

Two-thirds of Australians don't want to read about politics: study reveals



ABC's Gaven Morris says Australian news organisations "massively over-report politics".
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Australians interested in politics are more likely to read and watch news across a number of mastheads and be more engaged in news generally, a new study has found.

The 2019 Digital News Report Australia, co-ordinated by the Reuters Institute and conducted by YouGov, found that while two thirds of Australians are disengaged with politics, those who are interested are all big consumers of news.

A study of 2010 people between the end of January and start of February shows right-wing and left-wing consumers tend to read news across a number of brands - an average of six publications - compared to those who don't have a political affiliation, an average of 4.

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Richard Ferguson, EWIN HANNAN

However, the report also found that two-thirds of Australians are not interested in reading about politics.

On a panel at the report's launch, Gaven Morris, ABC's director of news, said that Australian news organisations "massively over-report politics", compared to any other country he had spent time in and people's comparative interest in it.

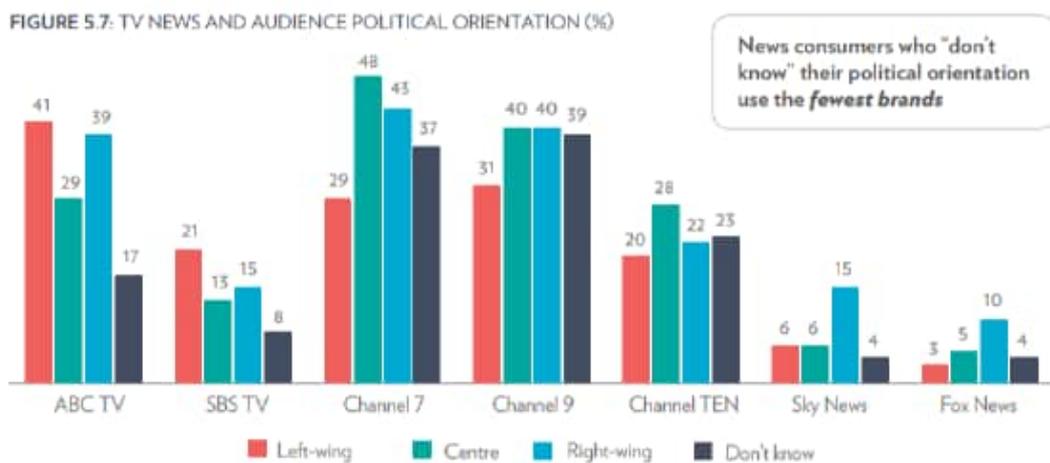
“The amount of time we spend talking and speaking about the frippery in politics that is of no interest to most people -- it is massively overrepresenting what we report,” Mr Morris said.

“What you’ve created then is a divide between audiences where - and this is a struggle within the ABC as much as anything else - we spend too much time doing incidental things about politics beyond most people’s interest or interviewing politicians who don’t have anything to say which has become a real trend in the last 10 or 15 years.

“That’s a problem. What that’s created on the other side of the fence for organisations that have worked that out is an almost total reflex to that is that they never report politics even when there are serious issues to report.”

Right wing-oriented news consumers are also far more likely to be concerned about fake news. However left-wing news consumers are more likely to perform fact-checking and verification practices than those who are centrist or right wing.

A breakdown of particular news brands shows 41 per cent of left-wing consumers watch the ABC, compared to 39 per cent from the right. More Australians who lean right watch Sky News - 15 per cent on the right to 6 per cent on the left wing, and those who sit at the centre of politics tend to watch Nine or Seven.



TV news and political orientation. Source: 2019 Digital News Report Australia

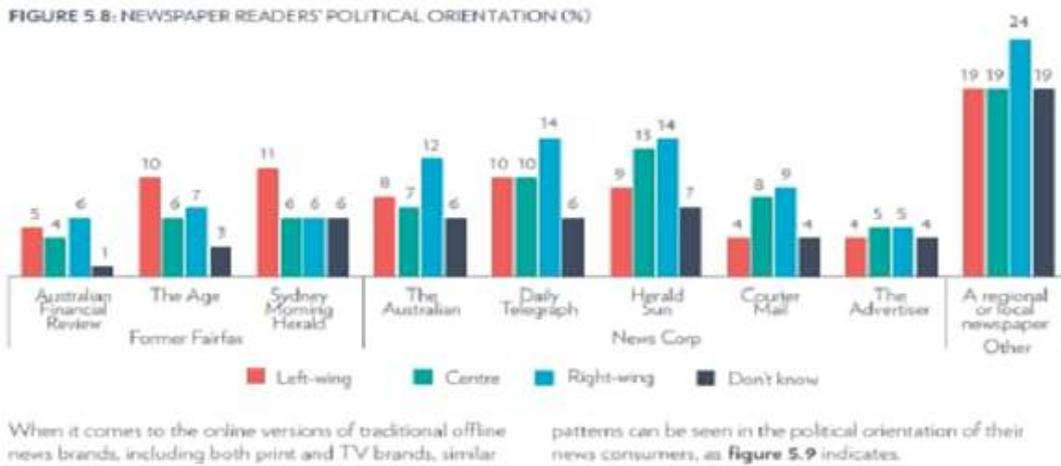
Readers of News Corp mastheads including *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph* have more right-wing consumers than left, while Nine’s *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* skew left.

The most overwhelmingly left-wing readership, and politically partisan readership overall, was the ABC News Online, which had 35 per cent of those readers surveyed identifying as left wing.

While readers of *The Australian* had a higher percentage of right-wing readers (12 per cent of those surveyed) its second highest cohort of readers were left-wing (8 per cent).

For Nine's *The Australian Financial Review*, and News Corp's *The Advertiser* and *Courier-Mail*, the audiences are more evenly split. In regional areas, most who consume are right wing.

But with the exception of news.com.au, almost all news consumers of online-only news brands attract more left-wing consumers.



Newspaper readers and political orientation. Source: 2019 Digital News Report Australia

The Guardian, *Buzzfeed*, *HuffPost*, *New York Times*, *The Conversation*, *Vice News*, *Junkee*, *Mail Online*, *Crikey* and *The Saturday Paper* all attract those who affiliate with the left, more so than the right.

Overall, the most disengaged consumers of news were those from low education, low income backgrounds, who also tend to be disinterested in politics.