NEWS CORPORATION TABLOIDS AND PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY DURING THE 2013 AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

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Abstract

Academic attention has often been focused upon analysing words in journalism texts and, consequently, the impact of photographs in newspaper journalism has tended to be overlooked. This is problematic because images are a key method by which news is selected, framed and communicated, particularly in tabloid newspapers. This article focuses upon criticisms that tabloids from Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation Australia were biased—against the Kevin Rudd-led Labor government and towards Tony Abbott's conservative Liberal-National Coalition—during the 2013 federal election in Australia. Through an analysis of front-pages, this article explores how photographs contributed to reporting the campaign and expressing the strong political preferences of News Corporation. The article concludes that Murdoch's Australian tabloids shifted towards a British-style overt partisanship in their reporting of the 2013 election. Images were at the forefront of that shift as they are a powerful tool for conveying messages of newspaper support and opposition and occupy a central place in how political issues, events and individuals are represented and understood.

Keywords: Australia, bias, News Corporation Australia, press photography, Rupert Murdoch, tabloid newspaper journalism, UK.

Introduction

The British tabloid press is notoriously partisan and Rupert Murdoch's tabloid the *Sun* particularly well-known for overt political endorsements and rejections on its front-pages ("THE *SUN* BACKS BLAIR" (1997); "LABOUR'S LOST IT… Now it's lost *The Sun*'s support too" (2009), "SAVE OUR BACON. Don't swallow his porkies and keep him OUT" (2015) (see also Evans 1984; McNair 2000, 146-55; Martin 2015). In Australia, there have been historical occasions when Murdoch's newspapers were criticised for biased pro-Labor reporting (most notably in 1972) and anti-Labor reporting (particularly in 1975 when some of its own journalists went on strike to protest editorial interference and bias (Cryle 2008, 137-45)). However, in comparison to the partisan-style reporting of elections in the UK, Australian newspapers have traditionally been far more temperate and centrist, blandly so according to some critics (see Young 2011, 232-3). The political economy of Australian newspapers influences this.

Generally, a small media market in Australia reduced opportunities for overt partisan bias because it is commercially unsound to risk alienating so many potential consumers when support for the major parties tends to divide quite evenly. In many capital cities, Murdoch's papers are often in a monopoly position as the only outlet or only tabloid. Partisan support has therefore tended to be more measured and less overtly partisan. This helps explain why a study of newspaper bias concluded that: "Australian media are quite centrist, with very few outlets being statistically distinguishable from the middle of Australian politics" (Gans and Leigh 2009, 1). Another study by different academics using a different methodology also did not "find any evidence of systematic bias towards one political party" (APC 2008, 38).

However, since the mid-2000s there has been increasing criticism that the Australian Murdoch press has become more partisan, anti-Labor and especially anti-Greens (the Greens were Labor's coalition partner in government between 2010-2013). The company's reporting

of the 2013 election led to pointed criticism that the Australian Murdoch press had shifted to a more British-style of overt press partisanship with unusual front-page declarations of support and editorial directions to readers to vote Labor out (Tiffen 2013a, 2013b; MacCallum 2013; McKnight and Hobbs 2015). This was particularly evident in the *Daily Telegraph* (published in the state of New South Wales) and the *Courier-Mail* (Queensland).

Rupert Murdoch is a globally controversial figure however, in Australia, the power and influence of his news media organisation is exacerbated by the high proportion of news outlets its owns, or is involved in, the nature of the political environment and significant, close relations between key media and political players (Chadwick 1989). Despite his geographic distance as a now American citizen, Murdoch is seen as a looming and significant presence in Australian politics. In three out of Australia's eight state and territory capitals, the Murdoch press effectively operates as a monopoly and, in the two largest states (New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria), it faces no tabloid competition, only a rival broadsheet-style newspaper (published by Fairfax Media).

During the 2013 federal election campaign, critics alleged that newspapers published by News Corporation Australia (the Australian arm of Rupert Murdoch's international media business) ran a stridently partisan editorial line favouring Tony Abbott and the Coalition with a degree of biased political reporting unseen since Murdoch's 1975 anti-Whitlam/Labor-government reporting (e.g. Tiffen 2013b; Manne, 2013). News Corporation representatives and tabloid editors refuted the allegations of bias or, generally, defended their reporting as legitimate examples of passionate engagement with key national issues in Australia rather than bias (e.g. Williams quoted in Stephens, 2013).

In a highly unusual occurrence, during the campaign, even the sitting prime minister, Labor's Kevin Rudd, publicly accused Murdoch and News Corporation of bias (Coorey and Massola, 2013). There was a background history to such claims. Both the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments had a testy, and sometimes poisonous, relationship with the Murdoch press in Australia (Young and Ricketson 2014). A key point of contention was the Labor government's 2012-13 inquiry into media accountability (the Finkelstein inquiry) and its failed attempts to introduce new legislation mandating procedures for media scrutiny and accountability.

In the 2013 election campaign, marginal seats in NSW and Queensland were sites of key electoral contest. The Coalition needed to win key marginal seats in these states in order to win government. On the first day of the campaign, the front-page of the *Daily Telegraph*, the monopoly tabloid in NSW, told readers that: "Finally, you now have the chance to… KICK THIS MOB OUT" (Figure 1). This type of reporting led the Labor prime minister Rudd to publicly accuse Murdoch of wanting to "destroy the Labor government and its national broadband network" policy in order to protect Murdoch's Foxtel pay television "cash cow" (Coorey and Massola 2013). In an appearance on the ABC's *7:30* program, Rudd also suggested that commercial interests and media policy were behind Murdoch's opposition to the Labor government (ABC 2013a).

News Corporation's rivals, Fairfax Media (which publishes rival newspapers in Melbourne and Sydney and a national financial newspaper), and the *Guardian* (which is an online-only outlet in Australia), revealed that Murdoch had personally "conscripted" his "tough-guy" "lieutenant" Col Allan from his position of editor-in-chief of the *New York Post* to come to Australia the week before the election began (Wright 2013). There were suggestions that Allan's presence in Australia at that particular time was strong evidence of Murdoch issuing "riding instructions" to his outlets about how to cover the election in order to advantage a preferred candidate—a practice which News Corp has a reputation for enforcing (Suich 2004; Manne 2013; Guthrie 2013; McKnight 2012). Rudd claimed to have received an insider's account of a meeting that occurred after Allan's arrival in which Allan

had reportedly instructed News Corporation editors to "go hard on Rudd [from day one]… and don't back off" (Taylor 2013).

Despite the many accusations of bias made about the reporting of the 2013 election, bias is not a straightforward, easily-identifiable entity. In academic research, bias is a heavily contested concept in terms of what it is, how to define and measure it and whether it is desirable or undesirable to have a partisan press (see Young 2011, 229-54). It is also important to note that the Australian Press Council (1977) has asserted that a newspaper "has a right to take sides on any issue". In its election guidelines it "upholds the right of a newspaper… to favour the election of one party and to oppose the election of another" but it still expects that news reports should be fair and balanced, and that fact and opinion be made clearly distinguishable (APC 2009).

Newspapers in Australia have traditionally supported the conservative side of politics (Economou 2008). However, support was expressed most strongly in newspaper editorials. There was, and still is, a strong sense (including in Press Council directives), that news and opinion should be separate. What appeared to be most unusual in 2013 was the seemingly dramatic shift in News Corporation tabloids to a more overt style of expressing direct partisan preferences in news and on front-pages. This article explores that contention but, in particular, explores the important role of photography in that shift.

Tabloids and Photography

Traditionally, the "special place" accorded to photographs in news reporting has been "on the grounds that the visual record is a purer, more accurate reflection of reality than any verbal report could be—the "'seeing is believing' syndrome" (Griffin 1992, 96). But photographs, like the words in news reports, are carefully selected, edited and placed to evoke particular feelings or opinions. Some photographs are staged in the sense that they are contrived or pre-arranged by the photographer and subject. Others are published out of context, re-touched or otherwise manipulated, especially in an era of digital photography. However, these decisions and processes are usually obscured.

The ideological basis for producing and selecting photographs is hidden from public view just as, in broader journalism, the ideological basis for producing and selecting news stories is hidden from view. Stuart Hall (1981, 241-2, original emphasis) argued that the central function of press images is to "support the credibility of the newspaper as an accurate medium" because they appear "literally to reproduce [an] event as it *really* happened…" and thereby "guarantee and underwrite [the newspaper's] objectivity". Hall says this "suppresses" the "selective/interpretive/ideological function…" of news photos as well as neutralising the "ideological function" of the newspaper itself (Hall 1981, 241-2).

However, tabloids use photographs in quite distinctive ways. The cropped, candid, often sensationalist photograph was a key element of popular press story-telling and the image really defined the rise of tabloid journalism in the 1920s (Adatto 2008,46-7). So entwined were images and tabloids that broadsheet newspapers were initially reluctant to use them. Images were considered low-brow and inferior to more serious text-based reporting because the image was so heavily associated with the populist tabloid press (Anderson 2014, 49; see also Evans 2001, 44, 63). Many broadsheets took longer to incorporate photographs in their news reporting and even longer to make them central to their front-pages.

Tabloids used photographs earlier and, more prominently but they also used photographs differently, to deliberately set themselves apart from the values of the serious, elite press (Åker 2012, 334; Becker 2008). Historically, some of the ways they achieved this were by using candid pictures, seemingly taken by accident, also using extreme sizes (both

big and small), combining photographs and using photos which "violat[e] what is seen as good composition" (Åker 2012, 334).

Tabloid newspapers are well-known for the dominance of sensational images over text on their pages, and particularly on front pages. Tabloids have a historical tradition of using photographs in ways that appeal to emotions and feelings rather than to the values of photographs as evidence of truth and objectivity seen in broadsheet-style news. Karin E. Becker (2008, 94) has argued tabloids thus use photographs to "both support and contradict the institutional standards of journalistic practice", presenting news events as "serious and emotional" at the same time. Similarly, Hansen et al (1988, 218) have noted that tabloids have a tradition of "rather than proclaiming a stance of 'objective', independent reporting, coolly presenting facts and opinion, tabloids often seek to champion causes and police moral boundaries in a deliberate display of emotional partisanship". Images play a key role in this different epistemology of news.

Newspaper photographs, ideology and bias

Given the pervading sense that photographs capture reality and "never lie", as well as the more traditional academic focus on words and language, Hansen et al (1988, 189) has noted that "Visual analysis is possibly the 'poor relation' in mass communication research". This neglect is despite the fact that visual images and press photographs are key elements in news coverage. The centrality of the media to today's societies has contributed to a widespread image culture (Adatto, 2008).

Studies have shown that visual images and photographs attract readers to news stories (Garcia et al 1991), are better remembered than verbal or written information (Pavio and Csapo, 1973) and foster more "cognitive elaboration" (thinking about something) (Lynn, Shavitt and Ostrom, 1985). Most significantly, studies from a variety of disciplines have uncovered strong evidence that photography and other visuals can influence opinions and attitudes (e.g. Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Paivio, 1991; Gibson and Zillmann, 2000; Gibson et al, 2001; Ottati and Deiger, 2002).

The general neglect of the visual carries through into the more specific study of political bias. When bias is studied in academic work, allegations of specific incidences often focus upon the words used in news reports and headlines. There were no shortage of interesting textual references during the 2013 election including the infamous "KICK THIS MOB OUT" headline and other rich examples from news reports, opinion columns and editorials. However, to look only at the words that were used is to, literally, miss much of the picture.

If visual images are important to news reporting and how audiences perceive things generally, then they are of particular significance during election campaigns when published images *may* have an impact upon how voters perceive candidates, policies and events and therefore, upon how they ultimately chose to vote. D. S. Martin (1978) found that voting decisions for Australian local government elections were strongly related to the first impressions voters had formed of candidates based upon photographs they had seen of candidates in newspapers. Alexander Todorov et al. (2005) found that even quick glances at candidate photographs could influence evaluations of the candidates' competence (see also Rosenberg et al, 1986; Rosenberg and McCafferty, 1987).

In the US, Andrew Barrett and Lowell Barrington (2005b) found that newspaper photographs shape how voters evaluate a candidate's personal traits, their general impression of that candidate, and their decision whether to vote for that candidate or not. In an era of highly mediated politics, where the Australian media news reports overwhelmingly frame elections as contests between major party leaders (Young 2011, 178-81), visual images of

those leaders may have a substantial effect in influencing reactions to them and their parties. Faces are especially crucial. Lanzetta et al. (1985) found that candidate facial expressions of happiness/reassurance, anger/threat, and fear/evasiveness were perceived differently, elicited different psychophysiological responses, and were capable of arousing and influencing viewers. Other studies have found similarly that leaders' facial displays elicit strong emotional responses from viewers (e.g. Sullivan and Masters 1988).

Method

One of the few studies specifically on political bias and news photography during elections is an American study by Barrett and Barrington (2005a) who used quantitative content analysis to study images and found that candidates who were endorsed by a particular newspaper—or whose political leanings matched the political stance of a particular paper—were represented more favourably in photographs than their opponents. They found the "favorableness" of photographs varied "markedly" depending upon whether the candidate was the newspaper's preferred candidate or not (Barrett and Barrington 2005a, 609).

News Corporation's tabloid newspapers—particularly the *Courier-Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*—were open about their preference for a Tony Abbott-led Coalition government in 2013. Editorials and the comments of their editors demonstrated this clearly during the election, including in strongly-worded election-eve editorials. One of the key questions addressed in this paper is whether such strong political preferences "seeped"—either unconsciously or deliberately—into the selection of visual images used in stories reporting the election campaign.

From the day the 2013 election was announced (4 August 2013), until two days after polling day (9 September), the author collected, and photographed, the front-pages of the Murdoch/News Corporation-owned tabloids, the *Daily Telegraph* (NSW), *Courier Mail* (Queensland), *Herald-Sun* (Victoria), *Mercury* (Tasmania) and the *Advertiser* (South Australia). Any front-pages that did not refer directly to the election or reported it in text only, were excluded from the study. Only front-pages that included a photograph or visual image that was at least a half-page in size to report the election were included. This led to a total sample of 60 front pages.

Rather than performing a quantitative content analysis on such a small sample, the author took a qualitative approach. There is no one method for visual analysis of photographs. The analysis presented in this article draws upon semiotic analysis and how meaning is generated through signs, including how codes in images encourage preferred readings by viewers (van Leeuwen 2005). This includes paying attention to narrative and conceptual patterns in photographs including size, colour, association with established symbols, but also relationships and perspective, as well as matters of composition, including the information value of the photograph, its salience and framing (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). This study therefore attempts a similar project to that undertaken by Goodnow (2010) who used semiotic analysis to uncover bias in eight photographs contained in a *Time* photo essay on Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic presidential campaign. However, the present study also draws upon discourse analysis and applies it to images, and the text accompanying images, as a way of paying attention to the practices of institutions (specifically news organisations, and even more specifically, three of News Corporation's tabloid newspapers) and the way issues of power, truth and technology are communicated (van Dijk 1998; Fairclough 1988). Three distinct and recurring themes were identified in the way the 60 images were used and eleven examples are provided in this article to illustrate, critique and review these techniques. The analysis below aims for depth rather than breadth in order to facilitate a nuanced understanding of how the Murdoch tabloids used images to

promote a particular narrative of the election, and to promote a particular outcome—the election of an Abbott-led Coalition government.

Frame 1: A Rudd Labor Government loss as inevitable

News Corporation tabloids were neither subtle nor dispassionate in their framing of the election. As mentioned, the headline for day one of the campaign in the *Daily Telegraph* was a directive to "KICK THIS MOB OUT". The headline provoked much debate in Australia for its unusual aggressiveness and overtly partisan style of editorial direction and not least because the full entreaty to kick Rudd/Labor out was directly addressed to readers: "you now have a chance…" (my emphasis) (Figure 1). Less remarked upon in the debate was the photograph of Rudd selected for that first day of campaigning. Rudd's face, but especially his mouth, was a key signifier in the tabloid news reporting. Facial expressions convey information that is so biologically and socially important to humans that we have evolved complex systems of decoding and interpreting what they mean. In Figure 1, Rudd is mid-speech. His expression—open mouth, lips apart and pursed—is unflattering. This was an early, and still fairly mild, image. Later images were more unflattering. The open-mouth representation invites readers to see Rudd as ungainly/foolish, thus inviting ridicule or contempt. Given how often politicians speak, there are ample opportunities to photograph them mid-speech and to represent them in this visually unfavourable manner. Even casual observers of British politics have noted that the mid-sentence photograph is one way that partisan newspapers represent politicians they disapprove of, by showing them with their mouth hanging open, and that Gordon Brown was a regular target of that particular technique (e.g. Stubagful 2013).

[[Figure 1 about here]]

        Later in the 2013 Australian federal election campaign, photographs were used to build up a narrative that Rudd/Labor's loss was both inevitable and desirable. Because election candidates need voters to view them as having a realistic chance of success, representing a party leader as the "inevitable loser" is potentially a very damaging frame. Figure 2 shows how the *Courier-Mail* used a photograph of Rudd with a hand gesture that is made to signify someone should get back, or go backwards, in the direction of the thumb. The hand gesture supports the headline, in which the paper editorialised that it was "TIME [for Rudd] TO ZIP". This headline was also parodying one of Rudd's signature phrases. To end press conferences, Rudd often remarked that he had to "zip" (meaning he had to leave). In this photograph, Rudd is again shown with his mouth open and lips prominent. Ostensibly, the article was reporting the findings of a "shock" poll that suggested Rudd might lose his own seat (ultimately, he did not). However, if the headline is read on its own (which is made more likely by the fact that it is the only capitalised, large font words on the page), it also reads as a direction, a commentary that Rudd should go, that his time is up.

[[Figure 2 about here]]

        Figure 3 shows a highly symbolic front-page photograph. On 1 September, Rudd launched Labor's election campaign. In Australia, campaign "launches" in recent years have been held towards the end of the camapign and function more as a summary speech. It is

traditional for the spouse of the candidate to appear at the end of the speech and give them a congratulatory hug or kiss and then, to be photographed—usually with the extended family who come on stage for that moment. This photograph captures the fleeting moment of Rudd's wife Thérèse Rein hugging Rudd. It is a deep hug and the reader is instructed how to interpret the image by the headline "THE LONG GOODBYE" suggesting the end for Rudd, that he will lose the election. Although the two in the photograph were smiling prominently when on stage (Figure 4 is more representative of their demeanour), the hug photo has been framed as representing sorrow and departure, the passing of an era. It even suggests a resigned acceptance of the inevitable loss within the Rudd camp which might make the act of voting against Rudd/Labor more palatable to voters who were still unsure about whether to follow the newspapers' instructions about how to vote.

[[Figure 3 about here]]

On the same day, the *Daily Telegraph* instead showed a more traditional, and positive, image of a smiling Rudd with his family to report Labor's campaign launch (Figure 4). But any positive reading of that image is strongly diluted by the presence immediately below of a starkly negative headline. That headline does not refer to the election launch which was judged undeserving of its own headline in the *Daily Telegraph*. Instead, the headline below the photograph was about insurance companies—"A PREMIUM RIP-OFF". Its placement attaches a negative association to the image above and means that it could be read, by a casual reader, as a direct indictment of Rudd/Labor. The *Mercury*'s front-page that day (not shown) was very similar. It also included a headline below a very similar photograph. That headline was: "TAFE TAKEOVER THREAT" which turned what Labor believed was a positive policy into a negative by stating that Rudd "threatened to take control of TAFE colleges if states do not fund them properly". "Threat" was an important word: the sentence would have read very differently if it had begun "[Rudd] promised to take control of TAFE colleges..." (*Mercury*, 2 September 2013).

[[Figure 4 about here]]

When the Coalition had held its campaign launch a week earlier, the front-pages were in stark contrast to figures 3 and 4. The *Courier-Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* chose the same image of Abbott's launch, albeit cropped differently (not shown). The photograph was a very positive image. It showed Abbott, his wife, two telegenic daughters and his Liberal colleague Julie Bishop, laughing and smiling. In the *Courier Mail*, the accompanying headline was "FAMILY TRUST". The *Herald Sun* in Victoria captioned a different image of Abbott with his wife and two daughters from the event as "WE WON'T LET YOU DOWN" (26 August 2013).

Although this article focuses upon front-pages of hard-copy printed newspapers, it is important to note that audiences (and revenues) for printed newspapers are declining and the ways in which photographs are used by newspapers on their websites and mobile products are of growing significance. I therefore raise below one important example from the *Courier-Mail*'s website because it signifies that trend and shows the "inevitable loss" frame but it also raised key questions about ethics and the selection of photographs.

On the 21st of August, at the mid-way point of the campaign, with seventeen days remaining to polling day, the *Courier-Mail*'s website published a photograph of a very sombre-looking Rudd and his wife, Thérèse Rein, under the headline "Party Games: Labor's campaign bus is careering out of control as it hits the halfway mark" (Figure 5). As Stuart Hall (1981: 229) has noted: "It is a very common practice for the captions to photographs to tell us, in words, exactly how the subject's expression ought to be read". In this case, the caption under the photograph describes Rudd as "like an angry PM…" The clear impression from this photograph, as *Crikey*'s Richard Farmer (2013) pointed out, is of "a couple who are down and virtually out".

[[Figure 5 about here]]

The day this image was published online, Thérèse Rein tweeted that it was actually a photograph which had been taken 15 days earlier at the Australian War Memorial. The two were sad because they were listening as the names of soldiers killed in Afghanistan were read out. After readers criticised the newspaper for publishing a misleading photograph, the online *Courier-Mail* removed the image and replaced it with a more recent one showing a smiling Rudd and Rein on the campaign trail.

It is rare that a debate about image manipulation by a news organisation reaches the public domain but this incident occurred when there had already been vigorous accusations that News Corporation was slanting its news coverage to diminish Labor's chances. Despite the traditional notion of news photography as providing an unfiltered and accurate snapshot of real events, there have long been debates about what news photographs actually show and about the ethical considerations of newspaper photography (e.g. see Wilcox 1961). The *Courier-Mail*'s use of an out-of-context file photograph to promote a particular narrative—of a sombre couple who were losing the election—was just an unusually public example of an ethical lapse that breached the trust of its readers.

Frame 2: Rudd as a figure of ridicule

Rudd's lips were a recurrent symbolic device in front-page photographs. Figure 6 shows a photograph of his lips pursed together in an exaggerated frown. It represents him as petulant, but also somewhat foolish, frowing in an almost comically childish manner that invites ridicule. It is difficult to tell whether there has been any photographic editing of this image to enhance the downturned mouth and pouting lower lip. However, there is no mistaking the photo editing on Figure 7.

[[Figure 6 about here]]

The ease with which digital manipulation can be achieved today has heightened debates about the ethics of news photography (e.g. see Reaves 1993; Newton 1998). The front-page shown in Figure 7 was, by Australian newspaper standards, a remarkable and controversially edited photograph during an election campaign. Three separate photographs of Rudd, one of his Labor ministers and a Labor MP were edited onto the uniforms of television characters, two of them the inept Nazis from the 1960s television program *Hogan's Heroes*. Rudd's lips were contorted in a very similar manner to the Figure 6 photograph. Although

some authors have suggested that editing to depict something that is obviously not real characterises the tabloid approach to visuals (Åker, 2012: 334; Becker, 2008), photographs of politicians during elections in Australia had, until this point, generally escaped such treatment. The *Hogan's Heroes* photograph could be viewed as a tabloid trying to eject "more humour, more escapism" into its reporting of politics, as News Corporation's then CEO John Hartigan (2009) had expressed a desire for years earlier. Alternatively, depicting Labor leaders as bumbling Nazis could be viewed as a more sinister and malicious incursion into electrical politics.

[[Figure 7 about here]]

The *Courier-Mail* also applied extreme digital editing at a key point in the campaign. With Queensland a key state for Labor, the party recruited former Queensland Labor premier Peter Beattie as their "star candidate" for a key marginal seat in Queensland. Figure 8 shows how the *Courier-Mail*, the only printed metropolitan newspaper in the state, represented this. Beattie was a "clown" with Rudd and Beattie framed by circus tents. Rudd's lips in this image are again significant to the symbolism—open-mouthed, lips protruding—and, in this case, may have been edited. The author could find no other photo of the event showing this strange expression on his mouth even after watching original videos of the press conference at which this image was taken. Rudd did point his finger at Peter Beattie at this event but, in this image, Rudd's hand appears to have been photoshopped from a different photo, taken at a different angle.

[[Figure 8 about here]]

According to the *Courier Mail*'s article on this front-page, its pretext for the headline and circus images was that Peter Beattie was known to like "clown[ing] around for the cameras". That seemed a remarkably thin justification for such an elaborate, and ridiculing, front-page representation of a candidate during an election when that representation, in the only metropolitan newspaper for that seat, could damage his prospects of success. *Media Watch* host Paul Barry argued the front-page: "…had one clear purpose: to damage Labor in Queensland" (ABC 2013b). (Beattie was ultimately beaten by the Coalition's candidate for the seat).

The photos in Figures 7 and 8 were heavily, and very obviously, edited to lead readers to view Labor and Rudd in highly negative terms: as fools, clowns and Nazis. The images were clearly not a "window on reality" in the way newspaper photographs have traditionally been conceived. Instead, they were consistent with tabloid "journalistic discourse that is irreverent [and] antagonistic…" (Becker, 2008: 95). On other occasions, when photographs alone did not capture the level of intended meaning, the *Daily Telegraph* used cartoons as visual images and depicted Rudd as a children's *Mr Men* storybook character. He was dubbed "Mr Rude" in a *Daily Telegraph* alongside a cartoon drawing of him as an angry story book character. In another front-page article, he was drawn as "Mister Chatterbox" (not shown).

The "Chatterbox" and "Mr Rude" headlines related to a series of scheduled campaign events. Demonstrating News Corporation's central role in elections, it organised and hosted two campaign forums. During the forum held in Brisbane, on 21 August, Tony Abbott stated of his opponent Rudd, just after Rudd had spoken, "Does this guy ever shut up?". The

Courier Mail approvingly included the quote on its front-page and dubbed it: "the question of the night". Again, the paper selected a photograph of Rudd mid-speech, mouth-open, lips prominent and hand gesturing to support the headline, conveying to readers that Rudd was verbose and a figure deserving of scorn. The headline was unusually disrespectful to apply to a national leader. It is difficult to imagine, for example, an American newspaper saying of a sitting US President; "DOES THIS GUY EVER SHUT UP?".

[[Figure 9 about here]]

Frame 3: Abbott and patriotism

In stark contrast to the visual representations of Rudd, the images of Tony Abbott published on News Corporation tabloid front-pages were overwhelmingly positive and noticeably presidential in nature. The front-page shown in Figure 10 is representative of these and is also highly symbolic. Published on polling day and headlined "YOUR TURN", it shows Rudd looking over his shoulder at Abbott, who has his hand on Rudd's shoulder. The headline has an ambiguity to it. If read in the context of the text above, the "you" in "YOUR TURN" refers to the reader/voter who now has a chance to have a say on polling day. However, if the capitalised large words "YOUR TURN" are instead read in conjunction with the photograph, it appears to suggest that, because Rudd's mouth is open, he might be the one saying "YOUR TURN" to Abbott. Read together, the text and image suggest viewers are seeing a symbolic and unscripted moment of Rudd passing the baton on to Abbott, who is accepting of the role and consoling Rudd.

[[Figure 10 about here]]

Four front-pages showed Abbott alone, in a composed, quite professional portrait form, as opposed to the type of candid photographs that tabloids are known for. Three of these included an Australian flag fluttering behind him. The flags appear to have been added to the photographs through digital editing. The accompanying headlines further instructed the reader how to interpret the visuals and framed Abbott as a strong leader, the deserved, inevitable victor. The front-page shown in Figure 11 is an example. It states the newspaper's stance unambiguously, that: "AUSTRALIA NEEDS TONY", but other similarly formal, positive and posed photographs were headlined: "TONY'S TIME" and "I'M READY" (not shown). These digitally manipulated images can only be read as a photographic form of editorialising.

[[Figure 11 about here]]

Photographs of Abbott with the Australian flag continued even on the day after polling day—Abbott's first day as Prime Minister. On 8 September, the *Sunday Mail* had a photograph of a smiling Abbott with a fluttering Australian flag behind him. This editing appears to have been a deliberate and repeated device used to signify patriotism and leadership. Politicians go to great lengths to activate this type of symbolism for themselves by having flags placed behind them during speeches and press conferences, flags on their

campaign advertising and letters and, often, on their cars and on their desks. Therefore, for a news organisation to repeatedly edit the flag in to photographs suggests they were trying to obtain those politically important associations—of national leadership, patriotism and strength—on his behalf. While there is no known research on this phenomenon in Australia and the cultural context of patriotism is quite different, an American experimental study published in *Psychological Science* found evidence "that nonconscious priming effects from exposure to a national flag can bias the citizenry toward one political party and can have considerable durability" (Carter et al 2011).

Photographers' positions and views

Today, the ubiquity of the visual image makes it easy to forget, as Fay Anderson (2014, 51) points out, that "photography only became a separate and compelling staple in Australian newspaper journalism in the late 1950s". Prior to the 1950s, "press photography was often subsidiary, static and unevenly integrated" (Anderson 2014, 51). Since then, the electronic revolution in press photography has been a major development which has had a significant impact on photographers' work.

In some respects, digitisation is liberating because it allows photographers more time in the field without the burdens of doing the time-consuming film development processes. However others see negative consequences as well. Peter Davis (2004, 12) argues that newspaper photographers have become increasingly "alienated" from their work as they are less involved in how their images and stories are being represented (see also Becker 1991). The effects of digitisation seem more pronounced for photographers at tabloid newspapers (Tirohl 2000). This seems especially true for Australian tabloids. Elgar (2002, 7) found that Australian broadsheet news photographers have had higher levels of control over their final image than tabloid newspaper photographers, as well as higher levels of confidence in the ethics of their organisation.

The high concentration of press ownership in Australia has led to a small number of potential employers, fostering employment insecurity and a greater tendency to cede authority to editors and newsroom hierarchies (Griffin 1995; Kobré 2002). Digital editing, re-touching, manipulation and selection in news photography were all evident in the visual images used in the Murdoch tabloids. Doctored images designed to ridicule and damage Rudd contrasted with serene profiles and gentle close-ups of Abbott with the Australian flag behind him. Drawings of Rudd as a cartoon character, photoshopped images of him, and his candidates, as either Nazis or clowns sent a strong message. Using cartoons and manipulating photographs allowed editors to convey a message through metaphor and stereotypes without need for recourse to "reality". News Corporation tabloids' use of photographs was "anti-authoritarian and populist" (Becker 2008, 95). Their use of photographs represented very well Åker's (2012) argument that the tabloid use of photographs is a "break with professional photography" and part of a "de-professionalization of photography". In their move away from news photographs as bearing witness and representing truth, Rodney Tiffen (2013a) stated bluntly that the *Daily Telegraph*'s editors behaved 'like a group of ageing attention-seekers who have just discovered Photoshop'.

The impact and influence of visuals

Stuart Hall (1981, 231) noted that the way a newspaper inflects ideological themes through its use of visuals is "governed by the newspaper's policy, political orientation, its presentational values, its tradition and self-image". The political atmosphere of News Corporation Australia

leading into the election, an organisation often described as "tribal" and viewed as politically powerful in Australia, is not in any doubt. News Corporation supported the Abbott-led Coalition and advocated for its election in a way that, by Australian norms, was unusual and much more like a British-red-top partisan expression of newspaper support. Given the strength of News Corporation's conviction, this intensity influenced the selection of party leader photographs, and especially those used by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier-Mail*. News Corporation's selection of photographs strongly reflected its overall political atmosphere and was consistent with the political slant of its editorial pages.

Whether such selections occur unconsciously or deliberately remains a question for further exploration. Conscious bias cannot be proven here but it certainly cannot be discounted. The selection of photographs may have resulted from editorial direction ("riding instructions") or from employees in a declining and concentrated ownership market inferring what their outlet "wanted" (or a combination of both). The hierarchical and conformist organisational culture of News Corporation Australia newspapers is relevant here (McKnight 2012; Tiffen 2014). While the decisions made by picture editors and editors remain largely hidden from view, even a cursory analysis of the photographs used on front pages shows evidence of deliberate editing of photographs in a repeated manner that suggested both purpose and planning.

Significantly, a former News Corporation tabloid editor, Bruce Guthrie, specifically predicted that photographic manipulation would happen once Rudd publicly accused Murdoch of bias. Guthrie (2013) stated: "I hope [Rudd] has thought [his reaction] through. Because he's about to get a working-over he'll long remember…". Guthrie specifically predicted that Rudd "will be misquoted and misrepresented, *photographed* [and] *Photoshopped…*" [italics added]. In the tabloid world, the visual is a key part of retaliation.

Another open question is the impact of such manipulations on newspaper readers, the wider public and, ultimately, the election result. News Corporation's actions certainly influenced the conduct of the campaign and the behaviour of its key actors, not least by provoking Rudd's public pronouncements of bias (a distraction from campaign themes and not the sort of headlines a campaigning political leader wants to see). Front-pages can also have wider impact than just upon their own newspaper readers. Activist group GetUp! (2013) argued that, in Queensland, the *Courier-Mail* turned "its front pages into huge political ads [by] installing them as bus-shelter and outdoor advertisements in key electorates".

However, while it is one thing to note potentially damaging and distracting effects on election campaign practice (for the affected party), it is extremely difficult, if not impossible this far out from the event, to empirically test any effect that the tabloid photograph selections and manipulations may have had upon audiences and their voting behaviour. The media effects of News Corporation's campaign was a matter of some debate following the election with some Labor insiders arguing that Labor did much better than expected in Queensland and New South Wales and that this showed News Corporation's sphere of influence was declining and/or was significantly less than it would have politicians believe. Others, however, argued the News Corp campaign had a very damaging impact on Labor's final result (e.g. Hawker 2013).

Tabloid readers are predominantly older males (Young 2011, 62) who can be influential in their peer groups. But, outside of these direct audiences, there is also an important inter-media influence. Popular media command such large audiences and can cover stories with such intensity and ferocity that other media often feel they have to pay attention as a result. News Corporation's tabloids are influential in Australian politics because they appear to have an inter-media agenda-setting effect, that is, they can affect how other outlets report the election, and not just other papers in the News Corporation stable but also rival newspapers as well as commercial and public radio and television (ABA 2001).

In terms of effects, one well-known phenomenon in political communication is that negative campaigns can have a strong, unintended effect of backfiring upon their sponsor by creating a backlash or "boomerang" effect (Garramore 1984). Research by Essential Media into trust in individual mastheads in Australia in 2013 found that only 48% of *Daily Telegraph* readers had a lot or some trust in the masthead—the lowest for any individual newspaper surveyed—with the *Courier-Mail* at 57% (Keane 2013). All major newspapers in Australia have been losing hardcopy sales for some time, including Fairfax titles the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Knott 2013). However, among the key tabloids, the *Daily Telegraph*—which was arguably the most strident in its anti-Rudd/Labor coverage—suffered higher circulation declines compared to other tabloid outlets. In the quarter to November 2013 (which included the election period), the *Daily Telegraph* lost 15.15% of its hard copy sales from the same quarter in the previous year (Knott 2013). Media analysis site *Mumbrella* (2013) reported in September 2013 on new figures revealing that News Corporation's newspaper revenues had fallen $350m from the previous year. Given how unusual News Corporation's 2013 election campaign reporting was by Australian mainstream press standards, perhaps one of the most salient effects of its more partisan coverage could therefore have been on the newspapers' own credibility, circulation and appeal to advertisers.

Conclusion

Newspaper photographs and other visual images were used by the Murdoch tabloids to promote a particular narrative of the 2013 Australian federal election and a particular outcome. Readers of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier-Mail* in particular were exposed to a series of images unfavourable to the Labor government and favourable to the Coalition opposition. As a key part of the newspapers' coverage, the photographs and images served to clarify, intensify and personalize the message that the newspapers were conveying. Front-page visuals in particular framed the news story by providing an initial impression that could shape readers' perception of the written text, not just on the front-page but throughout the newspaper. Based upon prior research into the impact of photographs in political news, at the very least, this *may* have helped to create a particular impression of a candidate or party in *some* voters' minds, and then reinforced that impression. It also likely played a role in influencing other media outlets' reporting and it certainly played a role in the conduct of the campaign for the Labor party, as its leader and a key adviser have both revealed (Coorey and Massola 2013; Hawker 2013). When such intense campaigns are mounted against them by powerful media owners and their organisations, there is a psychological impact upon those politicians and others who fear something similar could be done to them. That effect is difficult to measure empirically but it exists and it is an important restrictive element in the conduct of politics.

At the time, News Corporation's overtly partisan reporting in 2013 was unusual by Australian standards and this may have reflected the influence of an overseas editor being flown in to amplify the tabloids' impact. However, it also seemed to reflect a broader shift towards the expression of strong opinion in newspapers generally as well as a seemingly growing polarisation between the political reporting of the two remaining large newspaper publishers in Australia (News Corporation and Fairfax Media). In strongly backing the conservative side of Australian politics, News Corporation's reporting of the 2013 election demonstrated a shift to more overt partisanship in reporting politics. The form of this partisanship in tabloids was strident, emotional and highly visual.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1
Source: *Daily Telegraph* front-page, 5 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 2
Source: *Courier-Mail* front-page, 24 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 3:
Source: *Courier-Mail* front-page, 2 September 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 4:
Source: *Daily Telegraph* front-page, 2 September 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 5
Source: Original *Courier-Mail* website article, 21 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 6
Source: *Herald-Sun* front-page, 6 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 7
Source: *Daily Telegraph* front-page, 8 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 8
Source: *Courier-Mail* front-page, 8 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 9
Source: *Courier-Mail* front-page, 22 August 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 10
Source: *Daily Telegraph* front-page, 7 September 2013, News Corporation Australia.

Figure 11
Source: *Sunday Telegraph* front-page, 1 September 2013, News Corporation Australia.