

# The number of climate deniers in Australia is more than double the global average, new survey finds

June 16 2020, by Caroline Fisher and Sora Park

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Australian news consumers are far more likely to believe climate change is "not at all" serious compared to news users in other countries. That's according to new research that surveyed 2,131 Australians about their news consumption in relation to climate change.

## [The Digital News Report: Australia 2020](#)

[was conducted by the University of Canberra at the end of the severe bushfire season during January 17 and February 8, 2020.](#)

[It also found the level of](#)

[climate](#) change concern varies considerably depending on age, gender, education, place of residence, political orientation and the type of [news](#) consumed.

Young people are much more concerned than older generations, women are more concerned than men, and city-dwellers think it's more serious than news consumers in regional and rural Australia.

### **15% don't pay attention to climate change news**

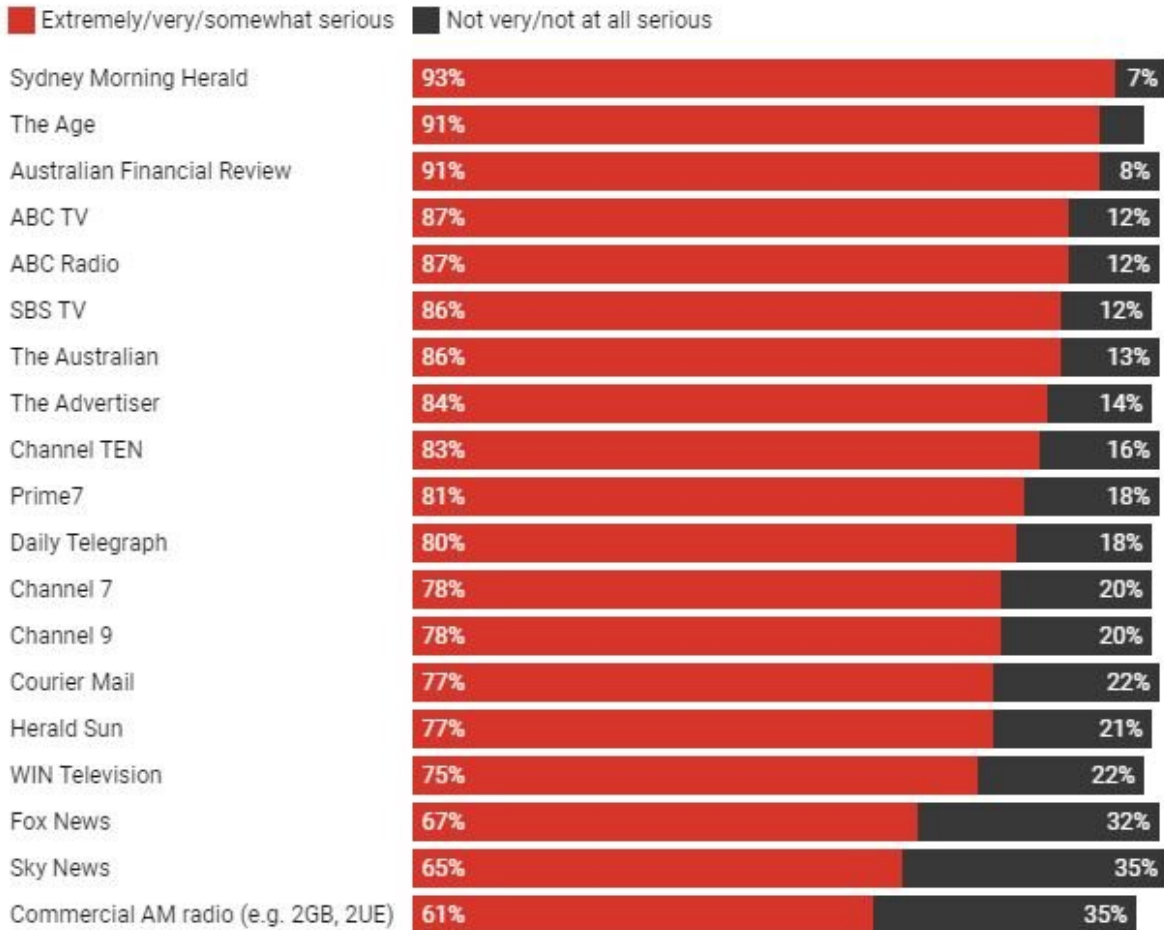
More than half (58%) of respondents say they consider climate change to be a very or extremely serious problem, 21% consider it somewhat serious, 10% consider it to be not very and 8% not at all serious.

Out of the 40 countries in the survey, Australia's 8% of "deniers" is more than double the global average of 3%. We're beaten only by the US (12%) and Sweden (9%).

While most Australian news consumers think climate change is an extremely or very serious problem (58%), this is still lower than the global average of 69%. Only ten countries in the survey are less concerned than we are.

## Offline news brands and concern about climate change

There's a strong connection between the brands people use and whether they think climate change is serious.



The percentage of people who answered "don't know" was in the range of 0 to 3.5%. While included in the calculation they were not included in the chart.

Credit: Chart: The Conversation Source: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra

## Strident critics in commercial media

There's a strong connection between the brands people use and whether they think climate change is serious.

More than one-third (35%) of people who listen to commercial AM radio (such as 2GB, 2UE, 3AW) or watch Sky News consider climate change to be "not at all" or "not very" serious, followed by Fox News consumers (32%).

This is perhaps not surprising when some of the most strident critics of climate change science can be found on commercial AM radio, Sky and Fox News.

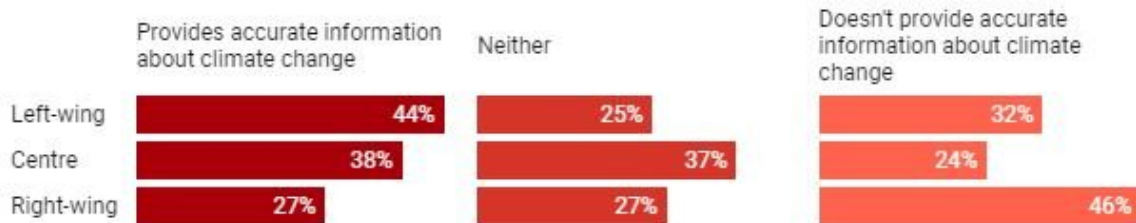
Among online brands, those who have the highest concern about climate change are readers of The Conversation (94%) and The Guardian Australia (93%), which reflects their audiences are more likely left-leaning and younger.

More than half of Australians get their information about climate change from traditional news sources (TV 28%, online 17%, radio 5%, newspapers 4%).

However, 15% of Australians say they don't pay any attention to news about climate change. This lack of interest is double the global average of 7%. Given climate change impacts everyone, this lack of engagement is troubling and reflects the difficulty in Australia to gain political momentum for action.

## Perceptions of climate change reporting

How people believe news media performs on providing accurate information about climate change, by political orientation



Credit: Chart: The Conversation Source: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra

## The polarised nature of the debate

The data show [older generations](#) are much less interested in news about climate change than news in general, and younger people are much more interested in news about climate change than other news.

News consumers in regional Australia are also less likely to pay attention to news about climate change. One fifth (21%) of regional news consumers say they aren't interested in climate change information compared to only 11% of their city counterparts.

Given this survey was conducted during the bushfire season that hit regional and rural Australia hardest, these findings appear surprising at first glance.

But it's possible the results [simply reflect](#) the ageing nature of regional and rural communities and a tendency toward more conservative politics. The report shows 27% of regional and rural news consumers identify as

right-wing compared to 23% of city news consumers.

And the data clearly reflect the polarised nature of the debate around climate change and the connection between political orientation, news brands and concern about the issue. It found right-wing news consumers are more likely to ignore news about climate change than left-wing, and they're less likely to think reporting of the issue is accurate.

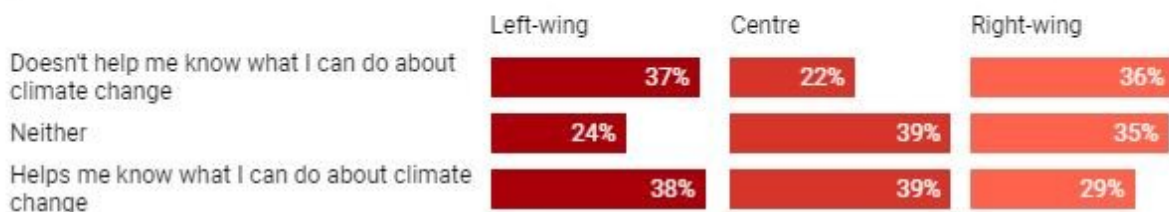
Regardless of [political orientation](#), only 36% of news consumers think climate change reporting is accurate. This indicates low levels of trust in climate change reporting and is in stark contrast with [trust in COVID-19 reporting](#), which was much higher at 53%.

The findings also point to a significant section of the community that simply don't pay attention to the issue, despite the calamitous bushfires.

This presents a real challenge to news organisations. They must find ways of telling the climate change story to engage the 15% of people who aren't interested, but are still feeling its effects.

## Perceptions of climate change reporting

How people believe news media helps them know what they can do about climate change, by political affiliation.



Credit: Chart: The Conversation Source: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra



## **19% want news confirming their worldview**

Other key findings in the [Digital News Report: Australia 2020](#) include:

- the majority of Australian news consumers will miss their local news services if they shut down: 76% would miss their local newspaper, 79% local TV news, 81% local radio news service and 74% would miss local online news offerings
- more than half (54%) of news [consumers](#) say they prefer impartial news, but 19% want news that confirms their worldview
- two-thirds (62%) of [news consumers](#) say independent journalism is important for society to function properly
- around half (54%) think journalists should report false statements from politicians and about one-quarter don't
- news consumption and news sharing have increased since 2019, but interest in news has declined
- only 14% continue to pay for online news, but more are subscribing rather than making one-off donations
- TV is still the main source of news for Australians but continues to fall.

## **The 'COVID-trust-bump'**

In many ways these findings, including those on climate change reporting, reflect wider trends. Our interest in general news has been falling, along with our trust.

This changed suddenly with COVID-19 when we saw a big rise in coverage specifically about the pandemic. Suddenly, the news was relevant to everyone, not just a few.

We suspect that key to the "COVID-trust-bump" was the news media adopting a more [constructive approach](#) to reporting on this issue. Much of the sensationalism, conflict and partisanship that drives news—particularly [climate change](#) news—was muted and instead important health information from authoritative sources guided the coverage.

This desire for impartial and independent news is reflected in the new [report](#). The challenge is getting people to pay for it.

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