



MEDIANET AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS SURVEY

# **COVID-19's Impact on Journalists and the Media in Australia**

March 2021

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## About the survey

Welcome to the findings report for Medianet’s survey on COVID-19’s impact on journalists and the media. This survey was conducted between November and December 2020 to provide insight into the challenges faced by journalists in 2020 and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the media industry. All respondents were invited to participate via professional email addresses stored in Medianet’s Contacts Database. 1008 Australian journalists participated in the survey, providing a comprehensive result which helps us understand how the day-to-day work, content produced and employment of those in the media industry changed in 2020.

The results of this survey demonstrate that the majority

of journalists believe the financial impacts of the pandemic on media organisations have in turn:

- Undermined journalists’ ability to work effectively.
- Affected job security for journalists, particularly women and non-binary people and those without permanent positions, such as freelancers.
- Changed workloads for journalists.
- Heightened threats to public interest journalism due to the closure of newsrooms and media organisations.
- Changed content for journalists, including a greater emphasis on producing content that will generate revenue.

The information presented in this report includes quantitative results, insights and quotes from respondents.

**Please note:** this survey is intended to provide a snapshot of the experiences of journalists, not a comprehensive study into the state of the media industry. Responses received may not fully reflect an accurate sample of all Australian journalists.

\*Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Where response percentages do not add up to 100, this is either due to rounding or because respondents were able to select more than one answer to the question.

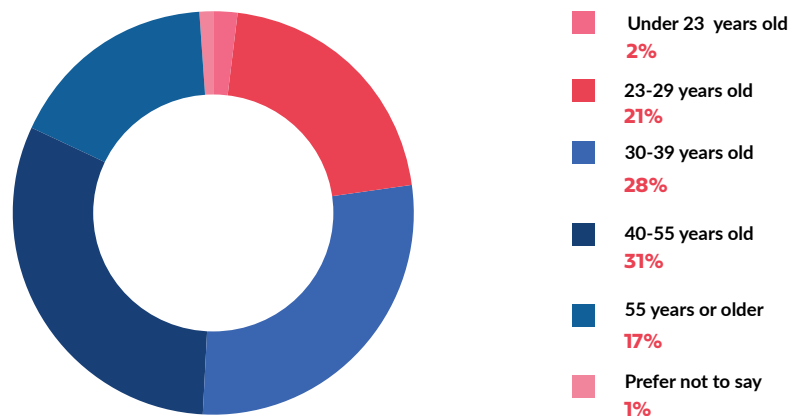
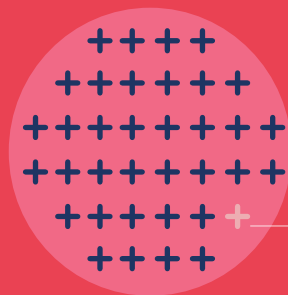


FIGURE 1: Ages of respondents

# 1008

respondents



**1%**  
non-binary



**40%**  
Male

**59%**  
Female

Radio	<b>20%</b>
TV	<b>14%</b>
Print	<b>52%</b>
Digital journalism	<b>62%</b>

\*respondents could select more than one medium



**I believe journalists were already in a position where lack of resources and staffing were an issue, but the pandemic accelerated that.**

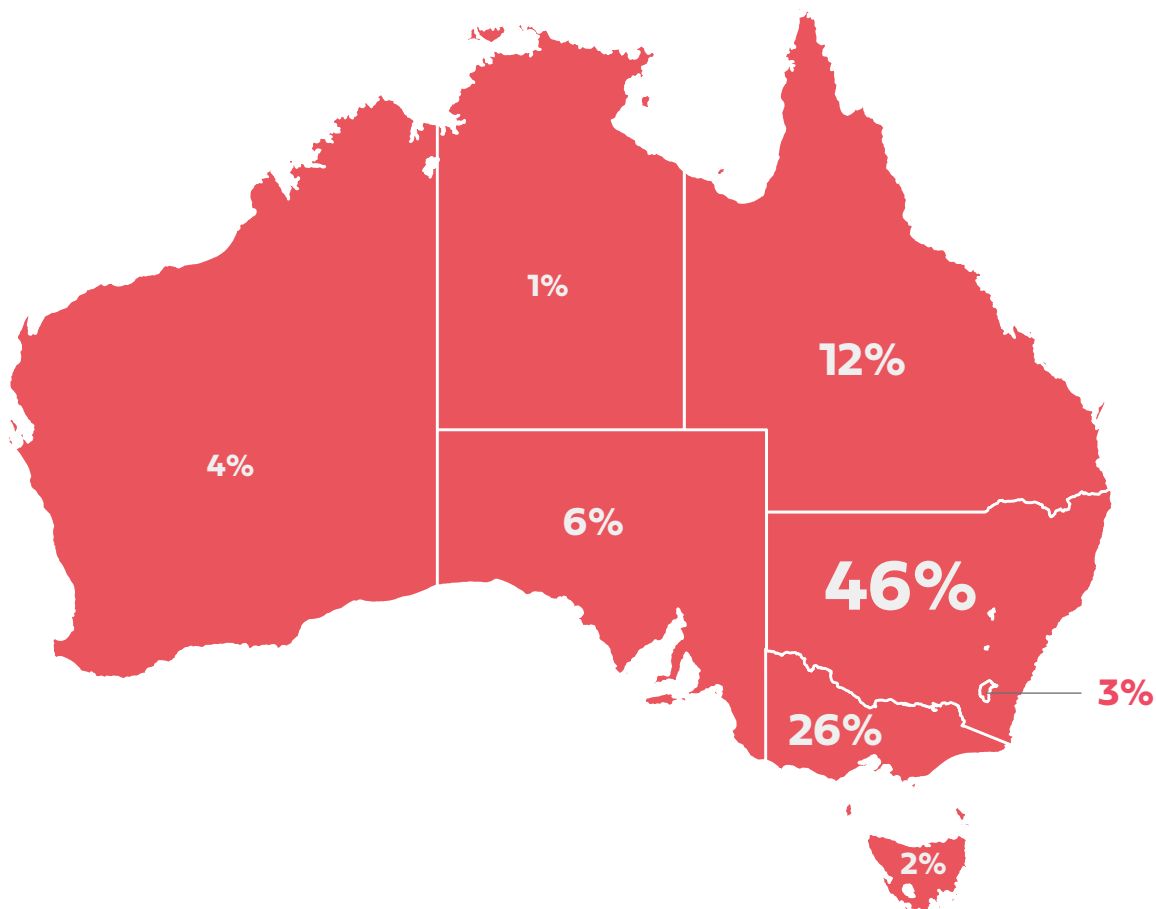


FIGURE 2: Journalist location

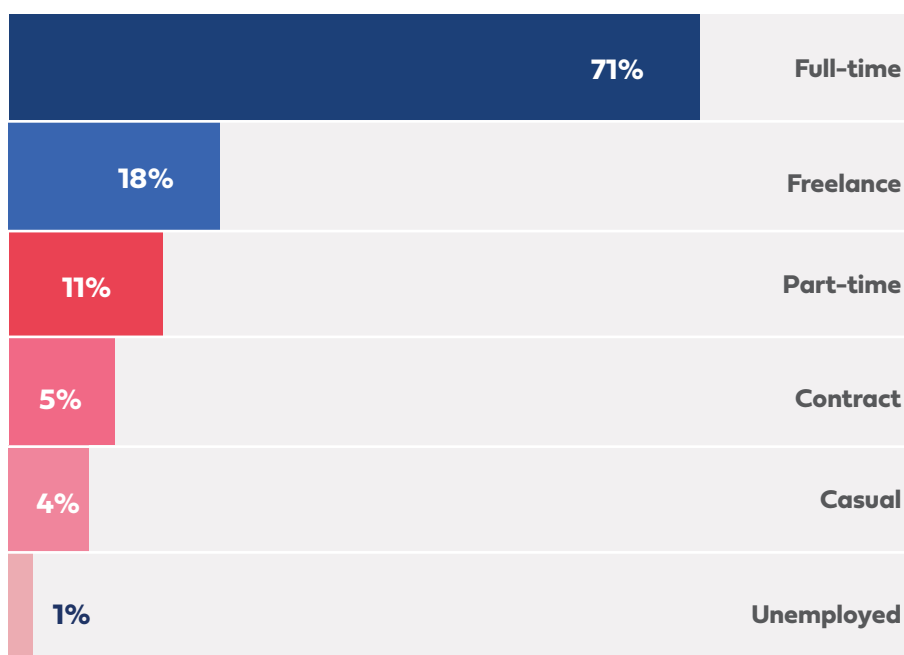
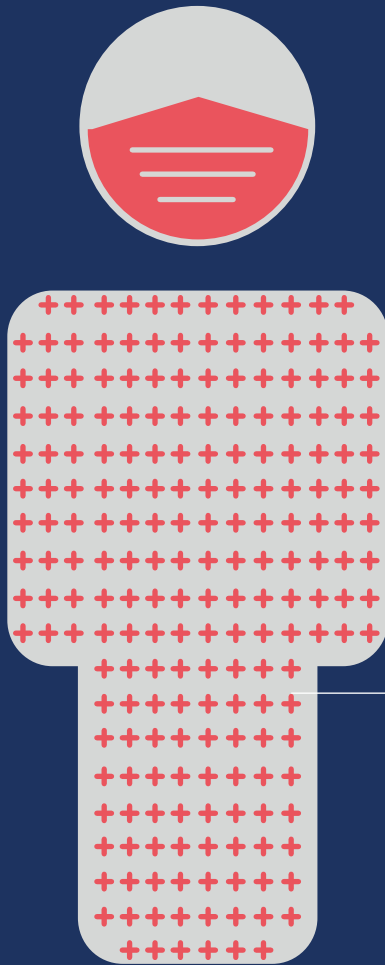


FIGURE 3: Employment type of respondents

## Snapshot of key findings



90%

of journalists said the pandemic heightened threats to public interest journalism.



In job security and employment, women and non-binary people have been more affected by the pandemic than men.



The work of freelancers has been particularly affected



41%

of freelancers reported that they have far less job security since the beginning of the pandemic.



61%

of freelancers reported a decrease in workload.

66%



of respondents said the closures of media companies and newsrooms have affected journalists' ability to work effectively.

66%

also said the closures of media companies/newsrooms have heightened threats to public interest journalism.

59%

of survey respondents indicated that there has been an increase in disinformation as a result of the pandemic.



# 01

## Employment



**18%** of journalists already worked from home prior to the start of the pandemic.



**82%** of all journalists worked from home for at least some period in 2020.

## Work

The most used sources for surveyed journalists when researching a story were industry and professional contacts, press releases and social media.

Respondents who selected 'other' story sources predominately cited official documents such as academic research papers, government websites and court documents.



### OFFICE

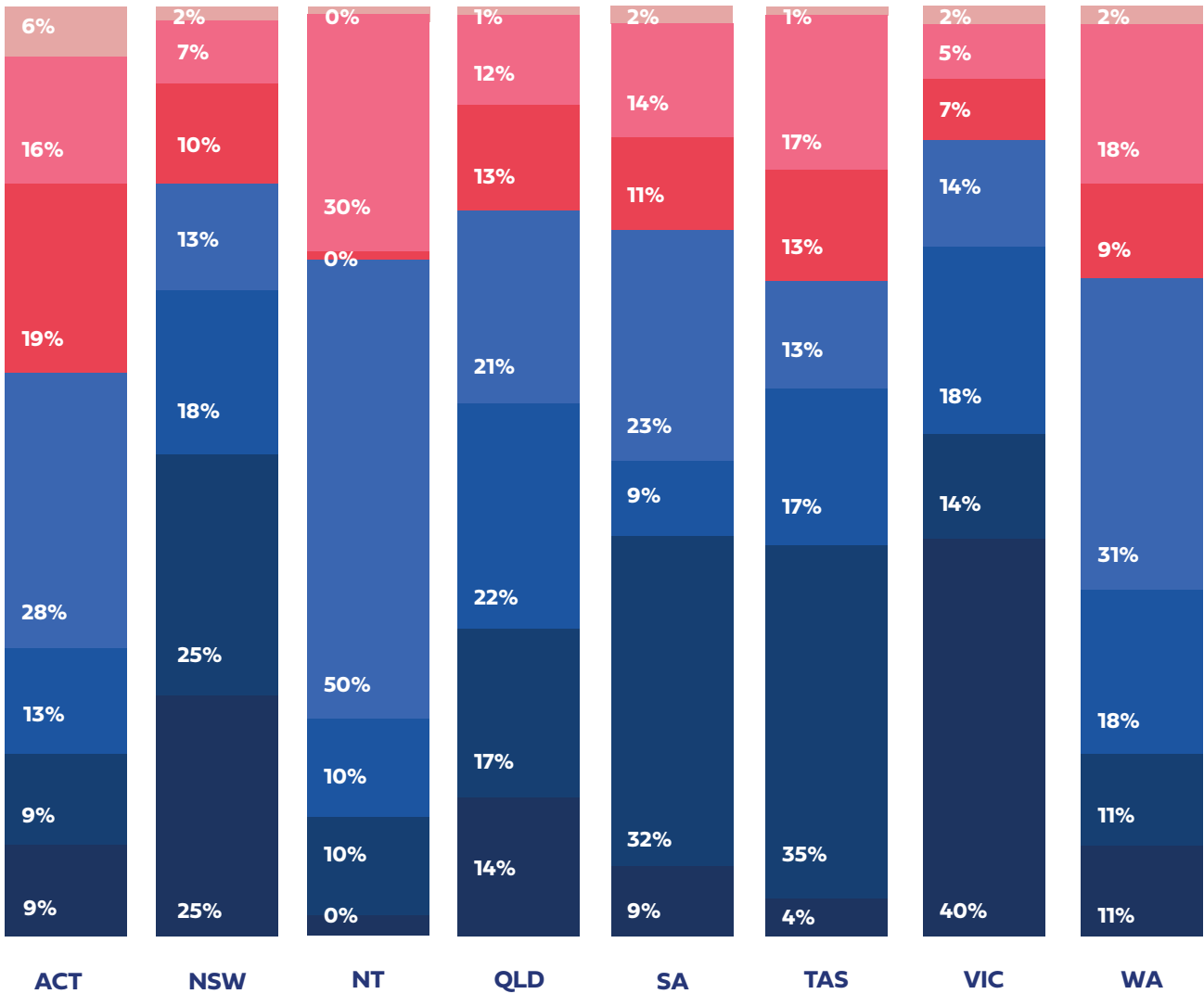
of all respondents identified as being back to the office or studio full-time at the end of 2020.



## Unsurprisingly, Victorian respondents reported the lowest return-to-office rates in the country

Worked from home since the pandemic began	25%
Worked from home and the office since the pandemic began	20%
Worked from home since before the pandemic	18%
Worked from the office throughout all of 2020	16%
Worked from home and the office since before the pandemic	10%
Returned to working in the office after working from home during the pandemic	9%
Other	2%

FIGURE 4: Where journalists worked in 2020



- Worked from home since the pandemic began
- Worked from home and the office since the pandemic began
- Worked from home since before the pandemic
- Worked from the office throughout all of 2020
- Worked from home and the office since before the pandemic
- Returned to working in the office after working from home during the pandemic
- Other

FIGURE 5: Change in workload depending on journalists' employment (percentage of total employment type)

## Job security

More than half of the survey respondents said the pandemic influenced their job security either favourably or unfavourably. This includes 30% of journalists who responded that they have slightly less job security, 19% who said they have far less job security and 4% who reported an increase in job security.

The survey also found that the job security of women and non-binary people has been most adversely affected by the pandemic. Freelance, casual and contract workers have also been far more affected than journalists in permanent positions, and digital and print journalists have also been more affected than TV and radio journalists.



**55% of female journalists and 42% of male journalists said they have less job security because of the pandemic**

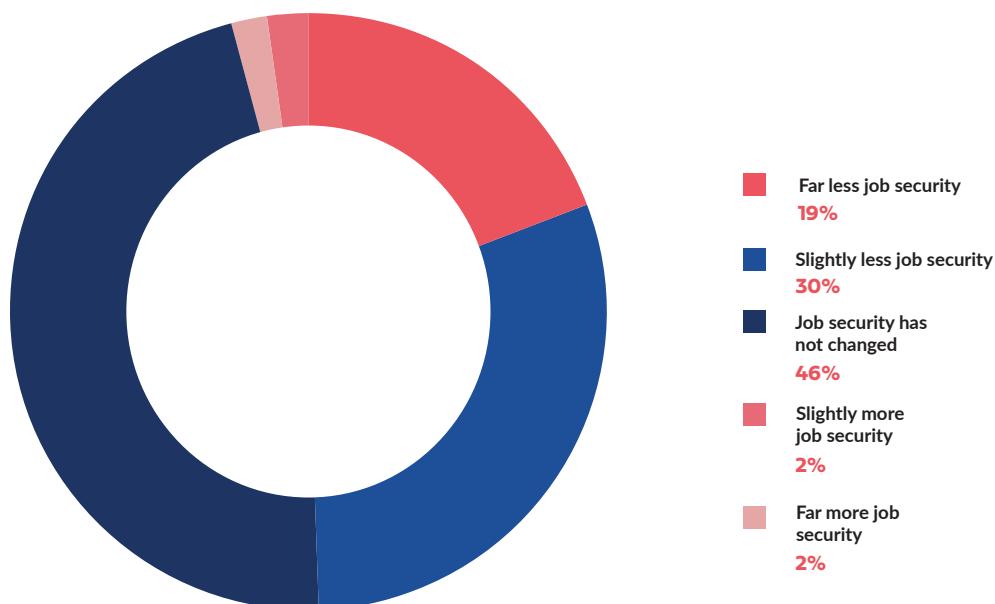
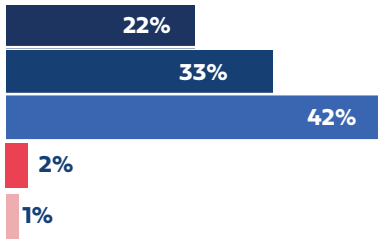


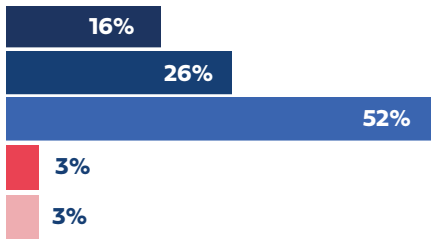
FIGURE 6: Impact of the pandemic on journalists' job security

**Gender**

**Females**



**Males**



**Non-binary**

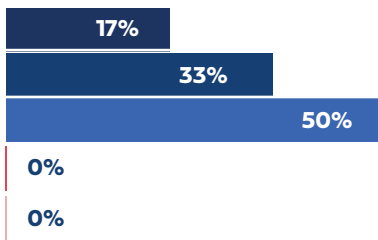
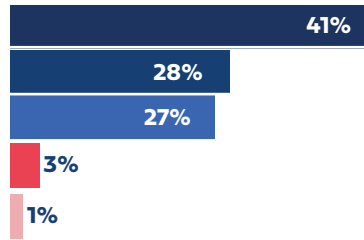


FIGURE 7: Impact of the pandemic on job security depending on gender

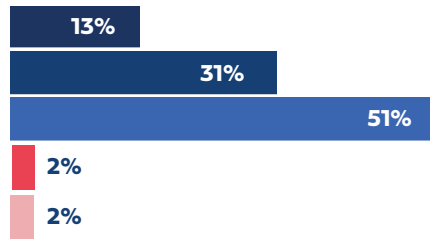


**Employment**

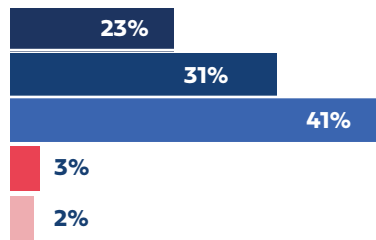
**Freelance**



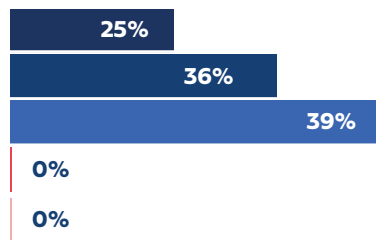
**Full-time**



**Part-time**



**Casual**



**Contract**

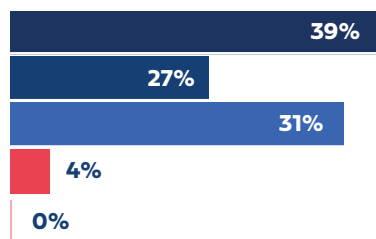


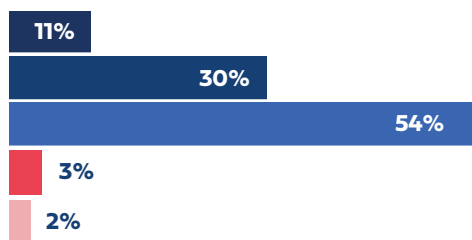
FIGURE 8: Job security based on employment (of currently employed journalists)

## Sector

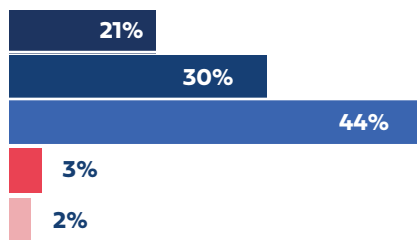
### Radio



### TV



### Digital



### Print

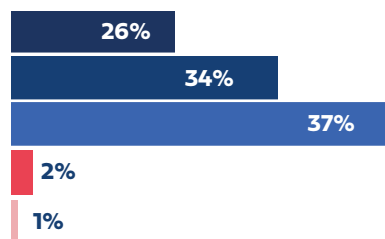
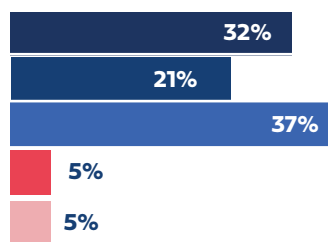


FIGURE 9: Job security based on sector

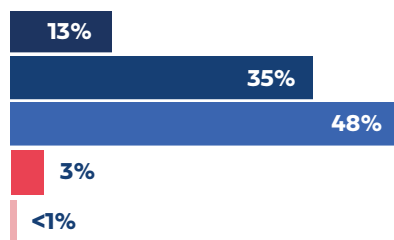


## Age

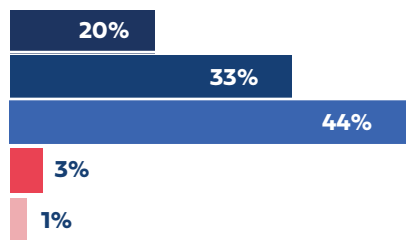
### Under 23 years



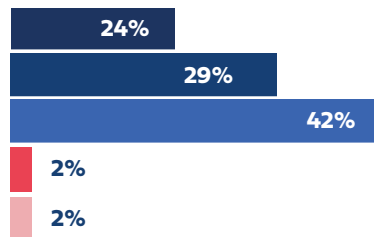
### 23-29 years



### 30-39 years



### 40-55 years



### 55+ years

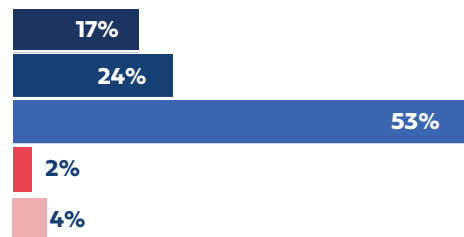


FIGURE 10: Job security depending on age (percentage of age group)

Note: Non-binary genders and some age categories had low numbers of respondents so results may not reflect an accurate sample of these demographics



**The freelance work I do for magazines has vastly diminished ... and they try to pay me less for doing the same work. Thirty years ago I was earning more per article for the same magazines than I am now.**



52%



**EMPLOYMENT CIRCUMSTANCES  
HAVE CHANGED**

Half of surveyed journalists (52%) said their employment circumstances have changed this year. The most common changes were an increase in unpaid work, salary cuts and reduced hours. Of the 16% of respondents who highlighted other changes to their employment this year, a significant number noted a loss of opportunities and funding for freelancers.

19%

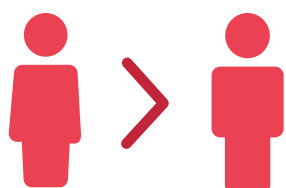
Increase in unpaid work

15%

Salary cut

13%

Reduced hours

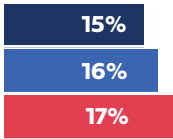


A higher percentage of women than men experienced redundancy or job loss, permanent or temporary closures of their media organisation and increases in unpaid work.

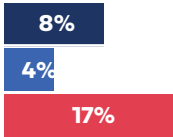
Employment has not changed	48%
Increase in unpaid work	19%
Other changes	16%
Salary cut	15%
Work hours reduced in permanent position	13%
Redundancy/job loss	6%
Temporary closure of media organisation	5%
Permanent closure of media organisation	2%

FIGURE 11: How has journalists' employment changed this year

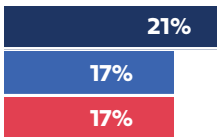
**Salary cut**



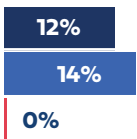
**Redundancy or job loss**



**Increase in unpaid work**



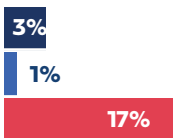
**Work hours reduced in permanent position**



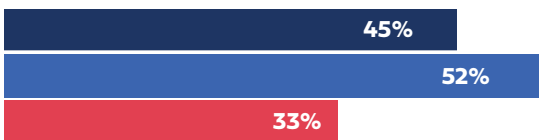
**Temporary closure of media organisation**



**Permanent closure of media organisation**



**Employment has not changed**



- Female
- Male
- Non-binary

**FIGURE 12:** Employment changes based on gender (percentage of each gender who experienced employment changes)

# Ongoing employment

The majority of journalists said their employment will not change in 2021, while a smaller percentage were unsure of their 2021 employment status or planning to change positions or roles in 2021.

Employment will not change	<b>77%</b>
Are unsure	<b>7%</b>
Changing roles at their company	<b>6%</b>
Starting a new position in the media industry	<b>5%</b>
Leaving the media industry	<b>2%</b>
Other	<b>3%</b>

**FIGURE 13:** Journalist employment in 2021

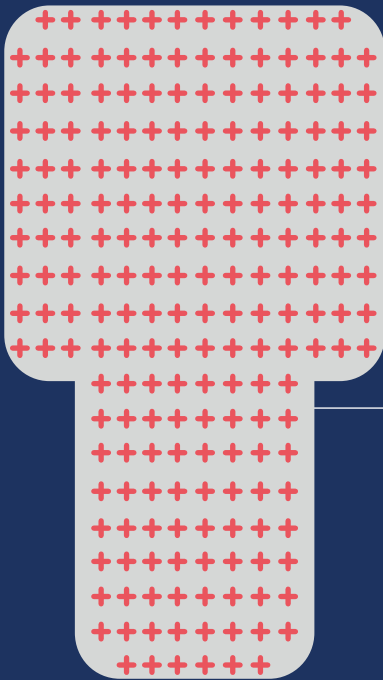
2021  
**77%**



**BELIEVE THEIR EMPLOYMENT WILL  
NOT CHANGE IN 2021**

# 02.

## Impact of the pandemic on public interest journalism



# 90%

of journalists said the pandemic heightened threats to public interest journalism.

The survey results indicated that a majority of journalists believe the pandemic has heightened threats to public interest journalism, with 90% of respondents citing at least one threat increased in 2020.

The most common threat was the closure of media companies and newsrooms, followed by an increase in disinformation and the concentration of media ownership.

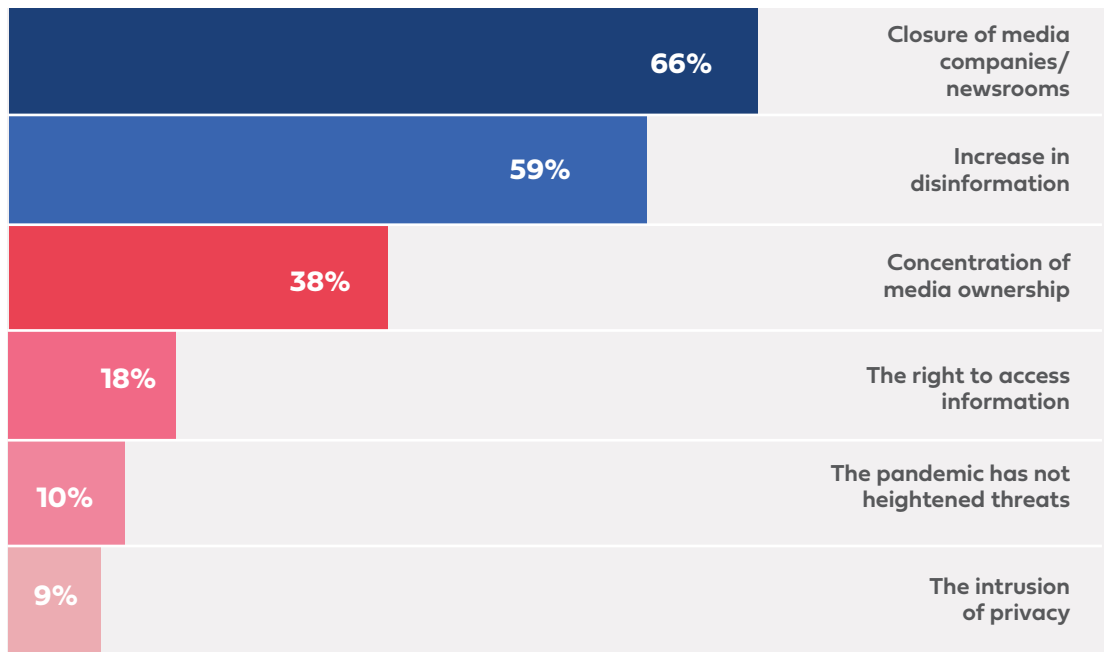


FIGURE 14: Threats to public interest journalism heightened by the pandemic

### Closure of media companies and newsrooms

Many respondents highlighted the effects newsroom closures may have had in smaller or regional communities, for example in holding local authorities accountable. Some also noted the impact the closures have had on remaining media, such as increasing pressure on journalists to produce content quickly, reducing the depth of coverage and placing further stress on resources.

**66%**

of surveyed journalists believed the closure of media companies and newsrooms is a threat to public interest journalism that has been heightened by the pandemic.

It feels like the journalism industry is crumbling, with so many titles either closing or laying off staff, or drastically reducing budgets.

So many newsrooms have closed or downsized but thankfully there have been many grassroots new independent start-ups. Disinformation has been rife making it more important than ever to have local news but local news from independent outlets receives little to no government funding or support through tax or charitable measures.

It was awful to see so many small country newspapers close or have to reduce their paper page numbers due to COVID. In country areas, newspapers are vital to providing information to the community. COVID-19 has also dramatically impacted the viability of media organisations even further. My old editor at a country newspaper always said he enjoyed having multiple competitors in the area because it keeps all journalists on their game and encourages good journalism. His newspaper was the only company that survived COVID-19, the other newspapers closed their doors.

## Our newsroom already suffered cutbacks. This could be the nail in the coffin.

59%

of survey respondents indicated that there has been an increase in disinformation as a result of the pandemic, which has heightened threats to public interest journalism.

### Increase in disinformation

The increase in social media has seen many reports on various topics that have been proven to be false or at best misleading, and as more people use social media as their first source of news, they are mistakenly seeing mainstream media outlets as almost irrelevant.

“ An increase in disinformation in Australia’s multicultural and linguistic-diverse community made bilingual journalists’ work extremely difficult this year. With unprecedented demands from the communities, journalists with bilingual skills were the truth-warriors fighting against disinformation in languages other than English.

“ Conspiracy theories are rife at the moment, which threatens how informed the general public is at the moment. The closure of newsrooms and concentration of media ownership has, I believe, only further threatened the trust audiences have in news, turning them towards conspiracy theories.

## Concentration of media ownership

The concentration of media ownership was cited by 38% of journalists as a threat to public interest journalism, with many respondents noting the connection between this and the closure of media organisations and newsrooms.



**38%**

of journalists cited the concentration of media ownership as a threat to public interest journalism.

“ The concentration of media ownership in this country is an ongoing, and incredibly serious problem.

“ As media companies merge to survive, the number of independent voices drops away - billionaires with their own agendas end up with too much ability to control the narrative.

## Right to access information

Many journalists encountered greater barriers when attempting to access information since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly from government departments or organisations. 18% said this was a threat to public interest journalism heightened by the pandemic.

In Victoria most journalists seeking answers when hotel quarantine and contact tracing were becoming major issues were met with brick walls from government agencies when seeking more detail.

Conduct of local, state and federal governments has adversely impacted us. Generally all three levels of govt [sic] have exploited the diversionary aspects of the pandemic to deceive and mislead.

## Intrusion of privacy

9% of survey respondents indicated that the intrusion of privacy during the pandemic was a threat to public interest journalism.

I think the collection of personal data and increased surveillance in the name of public protection will have knock on effects down the track that we are possibly not interrogating closely enough yet!





**[I was] often being told the information I sought was not accessible in COVID-19 due to safety precautions. Things like accessing court documents I was no longer allowed to do because I would handle the same paper as court staff.**

# 03

## Work of journalists



# 61%



61% of freelance journalists reported a decrease in workload, while 61% of journalists in permanent positions experienced an increase in workload.

# 75%

**of survey respondents experienced a change to their workload since the beginning of the pandemic.**

## Workload

75% of survey respondents experienced a change in their workload since the beginning of the pandemic. The majority of journalists (54%) reported an increase to their workload, while 22% reported a decrease. However, responses significantly differed depending on employment type. Those with permanent full-time or part-time positions tended to experience more increases in their workload compared to freelancers, who experienced significant decreases in workload overall.

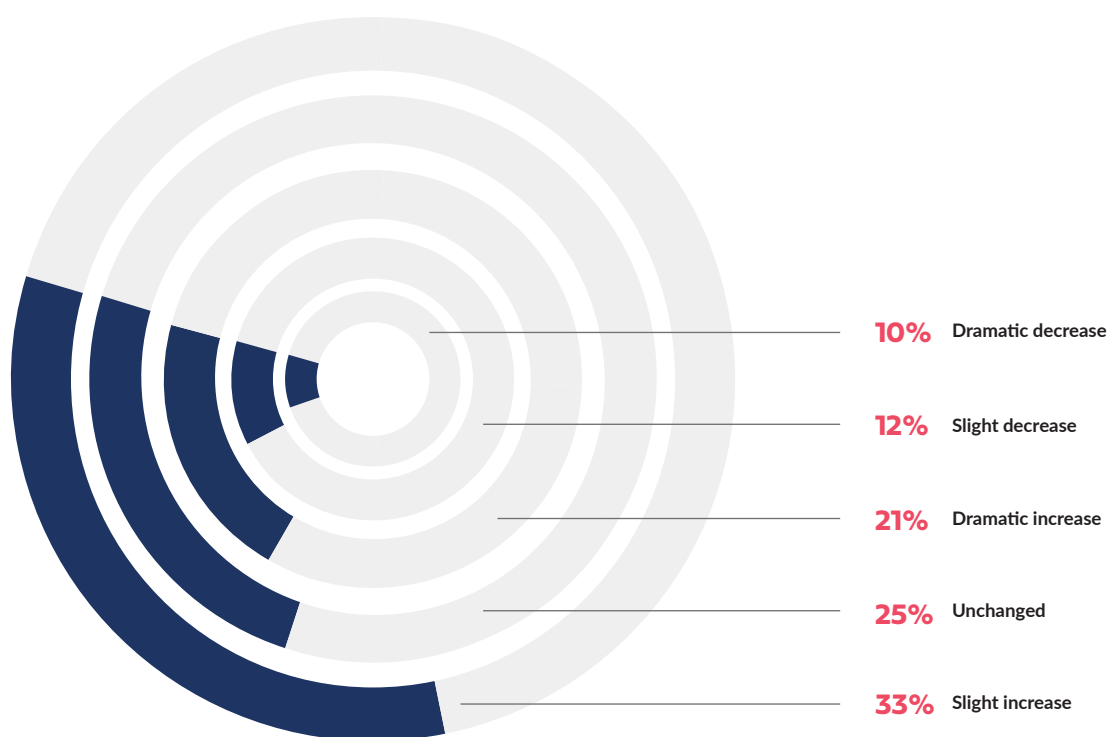
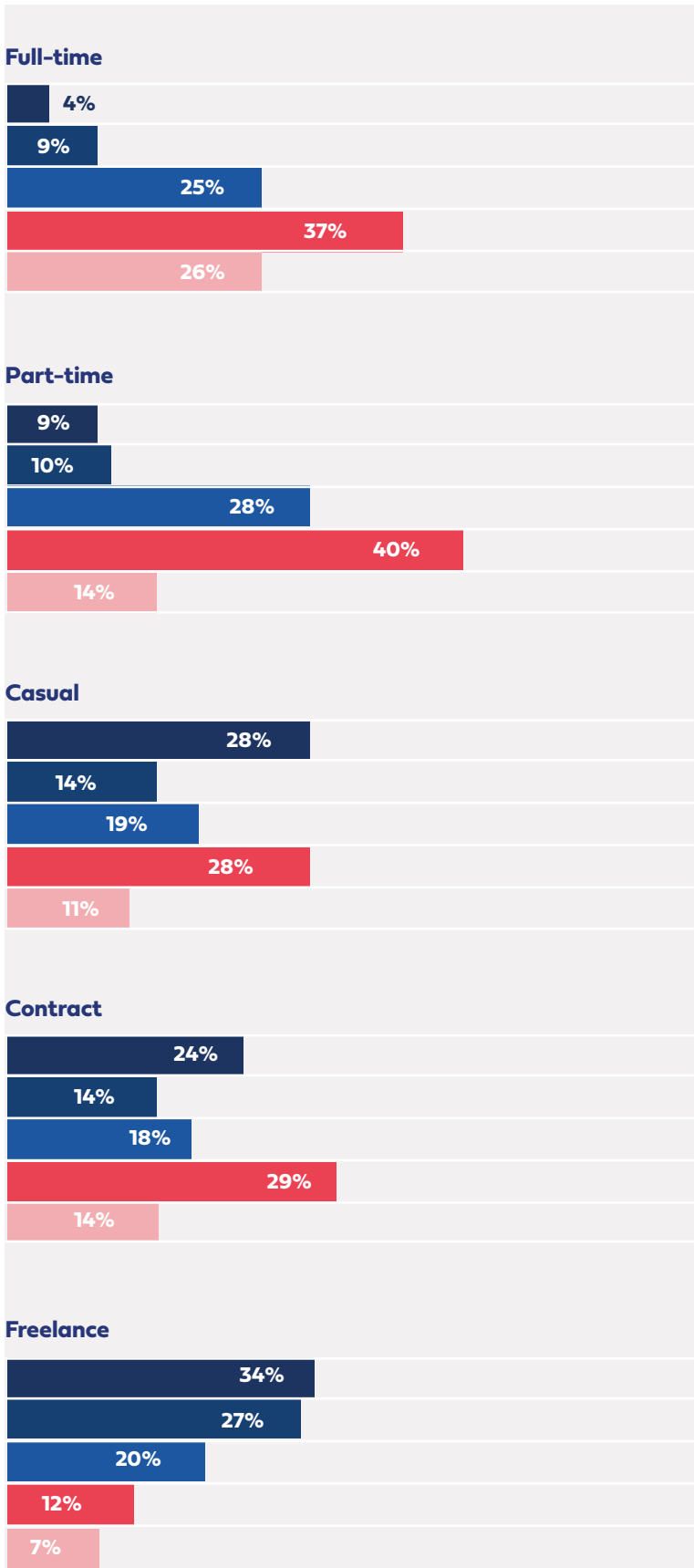


FIGURE 15: Workload changes since the beginning of the pandemic



- Workload decreased dramatically
- Workload decreased slightly
- Workload has not changed
- Workload increased slightly
- Workload increased dramatically

**FIGURE 16:** Change in workload depending on journalists' employment (percentage of total employment type)

## Journalist efficacy and barriers

# 95%

of journalists said that the pandemic has impacted their ability to work effectively.

## 29%

of the respondents said the greatest disruption to their work was the financial impact of the pandemic on media organisations.

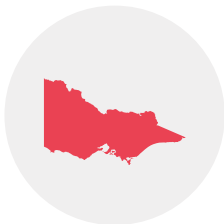
A smaller number cited either risks to the physical health and safety of journalists or an increase in harassment/undermining of the media as having the greatest impact.

## 22%

said the greatest disruption was restrictions on freedom of movement.

## 37%

said all of these factors had a negative impact.



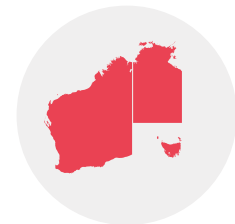
**VIC**

Victorian journalists were the highest geographic category of respondents who said all of these factors had a negative impact. This is a predictable result given Victoria experienced the toughest lockdown restrictions.



**ACT**

Journalists from the Australian Capital Territory reported the highest risks to their health and safety, which may be linked to the nature of the media work in Canberra.



**TAS | WA | NT**

No journalists from Tasmania, Western Australia and the Northern Territory responded that risk to their physical health and safety had the greatest impact on their ability to work effectively, unsurprisingly given the low COVID-19 case numbers in these states.

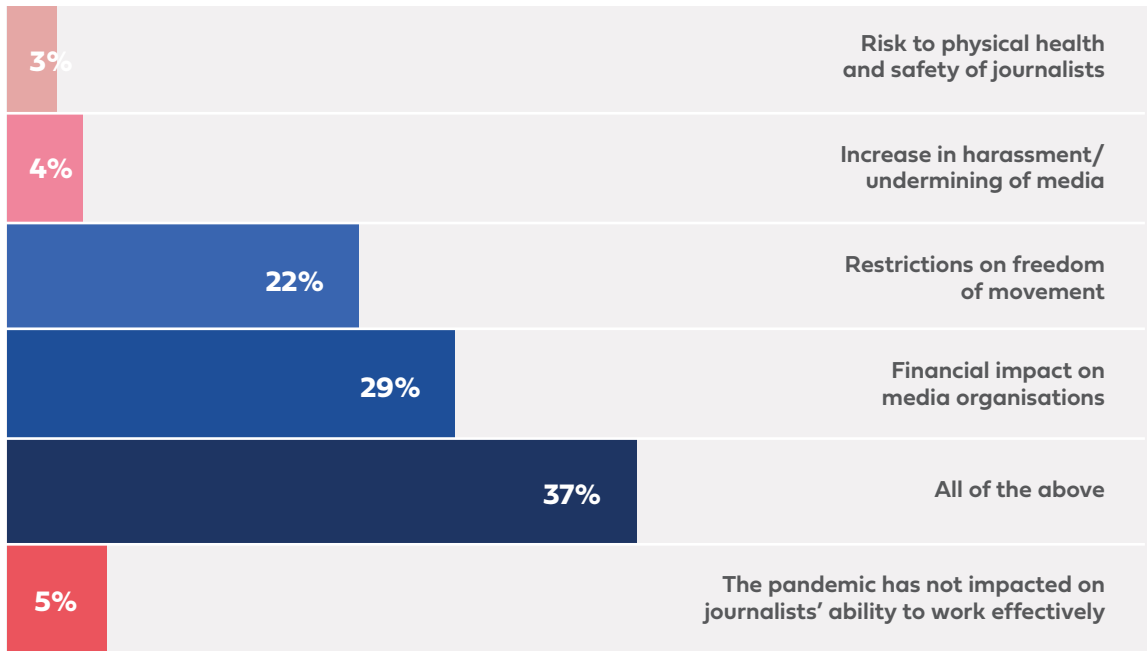


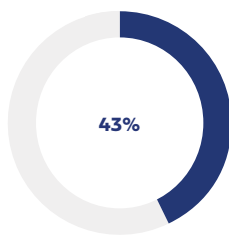
FIGURE 17: Greatest pandemic-related impact on journalists' ability to work effectively

As illustrated by the state breakdown of threats to effective journalism, the severity of each threat differed somewhat depending on the journalists' location.

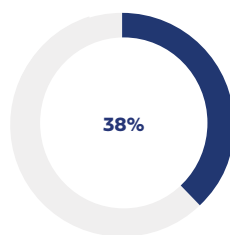
FINANCIAL IMPACT ON MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

SA	20%
QLD	34%
WA	38%
NT	30%

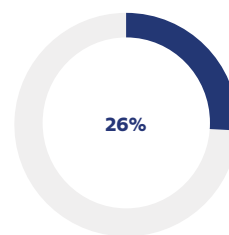
All of the above



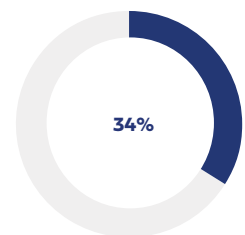
VIC



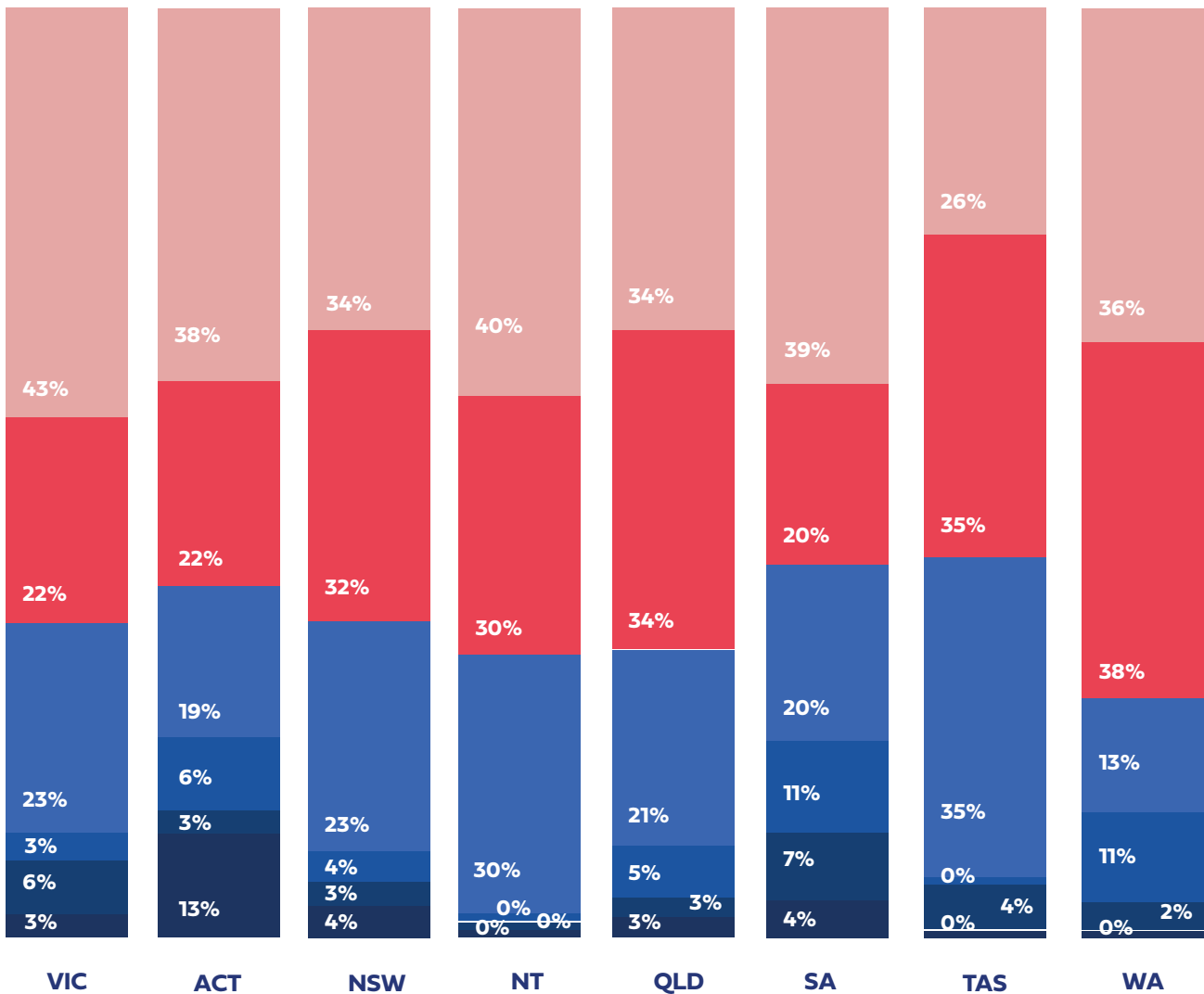
ACT



TAS



NSW



- Risk to physical health and safety of journalists
- Increase in harassment/undermining of media
- The pandemic has not impacted on journalists' ability to work effectively
- Restrictions on freedom of movement
- Financial impact on media organisations
- All of the above

FIGURE 18: Impact of the pandemic on journalists ability to work effectively, based on location

**Note:** Some states and territories, including the NT and TAS, had small sample sizes, so results may not reflect an accurate sample of this demographic

## Financial impact on media organisations

The majority of surveyed journalists felt that the financial impact of the pandemic on media organisations has affected journalists' ability to work effectively. This included 37% of respondents who cited it as one of the factors impacting journalists' work, and 29% of respondents who believe it was the factor which most impacted their work.

This survey's respondents predominantly represented those who have maintained full-time employment this year (71% of

all respondents). Many of these journalists felt the loss of colleagues and even rival media organisations have impacted their ability to work effectively. Many noted the extra time pressures to cover more stories because of these changes, and how the financial cost to media organisations has impacted the quality, depth and focus of the content produced. Although respondents were not asked specifically about what caused the financial impact on media organisations during the pandemic, many journalists suggested that a loss of advertising revenue was a big factor.

37%

of respondents cited this as one of the factors impacting journalists' work.

29%

of respondents believe it was the factor which most impacted their work.

Half our newsroom were told to work from home, while the other staff were in the office and edited the whole bulletin. Because of the extra workload I couldn't travel far to ensure enough time in the office to complete the workload. My company's finances were essentially 'frozen'. Overtime was banned and no extra expense could be made.

I believe journalists were already in a position where lack of resources and staffing were an issue, but the pandemic accelerated that. It leads to the content itself suffering. I work as the only journalist at our station and this isn't just limited to the pandemic, but we just don't have the ability to cover everything in our region. There are times where I can't cover a story to the extent that I would like because I don't have the time to undertake effective research and I'm sure I'm not alone in that thinking.

Sadly, a lot of my media contacts have found this very tough, like myself, some have had to get work in other areas just to pay the bills.

The pandemic has massively affected the organisation's finances which has increased workloads, leaving most journalists flogged and exhausted and feeling stuck in this weird yo-yo of feeling grateful for having work but needing to push back on the relentless demands of our employer. I feel guilty for being so unhappy in my role currently when so many journos are out of work - but the effect it's having on my personal life (or lack thereof because I am being forced to work hugely antisocial hours) is extremely detrimental on my mental health - and I am not alone in feeling like this.

I've had to cut my rate. I've also had my rate cut after invoicing. I've had stories killed and not been paid for them. Life is a lot worse as a freelancer.

We no longer have work cars, offices or a print product. We are driven to get subscribers to 'pay our wages' and to justify our existence so we can continue as a news source. So, the financial impact has been significant, to the point where we are trying to justify our employment daily by trying to get people to subscribe to our content.





**The financial impact  
has changed the  
focus of the news  
which further  
undermines the  
public's trust in the  
media's integrity.**

22 %

of survey respondents said the restrictions on freedom of movement had the greatest impact on journalists' ability to work effectively in 2020.

## Restrictions on movement

Many respondents indicated that restrictions on movement, such as lockdowns and border closures, had impacted their ability to work effectively due to:

- Being unable to communicate in-person with sources, which

affected trust and relationships with sources for some journalists.

- Being unable to travel for stories, or having far more barriers to do so (such as quarantines or border checkpoints).
- Being unable to communicate with colleagues in-person or work in the office.

**Rather than shooting and interviewing in person we have used stock imagery and completed interviews on zoom.**

My organisation is still working from home. For some of my colleagues that has been onerous, for others it has given them more opportunity to focus and drill down deeper into their work.

[I'm] based on the NSW/VIC border and operating in a 50km radius excluded face to face coverage in some cases, while criss-crossing the border checkpoint several times a day added time to an already busy day.

The pandemic rules have been draconian and limited the freedom of the press.

Rather than shooting and interviewing in-person we have used stock imagery and completed interviews on zoom etc.

My work is in community radio. We were restricted in access to studios due to physical distancing. Interviews being done by phone, skype or zoom meant more time editing and loss of that direct contact with guests. I lost 3 members of my team and have been carrying the show mostly on my own. Stress in the workplace (radio station) with some reacting badly to the pressure and bullying/harassing others.

---

## Harassment or undermining of the media

37% of journalists agreed that harassment or undermining of the media affected journalists' ability to work effectively in 2020, however only 4% identified it as the most disruptive factor. Many respondents noted a heightened distrust of the

media by the general public, sometimes linking this to the spread of disinformation or conspiracies online. Victorian journalists in particular spoke of pressure or harassment from the public when reporting on political decisions or issues. Social media was frequently raised by journalists as the platform where most harassment occurs.

While I understand the criticism, I think the outright distrust of journalists for doing their job has reached a fever pitch in recent months. It's been hard to stand up for people doing good work asking hard questions that some partisan commentators don't want to hear, and that's not been helped by partisan commentators \*within\* the media also using their platforms to make hyperbolic claims.

Government, public relations firms and businesses have taken a more harassing tone in engaging with the media. I suffered from a nervous breakdown and found my complaints about being mistreated were largely ignored until it was escalated to the highest levels.

[There was] no room for nuance in debate, people were either for Daniel Andrews/pro-science, or against Andrews and anti-science. Any attempt to discuss public health measures, reflect on their impact, their efficacy, and to look at which vulnerable groups were most impacted often resulted in journalists being attacked for not uncritically supporting every government measure 100 per cent.

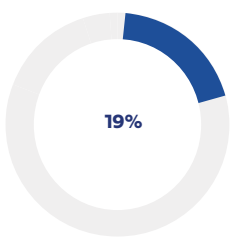
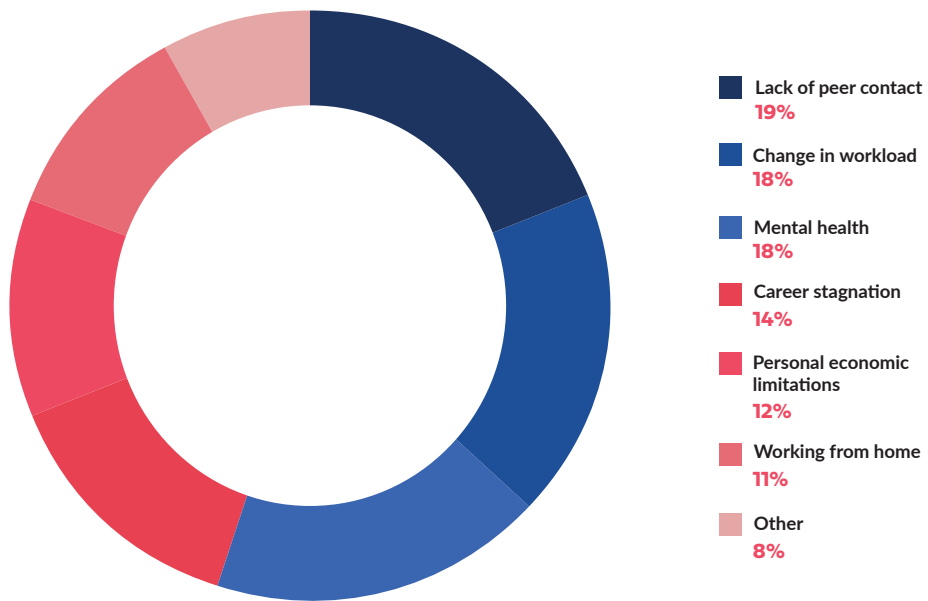
2020 has definitely heralded a wave of distrust and lack of respect for media organisations, which makes our job significantly harder when members of the public are hesitant or outright hostile towards us. This attitude in turn doesn't help media organisations financially, as the public also don't seem to want to pay for news anymore. I have grave fears for the future of an industry I'm really only just starting out in.

The media is more frequently harassed and undermined on social media (I personally have been defamed for trying to do my work - case currently with barristers) as more 'keyboard warriors' have emerged. This has got to the point where some social media users trust what others put on social media over what is reported by reputable media and qualified journalists.

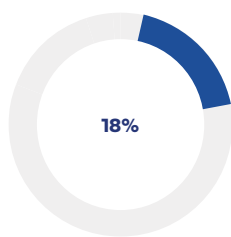
# Personal challenges

The biggest challenges in 2020 for surveyed respondents were lack of peer contact, changes in workload and mental health. Of the 8% of respondents who noted other challenges, uncertainty about the future was a common theme, as was the challenge of juggling work while homeschooling children.

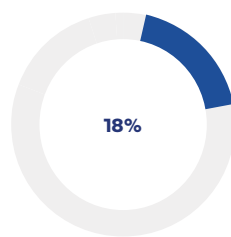
**F** Interviewing people who lost loved ones in aged care was awful and there was no support from my newsroom while this was going on; interviewing bereaved people, being attacked on social media; trying to write 5 stories a day and being treated poorly by Sydney managers who did not seem to truly recognise the impact of living in lockdown was terrible.



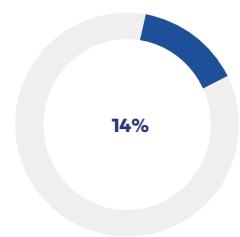
Lack of peer contact



Change in workload



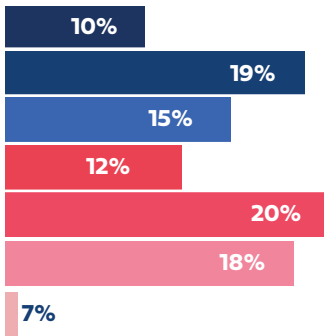
Mental health



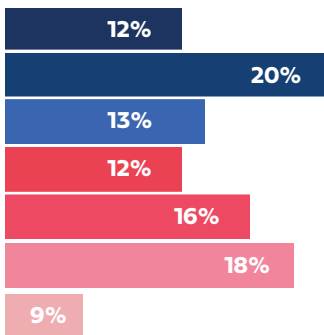
Career stagnation

FIGURE 19: Biggest challenge for journalists in 2020

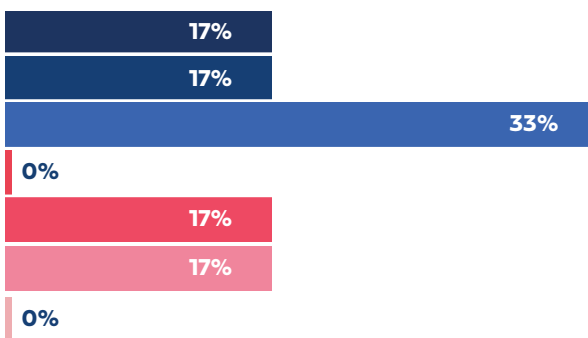
**Females**



**Males**



**Non-binary**

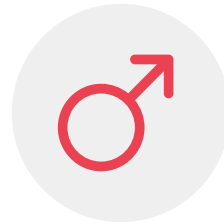


**highlights**

**20%**

**Change in workload**

The top challenge for females was a change in workload.



**20%**

**Lack of peer contact**

The top challenge for males was a lack of peer contact.



**33%**

**Career stagnation**

The top challenge for non-binary was career stagnation.

- Working from home
- Lack of peer contact
- Career stagnation
- Personal economic limitations
- Change in workload
- Mental health
- Other

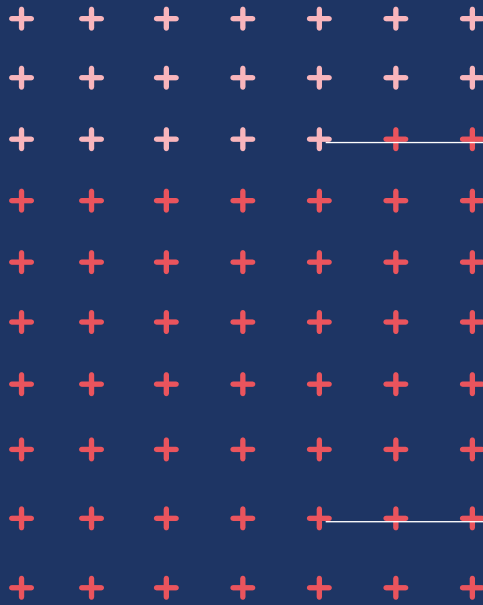
FIGURE 20: Personal challenges depending on gender

Note: Only 1% of survey respondents identified as non-binary. This sample size is too small to reflect an accurate representation of this demographic.

# 04.



## Media content in 2020



**28%**

CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY

**52%**

CHANGED SLIGHTLY

**80%**

of journalists said the content  
produced by their organisation  
has changed this year.

## Content changes for journalists

77% of journalists responded that the focus of their work has changed this year. Unsurprisingly, the majority of these respondents noted that COVID-19 and the effects of the pandemic have dominated their coverage or influenced the angle of most stories.

Many respondents said that the cancellation of events such as sporting competitions caused the biggest change in their content. Several also highlighted an increased focus on creating content that generates revenue, or the most “clicks” and subscriptions. Changes

in methods of communication and contact, such as covering more online events or meeting virtually, were also frequently cited as impacting on the content produced by journalists.

Many journalists spoke of making attempts to source stories unrelated to the pandemic due to either audience fatigue or a sense of responsibility to provide the public with some positive news stories. Some journalists also responded that their level of focus changed from a local lens to a national or global focus, or vice versa.

**📌 We write with the sole aim of getting page views (clicks) and subscriptions.**

**77%**



of journalists responded that the focus of their work has changed this year.

# Content changes for journalists in 2020

- I have always covered the news of the day, but the topics we cover and the way in which we cover them has shifted a bit in the wake of the pandemic.
- The pandemic has reduced the acceptable broadcast quality standards which has opened us up to the possibility of using remote guests within Australia and overseas. This has improved the diversity of on-screen talent.
- There were times when it wasn't appropriate to mention the pandemic. Other times when it was unavoidable.
- It is a greater focus on explaining what the CURRENT situation is to be clear and precise so people know what to do right NOW. Beforehand it was more holistic talking about past, present and future.
- Since a lot of community events (the majority, in fact) were cancelled this year, I had to much more actively go out and seek news stories as I didn't want my whole newspaper to be COVID-related (which it easily could have been!). I found that, as time went on during the pandemic, people wanted less focus on COVID and more "good news" stories. So that's what I aimed for.

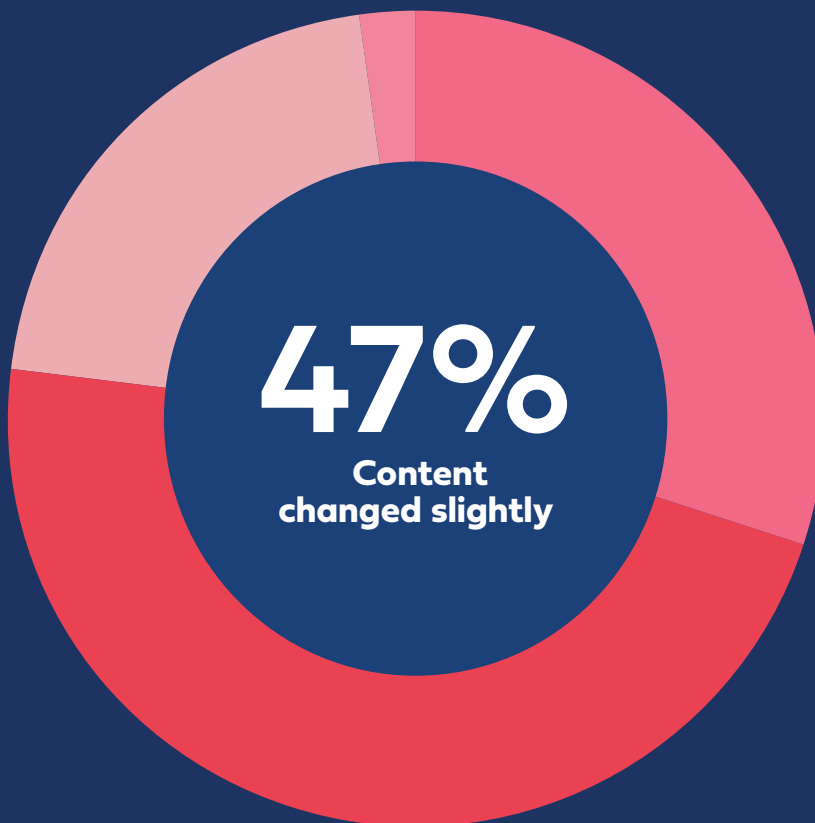


FIGURE 21: Content changes for journalists in 2020



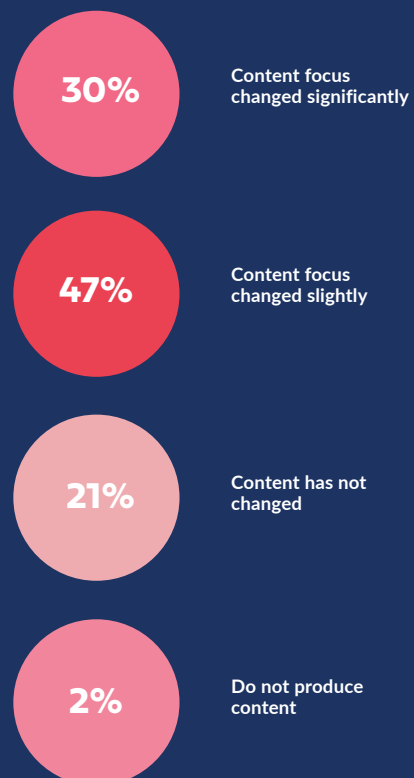
I used to write a mix of health/medical stories, breaking news, investigations, child sexual abuse, court cases, gender inequality. Now I do entirely pandemic stories, I have lost time and focus on other rounds and therefore my work is often churning out quick responsive stories to COVID rather than doing anything meaningful.

I have gone from just doing reporting duties (interviews, news writing, online publishing, photography) to contributing to marketing and strategy documents because the pandemic changed how we distribute our news. I spend at least eight hours a week working purely on marketing and content strategies.

During the pandemic I have been forced to think more about how global and national issues affect ordinary Australians. I believe the pandemic has changed the way we think about government decisions, everything from public health to welfare.

More of a focus on stories that I know will “get the clicks” as opposed to stories that need to be written and may have a smaller audience or less immediate appeal to the readership.

Everything I write now relates in some way to the impact of COVID.



## Content changes for media organisations in 2020

These changes were most frequently credited as either a response to the need to cut operational costs and generate revenue, or due to the editorial focus on the pandemic.

80%



of journalists said the content produced by their organisation has changed this year.



### Once again, many journalists highlighted an increased demand for positive news stories to counteract the pandemic coverage.

The results showed that the style or format of content also changed within some journalists' organisations, for example they produced more 'explainer pieces' or blogs. Aside from the pandemic, the summer bushfires and US election were the most common topics for media organisations this year, according to journalist comments.

TV journalists reported the most significant changes to their organisations' content, with 40% responding that their content has changed significantly, and 47% responding that it has changed slightly. Journalists working in print reported the lowest levels of content changes at their organisation.

**Changed significantly 28%**

**Changed slightly 52%**

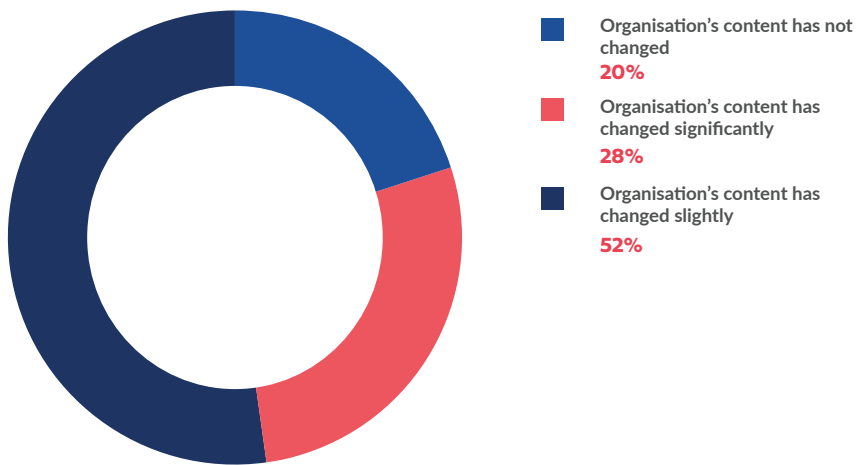


FIGURE 22: Content changes for media organisations in 2020

**Note:** Responses do not include surveyed freelancers.

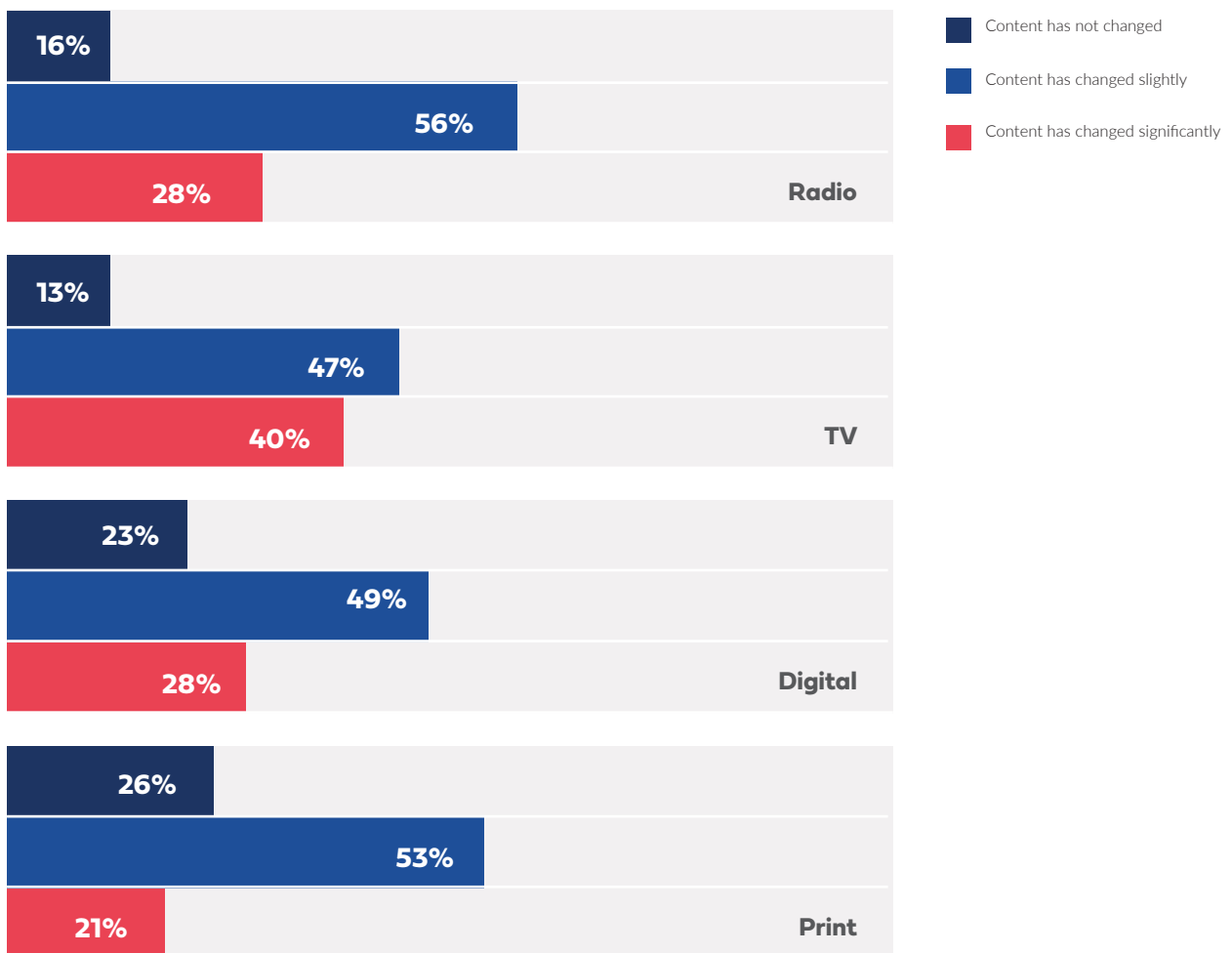


FIGURE 23: Content changes for media organisations in 2020, depending on sector

🗨️ Total obsession with coverage of COVID means other subjects are being ignored. Public interest journalism on those subjects - especially regionally - aren't happening because the journalists who still have jobs are all being directed to COVID coverage.

🗨️ For a six month period our lead every day was COVID-19 related. It was the recurring theme at the top of our bulletin every night. This is compared to a normal year when lead stories are mostly crime, politics or significant announcements.

🗨️ We are moving even more towards writing stories that will make people subscribe, which isn't necessarily what is most newsworthy.

🗨️ Just because it's a pandemic does not change the focus of news. People have a hunger to know what is going on. The subjects might change, but the focus on delivering facts and analysis does not.

🗨️ Obviously stories about the pandemic have dominated the news agenda. We are producing far more explainer type stories and analysis of developments than we used to.

**🗨️ We've never been so focused in on one subject, but, strangely, to offset the seriousness of that, the rest of our content has become more viral/lightweight.**



**Instead of setting  
the news agenda, we  
are reacting to online  
click and subscription  
selling trends which  
dictate what topics  
we write.**

## Journalist sources and social media



83%

### FACEBOOK USERS

In 2020 Facebook remained the most widely used social media platform for surveyed journalists.

05

## Sources

The most used sources for surveyed journalists when researching a story were industry and professional contacts, press releases and social media. Respondents who selected 'Other' sources predominately cited official documents such as academic research papers, government websites and court documents as their sources.

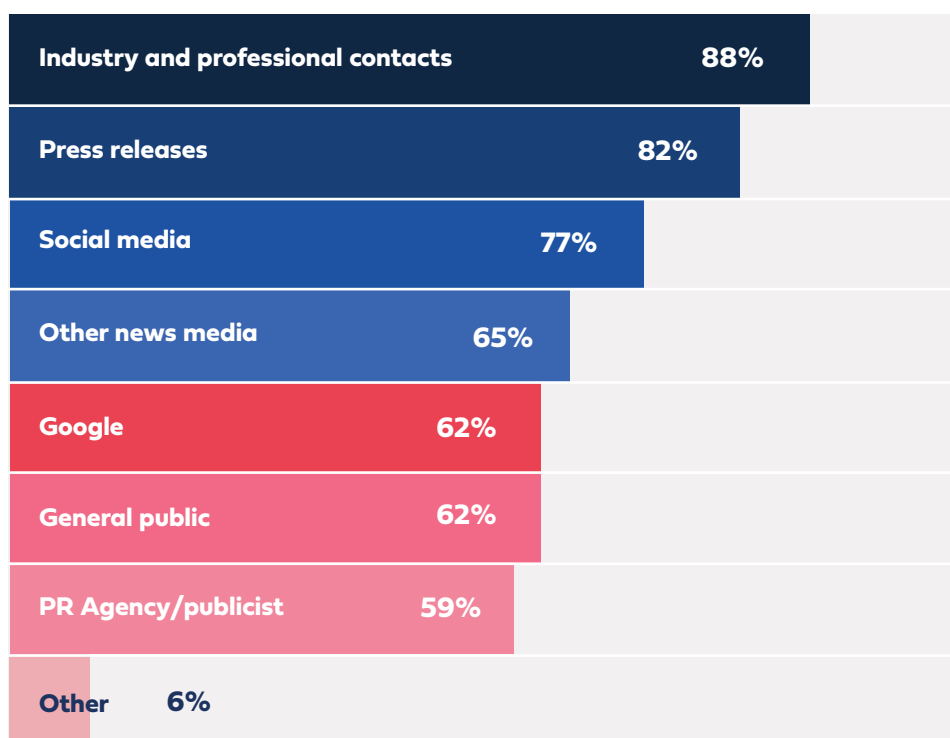


FIGURE 24: Sources used by journalists when researching a story

## Social media

In 2020 Facebook remained the most widely used social media platform for surveyed journalists, however the percentage of journalists using the site for work has dropped slightly (from 88% to 83%) since Medianet's 2019 Journalism and Social Media survey. It is anticipated that the News Media Bargaining Code may affect journalists' relationship with Facebook in 2021. Twitter remained

the second most popular social media site, followed by Instagram then LinkedIn. 11% of respondents also said they used Reddit in their professional work. 3% of respondents said they use no social media platforms in their work, which is consistent with the findings from Medianet's 2019 survey.

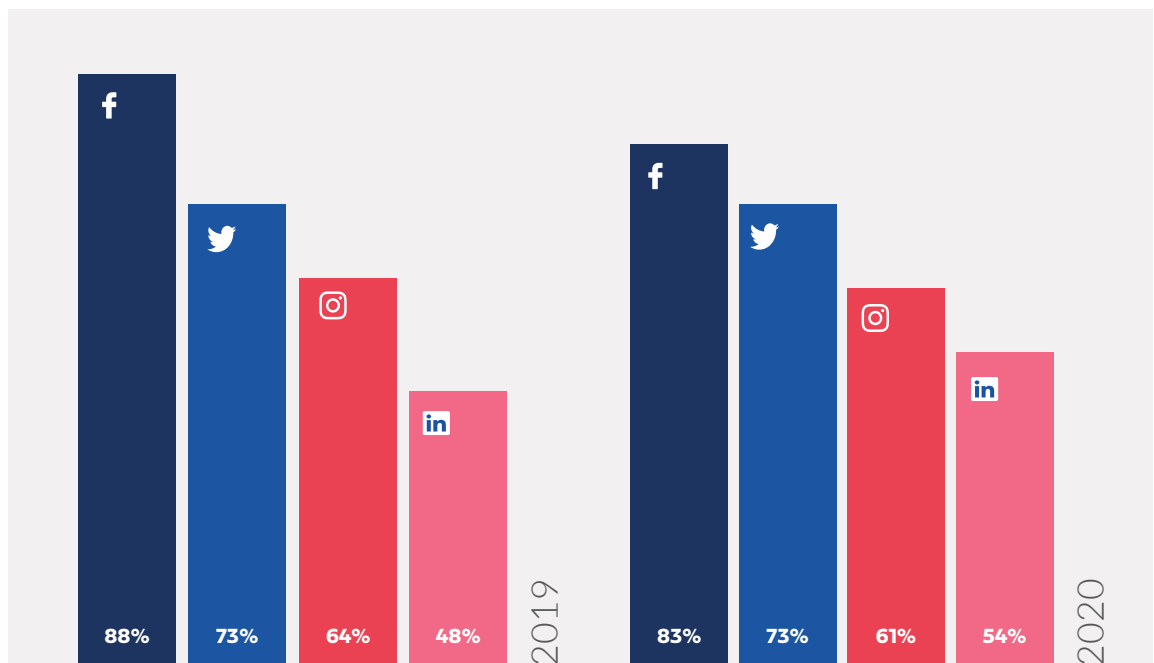


FIGURE 25: 2019 vs 2020 social media usage



Facebook has continued to be the most widely used social media platform for surveyed journalists.



Other

Of the 3% of respondents who selected 'Other' social media platforms, Pinterest, TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat were the most commonly used.





**Stories are now focused more on the reaction to an event, rather than the event itself. Social media commentary is now a story, and a popular one at that.**

## Communication

Unsurprisingly, the survey demonstrated a significant change in how journalists prefer to interact with sources and colleagues in 2020. 54% of respondents said they preferred face-to-face communication in 2019, but only 20% said it was their preferred method of contact in 2020, with preferences for emails and phone calls rising significantly.

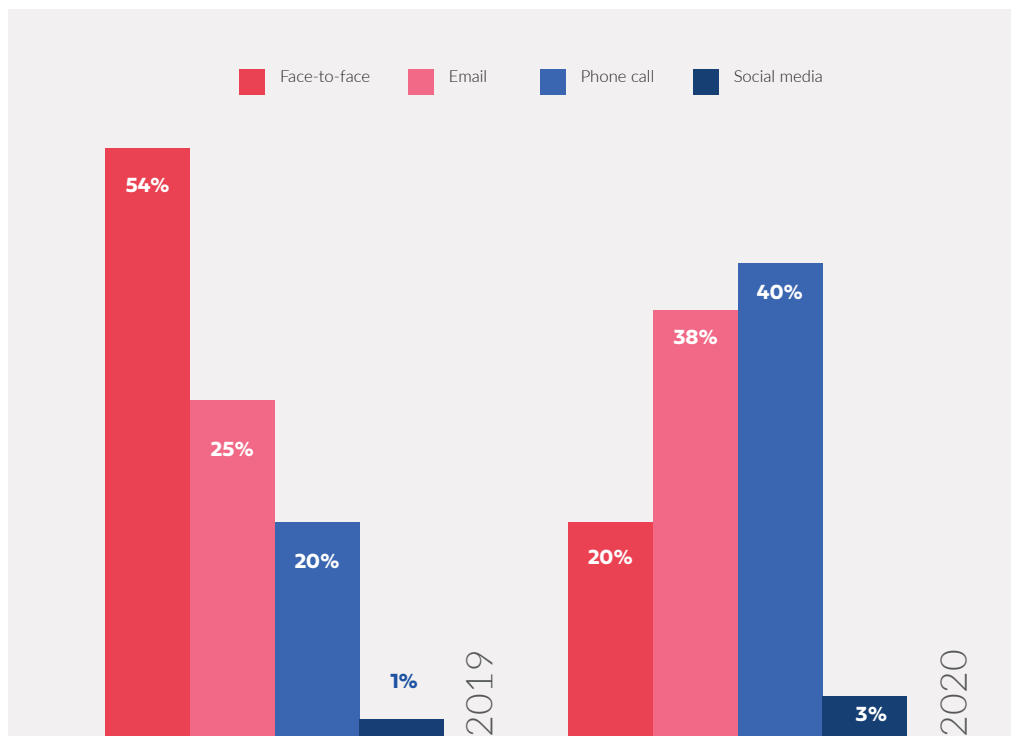


FIGURE 26: Journalists' preferred communication method in 2019 vs 2020

FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

54%



2019

20%



2020



40%

of journalists now prefer to be contacted by phone

## About Medianet

Medianet, a division of Mediality is a PR software and media intelligence business servicing both the media and public relations industries.



**Medianet offers Australian media a number of free services to assist with news writing and production.**

### Australian Media Profiles

Medianet's Contacts Database is the single largest representation of journalists and media organisation profiles in Australia. Information-rich profiles demonstrate your role in media and specify your rounds and subject interests. Manage and update your media profile at any time to ensure you receive relevant and exclusive pitches.

### Curated Press Release News Lists

Medianet's Editor service reviews all of the incoming press releases and curates a news list of the most newsworthy story opportunities each day. Our Editor does the heavy lifting reading each press release in full and presents to you a list of press release summaries for your perusal.

### Media Movements Bulletins

Medianet is the publisher of Media Movements, an email newsletter reporting on the movers and shakers in the media industry along with profiling some of Australian media's brightest talents in our weekly Spotlight Interview.

### Media Release Archive and Alerting Service

Medianet for Journalists is a media-only service providing exclusive access to press releases, alerts and upcoming media events. With breaking news opportunities alongside a 10-year archive of media statements, it is the single largest press release database in Australia and is offered free-of-charge to anyone with media credentials.

For access to any of the above services, please email [editor@medianet.com.au](mailto:editor@medianet.com.au) with your details. Please note they are only available to those holding media credentials in Australia.

## About this Survey

Medianet's Australian Journalists Survey is an annual study into the views of journalists. This year's survey asked questions on the impact of COVID-19 on the role of a journalist:

- 8,884 Australian journalists working across all media types and organisations were invited to participate in the survey. This included freelancers.
- 1008 Australian journalists responded

to the survey between November and December 2020.

- All identifying information about respondents were removed from the data to ensure responses were analysed confidentially.
- Limitations: the survey was distributed to the professional email addresses of journalists. Therefore journalists who lost their jobs last year may not be accurately represented in this sample.

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