**Tanay:** Hey, my name’s Tanay and I go to Melbourne High School. I love music, sports and debating.

Today I’m gonna be unpacking how the media influences our opinions.

How are citizens’ political choices shaped by the media?

Citizens rely on the media to get informed about political parties, their policies and their candidates, so that they are informed and can vote with confidence. The media can also play a role in keeping elections fair by reporting on the election campaign, fact-checking claims made by candidates and giving the public an opportunity to ask candidates questions. To perform this role successfully, the media must be unbiased and accurate in their coverage.

I reached out to Sally Young, who is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Melbourne. She has published widely in the areas of Australian Politics, Media, Political Communication and Journalism Studies.

I’d like to thank you for coming along.

**Sally:** And you’re very welcome.

**Tanay:** Tell us about your background. What made you interested in media and politics?

**Sally:** I’m a Professor of Politics at the University of Melbourne and I study Politics and Elections and also Australian Media and Journalism. The modern citizen’s dilemmas, I think is what sort of news content do I want. And whether you go with one sort of loyal trusted news source or whether you just read a social media feed, there’s so many ways you can do it.

**Tanay:** It is a blessing and a curse isn’t it? ‘Cause you have the opportunity to see a much bigger picture than before and yet at the same time it’s overwhelming and it can be disorientating. What would you say is the role of media during elections?

**Sally:** What we hope the media will do is play an important part of communicating information about the election, provide the public an opportunity to understand what the options are, what different policies mean for them and for the future and for the country.

**Tanay:** They play such an important role and yet as time moves on, there’s just a general rise in cynicism towards large media companies.

**Sally:** The major media organisations are struggling. So they’re trying to give you something distinctive that you’ll pay for. And one of the ways they do that is to appeal to your pre-existing ideas and to tell you the world is as you think it is.

**Tanay:** But surely there must be a silver lining in the media landscape, despite all this disruption.

**Sally:** One is that you can be an active participant and you can get media from all over the world and from different voices and opinions.

**Tanay:** So how can young people ensure that they are informed citizens?

**Sally:** That’s a really important element of being a young person now, is making those choices about what sort of content you’ll consume and what sort of message you’ll send to people who are deciding what to put in the news, go to reputable journalism organisations, if you’re not sure of something, double check it, use multiple sources and thinking why are they telling me this. Why are they telling me this now. So be an active media consumer.

**Tanay:** The first step in the right direction is definitely being engaged with the news?

**Sally:** Be involved, participate, never think that you don’t have a say in all of this because you absolutely do.

**Tanay:** Once again, thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to talk to me about media.

**Sally:** Thank you.

**Tanay:** So how do you evaluate the accuracy of news sources?

Fake news spreads faster than real news. Fake news contains unexpected and false information. It is important that we think about everything we read or watch and question how accurate the information is. The best way to do this is to go beyond the headline, think about who wrote or presented the news, its tone, when it was made, its purpose and the kind of evidence used.

To get another perspective, I sat down with Tehnan Shah, who’s a VicSRC Associate Student Advisory Committee Member, to talk about how young people can be informed citizens.

Thank you very much for coming out here.

**Tehnan:** It’s an honour.

**Tanay:** You know, it’s interesting as students thinking about where we get news from and our political information, since our information comes from our phones and the Internet.

**Tehnan:** I feel like with things like Facebook or Instagram or other social media, you get your information from. A lot of comes from algorithms and oftentimes you’ll notice that if you like something and you have a particular political opinion, you constantly gonna see information that supports your own opinion. And it’s sort of gonna neglect the opposite side of things.

**Tanay:** It would be nice if the way news was delivered to us, was still convenient and accessible without funnelling towards what we want to see. You really have to do your homework to build a definitive opinion on anything.

**Tehnan:** You need to be informed to make sure that you’re not just building on your own bias all the time.

**Tanay:** Why do you think young people need to be informed citizens?

**Tehnan:** It’s really important to be an informed citizen because in a few years you gonna be voting and not just rely on what I feel like my friend’s opinions are or my parents’ opinions are. And sort of like build on that individual opinion.

**Tanay:** It’ll be important to look at different parties’ track records, look at their agendas. I think there’s still a lot of power we have with our words, with what we comment online, the conversations we have with our friends and family.

**Tehnan:** You need to have an open mind to opinions different to yours. And you can only get that if you’re doing your homework and doing your research.

**Tanay:** Thank you so much for coming over and speaking to me about media.

Today we’ve heard from Tehnan and Professor Sally Young about how we can be more informed citizens.

How will you be checking the accuracy of what you’re reading and watching?

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2021