

Australia's media improve on diversity—but there's still a long way to go

March 9 2023, by Sora Park, Jee Young Lee and Kieran McGuinness

News media coverage of culturally diverse people

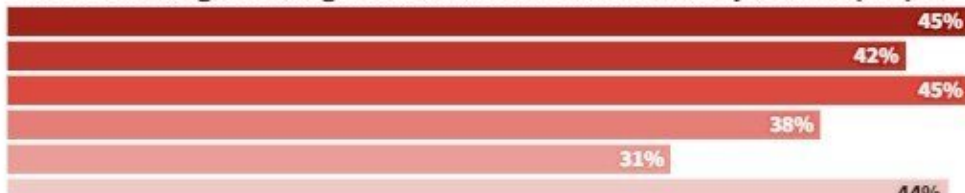
Question: How well do you think Australian news in general covers people with ethnically or culturally diverse backgrounds? In a survey of 2,266 people, in %.

■ Anglo-Celtic
 ■ European
 ■ Australian/New Zealander
 ■ Non-Anglo/Non-European
 ■ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
 ■ All

"Culturally diverse people are covered fairly"



"There is enough coverage of issues relevant to culturally diverse people"



Credit: ABS/ Author provided

Australian media have been widely criticized for not representing the diversity of the community they speak to and write for—nor, importantly, the people they report on. Our [latest research](#) shows that while the news industry is beginning to address its lack of diversity, there is still much work to be done.

Findings are showcased in the [Valuing Diversity in News and Newsrooms](#) report, released today. The analysis is based on a national online survey of 2,266 Australians and 196 [journalists](#), combined with in-depth interviews with 27 journalists about their views on diversity in the [news](#) and in newsrooms.

Australia is a [multicultural country](#). Half (48%) the population has at least one parent born overseas. Almost one-third (28%) were themselves born overseas. One in four lives in a non-English-speaking household.

However, the report shows only 39% of Australians believe everyone is treated equally, regardless of their ethnic or [cultural background](#).

A key reason respondents may feel this is a sense of not being seen or heard in the news. Feeling equally valued and heard is an essential ingredient of social cohesion.

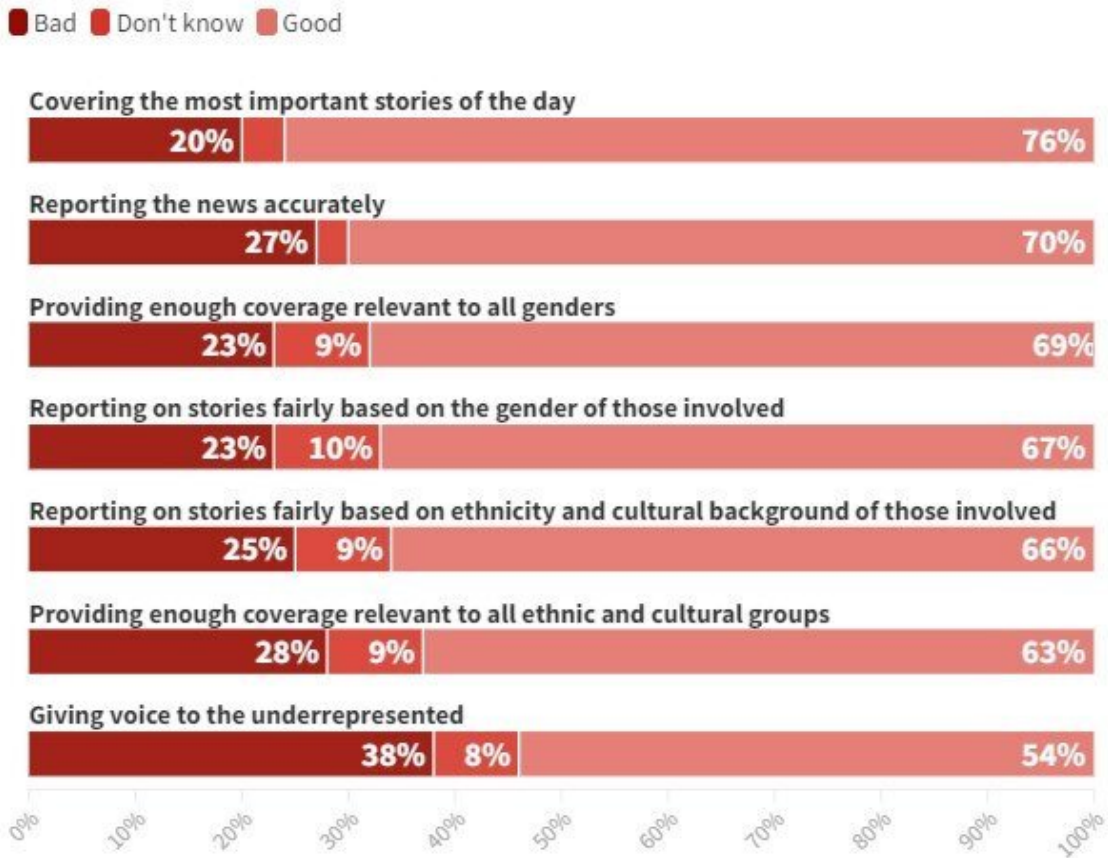
However, when asked about fairness and amount of coverage, less than half (46%) say the news covers culturally diverse people fairly. Only 44% say there is enough coverage of issues relevant to them, while 41% say the news is impartial and unbiased when reporting on these groups. These figures drop significantly among audiences from non-European, non-Anglo or Indigenous backgrounds.

Most Australians consider the news media to be doing a good job of covering the most important stories of the day (76%) and reporting stories accurately (70%). However, only around half say that news

organizations are doing a good job of giving voice to the underrepresented (54%), with 38% saying they are doing a bad job at this.

Importance of news values

Question: How important are the following factors in the decisions you make when reporting on a story? In a survey of 193 Journalists, in %.



Credit: ABS/ Author provided

Journalists are generally critical of the state of diversity in the industry. Only 30% of journalists say there is enough ethnic or cultural diversity

in their news organization. Around one in ten say they have experienced discrimination based on their ethnic or cultural background, and 47% of women journalists say they have experienced discrimination because of their gender. Only around half say their news organization is doing a good job of producing news content for ethnically diverse audiences.

Why are we not seeing diversity in the news? Some of the answers can be found in the structure, practices and cultures of news organizations.

First, there are simply too few people from different cultural backgrounds in newsrooms across Australia.

According to [Census 2021](#), only about 9% of journalists are from a non-Anglo or non-European background. A [study that analyzed 103 news programs](#) over two weeks in June 2022 found 78% of presenters, commentators and reporters had an Anglo-Celtic background.

Second, competing news values often push diversity down the priority list.

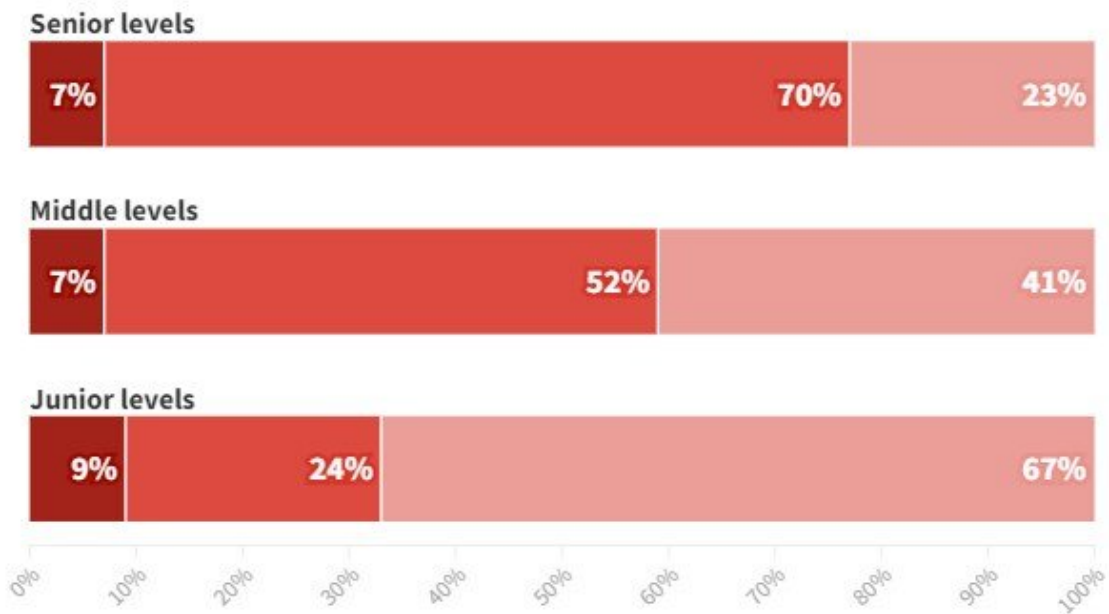
Most journalists we interviewed agreed inclusive reporting is good journalism. In the survey, we asked journalists which area of newsroom diversity they would like to prioritize: "ethnic and [cultural diversity](#)" was ranked the top.

However, when they are on the job and making reporting decisions, understandably they prioritize relevance to their audience (91%) first. Compared to other news values such as exclusivity (47%), capturing attention (42%) or surprise and novelty (38%), only 29% say it is very or extremely important that news includes voices from multicultural communities.

Employee diversity at your news organisation by level

Question: " To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? My news organisation is doing a good job with employee diversity at a..." In a survey of 193 Journalists, excluding freelancers/contractors, in %.

■ Don't know
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Agree



Credit: ABS/author provided

Third, the "[glass ceiling](#) and sticky floor" phenomenon is persistent. We found people from ethnically or culturally diverse backgrounds seeking a career in journalism continue to face discrimination.

Overall, 43% of journalists agree there are barriers to getting a job in their organization because of ethnic or cultural background. And the

majority (69%) of journalists from non-Anglo/non-European backgrounds say they have experienced barriers to career progression because of their ethnic or cultural background.

More than two-thirds "somewhat" or "strongly agree" their organization's junior level is doing a good job with employee diversity (67%). In stark contrast, only 23% "somewhat" or "strongly agree" that senior levels at their organization are doing well with employee diversity.

Fourth, there is not enough training and support from the organization.

Over half (52%) of journalists say their news organization has policies relating to language use about ethnically diverse communities. About half (49%) also say their organization collects or monitors staff diversity. However, only 39% received training on how to cover issues of diversity in the past year.

The journalists we interviewed cautioned against inclusion as a "box-ticking" exercise, and labeling people from diverse backgrounds. A journalist from an Asian background talked about an inclusivity workshop where participants were all non-white, emphasizing the importance of making sure journalists from all cultural backgrounds receive adequate training.

News organizations have made significant efforts to improve newsroom [diversity](#) in recent years. Despite this, we still have a long way to go in shifting the culture, removing unconscious bias and making space for journalists from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Trust and engagement with the [news media](#) are directly related to audiences' perceptions of [adequate and fair representation](#). So for news organizations seeking to regain audience trust, it is vital to have journalists from diverse cultural backgrounds telling stories from their

experience.

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