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Media actors as policy entrepreneurs: a case study of “No Jab, No Play” and “No Jab, No Pay” mandatory vaccination policies in Australia

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Abstract

The media’s central role in the policy process has long been recognised, with policy scholars noting the potential for news media to influence policy change. However, scholars have paid most attention to the news media as a conduit for the agendas, frames, and preferences of other policy actors. Recently, scholars have more closely examined media actors directly contributing to policy change. This paper presents a case study to argue that specific members of the media may display the additional skills and behaviours that characterise policy entrepreneurship. Our case study focuses on mandatory childhood vaccination in Australia, following the entrepreneurial actions of a deputy newspaper editor and her affiliated outlets. Mandatory childhood vaccination policies have grown in strength and number in recent years across the industrialised world in response to parents refusing to vaccinate their children. Australia’s federal and state governments have been at the forefront of meeting vaccine refusal with harsh consequences; our case study demonstrates how media actors conceived and advanced these policies. The experiences, skills, attributes, and strategies of *Sunday Telegraph* Deputy Editor Claire Harvey facilitated her policy entrepreneurship, utilising many classic hallmarks from the literature and additional opportunities offered by her media role. Harvey also subverted the classic pathway of entrepreneurship, mobilising the public ahead of policymakers to force the latter’s hand.

Keywords Policy entrepreneurs · Policy entrepreneurship · Media actors · Media and policy change · Vaccination

Introduction

The media’s central role in the policy process has long been recognised, with scholars noting the potential for news media to influence policy change by, for example, joining advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). However, scholars have paid most attention to the news media as a *conduit* for the agendas, frames, and preferences of other actors (e.g. politicians, policy entrepreneurs, and various interest groups). More recently, scholars have examined media actors *directly contributing* to policy change, considering

how special interest journalists and editors—those who market themselves on their knowledge of a topic and its readership—bring distinct preferences and beliefs to the coverage of policy issues (Shanahan et al., 2008). McBeth and Shanahan (2004) suggest that the media may play the role of “policy marketer”. Petridou and Mintrom (2020) recently recognised potential overlap between the “policy marketer” and the “policy entrepreneur”. Where the marketer authors narratives, the entrepreneur promotes solutions. These scholars suggest that closer investigation of the intersection between their *strategies* could advance the literature (Petridou & Mintrom, 2020, p. 11). Hanani (2021) similarly notes that there is scant literature on how the media might play an entrepreneurial role in policy processes and advocates for further research in this burgeoning field (see also Frisch Aviram et al., 2020).

While this emerging field of research has begun to examine the potential role of the media in playing a policy entrepreneur role, there has been little consideration of *whether* specific members of the media act as policy entrepreneurs, *how* they might do so, the *structural conditions* that facilitate it, their *skills, attributes, and strategies*, and the *implications*. We build on existing literature to argue that members of the media (in this case, an individual journalist) may display policy entrepreneurship, with structural conditions in the contemporary media landscape incentivising such entrepreneurial behaviour. This article therefore contributes to and extends recent literature recognising the increasingly hybrid and boundary-spanning nature of policy and political work (Medvetz, 2014; Williams, 2002), as well as the possibility for non-traditional sources and forms of policy entrepreneurship (Callaghan & Sylvester, 2021; Lavee & Cohen, 2019).

Literature review

Policy entrepreneurs devote “time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money” (Kingdon, 1984, p. 122) to promote their preferred solution to a policy problem (Cohen, 2016; Kingdon, 1984; Mintrom, 2019; Mintrom & Vergari, 1996; Walker, 1974). While many actors seek influence within established institutions, policy entrepreneurs seek to *reshape*, rather than merely participate in, the policy status quo (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). Policy entrepreneurs may be located within or external to government, in elected or appointed positions, or in interest groups or research organisations. Various motivations drive them, including self-interest; values, beliefs, or ideologies; passion; or satisfaction (Arnold, 2021; Béland, 2015; Cohen, 2016; Kingdon, 1984). The entrepreneur develops and refines policy solutions, which they “hook” to policy problems to “sell” the idea to policymakers and other potential supporters (Mackenzie, 2004). In doing so, they may help to stimulate or reorient debate about policy issues (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018).

Studies of media influence on agenda setting and policy change have constituted a major theme in contemporary political science, public policy, and communication literature (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016). Media coverage can play a key role in political actors and the public becoming aware of issues (Crow, 2010; Hanani, 2021; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). It can affect “issue salience”: how the public thinks about an issue and the extent to which they view it as important (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Crow, 2010; Weaver, 1991). The more an issue is covered, the more salient it is likely to be. Moreover, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) argue that media outlets tend to mimic each other, self-reinforcing coverage and interest, especially when the public reacts strongly to an issue or story. Some scholars present agency and influence as interactive, suggesting that the media will cover issues to which the public is receptive (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Shaw &

Martin, 1992). Issue coverage shapes narratives (Lancaster et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2011), which in turn influence audience perceptions.

For key policy actors, then, media is a crucial *conduit* for raising consciousness of issues and communicating agendas and frames to citizens and elites. Media is also the venue for battles over problems and solutions. However, we contend that some media actors may also *directly engage* in policy entrepreneurship, shaping policy outcomes as they apply their own beliefs and interests to covering policy issues. This goes beyond operating as problem brokers, whereby the actor narrates and frames a policy problem but does not advocate a solution in response (Knaggård, 2015). If it is established that the media can be a *contributor*, then under which circumstances might it become *entrepreneur*?

The altered media landscape

Journalists and editors have long been trained to be objective rather than activist. Received ideas about noble framings of the fourth estate and its role in protecting the public interest may have deterred policy scholars from considering media actors as policy entrepreneurs, as if the reportage role is primarily to pursue objectivity, then this would be at odds with entrepreneurship. Yet media objectivity is not merely a free-floating creed underpinning professional norms. The demand for objectivity was determined by historically contingent factors: professionalisation; the development of broadcast/print technology and its audience; and the ascension of independence and scientific objectivity as Enlightenment values (Maras, 2013). The influence of all these factors has declined significantly in the past 50 years with “more politically active and aggressive” reporting emerging (Donsbach, 1995).

Whereas broadcast media technologies demanded that journalists wrote to a general, and therefore somewhat “objective”, audience, the field of journalism has been fundamentally altered by digital media. Digital analytics provide newsrooms with audience background and predilections; journalists and editors are increasingly trained to understand and write towards those predilections, and stories are found more often because of their searchable topic than because of their masthead (Tandoc, 2015). The loss of the “editorial subsidy” of advertising and classifieds has led to the increasing casualisation of the profession, the collapse of the advertising/editorial divide (Bakker, 2012; Carlson, 2015; Couldry & Turow, 2014) and, most recently, the rise of algorithmic content production, which can quickly produce both “generic” news copy (Pavlik, 2023) and “fake news” that nevertheless demands a certain amount of attention (Bontridder & Poulet, 2021). Traditional journalists have responded to these threats with the rise of feature stories, strong editorial campaigns, and opinion-based journalism. In an effort to generate “cut through” and “engagement”, journalists have become “entrepreneurial” content creators, understanding that their ability to command a “special interest” topic translates to increased readership (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Gynnild, 2014).

Journalists are typically still held to professional expectations about objectivity and rigour by editors, publishing regulations, peers and members of the public. Similarly, the digital world, as with the broadcast world, remains subject to populist constraints on what will be a strategically successful topic (Harper, 2017). Nevertheless, the digital media ecology has fundamentally changed the field of journalism, from audience expectations to optimisation of headlines for search engines (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022; Hanusch, 2017). In this fragmented media environment with abundant sources of information and diminishing advertising revenue, “successful” journalism has increasingly become journalism that can

speak to those interested in a topic, and the more emotive and broadly popular the topic, the larger the interest. This new environment creates incentives for media actors to engage in policy entrepreneurship. This environment also underlines the need for compelling content and the art of storytelling.

The skills and strategies of media policy entrepreneurs

In the emerging context described above, we may expect to see media actors, particularly special interest journalists, taking on more entrepreneurial roles. Media actors share several skills, attributes, and strategic behaviours with successful policy entrepreneurs: the policy entrepreneurship literature demonstrates considerable overlap with what we would expect from special interest journalists and editors.

First, impactful policy entrepreneurs are effective communicators (Roberts & King, 1991) who frame problems and present complex information in an accessible way that resonates with their target audience (Cairney, 2018; Cino Pagliarello & Cini, 2023; Zahariadis, 2008). As Morisson and Petridou (2023) argue, compelling “storytelling” is a hallmark feature of policy entrepreneurship strategies that manage to drive policy change. Often, they will use facts and figures that support their narrative and symbols that are contextually and culturally meaningful (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018; Frisch Aviram et al., 2020). These tasks are the bread and butter of effective journalism. Second, being perceptive and showing social acuity helps policy entrepreneurs to understand others’ thoughts and motivations, enhancing communication efforts and capacities to spot opportunities to promote their ideas (Cairney, 2018; Cohen, 2016; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). While the relationship between media and audience is complex, perceptiveness and sense of audience are equally valuable, especially as audience expectations about inclusiveness and participation change in the digital era (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012). Third, policy entrepreneurs require networks and coalitions to formulate common goals and interests (Frisch Aviram et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2010; Oborn et al., 2011; Petridou et al., 2023), to acquire knowledge and insight, and to facilitate their access to formal institutions and actors (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018; Mackenzie, 2004; Zahariadis, 2008). This includes knowing how to navigate institutions and processes (Beeson & Stone, 2013; Zahariadis, 2003). Such knowledge is equally important for journalists and editors who need to obtain sought-after information from officials or through documents (Örebro, 2002). Establishing a network comprised of diverse actors from different institutions or levels (i.e. from the ground up) is also associated with greater policy entrepreneur success (Arnold, 2021; Capano & Galanti, 2021; Cino Pagliarello & Cini, 2023; Frisch Aviram et al., 2020).

Journalists and editors may draw upon further entrepreneurial attributes and skills. Ambition or tenacity help entrepreneurs to overcome barriers and rebuffs (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018; Mintrom, 2019; Petridou & Mintrom, 2020); these traits are ascribed to investigative journalists in particular (Carson, 2020). Policy entrepreneurs often have expertise in their issue (Crow, 2010; Zahariadis, 2008), which endows them with credibility (Beeson & Stone, 2013; Cino Pagliarello & Cini, 2023; Mintrom, 2019), the capacity to develop technically feasible solutions, and the ability to mobilise evidence. Some journalists and editors develop strong policy expertise, particularly if they specialise on a particular “beat” (Montpetit & Harvey, 2018), or regularly interact with experts (Albæk, 2011).

Finally, journalists and editors may have special advantages over traditional policy entrepreneurs. They possess significant resources to draw attention to a policy issue. Even if journalists and editors cannot direct coverage themselves, they will likely have closer

relationships with those who can (Hanani, 2021). Those with editorial responsibilities will be aware how issues sit on their outlet's agenda, and how their pitch may be most effectively timed for impact. Kingdon describes entrepreneurs as surfers waiting for the perfect wave; media actors may be able to *create* the wave or see it more clearly on the horizon (Cairney, 2013; Kingdon, 1984). Media actors also possess enhanced capacities *vis-à-vis* traditional policy entrepreneurs to generate and change social constructions of particular groups. They can use their narrative techniques in creating heroes and villains to render groups as targets for new policies (Pierce et al., 2014; Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

Table 1 summarises these characteristics, modifying Mintrom's (2019) construct of attributes, skills, and strategies of policy entrepreneurs. The characteristics in the first two columns are common to policy entrepreneurs; the third column suggests how media actors may share them, owing to their professional position and skills, and emphasises where media actors may enjoy advantages over traditional policy entrepreneurs.

While we expect that the *skills and attributes* in Table 1 translate well to media policy entrepreneurship, it is less clear whether media actors would actively use the *strategies*. Policy entrepreneurs “venue shop” to find the most receptive audience and appropriate frame (Cairney, 2018), gauging reactions, “softening up” audiences, and building acceptance over time (Cairney, 2013). They may also use “salami tactics”, segmenting the proposed policy and presenting it in incremental stages (Ackrill & Kay, 2011; Zahariadis, 2003). Similarly, entrepreneurs can use evidence of success in one jurisdiction to “scale up” to others (Mintrom, 2019), or utilise “cross-boundary strategies” across vertical, horizontal, and diagonal boundaries (Faling et al., 2019). Actors dedicated to policy change employ such strategies, sometimes over extended periods.

In the case analysis to follow, we have two primary aims. First, we consider how the skills and attributes of a media actor contribute to policy entrepreneurship. Second, we examine the strategies they use to engage in this entrepreneurship and consider the degree to which these align with strategies identified in the literature.

Case study background

Our case study focuses on new childhood vaccine mandates in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) and at the federal level between 2013 and 2016, following the entrepreneurial actions of a deputy editor and her affiliated newspaper outlets. Although their emergence is beyond the scope of this article, almost every other Australian state subsequently adopted similar policies (Attwell & Drislane, 2022), making the initial mobilisation by media actors especially significant.

Mandatory childhood vaccination policies have grown in strength and number across the industrialised world (Attwell et al., 2018). Governments introducing such policies respond to a range of domestic pressures (Attwell & Hannah, 2022), but at their heart is the spectre of vaccine hesitancy and refusal: parents choosing not to vaccinate their children (Dubé et al., 2021). Australia's governments have been at the forefront of meeting vaccine refusal with harsh consequences. Despite the recent global convergence on vaccine mandates (Attwell & Hannah, 2022), vaccination policy in many countries has been historically static, apolitical, and path dependent (McCoy, 2019). Public health bureaucrats, health professionals, and academic and technical experts favour non-coercive strategies (Leask & Danchin, 2017; Omer et al., 2019), and piecemeal interventions achieve modest successes as behavioural insights garner strategies to increase uptake without coercion (Navin

Table 1 Attributes and skills of policy entrepreneurs applied to media actors

Attributes and skills	Theoretical application	Media example (*enhanced in media actors)
Tenacity (Ackrill and Kay, 2011; Mintrom, 2019; Zahariadis, 2008).	Persistence, dedication, ambition (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990)	Journalists' determination to secure sources and story; "Fourth estate" ideology (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990).
Acuity (Cairney, 2018; Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Zahariadis, 2008) and sense of timing (Brouwer & Biermann, 2011; Cairney, 2018; Perks & Gilchrist, 2022; Zahariadis, 2008).	Sense of the national mood and community values Identifies supportive audiences through "venue shopping" Recognise opportunity and act to take advantage	Cover "the news" so know what's happening. Build awareness of "what matters" through polls, public opinion stories, letters to the editor. Constantly mindful of audience as part of a mission to speak to a particular (large) constituency and maintain readership (Harper, 2017; Tandoc, 2015). Analytics suites measuring audience engagement are frequently driving contemporary news production (Couldry & Turow, 2014; Tandoc, 2015) *Can generate timing through coverage
Strategic and creative thinker (Capano & Galanti, 2021; Mintrom, 2019; Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Zahariadis, 2008).	Come up with ideas, designs, innovative policy proposals that are technically feasible	Journalism involves strategic planning and execution to "get" the full story and cover different angles (Skjerdal, 2011). Journalists may need to think outside the box to set their work apart from others or to agitate a response
Good communication skills (Ackrill et al., 2013; Cairney, 2018; Mintrom, 2019; Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Zahariadis, 2008).	Know value of a good story and how to tell it, framing narrative and evidence to resonate with particular audience	Tells the story in a way that will draw in the reader (Boesman & Costera Meijer, 2018) Finds information that gives the story credibility *Social construction of policy targets as deviants through coverage (Pierce et al., 2014; Schneider & Ingram, 1993)
Systems knowledge (Beeson & Stone 2013; Cairney 2013) and networking skills (Brouwer and Biermann, 2011; Casas et al., 2022; Frisch Aviram et al., 2020; Mintrom, 2019; Mintrom 7 Norman, 2009; Nakkash et al., 2018; Oborn et al., 2011; Petridou et al., 2023).	Understand the rules of the political game and the operation of formal institutions of policy making Build coalitions of support	Coverage of political events produces understanding of systems and processes Develop knowledge of and connections to key political actors in relevant policy domains Professional function and credentials get them past gatekeepers to connect with formal actors (Albæk, 2011)
Ability to invest resources (Beeson & Stone 2013; Mintrom & Norman, 2009).	Willingness and capacity to invest time and energy	*Manager/ Editor holds high degree of autonomy over where to direct resources Claiming policy victories can bring commercial benefit—selling papers, breaking stories, winning awards (Bovitz et al., 2002; De Bruycker, 2019)

& Largent, 2017). Nevertheless, since 2014, five Australian states have implemented and tightened similar policies called “No Jab, No Play”. These policies exclude unvaccinated children from childcare and early education (Attwell & Drislane, 2022). This case study focuses on the first, introduced in Australia’s most populous state of NSW in 2014, which led the national field.

Australia’s federal mandatory vaccination policy is called “No Jab, No Pay”. Implemented in 2016, it reduces cash benefits paid to low- and middle-income earners whose children are not vaccinated (unless they are medically exempt) and withholds childcare subsidies (Attwell et al., 2020a). Significantly, No Jab, No Pay abolished formal conscientious objections to vaccination. Previously, vaccine objectors remained eligible for relevant payments. Since the policy removed this exemption, vaccine refusing families now face financial consequences. When NSW enacted its No Jab, No Play policy, it initially included provisions for conscientious objections in line with the federal policy, permitting unvaccinated children access to childcare if parents lodged the necessary paperwork. However, NSW abolished conscientious objections after January 2018 (Attwell & Drislane, 2022).

Scholars have identified the role of media actors in these policies (Beard et al., 2017; Helps et al., 2018; Stephenson et al., 2018) including through their framing of the target population as socially deviant (Court et al. 2021). Media actors have themselves claimed responsibility (Harvey, 2015b; Maiden, 2015); and governments have utilised the “No Jab” nomenclature first advanced in media campaigns (Abbott, 2015; Government of Western Australia, 2018). However, there has been little consideration of the media’s role in generating the initial policy idea, nor of the strategies used by media actors to promote it to politicians at both state and federal level. Therefore, the case presents an opportunity to take a broader view of the potential role of media actors in the policy process, departing from the accepted understanding of media as a conduit for and framer of policy ideas to explore the journalists taking on the role of policy entrepreneur themselves.

Methods

This study utilises data collected by the lead author as part of a broader research project on the introduction and implementation of mandatory vaccination policies. The process consisted of iterative cataloguing and analysis of events, actors, policy and legislative documents, media coverage and third-party analysis, as well as semi-structured key informant interviews. Eight interviews of approximately one-hour duration each were conducted between April 2019 and July 2020. Six of these were conducted face-to-face at the participants’ workplaces or, in one case, a public park, and two via Zoom. The research was approved by UWA Human Ethics Committee (RA/4/20/5003 and RA/4/20/5833). Key informants were approached based on specific expert knowledge or roles in the introduction or implementation of Australia’s “No Jab” policies. Hence, they included political actors, technical experts, and bureaucrats who could explain and triangulate the emergence of issue on the policy agenda, as well as the media actor widely recognised for her role (Claire Harvey, the deputy editor we depict as a policy entrepreneur). The lead author emailed a brief enquiry to proposed informants, then sent Participant Information paperwork. Interviewees provided formal consent and were offered anonymity, but only two utilised it. Questions pertained to agenda-setting and policy design. Appendix 1 lists participants by role, organisation type and abbreviation. All interviews were transcribed in full and analysed thematically with NVivo 12 by the lead author, an experienced qualitative

researcher who applied Tracy's (2010) quality criteria. This included sincerity (self-reflexivity and transparency), credibility (thick description and triangulation), and rich rigour in the data collection and analysis, where both inductive and deductive coding methods were employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial inductive coding explored the emergence of "No Jab" mandates on the agenda. The importance of media entrepreneurship emerged out of this initial coding. Subsequent analysis employed theoretical coding based upon the attributes and skills in Table 1 and the strategies we sought to investigate (venue shopping, softening up, salami tactics and scaling up). This round of coding also sought to identify inductively any additional strategies for media policy entrepreneurship in this case. Coded data were discussed within the author team at several points during the analysis to incorporate feedback.

The nature of the study and core research questions required an interpretive approach to data analysis. The interpretive tradition in the social sciences has been widely theorised and methodologically elaborated, especially in political science and public policy research where several scholars have offered extended articulations of what an interpretive approach means in practice (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011; Turnbull, 2016; Yanow, 1996). Central to interpretive analysis is a focus on examining the *meaning-making processes* at work in policy materials and amongst policy actors. With close attention to the context-dependent ways that meanings relating policies are formed (i.e. *situated meanings*), an interpretive approach typically combines document and interview-based research to develop rich descriptive accounts of "policy worlds" (Savage, 2021; Shore & Wright, 2011; Yanow, 2007). Reflecting the broader interpretative tradition, we pay particular attention in this paper to historical forms of explanation (Bevir, 2010) to trace how policy actors understand the context-specific emergence and effects of policy events and their implications over time.

Findings

In May 2013, the *Daily Telegraph* and its sister *Sunday Telegraph* tabloid newspaper commenced a campaign called "No Jab, No Play". The campaign's introductory salvo declared the papers "are today launching a campaign to stop the rise in the number of children succumbing to preventable diseases because parents are failing to have them fully immunised". The article announced:

two specific aims: first, to demand the NSW government amend the Public Health Act 2010 to allow childcare centres to ban unvaccinated children if they so wish. Second, for the federal government to close a loophole enabling parents to claim they are "conscientious objectors" to avoid the rule that only vaccinated children are eligible for the 50 per cent childcare rebate.

The article quoted NSW Health Minister Jillian Skinner that "the government had no plans to toughen laws" (Hansen, 2013a). At the time, Australia's vaccination rates were high and rising, and non-vaccination was not perceived as a major problem (Attwell et al., 2020a). However, before the month was over, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported the Opposition Labor Party's plans to introduce a bill (Hansen & Ongaro, 2013), and Skinner's government passed its own legislation (Parliament of New South Wales, 2013). The amendment was implemented in 2014.

The *Telegraph* newspapers claimed early support from the Commonwealth arena, with then opposition leader Tony Abbott advocating for the State policy and supporting a review

of Commonwealth childcare assistance for non-vaccinating families (Hansen, 2013d). Abbott was elected Prime Minister but did not introduce any legislation. In 2015, the *Telegraph* newspapers stepped up their campaigning. Almost immediately, the Government announced it would implement their policy, using the same nomenclature (Government of Australia, 2015). The *Telegraph* claimed victory (Daily Telegraph, 2015) and the legislation was passed and implemented at the beginning of 2016 (Australian Government Department of Health, 2016).

During this period, the *Telegraph* papers were—and remain—a key part of Australia’s media ecology. NSW has two daily papers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* broadsheet, and the Murdoch-owned *Telegraph* tabloids. The latter speak to an “Aussie battler” identity of antielite, working families, particularly in Sydney’s populous (but less salubrious) western suburbs (Tiffen, 2015). The papers syndicate to similar publications in other States, and enjoy the flagship support of *The Australian*, one of the country’s two national broadsheets.

Sunday Telegraph deputy editor Claire Harvey played a key role as media policy entrepreneur in changing vaccination policy. Harvey instigated the “No Jab” campaign and lobbied her management to run with the issue. She mobilised a team of journalists including Jane Hansen, who lived in a region with many vaccine refusers. Harvey would later take responsibility for assigning 35 story ideas and publishing approximately 60 stories about the need for policy change in NSW alone (Sturgess, 2013). The ideas for policy change were Harvey’s own: she was not merely providing oxygen to others’ aspirations. She campaigned state and federal governments to change specific policies, well beyond setting the agenda for others to act. We explain Harvey’s attributes, roles, actions, strategies, and incentives to show how she achieved policy change at two different levels of government. In doing so, we illustrate that contemporary media actors can act as policy entrepreneurs.

Harvey’s entrepreneurship began with her recognition of a policy problem from her personal life. Viewing a day care centre while pregnant, she noticed “a list of about twenty-five names of children who were not vaccinated”. Upon querying the centre operator, she was told that “the law is that [we] can’t exclude [unvaccinated children]”, which in turn caused “a massive...administrative burden” for businesses when children contracted measles or whooping cough. Harvey’s motivations and sympathies initially lay with daycare providers as businesspeople; this perspective subsequently became overshadowed by a policy focus on recalcitrant parents. However, it demonstrated from the outset Harvey’s strategic networking skills in building potential alliances with supportive constituencies, as well as horizontal boundary crossing to link health policies with relieving administrative and risk burdens on businesses.

Upon identifying the issue, Harvey further investigated the problem, “Googling and reading the stories that had been published in the press about vaccination. And I found some postcode data...”. This data, a Commonwealth report called *Healthy Communities* (National Health Performance Authority, 2013), revealed granular information on postcodes with high levels of vaccine refusal that had never been made public before. It would prove to be dynamite for Harvey and the *Telegraph* in building a campaign for legislative change to address vaccine refusal.

To this point, perhaps the only slightly unusual feature of Harvey’s work was drawing from her own personal experience, yet it is common for journalists and newspapers to highlight emerging social and policy problems. Where Harvey differs is the degree of ambition that she demonstrated in seeking change. She did not just collect evidence regarding the problem, she investigated solutions: “[I] did some research and realised that there were some fairly simple policy levers that could be pulled to, I thought, increase the rate of vaccination”. Harvey relied upon her own expertise and understanding of the political system

to design a campaign with the best chance of success, echoing Kingdon's (1984) work on the multiple streams framework:

My view is that when you're asking a government to do something ... you have to specifically tell them exactly what you want them to do and which piece of legislation you want them to change. But my view is also that ... and this is very much the case with "no jab no play", that the goals should be small and easily achievable.

In developing incremental solutions to pitch to government, Harvey collaborated with other journalists in the News Limited network:

... at a Federal level ... in my conversations with our political editor Samantha Maiden in Canberra, I said to her ... "You can still get the vaccination bonus if you don't vaccinate", and she said, "Yeah, you just need to sign a form saying you're a conscientious objector". And I said, "Well, that's stupid. So why don't we add that to our campaign goals: if you don't immunise you can't get the immunisation bonus".

Through this networking, Harvey employed further entrepreneurial strategies, making shrewd use of venue shopping and vertical boundary crossing. She was now applying her policy aspiration—to make vaccine refusal more consequential for parents—at two different levels. She tailored legislative demands to two distinct but overlapping audiences whom she could soften up and play off against each other. For example, by gaining federal opposition leader Tony Abbott's public support for the NSW policy, she could push him and other federal politicians to act in their own domain. Once again, Harvey went well beyond facilitating the existing ideas of other actors or covering the problem to generate discussion of solutions. Rather, she paired problem and solution based on her own understandings of policy and strategy. As an editor of a high-circulation tabloid newspaper, Harvey had access to resources that most policy entrepreneurs do not: the ability to frame coverage of both problem and solution and to present these to a wide audience. However, she still relied on key skills associated with policy entrepreneurship. For example, Harvey had to network to attract support within her newspaper:

I talked to the Editor of the Sunday Telegraph, Mick Carroll. The Editor of the Daily Telegraph at that time was Paul Whittaker. [I] said I think we should campaign on this. So I designed a ... campaign, tasked Jane Hansen, who's one of our journalists, to write a lot of the stories, and then we started publishing them.

Harvey's social acuity was fundamental. Vaccine refusal was something done by "other" people in other places: "[Our readers'] children's health is put at risk by parents in wealthy parts of Sydney where rates are much lower, and in 'alternative lifestyle' areas like Byron Bay where rates are shockingly low" (Sturgess, 2013). Yet Harvey described encountering non-vaccination in her "working class suburb" of south-east Sydney, and was mindful of it extending into Western Sydney.

The decrease in vaccination rates was extending to places like Parramatta, which were gentrifying, which is our heartland, that's where our readers live. ... I felt that the readers were at risk, and that their children were at risk ... from people who, you know, think that they're smarter than doctors, basically...

Harvey identified a potentially scandalous culture war between the gentrifying families bringing vaccine refusal into affordable pockets of the city (subtext: *not* her readers) and her "heartland" media consumers who now faced elevated risk from vaccine preventable disease. She remained reflexively aware of what mattered to her readers (Frisch-Aviram

et al., 2018), which ultimately affirmed her credibility both to them and to the political class. “We ... copped a huge amount of vitriol and nastiness but also vast support from our readers. Our heartland is Western Sydney where the vast majority of parents vaccinate” (Sturgess, 2013).

Harvey used her platform not only to connect to a readership, but to place political pressure on government and other key actors, demonstrating persistence and venue shopping. She described failing to make inroads with NSW Health Minister Jillian Skinner, whom she said “would rather have fallen in a hole than talk to us”, and subsequently appealing to the NSW Premier at State Parliament. “[We spoke] to Barry O’Farrell and his Chief of Staff ... We were giving them advance notice that we were gonna publish, start the campaign. But they didn’t give us a commitment at that time”.

Harvey and her colleagues also connected with the Labor Opposition, astutely exploiting their mutual interests in creating a political issue for the Government. They struck gold with Andrew MacDonald “who, at the time, was the Labor Health spokesman, who’s a paediatrician, and he was actually one of the few people who was incredibly helpful”. Harvey later added, “in fact, he was virtually the only person who we could get to back us, at the start”. MacDonald’s willingness to help built on the fact that he was already a “good contact” of journalist Jane Hansen. Drawing on this relationship, Harvey and Hansen used MacDonald’s expertise to frame their call to action with precision: “[H]e helped Jane work out exactly which legislative instrument would need to be changed at a State level to allow childcare centres to turn away unvaccinated kids if they wanted to”.

Not only did Harvey and her colleagues pressure state and federal politicians, she also thought strategically and systemically about the policy ecology, considering interest groups, the bureaucratic environment, and potential barriers to change. For example, “the Australian Medical Association wasn’t interested” and “we couldn’t get any immunisation experts to back [the campaign]”. Harvey described the medical fraternity as “scared of the potential backlash”. Similarly, Harvey identified the Health Department as potentially “the greatest impediment to change”. She saw her newspaper’s role as “giving politicians cover” so that they could “get past the bureaucrats”, who, without external pressure, might resist change. A state health bureaucrat confirmed that “The *Daily Telegraph* were running their No Job, No Play campaign and had in fact elicited a commitment from the Premier to implement it” even though “we didn’t think that was the best approach, here in the Department”.

NSW Health Minister Skinner maintained that she was never opposed to the policy and had avoided going public only until she had the numbers in Cabinet. She reinforced the success of Harvey’s approach even as she sought to reframe the impetus as her own:

Whenever a newspaper runs a campaign like this, where you want to take action but there is some community opposition, it’s always very helpful to have a paper raising the profile. And it’s helpful to let the community know what you want to do, but also to let your Cabinet colleagues know that this is something that has got widespread support.

Harvey creatively adjusted frames and strategies during the campaign. “Vaccination had become a victim of its own success ... I felt that a lot of parents were unaware of how serious these diseases were”. To counter this attitude, her team found “parents of children who died or who had suffered vaccine preventable diseases, but also ... someone who had survived every single vaccine preventable disease from polio to measles to mumps...everything”. Harvey was engaged in “pairing”. Reports highlighted “how deadly these diseases are, that they do kill children”, relying on stories of children who

had fallen ill, and in some cases died, as evidence (Hansen & Ongaro, 2013; Hansen, 2013b, 2013c) and warning readers that a measles outbreak would kill a child “in the near future” if vaccination rates remained too low (Hansen, 2013a). Simultaneously, the newspaper was repeating the mantras of “No Jab, No Play” and “No Jab, No Pay” to pressure governments to “change the laws” (CH, pro-vaccination activist). As Harvey noted, “tabloid newspapers are a blunt instrument, we just publish what we want them to do and then we expect them to do it, and we keep pushing them until they do it”. The *Telegraph*’s coverage avoided “complex” policy matters such as exemptions, keeping to emotive and accessible reports which facilitated greater issue salience, constructing the problem to make it compatible with audience ideals and value judgments (Reardon, 2018), and continually “softening up” their audiences.

When the NSW state government implemented the policy and it began to deliver higher rates of vaccine coverage, *Telegraph* reporting continually emphasised the campaign’s role in the policy change (Hansen, 2014a, 2014b), a framing that could generate a sense of efficacy and positive psychological reward for readers and other policy actors involved (van Zomeren, 2013). This communication approach was strategically important, helping to maintain momentum as Harvey pursued Federal policy change following success at the state level.

... After the initial sort of tranche to the campaign ... Skinner and O’Farrell ... did what we wanted pretty quickly, and then we very much turned our focus to ... the Federal thing, which is what we still wanted.

Harvey continued to boundary cross and venue shop, drawing upon her networks and contacts in the Federal arena to “scale up” the success of the NSW campaign. She spoke.

to staff of the Health Minister at the time, who I think was Tanya Plibersek. I spoke to [opposition leader] Tony Abbott’s staff, and ... I can’t remember who was Prime Minister at the time, but I think I spoke to Julia Gillard’s staff.

Harvey’s federal intervention proved slower and more difficult compared to NSW. Yet her early steps to venue shop, soften up, and scale up through vertical boundary crossing ultimately proved fruitful, as did her acuity, determination, and patience. An important element of the *Telegraph*’s ultimate success was the ability to exploit ongoing events. With a keen sense of timing, Harvey remobilised the frames and demands of the previous two years when a Perth infant died from whooping cough in 2015.

[E]ighteen months later, Tony Abbott... still hadn’t done anything. And then Riley Hughes died of whooping cough. ... I wrote a column saying, you know, this is just disgraceful, nothing has happened, why not?! ... It was the publication of that column on the Sunday and, um, I think we splashed again with a vaccination story ... that then mobilized the Federal government to do what we asked for.

Harvey’s column was her infamous “Babykillers” piece declaring that antivaccinationists were responsible for infant deaths (Harvey, 2015a). Here, Harvey was using her platform and skills to construct vaccine refusing parents as socially deviant and a deserving target of punitive policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). She also castigated Abbott for not enacting “No Jab, No Pay”. The same day, the *Telegraph* published their Galaxy poll stating that 86% of Australian supported compulsory vaccination. The newspaper thus pushed multiple frames at once: describing tragedy, identifying a villainous policy target, casting blame for inaction, and demonstrating overwhelming public support.

There were some very strongly worded journalism at the time admonishing anti-vaxxers for their stance. And look I don't think that's by chance. I think that ties in with their campaign to push for "No jab no pay" policy, a hundred percent. (CH, pro-vaccination advocate and mother of Riley Hughes).

The emergent context was fertile ground for entrepreneurial strategies of issue-linking and rhetorical persuasion (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018), substantively bolstering the need for policy change. Harvey again demonstrated her social acuity by keeping her gut response to the Galaxy poll out of the spotlight. She was "stunned [by the result] because I don't support compulsory vaccination". regarding the prospect as "kind of horrifying". However, with 86% of the readership disagreeing with her, Harvey kept her thoughts to herself, and the *Sunday Telegraph's* coverage focused instead on heart-wrenching comments of Riley Hughes' father about the "anguish" his baby son experienced and his feelings of "failure" in being unable to prevent it. With the federal legislation following shortly afterwards, Harvey and her paper were widely recognised as the source of the policy change. As a source close to the Department explained:

I don't think somebody looked at the data one day and said, "Oh, my God, we better have ... some new policy..." The process was: there was a media campaign. The minister responded to the media, and then then the bureaucrats had to work out a policy to, kind of, make it meaningful (AR).

Discussion and conclusions

Our case study analyses how a media actor played a key role as a mandatory vaccination policy entrepreneur in the state of NSW, and then federally, cascading similar policies in almost every state. We have sought to broaden understandings of media actors in the policy process to recognise that journalists and editors can engage in policy entrepreneurship. We now reflect on three key considerations arising from the case, and the implications that follow. First, we ask what enabled Harvey to go beyond *conduit* to become *contributor* to policy change, how she demonstrated the strategies employed by successful policy entrepreneurs in existing literature, and identify novel strategies. Second, we ask whether this could this happen again. Third, we consider additional implications of this study for the broader literature.

From conduit to contributor

Some key factors enabled Harvey to move beyond conduit to become a direct contributor to Australia's vaccination policy. First, her experience resonated with her deep understanding of her readers' values and concerns. What rankled Harvey when she spoke to childcare operators would also strike a chord with her readership, activating key themes of (un)fairness, privilege, and danger. Harvey could amplify these themes through her media reach to socially construct vaccine refusing parents as deviants who deserved to be the targets of punitive policies (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Harvey then used her professional networks, direct reports, and extensive reach to expose the problem and pair it with her solution(s) via an inspired mix of evidence and storytelling. She knew—via these networks and her professional experience—that she needed to call for changes to specific policy instruments at each level of government in Australia's federal system. Knowledge was provided in NSW

through the expertise of the opposition Health spokesperson, who had his own motivations to help.

Our case indicates that multi-level governance provides key opportunities for media actors to perform as policy entrepreneurs, particularly when mastheads are syndicated across states and media entrepreneurs can mobilise national broadsheets. The collaboration between Harvey and Maiden is pertinent. Their early conversation led Harvey to expand her scope from NSW to the entire country. Later, in 2015, Maiden's reporting of a child-care policy review helped to reignite Harvey's issue. Harvey astutely exploited opportunities of multi-level governance for venue shopping, softening up and scaling up. She played the long game federally, demonstrating Boasson and Wettstad's (2014) idea of engaging in "carpe diem" entrepreneurship (taking advantage of favourable contexts) at one level, and "tortoise" entrepreneurship (paving the way to create the policy window) at another.

Thus far, we have described Harvey utilising the expected strategies of policy entrepreneurs. However, we have also indicated that media policy entrepreneurs may be able to draw upon particular skills and attributes, as well as contextual features of their occupation, that could offer them additional opportunities and strategies for entrepreneurship. In this case, the key resource was Harvey's ability to pitch her policy idea directly to her readership. Of course, mobilisation of public opinion is often recognised as important in successful entrepreneurship (Burstein, 2003; Cairney, 2018). However, classic policy entrepreneurship is understood to involve nurturing an idea until a problem or opportunity emerges. Harvey's problem was not on anybody else's agenda, even as vaccine hesitancy was an emergent background issue in technical circles. Policy experts in NSW opposed her solution, and the state government was reticent. With support from strategic allies (such as the State Opposition), Harvey bypassed potential "blockers" by going directly to the public—and as an editor, she was able to shape that coverage in ways that no other policy actor could. Furthermore, she intuitively understood that winning public support could capture government attention.

Our case therefore adds to the literature on how scaling up can operate and how "success" can motivate policymakers in other jurisdictions. Mintrom (2019) depicts scaling up as relying on the success of the policy change in one institution to leverage similar changes elsewhere. Harvey's scaling up from NSW to the federal arena (and then subsequently to other states) relied upon her demonstrating to political actors across the country—via the NSW case in the first instance—that the feasibility of *public support* (rather than *technical policy success*) could drive vaccination policy change. Specifically, the success of the NSW policy in increasing vaccination rates—its technical outcomes—mattered less than the fact that the public would back and even demand such policies.

The role of context and the possibilities of media policy entrepreneurship

While Claire Harvey undoubtedly engaged in policy entrepreneurship, there is a need to consider whether this is an exceptional case, enabled by very specific circumstances, or whether it points to a broader (and under-recognised) capacity for media policy entrepreneurship. In our view, the "No Jab" case suggests that while media policy entrepreneurship is likely an understudied phenomenon, it is likely to be limited to specific circumstances.

The first question is whether Harvey possessed unique attributes, skills, or experiences. Certainly, Harvey drew on her status as a senior leader at her newspaper. Her abilities to drive and shape coverage would not be available to a typical journalist working alone. However, a similarly qualified and positioned person might achieve what Harvey did.

Harvey's understanding of her own capacities and responsibilities also reflect the sort of entrepreneurship that Deuze and Witschge (2018) argue is increasingly prevalent amongst contemporary journalists, who are simultaneously empowered to take more control over narratives, while being made more responsible for their success. At the same time, we do not argue that journalistic policy entrepreneurship is likely to be as commonplace as it is for academic experts or members of interest groups. As we describe in the case, it took quite specific personal engagement with government policy for Harvey to begin to think about policy solutions—it was not part of her everyday practice.

The second consideration is the extent to which the specific policy context made media policy entrepreneurship more likely. The childhood vaccination case may be peculiar, with further peculiarities arising from the Australian setting at the time. Childhood vaccination enjoys extremely high public support in Australia, and this has largely translated into support for mandates. Vaccine mandates are less supported in cognate jurisdictions (for a review, see Smith et al., 2019). At the time of these “No Jab” policy changes, Australian vaccine refusers were a numerically small group who attracted little political support. Governments had not seen fit to pursue more hard-line policies against them, even though the widespread support for immunisation might have offered an easy chance to attain public approval. Government reticence likely derived from technical and academic experts not supporting punishing vaccine refusers, and the perception that refusal was not a significant problem. Indeed, existing childhood vaccine mandates in place prior to Harvey's intervention (which enabled formal opt-outs for refusers) garnered high compliance from the rest of the population (McCoy, 2019). However, support for vaccination can convert to support for mandates amongst political actors once they emerge on the policy agenda (Attwell & Navin, 2022).

So, the political circumstances were perhaps ripe for vaccine mandates. But this is hardly the same as saying it was *fait accompli*. Policy entrepreneurship of all kinds is context dependent. One of the key contributions of Kingdon's foundational work is to highlight that successful entrepreneurship is largely about the skilful navigation of circumstances and opportunities that are difficult to predict or control. Harvey was in a position to identify and exploit the gap between public and expert opinion, but doing so took determination and careful strategy, as the case study describes.

Still, the strategies that were successful for Harvey during the “No Jab” period may not be so easily used for issues that have already attracted political attention and controversy. One way of demonstrating this is to compare to debates over vaccine mandates during the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

In the “No Jab” case, once media coverage drew public attention to the emerging threat of vaccine refusal, the proposal gave politicians from both sides of politics a chance to be viewed as cracking down on a group that was now widely perceived as deviant: the NSW Labor opposition could wedge the State Government; the State's Health Minister credited the newspaper with allowing her to persuade colleagues; and there was ultimately bipartisan support at a federal level. There were strong ethics-based arguments from both sides of politics in support of “No Jab” policies (Attwell & Navin, 2022). While relevant scientific experts and bureaucrats did not support “No Jab” policies, these voices remained muted either through bureaucratic professional norms or because the dominant Murdoch media outlets did not amplify dissent.

Such alignment of problem, policy and politics was far more difficult in the pandemic context. Immunisation has never been entirely uncontroversial, but the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines saw the hyper-politicisation of the issue, and widespread disagreement over the possible application of tools such as vaccine mandates. In Australia, and elsewhere,

technical experts and hence media actors voiced a range of perspectives on COVID-19 vaccine mandates. In some countries, especially the USA, political debates over mandates became highly partisan (Fernandes et al., 2021; Funk et al., 2023). In such a context, it would likely not have been possible for a journalist like Harvey to shape coverage and policy adoption in such a direct way.

Additional implications for policy entrepreneurship and beyond

Notwithstanding the limitations discussed in the previous section, the identification of media policy entrepreneurship has important implications for existing policy entrepreneurship literature and beyond.

First, the case analysis highlights the varied forms of “boundary-spanning” and hybrid policy work that may contribute to successful policy entrepreneurship. Boundary spanning is often associated with specific organisations—like think tanks and policy research institutes—at the intersection of multiple professions (Medvetz, 2015), or with “wicked” policy problems that cross organisational jurisdictions (Williams, 2002). Established boundary spanners like think tanks tend to occupy a trusted insider status within policy networks, acting as hubs for policy actors and advocates for certain ideas within cross-professional networks (Tchilingirian, 2021). At an individual level, boundary spanners are described as instinctively being able to “sense the boundaries that need to be spanned, and avail themselves of the social and communicative tools to do the actual spanning” (Leeuw et al., 2018, p. 542).

Existing literature recognises the link between boundary-spanning action, such as cross-sectoral coalition building, and policy entrepreneurship (Casas et al., 2022; Faling et al., 2019). However, the journalist is not the traditional policy entrepreneur, or even boundary-spanning policy actor. Claire Harvey was able to both use the resources and practices of a profession usually seen as a conduit for other policy actors, while simultaneously transgressing traditional boundaries, playing multiple roles, and appealing to actors and audiences from multiple other professions and jurisdictions. This research hence contributes to an emerging recognition of non-traditional policy entrepreneurs—from street-level bureaucrats (Lavee & Cohen, 2019) to private citizens, such as parents (Callaghan & Sylvester, 2021)—who bring distinct resources and strategies to bear on the policy process and can navigate organisational and jurisdictional boundaries in unexpected ways.

Finally, our case has some implications for public health, communication studies, and vaccination social science. Global discourse in the public health milieu has tended to focus on media actors as *antivaccine* facilitators; previous work has recounted how media coverage inflamed local vaccination scares in France and Italy, eventually contributing to more restrictive childhood vaccine mandates (Attwell et al., 2021; Attwell et al., 2020b). The tide is turning, however. Recent scholarship focuses on how the media shapes public perspectives on vaccine refusal, which can prompt support for more punitive policy responses (Capurro et al., 2018; Court et al., 2021; Greenberg et al., 2019; Stephenson et al., 2018). California media actors in 2015 supported more restrictive childhood vaccine mandates without taking on Harvey’s entrepreneurial role (Attwell & Hannah, 2022). Our article demonstrates that media actors can go well beyond merely amplifying, giving voice to, or popularising the ideas of pro-vaccine activism, and successfully embrace the role of entrepreneur, driving significant policy change.

Appendix 1: Interviewees, jurisdiction of concern, and role

Interviewee	Jurisdiction of concern	Role
A.I. 1	Federal	Public Servant
Peter MacIntyre	Federal	Former Director, National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance
Catherine Hughes	Federal	Director, Immunisation Foundation of Australia and Light For Riley campaign
Claire Harvey	New South Wales	Deputy Editor and Journalist, <i>Sunday Telegraph</i>
John Robertson	New South Wales	Former NSW Opposition Leader
Jillian Skinner	New South Wales	Former NSW Health Minister
Michael Moore	Federal	Former CEO, Public Health Association of Australia
Senior Bureaucrat	New South Wales	NSW Health
Academic Researcher	all	Obscured for anonymity

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Declarations

Ethics approval Ethics approval was given by UWA Human Ethics Committee, permits RA/4/20/5003 and RA/4/20/5833.

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