



# [ Community Value of Public Interest Journalism ]

April 2020

**[PIJI]** Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative

# Community value of public interest journalism

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This is a report of results of a survey commissioned by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative from Essential Media. Essential Media conduct a fortnightly omnibus survey, in which five questions relating to public interest journalism were included. This survey was conducted from 2-5 April, 2020, and had 1,068 respondents (95% certainty for random sampling).

*The Essential Report - Public Interest Journalism Initiative* is Essential Media's report on its Qualtrics survey results. It is included in this document in its entirety.

This report forms part of PIJI's ongoing work to understand how the community values public interest journalism, including surveys conducted at six-month intervals commencing from October 2019. A deeper analysis of trends in public sentiment across demographics and comparisons over time will be conducted by Applied Economics following the third survey in October 2020.

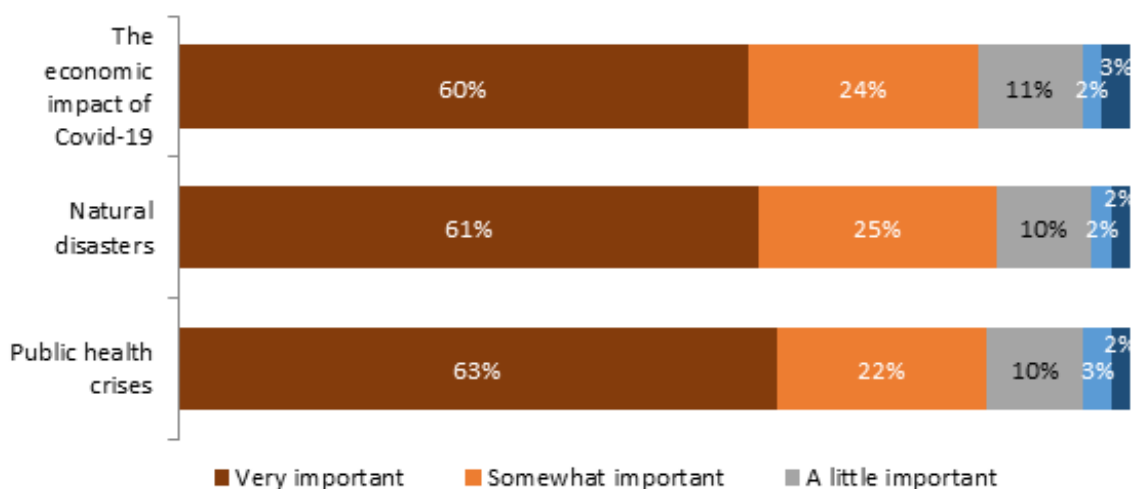
Previous survey material has also been used as a resource for a separate report for PIJI from the Centre for International Economics, *Tax Concessions for Public Interest Journalism*.

## Key findings

The key findings from this survey are as follows:

- 1. Australians are huge users of media (86%):** over half consume commercial TV/radio daily, likewise for social media, and close to half consume public TV/radio. Adding hardcopy and online media gives a total of 86% daily users at this time. (Women more than men, and young more than old, are relatively greater users of social media).
- 2. The vast majority of respondents (81%) say public interest journalism is important in media, and this rises to 86% for such journalism during natural disasters and 85% during public health crises.** (Public interest journalism being news and current affairs, and recording, investigating and explaining this).
- 3. This large majority of respondents is broadly satisfied at the amount of coverage across international, national, state/territory and local government affairs BUT some are nevertheless concerned that there may particularly be undersupply in the local government sphere:** twice as many respondents (28%) are expressing concern over an insufficient amount of local government coverage compared to concern over insufficient national affairs extent of coverage (13%).
- 4. A majority (53%) will actually support a tax increase to provide an increase in public interest journalism of \$6 each annually,** with this measured as 'definite' or 'probable' willingness to pay falling at higher tax amounts eg 40% at \$12 annually.

*Importance of public interest journalism during crises.*



# The Essential Report – Public Interest Journalism Initiative

17 April 2020



## The Essential Report

**Date:** 17/04/2020

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**Prepared By:** Essential Research

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**Data Supplied by:**



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**AMSRS** 

Our researchers are members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society.



## About this poll

This report summarises the results of a fortnightly omnibus conducted by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics. This report includes findings from the online community survey conducted between 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 with 1,068 respondents.

Note that the survey was conducted during an international outbreak of COVID-19 (coronavirus) – and some behaviours or attitudes may be impacted by those circumstances.

The methodology used to carry out this research is described in the appendix at the end of the report.

Note that due to rounding, not all tables necessarily total 100% and subtotals may also vary.



## Key Insights

### 1. Half of participants consume commercial or public TV/radio or digital social media daily

- 86% of people consume media on a daily basis, with commercial TV/radio being the most frequently consumed with 56% daily consumption, closely followed by digital social (55%) and public TV/radio (49%).
- Hardcopy or on-line media is the least frequently consumed at 22%, with 20% of participants saying they never read hard-copy or on-line media.
- Men are more likely than women to say they watch or read print media (26%, compared to 18% of women), whereas, women are more likely to read digital social media (61% to 48% men).
- Participants over 55 are more likely to consume commercial TV/radio (78%), public TV/radio (66%), or hardcopy or on-line media (28%) on a daily basis, than 18-34 year olds (32%, 32% and 19% respectively).

### 2. Four in five participants rate public interest journalism as either somewhat or very important

- 81% of participants rated public interest journalism as important (either somewhat or very important).
- Over 55 year olds rate public interest journalism more important than 18-34 year olds (38% very important now).

### 3. The majority of people say that public interest journalism is important during crises

- More than 84% of participants say that public interest journalism is important during recent crises (economic impact of COVID-19 84%, public health crises and natural disasters both 86%).
- Participants over 55 years old are more likely than 18-34 year olds, to say that public interest journalism is important during crises (economic impact of COVID-19 90% for 55+ compared to 80%, public health crises 92% v 83% and natural disasters 92% v 80%).

### 4. Over half of participants are either definitely or probably willing to pay more in tax specifically to support more public interest journalism

- 22% of participants would definitely support a tax increase at one of the price points they were shown and a further 31% said they would probably support an increase at one of the price points they were shown.

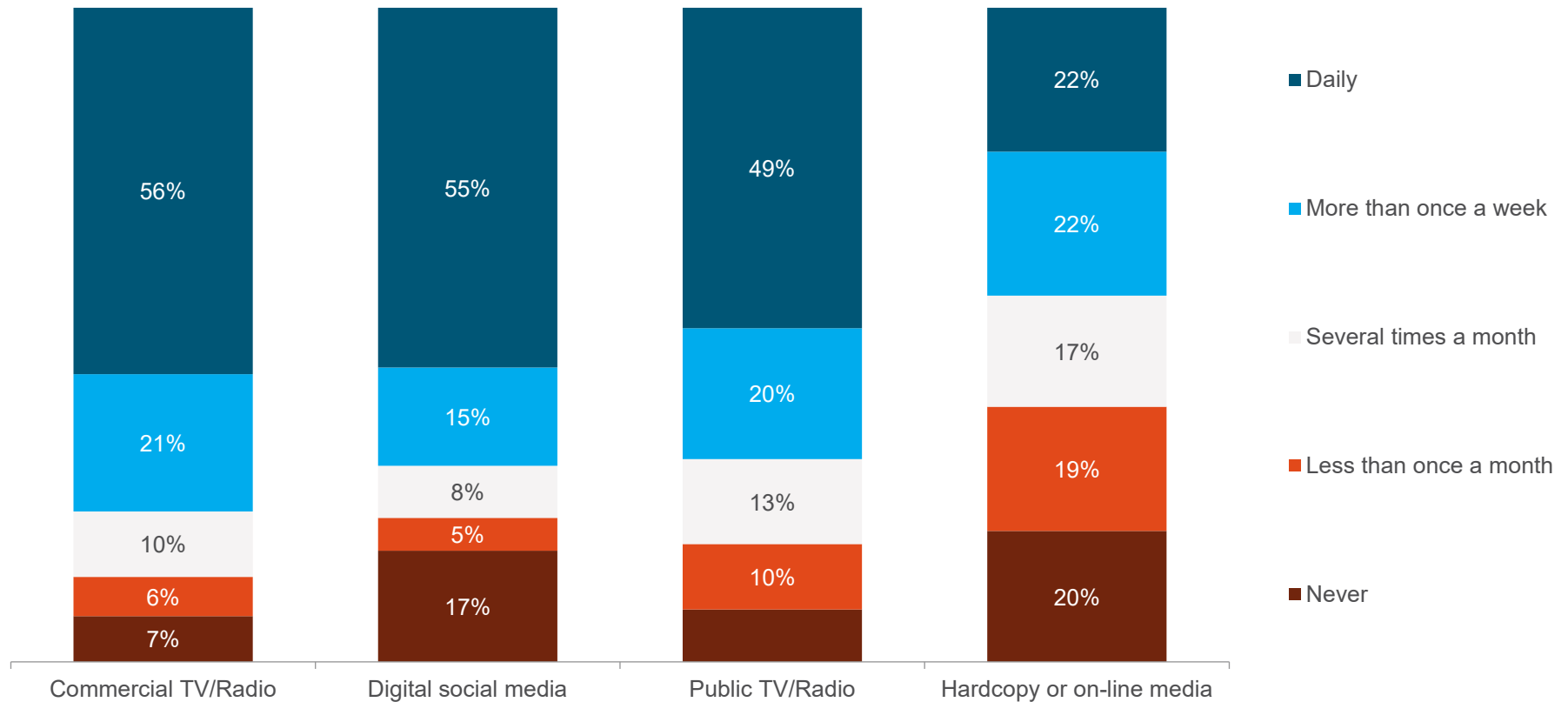
- As participants were only shown two price-points, this research cannot conclude whether those who definitely support at both price-points (say \$1 and \$5) would also support at the next price (\$15). Likewise, whether those who opposed at both would also oppose at a lower price. However, there is a notable drop-off in support between \$1 per month tax increase and \$5 per month.





## Frequency watch or read media

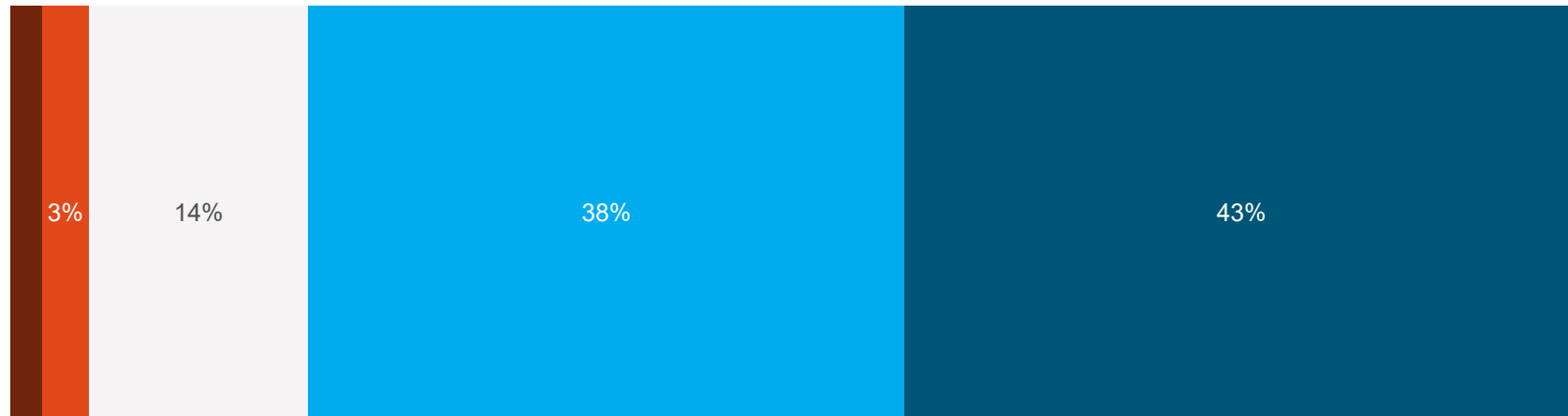
Q How frequently do you watch or read the following types of media?



## Importance of public interest journalism to Australian society

Q **Public interest journalism** refers to the **news and current affairs media or journalism which records, investigates and explains issues of public significance.**

To what extent to you think that public interest journalism is important or not important to Australian society?

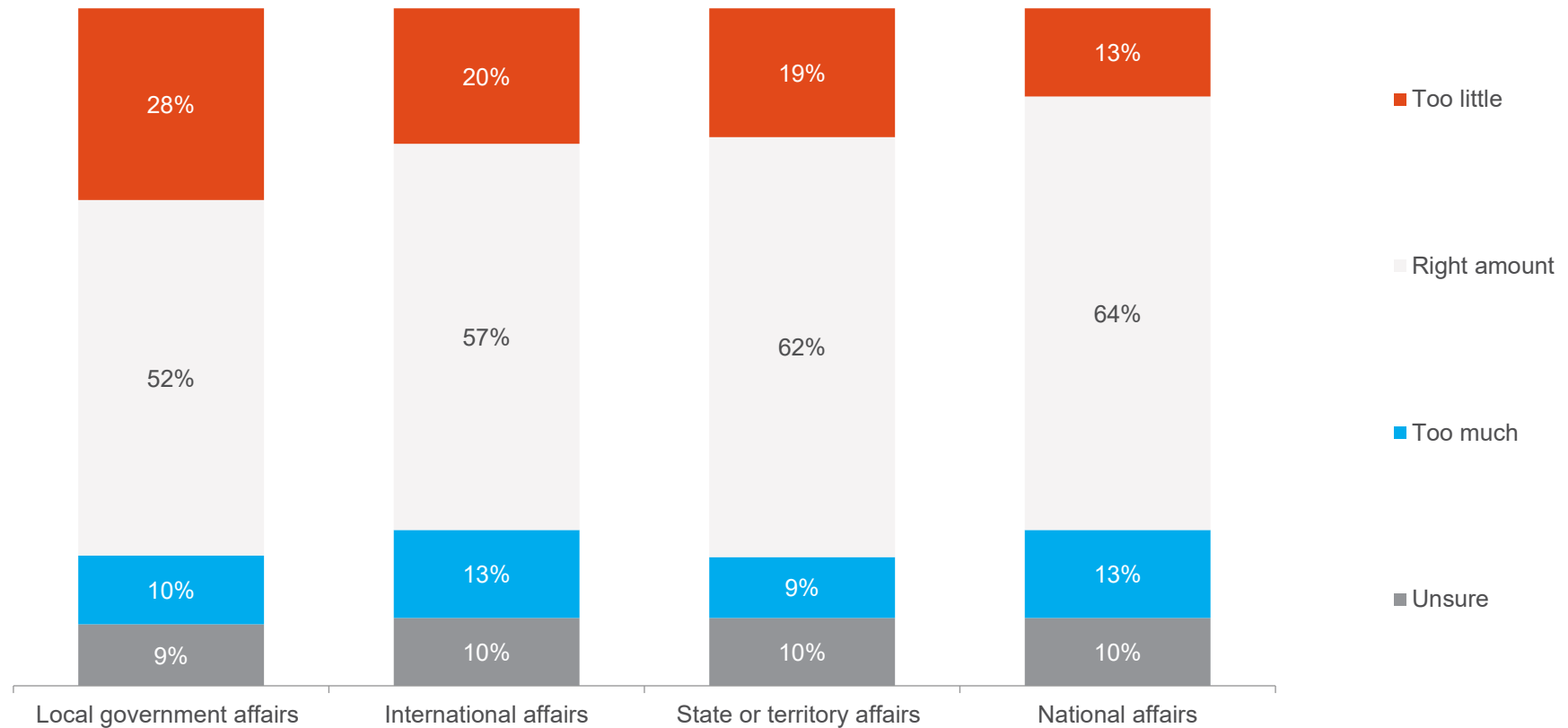


■ Not at all important   ■ Not very important   ■ A little important   ■ Somewhat important   ■ Very important



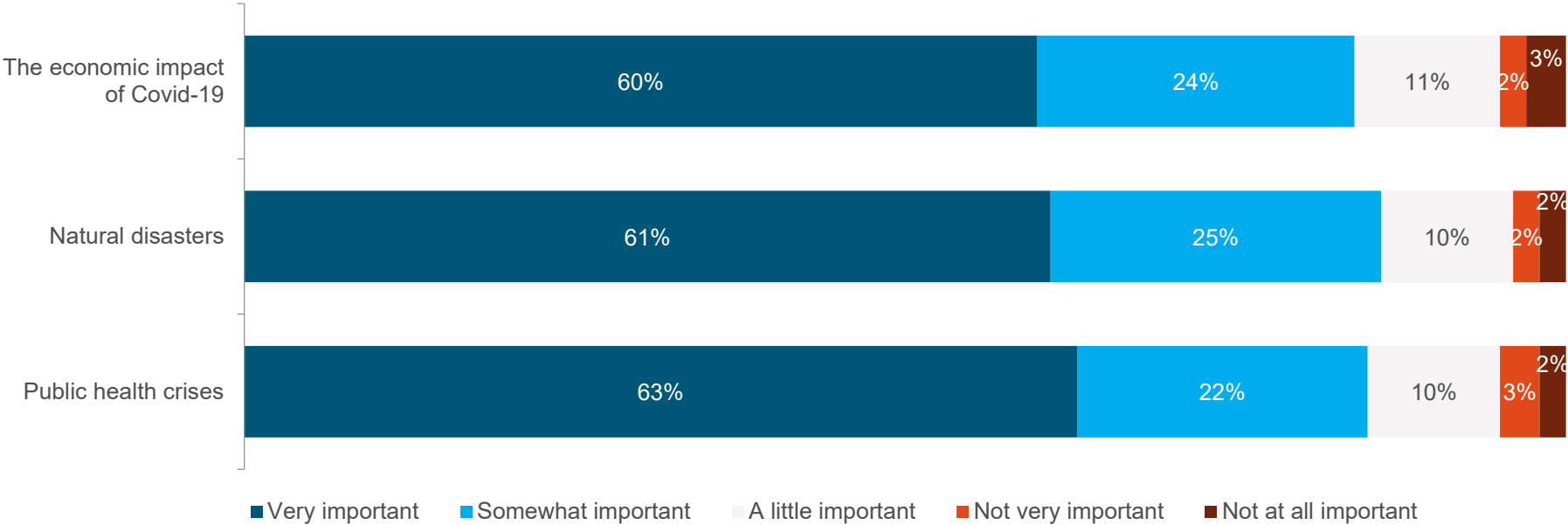
## Sufficient public interest journalism at various levels

Q Do you think there is enough public interest journalism reporting in the following areas?



## Importance of public interest journalism during crises

Q How important is the role of public interest journalism when reporting during the following recent crises and challenges for Australia?



## Overall support for tax increase – Support for all values shown to participants

In order to gauge possible public support in a tax increase to fund public interest journalism, it was suggested to participants that the government could increase the amount of public interest journalism by 50 per cent for a randomly assigned price (\$0.50, \$1, \$5 or \$15) monthly or annually.

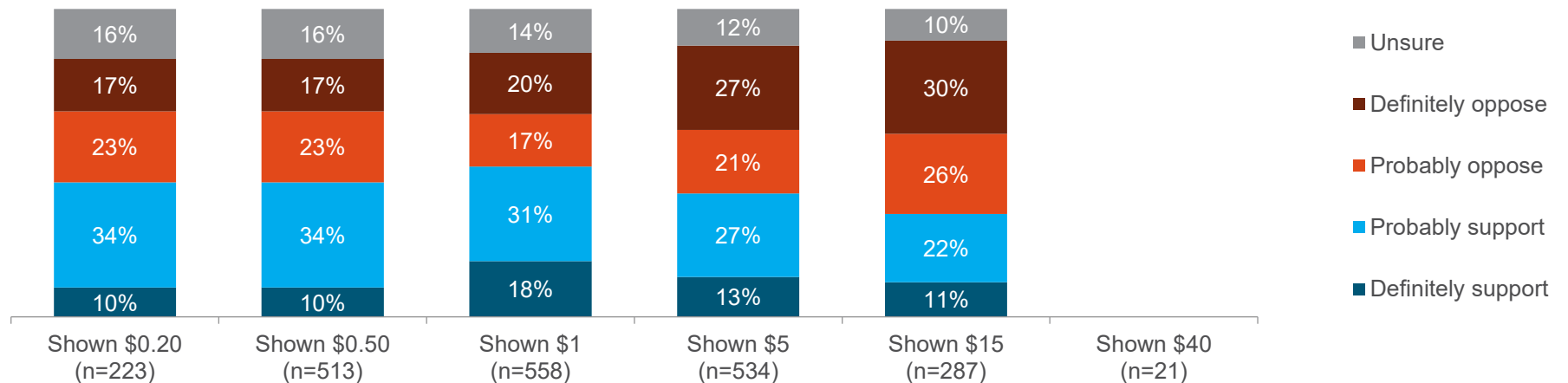
If the participant said they 'definitely would support' that tax increase, they would be asked the same question with a higher price (\$1, \$5, \$15, \$40). If the participant said any other option, they were shown a lower price (\$0.20, \$0.50, \$1, \$5) instead.

*For example, the first price a participant is shown is \$5 and they 'probably would support' a tax increase at that amount. At the next question they are asked if they would support a \$1 tax increase.*

The chart below shows the number of participants who were shown that value (either first or second) and the proportion who would support that value increase.

*\*Please note that \$40 option is not shown due to small sample size (n=21).*

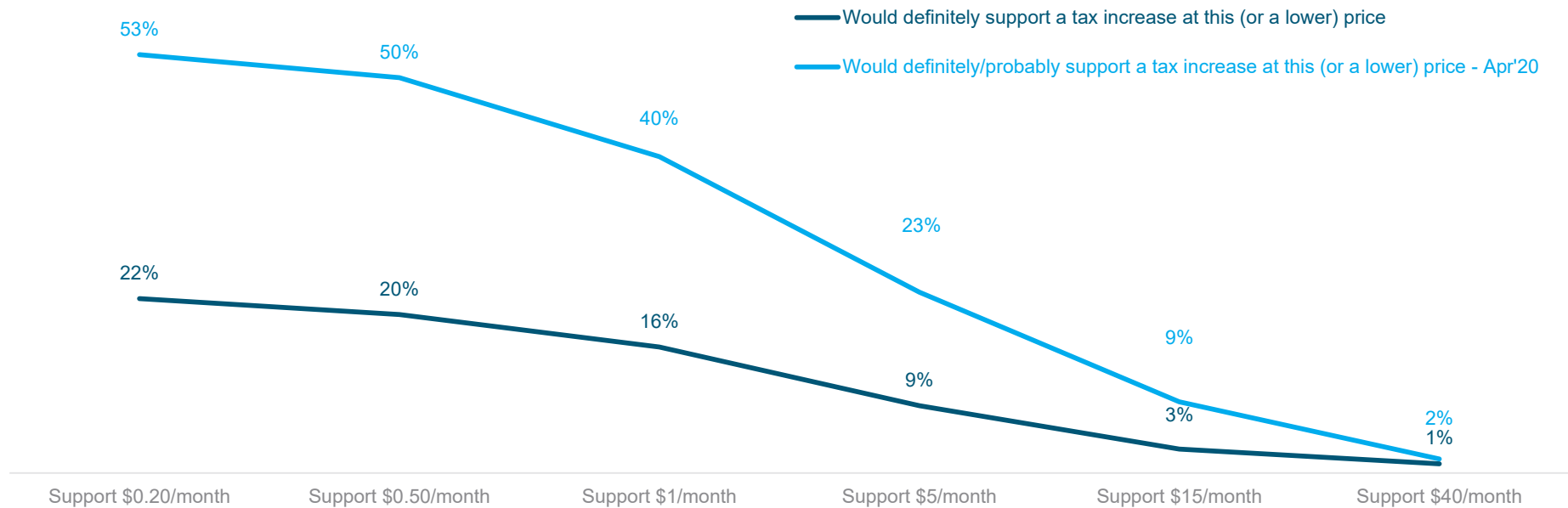
Q To what extent would you support or oppose paying <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you support or oppose paying more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?



## Overall support for tax increase – Cumulative support for tax increase

The chart below shows the proportion of participants who would support (definitely or probably) and definitely support an increased tax for public interest journalism out of the overall sample. For the purpose of this chart we have assumed that someone who would support a \$5/month tax increase, would also support \$0.20, \$0.50 and \$1 increases. Participants who did not definitely support either price points they were shown comprise the remaining 78% of the sample (53% opposed both price points shown or answered don't know).

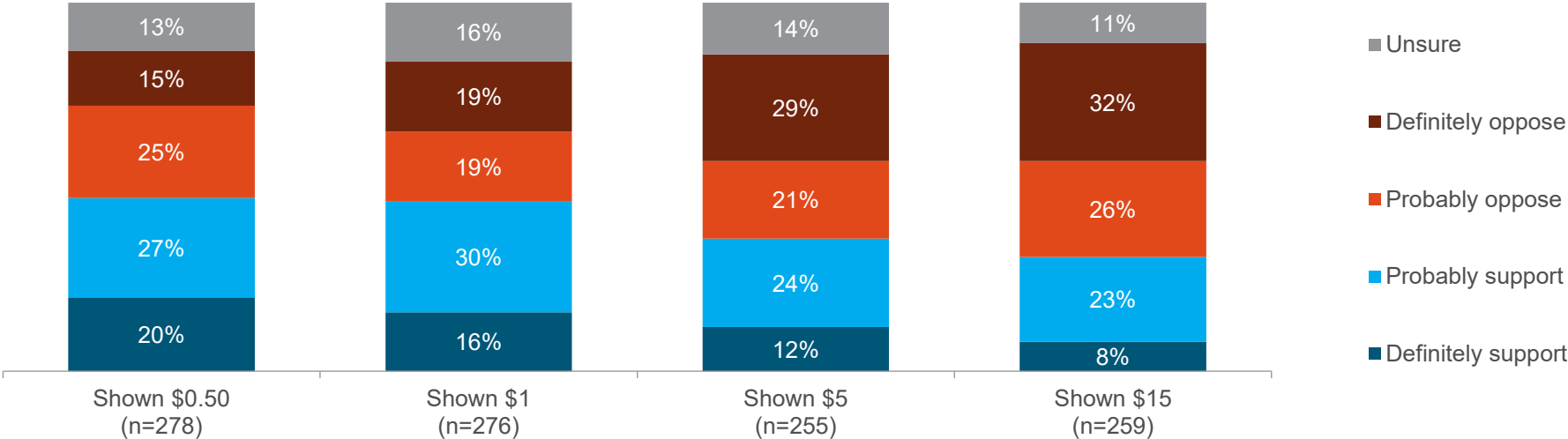
Q To what extent would you support or oppose paying <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you support or oppose paying more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?



### Overall support for tax increase – First price point shown

The chart below shows the proportion of participants who would definitely support, probably support, probably oppose, definitely oppose or are unsure about an increased tax for public interest journalism out of the overall sample. The first price point shown to participants was randomly generated with the intent that an even proportion of participants were shown each of the four price points across the entire sample.

Q To what extent would you support or oppose paying <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you support or oppose paying more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

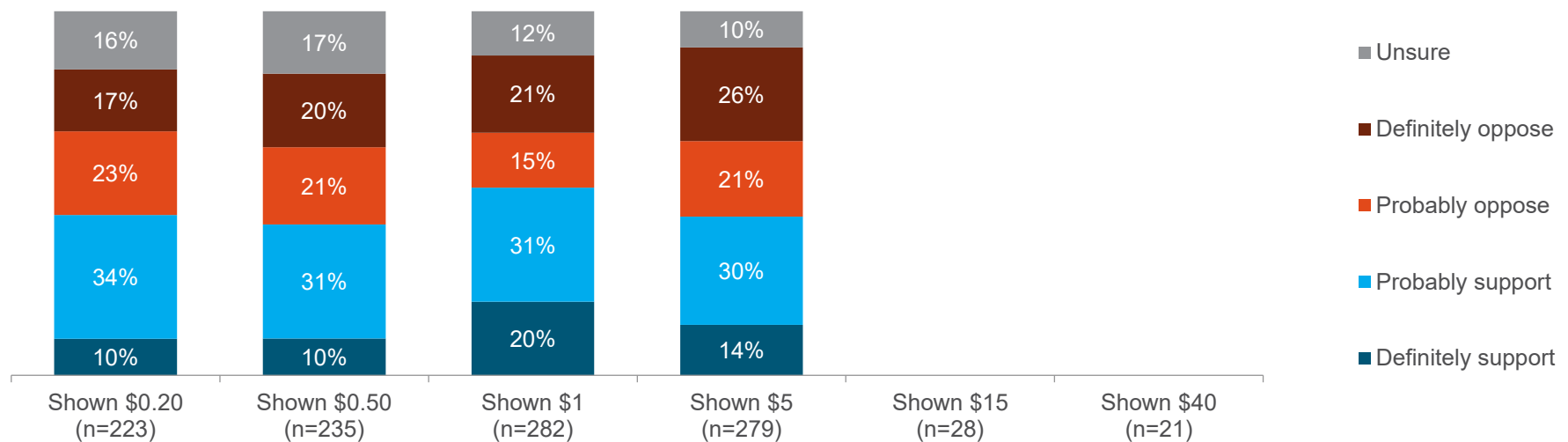


## Overall support for tax increase – Second price point shown

The chart below shows the level of support or opposition for an increased tax for public interest journalism out of the overall sample. The second price point was determined by their response to the first price point – if they would definitely support the first price point, the second price point was higher. If they would not definitely support, the second price point was lower than the first.

*\*Please note that \$15 and \$40 option are not shown due to small sample size (n=28 and n=21 respectively)*

Q To what extent would you support or oppose paying <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you support or oppose paying more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

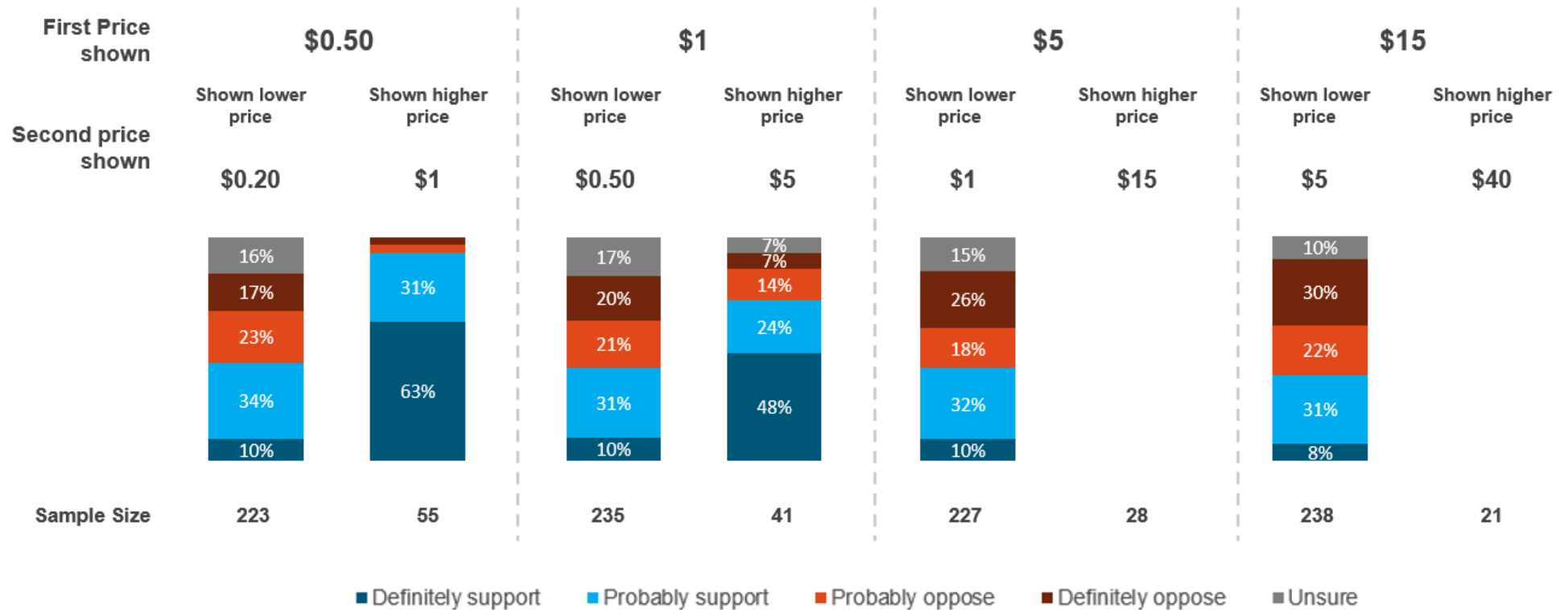




## Appendix: Overall support for tax increase – First and second price point differences

The first chart below shows the proportion of participants who would definitely support the tax increase at the first price they saw. The second chart shows the number of participants who were shown a higher or lower price point (based on their response to the first question) and the proportion who would/not definitely support a tax increase at this second price point.

*\*Please note that \$15 and \$40 option are not shown due to small sample size (n=28 and n=21 respectively)*



## Appendix: Household income definitions\*

NET: Lower Income	Up to \$51,999 per year Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)
NET: Mid Income	\$52,000 to \$103,999 per year Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)
NET: High Income	More than \$104,000 per year Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)

## Appendix: Methodology, margin of error and professional standards

The data gathered for this report is gathered from a fortnightly online omnibus conducted by Qualtrics.

Every two weeks, the team at Essential considers issues that are topical, and a series of questions are devised to put to the Australian public. Some questions are repeated regularly (such as political preference and leadership approval), while others are unique to each week and reflect current media and social issues.

The response rate varies each week, but usually delivers 1000+ interviews. In theory, with a sample of this size, there is 95 per cent certainty that the results are within 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire population had been polled. However, this assumes random sampling, which, because of non-response and less than 100% population coverage cannot be achieved in practice. Furthermore, there are other possible sources of error in all polls including question wording and question order, interviewer bias (for telephone and face-to-face polls), response errors and weighting.

The online omnibus is live from the Wednesday night and closed on the following Sunday. Incentives are offered to participants. Essential Research uses the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyse the data. The data is weighted against Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.

All Essential Research staff hold Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) membership and are bound by professional codes of behaviour.



The **Public Interest Journalism Initiative** Ltd is a non-partisan, philanthropically funded, not-for-profit body established as a limited-life initiative (3-5 years) to conduct research, develop policy and promote public discussion to ensure a sustainable ecosystem of independent, pluralistic, public interest journalism in Australia. PIJI was established in 2019 after consultations with publishers, editors, philanthropists, business leaders, policy-makers and researchers, and is governed by a board of highly-credentialed voluntary directors across the disciplines of media, law, public policy, research, philanthropy and business. PIJI supports informed debate with credible research, and works independently and collaboratively to develop rigorous public policy options.

PIJI operates as a Major Research Project of the newDemocracy Foundation.

**Glenn Withers AO** is a Professor of Economics in the Research School of Economics, Australian National University and UNSW Canberra. He is Past President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, co-managing director of the consulting firm Applied Economics Pty Ltd and Board Chair of education company Blended Learning International Pty Ltd. He is also Board Chair of World Bank affiliate the Global Development Learning Network. He is a member of PIJI's Expert Research Panel and is lead adviser on the Community Value Survey project for PIJI.

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