

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Community Value of Public Interest Journalism

Survey four  
February 2024

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## Survey four: February 2024

Glenn Withers

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 online from 7-11 February 2024, and had 1149 respondents (95 per cent certainty for random sampling).

The Essential Report - Public Interest Journalism Initiative is Essential Media's report on its Qualtrics data results from the survey. That Report 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 between October 2019 and November 2020.

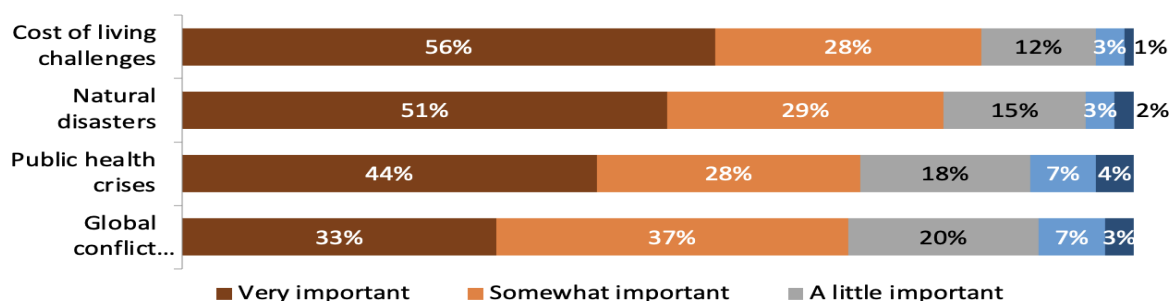
This 2024 survey continues to affirm strong support from Australians for public interest journalism. But the experience of challenges such as the Covid Epidemic, global conflicts and the cost-of-living crisis, combined with the rise of social media, have begun to qualify that support, so that rejuvenation of public interest journalism becomes even more important.

For previous surveys, please visit [PIJI's website](#).

## Key Findings

1. Australians continue to be **great users of media with digital social media now the strongest category** followed by commercial TV/radio broadcasting, with each engaging over half the population in daily use, at 62 per cent and 55 per cent respectively. Public TV/radio broadcasting and hard copy/online media usage have fallen from November 2020 peaks during the Covid epidemic to 39 per cent and 21 per cent daily rates, respectively, in February 2024. (Report pp. 6,7).
2. The **vast majority of Australians affirm public interest journalism as important or very important** for their media (72 per cent), though this is down from 86 per cent in the first PIJ survey in October 2019. **The intensity of this support differs across Australia** being highest in Victoria (76 per cent) and lowest in South Australia (67 per cent). (Report pp.8,9).
3. The majority of Australians do indicate that they feel that the **nature of coverage across each of international, national, state/territory and local affairs is mostly right**, but a significant and growing minority (33 per cent) do see **local government and community affairs deserving of greater focus**, up from 29 per cent in November 2020. (Report, p.10).
4. Across four years of challenges ranging from epidemic through natural disasters, to global conflict and cost-of-living crisis, **the importance of public interest journalism for crises remains affirmed as important or very important by the vast majority of Australians**. As of February 2024, **cost-of living was rated by 84 per cent of Australians as important or very important for such coverage, ahead of other challenges**, while public health crises had dropped in such rating from a peak of 81 per cent in November 2020 to 72 per cent in February 2024. (Report p.11)
5. **Public willingness to pay tax in support of enhanced public interest journalism remains strong for a concerned minority of Australians**. But it did reduce in this 2024 survey with, for example, 25 per cent definitely/probably willing to pay \$12 or more extra a year in tax for this, down from 34 per cent in 2020. (Report p.13).

These findings affirm recognition by Australians of the importance of public interest journalism in Australian life. But they also point to growing challenges to this role, including with the rise of social media use and with cost-of-living pressures. A policy response to better support public interest journalism, especially local and so much needed, including in crises, should be forthcoming.



Importance of Public Interest Journalism During Crises (February 2024)

# The Essential Report – Public Interest Journalism Initiative

16 February 2024



## The Essential Report

Date: 16/02/2024

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Prepared By: Essential Research

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Data Supplied by:



Our researchers are members of Research Society.



## About this poll

This report summarises the results of a fortnightly omnibus conducted by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics. The survey was conducted online from 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and is based on 1,149 participants.

The weighting efficiency applied to the results at a national level is 84%, which gives an effective sample size of 959. The maximal margin of error at this effective sample size is  $\pm 3.2\%$  (95% confidence level).

The full 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.

This also includes results from three previous community surveys conducted between October 2019 and November 2020:

- First survey conducted online from 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019 to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019 with 1,076 respondents
- Second survey conducted from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 with 1,068 respondents
- Third survey conducted from 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 with 1,063 respondents

Note that the second and third surveys were conducted during an international pandemic of COVID-19 (coronavirus) – as such some of the shifts may reflect participants' changed behaviour in response.

## Key Insights

### 1. Social media overtakes commercial broadcasting as the most consumed type of media

- Social media consumption is consistent with 2020, with 62% of participants using digital social media daily (up from 63% in Nov'20). This is the only medium that has not seen a decline since 2020.
- Consumption of commercial TV/radio and hard copy or online media have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Daily consumption of commercial TV/radio has dropped to 55% (65% in Nov'20).
- Daily consumption of public TV/radio consumption is lower than it was in 2019 (39%, 44% in Nov'19).

### 2. Perceived importance of public interest journalism has decreased since late-2020 and is now lower than in 2019

- 72% of participants think that public interest journalism is very or somewhat important to Australian society (down from 86% in Nov'20). This level of importance is also lower than it was in 2019 (78% Nov'19)
- Perceived importance of public interest journalism has decreased in all states, but the states with the largest decreases are VIC (70%, down from 77% in Nov'20), WA (72%, down from 77% in Nov'20) and NSW (76%, down from 80% in Nov'20).

### 3. Majority believe public interest journalism for all levels of governance is about right, but a higher proportion would like more coverage than less

- 23% of participants want more coverage of international affairs (whereas 12% would want less), 21% want more national affairs (9% less), 25% want more state/territory affairs (8% less) and 33% want more local government affairs (7% less).
- This demand for local content is also demonstrated in the high percentage who believe it is very important for public interest journalism to cover cost-of-living issues (56%). This is higher than the 51% who believe it's very important to cover natural disasters, 44% who believe it's important to cover public health crises and 33% who believe it's important to cover international crises.
- The importance of public interest journalism to cover public health crises has declined since the pandemic when 53% thought it was very important for public interest journalism to cover this.



**4. All measures indicate in the midst of the current cost of living crisis, there is less appeal in funding public interest journalism through tax increases than in previous years**

- The proportion who would definitely not be willing to pay more tax has increased, the amount of participants who would pay a higher amount and the overall proportion to pay any amount has decreased.

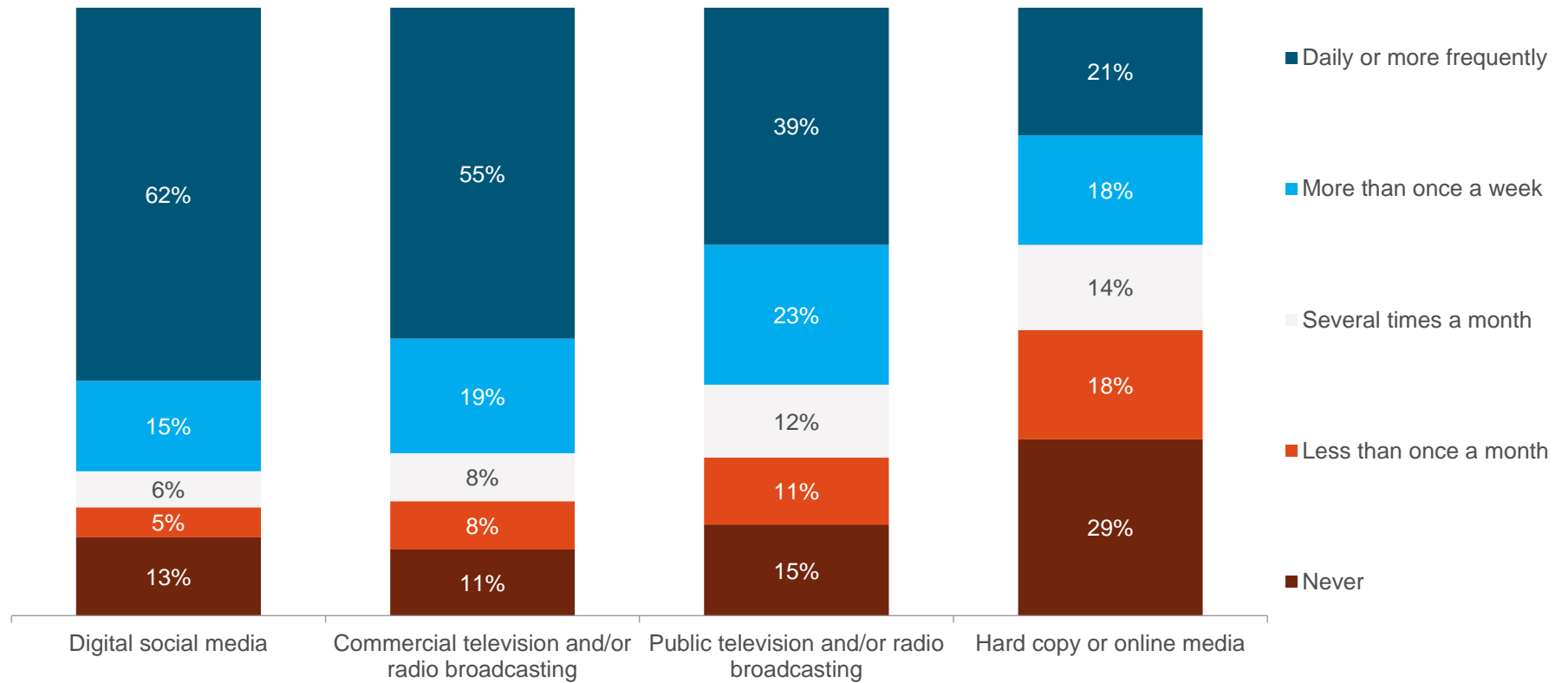




## Frequency watch or read media

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

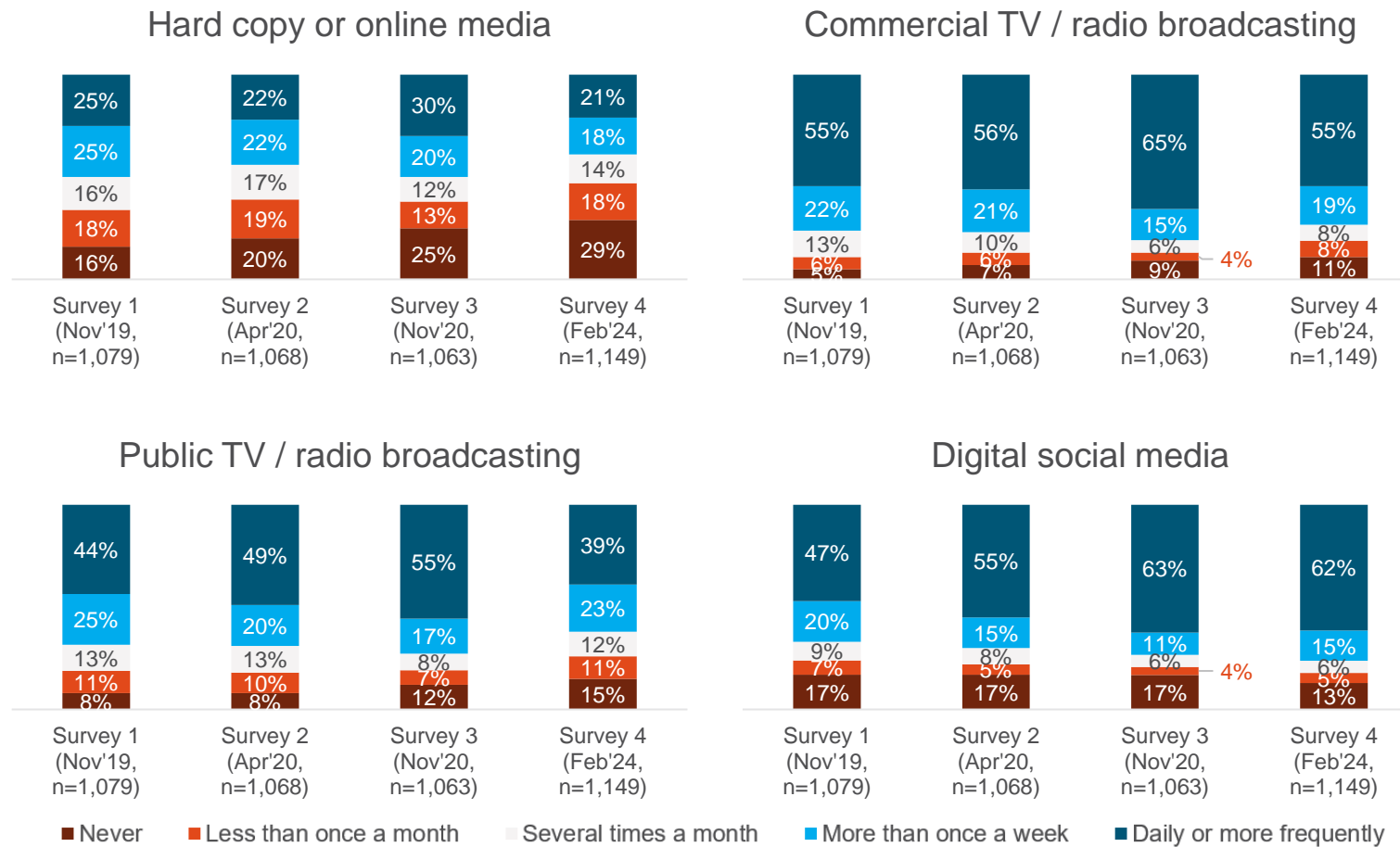
Base: All participants (n=1,063)



## Frequency watch or read media: Trends

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

Base: All participants

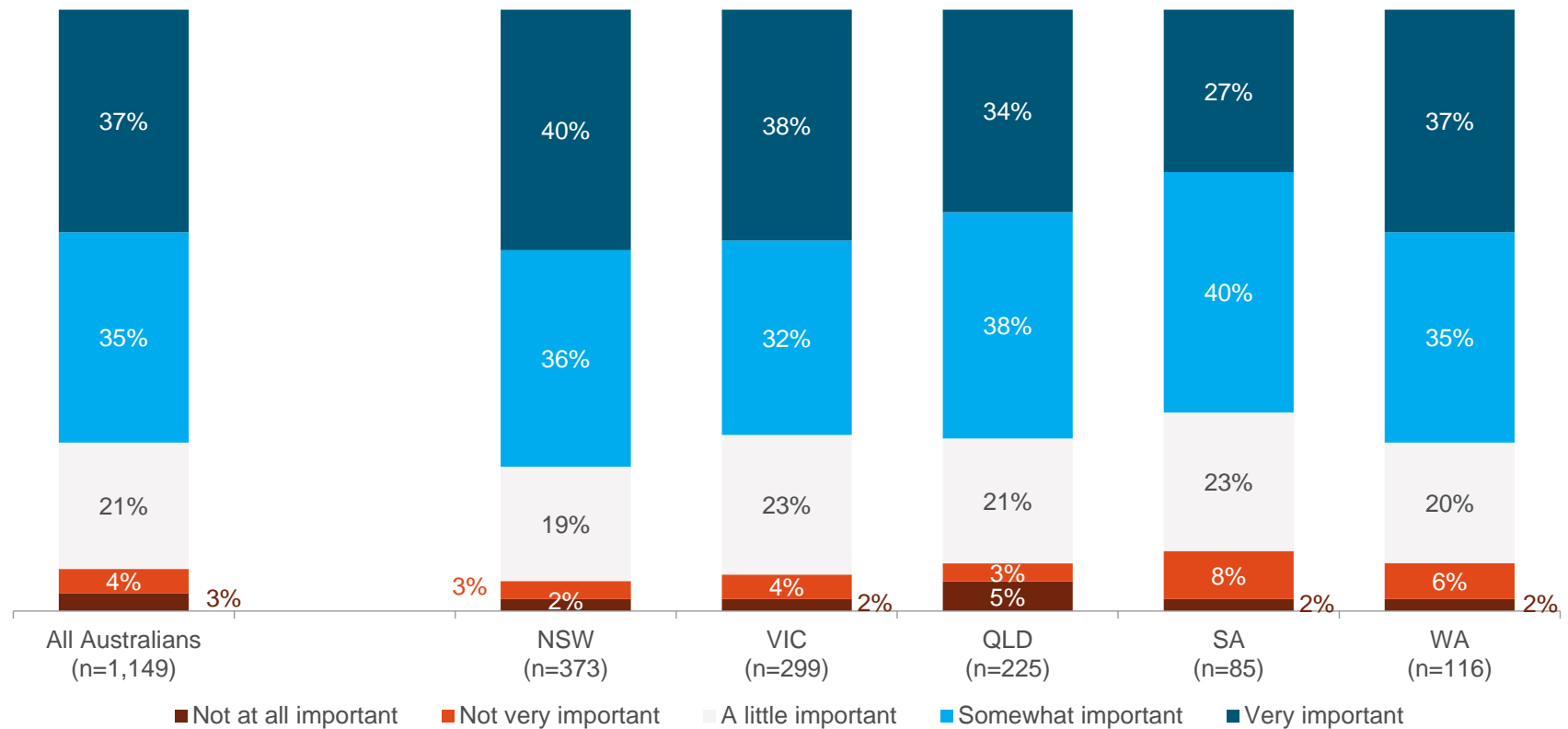


## Importance of public interest journalism to Australian society

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?

Base: All participants (n=1,063)

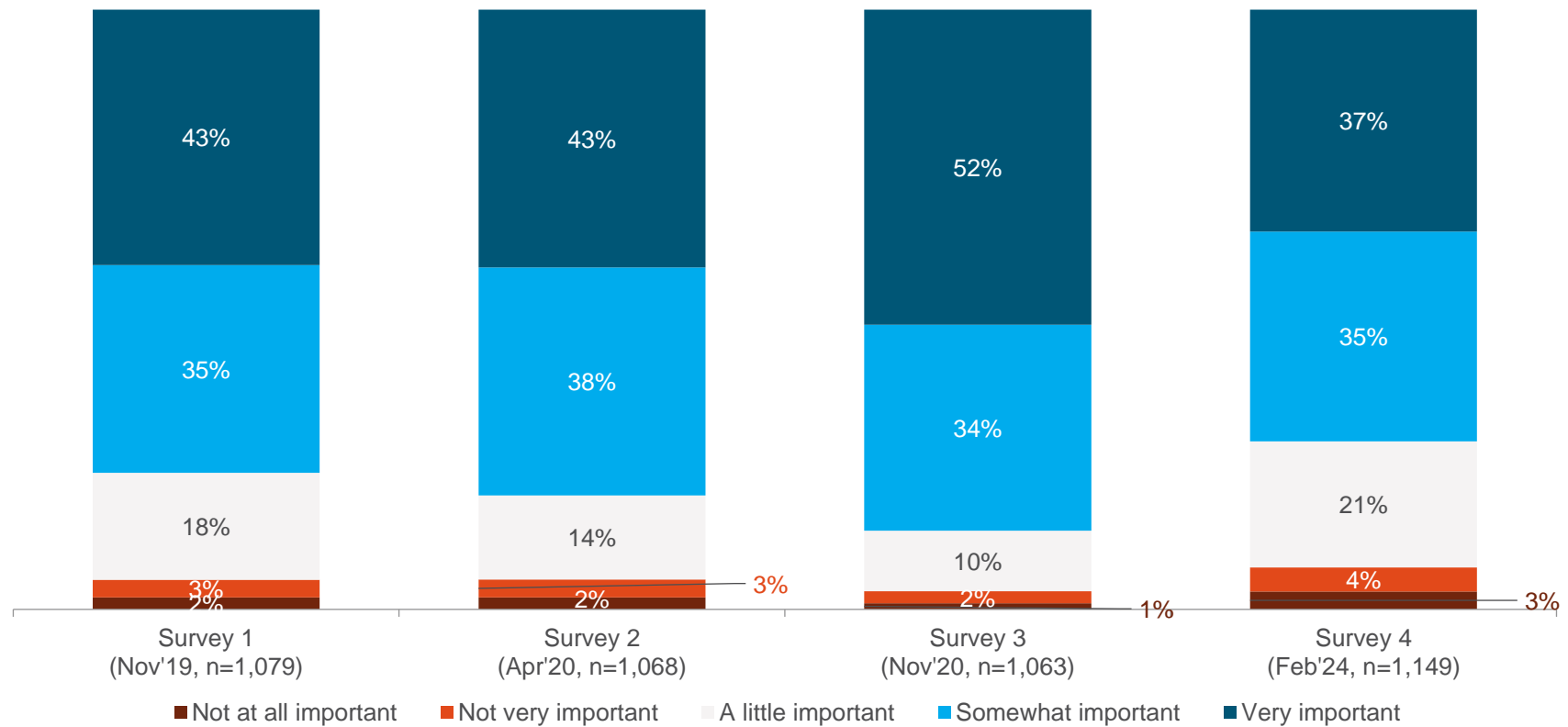


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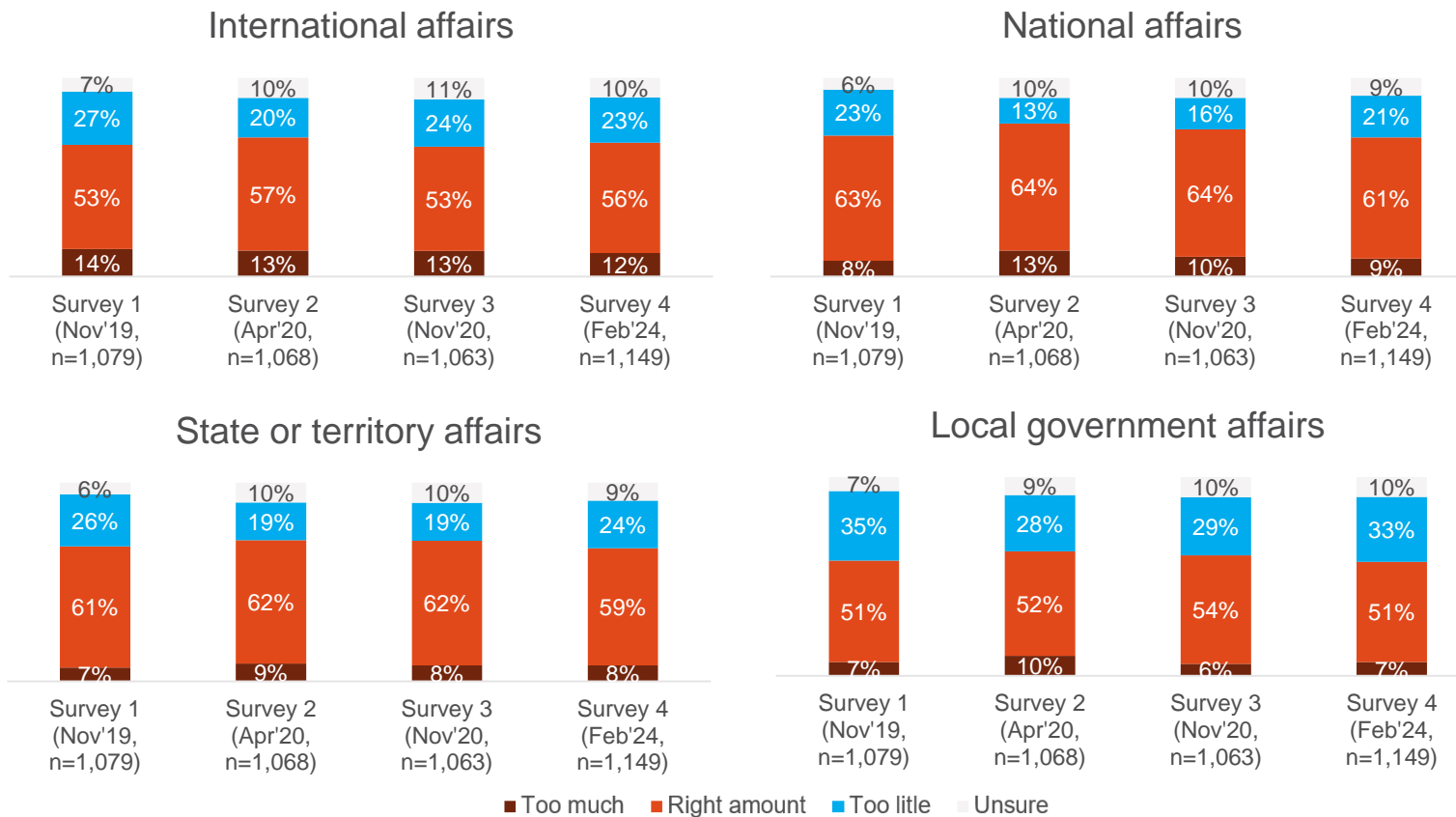
Base: All participants



## Sufficient public interest journalism at various levels: Trends

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

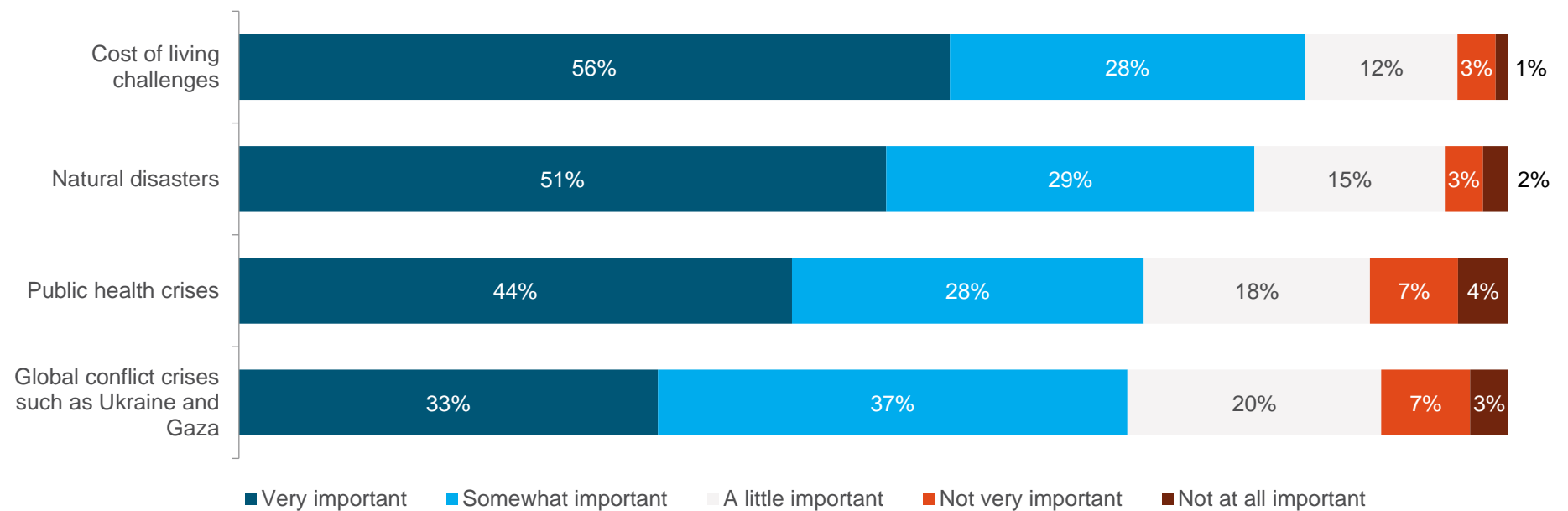
Base: All participants



## 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?

Base: All participants (n=1,149)



## Overall willingness to pay more in tax: Willingness to pay for all values shown to participants

In order to gauge possible public willingness to pay more tax 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 (\$0.20, \$1, \$5 or \$15) monthly or annually.

If the participant said they 'definitely would pay' 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 (free, \$0.20, \$1, \$5) instead.

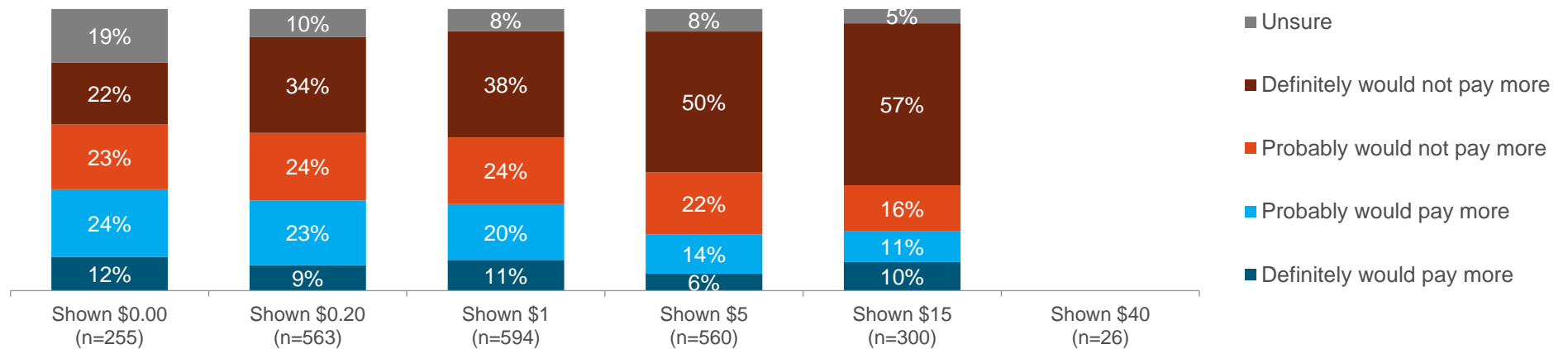
*For example, the first price a participant is shown is \$5 and they 'probably would pay more' tax at that amount. At the next question they are asked if they would pay a \$1 tax increase.*

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

*\*Please note that \$40 option is not shown due to small sample size (n=23).*

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

Base: All participants first and second value (n=2,298)

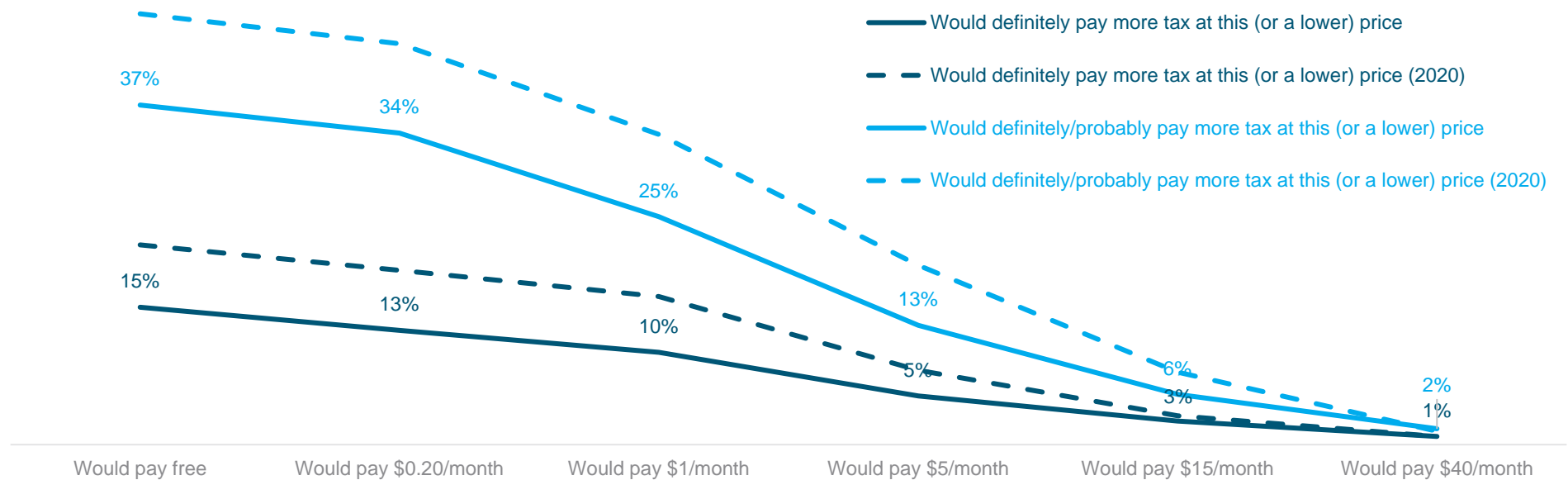


## Overall willingness to pay more in tax: Cumulative willingness to pay tax increase

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

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

Base: All participants (n=1,149)



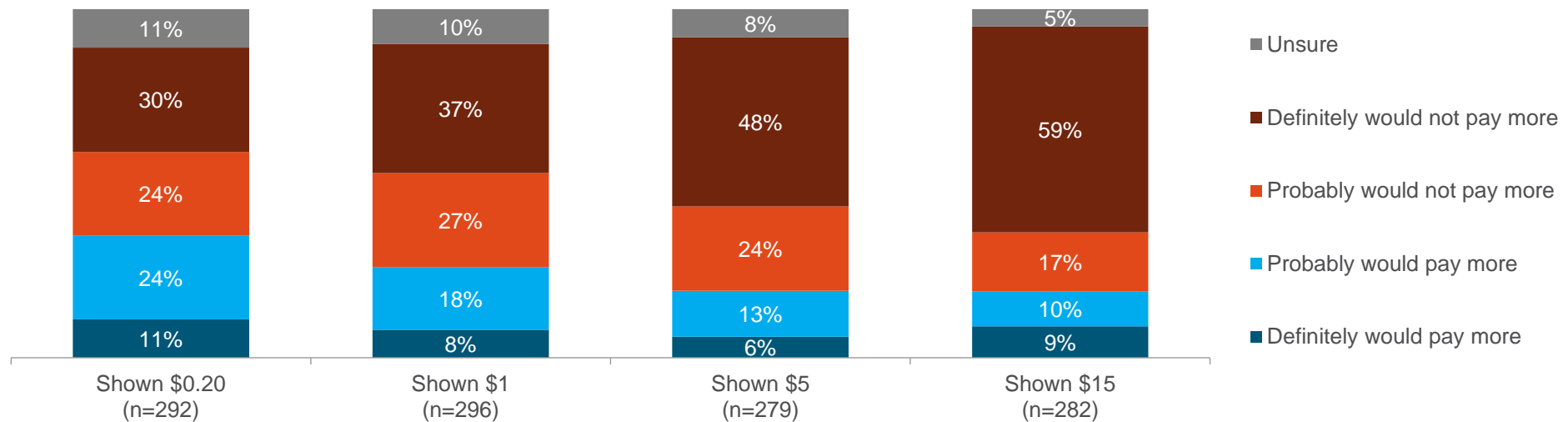


## Overall willingness to pay more in tax: First price point shown

The chart below shows the proportion of participants who definitely would pay more, probably would pay more, probably would not pay more, definitely would not pay more, or are unsure if they would pay more 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 be willing to pay <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you be willing to pay more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

Base: All participants (n=1,149)



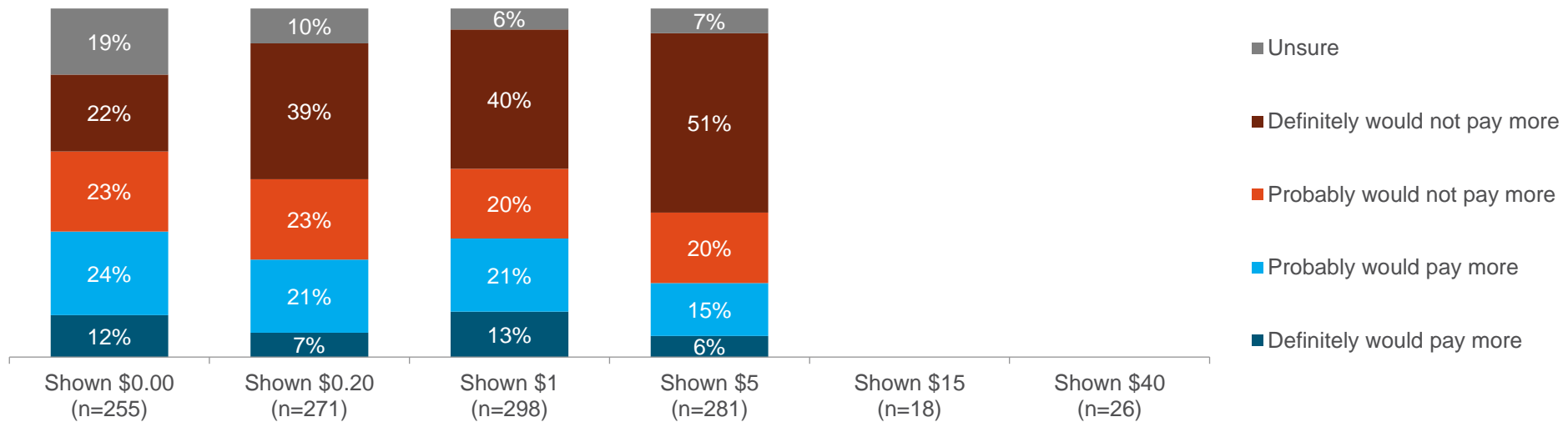
## Overall willingness to pay more in tax: Second price point shown

The chart below shows the willingness to pay more 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 ‘definitely would pay’ the first price point, the second price point was higher. If they selected anything other than ‘definitely would pay’, 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=27 and n=23 respectively)*

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

Base: All participants (n=1,149)

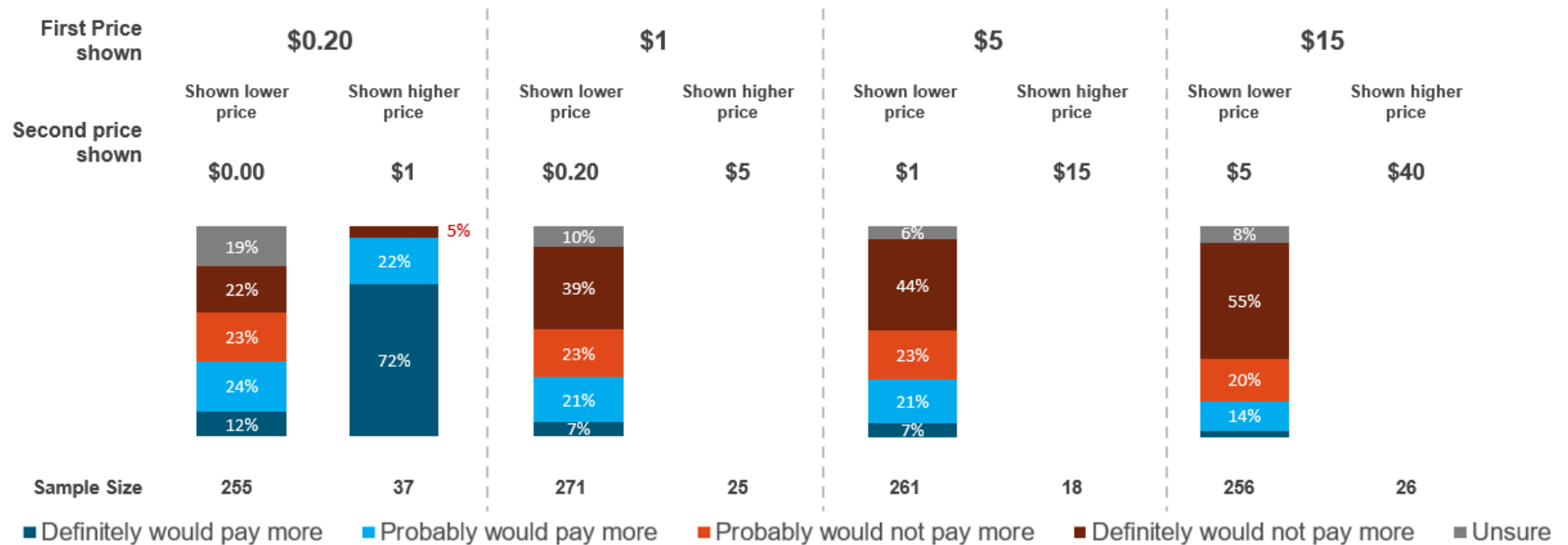


## Appendix: Overall willingness to pay more in tax: First and second price point differences

The first chart below shows the proportion of participants who 'would pay' 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.

Base: All participants (n=1,149)

\*Please note that \$5, \$15 and \$40 option are not shown due to small sample size (n=25, n=18 and n=26 respectively)



## Appendix: Household income definitions\*

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| TOTAL: Lower Income | Up to \$51,999 per year<br>Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)        |
| TOTAL: Mid Income   | \$52,000 to \$103,999 per year<br>Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions) |
| TOTAL: High Income  | More than \$104,000 per year<br>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 run by Essential Research with sample provided by Qualtrics from online panels.

The online omnibus is active from the Wednesday night of each week and closed on the following Sunday. The target population is all Australian residents aged 18+. Participants were invited to participate and completed the survey online without an interviewer present and incentives were offered for participation.

The response rate varies each week, but usually delivers 1,000+ interviews. Quotas are applied to be representative of the target population by age, gender and location.

RIM weighting is applied to the data using information sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The factors used in the weighting are age, gender, location, education and party ID.

Information for the weighting efficiency, effective sample size and margin of error for each poll (from June 2021) can be found here:

Each fortnight, the team at Essential Media Communications discusses 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. Full text for standard voting and regular political preferences can be found in the link above. No questions were asked prior to these questions which have material influence on results.

Participants not eligible to vote in federal elections (either for age, residency or other reasons) are excluded from voting intention. Eligible participants are able to select 'Unsure' for voting intention. They were then asked a 'leaner' question which also included an 'Unsure' option. Participants answering 'Unsure' are NOT excluded from published results, or any subsequent questions. 2 party preferred (2PP) calculations use stated preference. Preference flows from previous federal and state elections are only used for participants answering 'Unsure' for stated preference.

All Essential Research staff hold Research Society membership and are bound by professional codes of behaviour. This research is compliant with the Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards.



## About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) is a specialist think tank advancing a sustainable future for public interest journalism in Australia.

Through our original research and advocacy work, we seek to stimulate public discussion and establish optimal market pre-conditions in investment and regulation that will sustain media diversity and plurality in the long term.

PIJI is a registered charity with tax concession charity (TCC) status. It is a philanthropically funded, non-profit company limited by guarantee (ABN 69 630 740 153) governed by a Board of independent directors, advised by an Expert Research Panel and Policy Working Group and regulated by the ACNC, ATO and ASIC.

This project has been made possible thanks to the generous support of PIJI's funders, including the Susan McKinnon Foundation, Jibb Foundation, Ruffin Falkiner Foundation, H&L Hecht Trust and Mannifera.

## About Professor Glenn Withers

Glenn Withers AO is an Emeritus Professor of Economics in the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University and an Adjunct Professor at UNSW Canberra. He is Past President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, co-managing director of the consulting firms Applied Economics Pty Ltd and Social Cyber Group, and Board Chair of education company Blended Learning International Pty Ltd. He is also Board Chair of the World Bank's 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.

# [Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

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