

Media and gender

Gender balance across sports media
coverage in Aotearoa New Zealand
JULY 2019–DECEMBER 2020

APRIL 2021



isentia


SPORT
NEW ZEALAND
IHI AOTEAROA

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of evidence based on which we and others can advocate for greater value and visibility of women in sport.

Foreword

Sport is a huge part of our national identity and how we showcase New Zealand to the world. Many of our top athletes are women, but females are under-represented in sports coverage and sports reporting. This needs to change if sport's role in our national identity is to truly reflect who we are.

This report is a step in that direction. It's about creating a benchmark, shining a light on what's good and what's not, and starting a conversation to create positive change. Media, sports and others are already part of that conversation. Others will follow. Everyone is invited.

This study represents Commitment 23 of Sport New Zealand's (Sport NZ's) response to the Government's Strategy for Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation, and forms part of the work we are doing to improve the value and visibility of women in sport.

The study finds that women's sport accounts for 15% of all sports coverage. That's better than the findings of previous New Zealand studies and others conducted around the world.

It's also not good enough.



With New Zealand set to host three women's world cups from 2021 to 2023, we have an opportunity to showcase and celebrate women's sport. This needs to be coming through in what media are reporting. We need to show female athletes they are valued. We need the media to showcase their achievements so that they have greater ability to inspire.

This report is part of a two-year study we are conducting together with Isentia. I would like to acknowledge their contribution to this important discussion, and to the team at Sport NZ, and those across the sector, who have contributed to this project.

Thank you.

Raelene Castle

Chief Executive, Sport NZ

**This study
aims to
highlight
difference,
not desire
similarity**

Methodology

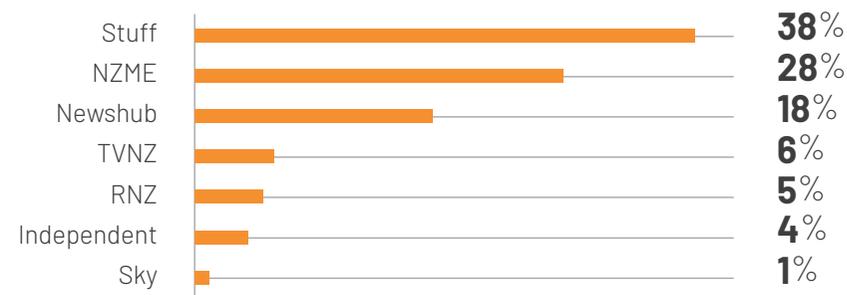
This report is based on qualitative content analysis of sports media coverage in Aotearoa New Zealand over two periods totalling 14 months (1 July 2019 to 29 February 2020 and 1 July to 31 December 2020). The study was paused in March 2020 when New Zealand went into COVID-19 Alert Level 4, due to the cancellation of sporting events.

The study has been conducted on behalf of Sport NZ by Isentia, and represents one of 24 commitments made by Sport NZ in response to the New Zealand Government’s Strategy for Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation, launched in October 2018.

Isentia has also completed large-scale analyses of gender bias in the media for the New Zealand Olympic Committee or NZOC (2016), Sport Australia (2019) and the UNSW Journalism and Research Centre (2010). The work for the NZOC in 2016 has been particularly influential on this analysis as it showed that good performance is central to coverage of women in sport, and that the dominant

performance of women (61% of New Zealand’s medals) drove gender balance in media coverage of Olympic athletes. We also found commonalities in how women were positioned in their media coverage: they were less likely to speak on their own performance and were more likely to be positioned as a partner or mother as well as an athlete.

Overall media share of voice breakdown



This new study takes a much broader view of sports rather than focusing solely on Olympic athletes. However, as with the NZOC study, it is a comparative analysis where female and male subjects are directly compared.

In order to understand how the media frame women in sport, it is necessary to look at how the media frame all sports coverage so that comparisons can be made and points of difference identified. This study seeks to determine the overall gender balance of sports media coverage available in New Zealand, and whether there are any fundamental differences in how men and women are framed in media coverage. While the point is not to imply that women and men should have the same identity in media, it is necessary to examine what potential bias might exist and what may be influencing that bias.

This project has been designed to give a representative sample of sports news coverage that is aired or published in New Zealand.

We have taken a broad view (rather than only coverage of New Zealand athletes and sports) to examine the information that the wider public has access to in the form of sports news. This report represents the first 14 months of a 24-month study covering 72,000 individual media items—from 1 July 2019 to 29 February 2020 and 1 July to 31 December 2020.

The pause in the data is due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically impacted the amount of sport able to be reported on, as sports events and competitions ceased due to lockdowns and health and travel restrictions.

Sampling

In order to gather a significant representative sample, media items were compared from all news content monitored by ISENTIA that mentioned a sport across print, online, radio and television. The only exclusions from the standard media list were community publications and specialist magazines. After modelling for publishing trends across the week, it was determined that a consistent amount of sports content is published every day. A randomised sample of media items based on media type was therefore analysed each day. This sample was 100 media items per day.

Analysis

This study involved human analysis of media coverage mentioning sport that was aired or published in New Zealand during the project period. This used an *a priori* design scheme to allow each media item to be coded for a number of predetermined factors, including imagery and language. Each gender mentioned in an item (referred to in this study as a “subject”), whether for an individual, a team or a sport, was analysed and coded by a team of human researchers. Multiple researchers worked on the project to ensure inter-coder reliability and consistency.

In order to consistently and effectively analyse the way that the media framed each subject, a coding design was established to assess the coverage of each subject against the same criteria. The criteria focused on the images, language and narratives used, and the source of these markers. The analysis of gender also extended to all sources present in coverage as well the journalists and presenters who authored content.

Key criteria included:

- Media information (including publication, reach, date, length and byline)
- Subject information (who is the item about, including their gender and sport?)
- Purpose of coverage
- Imagery (who is the subject of the image, who are they with and how are they framed?)
- Narratives (what are the themes evident in reporting on any of the subjects?)
- Language (use of gendered language and the source of that language, commonly occurring descriptive words)
- Sources (who is speaking about a subject, and what is their gender, their relationship to the subject and the topics they are commenting on?)

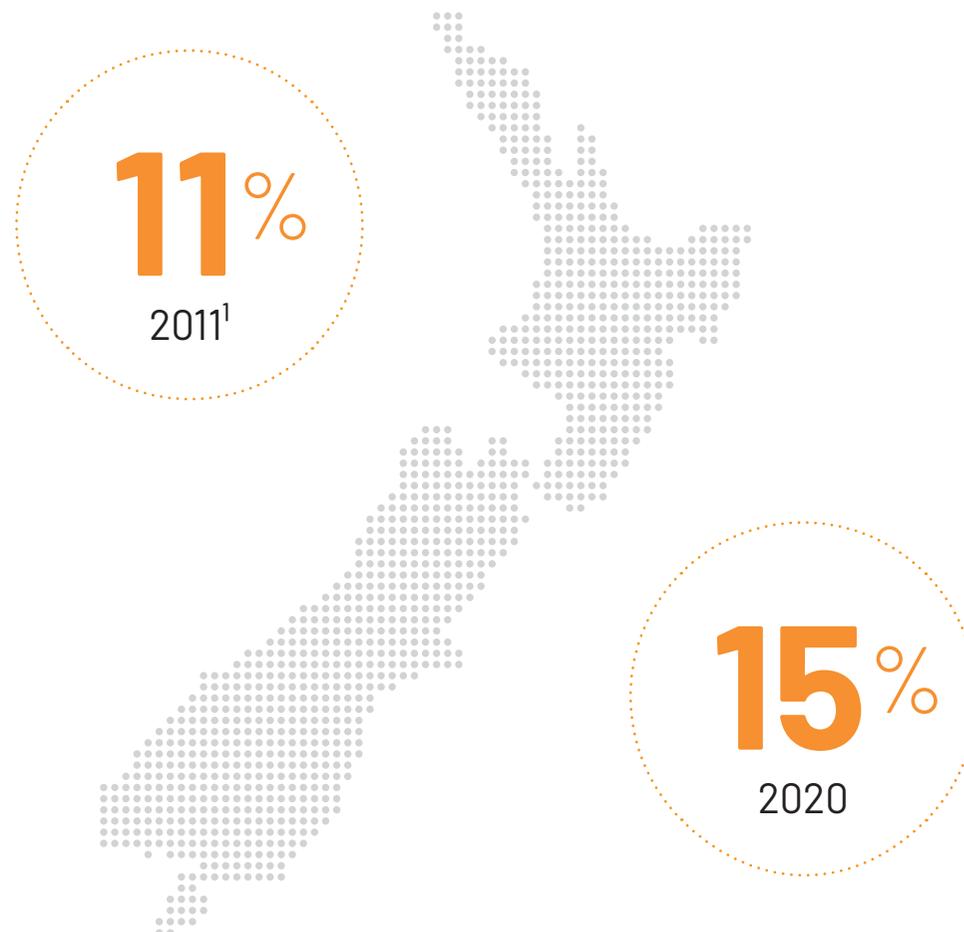
How do we compare?

The global context



How do we compare?

The New Zealand context



How do we compare?

Portrayal of athletes

The New Zealand Olympic Committee conducted a study leading up to and through the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. This identified a number of aspects of athlete portrayal where there was significant male bias; however, we now see significant improvements in how women are framed. In fact, there is now very little gender difference in how athletes are portrayed in sports news coverage.

Rio 2016:



Women at the 2016 Rio Olympics were **9x more likely** to be pictured with their partner or spouse.

Today:



Women are now only slightly **more likely (1.5x)** to be pictured with a spouse or other family member and this is a very low element of imagery analysed (<2%).

But:



Media are **2x as likely** to directly comment on the personal life of a female athlete.



Women are **3x as likely** to be framed as a parent when compared with men.

Rio 2016



Women were **3x more likely** to have others comment on their performance.

Today



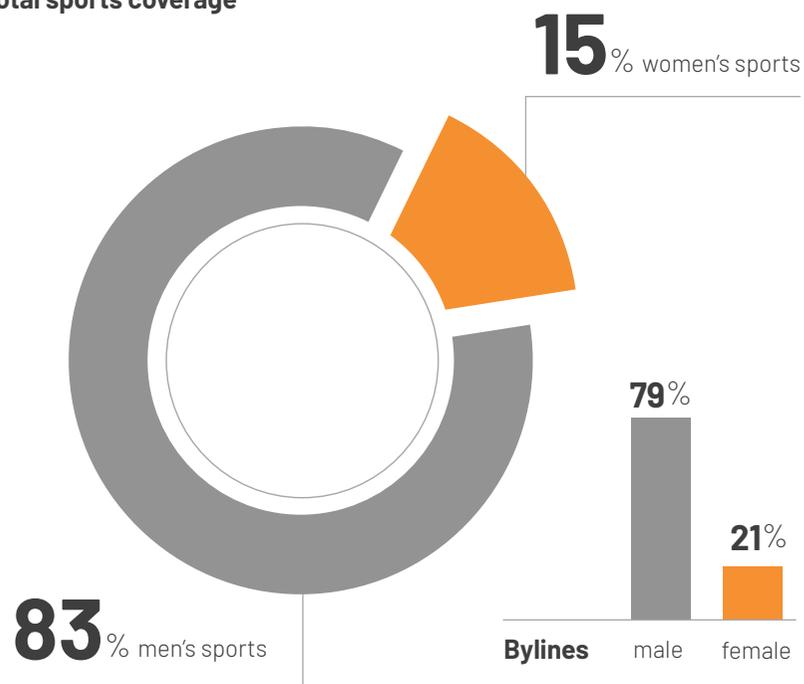
This has changed significantly

Women actually comment on their own performance more (22%) when compared with men (16%).

Gender balance of sports coverage in New Zealand

BALANCE

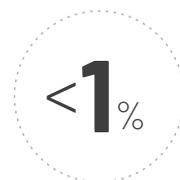
Total sports coverage



PORTRAYAL



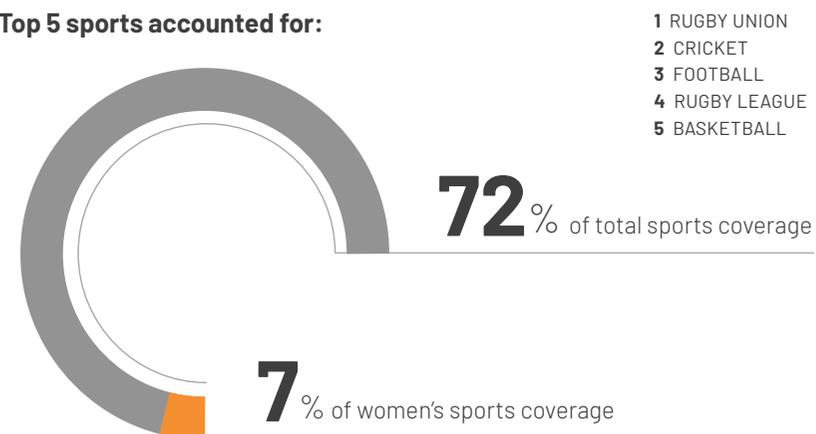
Female athletes were 3x more likely to have their appearance commented on than their male counterparts



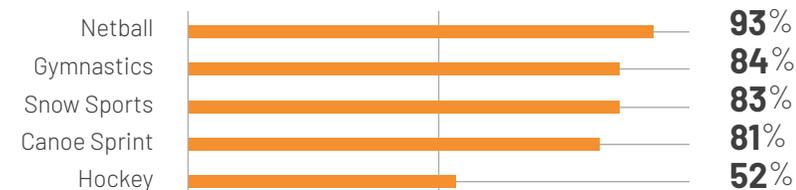
Almost no evidence of sexualised or demeaning imagery was found

COVERAGE

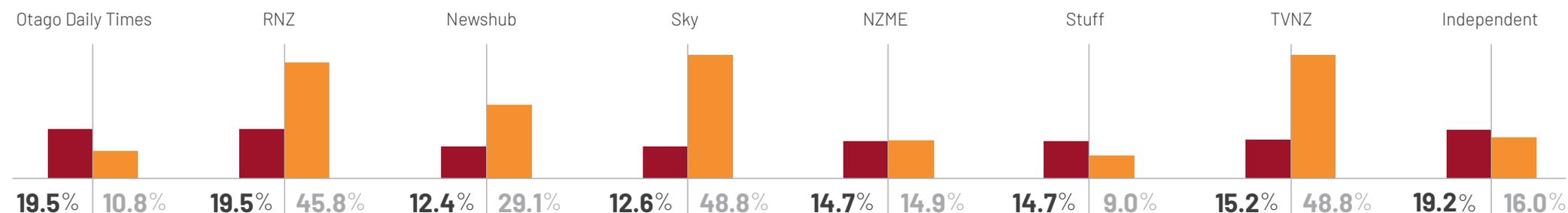
Top 5 sports accounted for:



Sports that had a majority of female coverage



BY MEDIA NETWORK



Balance

This section looks at the overall presence of women in coverage. This includes the number of female subjects that are mentioned in media items analysed, and their involvement in the creation of sports content.

At a high level these results show the vast majority of sports coverage in New Zealand (83%) is about men, and that 79% of all coverage is constructed by men.

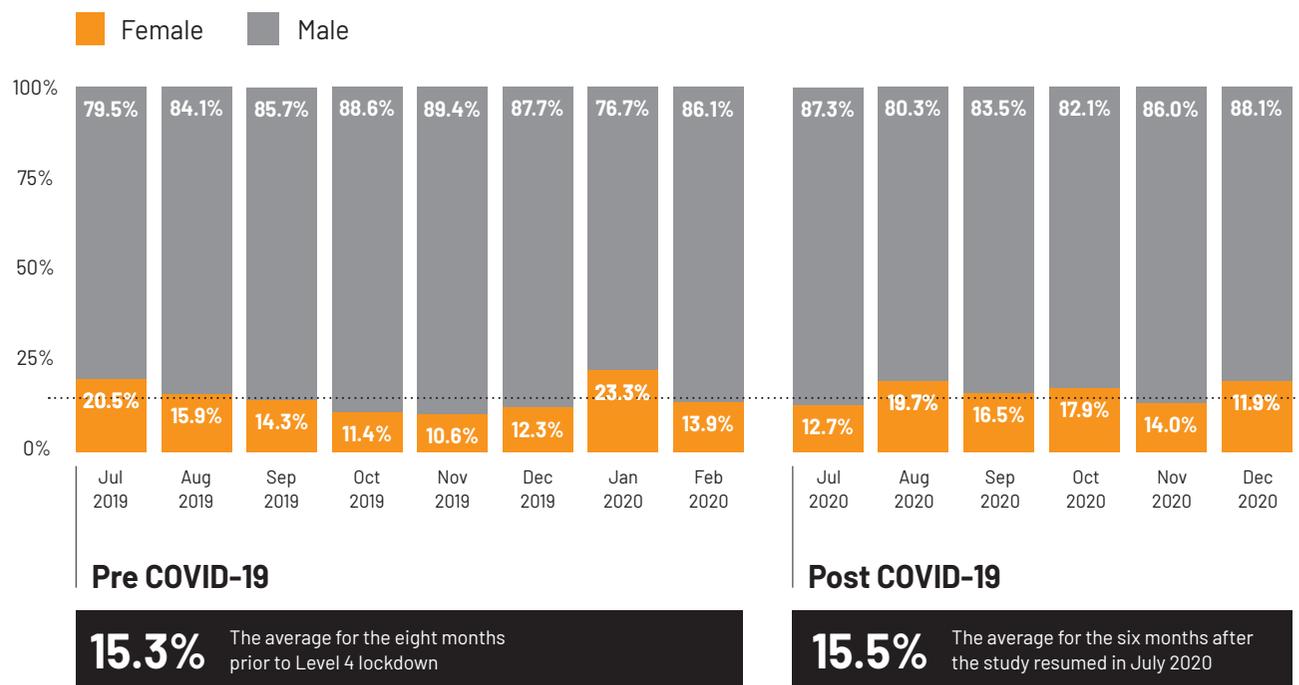


Balance Trend

The proportions of coverage that represented women peaked in July 2019, when the Silver Ferns won the Netball World Cup, and in January 2020, when reporting discussed visiting tennis stars such as Serena Williams at the ASB Classic. The global pandemic has significantly reduced sports news content (by close to 40% year on year when comparing July 2019 with July 2020). As New Zealand has been able to resume sporting events and activities in a domestic and some trans-Tasman capacity, there is an opportunity to increase the focus on women. The net gain in the representation of women post COVID-19 will continue to be tracked in the next reporting period.

Gender balance trend by month

The data period has a pause from March to June 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.



Balance

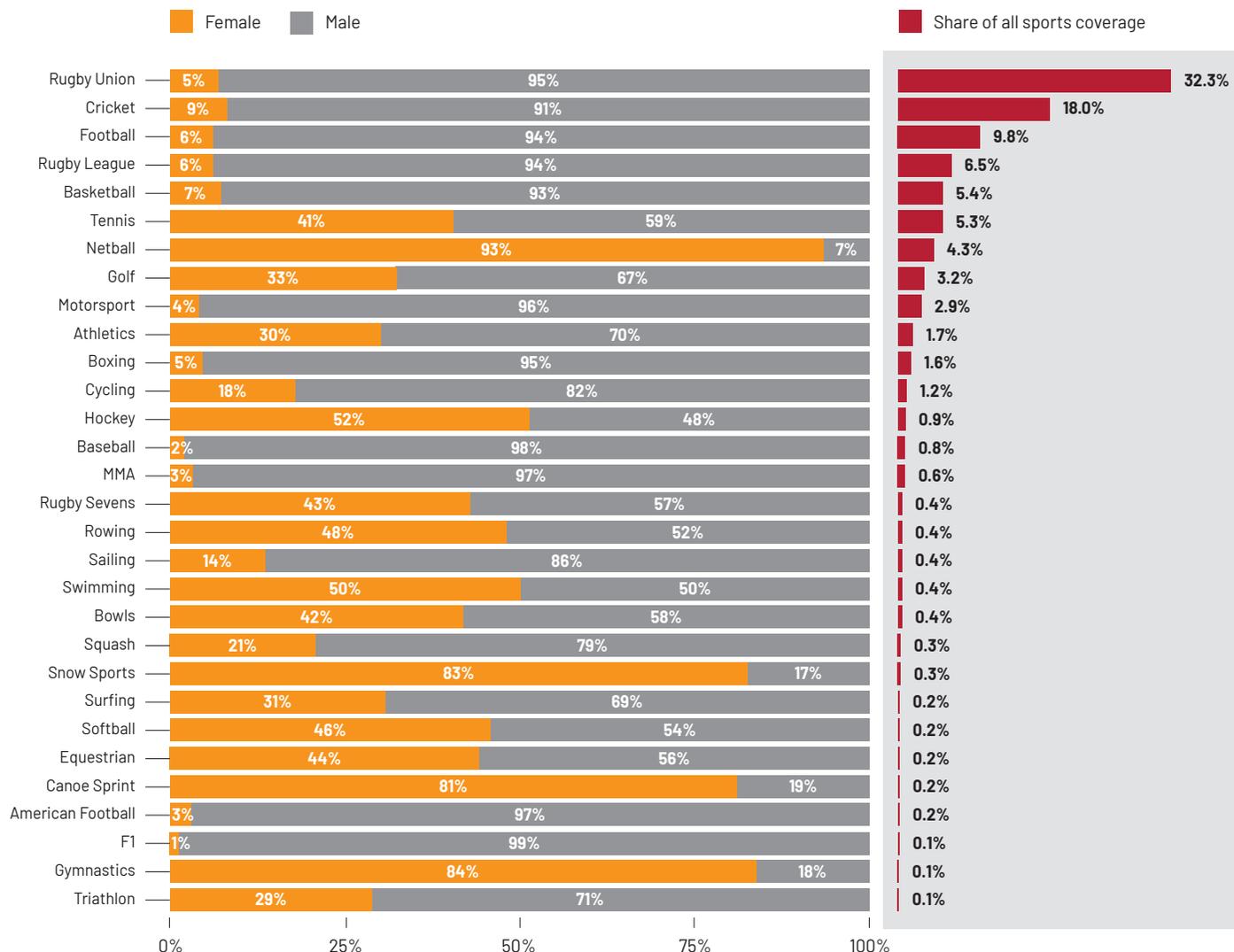
Overall balance by sport

This chart breaks down the overall balance of gender by sport and shows their share of total coverage. All coverage is from New Zealand media but may include coverage of international athletes and events.

The top five sports account for 72% of all coverage but average only 6.6% of women's sports coverage.

Only five sports had a higher representation of women than men:

- Netball (93%)
- Hockey (52%)
- Snow Sports (83%)
- Canoe Sprint (81%)
- Gymnastics (84%)



Balance

Unique subjects

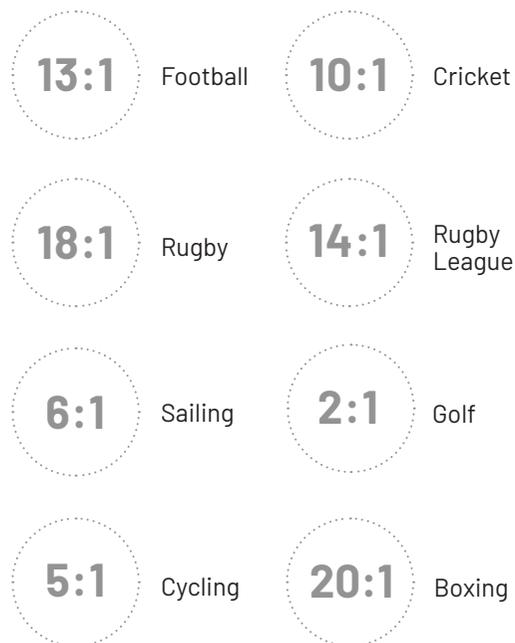
By 'unique subjects' we mean all of the individual athletes, officials, teams or others mentioned in sports coverage. This study has found a discrepancy in almost all sports where both men and women participate, with media covering a wider range of male than female subjects.

All coverage

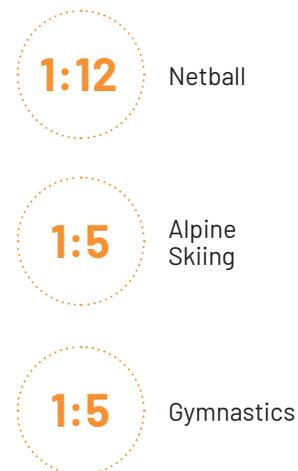


Five times **more unique male subjects than female** across the whole dataset

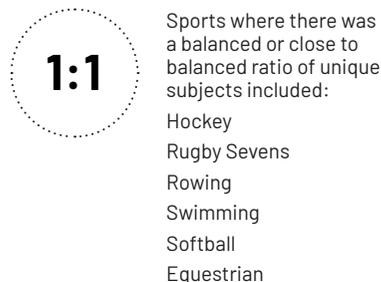
Over-representation of males



Over-representation of females



Gender balance

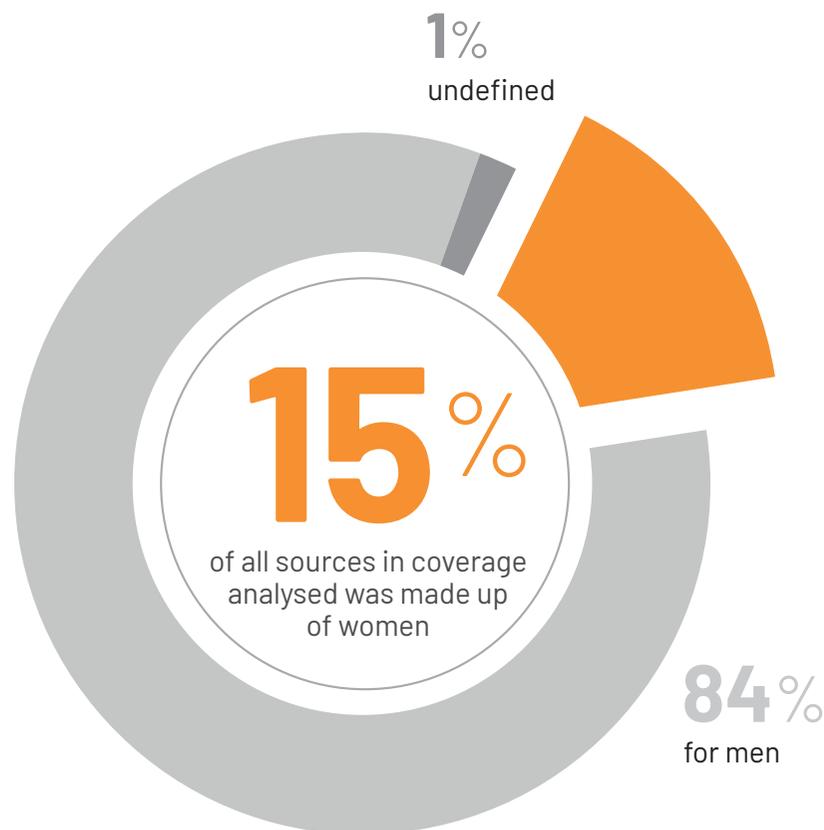


Balance Sources

By sources we mean those quoted in a media item. This includes official sources (athletes, coaches, officials, administrators) and unofficial sources (for example, fans).

These have been analysed for gender (where available), their relationship to the subjects in the item and what they were commenting on. The purpose of this was to establish whether there was any reliance on specific types of sources in reporting on each gender, and to examine the balance of the coverage in terms of the featured subjects.

Similar to the overall gender balance, men made up 84% of all sources in coverage analysed, compared with 15% for women.



Balance Sources

What we can see here is that there is an opportunity for balance to be considered outside of the main subject of coverage. Among the official sources of unofficial sources featured in sports media, including fans and the wider community, 78% are men. Increasing the balance of women as spectators and part of the wider sporting community should be actively considered to complement any increases in visibility of female athletes, officials and leadership.



of female subjects **commented on their own performance**, compared with 19% for men



of female subjects **commented on their personal life**



more likely that **a coach would comment on the personal life** of a female subject



more likely that a source would **comment on the appearance of a female athlete** when compared with men



of fans **quoted in sports media** are male



more likely that **unofficial sources will comment on the appearance** of a female subject



more likely that media commentators **will directly comment on the training and preparation** of male athletes



more likely that other sources **will directly comment on the performance** of male athletes

Portrayal

This section examines the differences in how men and women are reported through topics, images, language and framing.

While the overall representation of women is low (15%), it is also important to consider how they are being covered and whether there are any recurring biases in coverage of women. These biases may be slight but, if they are consistent, they have the potential to change how an audience relates to women in sport.

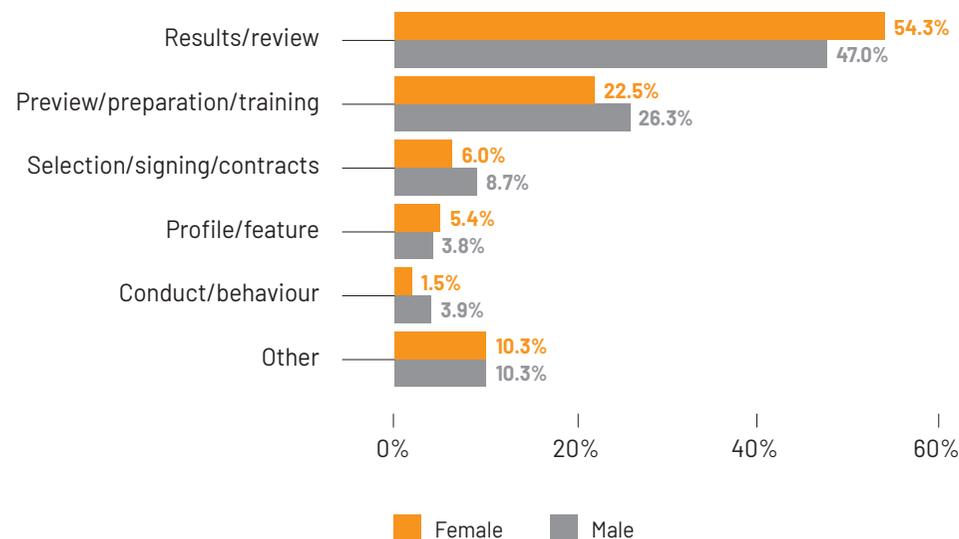
Portrayal

Purpose of coverage

The purpose of coverage for an item was determined by what the overarching point of the coverage appeared to be to the reader/viewer.

The categories where there was the most significant difference in the purpose of coverage between genders were preview/preparation/training (male 26.3% versus female 22.5%) and selection/signing/contracts (male 8.7% versus female 6%).

Given higher levels of male professional sport, the difference in discussion of contracts is understandable. However, the difference in coverage of preparation does demonstrate an opportunity to highlight women more. Considering the low representation of women overall (15%), this would be an area on which to increase focus for women's sport.

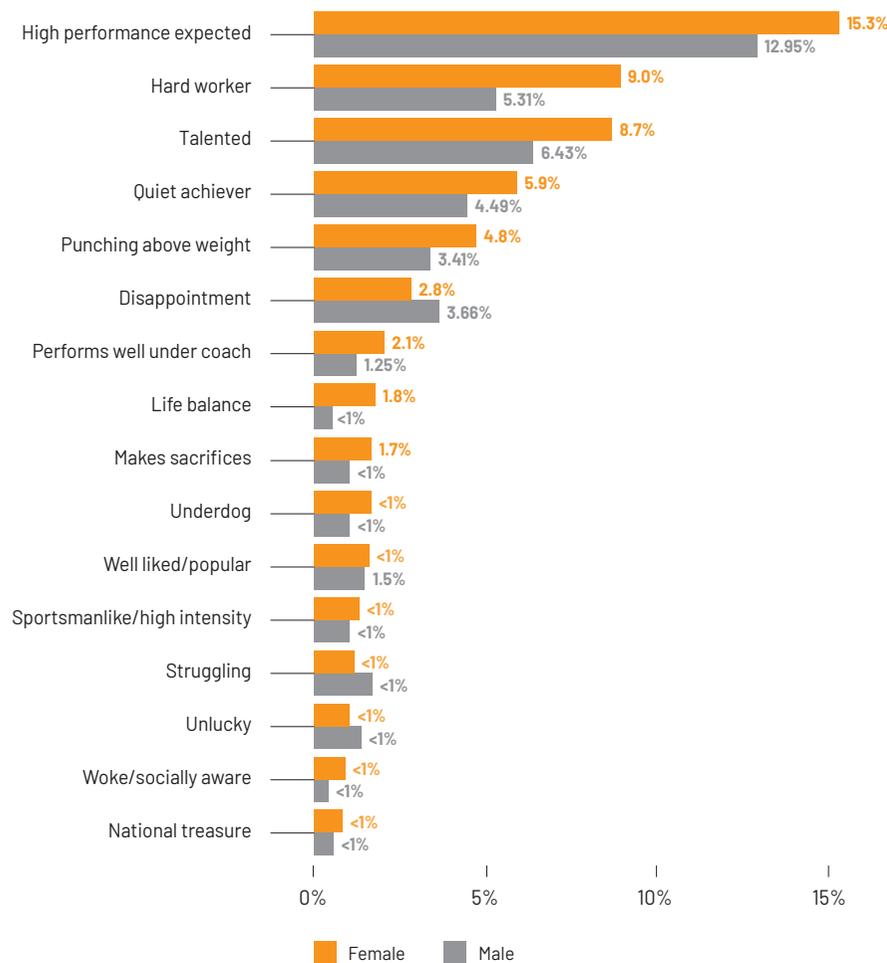


Portrayal

Performance narratives and behaviour

Performance narratives led coverage for both men and women. Where there were differences between men and women, they were largely in categories that represent small parts of the whole dataset.

It is more likely that narratives about sacrifice and life balance would refer to women than men, but these narratives appeared in only a small portion of women's coverage (less than 2% in each case).



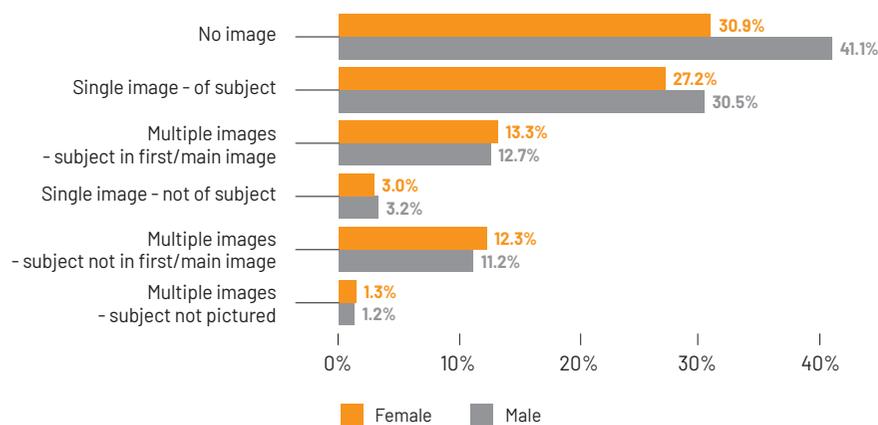
Portrayal

Imagery

This section looks at overall gender balance in imagery, how images are composed and how subjects are framed through imagery. This includes problematic framing such as sexualisation.

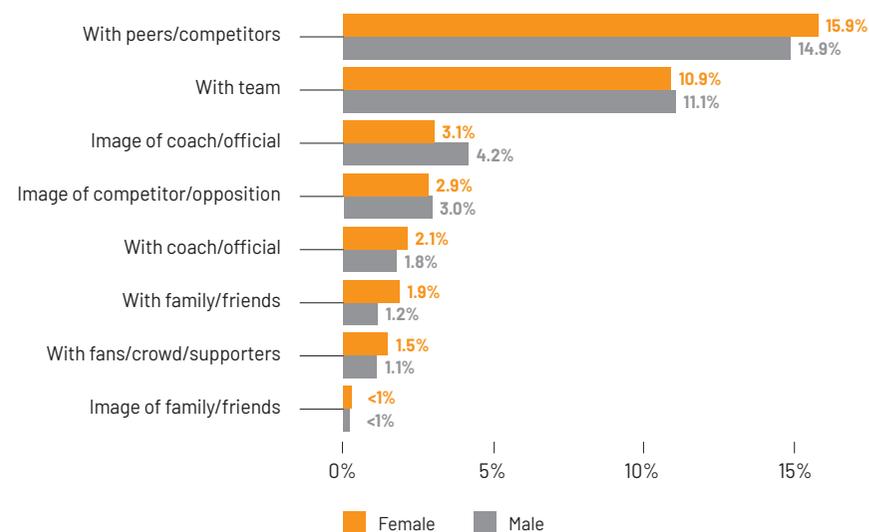
Gender balance

This chart shows gender balance in imagery based on the number of images used in any given media item. This is a reflection of editorial choice, as journalists and editors are making decisions over which images are used and what the relationship is between the image and the article content.



Composition

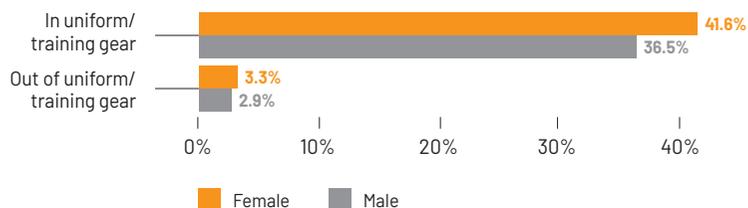
Composition explores who a subject was pictured with. The difference we can see here is that women were slightly more likely to be pictured with others, particularly peers/competitors, coaches and supporters.



Portrayal Imagery

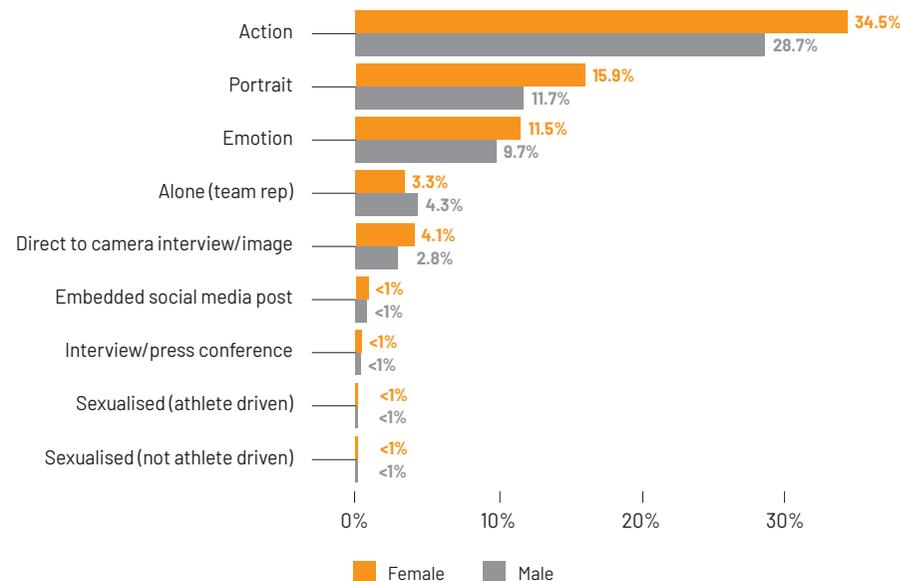
Appearance

looks at whether there are any differences in what subjects were wearing and whether the clothing could be considered provocative (intentionally or not). We can see here that there was very minimal imagery across the dataset that could be considered sexualised.



Imagery context

Imagery context looks at the overall tone of the image, and whether the purpose was to demonstrate action or emotion with the image itself. We can see slightly higher proportions of action and emotion for female subjects, but this can be attributed to higher levels of coverage of women that focused on results and performance.



The media

This section explores the gender balance of what media companies report and who is doing the reporting.

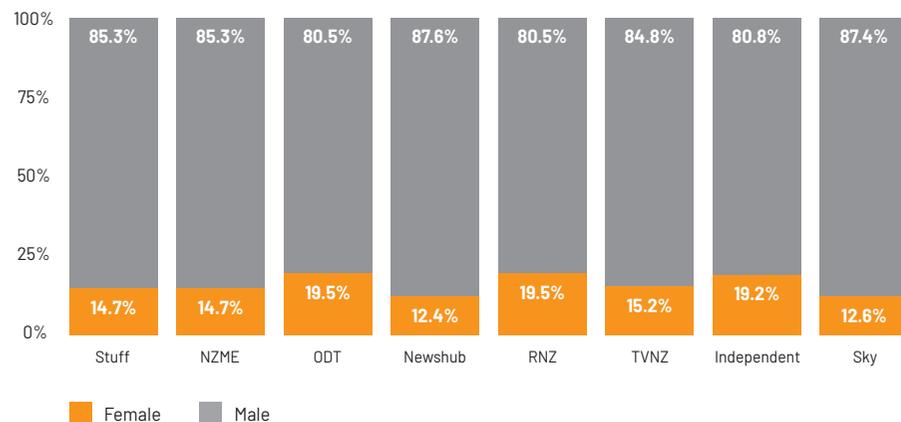
It finds that the spread of results is far more significant for bylines than it is for the gender balance of coverage.

The media

How they compare

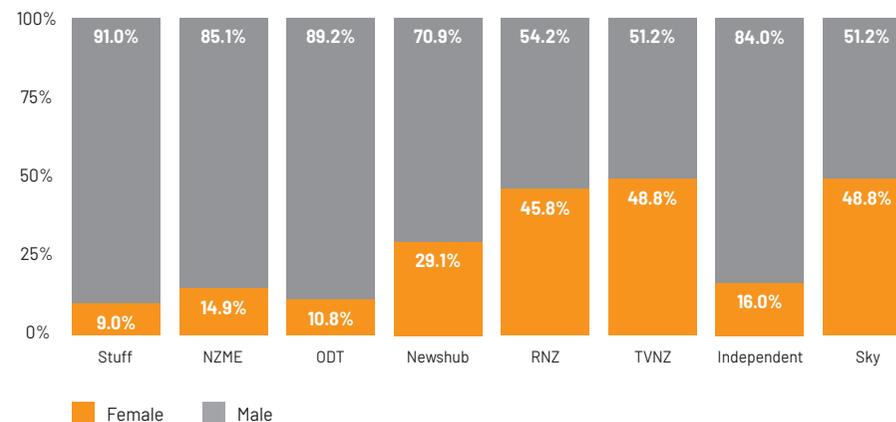
Gender balance of coverage

This chart shows the gender balance in coverage by each major media network. Pre-COVID-19 Bauer had the highest representation of women (30.0%), due to its stable of lifestyle magazines, while Newshub had the lowest level of female representation (12.4%). Bauer was then closed down during COVID-19 Alert Level 4.



Gender balance of bylines

Across the whole dataset, 23% of bylines were attributed to female journalists. Broadcast media has much better gender balance in bylines than other media outlets; however, bylines for broadcast media could be a reporter, newsreader or presenter. It should be noted that in a print and digital news environment, not all media items are given a byline; this data only includes those reports that had a named byline.

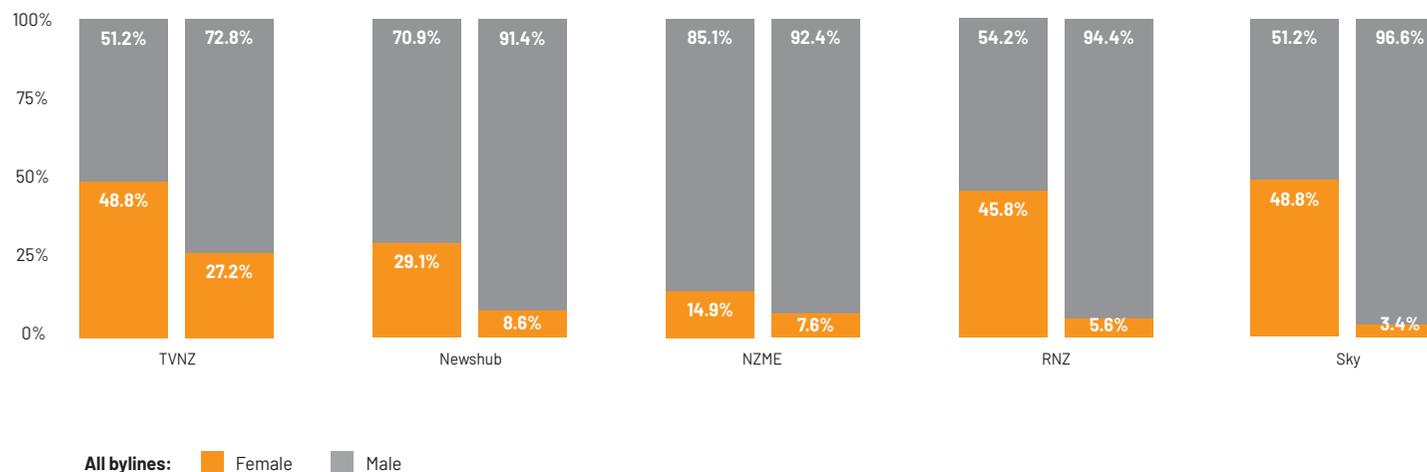


The media

Major networks

A closer look at broadcast media

The chart below shows the gender breakdown of bylines for broadcast media with presenters included (left) versus reporters only (right). There is a significant reduction in female bylines when presenters are excluded.

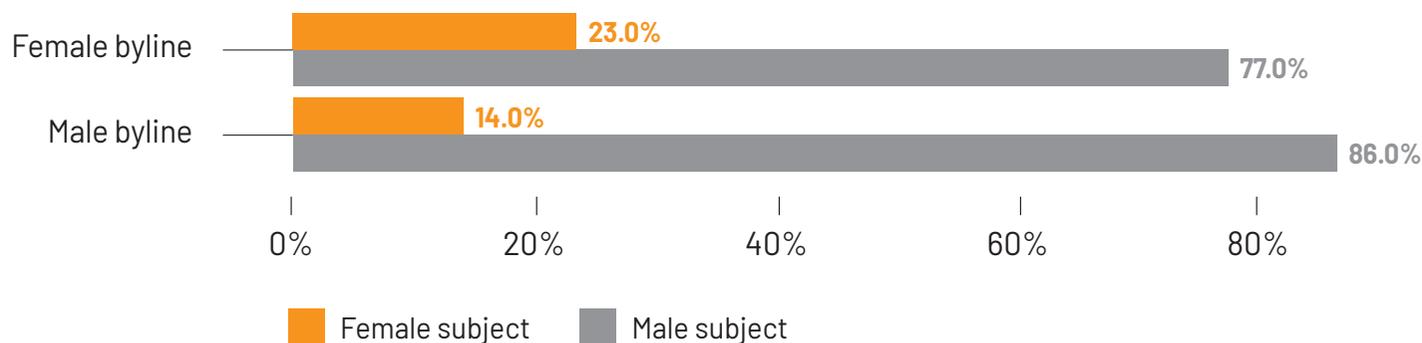


The media

Major networks

Gender of byline by gender of subject

Across the whole dataset, we did see a higher likelihood that a female byline would report on female subjects. Nearly a quarter (23%) of content reported by female bylines was about women, compared with just 14% for male bylines.



Appendix: New Zealand media

Stuff: New Zealand's largest print and digital stable. The main website leads the editorial agenda for the network and content is highly syndicated across all publications. In May 2020, Stuff was famously purchased for \$1 from Australian parent company, Nine, by its CEO Sinead Boucher and actively encourages donations from its audience.

NZME: Publisher of The New Zealand Herald, Newstalk ZB and commercial radio assets. With a smaller network of publications, content is less widely syndicated, and some premium content is behind a paywall on The New Zealand Herald website. NZME also operated Radio Sport, until it was closed in March 2020.

TVNZ: A government-owned public broadcaster (not public service) and has the highest-rated television news bulletins on New Zealand television. TVNZ is government-owned, but operates on advertising revenue to operate and return a dividend to the government.

Newshub: News brand of MediaWorks, owner of television channel Three and a series of commercial radio stations. Has been embattled in recent years with declining ratings and advertising revenues. It has argued that it is disadvantaged by the fact that its main broadcast competitor (TVNZ) is government-owned and less impacted by declining revenues and fragmentation of younger audiences.

Additional government funding for public media in New Zealand is distributed by New Zealand On Air. This includes additional funding for Local Democracy Reporting (LDR) in areas where local publications are impacted by the economic environment, and funding that is available for content considered beneficial for New Zealand audiences that otherwise may not be made.

RNZ: Public service radio broadcaster. Funded by the government rather than advertising revenue, and is focused on news, current affairs, local content and stories.

Sky: Pay television service providing satellite and media streaming. Has a strong focus on sports broadcasting and production and has the broadcasting rights to a number of key sports in New Zealand. Is not focused on news and current affairs.

Allied Press: A South Island-owned media company with interests in regional and community publications and regional television. Owner of the Otago Daily Times and a series of community publications across the South Island.

Newsroom: An independent news and current affairs website funded by subscribers and corporate partners. Focused on long-form, investigative journalism. Content is also shared across Stuff's digital network.

The Spinoff: Online commentary and opinion site that has become well known for its breadth of content across pop culture and news and current affairs. The Spinoff is funded by partnered content with brands, website members and New Zealand On Air.

