

Snapshot:

Women for Media Report 2024

An Unfinished Story: Understanding Gender Bias in Australian Newsrooms

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This 2024 *Women for Media* report is the sixth edition in a series initiated by WLIA in 2012. Bringing together an expert team of media and political science scholars to assess the current state of women's representation in the Australian news media – from the perspective of who produces the news, and who features in it.

This report is the largest and most innovative study of its kind to track gender representation in bylines across key news topics and major Australian media outlets. Analysing over 200,000 articles with advanced machine learning techniques for topic clustering, complemented by generative AI and rigorous manual coding, this report represents a significant advancement in media and gender research.

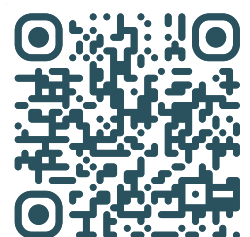
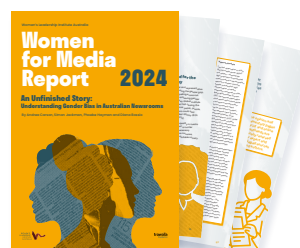
More than a decade after the first *Women for Media* report, we find that progress towards gender parity in media representation is moving slowly. Despite nearly equal numbers of male and female journalists in our sample, a long shadow of gender bias persists. As in the past, women still disproportionately cover “soft news” stories, while men write the “hard news” topic areas. And women have less access to exclusive taglines, enjoy less visibility on newspaper's premium pages and are underrepresented in the opinion and commentary sections.

The gap extends beyond just who's writing the stories. On the other side of media coverage – the quoted experts, the people who are bestowed with authority in the media – the same old story persists. As in past reports, men dominate the quotes, and they tend to quote other men more often. Women are better at quoting their fellow women.

“There is no doubt that media organisations are facing tough times, with business models under pressure, increasing news avoidance, and the rise of disinformation on social media. Despite these challenges, it is crucial that we continue to prioritise diverse voices in our news coverage. The stories we see, the voices we consider authoritative, and the narratives we embrace all determine the future we build.”

– Carol Schwartz AO


To read the full 2024 *Women for Media* Report, visit
wlia.org.au/women-for-media-report

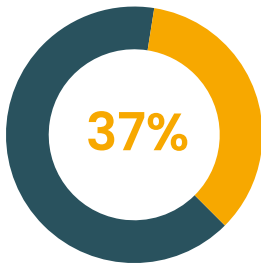


Key Findings

Unequal front-page and exclusive coverage:

Men wrote the majority of front-page articles and were quoted exclusively more than twice as often as women. Their stories are more common, more often tagged “exclusive” and typically contain more words, revealing their prevalence and prominence on premium news pages. Women’s stories less often feature on premium pages, or carry “exclusive” taglines, highlighting a significant gender disparity in visibility and prestige.

 A snapshot of front-pages shows women account for only




of front-page authors


Source: Authors using a snapshot of Factiva and Newsbank data




Gender bias in story topics:

Women more often cover “soft news” such as the arts, lifestyle, and entertainment while men dominate “hard news” such as sports, business, and foreign affairs. National and financial publications reflect this with a predominance of male bylines on their front pages and opinion articles.

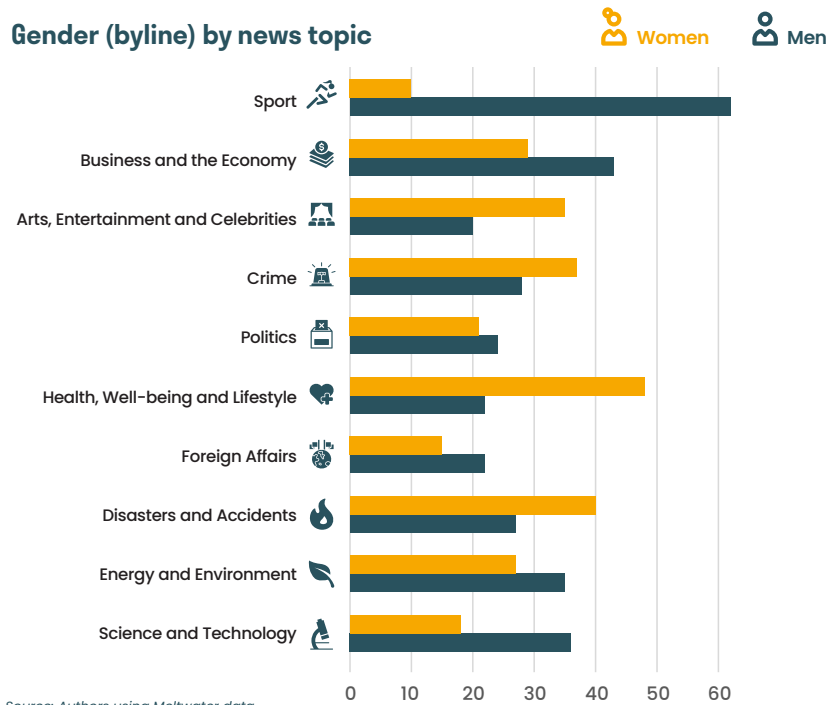
 Women are more likely than men to write about

-  Health, Well-being and Lifestyle
-  Arts, Entertainment and Celebrities
-  Crime
-  Disasters and Accidents

 Men are more likely than women to write about

-  Sport
-  Business and the Economy
-  Energy and Environment
-  Science and Technology

Gender (byline) by news topic



Source: Authors using Meltwater data

Data sources & method

See full report for method details



A ‘Big Picture’ sample of 185,734 stories published across 30 Australian news outlets across one month (March 2024)



A ‘Top Billing’ sample focused on >13,000 stories and opinion pieces published in Australia’s premium news pages

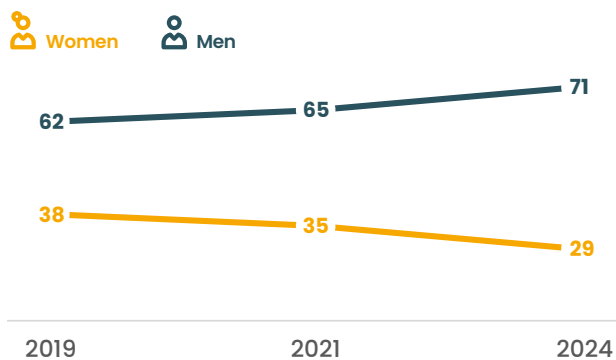


In-depth interviews with nine media outlet leaders

Gender imbalance in opinion article authors:

Men pen the most opinion articles, contributing to more than two-thirds of articles in the dataset. Women account for less than a third (29%) of opinion article bylines. Men's opinion articles are typically longer, and the authors are more often in-house reporters. In contrast, women's opinion pieces are usually written by external contributors. The findings represent a slow decline in women's commentary whereby women authored 35% of opinion articles in 2021.

Gender of masthead opinion authors 2019 - 2024 (%)

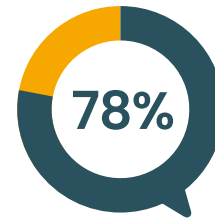


Sources: Authors from 2021 Women for Media Report: 'Take the Next Steps' (Price and Williams 2021), 2019 Women for Media report: 'You can't be what you can't see' (Price and Payne 2019), and Commentary and Opinion dataset using Factiva, News Bank and Saturday Paper data.

Men as default quoted experts:

Men are cited as experts more often and are quoted first more frequently in front-page stories than women. Women are more likely to quote other women in front-page stories. The same is true for opinion articles. Men account for 78% of quoted sources on front pages. Female opinion authors are more likely to quote women than men do.

A snapshot of front-pages shows men account for



of quoted sources on front-pages

Source: Authors using a snapshot of Factiva and Newsbank data

Tabloid vs. Broadsheet coverage:

Tabloids, with their focus on crime, disasters, and lifestyle, feature more female bylines in these areas. In contrast, broadsheets, covering business and foreign affairs, are predominantly male authored.

Syndicated stories amplify male-dominated content:



Story syndication is common in Australia and typically boosts audience reach of male-dominated genres like sports and business. Of 185,734 media items analysed, 90,647 were unique, highlighting the sharing of stories across masthead stablemates.

Leaders acknowledge progress and challenges:

Editor interviews indicate that newsroom leaders are committed to improving gender representation, and progress has been made, with more women staff and women leaders in the newsroom. But most acknowledge more work needs to be done, particularly representation of women from diverse backgrounds. Another key challenge area is developing policies to deal with online harms that disproportionately target women.

Print media's persistent influence:

Despite new media entrants in the digital age, print and its online versions remain the major content drivers, affecting gender visibility and equality perceptions in journalism. Some newspapers are doing better than others on women's representation on their premium pages as both authors and quoted sources. For example, *The Herald Sun* and *Canberra Times* have similar numbers of men and women writing front-page stories and opinion articles.

Front-page articles by gender (byline)

Publication	Women	Men
AFR	15%	60%
Canberra Times	52%	46%
Herald Sun	38%	28%
The Age	35%	61%
The Australian	29%	56%

Source: Authors using Factiva data

Key Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report and building on past scholarship and empirical data, the key recommendations to ensure equal representation and participation of women leaders and journalists in Australian news organisations are included below.

For Newsrooms, Media Leaders and Media Organisations:



Challenge and reduce horizontal segregation:

Encourage and support women to take on roles in traditionally male-dominated reporting areas, and have newsroom policies and practices that ensure a more balanced distribution of story topics to both men and women journalists.



Promote gender diversity in high-visibility, high-impact journalism:

Increase the representation of women in high-visibility pages such as the front page and opinion and commentary sections, and in male-dominated topic areas such as sports, business, economics, and international affairs.



Ensure conscious, equitable expert sourcing:

While some news events may dictate who is quoted, journalistic discretion should be exercised when able to actively engage more women as expert sources across all topics. Men, in particular, should be mindful of their tendency to default to male sources and make a conscious effort to include women experts in their reporting. Editorial oversight should challenge default reliance on male sources.



Consider and address syndication disparities that perpetuate gender imbalances:

Reflect how syndication practices can exacerbate gender disparities and ensure that women's perspectives are integrated across all areas of news coverage, not just in "soft news" topics.



Develop, strengthen and monitor gender equity and diversity policies:

Implement robust newsroom policies to promote gender equity and equality, including initiatives to actively increase women's presence in bylines, opinion pieces, "exclusive" taglines and as quoted experts. Support women with training and mentorship to build expertise in these areas. Establish clear processes to track and monitor progress, and publicly report outcomes to maintain accountability.



Tackle online harassment and protect women journalists:

Prioritise the development of policies and practices that protect women journalists and other vulnerable groups from online harassment and trolling to prevent a chilling effect on their participation in the media and public discourse.

For Governments and Policymakers:



Protect public interest journalism in tough economic times:

Governments should consider further policy incentives to support public interest journalism to enable newsrooms to support and sustain gender equitable workplaces and produce gender equitable journalism.



Advocate for digital safety standards:

Collaborate with media organisations and digital rights civil society organisations to establish and enforce digital safety standards that protect journalists (and women in public life) from online abuse.

