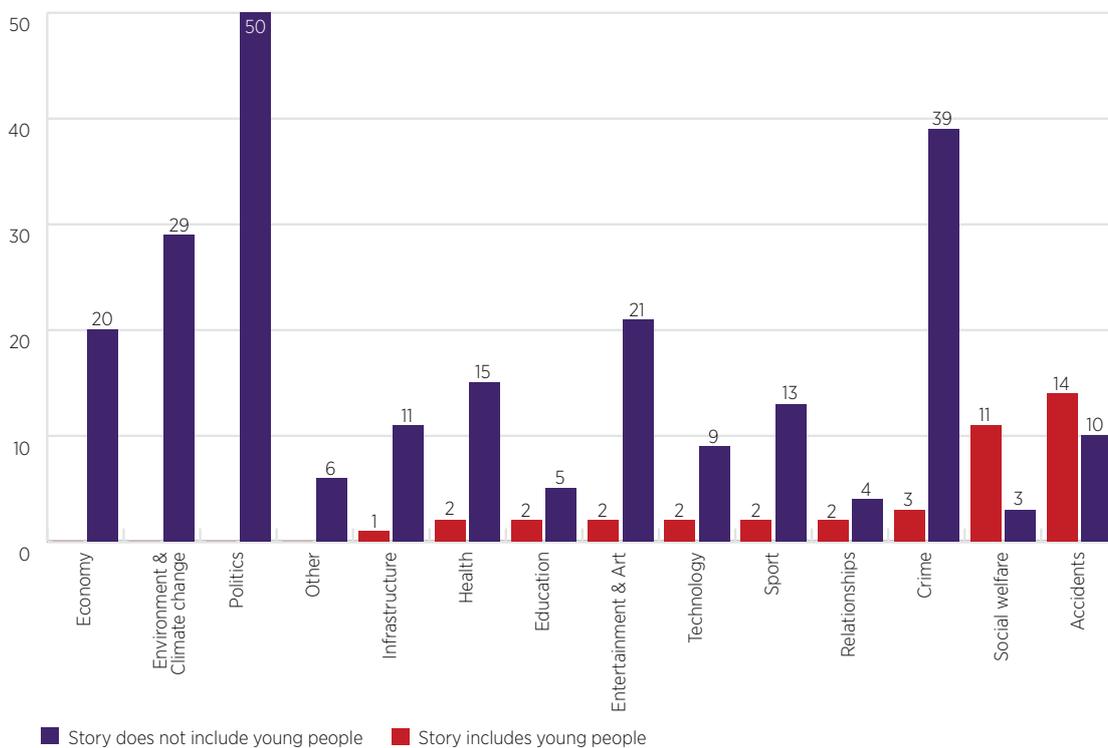
**FIGURE 9:** Young people as the principal focus of the story (n=276)

When a story is focused on young people, who does it focus on?



**FIGURE 10:** A breakdown of stories focused on young people (n=276)

### The main topic focus of all news stories where young people are the focus



**FIGURE 11:** The topic of news stories where young people were the main focus (n=276)

Of the 41 stories where young people were the principal focus on the story, almost half of these (19 stories, or 47% of all news stories analysed) focused on an individual young person. Eight stories (20% of all stories analysed) focused on a group or family, and nine stories (22% of all stories analysed) focused on a specific demographic or social group or category). Only five stories (12% of all stories analysed) were about young people as a general group or social category. Figure 10 therefore suggests that when young people did appear in the news media, it is usually because of an individual achievement, accident or wrongdoing. Young people as a social category were not given prominence. This is an important observation because it suggests broader social issues directly involving young people are not seen as newsworthy. This may be the result of young people not being recognised as a primary or key audience by news media organisations. Alternatively, youth focused organisations and advocates may not be able to get traction from news media to cover these kinds of stories. Further research is required to better

understand news media editorial decisions and the choices made by journalists around which stories about children and young people they do and do not report on. What is clear from our analysis is that when young people's voices were included, it was often a very brief or cursory inclusion and according to an agenda that appeared to be already determined by the journalist and editor.

Figure 11 indicates that young people are most represented on news stories about accidents (n=14, 5% of all stories) and social welfare (n=11, 4% of all stories). They are least represented on stories about the economy (n=0), on politics (n=0) and on environment and climate change (n=0). This suggests that young people are included in a very narrow way, mostly in stories where it can't really be avoided – since they are a focus of the event being reported on – rather than in stories where it may take more thought and effort to include them as people who can inform the story as a news source, witness or expert.

## NEWS STORIES THAT IMPACT YOUNG AUSTRALIANS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSION

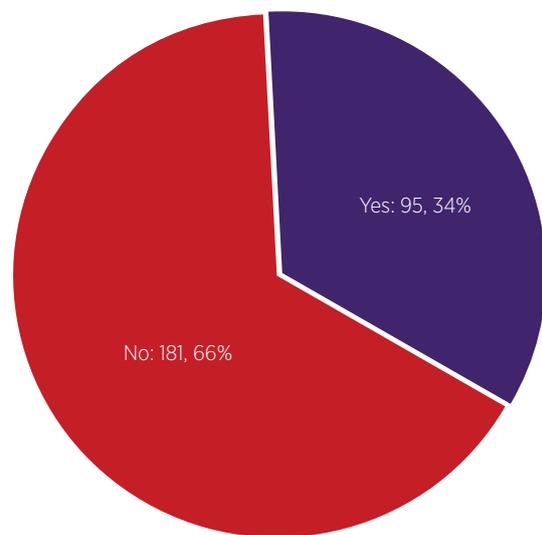
Although young people's views or experiences were only included in the news across 11% of news stories (Figure 2), more than one third (34%) of all news stories are about issues that are likely to affect young people (Figure 12). A story was considered to impact young people if it was likely to directly affect or influence all young people or a large group of young people (as opposed to an individual young person or a small number of young people)

We identified 9 news topics (spread across around 25 articles) where there was an opportunity to include a young person's experience or perspective, but this was absent. These missed opportunities included stories focused on politics, the environment and climate change, the economy, employment, technology, culture, health, sport and recreation. These stories were highly relevant to young people and/or covered an issue that would be likely to impact their lives. In our view, the inclusion of young people's voices, perspectives and experiences could have enhanced the quality of these stories as well as the relevance of the stories to young audiences.

These missed opportunities included stories about:

- **The Labor Party's policy proposal to ensure 50% electric cars by 2030** (multiple print and TV bulletins). This policy would (if enacted) impact upon all young people looking to purchase a car in the future, while the story relates to climate change action, a topic shown to be of significant interest to many young people.
- **Perceived declining standards of teacher training** (Daily Telegraph). The Daily Telegraph argued for a change to teacher testing and an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) cut off of 80 for all teachers across a feature spread including multiple articles. No alternative views to the critiques were provided on what makes a successful teacher from the point of view of student experience and results.
- **The growing role for social media for regional tourism and economies** (Cairns Post). This article talked about the role young social media influencers are having in promoting places and the need for tourism marketing to understand and support this. The article could have featured Australian influencers or have reported on young people's travel and tourism related social media practices.

Is the issue discussed in the story likely to directly impact young Australians?



**FIGURE 12:** News stories that directly impact young Australians (n=276)

- **Research suggests robots to take 6.5 million future jobs** (Financial Review). This article considered the lack of preparedness in workers, business and government. The story is relevant to young people looking at career prospects and education choices and could have included a youth perspective.
- **Teens not getting married** (multiple print stories). This was based on UK research that finds most young people who are teenagers today are unlikely to marry. The story could have been made relevant to an Australian audience by including Australian research, expertise or by talking to youth organisations or with young people.
- **Regulation of Facebook live streaming** (multiple print stories). These stories considered the need for new social media legislation regarding live video streaming. One of the stories included claims about new measures to protect young people, without any research or data being provided about this risk. The proposed regulatory and platform changes will impact on young people and this could have been explored.
- **NSW premier's new focus on regional youth, especially mental health and suicide** (multiple print stories). Youth mental health focused organisations or research could have been cited here to extend and support the Premier's claims about these issues.

→ **The closure of a water park in NSW** (print and broadcast).

Both publications stated that the water park is used extensively by schools and young people and they will be most affected. ABC News included a short sentence from a young person who used the center, which they sourced from a school Facebook page. In the Newcastle Herald, however, young people were pictured but not cited.

→ **Figures rise on Australians' acknowledgment of the human link to climate change** (Sydney Morning Herald). This article reports on research data that shows more Australians believe human action is responsible for climate change. While it suggests it represents the view of all Australians, the research data was only relevant to over 18s. Additional research could have considered youth perspectives and have considered the different views across generations.

→ **Crows win Australian rules (AFL) women's game** (multiple print stories). This article claims the match had the largest attendance numbers for a women's sport ever recorded in Australia (multiple print articles). In one article, we heard from the male coach but none of the women players. These articles could have looked at the possible impact of growing audiences on girls in sport and could have considered the role of girls and women in boosting crowd numbers.

It is notable that several of these stories impact young people's current or future lives, and yet their perspective was not provided. In many cases a youth perspective/angle would have been relevant, while in others youth focused research or expertise could have been referenced. Including the voices of young people poses challenges for journalists who may first require parental consent and are on a deadline. However, news organisations would benefit from investing in approaches to support the inclusion of young people's views and experiences if they want to engage young people as news sources and news audiences.

## THE INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE NEWS USING IMAGES

Images and video footage featured in two thirds of all the news stories we analysed, equating to 183 stories (Figure 13). Therefore, the inclusion of young people in the news can be visual as well as textual or aural. Although just 1% of news stories quoted a young person, 11% included a photograph or video footage of a young person or young people (Figure 14). Of the 201 print news stories, 8% included an image of a young person or young people; and of the 75 TV news stories, 17% included an image of a young person or young people. Of the 29 photos that include young people, 21 (72%) of these named young people in the image caption.

### Does the news story include a photograph or a visual footage?

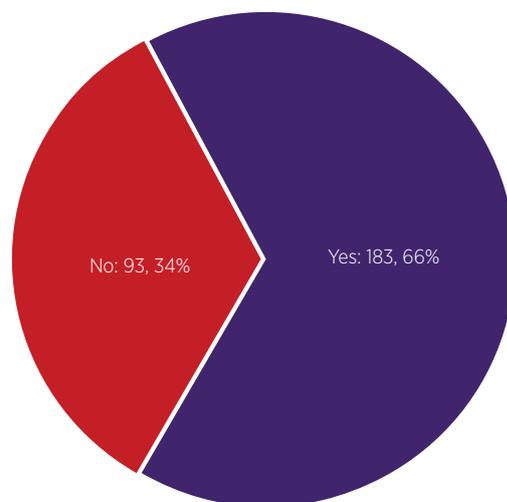


FIGURE 13: The inclusion of images in the news (n=276)

### Are any images of young people included in the news story?

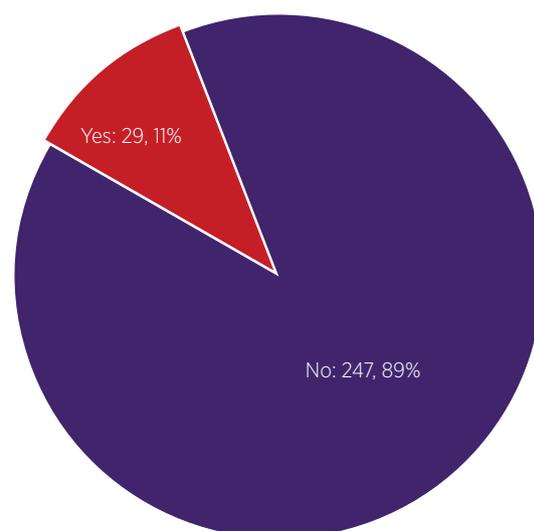
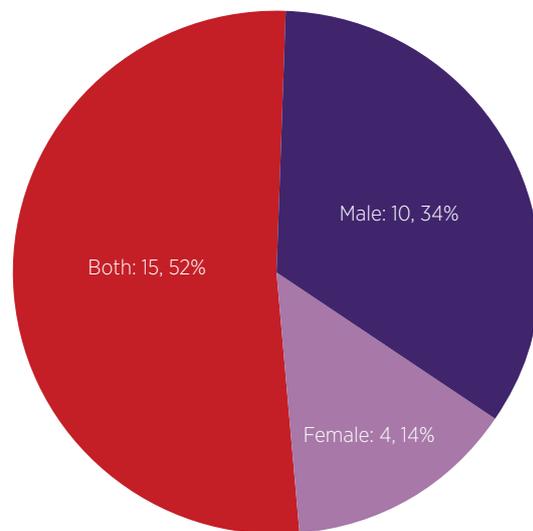


FIGURE 14: Images of young people in the news (n=276)

Further image analysis provided mixed results regarding gender. When an image was of a single child (see Figure 15), boys were more represented than girls (10 boys and 4 girls); however, more than half of the stories with an image of a young person included both boys and girls. There was some evidence of stereotypical depictions. For instance, a story about the rising cost of sports featured a group of active footballing boys ('Boots and all - rising sport costs', Daily Telegraph). At the same time, a story about a festival featured two young girls dancing ('Record crowd twirls back time in spectacular style at Kurri', Newcastle Herald). A larger study is required to determine if a trend exists depicting male and female children in stereotypical gender roles or to consider the representation and inclusion of other social variables, including social class, race and ethnicity.

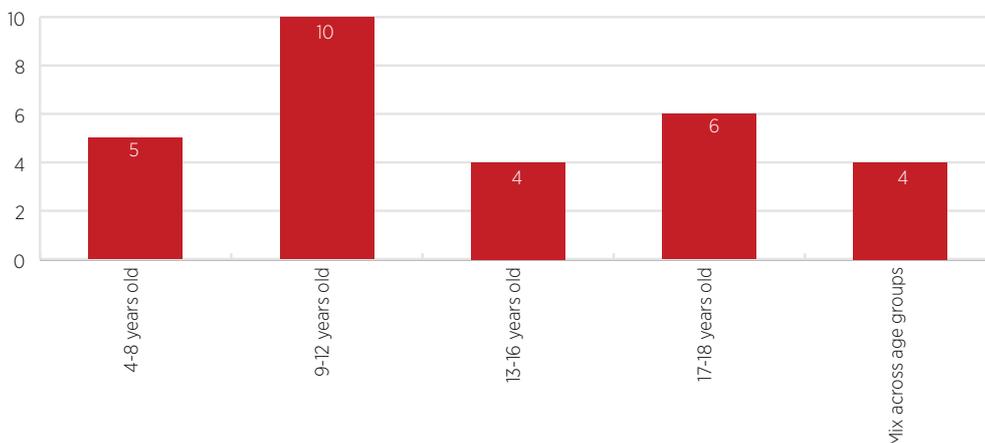
The analysis is also inconclusive regarding the age of children shown in images in news stories. Children and young people from across the age range of 4 to 18 were depicted, with 9-12 year olds being the most visually represented age category, featuring in 10 of the stories (Figure 16). However, it is not possible to know from our single day snapshot study if the greater number of children depicted in this age group is reflective of a broader trend. This warrants further research because it would be informative to know if children and young people conform to a particular aged-based stereotype when represented in the news.

**What is the gender of the young person in the photo?**



**FIGURE 15:** Images of boys versus girls (n=29)

**What is the (estimate) age of the young people photographed?**



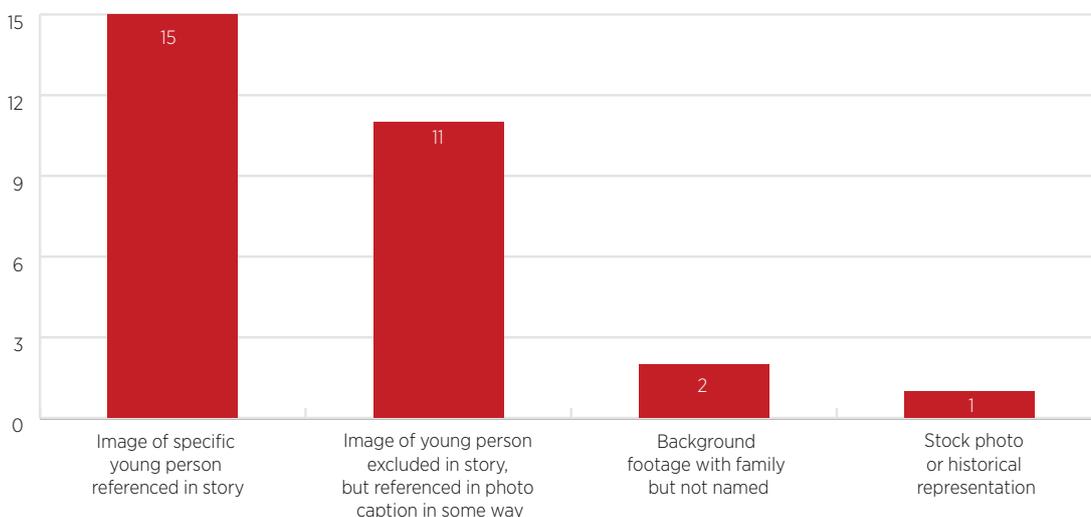
**FIGURE 16:** The age of young people who were photographed (n=29)

Perhaps the most important observation to emerge from the analysis is that young people were shown in news stories significantly more often than they were provided the opportunity to say something in a story. Fifteen of the 29 stories depicting images of children and young people also referenced the young person (Figure 17). While this figure initially appears reasonable, a 'reference' in a story includes examples where they are only included in a peripheral way. For example, they may be briefly mentioned as 'child of' an adult in the story. In addition, we identified 11 stories that included a prominent photo of a young person or young people where they were not cited or quoted in the story. This included photos of young people at festivals as well as stories about fundraising events, public services, sport-focused stories as well as non-sensitive family focused stories that only quoted the parents. In these cases, consent was apparently already given to include young people and they could have easily been given the opportunity to be heard. Two stories included images of young people but did not name or reference them at all, and one story included stock footage.

Therefore, our analysis of these 29 images finds that apart from a small number of exceptions most young people included in images are only peripherally included in the story, and only four are quoted. In this sense, they act as visual props, rather than being an integral part of the story itself. In several cases, they are included as members of nuclear families (defined as two parents and two or three children). In other examples, they are included as examples of innocent victims, without being spoken to; or their image is included to add 'colour' or emotional appeal to a story in which adults are speaking on their behalf. By 'colour' we mean the image has an emotional appeal or is visually provocative for readers and audience members.

In most cases children are seen but not heard in the stories we analysed. This undervalues their inclusion because an opportunity has been lost to hear from young people about a story that directly involves them. We believe it is far less common for an adult to be pictured in a story, but not interviewed and quoted. By taking the opportunity to speak with and quote young people in stories in which their image is shown, journalists could significantly and meaningfully increase young people's representation in news stories.

### How does the image of the young person relate to the narrative?



**FIGURE 17:** The relationship between images of young people and the news narrative? (n=29)

# CONCLUSION

In conducting this snapshot study, we set out to gain a better understanding of how young Australians are represented in the news media. In our findings, we have identified a clear mismatch between young Australian's expectations of the news and what major news outlets such as newspapers and television news programs are providing them in terms of both the focus or framing of the news and in terms of who is included in news stories.

Young Australians are not being given opportunities to speak about themselves and their experiences of society or about major events and issues, even when issues directly affect them. They are not being consulted by journalists on issues that young people care about; and they are not taken seriously as potential sources of insight or expertise about specific issues. Too often, young people appear in news stories only as victims or family members; or they are spoken about, but not listened to. They are often seen in images and video footage, but not heard.

It is our contention that it is to the major news organisations' detriment to ignore young people as news consumers, particularly at a time when there is a crisis in trust of journalists and journalism. One way for news organisations to build trust with young people is to include them in news stories in meaningful ways. As we have indicated in the report, there are simple but meaningful changes that might be considered when journalists are constructing stories. If young people are substantially absent from stories in which they appear in a

photograph or video footage, we might rightly ask why time could not be taken to speak to the young people involved. In addition, news organisations could direct resources to undertake further research about stories involving young people, to ensure good quality information is provided about issues in ways that meaningfully represent young people's views. This will take time and resources, but it seems prudent at a time when news organisations are trying to re-build the public's confidence in news integrity and reliability in an effort to maintain, if not grow, their audience. As our previous research has shown<sup>4</sup>, young people are attuned to the shortcomings of news media as much as anyone.

We acknowledge the limitations of a snapshot study, and we have indicated throughout this report where further research might take place to provide a more comprehensive and reliable picture of how young people are represented. One way this can occur is for other researchers and students to undertake further snapshot studies or, resources permitting, analyse news over longer periods of time. Other studies might also include analysis of additional social variables such as social class, race and ethnicity or examine how different age groups are represented. We encourage interested readers, and particularly young Australians, to use our toolkit to assist with this process. Through questioning how young Australians are represented in the news, together we may encourage news organisations to reflect on and improve their practices, for their own future viability as much as for the benefit of the young people they should aim to serve.

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**A/Prof Michael Dezuanni** is a leading Australian media literacy scholar. He was a secondary school teacher for 13 years and subsequently trained teachers in media literacy education for over a decade. He has extensive experience working with students and teachers. From 2010 to 2015, he was the expert advisor to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority for the Implementation of Media Arts in the Australian Curriculum. He is the author of three books and over forty peer reviewed articles and book chapters. He has been invited to advise on media literacy, digital technologies and learning by UNESCO (2014), the Minecraft in Education team, at Microsoft (2015-2019); national charity The Smith Family (2016-2019), Facebook (2019) and the Alannah & Madeline Foundation (2019). Michael is the Associate Director of the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology.

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