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Policy News in the Digital Age: An Examination of Australian Election Reporting

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Submitted in total fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

April 2018

School of Social and Political Sciences

Faculty of Arts

The University of Melbourne

Abstract

This thesis examines news coverage of policy issues in Australian federal election campaigns from 2001 to 2013. Focusing on three policy domains (health, education and taxation), it evaluates news coverage primarily through a quantitative content analysis of four key elements: media attention to policy issues, the amount of policy information provided, the sources quoted, and the frames and narratives adopted in these reports. In doing so, this study examines 1270 newspaper articles, 128 television news stories and 86 online news reports. Additionally, it analyses how media coverage intersects with political communication through a quantitative content analysis and qualitative language analysis of 10 campaign launch speeches. This study provides an original contribution by bridging a major gap in the Australian scholarship. It investigates news coverage of policy issues and campaign launch speeches over a period of immense technological, political and economic change in Australian political communication.

Australia's traditional print and broadcast media organisations are facing significant threats to their businesses models in the twenty-first century. A clear tension exists for Australia's news organisations as they attempt to balance their commercial challenges with their democratic obligations to inform the public sphere. To examine this empirical problem, this thesis addressed the following question*: What, if anything, has happened to traditional news media reporting of policy issues during Australian federal elections in the twenty-first century (2001-2013)?*

This study finds an overall decline in the quality of policy reporting provided by the press during election campaigns in the twenty-first century. The evidence suggests that policy reporting provided in later election cycles was limited in its capacity to facilitate a contest of diverse ideas and inform voters about policy matters. News coverage in later campaigns contained less policy information, adopted more game and strategic frames, and quoted fewer sources than earlier election cycles. However, this decline in the quality of policy reporting cannot be blamed entirely on Australian journalists. This study concludes that a combination of factors including financial pressures experienced by media outlets and changes in political campaigning adversely impacted on policy reporting in the 2000s.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) except where indicated in the Preface,
II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used, and
III. this thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signature: Date: 3/4/2018

Acknowledgements

There are several people I want to thank for their time and assistance. I wish to acknowledge the support of my principal supervisor, Professor Sally Young. I want to sincerely thank Sally for her guidance and supervision throughout my candidature. Thank you to my associate supervisor, Dr Aaron Martin, for the feedback, comments, and professional opportunities he provided. Also, thank you to my panel chair, Professor Adrian Little, for the encouragement he offered.

In addition, I want to offer a very heartfelt thank you to Dr Andrea Carson for her advice, suggestions and comments. Special thanks to Dr Scott Wright and Dr Stephanie Brookes for responding to my queries in the very early stages of this project. Also, a special thank you to the academic staff in the School of Social and Political Sciences (SSPS) for their time and advice, especially Dr Adam Hannah. In addition, I wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by the wonderful professional staff in the SSPS office.

On a formal note, I am required to acknowledge that this research was made possible because of the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship that funded my place at the University of Melbourne.

Finally, thank you to Jeremiah Brown, Bibiana Huggins, Jessica Megarry, and the many other PhD candidates in our School for your support and friendship.

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Introduction

On 18 June 2012, the newsrooms and printing plants of Fairfax Media fell silent as employees learnt that 1,900 jobs would be axed (Norrie, 2012a). In an email to employees, Jack Matthews, CEO of Fairfax's Metro Division, announced that 300 positions would be lost from the Division's editorial workforce (Norrie, 2012a). In addition to these job losses, Fairfax announced that its newsrooms would converge, more editorial content would be shared across its mastheads, and the company would adopt a "digital first" publishing model prioritising digital news content (Lannin & Hobday, 2012; Norrie, 2012a). While the 2012 restructures were not unprecedented, the scale of the redundancies was exceptional. The redundancies were also symptomatic of a broader problem in Australia's media landscape, and prompted further debate about the long-term sustainability of media business models in the digital age.

Traditional media organisations are facing an unprecedented economic crisis. The narrative of "decline and degradation" is a familiar story to media commentators, scholars, and journalists (see Coleman et al., 2016, pp. 1-2). In many western democracies, newspaper circulation has fallen, readership and viewership patterns have changed, audiences have fragmented across multiple platforms, newspapers have disappeared, and media ownership has become more concentrated (Buchanan, 2013; Carson, 2014, pp. 726-729; B. Franklin, 2008; Simons, 2012). In Australia, the business models of print and broadcast media organisations (henceforth referred to as "traditional news media") are under immense financial pressure.

Newspaper circulation has fallen dramatically in many English-speaking democracies, but Australian media organisations are particularly poor performers (Tiffen & Gittins, 2009, pp. 180-181). Australian newspapers' paid circulation figures per capita have declined significantly (Carson, 2014, pp. 728-730; Gawenda, 2012, pp. 2-4; Simons, 2012, pp. 10-14; Tiffen & Gittins, 2009, pp. 180-181; Young, 2010, p. 612). Moreover, the audience for news programs on Australia's major television network plummeted in the 2000s (Young, 2009). Many Australians are simply spending less time reading or watching news, and are buying fewer news products (Simons, 2007, p. 26; Young, 2009, p. 149).

The “rivers of gold”—advertising revenues— that once funded journalism have also evaporated for Australia’s media organisations (Gawenda, 2012, p. 2). In 2005, there were “measurable” shifts in advertising revenues from traditional to digital media (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 5). Indeed, Eric Beecher (2005, p. 8) foreshadowed this decline suggesting that falling revenues were undermining the ability of Australia’s traditional media to produce quality journalism. This is particularly problematic for Australia’s “quality” broadsheets because they rely so heavily on classified advertising to support their business models (Young, 2010, p. 612). These problems were further compounded by increased competition from new digital platforms (Young, 2011, pp. 218-220). Online platforms have increased competition for advertising revenues, and driven down the unit price classified and display advertising (Young, 2010, pp. 610-624). The business model that has funded Australia’s traditional media organisations for nearly two centuries is clearly broken (Simons, 2012, pp. 7-10).

To mitigate their losses, Australia’s news organisations have restructured their newsrooms. According to the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) 2008 report, *Life in the Click Stream: The Future of Journalism,* between 2001 and 2008 the number of full-time journalist in news organisations fell from 8500 to 7500 positions (Este et al., 2008, p. 9). The cutbacks continued in 2015 and 2016, with Fairfax announcing that it was implementing an editorial restructure that would result in a loss of 70 sub-editing positions across all its mastheads (Carson, 2016). Fairfax was not the only news organisation to reduce the number of full-time editorial staff. In 2016 and 2017, News Corp Australia announced more redundancies across its newsrooms, with $A40 million in cuts expected (Norrie, 2012b; Canning, 2016; M. Ward, 2017). Broadcast newsrooms were not immune from cost-cutting measures. Both public and commercial broadcasters have announced significant redundancies and implemented a range of cost-cutting measures, with the public broadcaster, the ABC, making 400 staff redundant following the 2014 federal budget cuts (Carson, 2016).

Summary of the Empirical Problem, Research Question and Aims

To many media scholars and commentators, the declines in advertising, falls in circulation/viewership, downsizing, and restructuring signify a major "crisis" in Australian journalism (see Simons, 2012; Young, 2010, p. 612). It is under these conditions that print and broadcast news platforms are expected to provide rolling political and election news coverage that informs public debate. However, if newsrooms continue to shrink and revenue streams continue to disappear, then this may severely undermine the capacity of traditional media to report news and provide the detailed policy news stories that are vital during an election campaign. Herein lies one of the principal challenges for the media and Australian democracy in the twenty-first century.

With so many announcements, press releases, policy promises, and events taking place during an election, much of what happens in a campaign is largely "beyond our immediate experience" (Young, 2011, p. 171). Australian citizens rely heavily on traditional media platforms for political information, especially in an election (Young, 2011, p. 171). The media are important actor in an election campaign because they provide the political material that voters might use to make their voting choices (Young, 2011, p. 3). With most voters having little direct contact with candidates during an election, much of the policy information voters received is filtered through these media platforms (Young, 2011, p. 3-4). It is this type of hard political and policy news that forms "the essential food supply of democracy" (A. S. Jones, 2009, p. 3).

While not all news of informative or "democratic value" necessarily needs to be policy-focused (see Cushion, 2012), policy-focused coverage is important because voters may use this news to guide their voting choices. Process-focused coverage can still provide informative and substantive political coverage (see Matthews, Pickup, & Cutler, 2012, pp. 281-282). But it is news coverage of policies (referred to here as policy news or policy reporting) that provides voters with the necessary material to hold their political representatives to account, and furnishes citizens with the necessary policy information to discharge their democratic obligations at the ballot box (see McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). However, as outlined earlier, traditional media outlets are clearly facing some

unprecedented economic challenges to their business models in the digital age. A clear tension exists for news outlets as they attempt to balance the many competing commercial problems with their democratic expectations to provide news that informs voters during an election.

Traditional media organisations have faced some immense commercial upheaval in the 2000s, and this may be severely hindering their ability to provide "quality" news, political information, and detailed policy stories that are vital for informed public debate and, by extension, Australian democracy. This study aims to investigate this important empirical problem through the following research question:

> **Central Research Question**: *What, if anything, has happened to traditional news media reporting of policy issues during Australian federal elections in the twenty-first century (2001-2013)?*

Detailed policy news stories are crucial to the facilitation of political discourse in an election campaign. Election campaigns should ideally be focused on the policy platforms, choices, and promises, with the media communicating this policy information from politicians to voters (Young, 2011, pp. 3-4). Voters are increasingly making their voting decisions based on issues rather than any sense of party loyalty (for example Hellwig, 2014; McAllister, 2011, pp. 50-55). Communicating the policy promises and proposals that politicians make during an election is important because citizens use these platforms to guide their voting choices (Håkansson & Naurin, 2014, pp. 1-2; Naurin, 2011, p. 30; Schedler, 1998, pp. 191-195). Yet, the professionalisation of politics has transformed the way that policy information is communicated (Mills, 1986; 2014, pp. 18-19).

Political campaigning has changed over the twenty-first century. Broad communication strategies have been replaced by carefully targeted strategies to win important undecided voters (Mills, 2014, pp. 19, 256-257). Politicians are also employing more small target strategies in their campaigns (Johnson, Wanna, & Lee, 2015a, p. 9). As a result, policy information is also more tightly controlled (see B. Franklin, 2004; Manning, 2001). Given these developments in political campaigning, it is important

that any study of political news in the 2000s also considers how politicians engage in policy debates, how they communicate policy information, and how their communications affect the quality of news coverage and informed political discourse in the public sphere.

Traditional media outlets are integral to the facilitation of informed debate in the public sphere. According to Jürgen Habermas (1974, p. 49), the media are vital to democracy because they provide a space where "something approaching public opinion can be formed." The media, specifically the press, are the "public sphere's preeminent institution" (Habermas, 1989, p. 181). They provide a link between the state and society, a platform for political discourse, an accountability mechanism in democracy, and a space for critical debate to occur that exists outside state control (Habermas, 1989, pp. 70-73; Young, 2011, p. 256). According to this "ideal" view, the media should "inform citizens" through their reporting, educate them on the facts, offer a platform for political debate, give "publicity to governmental and political institutions", and permit "the advocacy of political viewpoints" that allows for "dissenting views" to be heard (Habermas, 1989; McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). The professional codes of Australian journalism have also acknowledged that journalists hold this important democratic responsibility to provide news that "informs citizens and animate[s] democracy" (see Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b; Young, 2011, p. 2-5). In this sense, "quality" news is coverage that meets these liberal democratic public sphere ideals. It is reporting that has "democratic value" that can inform the public's understanding about issues and, in so doing, "empower them as citizens in a democracy" (Cushion, 2012, p. 2). But it is the quality of political and election reporting that is the subject of intense criticism in the election and journalism scholarship.

The quality of political news coverage is debated extensively in academic and popular discourse. Political journalism is heavily criticised for being far too focused on strategy, the horserace, political game, and contest narratives (Patterson, 1993, pp. 91-93; Thussu, 2007; Young, 2011, pp. 6-20). Critics argue that reporting lacks depth and substance, "dumbs down" policy debates by focusing on trivial issues, and thereby fails to provide substantive discussion (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, pp. 210-211, 224-226; Graber, 2012; Thussu, 2007, pp. 10-12; Trimble & Sampert, 2004; Williams, 2014, p.

110). Political journalism is said to only focus on the most "visible institutional figures" and journalists' commentaries instead of issues (Neveu, 2002, pp. 33-34). They allege that political journalism presents only shallow coverage of politics to pursue commercial profits (Williams, 2014, p. 110). However, as demonstrated in subsequent chapters, few Australian studies have examined these criticisms in relation to the reporting of policy issues in Australian elections.

There is a clear gap in this literature that this thesis fills. Existing Australian research focuses on election reporting more broadly rather than specifically focusing on policy coverage. There is a dearth of Australian studies examining the reporting of policy issues during the first five elections campaigns of the twenty-first century. Therefore, a further empirical study of Australian election reporting and policy news coverage is clearly warranted.

Aims and Argument in Brief

This study will analyse news coverage of policy issues from five election cycles between 2001 and 2013. This thesis aims to examine whether the reporting of policy issues in Australian election campaigns changed during this period of commercial disruption in the media landscape. In doing so, it fills an important empirical gap in the existing journalism and election scholarship (see chapters 1 and 2). The period of 2001 to 2013 was one of immense change in Australian political communication, with important innovations in election campaigning (see chapter 1). Thus, this thesis also aims to examine how changes political communication intersects with changes in policy reporting over the twenty-first century.

To achieve these aims, this study employs a quantitative content analysis and qualitative language analysis of 1270 newspaper articles, 128 television clips, 86 online news items (from the online news sites of traditional media organisations), and 10 campaign launch speeches. It samples this material from the five federal election campaigns between 2001 and 2013. As explained in the next section, this study primarily uses newspaper material to answer the research question, with the other data providing a supplement to this analysis. This study also examines the policy speeches (also known as campaign launch speeches) across the 2000s. Because policy speeches are a regular feature in

each Australian election campaign, they provide a consistent sampling frame to evaluate policy news coverage longitudinally.

This thesis will contend that there was an overall decline in the quality of policy reporting provided by the press during election campaigns in the twenty-first century. As will be shown, newspaper coverage from later campaigns reported less policy information, devoted less space to policy reporting, and quoted fewer sources than reporting from earlier periods. Moreover, it will be demonstrated that the quality of policy reporting differs across print and broadcast media, with voters better served by elite media platforms than popular news outlets. Finally, this study will show that the 2007 election represented a clear turning point for Australian policy journalism. This thesis will contend that the policy news reported in latter election cycles was limited in its capacity to inform voters about policy issues. Finally, this study concludes that a combination of factors including commercial pressures experienced by media outlets and changes in political campaigning adversely impacted on policy reporting in the 2000s.

Justification of Scope

Australia

The scope of my study is limited to the *Australian* media. There is a wealth of literature examining election coverage in other western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, (see Andersen, 2000; Benoit, Compton, & Phillips, 2013; Cross, 2010; Matthews, Pickup, & Cutler, 2012; Michailidou, 2012; Trimble & Sampert, 2004; Stoddart, Haluza-DeLay, & Tindall, 2016). However, Australia is clearly an under-researched field of inquiry, particularly when it comes to the study of policy-orientated news content. While several studies have examined election news coverage (Denemark, Ward, & Bean, 2007; Goot, 2008; Young, 2011), few studies have specifically examined how the media report policy in Australian elections (for example Hollander, 2006). There appears to be no studies examining the news coverage of policy issues over several Australian election cycles, media platforms, and policy domains. Therefore, my thesis makes an original contribution to the political

communications scholarship by filling a major gap within the existing Australian literature.

Australia also provides an interesting case because of its unique voting system. Unlike other western democracies, voting in Australia is compulsory. The use of compulsory voting in Australia means that election campaigns are highly important events because all eligible citizens are presumed to vote (Tiffen, 2008; Young, 2011, pp. 3-4, 27-37). The fact that there is less onus on mobilising voters should, theoretically, provide more opportunity for the media and politicians to discuss policy issues (see McAllister, 2011, p. 4). Furthermore, Australia is unique because it has relatively short election campaigns compared with other western democracies (see Stevenson & Vavreck, 2000; Tiffen, 2008, p. 113), with 34 days being the average length of the campaigns studied.[1] Finally, the period of 2001 to 2013 was a distinctive time in Australia politics because of the revolving door of political leadership that has seen five Prime Ministers in the less than ten years (2007 to 2016), and the rise of micro and minor parties in Australian elections (Australian Electoral Commission, 2010, 2013). Hence, Australia is clearly an interesting case to examine because of the recent turmoil and leadership issues in Australian politics.

Traditional Media, Print Media, and Policy Speeches

This study will focus on traditional news media. In this thesis, traditional news media includes newspapers, television news programs, and, the websites of traditional news organisations, including the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s online news site (for discussion see chapter 3). Newspapers are the primary dataset used in this research, with television material a secondary source. Online news articles supplement this analysis.

The decision to limit the analysis to print, television, and online news sites from traditional news organisations was informed by what other research on election communication and election audiences has discerned about their significance in the public sphere (see McAllister & Cameron, 2014; Young, 2011). While audiences are

[1] The recent 2016 election campaign was an exception to this. The formal 2016 campaign lasted eight weeks.

slowly migrating to online platforms for election news (Cushion, 2012, p. 112), large Australian surveys show that traditional news sources, primarily print and television, are amongst the most relied upon source of election news for most Australians (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 72-76). Given traditional news platforms have a wide audience reach during elections, it is important that we understand how these platforms communicate policy information.

This thesis primarily focused on newspaper reporting (see chapter 2 and 3).[2] Newspapers are an important agenda-setters in the public sphere. According to Maxwell McCombs (2014, p. 129), newspapers fill a vital function in the media ecology by shaping the issues that other news organisations report. Other Australian studies have also derived similar conclusion. For example, Rodney Tiffen (2010b) has shown that "while each of the media plays a distinctive role in the total mix of news that becomes public, television and radio (and internet blogs), all feed off the information made available by the press" (Tiffen, 2010b, p. 94). This is especially the case in an election campaign. As Young (2011, p. 146) notes, newspapers are influential in the media landscape, they inject stories into the news cycle that are adopted by other platforms, and tend to be "the first major influence on a journalist's day." Other scholars have also made similar claims, with research showing that many television policy-orientated news stories emanated from newspaper coverage (Cushion, Kilby, Thomas, Morani, & Sambrook, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, understanding how newspapers report policy issues is important because this can have broader implications for the quality of news coverage on other media. Moreover, newspapers have experienced significant economic upheaval arguably more so than any other news platform. Therefore, this thesis investigates how newspapers have balanced the commercial turmoil in the media landscape with their democratic role to inform the public sphere.

While this study is primarily an examination of press reporting, it also examines broadcast coverage a secondary source of data (see chapter 6). As noted in chapter 1, television is the primary source of election news for many Australians (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 72-76). It is a widely consulted news platform, with election events

[2] Unless otherwise stated, the findings presented in the results chapters 4, 5, and 7 are about newspaper coverage. Chapter 6 compares policy reporting across different media.

largely designed for televsion coverage (see Brookes, 2017; Young, 2011). Exisitng election news research has tended to focus on one medium (for example Denemark et al., 2007; Goot, 2008). This study examines multiple platforms to determine the differences in policy reporting across media.

This research is focused on print and broadcast media, but online news articles provide a small supplement to this dataset. Online news is often informed by the information and news made available by the traditional media (Oates, 2008, p. 158). As Sally Young (2011, pp. 223-225) found, most blogs and online news sites generally have the same news audience, many topics these websites discuss are the same, and "most feed off reporting from traditional news media." Moreover, previous online scholarship has shown that traditional news organisations often replicate the content of their print editions in the online sphere (see Hoffman, 2006; Oates, 2008). This is changing as news organisations include more interactive and video content in their online news coverage, especially in their election news (see Young, 2011, pp .203-223). Yet, as Stephen Cushion (2012, pp. 112-115) observed, when online election coverage was compared with "media coverage more generally," the analysis showed that the "nature of campaign reporting" on all platforms was "broadly similar" in terms of their news agendas. The internet has heralded an expansion in online news platforms and social media has changed the way audience access content, but much of this online content is still informed, shaped, and driven by what the traditional media report (Young, 2011, pp. 223-228). As a result, we must understand the way policy issues are reported by the traditional media, especially print media, because of their importance in the Australian media landscape.

This study *does not* measure the agenda setting effects of traditional news coverage upon public opinion. It could have explored agenda setting effects by analysing the correlation between the public and the media agenda (Dowding & Martin, 2017; McCombs, 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Yet, agenda-setting research is often more concerned with media influence and news audiences rather than the *content* of news coverage per se. Additionally, it could have examined social media platforms. There is an abundance of literature examining the prevalence of the internet and social media in Australian election campaigns (for example see Chen, 2013; Chen & Walsh, 2010;

Macnamara, 2012; Macnamara & Kenning, 2011; Macnamara, Sakinofsky, & Beattie, 2012). However, examining social media would have resulted in a very different research project that focused on the *audiences* of political news rather than its major reporters. Instead, the focus here is on the *content of policy news* because this thesis concerned with how the *traditional media report* policy issues during elections.

The scope was also restricted to media coverage of tax, health and education policy issues (see chapter 1 and 3). As will be shown in the next chapter, tax, health and education issues were amongst the most salient for Australian voters in the campaigns examined (McAllister & Cameron, 2014). Given their high degree of salience amongst voters, these issues may also be highly salient issues to the Australian media and thus may receive ample coverage in these elections. Because of their salience to voters, the way the media cover these issues is important as it may influence their decisions at the ballot box.

In addition to an examination of media coverage, this study also analyses the campaign launch speeches of the two major political parties. Australian election campaigns have several minor and micro parties contesting seats in the upper and lower houses of the Australian Parliament; however, there are only two dominant major political parties in Australia who have formed government during the 2000s: the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal Party (who form a coalition with the National Party in government). Major parties also receive the largest first preference vote share and, therefore, the way their leaders discuss policy issues and the way the media report these policies could have widespread implications for a large group of voters (see Australian Electoral Commission, 2008, 2010, 2013).

The campaign launch speeches of these two major parties are important events in the election cycle, with the speeches a highly visible and "consistent" feature of Australian campaign communication (see Brookes, 2017, pp. 15-16). Unlike other western democracies, such as the United Kingdom, Australia's major political parties do not produce election manifesto documents detailing all the policy proposals. Therefore, the campaign launch speeches serve as an important proxy for traditional party manifestos. The speeches were given in each election campaign examined in this thesis. They

provide a clear summary of the policy agenda and key issues of each election campaign, and represent a key moment in the campaign where party leaders articulate their salient policy proposals and "plans for the future and reasons for seeking election" to Australian voters (Younane, 2008, p. 66). As such, the campaign launch speeches provide a useful and consistent measure to evaluate policy communication longitudinally.

Finally, the theoretical scope is largely informed by liberal democratic approaches to media and democracy. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical underpinnings at length. In short, this thesis primarily draw upon liberal democratic ideals and Habermas' public sphere model to evaluate the findings. While Habermas' theory has its critics (see Calhoun, 1992, pp. 33-37), as chapter 2 shows, the public sphere model provides a useful normative lens to view the relationship between the media, democracy and news quality in the digital age.

Chapter Outline

This study addresses the empirical puzzle, themes, and research question raised in this introduction through eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides the necessary background information about the empirical puzzle to contextualise the findings of my thesis. Chapter 1 expands upon the economic problems in the Australian media landscape identified at the beginning of this introduction. It discusses the challenges facing newspaper organisations and television broadcasters, and outlines the extensive cost-cutting in the Australian media landscape. Chapter 1 also examines elections in Australia and changes in campaigning. It reviews the changes in campaigning over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Following this discussion, chapter 1 discusses the audience for Australian election news and identifies the salient policy issues in Australian election campaigns across the 2000s.

Chapter 2 reviews the empirical and theoretical literature on news quality, political news and election reporting. Chapter 2 begins by examining the theoretical assumptions underpinning this thesis. It focuses on Habermas' public sphere theory. It then analyses the empirical literature on Australian policy and election reporting. In doing so, it

identifies the gaps in the scholarship and explains how this thesis will contribute to this literature. The final part of the chapter reviews how "quality" news can be defined and evaluated. To do so, it reviews the arguments put forward in the international political reporting scholarship. Chapter 2 identifies four key themes in this scholarship that inform the analytical tools this thesis uses to examine policy reporting. These themes include 1) sources quoted in this coverage, 2) media attention to policy issues, 3) information content of news coverage, and 4) the frames and narratives used to report election news.

Chapter 3 outlines the research question, methodological approaches, data, and sampling strategies used in this thesis. It expands upon the research design and justifies the choice of methods.

The results are presented over four chapters. Chapter 4 compares how politicians communicate policy issues through their campaign launch speeches and how the media subsequently report policy matters in the 2000s. It first compares political and media attention to policy issues. It also examines how policy information is conveyed in speeches and news coverage. Finally, it analyses how politicians and the media communicate policy issues by comparing the framing of news coverage with the narratives used in campaign launch speeches.

Chapter 5 examines the primary sources defining policy coverage over the 2000s. It begins by examining how the media quote politicians in news coverage, including the share of voices. It then analyses the experts quoted in news coverage. Chapter 5 concludes by examining how ordinary citizens were quoted in policy reporting in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 6 takes a different comparative approach to the other results chapters. It analyses policy news by medium and format rather than election year. The other results chapters examine news coverage over time, but it is also important to differentiate between media and format because they have distinctively different limitation, audiences, and commercial interests. Chapter 6 begins by comparing television and newspaper coverage of policy issues. It then focuses on the differences between public

service and commercial broadcasters. Finally, chapter 6 compares policy reporting in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.

Chapter 7 uses the same analytical tools and primary newspaper dataset to evaluate whether there was a turning point in the way policy issues were reported during election campaigns in the twenty-first century. It begins by highlighting the innovations in political campaigning techniques in the late 2000s. Chapter 7 then analyses policy news on the front-page over the 2000s. It also evaluates the policy information provided in newspaper coverage. Following this discussion, chapter 7 investigates the use of personality narratives in policy news in the twenty-first century. It concludes by examining the expert sources used to tell the story and measures this across time.

Chapter 8 concludes by summarising the key trends is policy reporting from elections across the twenty-first century. In doing so, it places my findings within the broader empirical and theoretical literature. Chapter 8 discusses the implications of this thesis' findings for news quality, the public sphere, civic engagement, political trust, and Australian democracy.

Chapter 1: Traditional Media and Elections in the 2000s

Australia's traditional news outlets have experienced some immense upheaval and financial pressure in the twenty-first century (see Beecher, 2005, 2013; Tiffen, 2008, 2010a; Young, 2010). With declining revenues and shrinking news audiences, the business models that once supported Australian journalism are broken (Gawenda, 2012; Simons, 2012, pp. 11-30). To mitigate their revenue losses and ensure their long-term viability, news organisations have engaged in some extensive cost-cutting. But the cost-cutting and downsizing of Australia's newsrooms may be detrimental to political and election reporting.

This background chapter provides a comprehensive outline of Australia's traditional media. The first section reviews the challenges faced by print and broadcast media outlets in the twenty-first century. It examines how print and broadcast news organisations have responded to the commercial upheaval and digital disruption undermining their business models. The first section concludes by discussing the audience for political and election news in Australia.

Political campaigning has also transformed in the 2000s. These developments in campaigning pose challenges for the way news organisations collect and deliver information during an election. Therefore, the second section examines the recent innovations in political campaigning. It also analyses the salient election issues to Australian voters, and briefly explains this thesis' focus on tax, health and education policy problems. This chapter highlights the key changes in political campaigning and the media landscape, and identifies some of the implications for political reporting and policy journalism in the twenty-first century.

Section 1:

Challenges for Australian Newspapers

Compared to the United Kingdom (UK) or United States (US), Australia's newspaper market is relatively small for its population size (Tiffen & Gittins, 2009, p. 181). Australia only has 12 metropolitan and national daily newspapers currently in print: the *Canberra Times, Sydney Morning Herald, Daily Telegraph,* the *Age, Herald Sun, Hobart Mercury, Advertiser, West Australian, Northern Territory News*, *Courier-Mail*, the *Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review*. Newspaper ownership is highly concentrated between three companies: Rupert Murdoch's News Corp Australia, Fairfax Media, and Seven West Media (Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012, p. 60). News Corp Australia (part of parent company News Corp) is the largest of these print monopolies, "[accounting] for around two thirds of metropolitan daily newspaper circulation" (Tiffen, 2008, p. 116), and controls approximately 68 per cent of Australia's total newspaper market (Tiffen, 2010b, pp. 85-86; Young, 2013, p. 101). In addition, News Corp Australia's international parent company (News Corp) owns several cable TV stations, British and US newspapers, and movie studios (see Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012, p. 60; News Corp, 2015). Together, News Corp Australia and Fairfax Media account for 90 per cent of all daily metropolitan print circulation in Australia (Carson, 2014, p. 727; Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012, p. 60).

Ownership concentration has been a contentious issue in Australia since the 1950s, with renewed interest in debates about media diversity in the 1970s and 1980s (see Brown, 1993; Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012; Mayer, 1964; I. Ward, 1995; Young, 2010). In 2012, the *Independent Inquiry into Media and Media Regulation* considered the issue of media diversity in Australia (see Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012). The Inquiry noted that several potential problems created by Australia's high degree of ownership concentration, including the potential for a decline in journalistic standards due to a lack of competition (Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012, p. 280).

Ownership concentration presents several challenges to Australian democracy. In their propaganda model, Edward Herman Noam Chomsky (1988, p. 2) argued that increased media concentration is one "filter" that influence news reporting. They contend that

increased ownership, along with other factors, can impact upon what news outlets decide is news (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). Having a highly-concentrated media market can also limit the diversity of voices in the public sphere and prevent alternative opinions from being heard (Finkelstein & Ricketson, 2012, p. 280). There is another point to consider here in relation to election reporting.

Organisational and news values can act as a filter that shapes what is and what is not included in news reports (Galtung & Ruge, 1973, pp. 62-72; Manning, 2001, pp. 60-63,50-52). If newspaper ownership is limited to a few corporations, then such concentration could limit the information and viewpoints that are published during an election. Australia's ownership concentration is even more problematic because News Corp Australia owns all the highest circulating newspapers. According to the Audited Media Association of Australia (AMAA), the *Herald Sun (347,306)* was the highest circulating paper in Australia in the 2014 December quarter followed by the *Daily Telegraph (241,963)* and the *Courier-Mail (148,583)* (Audited Media Association of Australia, 2015b).[3] But newspaper circulation is largely in decline.

The Decline in Newspaper Circulation

Like many other western democracies, paid newspaper circulation in Australia has fallen dramatically across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Anderson, Weymouth, & Ward, 2007; Beecher, 2005; Carson, 2014, pp. 728-230; Meyer, 2009; Tiffen, 2010b, p. 84; Tiffen & Gittins, 2009, pp. 180-181; Young, 2010). For example, Tiffen and Gittins (2009, p. 181) observed that newspaper penetration in Australia almost halved between 1980 and 2007, with all of Australia's afternoon newspapers disappearing across this period. Similarly, the free commuter newspapers that began circulation in the early 2000s (the *MX* and *Melbourne Express*) also ceased publication

[3] The 'average net paid print sales' includes the gross print sales over the reporting period adjusted by subtracting the number of return copies, banded copies, contra copies, modified copies (domestic and overseas) and out of date copies. This figure is then divide by the total number of issues published over the reporting period. The figures exclude airline sales, accommodation and hotel sales, event sales, school sales, tertiary sales, multiple publication and bundled sales (Audited Media Association of Australia, 2015a, p. 18).

due to a lack of profitability (Carson, 2015b). Table 1.1 illustrates the decline in Australian newspaper circulation by masthead over a 15-year period (1997-2007).

Fewer people are buying Australian newspapers than ever before (Table 1.1). While the *Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review* experienced a small rise in their paid circulation figures, most newspapers experienced considerable losses between 1992 and 2007 (Tiffen, 2010b, p. 84). However, the decline in newspaper circulation has deep historical roots. Since 1954 and the introduction of television, there has been a steady tapering off in newspaper circulation (Mayer, 1964, pp. 34-35). Even in the mid-twentieth century, concerns about newspaper circulation were at the forefront of many discussions about the viability of newspapers in a television era.

Table 1.1: Metropolitan and national daily circulation figures, 1997-2007 (figures in '000s)

Newspaper	1992	2002	2007	15 year change
Daily Telegraph	459	398	383	-76
Herald Sun	584	546	531	-53
Sydney Morning Herald	269	249	238	-31
Age	240	212	223	-17
Courier-Mail	258	238	237	-19
Advertiser	220	216	203	-17
West Australian	263	233	229	-34
Australian	150	157	161	+11
Australian Financial Review	75	89	89	+14

Note: Figures in '000s. Source: Tiffen (2010b, p. 84).

While the falls in paid newspaper circulation figures are worrying, there are other pressing economic problems undermining the business models of Australian news outlets. Print news audience are also fragmenting across multiple media platforms, including online, mobile, tablet and other digital news platforms. According to readership figures collected by The Newspaper Works (an industry funded organisation), print readership is close to 14.4 million people each month (or 92 per cent of the population), while digital publication penetration is 11.2 million people (63 per cent) (The Newspaper Works, 2015). When digital newspapers (tablet, online and mobile replica versions of newspapers) and print readership are taken collectively, the *Sydney Morning Herald* has the largest cross-platform readership (5.1 million people), followed by the *Daily Telegraph* (4.34 million), *Herald Sun* (4.2 million), the *Courier-Mail* (3.3 million) and the *Age* (3.27 million) (The Newspaper Works, 2015). In contrast to the paid circulation figures, readership figures paint a more positive story about cross-platform readership in the twenty-first century.

Roy Morgan's research on newspaper readership has also drawn similar positive conclusions. As of December 2014, Roy Morgan (2015) estimated that the total readership for the 12 metropolitan and national newspapers was close to 18.5 million people (Roy Morgan Research, 2015). According to these figures, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had the largest cross-platform readership (3.5 million), followed by *Herald Sun* (2.6 million), the *Age* (2.5 million), the *Daily Telegraph* (2.5 million), and the *Courier-Mail* (1.95 million) (Roy Morgan Research, 2015). These figures suggest that people are still accessing news, but doing so using different digital and offline media platforms.

The positive picture painted by newspaper readership figures should be interpreted cautiously. Readership figures are generally self-reported by news organisations who have a commercial incentive to demonstrate that they are still a viable advertising platform (see I. Ryan, 2008). While newspapers organisations may have high readership across digital and print platforms, the fact remains that fewer people are paying for news content (Carson, 2015a).

Australians are also spending less time reading print news content. In 1950, Henry Mayer (1964, p. 228) observed that Australians spent on average one hour and 10

minutes *a day* reading newspapers. In 2002, audiences reported spending 3.2 hours *per week* reading newspapers, which fell to 2.9 hours in 2006 (Simons, 2007). The rise of internet and mobile news platforms is often blamed for the decline in newspaper circulation (for discussion see B. Franklin, 2008; Gawenda, 2012, pp. 2-4; Simons, 2012, pp. 9-14). However, news audiences spend very limited time on online news platforms. For example, online news readers spent two to seven minutes reading articles on news websites (Young, 2011, pp. 217-219). Therefore, simply blaming digital platforms for the declines in newspaper circulation and shifts reading habits overlooks the broad factors shaping audience demand for news in the twenty-first century.

Looking more broadly at the cultural and lifestyle factors of readers offers one explanation for these declines in newspaper circulation and changes in readership patterns (see B. Franklin, 2008, p. 309). Australians are working longer hours meaning they get home later and, therefore, have less time to read a newspaper or catch the evening television news (see Young, 2009, p. 152). The "urban sprawl" and changes in "commuter culture" mean that more people drive rather than catch public transport, they have less time to buy newspapers, less time to watched scheduled news programs, and less time to catch up with the news (Carson, 2013b, p. 3; B. Franklin, 2008, p. 309). Put simply by the former *Guardian* editor, Peter Preston:

> People didn't work set hours in offices and factories any longer, they worked at home or in industrial estates on the edge of town; they drove home rather than got a train: they found they couldn't get an evening paper delivered any longer because the traffic was too impenetrable: and the paper they could sometimes get because it went to press at noon rather than 3.30[pm] didn't have any of the facts that drove purchase... So the reason for buying a paper, which often wasn't in the right place at the right time anyway, was hugely diminished (quoted in B. Franklin, 2008, p. 309).

With changing lifestyle patterns, businesses needed to find new ways to advertise using different media to reach their targeted audiences. This had profound consequences for news outlets and their business models in the twenty-first century.

Falls in Advertising Revenue

The biggest threat to the viability of print media business models in the twenty-first century is the dramatic declines in advertising revenues. Australian newspapers receive nearly "two-thirds of their revenue from advertising" alone (Tiffen & Gittins, 2009, p. 181), with broadsheet publications considerably effected because they rely so heavily on classified advertising (Young, 2010, p. 612). However, as Simons (2012, pp. 7-10) writes, the "business model [the selling of advertising] that has supported journalism since the profession first emerged in the 1600s is broken."

The advertising "rivers of gold" are unlikely to return (Beecher, 2005; Gawenda, 2012, p. 2). According to a PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) report, newspaper advertising revenues fell considerably from $A2.9 billion in 2009 to $A2.1 billion in 2014 (quoted in Carson, 2015a, p. 1024). In total, the newspaper sector alone has lost close to $A1.1 billion in revenue streams (Carson, 2015a, p. 1024). Further evidence of these financial pressures can be found in the financial reports of Australia's major media companies. In February 2016, Fairfax reported a decrease of 2.2 per cent in its half-yearly profits (until December 2015) (Carson, 2016). Fairfax also indicated that their revenue from advertising in metropolitan daily newspapers had fallen by 15 per cent (Carson, 2016). News Corp Australia reported a much bigger decline in its half-yearly profits of 18.5 per cent (released February 2016) (Carson, 2016).

The declines in advertising were observed prior to the widespread proliferation of social media and digital aggregating news platforms. In 2005, Eric Beecher (2005, p. 8) forewarned that the revenue streams from classified advertising were evaporating. He argued that falling revenues were eroding the resources required for Australia's traditional media to produce quality journalism in the twenty-first century (Beecher, 2005, p. 8). Beecher (2005, p. 8) correctly pointed out that evaporating revenue streams were the biggest "ticking time bomb for Australia's best newspapers."

The studies above suggest that many of the structural problems in the media industry are long-term issues. These declines in advertising revenue took place over a decade. So any attempt to examine policy news coverage must take a longitudinal approach. An examination of policy news coverage requires us to consider the impact these long-term

advertising trends may have had upon policy reporting. These declines in advertising suggest that media organisations are in a concerning financial position. This thesis seeks to examine the implications this has for policy journalism in the 2000s. Fewer resources and less revenue may have curtailed the media's ability to produce the detailed policy stories that are vital for public debate in an election. But there are other worrying trends that could also have an impact on policy reporting.

Advertising revenue has also fragmented across media platforms. Between 2006 and 2011, the share of advertising revenue captured by newspaper outlets fell from 35 per cent to 30 per cent respectively (Carson, 2015a, p. 1026). This was also the case in other western democracies, such as the United Kingdom and United States, where print advertising revenue has also followed a similar trend (Carson, 2013b, pp. 40-41; Este et al., 2008, p. 7). In Australia, newspapers outlets' advertising share is expected to decline further. Newspaper organisations' share of advertising revenue is projected to fall to 14 per cent in 2018 (Carson, 2015a, p. 1026). By comparison, internet advertising is projected to capture 40 per cent of total advertising revenue in 2018, "which would make it Australia's largest advertising sector worth $A5.7 billion" (Carson, 2015a, p. 1026). Traditional news organisations are receiving a smaller share of advertising revenue, but digital competition has also driven down the "unit price" of advertising (Carson, 2014, p. 729).

In addition to losing fundamental revenue stream, the stock prices of newspaper organisations have plummeted since the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The GFC sent stock prices tumbling to some of their lowest historical levels (Carson, 2013b, p. 38). Between 2007 and 2008, media stocks in one of Australia's largest media organisation, Fairfax Media, fell from "$A4.99 in November 2007 to $A1.62 a year later" (Este et al., 2008, p. 9). In 2007-2008, the stock prices of Australia's largest media companies—Consolidated Media Holdings, Fairfax, Macquarie Media Group, the Seven Network, APN News and Media, and Austereo— fell by more than 50 per cent (Este et al., 2008, p. 9). At the time of writing, Fairfax Media's stock price was $A1.05; a difference of $A3.94 from the 2007 level (ASX, 2017). Australia's media organisations are in a very weakened financial position. A fall in stock prices places additional pressure on commercial media companies to cut costs, reduce expenditure,

and increase their revenue to satisfy their obligations to shareholders (Hamilton, 2004, pp. 2-5).

Australia's newspaper organisations have attempted to adapt to the intense commercial upheaval by reducing the size, length and space devoted to news content. However, press outlets may have compromised the quality of their journalism. If empirically proven, then this finding would be concerning because the information provided by the press is important to Australia's media ecology (Tiffen, 2010b, p. 94). For example, Australia's broadsheets, such as the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, have shifted to smaller "compact" sized tabloid style formats to save costs (Carson, 2013a). Moreover, Rodney Tiffen (2010a) found that the number of articles on the front-page of both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers also fell by 40 per cent between 1956 and 2006 (Tiffen, 2010a). If there is less space for text and newspapers are smaller, then there may be less space for the important policy news required in an election. These changes could have profound consequences for political knowledge by limiting the amount of information voters receive. Furthermore, this could have implications for other media.

Newspapers are a fundamental institution in Australia's media ecology. The issues that are reported by the press can subsequently influence the agenda of media outlets (McCombs, 2014, pp. 128-129). In this sense, newspapers have a significant inter-media agenda setting effects on the broader media landscape.[4] For example, McCombs (2014, p. 129) found that between 1985-1992 major elite newspapers, including the *New York Times,* could "significantly influence the agenda of three national television networks." Moreover, McCombs (2014, p. 128) observed that "journalists frequently observe" other news coverage "to validate their own news judgements about the day's events." To put it another way, the press shape not only the issues the public think about but also the issues other news organisations report (McCombs, 2014, pp. 128-132). These inter-media agenda setting effects were substantiated in recent studies of television and newspaper election coverage, which found that newspapers acted as

[4] Inter-media agenda setting is the ability for one media to determine the salience of issues (or set the agenda) on other different media platforms (see I. Ward, 1995, chapter 3; Sweetser, Golan, and Wanta, 2008)

opinion-leaders in the election campaign (Cushion, Kilby, Thomas, Morani, & Sambrook, 2016).[5] Newspapers are clearly an important part of the media landscape. If press outlets disappear entirely, this would upset the entire media ecology because other media would also lose a vital source of information. This could also have broader implications for broadcast news platforms, which were plagued with similar financial problems across the 2000s.

Challenges for Australian Television Organisations

Television is the most widely consulted sources of election news, with many contemporary campaign events designed for broadcast media (Blunsdon, 2014; Phillips, Tranter, Mitchell, Clark, & Reed, 2007; Young, 2011, p. 39). Yet, television networks are in a difficult financial position. Like print organisations, television news outlets are attempting to balance commercial upheaval with their democratic obligations to inform the public sphere. [6]

Commercial television networks dominate the Australian television sector, with the public broadcasters canvassing a relatively small share of the total viewership (see OzTam, 2014). At the time of writing, there were 16 free-to-air channels available in the metropolitan areas of Australia. Each commercial network (Seven, Nine, and Ten Networks) has three channels. Likewise, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) (a partly publicly-funded broadcaster) has three channels, which run a range of multi-cultural and non-English programs. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) (public service broadcaster) has four channels, with one channel dedicated to 24-hour news and current affairs coverage (ABC News 24). These five free to air networks account for 80 per cent of television viewing in the metropolitan regions of Australia, while paid subscription services (pay-tv) accounts for 20 per cent (OzTam, 2014). Table 1.2 shows the average network share of the five metropolitan networks across five metropolitan cities (Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth, and Brisbane).

[5] These studies are discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.
[6] Although newspapers, television and online news are the focus of this study, Australia's commercial and public radio broadcasters face the same economic problems as their television and print counterparts (Griffen-Foley, 2014, p. 150).

Table 1.2: Average network audience share (metropolitan cities), 2013-2014

Network	Average Network Share (%)
Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)	16.6
Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)	3.3
Seven Network	22.3
Nine Network	21.1
Ten Network	14.1

Source: OzTam (2014). Note: Average network share is taken across a 48 week period (11 reporting periods) beginning on the 29/12/2013 and ending on the 29/11/2014 (between 06:00 and 23:59 hours).

In a similar fashion to print media, ownership of Australia's television networks is highly concentrated. The dominant organisations in the sector include News Australia Holdings (part of company News Corp), Consolidated Media Holdings, Seven West Media, Nine Entertainment Company, Southern Cross Media, Ten Network Holdings, and WIN Corporation (Harding-Smith, 2011). Each of the companies listed has a share in one of the three commercial networks outlined in Table 1.2, with the WIN corporation and Southern Cross Media holding shares in regional television channels (Harding-Smith, 2011).

Rupert Murdoch's News Holdings Australia is a key player in the television sector, with Murdoch's son, Lachlan Murdoch, owning a large stake in the Ten Network.[7] The Murdoch family also have a significant stake in pay-TV, with shares in the Foxtel network (Harding-Smith, 2011). This is another example of how ownership of Australia's media outlets is highly concentrated in the Murdoch family. It is the concentration of ownership that has raised questions about the impartiality of political reporting in Australia. As will be discussed in chapters 2 and 6, news coverage from the 2013 federal election campaign— an election where editorial influence and partisanship was notable— clearly demonstrated some of the perils of having such a

[7] In 2017, the Ten Network was placed into voluntary administration (Chau, 2017; Letts, 2017).

concentrated media market (see Hobbs & McKnight, 2014). Ownership concentration is problematic because of the issues related to impartiality and diversity. But there are other problems in the broadcast landscape that we need to consider here; for example, the decline in television viewership and the impact it has for broadcast business models.

Fewer Viewers and Falling Revenue

Fewer people are watching television news than ever before. In a study of Australian news and current affairs audiences, Sally Young (2009) found that all three commercial networks (Nine, Ten and Seven) lost nearly six per cent of their primetime Monday-Friday news audience between 2001 and 2007 (Young, 2009, p. 152). But some network news programs have had considerably larger falls in their audience share. For example, the audience for the Nine Network's primetime news program, *National Nine News,* declined by 17.5 per cent across the 2000s (Young, 2009, p. 153). Similarly, the Ten Network's primetime program, *Ten News at 5pm*, lost 16.5 per cent of its viewership (Young, 2009, p. 152). Young's (2009, p. 147) study concluded that news audiences have fragmented across different news programs, including morning breakfast television, and across different media.

Like print readership, television audiences are spending less time watching television. In 2014, the average daily viewing of television for metropolitan audiences was two hours and 45 minutes, and three hours and 11 minutes for regional audiences (Screen Australia, 2017). According to Young (2009), "people under 40 are watching less TV now than they were in 1991 and, when they do switch on, they are not turning to news and current affairs in the way that they used to." In 2001, half of the Australian adult population were spending at least one hour watching, reading or listening to news and current affairs (Young, 2011, p. 61). In 2002, free-to-air television audiences spent 788 hours of all "average viewing time" watching news and current affairs, by 2006 viewing hours had slipped to 655 hours (Simons, 2007, p. 26). Interestingly, Australians did not "switch on" during election campaigns (Young, 2009, p. 150). Audience figures from the 2007 suggest that television news ratings were often very similar—or sometimes lower— during the 2007 election than prior to the election period (Young, 2009, p. 150).

The rise of online news sites and digital/mobile streaming platforms partly accounts for the decline in television viewership (for example see PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, pp. 48-51). The availability of streaming services and "on demand" television news programs means that viewers can access news at their own convenience. During their afternoon or morning commute, audiences can stream news programs or check up on daily news events from their mobile devices. The ability to access news "on demand" using digital news platforms or access online news sites means that there is less incentive for audiences to watch traditional scheduled news programs, such as the evening news (see PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, pp. 48-51). In a recent report by consulting firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the authors noted:

> Consumers with the devices are more likely to stream or download audio or video content online. In 2011, 55 per cent of smartphone users streamed audio or video content via mobile phones; compared with 19 per cent of non-smartphone users, 33 per cent of smartphone users downloaded audio or video content; compared with 10 per cent of other home users (PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 51)

The shifts in viewership habits have also increased competition for advertising revenue (PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 51). In a similar fashion to print media, Australia's free-to-air television networks are highly dependent upon advertising revenue; receiving close to 90 per cent of their total revenue from advertising alone (PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 32). And, like print outlets, their revenue streams are evaporating. In 2014, a PWC (2014, p. ii) report found that, although revenue growth for commercial television improved in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, "the overall trend since 2005-06 has been negative, reflecting the structural shift in the market for advertising." Between 2004 and 2012, advertising revenues for Australia's commercial free-to-air networks fell, despite a small rise in 2010 (PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 45). The PWC (2014, p. 30) report showed that the share of advertising revenue for free-to-air television was projected to fall from 29 per cent in 2012 to 27 per cent in 2017, with much of this revenue shifting to internet advertising. As noted in the PWC report, "television advertising revenue appears to

decline from 2004-05, while internet advertising revenue has grown unabated during the same period" (PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 44).

Public funded broadcasters have also experienced similar economic challenges to their operating models. Although their operating models are different to their commercial counterparts, public service media still face many of the same challenges as commercial media, including audience fragmentation (Cushion, 2012, pp. 4-5). While historically public service media had limited competition from other media outlets, the internationalisation of media markets and the growth of digital news outlets has increased the competition for their news audiences and placed significant pressure on their delivery of news (Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-7; Jacka, 2003, pp. 178-179; Lowe, 2010). Deregulation, competition, and commercialisation has exasperated these problems, with some scholars pointing out that there is in fact a crisis in public service media (Jacka, 2003, p. 178). The 2007-2008 GFC prompted many governments to reduce financial expenditure; as a result, many public service broadcasters lost a significant proportion of their revenue (Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-7). Budget reductions are akin to the revenue declines faced my commercial media organisations (Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-16). While their funding models are inherently different, public service media, such as the ABC, are by no means immune the experiences of commercial news organisations (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 1-16).

The economic problems faced by Australia's television networks manifested to a dramatic climax in 2017. In February 2017, the Ten Network declared that it was under financial "duress" due to a "weak advertising market" and falling revenue (Battersby, 2017a, 2017b). Following this announcement, the Ten Network was placed into voluntary administration (Chau, 2017; Letts, 2017). At the time of writing, US media giant, CBS, had placed a bid to purchase the network (Chau, 2017; Letts, 2017). The fall of the Ten Network is an example of the considerable upheaval and disruption Australia's television sector has faced. Increased competition, fewer viewers, changes in the way audiences view programs, and disappearing revenue streams are undermining the commercial viability of television business models in the digital age.

There are several questions that emerge from this analysis of the Australian media landscape. What are the consequences of this economic upheaval for reporting? What are the implications for political coverage? What aspects of news coverage, if any, are compromised? These are questions that I address throughout the subsequent chapters of my thesis.

Cost-Cutting in Australian Newsrooms

To mitigate the losses in revenue and audiences, Australia's news organisations have reduced the size of their newsrooms and initiated a range of cost cutting measures (Zion, Dodd, et al., 2016; Zion, Sherwood, et al., 2016). Put simply, "the paper city has been razed, the press gang gutted" (Buchanan, 2013, p. 15). There were four critical periods in Australian journalism: 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2012 (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 8). The year 2005 was when the first measurable shifts in advertising revenues from traditional to digital media were observed (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 8). The second critical juncture in Australian journalism was the period 2009 to 2010. According to Young and Carson (2018, pp. 453-454), the period of 2009 to 2010 was when "digital and social media, compounded by the impact of the GFC, affected the traditional news journalism industry in dramatic fashion." Increasing debt levels, falling revenue, and declining share prices compounded the existing pressures in the Australian media landscape and led to further job redundancies in the media sector (Young & Carson, 2018, pp. 453-454). The third turning point was in 2012 when news organisations implemented some the most extensive and large scale cost-cutting measures (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 8).

In 2012, Fairfax Media announced a significant restructure of its news operation as the organisation moved to implement a new "digital first" publishing model, which included redundancies across its mastheads (Lannin & Hobday, 2012; Myllylahti, 2014; Norrie, 2012a). The cost-cutting was not isolated to Fairfax Media, with News Corp Australia also announcing a similar restructure of its operations in 2012. Initial estimations suggested that 1000 jobs were to be lost (Norrie, 2012b). Recent studies have suggested that approximately 3000 staff were made redundant from Australia's two major news organisations in 2012 (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 8). The redundancies

of 2012 were the largest wave in a single year and built upon early job restructures and losses in the sector. As a result, there are now fewer resources and fewer specialist journalists in Australian newsrooms (see Buchanan, 2013, p. 20; Meade, 2016). Hence, the job losses and cost-cutting may have had a significant impact upon the quality of policy news by hindering the capacity of news outlets to deliver the detailed policy news stories that are vital to Australian democracy.

The pattern of job losses and redundancies continued in 2016 and 2017. In 2016, Fairfax stated its intention to reduce its editorial staff, with 120 jobs projected to go from its leading mastheads the *Age,* the *Sydney Morning Herald,* and the *Australian Financial Review* ("Fairfax job cuts plan prompts mass walk out as staff 'take a stand'," 2016; Kennedy, 2016). This was later negotiated down to 82 redundancies, which the MEAA estimated included close to one quarter of Fairfax's editorial workforce ("Fairfax job cuts plan prompts mass walk out as staff 'take a stand'," 2016). As of 2017, 2500 journalist positions have been lost from the news sector since 2011, with the industry losing a total of 4000 positions if printing and administrative positions are included (Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2017).

Television newsrooms were not immune from cost-cutting. In 2008, Channel 9 announced the discontinuation of two current affairs news programs, including *Sunday* and *Nightline* (Este et al., 2008, p. 9). In 2012, Channel 10 announced that it was cutting 100 full-time editorial positions from its workforce (Carson, 2014, p. 729). Public service broadcasters also implemented similar cost-cutting measures. Following the 2014 federal budget, the ABC announced redundancies equivalent to approximately 10 per cent of its workforce (400 staff) (Carson, 2016).

A major crisis in Australian journalism developed over the 2000s. But it was also a crisis experienced in other English-speaking democracies. For example, Francois Nel (2010) found that between 2001 and 2010 "the [British] mainstream journalism workforce had shrunk between 30 and 40 per cent" (quoted in O'Donnell, Zion, & Sherwood, 2016, p. 36). A UK survey of members from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) reported a 75 per cent increase in journalists' workload due to the cutbacks in newsrooms (Este et al., 2008, pp. 12-13). By comparison, a survey of

Australian journalists conducted by Essential Media reached a similar conclusion, with Australian journalists reporting that their workload increased by 71 per cent (Este et al., 2008, p. 13). Put simply, Australian journalists are working under similarly tough conditions to journalists in other western democracies, with fewer resources and increased workloads placing further pressure on their capacity to report news.

Journalists in Australian newsrooms work harder than ever before and with fewer resources than any other period in the twenty-first century. As noted by Rachel Buchanan (2013, p. 20) the constant demand for news and the increased workloads means there is simply not enough journalists "to cover even the most basic breaking-news stories." Buchanan (2013) makes an interesting point. If newsrooms do not have the basic manpower, then the ability of the news outlets to report even the most basic political information may be compromised. This may have wide reaching implications for Australian election journalism.

In an election campaign, it is valuable to have reporters on the campaign trail to garner information from politicians. On the campaign trail, journalists are uniquely placed to gain insights and access providing them with content they need to quickly provide "breaking" news updates (see B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 14-24; Manning, 2001, p. 55; I. Ward, 1995, pp. 162-165; Young, 2011, pp. 142-144). But if news organisations do not have the money to employ journalists or further reduce the size of their workforce, then their ability to cover even the most basic issues on the campaign trail may be severely hindered. Moreover, in-depth political reporting, especially investigative journalism, is time consuming, requires a lot of resources, and can be expensive to produce (Carson, 2013b, p. 41). Because news organisations have less money and fewer resources, they may be less inclined to produce this in-depth political coverage. As a result, we may end up losing the important hard news required to "feed democracy" and foster informed political discourse (A. S Jones, 2009, pp. 2-10).

Digital Disruption

News outlets blame the digital disruption of the twenty-first century as the catalyst for the cost-cutting and downsizing of their newsrooms. And rightly so. Digital disruption has cannibalised print and broadcast advertising revenues (see PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 44; Carson, 2015a, p. 1023). While newspaper advertising fell across the twenty-first century, internet advertising grew by 51 per cent between 2003 and 2007 (PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014). The arrival of new digital entrants, including *Crikey, Buzzfeed,* and online aggregating sites such as *Google News,* have also increased competition for audience share (Young, 2011, pp. 218-220).

Aggregating news sites and other specialist internet sites have created new competition for audiences and advertising revenues. The biggest competitors are social media sites and search engines such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *Google*. In 2014, revenue from advertising made up "92 per cent, 90 per cent and 89 per cent" of *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Google's* total income respectively (Bureau of Communications Research, 2016, p. 19). Aggregating sites index news content from news websites to attract viewers and advertisers to their platforms (Carson, 2013b, p. 47). Consequently, the news media have become highly dependent upon aggregating sites to act as intermediaries to bring them audiences (Carson, 2013b, p. 47).

To remain competitive in the digital environment, Australia's traditional media organisations expanded their presence in online sphere. They have experimented with several unsuccessful ventures, including News Corp's purchase of social media platform *MySpace* which it later sold at a loss (Carson, 2013b, p. 47). In addition to these purchases, news organisations have also expanded their capacity to deliver news through online and mobile platforms.

Australia's traditional media organisations launched their own dedicated online news sites in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the *Age* and the *ABC News* maintaining a strong online presence (Young, 2011, pp. 205-211). Each of Australia's daily newspapers now has an online news site, with many mastheads providing digital

versions (tablet and mobile versions) of their newspapers available for purchase. Despite expanding their online presence, newspaper organisations have not created new audiences for their products. Online news sites tend to have similar audiences to print newspapers (Young, 2011, p. 57). For example, Young (2011, pp. 57, 212) found that the audience for newspaper websites were essentially the same audience who read print news, with the internet a "secondary news source for most Australians." While readers may be slowly moving to online platforms (Young, 2008a; 2009; 2011, p. 157), recent industry research also showed that print media was still the most preferred source of news for many Australians, with more readers than online content across the 2015-2016 year (The Newspaper Works, 2016). Table 1.3 below shows the audience figures for the online websites of the *Age, Herald Sun, Sydney Morning Herald,* and the *Australian.*

Table 1.3: Quarterly average net paid website sales (Monday to Friday) (ending December 2014)

Masthead	Average Net Paid Digital Website Sales (Monday to Friday)**
Age	112,639
Herald Sun	46,953
Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)	117,896
Australian	60,836

Notes: **This is the digital version of the publication published on the World Wide Web under the same masthead. These figures only include paid sales that are measured quarterly. Data was only available for selected mastheads. Source: (Audited Media Association of Australia, 2015c).

According to Simons (2007, pp. 75-79), concern about the decline of traditional media audiences is overstated because the same traditional news audiences have simply moved to online platforms to read, watch, scan and seek out news. Some people have shifted to online or mobile news platforms (see Young, 2008a; 2009; 2011, p. 157). However, a significant proportion—including younger audiences— are still clearly missing from the online audience figures (Young, 2008a; 2009, p. 157). This is especially the case for political news audiences (Young, 2008a; 2009, p. 157). There may have been more people dissatisfied with traditional news coverage of politics in

the 2000s, but this did not correlate strongly with any "concurrent rise in the use of other platforms (such as the internet) for political information" (Young, 2011, p. 39).

There are also few people who pay for online news. Fairfax newspapers such as the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* had higher online subscription sales than their News Corp Australia counterparts. Yet, Table 1.3 showed that the net paid website sales are relatively small.

To make up the shortfalls in advertising revenues, traditional media organisations adopted paywalls to charge users access for news thereby monetising their digital content (Carson, 2015a, pp. 1037-1038). However, the introduction of paywalls on online news sites has not created new revenue streams but merely "cannabilised" print subscription sales (Carson, 2015a, pp. 1037-1038). As Andrea Carson (2015a, p. 1037) points out, "Australian newspapers are in purgatorial space: they are not earning enough from digital revenues to abandon print, yet digital subscriptions are cannibalising print subscription revenue." Traditional media organisations are expanding into the online sphere, but their capacity to bring in new revenue streams is still very limited.

Digital disruption has wreaked havoc upon the business models of print and broadcast media organisations. However, there is a competing narrative in the digital journalism literature that suggests digital innovations have presented new opportunities for new forms of news.

An Opportunity for New Forms of Journalism?

There is a contrasting story of opportunity and optimism that counters the pessimistic narratives of economic decline articulated throughout this chapter. Scholars have suggested that the internet has produced new opportunities for journalism, including for citizen driven journalism and hyperlocal media (this is journalism that focuses on a small number of topics or specific geographical region relevant to a certain community) (Carson et al., 2016, pp. 133-134). For example, David Harte and his colleagues (2016, p. 234) argue that online hyperlocal media provides an alternative to the traditional institutional gatekeepers by allowing "innovative, bottom up, technology-led" models of news production. Similarly, David Kurpius and his colleagues (2010, p. 359) found

that hyperlocal media "fill[s] the gap in public affairs coverage left by the shrinking traditional media." Moreover, Andrea Carson and her colleagues contend that social media platforms have allowed traditional media organisations to reach new audiences beyond geographical boundaries, "crowd source information," connect with audiences through comment features and hyperlinks, and promote greater civic discourse (Carson et al., 2016, p. 144).

While some commentators may lament at the economic decline of traditional media, other scholars claim there are new opportunities to redefine Australian journalism (see for discussion Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 4). Digital newsrooms are growing, more profitable, "hiring more journalist, attracting larger audiences and increasing their revenue" (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 3). Digital newsrooms have also fostered new styles of news journalism that are data driven, more personal, informal, humorous, "less reverential" and "more consciously in tune with their intended audience" (Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 4). But we should interpret these claims and trends cautiously.

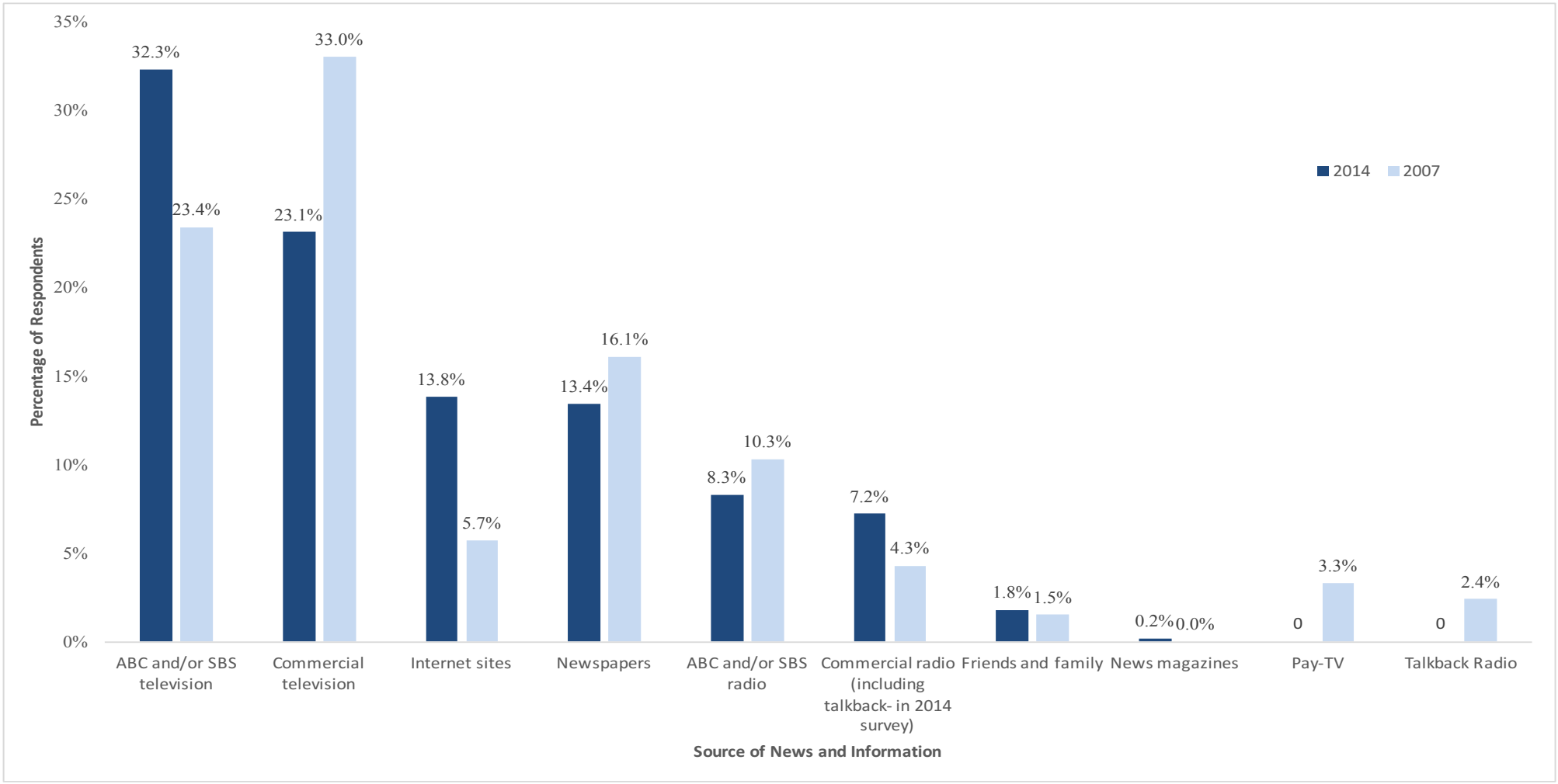
Digital journalism cannot replace all the news or professional journalists that we are losing from traditional media organisations (A. S. Jones, 2009, pp. 21-22). Traditional news platforms continue to be the most relied upon source of news for many Australians (Blunsdon, 2014; McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 72-76). Losing our traditional news platforms means we would lose a fundamental institution in Australian democracy.

The Political and Election News Audience

Reading, watching and listening to news is a vital activity for many Australians. According to the 2007 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA), 54 per cent of respondents "agree" that "catching up" with news was an important part of their daily routine, with an additional 27 per cent of respondents "strongly agreeing" with the statement (Phillips et al., 2007). Similarly, 49 per cent of respondents reported that they consulted commercial (free-to-air) television daily for news, while 39 per cent of respondents consulted public television broadcasters daily for news and information (Phillips et al., 2007). Newspapers had a lesser role in the daily news mix of these respondents, with only 38 per cent reporting that they consult newspapers daily (Phillips

et al., 2007). In other words, these statistics show that many people were still reading and watching news on traditional media platforms in the early twenty-first century. The data in Figure 1.1 also demonstrates that traditional media are amongst the most relied source of news for many Australians. Figure 1.1 shows the 2007 and 2014 survey responses to the question: "Which one of the following sources of information would you say you rely on MOST for your news and information?" (Blunsdon, 2014; Phillips et al., 2007).

Figure 1.1: Most relied upon source of news and information, Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2007 and 2014)



N (2014)=1317 survey respondents, N (2007)= 2295 survey respondents. Question wording (2007 and 2014): "Which one of the following sources of information would you say you rely on MOST for your news and information?" Note: Additional categories in 2007 included "pay TV" and "talkback radio." Source: Phillips et al. (2007) and Blunsdon (2014).

News audiences tend to favour traditional news sources as their most relied upon source of news. However, the importance of such legacy platforms is waning. Figure 1.1 shows that respondents were less likely to consider commercial television as their most relied upon source of news and information in 2014 (Blunsdon, 2014). The influence of newspapers was also waning (Blunsdon, 2014). In 2014, 13.4 per cent of respondents said that newspapers were their most relied upon source of news and information down from nearly 16.1 per cent in 2007. Publicly-funded radio programs were an important source of news in 2007, but their importance also declined in 2014. Internet news audience expanded slightly over this period. The internet had a relatively small impact in 2007 with 5.7 per cent of respondents identifying this as their primary news and information source. By 2014, this had increased by eight point with 13.8 per cent of respondents identifying the internet as their most relied upon source of news and information.

Although internet news audiences are growing, voters are still less likely to read election news online. For example, the 2013 Australian Election Study (AES) data showed that 46 per cent of users who had access to the internet did not use it to access news about the election (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 76). Moreover, 67 per cent of respondents reported that they followed election news on the internet "not much" or "not at all" (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 76). While audience demand for internet news platforms has increased, traditional media outlets are still very important in the overall media ecology. The Australian political news audience also relies heavily on traditional media outlets.

Many Australians take an interest in political news. According to the 2014 AuSSA data, 68 per cent of respondents reported that they use television, newspapers, radio or the internet "once" or "several times" a day to get political news and information. A large proportion of Australians (up to 90 per cent) either actively or inattentively were exposed to political news of some form, either via popular media or elite media sources (Young, 2011, p.33). Yet, only 20 per cent actively sought out political news content, with half of this audience turning to elite media sources (broadsheets, talkback radio, and public service television) (Young, 2011, pp. 40-41). Consequently, Young (2011,

pp. 27-36) found that the Australian news audience is divided into two groups: the "popular news audience" and "elite news audience."

The popular news audience is a broad demographic that seeks more entertainment focused news sources, and are less likely to engage in political activity (Young, 2011, pp. 30-37). The audience of popular news are generally larger than political news audiences; they tend to be blue-collar workers that are more likely to consult tabloid forms of news; and they tend to rely more heavily on commercial news providers than public broadcasters (Young, 2011, p. 83). The political news audience are largely politically engaged "news junkies" who actively seek out political news and information (Young, 2011, p. 42). Their primary sources of news tend to be broadsheets and public broadcasters; they are generally older men whom are better educated and wealthier than the general population; and they are also in key positions of influence and power, such as managerial positions (Young, 2011, pp. 59-60). As I showed earlier, what these popular and elite audiences have in common is there preference for traditional media sources over online news media. Another point to consider here is whether differences in news audiences shape the policy reporting that is provided on different news platforms.

With voters having limited contact with election candidates and less likely to engage in formal political activity outside of voting (see McAllister & Cameron, 2014; Young, 2011, p. 41), much of the information voters receive in an election is comes from traditional media sources. While most Australians still use traditional media platforms for election news, these studies suggest that their influence may be waning. If there is less demand for election news, then news outlets may be less likely to produce the political reporting and policy stories that are vital for informed deliberation during an election.

So far, we have identified some of the key challenges facing Australia's media outlets in the 2000s. This study aims to evaluate the policy news provided in election campaigns during this period of immense upheaval. Therefore, it is also important we consider how these developments in the media landscape intersect with transformations

in political campaigning. The second section briefly examines the changes in Australian election campaigning over the 2000s.

Section 2:

Elections and Political Campaigning in the Digital Age

Election campaigns clearly matter for democracy. But many early political communications scholars claimed that political campaigns rarely shaped election outcomes (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954, pp. 305-320; Lazarsfeld, 1944). Conventional theories, for example the work of Paul Lazarsfeld (1944), concluded that voters pre-established partisan identifications, party loyalties and class socialisation were more influential in voting decisions than politicians' election campaigns (see for discussion Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954, pp. 305-320; Jacobson, 2015; Lazarsfeld, 1944). According to this view, the media also had little direct influence on voters during a campaign, with election information generally disseminated to elites and "opinion leaders" who passed on this material via "word of mouth" (Lazarsfeld, 1944, p. 327). Many of the earlier arguments have largely been refuted by recent campaign effects research (for a summary see Norris et al., 1999, pp. 9-19).

Australian elections are some of the most mediated events in Australian politics (Young, 2011, p. 3). Formal election campaigns in Australia are relatively short (see Stevenson & Vavreck, 2000).[8] This is in stark contrast to other democracies, such as the United States, where presidential election campaigns often begin two years prior to election day with the party primaries (see Panagopoulos, 2013). Despite their brevity, many Australians decide how they will vote during the campaign period. According to 2013 Australian Election Study (AES) data, 34 per cent of respondents decided how they were going to vote during the campaign period (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 82).[9] Moreover, 14 per cent of respondents said that they decided how to vote "a few

[8] As I outlined in the introduction, the mean length of an election campaign between 1990-2013 was approximately 34 days (Australian Electoral Commission, 2015).
[9] This includes respondents who selected the responses: "the first few weeks of the campaign," "a few days before election day," or "on election day."

days before election day," with 13 per cent of respondents deciding "on election day" (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 82).

Given their relative brevity, politicians only have a short time frame to articulate their campaign messages. Consequently, politicians and voters rely heavily on the media to disseminate and garner election information (Young, 2011, p. 3). The media are an important source of political information for Australian voters. According to the 2013 AES data, 70 per cent of respondents followed the election through television news, 45 per cent reported that they paid attention to election coverage on the radio, 51 per cent of respondents followed election news in newspapers, and 34 per cent of respondents accessed election news on the internet (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 72-76).[10] Australia's media outlets are clearly a significant actor in an election because they provide the necessary link between candidates and voters (Young, 2011, p. 3). This is typified by one of the most mediated events in the election cycle, the campaign launch speech (also known as the policy speech).

Campaign launch speeches are an integral part of the election cycle where leaders outline their vision for the future of the nation (Younane, 2008, p. 66). Campaign launch speeches are also one of the most mediated, most prepared, most public, and the most heavily scrutinised addresses that political leaders give during an election period (Mills, 1996, p. 167). Since 1901, the policy speech has been an essential component of Australian elections (Young, 2003a, p. 98). Initially, campaign launch speeches were given at the start of electoral cycle to rouse the public's interest and provide otherwise inaccessible information to the public about party positions and politicians (Young, 2003a, pp. 98, 106). However, campaign launch speeches today are much later and serve a very different function (Tiffen, 2008, p. 116).

While campaign launch speeches are still used to "rally the party-faithful", they are largely an event designed for media coverage (Young, 2003a, pp. 106-107). A modern campaign requires announcements to be rationed across the campaign (Tiffen, 2008, p. 116). Campaign launch speeches are often given late in contemporary election campaigns to garner media attention, "maximise electoral impact", and maintain the

[10] These are cumulative percentages that include the respondents who selected 'a good deal' or 'some.'

rhythm required for the election campaign period (Tiffen, 2008, p. 116). Initially, the function of the speeches was to detail and provide in-depth detail about each parties' policy program, but their function has dramatically changed along with their timing in the election cycle (Brookes, 2017, pp. 161-162). Contemporary speeches are constructed for the media (Brookes, 2017, pp. 162-163). They are written for television with short sharp sentences and language that is deliberate and carefully chosen for "broad appeal" (Brookes, 2017, pp. 162-163).

Contemporary campaign launch speeches are more summative tying together the key themes and communication from across the campaign, with a selection of key policies and promises (Brookes, 2017, p. 162). In contrast to the early speeches of twentieth century, campaign launch speeches of the twenty-first century have limited direct engagement with voters and are far less expansive; relying on information previously announced across the campaign through press releases and interviews (Brookes, 2017, p. 162).

Changes in the timing and style of the speeches also coincided with a change in the funding arrangements of election campaigns. Contemporary launches are often later in the campaign to maximise funding subsidies. Incumbent politicians can continue to claim their travel expenses from the government purse until they officially launch their campaign (Maiden, 2013a). The shift in the timing of the campaign launch speeches are also indicative of other developments in political campaigning.

Changes in Campaigning

Election campaigns have transformed over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. And this has had important consequences for how the news media report on campaign issues. According to Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell, and Semetko (1999, pp. 22-23), campaigns have "evolved" from the "pre-modern" campaigns, to the "modern" campaigns of the mid-twentieth century, to the "post-modern campaign" of recent elections. Scholars argue that there were eight developments that fostered an evolution, including changes in campaign organisation, preparation, central coordination, feedback, the media, campaign events, costs and the electorate (Norris, 2000, pp. 137-138; Norris et al., 1999). Pre-modern campaigns were "characterised by the

predominance of partisan press"; local party volunteers in constituencies; and "a short, ad hoc, national campaign run by the party leader" (Norris et al., 1999, pp. 22-23). In the mid-twentieth century, campaigns evolved to the modern campaign, which saw a move from print to electronic media such as television; a professionalisation of the campaign process; and a more centralised party leadership (Norris et al., 1999, p. 23). The post-modern campaigns today can be characterised by the fragmentation of media outlets and audiences across different platforms; more professional campaign personnel; a greater emphasis on strategic communication and media management; the adoption of more sophisticated strategies to target voters; and a shift towards "permanent campaign" strategies (Norris et al., 1999, p. 23).

An important consequence of this change for media reporting was the shift towards professional political campaigning techniques (Farrell, Kolodny, & Medvic, 2001, pp. 11-12). As Gibson and Römmele (2009, pp. 267-268) argue, this professionalisation includes the "adoption of new tools" and "intensification of existing methods;" the use of more "capital-intensive, aggressive or attack-oriented and continuous mode" based campaign strategies; and more individualised and interactive engagement with the electorate. Moreover, "the restructuring of power relations within the party" have reshaped the way political campaigns are managed (Gibson & Römmele, 2009, pp. 267-268).

In Australia, the rise of "professionally trained" individuals and party officials within political parties has shifted campaign practices, and instigated an "institutional transformation" (Mills, 2014, pp. 18-19). There is more top down driven campaigning with professionals applying their technical skills on behalf of a client to run the campaign and win an election (Mills, 2014, pp. 15-19). For example, Stephen Mills (2014, pp. 258-259) contends that national party officials have effectively taken over state branches, displaced the party membership, and transformed the parliamentary party. New campaign professionals have introduced new techniques and a "new strategic focus" in which data-driven scientific methods have replaced political intuition (Mills, 2014, pp. 256-258). A process of professionalisation has led party officials to usurp traditional party authorities taking control of the resources of campaigning, centralising campaign structures, and redefining the way political parties

engage with voters (Mills, 2014, pp. 256-258). It has also reshaped how politicians engage with the media during election cycles. This is evident by the clear increase in the number of media advisers employed by Australian political parties.

The professionalisation of Australian politics intensified in the new millennium with the hiring of more media advisers, spin doctors, and marketing consultants (I. Ward, 2007, pp. 5-11). In the early 2000s, media advisors accounted for just one in ten ministerial staff under the Howard Government (Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 17; I. Ward, 2007). This expanded dramatically across the twenty-first century to a point where there were more "ministerial minders", media advisers, and press secretaries than press gallery journalists (Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 17; Hobbs, 2016, p. 374; I. Ward, 2007, pp. 6-11). As observed by Young (2011, pp. 137-138) and Julian Fitzgerald (2008, p. 17), for every member of the press gallery in 2007-2008, there were approximately two media advisers or press secretaries working for politicians.

Political communication has become more centralised and institutionalised across the 2000s. As Ian Ward (2007, pp. 8-11) notes, one of the hallmarks of contemporary political communication is the establishment of "media units." While the formation of these units dates to the 1980s, they have clearly expanded across the 2000s (I. Ward, 2007, pp. 8-9). For example, the Howard government established the Government Members Secretariat (GMS) to monitor the media, train ministerial and parliamentary members, provide messaging documents, and, in effect, attempt to manage the information provided to the media (I. Ward, 2007, p. 10). The Rudd and Gillard governments also maintained similar units in the PMO alongside a similar "media support unit" dubbed the Caucus Communication Team (CCT) (Hobbs, 2016, p. 374). Consequently, campaign messages have increasingly become more crafted and filtered by more media advisers. As I discuss in chapter 2, political news is a product of "mutual construction" between politicians and journalists (B. Franklin, 2004, p. 16). It is the filtering and managing of the messages that may have some profound consequences for political and election journalism. More media adviser and spin doctors means that information is more tightly controlled. In other words, journalists may be unable to find the policy information they need to produce the detailed policy stories. As a result, the

quality of policy reporting may be adversely impacted by these campaigning techniques.

Another important development is the trend towards small-target campaigning. Political parties have also adopted more small target strategies, particularly since the 1993 federal election (Tiffen, 2008, p. 119). In 1993, Liberal Party leader John Hewson ran a "big target" campaign releasing a comprehensive policy proposal that became a target of criticism by opposition parties (Tiffen, 2008, p. 119). Successive campaigns have largely followed a "small target" model by releasing policies late in the campaign or engaging in highly scripted and crafted communication (Tiffen, 2008, p. 119). Subsequent elections in the 2000s continued to adopt a small target approach. The 2007 election campaign was dubbed the "me too" election for the noticeable policy convergence of the major parties (Young, 2011, p. 140). Small target approaches were evident in 2010 and more so in 2013. The Liberal opposition, under the leadership of Tony Abbott, ran a formidable small-target campaign. For example, Carol Johnson, John Wanna and Hsu-Ann Lee (2015a, p. 9) found that in 2013 "the [Liberal National Party] Coalition pursued a small target strategy on many social issues, including previously controversial ones such as health or education, in an attempt to neutralise points of policy difference." There are some broader points to consider here. If campaign messages are becoming highly sanitised, then this may hinder the way news outlets cover salient policy issues.

Most Salient Policy Issues

Policies are fundamental to elections, with political parties campaigning on policy issues and releasing policy platforms to persuade voters (Håkansson & Naurin, 2014, pp. 1-2; Naurin, 2014, pp. 1047-1048; Schedler, 1998, pp. 191-195). Ideally, parties aim to make distinct policy promises (Naurin, 2011, pp. 15-16). Parties publicise these election programmes and policy promises through the media and other outlets to secure votes (see Thomson, 2001, p. 173). Voters may decide to use these policy platforms to identify the parties that best align to their issue positions, and to hold their representatives to account in government (Naurin, 2014, p. 1048). Therefore, the way these policy issues are reported by the media can have broader consequences for voting

decisions and the salience voters attribute to certain issues (see Dowding & Marton, 2017, pp. 197-198; John, Pertelli, & Bevan, 2013).

According to the longitudinal Australian Election Study (AES), health, education, and taxation were amongst the most salient issues to Australian voters across the 2000s. Social policy issues were clearly more important over time. Figure 1.2 shows the percentage of respondents who believed that tax, health or education issues were the most salient issue between 1990 to 2013. Of the three policy areas examined in Figure 1.2, "health/medicare"[11] was identified as the most salient issue between 2001 and 2013, with "education" more important in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns. "Taxation" has declined in importance since 1998, and this suggests it was a less salient issue in recent campaigns.

[11] The AES collapses "Medicare" with health. Medicare is the name used to denote the publicly funded universal health system in Australia.

Figure 1.2: Australian Election Study survey responses identifying the most important election issue (taxation, education and health/medicare), 1990-2013

Note: No data was available for taxation in 1993. Question wording varied slightly across this period. Sample(Year): N(1990)=1915, N(1993)=2208, N(1996)=1622, N(1998)=1765, N(2001)=1849, N(2004)=1677, N(2007)=1796, N(2010)=1911, N(2013)=3619. Source: McAllister and Cameron (2014, p. 88).

Health issues were clearly the most salient between 2001 and 2013. In 2001, 16 per cent of respondents ranked health issues as the most important issue, but this increased to 19 per cent in 2013 (McAllister & Cameron, 2014). By comparison, more respondents (17 percent) ranked "education" amongst the most salient issues in 2001 than in 2013 (15 per cent) (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 86). "Taxation" was by far the least important of the three issues examined, with 16 per cent respondents identifying tax issues as highly salient in 2001 falling to 11 per cent in 2013 (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 86).

Given health, tax and education issues are highly salient issues to voters between 2001 and 2013, these are the key policy domains that will be examined in my study. My analysis of policy news coverage will consider how the media report tax, health and education issues in election campaigns across the twenty-first century (see chapter 3 for further explanation and justification of this scope). A period of immense change in Australian politics. And a period of economic turmoil for the Australian media.

Conclusion

News outlets are facing an unprecedented economic crisis. Advertising revenues are in decline, circulation and viewership figures are falling, stock prices are plummeting, and fewer people are paying for news content (see Carson, 2013b, p. 38; 2015a, p. 1026; Tiffen, 2010b, p. 84; Young, 2009, p. 152). Moreover, the emergence of digital news platforms and social media has disrupted the commercial operations of media organisations, fragmented advertising revenues, and created more competition for news audiences (see Carson, 2014, 2015a; Este et al., 2008; Young, 2009). Print media performed particularly poorly. As Andrea Carson (2013b, p. 60) correctly identifies, Australian newspapers are in a "cycle of decline" that "sharpened" following 2007-2008 GFC.

To combat this economic decline, news organisations slashed jobs from their newsrooms. Newsrooms shrunk over the 2000s as news organisations introduced a range of cost-cutting measures. In short, news organisations employed fewer journalists, fewer subeditors, and outsourced many of their newsroom functions (Simons, 2012, pp.7-10). This was the most visible indication of a severe crisis in Australian journalism. Put simply, there were fewer resources available to report the news (see Buchanan, 2013, p. 20).

Quality news is in part reliant upon profitability of media organisations (Meyer, 2009, pp. 1-5, 33-35). In-depth reporting is time-consuming, expensive, and requires significant resources (see Carson, 2013b, pp. 59-61). So, when news organisations are less profitable, then they arguably are less likely to produce "quality" news (Meyer, 2009, pp. 1-5, 33-35). Hence, the economic decline of the Australian media may have some important implications for policy journalism and public debate in the twenty-first century. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, traditional media outlets are still an important source of news for many Australians (see Blunsdon, 2014). And so, the way policy issues are communicated via traditional media platforms is highly important, especially during an election campaign.

Election campaigning also changed over the twenty-first century. Political parties have adopted more small target strategies in recent campaigns; they have employed new tools that enable politicians to bypass the traditional media gatekeepers; and have engaged with voters in new ways (see Lukamto & Carson, 2016, p. 191-193; Macnamara, 2008, pp. 7-11; Mills, 2014, pp. 15-19). Moreover, the professionalisation of Australian politics intensified in the new millennium, with more media advisers, spin doctors, and marketing consultants hired to manicure and shape political messages. In this sense, the professionalisation of politics and the adoption of new campaign techniques has placed further pressure on the way news organisations collect and deliver information. An aim of my research is to understand how changes in political communication intersect with news reporting of policy issues.

By examining policy through a media lens, I explore how policy discourse in the public sphere has changed during a period of immense economic instability in the Australian media sector. Given voters receive most of their election news and information through the media (Young, 2011, p. 3), any decline in the quality of policy reporting could have broader implications for political knowledge, democratic engagement, and informed debate. The next chapter examines the empirical studies of policy and election reporting in Australia, the international scholarship on news quality, and the broader theoretical literature underpinning my approach to the study of policy news in the 2000s.

Chapter 2: Election Reporting and Political News

The health of a democracy is, in many respects, contingent upon the quality of its media. According to Jesper Strömbäck (2005, p. 332), "journalism needs democracy for its freedom and independence and, in turn, democracy needs journalism for the flow of information, for public discussions about political issues, and as a watchdog against the abuse of power." Any contemporary study of democracy should examine "how the media report and interpret political events and issues" (McNair, 2000, p. 1). But before examining how the media report policy issues, it is necessary to review the scholarship and theoretical approach informing my study.

This chapter reviews the scholarship on political and election reporting in Australia and abroad. It begins by briefly explaining the theoretical approach underpinning my thesis. The first section argues that news coverage should be measured against the standards that journalists and news outlets have adopted. In the 2000s, the standards journalists and news outlets promised to uphold were based upon Habermasian ideals of the public sphere. Therefore, Habermas' theory of the public sphere provides a starting point to evaluate the trends and findings presented in this study.

The second section evaluates the key empirical Australian works on policy and election reporting and link the Australian studies to broader debates in international literature on the "dumbing down" of political news. There are three clear gaps in the Australian literature. Firstly, while there is extensive research on Australian election news, the Australian literature specifically evaluating news coverage of policy issues over multiple election cycles and different media platforms is limited in quantity and scope. Secondly, existing studies of election news often focus on whether policies were or were not reported rather than analysing the policy details in news coverage. Finally, existing studies of election and policy news tend to examine media reporting in isolation rather than considering the broader political campaigning factors shaping news coverage. This thesis fills these three gaps in the Australian scholarship.

The absence of Australian research also provides an opportunity to develop an analytical approach to study policy news coverage. The third section identifies four key areas of debate from the initial review of the Australian literature and "dumbing down" thesis. These themes include 1) the sources quoted in news coverage, 2) media attention to policy issues, 3) the information content of news coverage, and 4) the frames and narratives used in reporting. The third section reviews the empirical scholarship in these four areas. In doing so, it argues that the policy news can be analysed by examining each of these four elements. This chapter concludes by summarising the gaps in the literature and identifying opportunities for further research.

Section 1:

Media, Democracy, and the Public Sphere

Across the 2000s, news organisations promised to offer "informative" election news, coverage that "animate[s] democracy", and reporting that covers the "issues" important to Australian voters (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b; Young, 2011, p. 3). News outlets claimed that their news coverage would inform the citizenry and hold the powerful to account (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b). Such promises were grounded in liberal democratic principles and public sphere ideals. Consequently, any evaluation of news coverage should be based upon the standard news organisations promise to uphold. The standards that news organisations advocated in the twenty-first century were, in many respects, informed by liberal democratic assumptions (see Young, 2011, pp. 3, 279).

At this point, it is important we acknowledge that the professional values individual journalists themselves hold may vary substantially. Professional values are often shaped by individual educational experiences, institutional or organisational structures, and historical traditions (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 45-48). Hence, not all journalists may be committed to the same liberal democratic norms and assumptions underlying their profession. Research on US journalism has shown that while many journalists are committed to the notion of journalism as a "public service" and identify this as a core professional value, other news workers questioned whether this "public service" value can be sustained under the increasing economic disruption of the modern age (see

Beam, Brownlee, Bonnie, Weaver, & Di Ciccio, 2009). Cross-national studies have also found that there are variations in the importance attributed to different values in different media systems (Cushion, 2012, p.45-48). Despite these variations, other scholars have argued that journalists generally navigate their profession, practices and understandings of the world collectively (Zelizer, 1997 quoted in Cushion, 2012, pp. 47-48). In other words, many journalists have a shared understanding of how their profession is practiced and conceptualised but, at the same time, there may be differences between individual journalists (Cushion, 2012, p. 48). Similarly, Hanitzsch et al. (2007) survey research of journalists from 18 countries found that certain values have universal appeal, such as holding the powerful to account, maintaining impartiality, and providing reliable information to inform the public sphere. As I outline later in this chapter, it is this shared understanding based around liberal democratic ideals that is evident in the professional codes of conduct of Australian journalism. While not all individual journalists may subscribe to these liberal principles, these ideals are nonetheless entrenched in the professional culture of Australian journalism (Young, 2011, pp. 2-3). Influential here is Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which provides a "normative model of exemplary civic life" (Schudson, 2011, pp. 60-65).

In his seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* Habermas (1989, pp. 25-36) identified the public sphere as a space where citizens conferred and ideas were exchanged, in coffee houses and salons, outside of the dominance of the state and public authority. In Habermas' view, the mass media are the "public sphere's preeminent institution" that furnish citizens with information about public affairs issues (Habermas, 1989, p. 181). The media provide information to the citizenry that guides and streamlines public discussion (McNair, 2011, p. 18). In this "ideal" model, based on classic liberal democratic theory, the media serve an important function to inform the citizenry and uphold democracy (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). Put simply by Brian McNair (2011, pp. 18-20), the media should (according to this ideal view):

1. *Inform* citizens about public affairs issues and "what is happening around them."
2. *Educate* citizens regarding "the meaning and significance of the 'facts.'"
3. Provide a *platform* for "public political discourse" to facilitate the formation of public opinion, and provide a platform for *dissenting* views.
4. Act as a "watchdog and give *publicity* to governmental and political institutions."
5. And serve as a channel for the "*advocacy* of political viewpoints" with open access for parties to articulate their policy programs and vision to a "mass audience" (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20).

Whether the media fulfil this role is a point of contention in scholarly discourse. According to Habermas (1989, pp. 181-195), the quality of the public sphere degenerated as capitalism thrived and news organisations became motivated by profit-seeking. Tracing the decline of the public sphere, Habermas (1989, pp. 171, 182-183) pessimistically concluded that the commercialisation of the media, prioritisation of profit over editorial freedom, and transformation of the media to an "object of consumption" has led to the degeneration of the public sphere in which "the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only."

The degeneration of the public sphere remains highly contested. According to Calhoun (1992, p. 33), Habermas overestimated the denegration of the public sphere by ignoring the leading thinkers of the twentieth century in his historical analysis. In fact, Habermas (2006, pp. 411-412) later revised his pessimistic assessment suggesting that deliberative democracy was still possible provided that "a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments and if anonymous audiences grant a feedback between an informed elite discourse." In addition, Habermas' model has been criticised for under representing women and focusing solely on elite discourse (for discussion see Calhoun, 1992; Schudson, 2011, pp. 60-65). But it is the active form of citizenship that critiques also challenge.

Contemporary theorists, including John Zaller (2003) and Michael Schudson (1998), argue that the most significant flaw in public sphere theory is the "active" form of citizenship that the model promotes. Citizens are busy, they live "multidimensional lives" and "might want to do with their time—virtuous things—besides engage in politics" (Schudson, 1998, p. 312; Zaller, 2003, p. 119). For Schudson (1998, pp. 310-312), a good citizen is not an informed citizen but a "monitorial citizen." Rather than informing themselves on every issue or event, a "monitorial citizen" scans the environment, gathers information, and is ready to act when required (Schudson, 1998, pp. 310-312). Extending Schudson's argument to media reporting, Zaller (2003, pp. 112-116) argues that the standard of news quality required by Habermasian and active citizen models —what he dubs the "full news standard"— are simply unrealistic and unnecessary. Zaller (2003, p. 110) argues that news media should simply "provide information in the manner of attention-catching "burglar alarms" about acute problems, rather than "police patrols" over vast areas that pose no immediate problems."[12]

The arguments put forward by Zaller (2003) and Schudson (1998) are not in dispute here. Habermas' model does place high demands upon the media and citizenry. By adopting a Habermasian lens, I am holding the media to a high normative standard. Yet, Habermas' model still remains the most appropriate normative lens to evaluate news coverage of policy issues because it is the standard that news organisations and journalists themselves have pledged to uphold in their professional codes.

The professional norms of Australian journalism draw heavily on liberal democratic principles and Habermasian inspired ideals. As Young (2011, pp. 2-3) notes, the code of ethics of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)—the union representing Australian journalists—is informed by liberal democratic ideals. For example, the MEAA code emphasises:

[12] Zaller (2003, p. 122) proposed that journalists should act as "burglar alarms" focusing on issues of importance that require "urgent attention" by providing intense coverage that rouses the attention of the monitorial citizen. Rather than a "full news" standard that places unrealistic and unnecessary burdens on the citizen, Zaller argued that coverage should be engaging, dramatic, entertaining and provide information to "catch the attention" of the monitorial citizen allowing them to respond when required (Zaller, 2003, pp. 110, 122)

> Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists search, disclose, record, question, entertain, comment and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be responsible and accountable (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b).[13]

Habermasian public sphere and liberal democratic ideals also informed the promises news outlets made to their election audiences in the twenty-first century (see Young, 2011, pp. 2-3, 270). For example, the *Age Online* pledged it would provide readers with "journalism that is accurate, independent, compelling, trustworthy, and of the highest-quality;" the *Daily Telegraph* promised it would "improve the lives of our readers with campaigns, exclusive stories and in-depth investigations" while television programs promised to provide "in-depth coverage and analysis" (*7.30 Report*) to cover "the issues that affect you and your family" (*Today Tonight*) (original source quoted in Young, 2011, p. 3).

If we judge election and policy reporting by the pledges news organisations made in the 2000s, then we are evaluating news coverage against these liberal democratic and public sphere ideals. Therefore, this thesis also examines whether news outlets met their promise to inform citizens and facilitate a contest of diverse ideas in the public sphere.[14] Having outlined the theoretical assumptions underpinning my study, we can now turn our attention to the key gaps in the empirical scholarship on election, policy and political reporting in Australia and abroad.

[13] Although this is the 2017 version of the *MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics*, the original code was created in 1944. According to the MEAA website, the code has only been updated twice; "substantially in 1984, when it was issued as a set of 10 clauses, and again in 1999 when it became the 12-clause MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics that operates today" (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017a).
[14] Section three examines this point in greater detail.

Section 2:

Empirical Studies of Australian Election and Policy Reporting

Election campaigns provide an opportunity for debate, discussion, and a "mechanism" for the public to garner information about leaders, candidates and policy issues (Hillygus & Shields, 2008, p. 183). They are "moments of change and challenge" where citizens engage collectively to contemplate the future of their community (Brookes, 2017, p. 2). News organisations are integral to this process because they communicate important information between candidates, parties, and voters (Young, 2011, pp. 2-5).

This section reviews the literature on Australian elections news and policy reporting. I argue that the Australian literature lacks research examining news coverage of policy issues. The Australian election scholarship has often derived pessimistic conclusions about the state of contemporary election reporting. However, missing from this scholarship is a systematic Australian study of policy reporting over several election cycles. Thus, many of the findings and claims in the Australian election reporting scholarship require further examination. As will be shown, there are three clear gaps in this scholarship that my thesis aims to fill.

Reporting Policy Issues in Australian Elections

While election reporting is examined thoroughly in the Australian scholarship (Denemark et al., 2007; Goot, 2008; Mayer, 1964, 1973b, 1973a, 1994; Simms & Bolger, 2000; Tiffen, 1989, 2008; Young, 2011), few studies have investigated how the media report policies in Australian elections. The gap identified here is an important oversight in the Australian and international scholarship.

In Australia, scholars have criticised election news coverage for neglecting to report on policy debates or failing to report policy deails (Haas, Chapman, Viney, Hall & Ferguson, 2001, pp. 83-84). For example, Rodney Tiffen (1989, p. 132) argues that the "herd journalism" of election reporting and the strategic contest frames adopted in news coverage mean the "policy forum" of election campaigns is often neglected by the media. The Australian news media simply view policy as a series of "moves in the

electoral game;" consequently, the substance of policy issues is secondary to the interpretations of the political contest (Tiffen, 1989, p. 132).

Tiffen (1989) is not alone in making such claims. Recent empirical studies have drawn similar conclusions about the state of policy coverage in Australian elections. Scholars claim that news outlets neglect policy issues because they focus on reporting opinion polls, political strategy, the "election race" and the winners or losers in the election contest (Benoit et al., 2013, pp. 206-207; Simms & Bolger, 2000, p. 35). From this perspective, the focus on polling and horserace reporting distracts the media from reporting on public affairs issues (Tiffen, 1989, p. 132). For instance, Robyn Hollander's (2006, p. 574) study of news coverage of forest policy in the 2004 federal election found that:

> Campaign reporting tends to focus on strategy rather than issues, it is driven by political rather than policy specialists, and it draws on the expertise of political pundits rather than policy specialists (Hollander, 2006, p. 574).

Hollander (2006, pp. 581-582) concluded that the way the campaigns were "managed" by the major parties, including the way their policies were released and the late timing of their announcements in the election cycle, perpetuated a focus on game framing over substantive policy discussions. The link between campaigning and election reporting drawn by Hollander (2006) is important. It suggests that changes in political campaigning may have detrimental implications for the quality of policy news coverage in other elections over the twenty-first century.

Recent research suggests that media coverage of policy issues has waned in recent elections (Young, 2011). When the media do report on policy, news stories generally revolve around a very small set of policy topics (Simms & Bolger, 2000, p. 35). Yet, policy issues are more likely to be neglected in news coverage. For example, Young's (2011, p. 182) content analysis of Australian election reporting revealed that media reporting of policy issues declined by 60 per cent between 2001 and 2007, with the percentage of stories that had limited or no reference to policy increasing to 54 per cent in 2007. Previous studies have found that the media and political agendas are

interconnected, with the political agenda influencing the salience of issues on the media agenda and vice versa (Boulus, Dowding, & Pietsch, 2013, pp. 301-309; Dowding & Martin, 2017; Papadakis & Grant, 2001, pp. 299-301). The studies presented here suggest that we need to consider the broader factors influencing the quality of policy news in the twenty-first century. Put simply, future studies of policy news should consider what politicians say about policy issues, what issues they pay attention to, and how they communicate policy information because this could shape how policy news is reported.

Previous Australian studies show that news coverage of policy issues lacks substance, focuses on a narrow set of issues, is too concerned with strategy over substantive discussions, and is largely driven by campaign announcements (Haas et al., 2001 ; Hollander, 2006; Tiffen, 1989). But absent from the Australian literature is research specifically examining the trends in policy reporting across the 2000s. A period of immense commercial uncertainty for Australian journalism. There is a severe lack of empirical research examining news coverage of policy issues over several election cycles and across multiple media platforms. Hence, there is limited empirical evidence to support many of the Australian claims about policy reporting beyond one election cycle or one news platform. Moreover, existing election research has largely focused on one policy domain, such as forest policy (Hollander, 2006). Few studies have examined the reporting of several policy issues in Australian elections. This thesis aims to fill these empirical gaps in the Australian literature by examining the reporting of tax, health and education issues over five election periods between 2001 and 2013.

Reporting Australian Elections

While scholars have paid limited attention to policy reporting in election cycles, there is a larger body of literature examining the reporting of Australian elections more broadly (see for example Denemark et al., 2007; Young, 2011). Popular topics in the election literature include media bias and editorial endorsements in Australian election reporting (J. S. Gans & Leigh, 2012, pp. 140-141; Mayer, 1964, pp. 134-137; 1973a; Mayer, Thompson, & Beatty, 1973); radio and television coverage of election campaigns (Rawson, 1961); media reporting of polls (Goot, 2002; Mills & Tiffen, 2012); personalisation and presidentialisation in election news coverage (I. Ward, 1995,

p. 215); internet news and the sources quoted(Goot, 2008); and the use of social media and e-electioneering techniques (Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011; Gibson & Ward, 2002; Lukamto & Carson, 2016; Macnamara, 2012; Macnamara & Kenning, 2011; Macnamara et al., 2012).[15]

Scholars have been critical of election reporting on traditional media platforms (Denemark et al., 2007; Goot, 2008). For example, David Denemark and colleagues' (2007) study of television news content during the 2001 Australian election campaign found that the narrow nature of the 2001 news coverage only gave voters a "partial story" because it excluded minor parties and some domestic issues from public debate (Denemark et al., 2007). Similarly, Murray Goot (2008) concluded that online news in the 2007 Australian federal election excluded many voices from election reporting, with online coverage focusing on the Prime Minister and incumbent candidates at the exclusion of opposition and minor party politicians (Goot, 2008, p. 108).

Denemark et al. (2007) and Goot's (2008) findings suggest that the public were presented with an incomplete picture of these elections because many issues and voices were absent in news coverage. Yet, further analysis is merited to see if the same argument applies to news coverage of policy issues in the twenty-first century. There is some research examining this empirical problem (Hollander, 2006). However, the scope of existing election research is often limited to two or three campaign periods. The largest and most systematic study of Australian election reporting is Sally Young's (2011) work, *How Australia Decides: Election Reporting and the Media.*

Using quantitative content analysis and qualitative analysis, Young (2011, pp. 281-282) examined a sample of 965 news stories from the 2001, 2004 and 2007 federal elections. In her analysis of election coverage, Young (2011, pp. 278-280) argued that Australian election news in the 2001, 2004 and 2007 campaigns was falling short of the normative public sphere ideals advanced by scholars. Between 2001 and 2007, Young (2011, pp.

[15] Online communication in election campaigns is a burgeoning field in the Australian election scholarship. Recent research includes studies of blogging, online campaigning (e-campaigning), and social media (for example Bruns, 2008; Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Chen, 2013; Chen & Walsh, 2010; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011; Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Lukamto & Carson, 2016; Macnamara, 2008; Macnamara & Kenning, 2011; Macnamara et al., 2012; Kissane, 2009; Vromen, 2007, 2008).

259-279) found that there was a marked reduction in the amount of election news provided by the traditional news media, more horserace reporting, and more coverage that focused exclusively on male major party leaders. Young (2011, pp. 278-279) concluded that contemporary election news in the 2000s "fell well short" of public sphere ideals but, compared to election reporting in the 1950s and 1960s, the coverage was "more diverse, insightful and inclusive."

The studies reviewed here suggest that the public sphere was provided with very few informative election stories in the 2000s. However, there are some significant gaps in this scholarship. As shown earlier, there is a clear lack of research studying policy news in Australian elections. Existing Australian research has studied different time periods, fewer election cycles, and focused on election news rather than policy reporting. For example, Young's (2011) study was constrained to three elections (2001, 2007 and 2010) with a focus on election coverage in newspaper and television news (and to a lesser extent radio and online news). Like Hollander's work (2006), Young's (2011) research was conducted prior to the upheaval in the media landscape in 2012. My study aims to fill this gap by focusing more specifically on policy news. Moreover, it conducts research over five election cycles to determine whether traditional media organisations disseminated policy information differently during this period of economic turmoil in the media landscape.

In summing up the Australian scholarship, it is not the arguments or trends that I dispute. As will be shown, the assertions about election reporting in Australia are mostly supported by international research. Yet, the existing Australian research on election reporting only tells a partial story. It presents a superficial analysis of policy issues in media coverage that is often limited to whether an issue was or was not reported in the election. There is a lack of research examining other aspects of election coverage, including the voices defining policy news stories, the types of policy details included in news reports, and frames used to discuss policy issues. This thesis fills this second gap by examining these aspects of policy news.

Campaign Launch Speeches, Political Rhetoric, and Media Coverage

Another clearly under researched field in the Australian election literature is the study of policy speeches (also known as campaign launch speeches).[16] The lack of research is puzzling given that campaign launch speeches are some of the most highly mediated, most prepared, most public, and the most heavily scrutinised speeches given during an election (Mills, 1996, p. 167; Young, 2003a, p. 98). The speeches also provide vital platform for politicians to communicate their policies and platforms to the Australian public through the media.

Campaign launch speeches are amongst the "most visible" events and "most consistent" features of Australian campaign communication (Brookes, 2017, pp. 15-16). But very few studies have examined how the campaign launch speeches are reported by the media. Early research on Australian policy speeches was primarily concerned with voter attitudes and evaluation of candidates than news coverage per se (Hughes & Western, 1966; Western & Hughes, 1967). For example, Colin Hughes and John Western (1966) traced the impact of Sir Robert Menzie's 1963 policy launch speech on voters' political knowledge and opinions. Similarly, Western and Hughes (1967, pp. 197-199) examined the audience for the 1966 election policy speeches and their preferred media platform for political information. Other scholarship examining campaign launch speeches has focused on topics such as party convergence, issue salience, political communication techniques, and the impact of new technologies on campaigning (for example Coatney, 2013; Glover, 2007; Goot, 2004; McAllister & Moore, 1991; I. Ward, 1995, 1999; Younane, 2008; Young, 2003a, 2007). Missing from this literature is research specifically studying media coverage of speeches and their policy content over multiple election cycles.

One of the most extensive studies of campaign launch speeches in Australia is the work of Stephanie Brookes (2017). Brookes (2017) investigated the construction of Australian identity in political rhetoric. In her analysis of Australian political discourse over a century of political communication, she argued that the language used in policy

[16] The terms "campaign launch speeches" and "policy speeches" are used interchangeably throughout this thesis to denote the speech given by the party leaders during their campaign launches.

speeches provided a "unique window" into the themes of a campaign and the overall "national mood" that is constructed through political discourse (Brookes, 2017, pp. 6-9). Media coverage does feature in Brookes' (2017) analysis, but it is often studied in relation to identity, values and security. Brookes' (2017) research does not analyse media reporting of these speeches. There is a lack of Australian scholarship examining news coverage of the campaign launch speeches over several election cycles in the 2000s. There is also a dearth of Australian research comparing policy news with the policy content of these speeches. This is the third empirical gap identified in the Australian scholarship that this thesis aims to address.

Most voters will never hear, meet or see a political candidate speak in person, but will engage with their spoken communication through the media (Brookes, 2017, p. 9). The media act as a bridge between the political and public spheres (Brookes, 2017, p. 2). Therefore, scholars should have a better understanding of how policy information is communicated in these speeches, whether it has changed over time, and the impact speech content has upon media coverage during elections.

Political speeches are an important vehicle of contemporary political communication. Some scholars argue that the days of the grand Athenian forum— where oratory was key to political success—are largely behind us (Glover, 2011, pp. 35-59). However, the speeches that leaders give during election cycles can still play a vital role in shaping the agenda and narrative of a campaign (see Hart, 2000; Powell &Cowart, 2016, pp. 147-149). Political speeches are a crucial piece of political communication because they allow candidates to express their ideas, values and media messages (Powell &Cowart, 2016, pp. 147-149). They are a long-form piece of political communication that is unique in the short soundbite era of contemporary politics (see Powell &Cowart, 2016, pp. 147-149). As noted Roderick Hart (2000, p. 7), a speech may set the news agenda for the day influencing what audiences watch, how campaign staff react, and the questions reporters ask at press conferences.

The political language used in these speeches can also shape the nature of democratic politics (Hart, 2000, pp. 26-28). Political language "is an instrument of power" and it is deeply embedded in the power relations between groups and individuals (Hart, 2000,

pp. 26-28). The words, phrases, and frames that are used to communicate politics can influence the power structures of society and may be used to justify political decisions (Hart, 2000, p. 26). For example, Hart (2000, p. 26) notes that phrases like "the economy" can be used to justify unpopular political actions that may disadvantage some social groups. By framing these actions as the result of economic forces beyond the role of the state, politicians may negate any responsibility being attributed to them for their actions (Hart, 2000, p.26). The choice of political language is also influential in elections.

In an election campaign, the political language used in speeches is important because it can influence public debate (Hart, 2000, p. 29). The time pressures faced by campaigners and various imperatives shaping media reporting mean that campaign language is so carefully crafted, workshopped, and choreographed (Hart, 2000, pp. 28-29). The contemporary media environment rewards candidates who can deliver soundbite phrases (Hart, 2000, pp. 28-29). As such, campaigns have become increasingly more structured around the crafting of words and messages (Hart, 2000, pp. 28-29). The words, phrases, and language used in speeches to convey information may influence voters; for example, by shaping what issues the media report, the issues voter think about, how they perceive candidates, and how they react to candidates' statements (see for example Bull &Miskinis, 2015; Mio, Riggio, Levin, & Reese, 2005; Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003). So understanding the language used in political speeches is important because it can have such a wide-reaching influence upon the framing, narratives, and agendas of a campaign (Hart, 2000, pp. 2-9). Any examination of election reporting in the twenty-first century should also consider the way politicians communicate policy information through the language they use. One way to examine political language is through the formal political speeches of party leaders.

While there is a dearth of scholarship analysing campaign speeches in Australia, there is a wealth of international literature examining campaign rhetoric, political speeches, and political language (for example Benoit, 2014; Hart, 2000). The literature examines a diverse range of themes, issues and topics. On the one hand, studies have used rhetoric as a lens to examine different theories of democracy; for example, the relationship between deliberative types of political rhetoric and theories of democracy (see

Chambers, 2009). On the other hand, scholars have taken a more empirical approach to examine political speeches using text analysis and automated text programs (for example Hart, 2000). For example, Bligh, Schroedel, and Gonzalez, (2010) examined the changes in political rhetoric across the 2008 presidential election by examining Hilary Clinton's political speeches before and after the New Hampshire primaries. Similarly, other scholars have focused on the mechanics of speechwriting, speech techniques, and changing nature of speech construction (for example Charteris-Black, 2014; Glover, 2007). Yet, missing from this literature is an empirical examination of Australian political speeches focusing on the policy content of this communication over time.

Given the importance that language, word choice, and phrasing can have upon political campaigns, it necessary that any evaluation of election reporting in the twenty-first century also considers the way politicians communicate information through the language, phrases, and political rhetoric they adopt. At present, the Australian literature examining campaign speeches is a relatively small field with several significant gaps. Few studies have examined the relationship between campaign speeches and media coverage, especially in relation to their policy content (see for example McAllister & Moore, 1991). The absence of longitudinal research means that many arguments, findings, and claims of the existing scholarship need to be tested using more recent data.

The "Dumbing Down" Debate

Many of the claims and arguments discussed in the Australian scholarship can be situated within the broader debates about the "dumbing down" of political content. In popular and academic discourse, journalists and news outlets are charged with "dumbing down" the quality of political debate by neglecting to cover serious policy issues. The "dumbing down" thesis contends that the focus on sensationalism, personality and entertainment has led to the trivialisation of political reporting (B. Franklin, 1997, pp. 4-5; Temple, 2008, pp. 172-173). Political journalism is said to have succumbed to "the pressures of tabloidization" (McNair, 2000, p. 4). By focusing so intently on personality and entertainment, scholars claim that journalists neglect hard

news and neglect to pay attention to serious policy discussions (Temple, 2008, p. 173). By neglecting hard news and prioritising entertainment, news organisations have in fact fostered an "uninformed and apathetic citizenry" (Temple, 2008, p. 173). This is a view espoused by other academics, including Bob Franklin. He contends that contemporary news be described as "Newszak": news that is an entertainment product which makes "only modest demands on the audience" (B. Franklin, 1997, pp. 4-5). Franklin argues that:

> Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgement has succumbed to sensationalism; the trivial has triumphed over the weighty; the intimate relationships of celebrities from soap operas, the world of sport, or the royal family are judged more 'newsworthy' than the reporting of significant issues and events of international consequence (B. Franklin, 1997, p. 4).

Many of the trends in political reporting identified by Bob Franklin (1997) are said to be the product of media logic. Explored in the work of David Altheide and Robert Snow (1991), the concept of media logic suggests that news is shaped by various imperatives and news values (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 52-53). For example, Jesper Strömbäck (2011, p. 373) defines media logic as the "institutional, technological, and sociological characteristics of the news media, including their format characteristics, production and dissemination routines, norms and needs" (quoted in Cushion, Thomas, Kilby, Morani, & Sambrook, 2016, pp. 473-474). In this sense, media logic includes commercial logic (commercial imperatives), industry logic (requirements and imperatives of the media sector), technological logic (the importance of technological constraints) and cultural logic (Mazzoleni, 2008, p. 445). Put simply, different mediums have different conditions and attributes which influence what is reported "and in what manner" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 52).

Bob Franklin (1997, pp. 15-17) argues that commercial logic, such as increased competition, technological disruption and the declines in advertising and circulation/viewership, have fostered a new style of reporting that fails to adequately facilitate informed debate within the public sphere. In this sense, media logic is driving

many of the detrimental trends in contemporary journalism. But also imporant here is political logic.

Political logic "refers to a need to form, take decisions on and implement policies, and the need to be successful in different processes of winning support in elections or in the battle for publicity, public opinion, and in negotiations and bargaining" (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014, pp. 15-16). Election campaigns are often viewed as the ultimate battle between political and media logic (Mazzoleni, 1987; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008; Takens, van Atteveldt, van Hoof, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013). Media logic is often claimed to trump political logic as evident by the continual focus on horserace and process journalism over substantive policy reporting (see Cushion, Thomas, et al., 2016, p. 474). Yet, in their study of UK election news, Stephen Cushion and colleagues (2016) argued that political logic—including the way politicians campaigned and their unwillingness to address policy questions—influenced the way the journalists reported election information from the campaign trail. In this sense, the trends in political reporting described by Franklin (1997) are the product of political logic. Clearly, there are a variety of explanations put forward to explain these changes in political reporting. Hence, we need to consider both political and media logic when examining news coverage of policy issues in the twenty-first century.

Optimistic-Pessimistic Divide

Scholars have advanced several arguments to explain these trends in political reporting. But it is the significance of these trends that is debated extensively in the scholarship. Brian McNair's (2000) work, *Journalism and Democracy: An evaluation of the political public sphere,* adopts a more optimistic view of contemporary political reporting.

Using interviews and quantitative content analysis, McNair (2000, pp. 3-7) finds that political journalism has become more focused on the style and spectacle rather than the substance of political debates. However, McNair (2000, pp. 171-172) argues that such evidence does not indicate a "dumbing down" of political content or a decline in quality. Rather than limiting debate in the public sphere, McNair claims that these trends have prompted a shift towards the demystification and the "deconstruction of the relationship

between journalism and the powerful" (McNair, 2000, pp. 171-172). He argues that these trends in contemporary journalism have increased the "accessibility of contemporary political debate" and improved the "democratic accountability of political elites" (McNair, 2000, p. 172).

In addition, other scholars have claimed that these trends have led to a democratisation of news content that has permitted access to a wider portion of the population not just the "cultural elite" (Temple, 2008, p. 179) According to Temple (2008, p. 176), the notion of "dumbing down" itself implies that there was a mythical "golden age" of journalism which did not exist. Temple (2008, pp. 176-177) argues that today there are more news outlets, greater attention, more coverage and more visibility of problems and issues than ever before. But such optimistic assessments of political news should be interpreted cautiously.

The optimistic perspective posits that the media are making political news more accessible through different platforms (Temple, 2008). Yet, equating the plurality of news platforms with news quality is problematic. As Stephen Cushion (2012, p. 58) correctly notes, the quality or democratic value of news content is "not necessarily enhanced by more platforms supplying journalism." While it is problematic to suggest that there was a "golden age" of political journalism without providing some form of empirical validation, it is also questionable to equate quality news with the plurality of media outlets. As will be discussed, it is the content that is provided on these platforms that needs to be taken into consideration.

Different perspectives along this optimistic-pessimistic spectrum have arrived at different conclusions about the state of contemporary reporting. The Australian studies discussed earlier can be situated along this spectrum. The claims about political reporting advanced in this debate are, in the most part, highly critical of contemporary journalism. However, we need to consider how these studies have measured the quality of political reporting. How should political news be evaluated? More specifically, how should news coverage of policy issues be analysed? And what aspects of policy news content should be measured? By addressing these question, my thesis aims to fill another empirical and methodological gap in the Australian and international political

communications scholarship by developing an analytical approach to study news coverage of policy issues.

Section 3:

Evaluating Policy News

In Australia, as is the case in other western democracies, political journalism is said to be in a state of crisis (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Neveu, 2002, p. 33). As I have shown, it is the "quality" of political news that is at the centre of these criticisms. Yet, this raises some fundamental questions for us to consider; namely, what is "quality" news? And how do we evaluate political news coverage over time?

What is "Quality" News?

Central to many of the criticisms in the political communications literature is the issue of news quality. However, there is less consensus on how "quality" news is defined. For example, scholars have viewed the quality of news in terms of 1) its cultural value, 2) the plurality of media platforms and reporting styles, or 3) the "democratic value" of news to the citizenry (Cushion, 2012, pp. 44-58).

The first approach equates quality with cultural value (Cushion, 2012, p. 51). In this sense, quality news is hard news or serious journalism (news about politics, economics, business, and public affairs) (Cushion, 2012, p. 51). According to this view, any move towards soft news topics (such as crime, sport, or personality driven journalism) or the tabloidisation of news coverage is viewed as a decline in quality (Cushion, 2012, p. 51). Yet, these cultural value based accounts perpetuate an elitist and simplistic view of quality that disregards the value of soft news and tabloid journalism in the public sphere (see for example Baum, 2002, 2003). So, we need to consider news coverage from another perspective.

A second approach offered in the journalism literature links the quality of news with pluralism in the media landscape (Cushion, 2012, p. 54). In the media studies scholarship, pluralism is often equated with the number of media platforms in a market,

but it can also refer to the extent news outlets routinely draw upon different perspectives in their news coverage (Cushion, 2012, p. 54). Pluralist accounts argue that the expansion of digital technologies and new forms of communication have provided citizens with more access to information (Cushion, 2012, pp. 52-54). In doing so, news quality has improved because this expansion has provided greater choice and more voices in public debates (Cushion, 2012, pp. 52-54). However, many of these pluralist accounts focus solely on the number of platforms rather than news content. Exclusively equating the plurality of media outlets, media ownership and audience reach with "quality" neglects the "editorial content," the "diversity of news produced" and whether news coverage is enhancing political knowledge (Cushion, 2012, pp. 44-45, 55-57). Thus, any evaluation of news quality needs to consider the value of this content in the public sphere.

The final approach discussed here links the quality of news to its "democratic value." This thesis is informed by this approach. Cushion (2012, p. 2) defines "quality" reporting as news of "democratic value." In this definition, quality news is reporting that "above all, has informative quality, enhancing people's understanding of the world on issues likely to empower them as citizens in democracy" (Cushion, 2012, p. 2). In other words, news of democratic value is news that conveys information likely to improve citizens' understanding of issues and events (Cushion, 2012, p. 204). Hence, the democratic value of news is enhanced when it provides a supply of hard news topics, contains in-depth journalism, or provides extensive coverage of policy matters and different electoral contests (Cushion, 2012, p. 204-205). News of democratic value provides citizens with access to information and the necessary tools that are vital for informed public debate and democratic participation (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 58-59; Lewis, 2006).

The democratic value approach is consistent with Habermasian ideals of the public sphere. The approach is not tied to the plurality of news outlets or type of platforms, but is linked to how well news content can inform public debate. Cushion's (2012) definition of news quality is the most relevant to my analysis of policy content. It is an empirically workable definition of news quality that is consistent with the assumptions that inform my thesis. Hence, the definition used in this thesis equates "quality" policy

news with reporting that informs public debate, provides in-depth journalism, reports on policy matters, enables a channel for various viewpoints to be expressed and, in so doing, facilitates a contest of diverse ideas. Having conceptualised "quality" news, we can now turn our attention to how we evaluate policy news coverage over time.

Analysing Policy Reporting and Political News

Earlier I reviewed the arguments put forward in the "dumbing down" debate and Australian literature. The debates and discussions in this literature largely centred around four key themes: 1) the sources quoted in news coverage, 2) the attention paid to policy issues, 3) the policy information or details in reporting and 4) the frames and narratives used to tell political and policy stories. This section delves deeper into the empirical studies in each of these four areas. It reviews the key critiques of political and election reporting. In reviewing these studies, this section argues that these four themes provide a useful set of analytical tools or lenses that can be used to study different aspects of policy reporting.

1) Sources Quoted and "Primary Definers" in Political News

Sources play an integral role in shaping news content. Journalists need sources "to get access to information, to provide different viewpoints, to offer context and interpretations, and to validate news accounts" (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2009, p. 75). Journalists are highly dependent upon sources for information that they can easily use to produce their reports and meet their deadlines (Manning, 2001, p. 55). As Manning (2001, p. 55) notes, the "frenetic scramble to meet the deadline" means that journalists often need to "build certainty" into the news process, which they do by seeking out sources for information that can easily be "fashioned into news copy" (Manning, 2001, p. 55). Hence, one way to evaluate whether policy news has changed over time is to examine the sources quoted in news coverage.

Previous studies have shown that journalists are highly dependent upon political sources for information (for example see Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; 1995, pp. 32-42; Hocking, 2009, pp. 213-216; Örebro, 2002; Sigal, 1973, p. 180). Journalist use politicians as a source of information to substantiate their reports (B. Franklin, 2004,

pp. 15-17). For example, Stuart Hall and his colleagues (1978, p. 58) argued that due to newsroom pressures and values, journalists were more likely to privilege powerful sources of information in the belief that they had "more accurate or specialised information on particular topics than the majority of the population." Powerful sources can then become the "primary definers" of news content with immense influence to shape the news cycle (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). Moreover, Herbert Gans (1979, pp. 9-15) argued that official sources including politicians, government officials, judges, professionals, experts, and business or leaders were far more likely to be the dominate sources in news coverage.

Politicians can use the media as a conduit to provide political information, promote an image, or leak a story (B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 15-17). By managing information, key political actors can exercise influence over the information that flows to the news media by selecting key pieces of information for journalists to reproduce in their news articles (Manning, 2001, pp. 107-108). It is important to understand the way politicians communicate information because this could affect how news outlets cover political and policy information during an election.

Recent empirical studies have also found that official or political sources were highly influential in news coverage (Cross, 2010, p. 428; Dekavalla and Jelen-Sanchez, 2016; D. Jackson, 2011, p. 186; Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 190). For example, in a comparative 11 country study of source selection patterns, Rodney Tiffen and his colleagues (2014) found that political sources monopolised domestic political and policy-related news coverage, "with the proportions relatively tightly grouped between 50 and 60 per cent [of coverage], except for Australia." Tiffen and colleagues (2014) found that that number of sources also varied by media type, with newspapers in Australia and the UK, which have tended to be viewed as quality journalism, containing fewer sources in their news coverage than television (Tiffen et al., 2014, pp. 387-388). This research shows that the news medium matters when it comes to source selection. Different media appear to use different sources. This raises several questions for us to consider in subsequent chapters: do the sources quoted in policy coverage vary by platform? Do some platforms provide more opportunity for certain sources to be heard? If so, what are the broader implications for quality of policy discourse?

According to normative public sphere based ideals, the media should provide a platform for diverse range of viewpoints to be heard (McNair, 2011, p. 18). If the media provide a platform for some people to contribute to political discussions but other voices are excluded, then this may suggest that the media are failing to execute their democratic function to facilitate a diverse contest of ideas. If political sources are the only voices heard, then such actors can influence debates to their advantage, excluding other points of view, critiques, and details from the discussion (W. L. Bennett et al., 2007, pp. 48-50; B. Franklin, 2004). The press become increasingly the subject of manipulation by political elites whose distortion of facts prevents the media from maintaining political accountability (W. L. Bennett et al., 2007, p. 48; Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016; McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). When the diversity of sources or voices is limited, then democratic deliberation is curtailed because there are fewer opposing voices are heard (W. L. Bennett, 1990, p. 106; Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). Consequently, political sources can more easily sway the public agenda and limit the scope of discussions to their advantage (W. L. Bennett, 1990, p. 125; Schudson, 2011, p. 145). Hence, it is crucial that we understand the key sources the media quote in policy reporting because this has broader implications for informed discourse in the public sphere.

2) Media Attention to Policy Issues

Another area of contention in the "dumbing down" debate is whether the media do or do not cover policy issues. Media attention is so important because it is a finite resource (Boydstun, 2013, pp. 11-12). There are numerous events, issues, and topics competing for media attention on any given day (Boydstun, 2013, pp. 11-12). Most issues are ignored simply because the media lacks the capacity to report on absolutely every single event or issue (Boydstun, 2013, p. 12).[17]

Understanding what issues or problems the media *do* decide to report upon is crucial because such attention may have broader priming and agenda setting effects. In their

[17] There are diverse theoretical explanations that attempt to account for why some policy issues are covered more than others (for summary discussion see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Dowding & Martin, 2017, p. 14; B. D. Jones & Baumgartner, 2012; Richardson & Jordan, 1979; Shepsle, 1979; Tsebelis, 2002). The most relevant for this thesis' study of media attention is agenda setting theory which focuses on the influence of the media over issue salience (McCombs, 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

seminal work on agenda-setting, *The Agenda-Setting Function Of Mass Media*, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972, pp. 180-181) concluded that the media attention had a considerable influence over what voters perceived to be the most important issues in the 1968 Presidential election campaign. Media attention matters because it highlights problems, primes audiences to think about issues, and shapes the agenda of public debate (for a detailed discussion see Boydstun, Bevan, & Thomas III, 2014, p. 192; Ghanem, 1997; McCombs, 2005, 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Roessler, 2007; Takens, Ruigrok, Van Hoof, & Scholten, 2010). Put simply by Bernard Cohen (1963, p. 13), "[the press] may not be successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." Related to agenda setting is priming theory.

Priming theory suggests that the media can alter the criteria we use to view or make judgements about issues or candidates by highlighting certain problems or topics in media content (Young, 2011, p. 103). For example, the media may highlight the issue of terrorism in news content prior to a leader's speech, and voters may subsequently base their judgements of the leader upon who was toughest on crime (Young, 2011, p. 103). This is particularly important in an election campaign. In Australia, much of the information voters receive about is filtered by news organisations (Young, 2011, p. 171). Therefore, it is important to understand the topics and issues media pay attention to because this can shape what voters think about at the ballot box. Given these important priming and agenda setting effects, the second analytical tool used in this thesis to evaluate policy issues examines whether media attention to policy issues has changed over time.

Empirical studies of the media agenda have been critical of news outlets for their failure to cover policy issues. Existing research has claimed that the focus on strategy or the political game displaces policy issues from reporting (see Cushion, Thomas, et al., 2016, pp. 479-481; Hopmann, De Vreese, & Albæk, 2011, pp. 276-277; Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 77; W. Schultz & Zeh, 2006; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008, p. 425). Other agenda-setting research has shown that politicians, specifically national leaders, are highly influential in shaping the media agenda and influencing public debates on public affairs issues (McCombs, 2014, p. 132). Scholars have claimed that what politicians

say and how they campaign often affects what the media report in their election coverage (Young, 2011, p. 164). For example, Cushion, Thomas and colleagues' (2016, pp. 479-481) study of British election news found that media reporting was often shaped by political logic, with attention to policy issues often secondary to the attention given to process news. They also found that politicians were highly influential in shaping reporting, with the tightly controlled and staged managed way that parties ran their campaign events, and the fact that political parties rarely held morning press conferences, denying journalists the opportunity to ask questions about policy matters (Cushion, Thomas, et al., 2016, pp. 479-481).

While existing research has mostly been critical media coverage of policy debates, there is a competing narrative in the political communications literature that paints more positive assessment of media attention to policy issues. For example, Doris Graber (2012, p. 46) found that there was ample coverage of the policy issues and topics on the US media agenda in which news coverage was able reach "a broad array of US media audience, regardless of their particular choice of news platforms." Consistent with Graber's (2012) view, McNair's (2000, pp. 46-48) content analysis of 19 national newspaper, five television news channels, and one radio station in the UK concluded that more than 50 per cent of the 1500 news stories were policy-based stories, which included a diverse range of issues (McNair, 2000, pp. 46-48). There is a tension here between scholars who claim that the media do not report on policy issues, and those who suggest that the media pay ample attention to issues on the public and political agenda. The divide between these two perspectives can also be broadly mapped on the optimistic-pessimistic spectrum of the "dumbing down" debate that I discussed earlier.

There is a wealth of scholarship discussing whether the media do or do not cover policy issues. But there are important other questions that emerge in this literature: what factors prompt shifts in media attention to policy issues in elections? How do the words of politicians influence media attention to policy issues? Examining the patterns of media attention to policy issues across the 2000s provides another tool to examine news coverage of policy issues during election campaigns.

3) Policy Information in News Coverage

Another aspect to consider when analysing policy coverage is the information and details that are included in news reports. A key argument put forward in the "dumbing down" debate suggests that the information content of political news coverage has declined over time (for discussion see W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 44-49; B. Franklin, 1997, pp. 4-6; Temple, 2008, pp. 173-179). Influential in early debates, Neil Postman (1985, p. 8) argued that the ascendancy of television as a primary news medium had dramatically shifted the content of public discourse to a point where "form excludes content." According to Postman's view, television serves the public "most ill" because it "co-opts" serious discourse—such as hard news, politics, education and science—and turns it into entertainment that the audience passively consumes (Postman, 1985, p. 159). To Postman (1985, p. 8), "as the influence of print wanes," the content of political and public discourse had changed to be "recast in terms that are most suitable to television." Postman (1985, pp. 87-88) observed that entertainment had replaced substance because television news was constructed as a form of entertainment, with music, a smiling cast, and friendly banter.

Recent empirical studies of political information in news content have drawn similar conclusions to the early scholarship (see Anderson, 2007; Entman, 1996; Graber, 2012; Yada, 2007). Scholars have charged news outlets for reducing their coverage of politics and "policy arguments to a clash of simple slogans" (Entman, 1996, pp. 78-79). Adopting a similar line of argument to Bob Franklin (1997), Robert Entman (1996, p. 78) observes that media's focus on personality, emotion, and the process (or game) of politics obscures substantive policy discussion. In framing news using process narratives, the media reduce the complexity of policy issues and over-simplify policy debates, which compromises the depth and detail of the reporting (Entman, 1996, pp. 78-79). Advancing this argument, Heinz Brandenburg (2007, p. 224) demonstrated that the economic decline of news organisations had a detrimental impact upon the depth of coverage and quality of journalism in the US. Consequently, we need to consider whether the immense technological and commercial disruption in the Australian media landscape has had a similar impact upon policy coverage.

Building upon the arguments of Postman (1985) and Bob Franklin (1997), W. Lance Bennett (2012, pp. 44-45) contends that problems in political reporting are best thought of as "information biases." In seminal work, *News: The Politics of Illusion,* W. L. Bennett (2012, pp. 48-49) claims that it is not necessarily the stories themselves that create "information problems," but it is how political stories are told. W. L. Bennett (2012, pp. 48-66) finds that there are "four information biases" that have had a detrimental impact upon the quality of information presented in news coverage. Information biases include the tendency of the media to focus on "personalization, dramatization, fragmentation, and the authority-disorder bias" (W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 44-48). Reporting then becomes focused on elements of personality, drama and what action authorities (politicians, governments and so on) are taking and "whether this is moving in an orderly and reassuring or disorderly and disturbing direction" (W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 62-63). According to W. L. Bennett (2012, pp. 44-64), these four information biases obscure and trivialise the presentation of information in the public sphere by only engaging superficially in political discussion. These negative evaluations of political news have largely been tempered by more positive comparative studies of online and print news.

More optimistic assessments of political news in the twenty-first century claim that the internet has improved the dissemination of political information. The internet is often viewed as somewhat of a saviour for contemporary journalism by allowing more space for information to be reported, and a new "space for policy deliberation" through the establishment of citizen networks (Coleman, 2012). For example, early internet scholarship argued that online news sites were able provide greater depth and immediacy in their news coverage that was "unmatched by any other news mediums" because the traditional limitations do not apply (Allan, 2006, pp. 25, 64). However, recent comparative studies of print and online communication have refuted many of the earlier claims about the internet.[18] In fact, recent studies have shown that print news

[18] Recent comparative research has found little difference in the information content of print and online news platforms. For example, in a content analysis of US newspapers and their online news sites, Lindsay Hoffman (2006, pp. 60-65) analysed the amount of "mobilising information" in news coverage—information that enables people to act on pre-existing attitudes such as how people should follow through with an action or attitude. Drawing similar conclusions to Singer (2003), Hoffman (2006, p. 69) concluded that there were no significant differences between the amount of information in online and print news.

generally performs better than online news, with newspapers providing more political information, depth and breadth than their online counterparts (Maier, 2010b, p. 17; Maier & Tucker, 2012, p. 59). This suggests that claims about the internet improving the amount of political information in the public sphere should be interpreted cautiously.

There is a clear divide here along the optimistic-pessimistic spectrum. On the one hand, optimistic scholars claim that online news sites have provided a new platform for policy deliberation (see Allan, 2006). On the other hand, more pessimistic scholars argue that policy information in the public sphere is lacking because media organisations simply do not publish policy material (see Brandenburg, 2007). What these optimistic and pessimistic scholars do appear to agree upon is that political and policy information is vital for informed debate (W. L. Bennett, 2012; McNair, 2000, 2011). If there is a lack of information, then the public are prevented from evaluating various policy options on their own (Entman, 1996, p. 81). Consequently, the quality of debate is undermined, and the ability of voters to make informed decisions at the ballot box is hindered.

The Australian media landscape is plagued with many similar commercial problems which may be compounding any information deficit in the public sphere. Therefore, analysing the information content of policy news provided another way to evaluate policy reporting over the twenty-first century. Examining *what* is reported, *how much* is reported, and *who* defines political discussions is crucial in any analysis of news coverage over several campaigns. But we also need to consider how political stories are *told*.

4) Frames and Narratives in Political News

Election campaigns are stories, with narratives and plots based around conflict and drama (Coleman, 2015, p. 167). As Stephen Coleman (2015, p. 168) notes, elections are story telling contests that "give tangibility to the abstract notion of 'the publics.'" According to Coleman (2015, p. 172), the media present three types of election stories: 1) a story based upon the meta-narrative such as "when and what the election is;" 2) a story explaining the political stakes of the election such as information about the

political agenda; and 3) a story about the voters that is told through opinion polls and interviews with citizens. It is the way political stories are framed by the news media that is one of the most contention areas of scholarly debate. Therefore, the final part of the analytical tool used to examine policy news considers the frames and narratives used in policy coverage.

According to framing theory, communicators select (or frame) an aspect to promote a certain "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). News frames allow information to be packaged and processed so that it "can be quickly conveyed by reporters and easily interpreted by the audience" (Trimble & Sampert, 2004, p. 52). In elections, journalists need to present complex information in a short time period that interests and engages their audience (Trimble & Sampert, 2004, p. 52; Young, 2011, pp. 178-182). The way political stories are framed can influence the way people think about policy problems and politics more broadly (Chong & Druckman, 2007, pp. 104-106). It is the types of frames used to communicate political news that are often the subject of criticism in the communications scholarship.

Scholars have been highly critical of the framing of election and political news. Political news, so the critics claim, frequently adopts game, contests or horserace metaphors in reporting that obscures policy issues, diminish the quality of news, fosters greater cynicism amongst voters, erodes political trust, and places voters as spectators rather than participants in political debates (see Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; D. Jackson, 2010, 2011; Lawrence, 2000; Mendelsohn, 1996, p. 15; Lee, McLeod, & Shah, 2008; Patterson, 1993, pp. 92-93; Tedesco, 2005; Trimble & Sampert, 2004, p. 52; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008).[19] Advancing this argument, Thomas Patterson (1993) examined the use of game frames in US election coverage. In a content analysis of US presidential campaign coverage, Patterson (1993, pp. 60-61) found that strategic game narratives were the dominant frame or "schema" in campaign news coverage, with policy discussion increasingly more marginalised. Patterson (1993, pp. 60-61) argued that

[19] There are several contextual factors that are predictors of game and strategic frames in news coverage, including whether news coverage is from an election period, number of parties contesting an election, the type of media, or whether there is conflict between policymakers (Binderkrantz & Green-Pedersen, 2009; Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013, pp. 83-85; Lawrence, 2000, p. 93).

policy issues "lack the novelty" that makes them attractive to journalists; often because they are longstanding issues. As Patterson (1993, p. 62) observed:

> 'Horse races' happen; 'horse races' are themselves filled with specific actions. Policy issues, on the other hand, do not happen; they merely exist. Substance has no events; issues generally remain static (Patterson, 1993, p. 62),

According to Patterson's view, the horserace becomes more newsworthy than policy issues, with the game frame "embodying the conflict journalists prize" (Patterson, 1993, p. 63). Patterson (1993, pp. 77-81) attributes the rise in the "game schema" to the way political campaigns are run, the decentralisation of campaigning, and the way candidates present themselves. Moreover, he argues that the adoption of more aggressive and interpretive styles of reporting, tighter news deadlines, the celebrity factor of modern politics, and other commercial developments in the media landscape largely accounted for the adoption of the "game schema" in election coverage (Patterson, 1993, pp. 60-82). The press' focus on the "game schema," so the argument follows, prevents candidates from articulating their messages, increases voters' mistrust in politicians, reduces voters' involvement in the campaign, and prevents voters and journalists from viewing the campaign in other ways (Patterson, 1993, pp. 92-93).

Critics argue that game and strategic framing has detrimental consequences for the public sphere because substantive information about policy issues is sacrificed for a game frame that only presents a "one dimensional view of politics" (Lawrence, 2000, p. 94). In doing so, "game framing trivializes and de-politicizes electoral democracy by telling stories about the most superficial, episodic and tactical elements of the campaign" (Trimble & Sampert, 2004, p. 69). Hence, game framing can also impact the reasoning processes used in the publics' evaluation of policies (Pingree, Scholl, & Quenette, 2012, pp. 643-644, 653). Yet, the pessimistic conclusions presented in the discourse on game framing are heavily contested.

In contrast to the critical view, J. Scott Matthews and colleagues (2012, pp. 262,281) found that longer stories that included polls often had more substantive issue content

and more analytical or interpretive content than other election news stories. In their content analysis of newspaper articles in the 2006 Canadian election, Matthews et al. (2012, pp. 281-282) argued that "poll stories create an opportunity for journalists to elaborate on the political context of poll results…poll stories may, as a consequence, be an underappreciated source of political learning for voters." This evidence challenges the view that game framing is in fact detrimental to the public sphere because it hinders political engagement.

We should be sceptical of such positive assessments of game and horserace framing. It is the way the information is presented in polling stories that is problematic. Simply because a polling story contains some information does not mean that the information is useful to voters. If it is presented in a way that negatively depicts the political process or reduces arguments to simplistic assertions, then any positive impacts are indeed questionable. Put simply, there is more evidence to suggest that game and strategic framing does more harm to democratic engagement than good.

Game and strategic framing hinders political engagement by promoting political cynicism and distrust in politics. For example, prominent scholars Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Jamieson (1997, pp. 230-232) found that those audiences who were exposed to strategic framed news were more likely to have higher levels of political cynicism.[20] Strategic frames undermine democracy by fostering distrust in political institutions, disengagement amongst voters, and taint their views of the media (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). The media continues to report strategic framed news stories believing the public wants this news, but this just leads to a "spiral of cynicism" that becomes "mutually reinforcing" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, pp. 238-239). Building upon Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) argument, Nicholas Valentino and colleagues (2001, pp. 104-105) also showed that the focus on game and strategic frames depressed citizens' information retention, impeded the development of political knowledge, and often led to more negative evaluations of politics and candidates.

[20] Cappella and Jamieson (1997, pp. 230-232) argued that even a single strategic framed news story can "activating cynical attributions."

A clear tension exists in the framing literature between those who view the dominance of strategic, horserace and game frames in a negative light (such as Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993), and those scholars who see the potential for these frames and narratives to provide information and engage voters (for example Matthews et al., 2012). But the evidence suggests that game and strategic framing does little to improve voters' capacity to participate in informed deliberation (Valentino, Buhr, & Beckmann, 2001).

If Australian news coverage of policy issues is reported using a game or strategy frame, then this may be detrimental to the facilitation of debate in the public sphere. Patterson (1993, pp. 77-81) claimed that new campaigning techniques can lead to a proliferation of game and strategic frames in election news. Therefore, we need to consider whether game framing has intensified with the developments in political campaigning in the late twenty-first century, such as the rise of new digital campaigning techniques (see Mills, 2014). Hence, the final analytical tool used to evaluate policy news coverage examines the frames and narratives in policy news.

Media Bias

Another popular topic in the framing literature is the issue of media bias (for studies examining bias see Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; J. S. Gans & Leigh, 2012; Ho & Quinn, 2008; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Stroud, 2011). There are many definitions of media bias offered in the media scholarship (see McQuail, 1992). In political terms, bias can be defined as the "inclination, leaning or predisposition" to a political idea, ideology, policy, or party (Young, 2011, p. 230). Bias "can "skew and thwart the democratic process" by presenting misinformation, promoting interests of others over another, and by omitting details and facts to shape perceptions of issues (Street, 2011, p. 25). Approaches to the measurement of media bias vary substantially, with bias measured by the tone of news articles, the sentiment of editorial coverage or the percentage of speaking time for each political party/individual (Dalton et al., 1998; Durante & Knight, 2012, pp. 455-464; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Simms & Bolger, 2000, pp. 29-31).

The Australian news media are said to be even handed and "quite centrist" in their reporting of political news (Australian Press Council, 2007, p. 38; J. S. Gans & Leigh, 2012, pp. 140-141; Turner, 2005, pp. 105-109). However, there are some examples of explicit bias in election reporting. For example, this was evident during the 1972 Australian federal election campaign (see Mayer et al., 1973), 1998 campaign (Simms & Bolger, 2000, pp. 29-30) and more recently in the 2013 federal election (Hobbs & McKnight, 2014). The divide between those who perceive bias in political reporting and those who do not is illustrative of a broader point made by Young (2011, pp. 253-254) who argues:

> News is never a straightforward reflection of reality. Selecting topics means invariably privileging one account of what has happened and what it means over many other possible interpretations…When it comes to political news, media outlets send out mixed, contradictory and confusing messages. *This is why, for every perceived example of bias, there is usually another indicator pointing the other way* (emphasis added)(Young, 2011, pp. 253-254)

Understanding media bias is a complex task. Many studies have focused on the tone of news coverage, but we can also evaluate bias by examining the voices defining policy discussion. Analysing the balance or share of voices provides another approach to evaluate bias in election coverage and evaluate the quality of policy news (see Tiffen et al., 2014, p. 376). In doing so, I use the analytical tools and approaches identified throughout this review to explore the issue of bias in reporting.

Conclusion

In reviewing the literature, this chapter has identified three clear gaps in the Australian election reporting and media scholarship. Firstly, there is a lack of empirical research analysing news coverage of policy issues in several Australian elections and across multiple media platforms. This was the biggest gap identified in the scholarship. There is some existing research examining news coverage of policy issues (for example Haas et al., 2001; Hollander, 2006). However, this existing research has either focused on one election cycle or one policy domain. Hence, there is limited empirical evidence to

extrapolate many of the Australian claims about policy reporting to other election periods. This thesis aims to fill this empirical gap in the Australian literature by examining the reporting of tax, health and education issues in five election periods between 2001 and 2013

Secondly, existing studies of policy news have largely focused on whether policies were or were not reported. There is a lack of research examining other aspects of policy coverage, including the voices defining policy news stories, the types of policy details included in news reports, and frames used to report policy issues. This is the second gap this thesis aims to address through its analysis of policy reporting in subsequent chapters.

Finally, this review argued that there was a dearth of research examining news coverage of the campaign launch speeches over several election cycles in the 2000s. This is perplexing given these speeches are one of the highest profile events in the Australian election cycle (Brookes, 2017, pp. 15-16; Mills, 1996, p. 167). Existing studies have largely focused on the rhetoric of these speeches rather than news coverage of these events (Brookes, 2017; Younane, 2008). This is the third empirical gap identified in the Australian scholarship that this thesis aims to address through its analysis of media coverage and campaign launch speeches. This study fills these gaps in the Australian scholarship. It aims to do so by examining policy news coverage in Australia over several campaigns; by comparing policy reporting with the campaign launch speeches; and by examining multiple facets of policy reporting using the four analytical lenses identified in this review.

The absence of Australian research raises several questions about how we evaluate news coverage of policy in the twenty-first century. The final section of this chapter argued that policy reporting should be analysed by examining: 1) the sources quoted in news coverage, 2) media attention to policy issues, 3) the information content of policy news, and 4) the frames and narratives used in policy reporting. These four perspectives form the analytical tools or lenses that I use to evaluate news coverage of policy issues in elections between 2001 and 2013. To interpret the findings derived

from this analysis, this study draws upon liberal democratic principles and Habermas' public sphere ideals.

This chapter argued that news coverage should be evaluated by the standards news outlets promised to uphold. The standards that news outlets and journalists adopted in the twenty-first century were informed by public sphere theory (see Young, 2011, pp. Public sphere ideals are entrenched in the professional codes of Australian journalism (Young, 2011, pp. 2-3). Therefore, public sphere theory is the most appropriate theoretical approach to interpret the results and trends presented in subsequent chapters.

This study examines the reporting of policy issues across the 2000s; a period fraught with economic uncertainty for Australian news organisations. This chapter has outlined several key gaps in the Australian literature. In filling these gaps, this thesis aims contribute to the literature by expanding upon existing Australian research, by bridging the gaps in the Australian scholarship, and by developing stronger links between the Australian and international literature. The next chapter expands upon the research design used in this study to achieve these aims.

Chapter 3: Research Design

In reviewing the empirical and theoretical literature, the previous chapters have highlighted the key challenges facing Australia's media outlets in the twenty-first century. They have identified a several problems in the Australian media landscape and identified several gaps in the Australian scholarship that this thesis aims to fill. The following chapter expands upon the research design used to address the gaps and aims identified in the previous chapters. This chapter will outline the research questions, approach, data collection strategy, and the quantitative and qualitative methods employed to examine this research problem. It begins by returning to the research question, outlining some expectations, and operationalising some key terms and definitions. Following this discussion, the chapter will outline information about the sample, data, and research methods. It justifies the methods and explains how they were be applied to answer the central research question of this thesis.

Central Research Question

The earlier chapters identified an important empirical puzzle about the media, news quality, and policy reporting in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, media scholar and journalists have argued that news organisations have a responsibility to provide "quality" news— including detailed policy coverage—that informs voters, facilitates policy discourse, and contribute to debate in the public sphere (for discussion Habermas, 1989; McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). As showed in the previous chapter, public sphere ideals shape the professional culture of the Australian media, as evident in their codes of ethics (Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b). However, the economic turmoil in the media landscape may be curtailing the ability of news organisations to inform the public sphere. Chapter 1 highlighted that the business models of Australia's traditional media organisations are struggling under intense financial pressure. To adapt, news organisations have restructured their newsrooms to control their expenditure (see Zion, Dodd, et al., 2016; Zion, Sherwood, et al., 2016). But has the cost-cutting hindered their capacity to report the detailed policy news stories crucial to informed political discourse in Australian elections? A clear tension exists for news outlets as they try to balance their commercial problems with their democratic role to

inform public debate during election campaigns. This thesis aims to investigate this tension through the primary question:

> ***Central Research Question****: What, if anything, has happened to traditional news media reporting of policy issues during Australian federal elections in the twenty-first century (2001-2013)?*

The previous chapter argued that there was an opportunity to develop an approach to evaluate policy news coverage during election campaigns. After reviewing the literature, it identified four analytical lens (or tools) that it could use to answer the primary research question. Therefore, this thesis examines policy news by analysing 1) media attention to policy issues, 2) the information content of news coverage, 3) the sources quoted in news coverage, and 4) the frames and narratives used in policy stories. As will be shown, this study employs a qualitative language analysis and quantitative content analysis using a coding frame. This coding frame was used to examine each of these four elements of policy reporting. Hence, these analytical tools or lenses can be formulated into a set of questions that will be used to answer the central research question and guide the analysis of policy reporting in election periods:

1. What, if anything, has happened to *media attention* to tax, health and education issues during Australian election campaigns in the twenty-first century?
2. What, if anything, has happened to the *information content* of policy news in the twenty-first century?
3. Who are primary *sources or voices* quoted in the policy news in the twenty-first century?
4. What, if anything, has happened to the *framing* of policy news in the twenty-first century?

Definitions

To conduct the quantitative and qualitative analysis of policy news coverage, it is necessary to define the terms "policy issue" and "policy news." This section briefly outlines these two key definitions.

Defining a Policy Issue

Offering a single definition of a "policy issue" is a conceptually difficult task (Guinaudeaua & Persicob, 2014, p. 314). For example, policy issues can be defined by their saliency, complexity, or issue type, such as "valence" or "wedge" issues (Guinaudeaua & Persicob, 2014, p. 314). According to Guinaudeaua and Persicob (2014, pp. 314-315), a policy issue can be defined as a broad policy theme, such as welfare or international relations; a specific policy sector, such as health, transport or immigration; or a specific policy problem, such as the tax avoidance (Guinaudeaua & Persicob, 2014, pp. 314-315). Guinaudeaua an Persicob (2014, p. 316) define a "policy issue" is effectively "a question of public policy, as demarcated, defined and specified by political actors"

Informed by Guinaudeaua and Persicob's (2014) defintions, I define a "policy issue" as a "question of public policy" that can be isolated to a policy theme and a more specific objective or measure (see Guinaudeaua & Persicob, 2014, p. 316). In this thesis, a policy issue is defined as containing: 1) a broad policy theme (such as tax, education, or health), and 2) a specific policy objective (such as lower inflation, high educational results, decreased hospital wait times) or specific policy measure (such as a health training scheme, an investment in an education program, or a cut in company tax).

Defining a Policy News Story

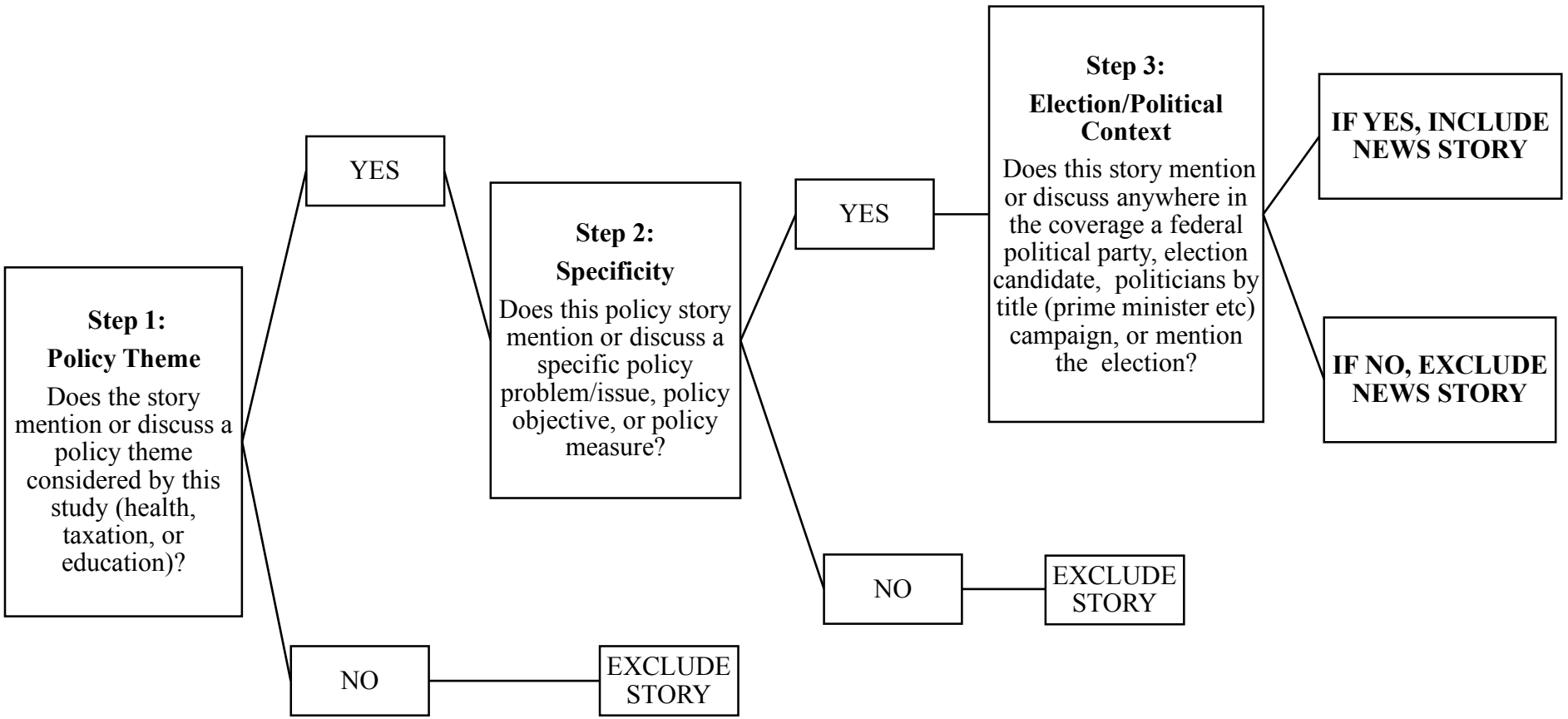
It is necessary to also differentiate between "policy news" and more general election news stories. To differentiate between the two different types of news stories, I developed a set of criteria to evaluate each news story (Figure 3.1). To do so, I drew upon the definition outline above, which was informed by Guinaudeaua an Persicob's (2014, p. 316) classification of a "policy issue."

For a story to be included in my sample, it needed to be based on a policy issue which can be isolated to a policy theme and a specific objective/or policy measure. Simply including the word health, tax or education in the story with no discussion of a specific policy or policy issue did not qualify for inclusion in my dataset. In line with the definition I outlined earlier, a degree of specificity was required in the reporting. This could simply include mentioning the name of a policy program, measure or issue. For example, this could include mentioning university funding and place allocations, problems with the two-tiered health funding arrangements, a change in the goods and services tax, a repeal of the carbon tax, a review of the funding arrangements for schools, company tax cut, carbon tax, education tax rebates, reform of public hospital funding and so one.

News stories were also required to mention or discuss the election or political context. I am concerned with media coverage of policy issues *during election periods*. This study is researching policy news stories in election reporting and how the media cover campaign issues. To be included in the sample, the stories need a connection to the election context in which they were reported. Policy news stories needed to mention or discuss the federal election, a federal political party, or a candidate or politician. This could have simply included a mention of a word such as "election", "independent candidate," "campaign", "prime minister" "federal minister" "Labor" or "Liberal" in the headline or body of the text/story. I deliberately kept this category broad to ensure that I included as many relevant tax, health and education policy stories from each election. These criteria were deemed necessary to ensure the feasibility of the project and collect the policy stories that dealt with the election and campaign issues. Other election studies have also followed a similar approach by placing limits on the types of election stories collected during a campaign (Denemark et al., 2007; Hollander, 2006).

The requirements for a story to be included in the sample are summarised in Figure 3.1. Each news story was evaluated against these criteria before being included in the sample. It is important to note that I excluded “letters to the editor” and “text to the editor” because I was interested in the reporting of policy issues by news outlets and journalists; not the way voters wrote about these issues. Using this guide, I collected a sample of 1484 news items. Further details about the sample are available in this chapter and appendix B.

Figure 3.1: Sampling guide for determining a policy news story



Research Approach and Recap of Scope

This thesis could have employed several different approaches to study election reporting. If I was interested in the role of organisational values in shaping election news, then participant observations and interviews with journalists and editors would have been appropriate. Participant observation would yield some interesting data on organisational structures and the news process, but very limited information about the content of policy reporting. If I was investigating the agenda setting effects of policy news upon news audiences or politicians, then I could have analysed public opinion and legislative data alongside an analysis of the media agenda. For example, I could have examined attitudes to macroeconomic, social welfare, or education issue using surveys and then conducted a content analysis media coverage and legislative attention to policy issues (for example study see Dowding and Martin, 2017, pp. 203-227). However, surveys would provide fewer insights into *news content*. If I was interested in the way audiences communicated and debated policy information, then a study of social media platforms would have been appropriate. For example, I could have employed a social network analysis of social media platforms to trace how the public were engaging in policy discussion online. Yet, social network analysis would provide limited information about the way *the traditional media report* policy issues. My study focuses on the way policy is *reported* in mainstream news coverage. As will be shown, quantitative content analysis and qualitative analysis of language were deemed the most appropriate methods to examine news coverage of policy issues.

The scope of this thesis was limited to the traditional news media, which included broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, television news programs, and online news articles published on newspaper websites (such as the *Sydney Morning Herald Online*). The justification for this focus was outlined extensively in the introduction and chapter 1. To recap, the decision to limit my scope to these media platforms was also informed by other studies of election news, political reporting, and election news audiences (Denemark et al., 2007; Goot, 2008; Singer, 2003; Young, 2011). As I demonstrated in chapter 1, traditional news platforms (primarily print and television) were most relied upon sources of election news for many Australians in the 2000s (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 72-76). Moreover, traditional media serve a vital function in the

media ecology and can shape the issues that other news outlets report (see McCombs, 2014, p. 129; Tiffen, 2010b, p. 94). So a focus on traditional media was clearly warranted.

This thesis also limited its scope to tax, health and education issues. This was necessary to ensure the feasibility of the project and was consistent with the other studies of policy reporting discussed earlier (see Hollander, 2006). As outlined in chapter 1, the Australian Election Study data shows that tax, health and education issues were amongst the most important issues to Australian voters in the five election periods examined (see McAllister & Cameron, 2014). For example, in 2001 and 2004 the top three salient issues to Australian voters were tax, health and education issues (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). In 2007, health, industrial relations, tax, and education were the most salient issues to the public (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). The most salient issues to voters in 2010 were management of the economy, health, education, global warming and tax (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). In 2013, the salience of these three issues waned slightly, with the most important issues to Australian voters including management of the economy, health, education and tax (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). Overall, these tax, health and education issues were consistently ranked by Australian voters as among the most important issues between 2001 and 2013.

Agenda-setting research has shown that the salience of issues on the public agenda is influenced by the salience on the media agenda (McCombs, 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972, pp. 180-181). Hence, we could also expect tax, health and education issues would also be highly salient in media coverage because these are important issues on the public agenda. Most voters have very little direct engagement with political candidates, so they rely heavily on the media for election information and policy material (Young, 2011, p. 3-4). Therefore, it is important to understand how the media report these very salient tax, health and education issues because this reporting can have agenda-setting and priming effects. This could influence the policy issues voters think about as they cast their votes (see Young, 2011, p. 103).

Sample and Data Collection

This study sampled news coverage of tax, health and education issues on the *day of* and *day following* the campaign launch speeches in every federal election campaign between 2001 and 2013. I also collected all the major party campaign launch speeches delivered over this period. The campaign launch speeches are a "major set piece" of the election cycle that are designed to garner media attention and maintain momentum in the final days of the campaign (Tiffen, 2008, p. 116; Younane, 2008; Young, 2011, pp. 139-140).

In addition to their significance in the campaign cycle, the campaign launch speeches provided a consistent sampling frame to analyse news coverage longitudinally. Despite appearing later in the election cycle (see Tiffen, 2008, p. 116), these speeches have been a feature of every election campaign between 2001 and 2013. Hence, the campaign launch speeches provide a useful point in the election to evaluate news coverage across the 2000s. The same period of the campaign can be sampled to ensure the comparability of the analysis across time. However, it is important to remember that these are snapshots in time. Like other Australian election reporting studies (Denemark et al., 2007; Hollander, 2006), this study only captures policy reporting during specific election periods. It is also does not include political journalism that takes place outside an election period. Consequently, the findings that are derived from this analysis can only make claims about policy reporting in Australian elections between 2001 and 2013.

It is also prudent to acknowledge that the sampling approach I have taken imposes some constraints. This study's primary aim is to examine the reporting of policy issues in federal election campaigns. It does not examine other election coverage. Therefore, I do not make claims about non-policy news reporting because this type of news coverage falls outside the scope of this thesis. By constraining my scope to policy news coverage, I am also conscious that there are limits to my analysis of policy attention. This thesis does not examine whether the media do or do not pay attention to policy issues. The data collected in this study does not lend itself to making such claims, and there is already existing research addressing this topic (see Young, 2011). It is difficult to

discuss the distribution of policy attention at a broader level without also looking at articles that do not deal with policy at all. Instead, this study analyses the distribution of policy attention within three different policy areas. By restricting the period and sampling strategy in this way, I ensured that my sampling was feasible, consistent, reliable and comparable across time.

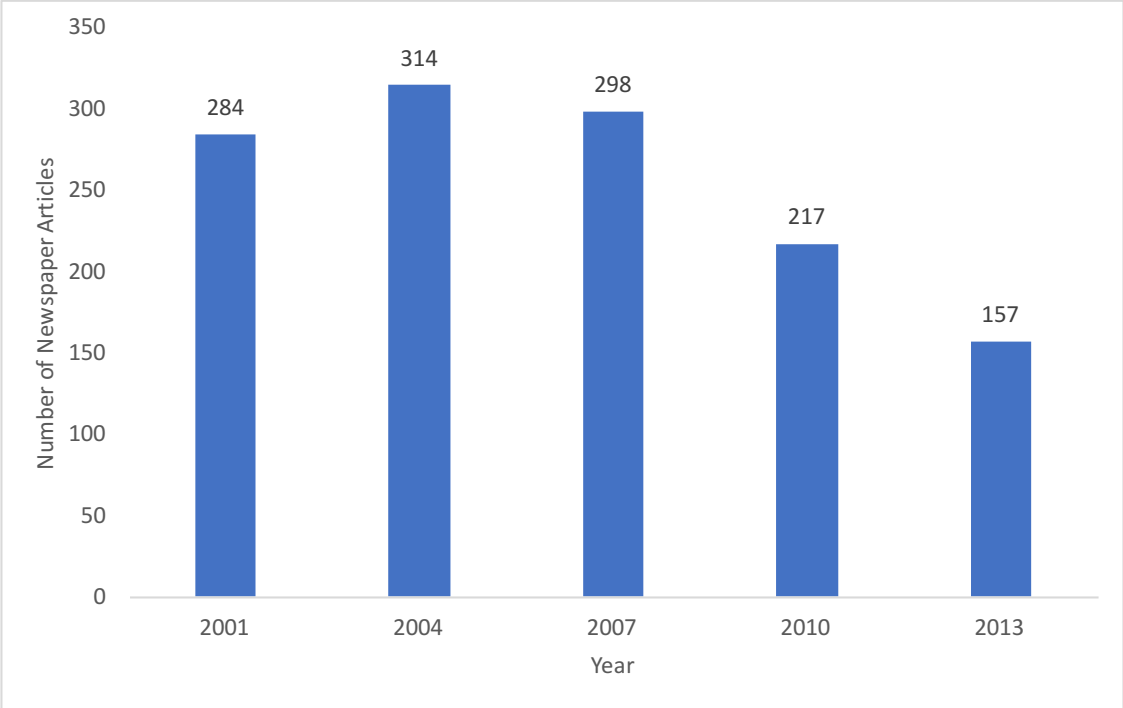
Newspaper Articles (Primary Dataset)

Newspaper articles were the primary source of data used to address my research question.[21] I collected 1270 newspaper articles from tabloid and broadsheet newspapers including the *Age, Herald Sun, Sydney Morning Herald, Daily Telegraph, Courier-Mail, West Australian, Advertiser, Northern Territory News, Hobart Mercury, Australian, Canberra Times,* and the *Australian Financial Review*. The sample includes newspapers from each state and territory, and Australia's two national newspapers. It also includes all the three dominant media organisations in Australia: News Corp Australia, Fairfax Media, and Seven West Media (see chapter 1). Newspaper articles were sampled on the *day of* and *day following* each major party campaign launch speech. The newspaper material was collected from online archive Factiva and Lexis Nexis Academic using a simple keyword search.[22] Factiva was the primary archive used to collect the newspaper material, with Lexis Nexis used to identify meta-data, such as page numbers, when this data was not provided by Factiva. Following the initial keyword search, I read each newspaper article to determine whether it matched the criteria for inclusion (Figure 3.1). Articles were saved and the relevant articles were coded according the coding guide and instructions outlined in appendices A and B. Figure 3.2 and 3.3 show the breakdown of the newspaper sample by year and by newspaper masthead.

[21] The justification for the focus on newspapers was outlined in chapter 1 and the introduction of this thesis. In short, newspapers fill a vital function in the media ecology by shaping the issues that other news organisations report with many other platforms "feed[ing] off the information made available by the press" (McCombs, 2014, p. 129; Tiffen, 2010b, p. 94).

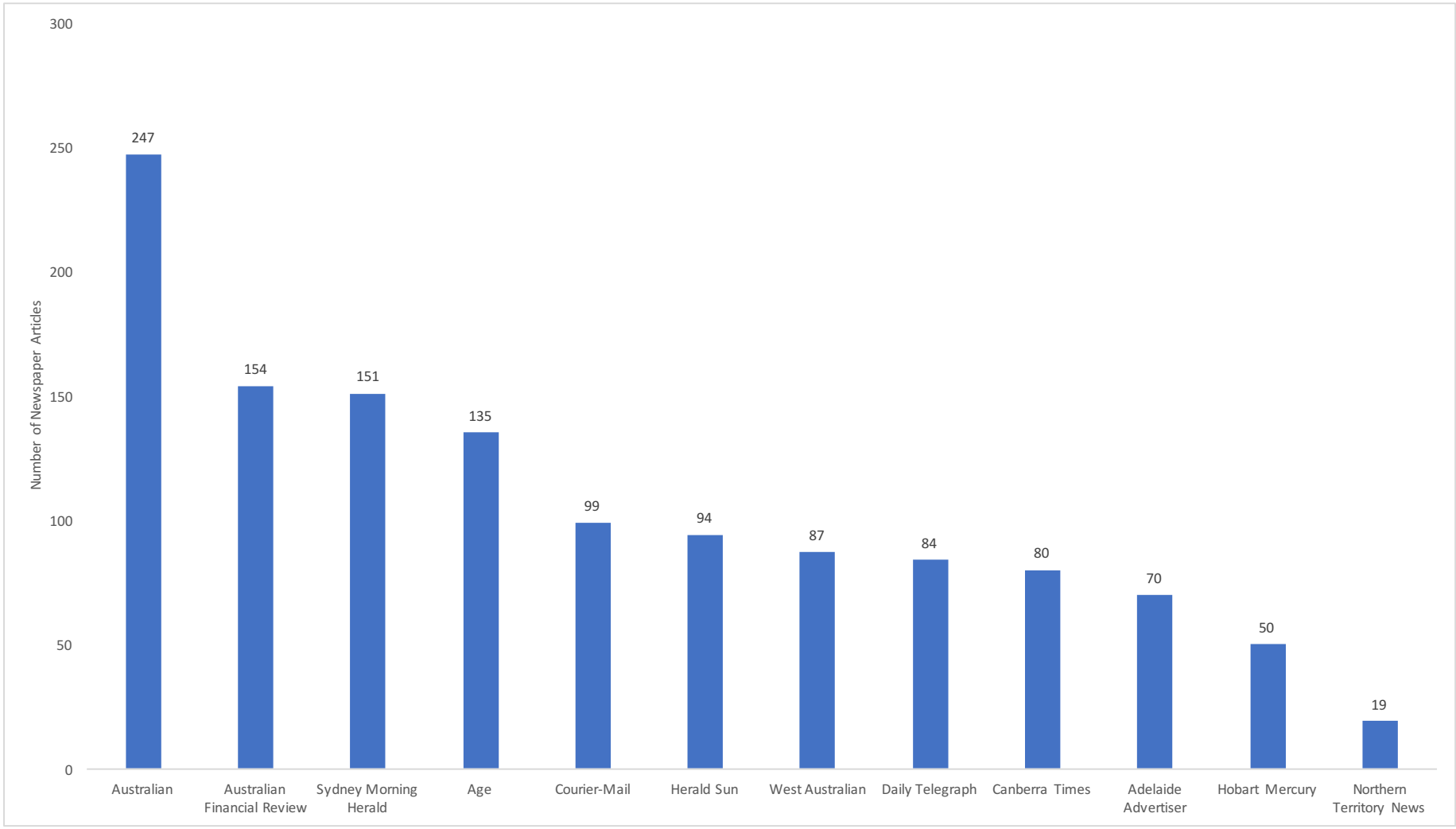
[22] For example, this included a set of broad keywords such as "launch* "launched" "campaign" "policy" and "speech" which I entered into the field titled: 'at least one of these words.' I decided to use broad keywords to ensure I identified a large array of articles in this initial search phase.

Figure 3.2: Sample of policy newspaper articles by year, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Figure 3.3: Sample of policy newspaper articles by newspaper masthead



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Television News Clips

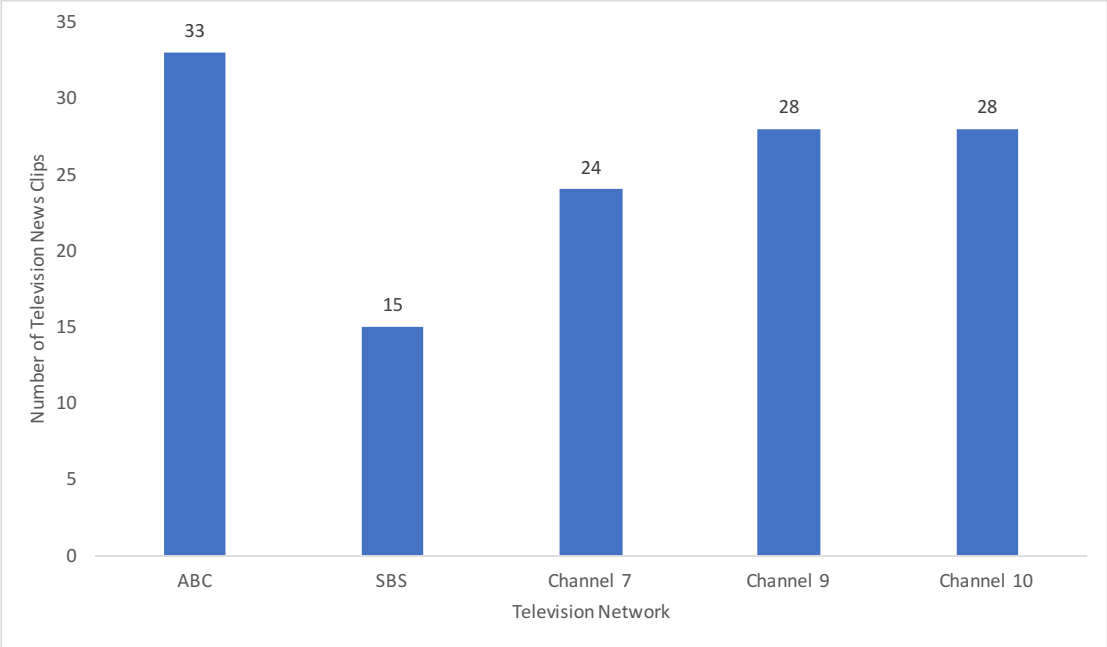
I also collected television policy news stories from metropolitan television news networks, including material from *Seven News (Chanel 7), Nine News (Channel 9), Channel 10 News, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) News, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) News*. Television material was collected from the Informit TV News Archive, and from the archive of news content created for Young's (2011) study. I collected 128 televisions news stories from election campaigns between 2001 and 2013. These were individual stories not the entire news program. An individual or single story was deemed as a story that began with an opening introduction from the news program anchor or presenter and ended with the presenter, journalist or news anchor issuing a 'sign off'.[23] Consistent with my sample of newspaper content, I sampled the television news clips on the *day of* and *day following* the campaign launch speeches. Each television news clip was analysed in a similar manner to the newspaper material using the coding frame outlined in Appendix A. The focus of my television analysis was on the attention policy topics received, the policy details provided in the stories, and the frames and narratives used to articulate the policy information. I also paid close attention to the words, images, and phrases used in these clips, including references to game or contest language, and the use of other visual aids such as graphs or slides listing the details about a policy announcement.[24]

Figure 3.4 shows the breakdown of the sample by television network. Most television news stories were from commercial television networks; however, 48 news stories were from publically-funded broadcasters, including the ABC and SBS.

[23] A 'sign off' refers to the concluding statement from the journalist or news anchor acknowledging the person reporting the story. For example, "Andrew Gibbons, Nine News" or "that report was from Andrew Gibbons in Canberra."

[24] Further details about the analysis of television news clips can be found in the appendices. Additional details are provided later in this chapter.

Figure 3.4: Sample of television policy news clips by television network



N= 128 television policy news clips. Source: Author.

Online News Articles

I also examined policy news articles published on the websites of traditional newspaper mastheads. The most significant problem I faced in sampling the online news articles was the ephemeral nature of digital content. For many online news websites, such as the *Australian Online*, it was difficult to consistently sample the *day of* or *day following* the campaign launch speech. Articles were either not archived or paywalls limited the material that the archives collected. Consequently, I was restricted to sampling articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald Online (The SMH Online)*.

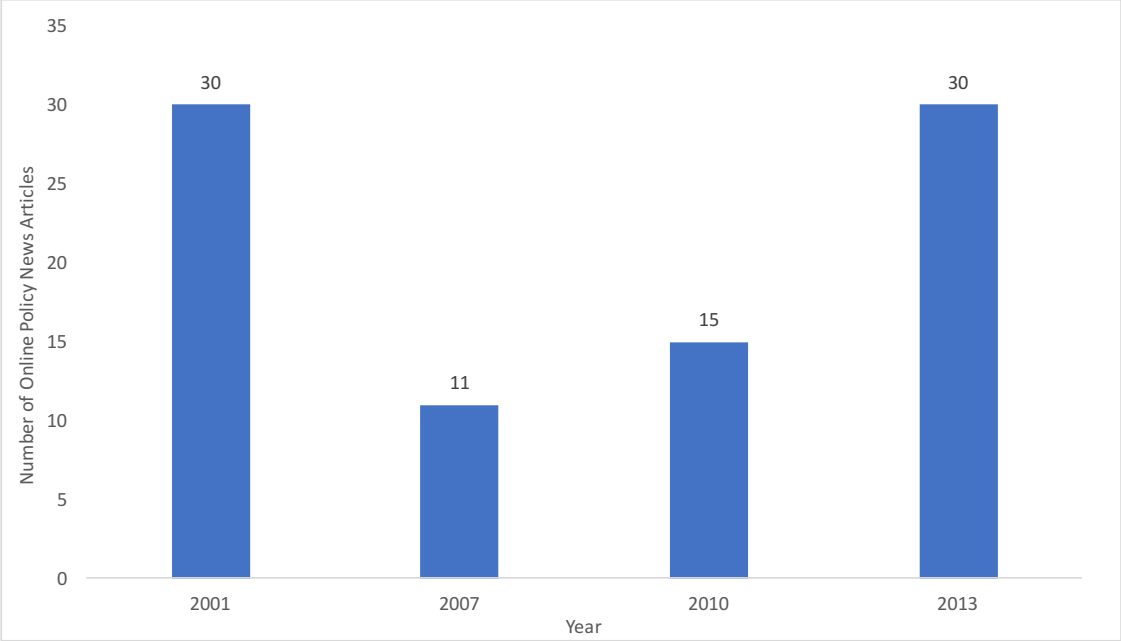
Online news articles were sampled from the "Federal Election" section of the *Sydney Morning Herald Online (SMH Online)*. The sample included 86 online policy news articles (see Figure 3.5). While Factiva and Lexis Nexis Academic provided comprehensive archives of newspaper material, they did not archive online news articles from earlier election periods. Therefore, my collection of online policy news articles was sampled from the National Library of Australia's PANDORA Archive and the online web archive The Wayback Time Machine.

The *SMH Online* was chosen because it provided a consistent sampling frame between 2001 and 2013. However, there were some limitations with the collection of online articles. It was not possible to sample the *day of* the campaign launch speech for all election years. The *day following* the campaign launch speeches was sampled to ensure consistency over this period. Despite exhaustive and extensive searching, online news coverage of the 2004 campaign launch could not be collected because it was not archived. Similarly, online news coverage on the *day following* the 2007 Labor campaign launch (15 November 2007) was also unavailable despite extensive and exhaustive searching of multiple news archives.

Given the limitations of the online sample, my analysis of policy reporting primarily draws upon newspaper and television news content. The online news data provides a smaller supplement to this primary dataset. The online news data was not used to evaluate media attention or information content because of the gaps in dates. Nonetheless, the online sample still provides a useful dataset to examine reporting in

the online sphere, including how frames, narratives and language were used in online policy coverage.

Figure 3.5: Sample of the *SMH Online* policy news stories by year, 2001-2013



N= 86 online policy news articles. Source: author.

Campaign Launch Speeches/Policy Speeches

The final source of material included campaign launch speeches. I collected every formal speech given by each major party leader at their campaign launch between 2001 and 2013. This yielded 10 campaign launch speeches from five election campaigns. The speeches were collected from the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House (Museum of Australian Democracy, 2014). As noted by Stephanie Younane (2008, p. 66), the campaign launch speech is a key moment in the campaign where party leaders articulate their "vision for the nation, plans for the future and reasons for seeking election." Unlike other western democracies, Australian political parties do not produce party manifesto documents detailing all the party's policy proposals. These speeches therefore serve as an important proxy for traditional party manifestos. Table 3.3 provides the key information about each speech, including the year, location and date on which the speech was given. Table 3.4 provides an overview of the sample used to answer my primary research question.

Table 3.3: Campaign launch speeches (policy speeches)

Election Year	Delivered by	Political Party	Date	Days prior to polling day	Location
2001	John Howard	LIB/NAT	28 October	13 days	Sydney, NSW
	Kim Beazley	ALP	31 October	10 days	Sydney, NSW
2004	John Howard	LIB/NAT	26 September	13 days	Brisbane, QLD
	Mark Latham	ALP	29 September	10 days	Brisbane, QLD
2007	John Howard	LIB/NAT	12 November	12 days	Brisbane, QLD
	Kevin Rudd	ALP	14 November	10 days	Brisbane, QLD
2010	Julia Gillard	ALP	16 August	5 days	Brisbane, QLD
	Tony Abbott	LIB/NAT	8 August	13 days	Brisbane, QLD
2013	Kevin Rudd	ALP	1 September	6 days	Brisbane, QLD
	Tony Abbott	LIB/NAT	25 August	13 days	Brisbane, QLD

N= 10 speeches. Source: Museum of Australian Democracy (2014).

Table 3.4: Overview of sample

Medium/ Material	Sample	Sample Size	Sampled On	Time Period	Collected From
Newspaper articles (Primary dataset)	12 Newspapers: the *Australian, Australian Financial Review, Advertiser, Sydney Morning Herald, Daily Telegraph, Hobart Mercury, Courier-Mail, West Australian, NT News, Canberra Times, Herald Sun,* and the *Age*	1270 newspaper articles	Day of and day following the major parties' campaign launch speeches	2001-2013	Factiva News Archive, Lexis Nexis Academic Archive
Television news clips	Metropolitan news coverage: Channel Nine, Channel Seven, Channel 10, SBS, and ABC News.	128 television news clips	Day of and day following the major parties' campaign launch speeches	2001-2013	Informit TV News Archive, and TV News Data from Young's (2011) Archive.
Online news articles	Sydney Morning Herald Online	86 online news articles	Day following the major parties' campaign launch speeches	2001, 2007, 2010 and 2013.	National Library of Australia's PANDORA Archive, and the Wayback Time Machine
Campaign launch speeches	Australian Labor Party and Liberal Party campaign launch speeches	10 speeches	Major party campaign launch	2001-2013	Museum of Australian Democracy Archive

Source: Author. Note: details of coding available in appendices.

Key Methodological Approaches of Previous Empirical Research

Existing research has often studied election and political reporting by collecting empirical data using three key methods: content analysis, interviews, and discourse analysis. Table 3.1 and 3.2 provides a summary of the methods used in key international and Australian studies of political journalism, policy speeches, and election reporting. From the key works listed, the majority have employed content analysis to analyse news coverage and campaign speeches. Other major approaches in the field include language and textual analysis, survey methods, interviews, and secondary analysis of existing datasets.

Table 3.1: Example research methods used in key Australian studies of political news, policy and election reporting.

The Australian Literature	
Author	**Research Method(s)**
Boulus et al. (2013)	Content Analysis
Brookes (2017)	Content Analysis Discourse Analysis
Denemark et al. (2007)	Content Analysis
Dowding and Martin (2017)	Content Analysis
J. S. Gans and Leigh (2012)	Content Analysis
Goot (2008)	Secondary Analysis Content Analysis
Haas et al. (2001)	Content Analysis
Hollander (2006)	Content Analysis
Hughes and Western (1966)	Panel Survey
Mayer et al. (1973)	Content Analysis
Papadakis and Grant (2001)	Content Analysis
Simms and Bolger (2000)	Content Analysis
Tiffen (1989)	Interviews Comparative Case Study Approach Content Analysis
Western and Hughes (1967)	Interviews
Younane (2008)	Discourse Analysis Content Analysis
Young (2008b)	Content Analysis/Mapping Coverage Interviews
Young (2011)	Content Analysis Qualitative Analysis 'Media Mapping'

Table 3.2: Example research methods used in key international studies of political news, news quality, policy and election reporting.

The International Literature	
Author	**Research Method**
Baum (2002)	Secondary Analysis of Survey Data Content Analysis Logit Analysis (Multivariate Analysis)
W. L. Bennett et al. (2007)	Interviews Content Analysis
Benoit et al. (2013)	Content Analysis
Boydstun (2013)	Content Analysis Statistical Modelling
Coleman (2015)	Qualitative Analysis
Cushion, Kilby, et al. (2016)	Content Analysis Semi-structured Interviews
Cushion, Thomas, et al. (2016)	Content Analysis Semi-structured Interviews
Cushion and Thomas (2015)	Content Analysis
Cushion (2015)	Content Analysis Qualitative Analysis
Entman (1996)	Content Analysis
B. Franklin and Richardson (2002)	Content Analysis Interviews
B. Franklin (2004)	Interviews Qualitative Analysis Secondary Analysis
B. Franklin (1997)	Qualitative Analysis Secondary Analysis Content Analysis
Graber (2004)	Meta-analysis (review study)
Graber (2012)	Content Analysis
Hopmann et al. (2011)	Content Analysis
Humprecht and Büchel (2013)	Qualitative Comparative Analysis
Jackson (2011)	Content Analysis
Lawrence (2000)	Content Analysis
Lewis et al. (2008a)	Content Analysis
Lewis et al. (2008b)	Content Analysis Interviews
Lichter and Smith (1996)	Content Analysis
Maier (2010b)	Content Analysis Secondary Analysis
Maier and Tucker (2012)	Content Analysis
McNair (2000)	Interviews Content Analysis
Patterson (2000)	Survey Methods Content Analysis
Patterson (1993)	Qualitative Analysis Content Analysis
Strömbäck (2007)	Content Analysis

Research Methods

A key aim of this study is to examine the reporting of tax, health and education issues during Australian election campaigns in the 2000s. To do so, it was necessary to use a method that enabled a systematic analysis of a large dataset of news content over several election cycles. Therefore, quantitative content analysis was the preferred method. Content analysis is used in many studies of election and political reporting (see Table 3.1 and 3.2). But it is also often the only method used in these empirical studies (Riffe & Freitag, 1997). This is particularly problematic in situations where content analysis cannot be applied to quantify all elements of a text (see Holsti, 1969). To address the limitations of content analysis, I also employed a secondary qualitative method, described as a qualitative analysis of language, to examine policy news coverage and speech content. This is based upon Young's (2011) approach. This was a supplementary method to the primary content analysis used in this thesis. Other longitudinal studies have also employed similar qualitative methods alongside content analysis to examine the use of words and language in newspaper content (see Young, 2011).

Mixed methods provide numerous advantages in data collection and analysis that mitigate the limitations of "mono research designs" (Bergman, 2008a; 2008b, p. 19). Yet, critics contend that there are epistemological and ontological inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative methods that make mixed methods designs difficult to apply (Bergman, 2008a, 2008b; Hesse-Biber, 2010). While there are criticisms of mix methods research designs, they nonetheless offer complementarity when addressing a research problem that permit the researcher to gain a richer understanding of the problem by exploring the findings beyond the numerical explanations (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 4). Therefore, I employed both a quantitative and qualitative analysis in this thesis. This section details the justification and limitations of the methods used.

Primary Method: Quantitative Content Analysis

The preferred and primary method employed to study media and speech content is quantitative content analysis (hereafter content analysis). Content analysis is often summarised using Bernard Berelson (1952, p. 18) definition as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (quoted in Sproule, 2010, p. 324). However, Berelson's (1952) definition is criticised for its emphasis on quantitative techniques and objectivity (Macnamara, 2005, p. 2). One of the most cited discussions of content analysis is the work of Klaus Krippendorff (1980). Krippendorff (1980, p. 21) defines content analysis as a "research techniques for making replicable and valid inferences from the data to their contexts." Similarly, Markoff, Shapiro, and Weitman (1975) suggests that content analysis is:

> …any methodical measurement applied to text for social science purposes… the term refers to any systematic reduction of a flow of text, that is, recorded language, to a standard set of statistically manipulable symbols representing the presence, the intensity, or the frequency of some characteristics relevant to social science (Markoff et al., 1975, p. 5).

Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) draw upon elements of these definitions, including the notion of replicability, systematic measurement, and quantification. Riffe et al. (2005, p. 25) define content analysis as the replicable and systematic measurement of "symbols of communications" using numerical values and statistical techniques to describe communication, to draw conclusions about its meaning, and to infer to broader contexts. This study draws upon the definitions offered by Markoff et al. (1975, p. 5) and Krippendorff's (1980, p. 2). It uses a coding frame to analyse content into variables that can then be used for aggregated statistical analysis.

Content analysis is employed in numerous studies of election and political reporting, as shown in Table 3.1 and 3.2 (for example Benoit et al., 2013; Boydstun, 2013; Entman, 1996; Graber, 2012; Lawrence, 2000; McNair, 2000; Patterson, 2000). It was appropriate for my project because it provides a systematic and rigorous approach to

analyse the key trends and characteristics of policy news over time. Examples of it use in the Australian studies can be found in the works of Young (2011), Denemark et al. (2007), Goot (2008), Hollander (2006) and Henry Mayer (1964). Existing Australian studies have used content analysis to examine various characteristics of newspaper, television, and radio coverage. For example, Denemark et al. (2007) employed content analysis to assess the types of issues reported in television election news coverage, including an analysis of the amount of air time given to each issue. Moreover, Young (2011) adopted content analysis to study election reporting, including the reporting of opinion polls and the coverage of leaders. Additionally, other Australian studies have used content analysis to assess the issue of media bias during Australian elections (for example Mayer et al., 1973; Simms & Bolger, 2000) or to track trends in the reporting of issues over time (for example Papadakis & Grant, 2001).

Content analysis has many advantages in the study of political reporting. Firstly, content analysis enables one to systematically and quantitatively measure news coverage over time; reducing complex texts and large amounts of information into manageable variables (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 38). Content analysis is useful when researchers are dealing with large volumes of data where key themes and characteristics need to be succinctly presented to the reader (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 38). It provides a rigorous approach because it requires the use of coding sheets and coding rules to ensure consistency during the analysis (see Riffe et al., 2005; Weber, 1990). It was adopted in my project because it enabled the analysis of a large sample of material from over several campaigns. Moreover, content analysis provided a way to systematically analyse the material from each of the four analytical perspectives outlined earlier. It provided a way to trace the trends over time in each of these four areas. Using content analysis also ensured consistency in my research as it requires a coding frame with rules and procedures to ensure reliability in the coding.

Secondly, content analysis is a nonintrusive research technique that enables researchers to draw conclusions from content without requiring direct access to the original communicators (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 38). I examined the trends in policy reporting across a long period of time; thus, it was simply not feasible to contact the original creators of this material. As noted by Riffe et al. (2005, p. 38), content analysis enables

the longitudinal study of archival materials that may have "outlived" the original communicators and their audiences.

Thirdly, as noted by Berelson (1952), content analysis permits researchers to describe communication trends, compare different media, undertake comparative analysis, and trace attitudinal development (discussed in Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 33-34). Content analysis enables researchers to compare different media, compare news content with other indicators, and analyse trends in communication (Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 33-34; Weber, 1990, pp. 9-10). This was useful in my research when examining trends in communication in print news. As mentioned earlier, content analysis is a well-established method in political communications research. Put simply by Susan Herring (2004, p. 49), instead of "reinventing the methodological wheel, new media researchers can draw upon, and benefit from a well-established tradition."

Content analysis does have limitations. It cannot be applied to all document-based research (Holsti, 1969, pp. 18-19). Ole R. Holsti (1969, preface n.p.) notes that content analysis, despite being a "valuable research tool," has been employed to produce a vast number of "unimaginative studies" that were clearly motivated by the ease of the method. Often more meaningful and accurate inferences can be made using qualitative research techniques, especially when dealing with problems in social science research (Holsti, 1969, p. 10).

Robert Weber (1990, p. 70) also makes similar claims suggesting that that content analysis simply equates the number of mentions of a word in a text with the importance of the concept, but "equal counting of each instance does not reflect changes in the level of effort required to maintain the topic" (Weber, 1990, p. 73). While content analysis offers a systematic method to study documents and media material, Holsti (1969, p. 20) argues that it is wise not to rely solely on content analysis to answer a research question. Researcher should use complimentary methods to supplement the limitations of content analysis (Holsti, 1969, p. 20).

Content Analysis of Media Material

In this study, I aim to investigate news *content*; thus, content analysis was deemed the most appropriate method. I applied content analysis to quantitatively code the news content and campaign launch speeches. News coverage was coded into 90 variables using a set of coding rules and coding instructions (see appendices A and B). Although 90 variables were included in the coding guide, the application of these variables was dependent upon the type of media. For example, the variable "tabloid or broadsheet" only applied to newspapers. The coding frame developed for this study was guided by my analytical approach and research question. It included variables based on the four areas of my analytical approach that I outlined earlier. The coding frame included variables measuring issue themes/topics in news coverage, the information content of policy news, the framing and narratives used in reporting, and the sources quoted in policy news.

Content analysis is a method that enables consistency in the overall analysis through codified rules and procedures. As Weber (1990, p. 23) notes, content analysis should aim to be valid, consistent and reliable to ensure that the analysis is purposeful. This can be achieved through a set of clear coding rules and instructions that enable different coders to analyse the content in a similar way (see appendix A and B). Content analysis studies can involve multiple people in the analysis of content. Thus, it is necessary to determine how often coders differ or agree in their analysis of content (see Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, pp. 588-593). Inter-coder reliability is a measure used to determine the agreement and reliability between different coders (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, pp. 588-590). When content analysis studies only have one coder or researcher, it is equally useful to measure the intra-coder reliability: "the consistent manner by which the [one] researcher codes" (van den Hoonaard, 2008). There are several approaches I could employ to determine inter- and intracoder reliability (see Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The method I deemed most

appropriate was a simple percentage agreement test because there was only one coder involved in this study.[25]

Due to the resource constraints imposed upon this project, only one coder analysed the policy news content. Although having one coder ensures consistency in the coding process, it is important to acknowledge that there may be disagreements for some variables if they were coded by two or more coders because of the nature of the news content under examination. To address this issue, I produced a clear set of codified rules, coding notes, and a coding instructions booklet. This will enable researchers to replicate the coding undertaken in this study. In the absence of having a second coder, I assessed the consistency of my coding by recoding a small random sample of newspaper material a year following the completion of my content analysis. Using a percent agreement reliability test, I found that there was 98 per cent agreement between my initial coding and the sample analysed twelve months later. This suggest that there was a high degree of consistency in my coding. I also measured the level of agreement for each variable. The lowest level of agreement recorded was 75 per cent for a variable measuring the type of strategic, game or contest frame used in a news report (see variable 45 in Appendix A). I recoded this variable into a binary variable measuring whether there was a strategic, contest or game frame used in the news report. My analysis of the other variables showed that there was perfect or near perfect agreement between my initial content analysis and the sample analysed for the reliability test.

Content Analysis of the Campaign Launch Speeches

I also conducted a content analysis of campaign launch speeches (see appendix C). In line with previous studies of speeches and policy attention (Dowding & Martin, 2017, pp. 87-128, 248), I employed quasi-level sentence coding of each campaign launch speech.

[25] A percentage agreement test is calculated by taking the total number of cases where there is agreement between coders divided by the total number of cases analysed. This figure is then converted to a percentage. Scholars suggest that an acceptable level of agreement is a figure above 70 per cent (see Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, pp. 588-593).

To conduct my analysis of the speeches, I analysed each speech at the sentence level and assigned a thematic code. To do so, each speech was divided into individual sentences or clauses. Where a sentence contained clauses that explored a different theme to the previous statement, it was divided and coded separately. These sentences or clauses became the unit of analysis. The maximum length of each statement was one sentence and each sentence received one thematic code (see Dowding & Martin, 2017).

Once the campaign speeches were divided into sentences and clauses, each clause or sentence was analysed using five variables. These five variables measured the major policy theme in the statement or clause (major code), the minor or sub–policy theme in the statement or clause (minor code), the specificity of the statement, such as whether it mentioned a specific policy issue or a general policy theme, and a variable measuring whether the statement was about a past, current or future policy measure, issue, achievement or action. All statements that contained a policy dimension received a major policy code. The policy domains of health, tax and education were coded as per the thematic codes used to analyse news content (see Appendix A, B and C). Coding the speeches in this way ensured that my analysis of the policy content in the speeches and news content was analogous. Specific policy statements also received a minor policy code, which described the policy measures referred to in the clause (such as a company tax cut, an investment in school facilities and so on).

To code a specific policy statement/theme in the speeches, the sentence or clause needed to mention a specific policy objectives (such as to reform Medicare), specific issue (for instance, income tax inequality), specific achievement of the party/government (for example, the introduction of the GST), or a specific future policy measure (such as a new childcare tax rebate). Statements about opponent's policies were also coded. General policy statements— phrases with no specific issue or measure but mentioned a general policy theme— were also coded under a major theme but were not assigned a minor (sub-policy) code. Non-policy statements with no clear policy themes were also coded under "non-policy issues." All codes were aggregated for analysis. Extensive details and instructions regarding the coding of the news content and speeches can be found in appendices A, B, and C.

Secondary Method: Qualitative Analysis of Language

The primary method used in this study is content analysis. This thesis primarily uses the quantitative evidence derived from the content analysis to answer the research question. However, a secondary technique described as a qualitative analysis of language (also referred to here as qualitative language analysis) (QLA) was employed to supplement this primary method. There are numerous qualitative methods available to study news content, including critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and semiotic analysis (see Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999; Punch, 2005, pp. 216-227). The approach deemed most suitable for my study was based on a textual analysis method called qualitative language analysis. The approach used in this thesis was informed by Young's (2011, pp. 281-283) research. Young (2011) employed a method she described as a "qualitative analysis" to examine language, words, text, and speech in a small sample of news content. Like my study, Young's (2011) research primarily drew upon a quantitative content analysis of election reporting. The qualitative analysis Young (2011) employed examined a small sample of material identified after the initial content analysis. Young (2011, pp. 281-283) applied this qualitative analysis to examine elements such as news headlines, front-page coverage, news articles, and other visual dimensions of news coverage.

Adopting a similar approach to Young (2011), I employed a qualitative analysis of language to examine the campaign launch speeches and a smaller sample of news content identified during the content analysis. QLA is a qualitative textual analysis technique that addresses the limitations of content analysis, including its inability to make inferences about some aspects of texts (see Holsti, 1969, pp. 10-11).

QLA is a textual analysis technique that focuses on the way information is conveyed through language. QLA allows researchers to go beyond the simple numerical terms used in content analysis and adds greater depth to research findings (for a discussion on textual analysis see Deacon et al., 1999; Punch, 2005).

Using textual analysis methods, researchers can "read against the grain" of a text/talk to identify patterns and issues in texts (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 258). QLA shares many

similarities with discourse analysis, including the focus on talk, text and language (see Willig, 2014, p. 341). However, there are distinctive differences. Discourse analysis is concerned with latent meaning in language and texts, such as discursive constructions of power (Willig, 2014, pp. 341-342). QLA is an analysis method that is focused primarily on aspects of language and texts, including what ideas, issues, words, and language is communicated to audiences.

QLA has several advantages over other methods when studying policy reporting. QLA permits researchers to delve deeper into written and spoken communication. This was particularly useful because my research primarily used newspaper articles and campaign launch speeches to analyse the policy information, frames and narratives in the content. Secondly, by using a QLA, I could explore research findings in-depth and follow up on issues identified in the initial content analysis. Thirdly, QLA was appropriate because I was dealing with the content and textual characteristics of media reports, including the that information was communicated in policy news. Finally, QLA was appropriate because it is a method used in other studies of election reporting to analyse how news coverage has changed over time (Young, 2011, pp. 281-283).

Qualitative approaches to text analysis do have limitations. Critics argue that qualitative methods are more open to the issue of selection bias because researchers often select a small number of texts at the exclusion of other cases (Jacobs, 2010, p. 360). Critics also question the validity of qualitative language methods because they are seen to reduce "all aspects of social life to language" (Jacobs, 2010, p. 360). Nonetheless, QLA provides a useful method to analyse news content because it enables one to explore themes and issues identified in the initial analysis in greater detail. It adds richer detail to my overall analysis of news coverage.

Informed by Young's (2011) methodological approach, I employed a qualitative analysis of language to analyse a smaller sample of material, primarily the speeches. The content analysis was initially applied to identify the frequency of elements, such as frames and narratives, in media texts. Once coded, the sample was analysed to identify the key themes and trends. The quantitative analysis guided the qualitative

analysis of news coverage. A small sample of media texts was identified during the initial content analysis stage and noted in my coding notes for further investigation.

QLA was also applied throughout the thesis to examine the 10 campaign launch speeches in a similar manner. Each speech was analysed thematically using qualitative software NVIVO. Guided by the analytical tools/framework I outlined earlier, the contents of each speech were qualitatively coded under different themes. I focused on 1) the information and details and 2) frames and narratives used in these speeches. For example, I qualitatively coded whether the text of the speech included game or contest language, referred to political strategy, made values or ideological statements, mentioned a specific policy issue, outlined a policy problem, discussed policy implementation, highlighted the benefits or disadvantages of a policy measure, discussed the cost of policies, mentioned political opponents, discussed leadership, highlighted party tensions, discussed the economy, or discussed families. While the quantitative analysis of the speeches focused on sentences and clauses, there was no set length for statements in the qualitative analysis. Some statements were paragraphs and some were sentences. I also examined single words or short phrases. Unlike the quantitative analysis, I double coded statements, words, and phrases under multiple themes. For example, a statement about a policy measure in a speech may also adopt a contest narrative and therefore be coded under multiple thematic headings. This qualitative speech data was then used to illuminate my quantitative analysis.

QLA was also employed to examine media coverage. I compared the language and choice of words in the speeches to media coverage. When applying QLA, I paid close attention to the word choices and phrases used in reporting to communicate frames and information to news audiences. Consistent with previous studies of framing and election news (Trimble & Sampert, 2004), I paid close attention to news headlines because these provide the clearest indication of the framing of a news report. I used three of the four analytical tools outlined earlier to examine different aspects of news coverage qualitatively. This included analysing the frames and narratives communicated through language or word choice (for example, words such as “pitching” or “buying”); the information or policy details described in the content; and the quotes of different sources in the news reports. The emphasis of the qualitative analysis was

on drawing out the themes in the content analysis by examining the language and words used in reports and speeches. Again, content analysis is primary method used to answer the research question, but QLA provided a supplementary method that adds greater depth to my quantitative analysis.

Table 3.5: Summary of research design

Results Chapter	Aspects of Policy Coverage Examined (Analytical Tools)	Sample Used	Time Period	Method(s) Used
Chapter 4	Media attention; information content; and frames and narratives.	Newspaper articles (primary dataset); policy speeches; and online news articles.	2001-2013	Quantitative content analysis (primary method) Qualitative language analysis
Chapter 5	Sources quoted.	Newspapers articles (primary dataset).	2001-2013	Quantitative content analysis (primary method) Qualitative language analysis
Chapter 6	Media attention; information content; frames and narratives; and sources quoted.	Newspaper articles (primary dataset) and television news clips.	2001-2013	Quantitative content analysis (primary method) Qualitative language analysis
Chapter 7	Media attention; information content; frames and narratives; and sources quoted.	Newspaper articles (primary dataset).	2001-2013	Quantitative content analysis (primary method) Qualitative language analysis

Conclusion

This study primarily used a quantitative content analysis to examine the reporting of policy issues during Australian federal election campaigns. It supplemented this analysis with a qualitative analysis of language, which is based upon a qualitative approach used in Young's (2011) study. Using this mixed methods design mitigates the limitations of purely quantitative approaches (for example see Holsti, 1969, pp. 10-22, 20; Weber, 1990, pp. 72-73). I employed content analysis to analyse a sample of 1484 news stories from five election periods. The sample included 1270 newspaper articles, 128 television clips, and a supplementary sample of 86 online news articles.

Existing research has largely focused on single election periods, or often conducted broad sweeping numerical analysis that fails to explore news content qualitatively. I addressed the gaps in the existing knowledge by analysing news coverage quantitatively and qualitatively. I analysed the dataset through four analytical lenses: 1) media attention to policy issues, 2) the information content of policy news, 3) the sources quoted in policy reports, and 4) the frames and narratives used in policy news. This analytical approach informed my coding frame, which used 90 variables to examine the large unique dataset I collected. The subsequent chapters report the results of this analysis, providing empirical insights into a clearly under-researched field of inquiry.

Chapter 4: Politicians, the Media, and the Policy Story

Understanding how the media report policy issues matters because media attention can affect what the public "know and remember" (Young, 2011, p. 175). Citizens rely heavily on the media, especially during Australian election campaigns, to sort through information, track down policy details, and identify the important policy problems (Young, 2011, p. 171). Because more citizens are basing their voting decisions on issues rather than traditional party loyalties (see Hellwig, 2014; McAllister, 2011, pp. 50-55), understanding how the media communicate policy issues is more important than ever before. But there are many factors influencing what the media report, including the actions and statements of political elites (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, pp. 125).

What politicians say and how they campaign often affects what the media report in their election coverage (Young, 2011, p. 164). For example, Cushion, Thomas and colleagues' (2016, pp. 479-481) study of British election news found that media reporting was often shaped by political logic, with the adoption of horserace narratives over issue frames influenced by the way politicians campaigned. Agenda-setting research has also concluded that politicians are highly influential in shaping the media agenda and influencing debates on public affairs issues (see McCombs, 2014, p. 132). So it is important we understand how politicians discuss their policies because this may affect how the media report policy matters in Australian elections.

This chapter investigates how deliberate forms of political communication shape policy reporting. To do so, it examines the campaign launch speeches and newspaper coverage of tax, health and education issues. This chapter compares policy reporting and campaign speeches from three perspectives. It analyses 1) media and political attention to policy issues, 2) the policy information found in speeches and newspaper coverage, and 3) the frames and narratives adopted by politicians and news outlets to tell policy stories.[26]

[26] A frame promotes a certain view, "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames highlight certain bits of information about an item over others, making them more salient or memorable, using words or images to highlight different aspects of a story or issue (Young, 2011, p. 103).

The first section examines the policy content of campaign launch speeches across the twenty-first century. The second section compares the media and political agendas. It analyses the attention politicians and news outlets paid to tax, health and education issues in election campaigns between 2001 and 2013. The third section considers how politicians and journalists discuss policy information in their speeches and news reports. The final section investigates how the narratives adopted by politicians in their campaign launch speeches influences the framing of policy news. This chapter finds that politicians shape what issues the press report and how they report them. As will be shown, when politicians paid less attention to policy matters, focused on their opponents, or provided fewer policy details in their speeches, media reporting followed suit.

The Policy Content of Campaign Launch Speeches

Campaign launch speeches (also known as policy speeches) are one of the most scrutinised and mediated forms of political communication (see Mills, 1996, p. 167). Historically, party leaders used their campaign launch speeches to present *new* policy information *at the start* of the campaign. For instance, Robert Menzies' 1949 address was given nearly a month prior to polling day, and subsequently published in a 40-page booklet with 15 pages of supplementary policy material (Menzies, 1949). Similarly, Labor leader Ben Chifley's 1949 policy speech was also given at the start of the campaign and published in the same manner, with an 18-page policy speech followed by 36 pages of supplementary policy information (Chifley, 1949).

Contemporary policy speeches differ because much of the policy detail is already known or leaked to the press in the lead up to the campaign launch to ensure that audiences are primed about the key issues (Young, 2011, pp. 103, 132-134).[27] Contemporary speeches are also much later in the election cycle. Table 4.1 shows the timing of each major party campaign launch speech over the 2000s. Between 2001 and 2013, the Coalition's campaign launches were 13 days from polling day; except for the

[27] Priming theory suggests that the media can alter the criteria we use to view or make judgements about issues or candidates by highlighting certain problems or topics in media content (Young, 2011, p. 103). For example, the media may highlight the issue of terrorism in news content prior to a leader's speech, and voters may subsequently base their judgements of the leader upon who was toughest on crime (Young, 2011, p. 103).

2007 and 2013 speeches, which were delivered 12 days from polling day. By comparison, Labor's campaign launches moved closer to polling day. In 2001, 2004, and 2007, Labor's campaign launch speeches were 10 days from polling day. This halved to five days and six days in 2010 and 2013 respectively. The change in the timing of these speeches also corresponded with a change in their policy content.

Table 4.1 Timing of the major party campaign launch speeches

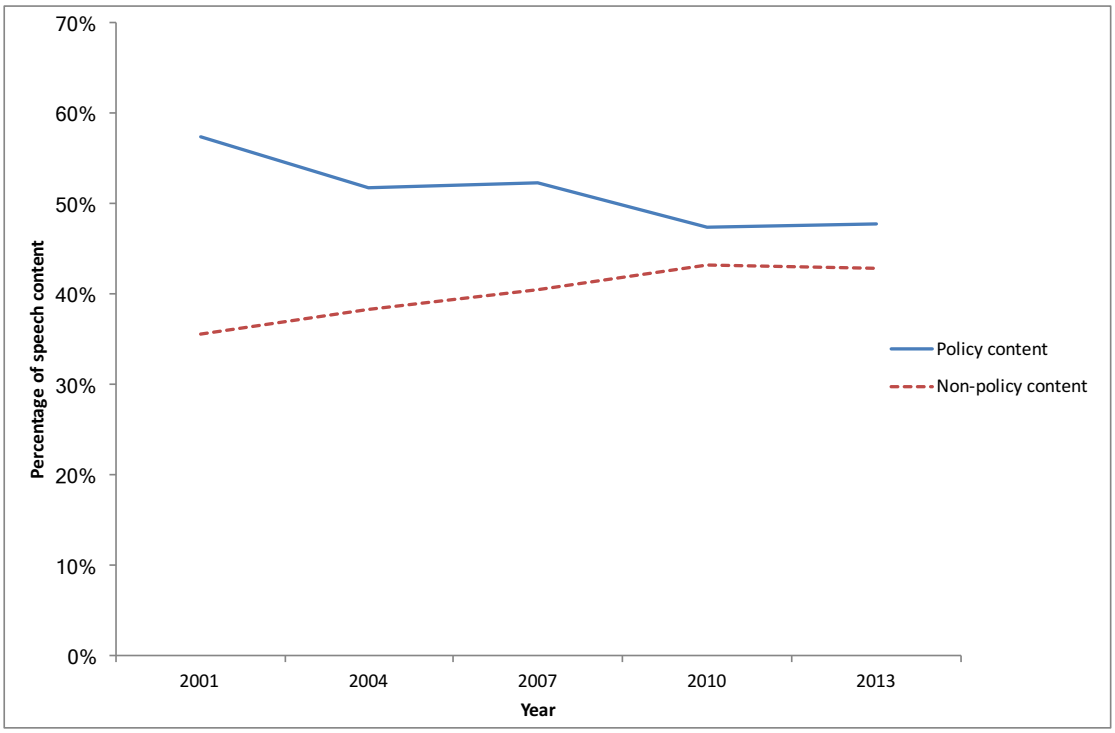
Election Year	Date	Party	Speaker	Number of days prior to polling day
2001	31 October	ALP	Kim Beazley	10 days
2001	28 October	Liberal Party	John Howard	13 days
2004	29 September	ALP	Mark Latham	10 days
2004	26 September	Liberal Party	John Howard	13 days
2007	14 November	ALP	Kevin Rudd	10 days
2007	12 November	Liberal Party	John Howard	12 days
2010	16 August	ALP	Julia Gillard	5 days
2010	8 August	Liberal Party	Tony Abbott	13 days
2013	1 September	ALP	Kevin Rudd	7 days
2013	25 August	Liberal Party	Tony Abbott	12 days

Source: Author.

Politicians were more likely to speak about non-policy issues in their speeches, such as values and leadership, than their policies and platforms. Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of policy and non-policy content in the speeches between 2001 and 2013. There was a slight decline in the percentage of speech content devoted to policy issues across this period. In 2001, the percentage of policy content found in the speeches was 57 per cent. In 2004 and 2007, policy discussion made up 52 per cent of speech content. By 2010, this had dropped to 47.4 per cent of overall speech content before rising slightly to 47.7 per cent in 2013. Although this was a decline of less than 10 percentage points between 2001 and 2013, it nonetheless shows that politicians were speaking less about policy issues in their formal campaign speeches during latter elections. Moreover, the analysis shows a gradual rise in the percentage of *non-policy statements*[28] from 36 per cent in 2001 to 43 per cent in 2013. In other words, the policy content of these speeches was gradually being supplanted by non-policy content.

[28] Non-policy statements were statement that did not include a policy dimension. These included statements about leadership, values, ideology, the political contest, and so on. For example, statements about leadership such as "I believe my instincts, my energy, my experience, my successes to date, and my sheer commitment to the land I love best equip me for that job" (Howard, 2001). Statements about values included acknowledgement of beliefs or ideology such as "We believe in values of freedom, values of compassion and values of a fair go for all" (Rudd, 2013). Other examples of non-policy statement that did not contain any policy dimension were statements such as "my fellow Australians, this election is about you. It's about your future, your family's future and our nation's future" (Abbott, 2010).

Figure 4.1: Policy and non-policy content in the major party campaign launch speeches, 2001-2013



N= 2433 quasi-statements from 10 speeches. Source: Author. Note: Labor and Liberal speeches have been analysed collectively. The category "policy content" included statements about a general policy area or specific policy measures (see appendix C). Statements about the current or future state of the economy (such as interest rates, economic growth, gross domestic product, and so on) were coded separately (see appendix C). Percentages in graph do not add up to 100 per cent.

Statements about values, leadership and the election contest were prominent in the speeches. This largely displaced their policy content. In 2013, both major party leaders paid more attention to issues of leadership and party values than policy matters. Kevin Rudd (2013) claimed that the election was about "the values which underpin Australia's future" while Abbott (2013) suggested that the election was one of "trust." Both claimed that the election was about ensuring "competent and trustworthy" leadership, it was an election "all about trust" (Abbott, 2013); about "judgement and even temperament when it comes to the responsibilities of high office;" about the "fight" for "Australia's future;" a contest and "fight for the heart and soul of the Australia we all want for the future" (Rudd, 2013). Rhetorical flourishes were common in the campaign launch speeches across the 2000s. But, as Figure 4.1 shows, such rhetorical language was more common in latter campaigns.

Politicians were less likely to discuss policy issues in their speeches with each election, but the speeches themselves were also much shorter by 2013. In 2001, the Labor and Liberal leaders' speeches were 4253 and 7256 words in length respectively. By 2013, both Labor and Liberal speeches were shorter, 2993 and 3254 words respectively. In other words, politicians were devoting less attention to their policies, but they were also giving much shorter speeches.

The lack of policy content is illustrative of the way both major parties have adopted small target strategies in earnest in recent campaigns (see Tiffen, 2008, p. 119). In 2010 and 2013, the opposition parties and the incumbent government were unwilling to reveal too much policy detail for fear of being subjected to devastating attacks from their opponents. In 2013, the major political parties pursued small target strategies on social policy issues, such as education and health (Johnson, Wanna & Lee, 2015a, p. 9), Newspapers made similar observations about the 2010 and 2013 elections, with reports describing how politicians were "playing it safe, offering a small target to the media" (Munro, 2013, p. 38); how they were "shifting their campaign into small-target mode by delivering the first formal election speech in living memory without a new spending promise" (M. Franklin, 2010, p. 1); or how political opponents were trying "to explode…[the] small-target strategy in the final two weeks of the election campaign" (Maher, 2010, p. 7). By taking a small target approach, policy information was tightly controlled, with politicians omitting or ignoring policy issues in their speeches.

Political and Media Attention to Policy Issues

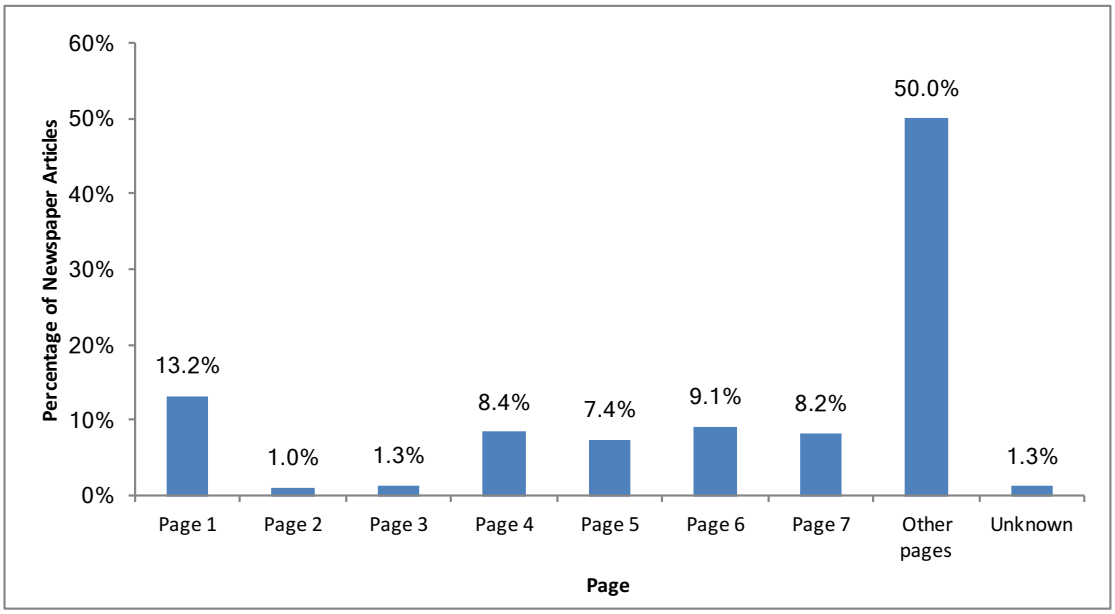
The campaign launch speeches are largely designed for media consumption (Brookes, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, a decline in their policy content could have some profound consequences for political reporting in the twenty-first century. One way to evaluate whether this is the case is to compare political and media attention to tax, health and education policy issues. The findings presented in this section show that where politicians lead, the media largely follows.

The previous section demonstrated that politicians paid little attention to policy issues in their speeches, especially in the 2013 election. In a similar manner to major party leaders, newspaper outlets also attributed less importance to tax, health and education policy issues in their coverage, as indicated by the lack of front-page coverage.

When news outlets publish a policy story on the front-page, they are "signalling" to their readers that it is an important policy or policy issue (Dowding &Martin, 2017, p. 198; John, Bertelli, Jennings, & Bevan, 2013, p. 52). This can also effect what issues audiences view as important (Young, 2011, p. 176). Studies show the more often an issue appears on the front-page, or other prominent spaces in news coverage, the more informed people tend to be about those issues, the more likely they will pay attention to those problems, and the more likely they will judge those issues as important (Graber, 1980, pp. 130-133; Young, 2011, p. 146). When policy issues or stories are buried within news coverage, they are more likely to be ignored or go unnoticed by the public (see Dowding &Martin, 2017, p. 198). This was the case in the 2000s. Despite being highly salient policy issues to voters between 2001 and 2013 (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 21, 86), news coverage of tax, health and education policy issues rarely made the front-page.

Figure 4.2 shows the prominence of policy news articles by page number. Policy news was more likely to be buried beyond the first seven pages of the newspaper, with only 49 per cent of articles appearing on or before page seven. The lack of front-page coverage of policy issues shows that the media rarely viewed tax, health and education policy news as important news stories in the 2000s. Only 13 per cent of newspaper articles on tax, health and education issues made the front-page. Together with my earlier findings about the policy content of the speeches, the evidence suggests that the salience of policy issues on the political agenda may affect the salience of these issues on the media agenda. But more careful analysis is required to substantiate this argument.

Figure 4.2: Prominence of policy news by page, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author. Note: Unknown category includes articles where the page numbers were not included in the meta-data accompanying the article.

What leaders say can influence what issues news outlets report. For example, Baumgartner and Jones (1993, pp. 103-107, 125) argue that media attention is partly subjected to shifts in elite attention. In their study of US media and policy agendas, they found that media reporting of policy issues was either a "feast or famine". Media attention would lurch in "fitful" ways from one issue to another, with issues low on the media agenda during some periods and high on the agenda at other times (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, pp. 20, 125). They showed that media attention often preceded, as well as followed, elite attention (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, pp. 125).

While the direction of this relationship is often difficult to "disentangle" (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009, p. 247; Dowding & Martin, 2017, pp. 178-179; Kingdon, 1984, pp. 61-65), the findings presented here suggest that media outlets may take their cues from political elites and vice versa. This can be problematic. If the media take all their cues from political elites, then the press may be more easily manipulated (W. L. Bennett et al., 2007, p. 48). This prevents the public from being informed about a diverse range of policy problems (W. L. Bennett et al., 2007, p. 48; Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). When political elites decide to neglect issues because they do not serve their political interests, then media coverage—as will be shown—would likely follow suit.

Analysing the relationship between the policy, media and public agenda, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Dowding and Martin (2017, pp. 37-39) argued that fluctuations in attention could be measured by examining the punctuations over time. Dowding and Martin (2017, pp. 37-39) described these punctuations as "a larger than normal increase in change in attention." A "punctuation" was defined as a change in attention of 100 per cent or more from the previous period (Dowding & Martin, 2017, pp. 38-39). This provides a useful way of interpreting the trends in media and political attention to tax, health and education issues across the 2000s. The focus here is on the overall patterns attention.[29]

Press reporting of tax, health and education policy issues tended to mirror political attention. Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 compares media and political attention to tax, health and education issues[30] between 2001 and 2013. Look first at Figures 4.3, we can see that when politicians spoke more often about tax issues in their campaign launch speeches, newspaper coverage mirrored this pattern. In other words, when politicians focused on tax issues, newspaper coverage was more intense than in any other period.

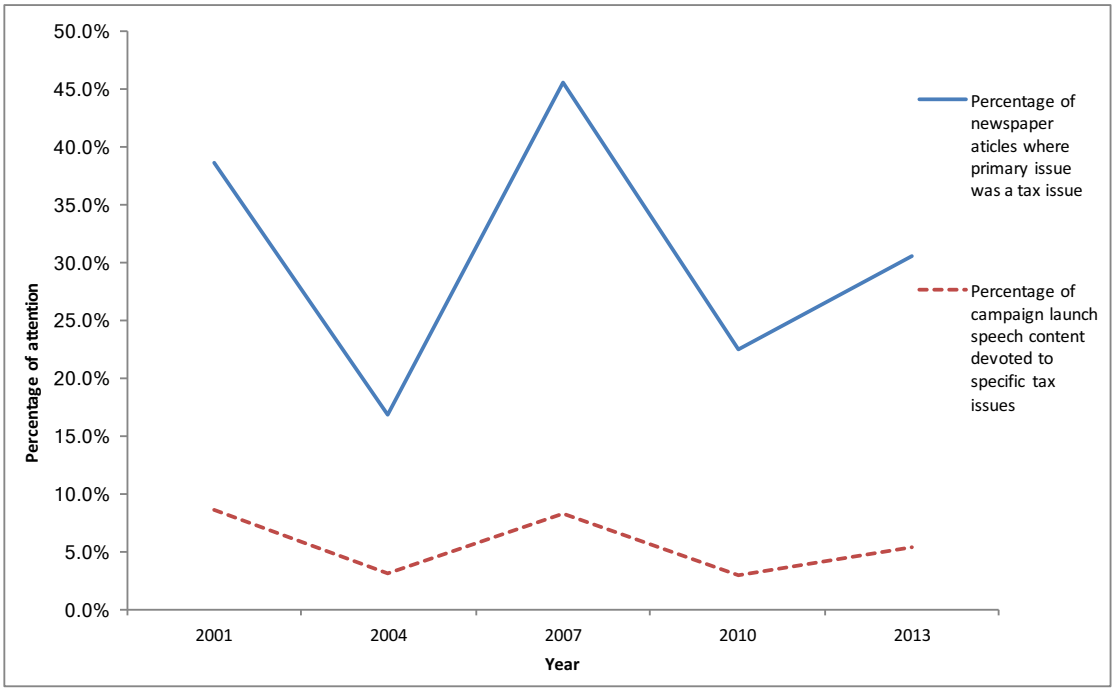
In 2007, there was a clear punctuation in newspaper coverage of tax issues, with 46 per cent of newspaper stories primarily focusing on tax issues. This reflected the way political leaders paid attention to tax issues in their speeches, with a clear punctuation in attention in 2007. Both leaders' speeches were notable for their focus on three key tax policies: a reduction in taxes for first home buyers, increases in the childcare tax rebates, and the introduction of a new tax rebate for education expenses (Howard, 2007; Rudd, 2007). For example, John Howard promised: "a re-elected Coalition Government will introduce a new tax rebate for education expenses including, crucially, school fees"

[29] I acknowledge that there are limits to the claims I make about policy attention at a broader level. I did not sample every election news article on these days. I only sampled articles that discussed a policy issue, theme, or measure. As such, the findings presented in this section only show the patterns of attention as a percentage of the policy articles collected in this sample. While this does not invalidate my findings, I acknowledge that it may be difficult to make claims about whether the media do or do not pay attention to policy issues during Australian elections. Future research may wish to expand this dataset to include non-policy articles. In doing so, future studies may be able to make broader claims about the overall distribution of policy attention across the 2000s. Nevertheless, the findings presented here do provide some interesting insights into the patterns of policy attention in these three policy domains.

[30] Unless otherwise stated, this is news coverage where the **primary issue** was either a tax, health or education issue. The "primary issues" is the issue that received the most coverage in the news story. See appendices A and B.

(Howard, 2007); while Kevin Rudd similarly offered a tax rebates for "investment in the modern tools and resources of …children's education" (Rudd, 2007). This emphasis on tax issues was echoed in newspaper coverage, as evident by the patterns of attention displayed in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Attention to tax issues in newspaper coverage and campaign launch speeches, 2001-2013

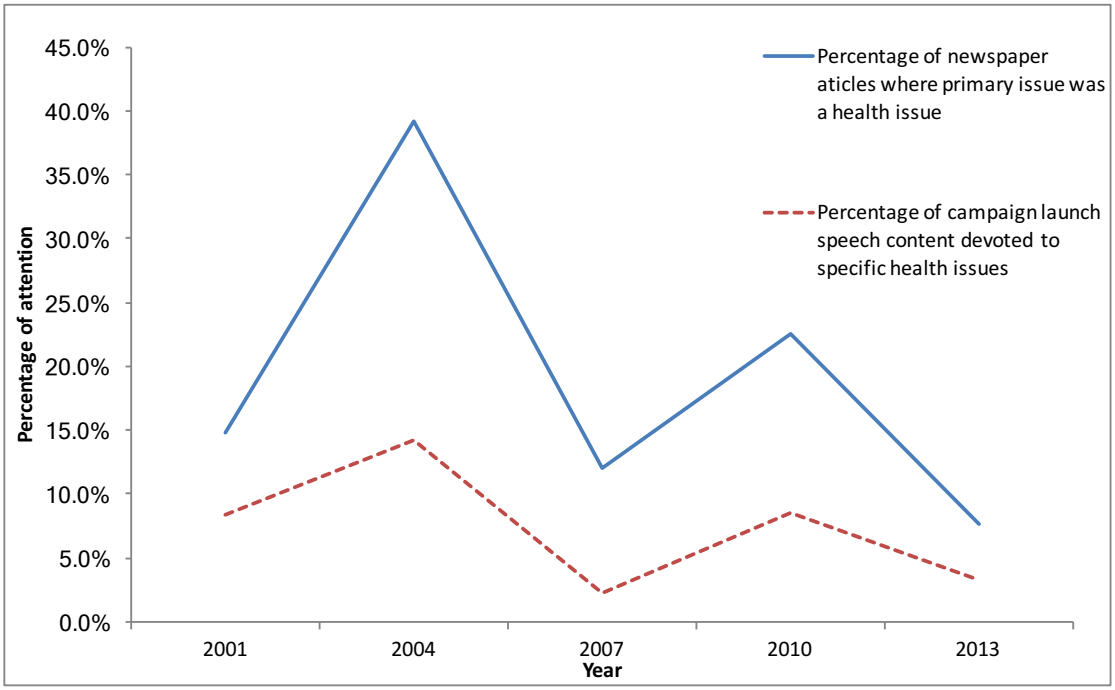


N (media)= 1270 newspaper articles, N (speeches)= 2433 quasi-statements from 10 speeches. Source: Author. Note: Labor and Liberal speeches were combined and analysed collectively.

Newspaper coverage of health policies also followed a similar pattern to political attention. Figure 4.4 shows that when political leaders spoke more often about health issues, news outlets published more articles on health policies. In 2004, attention to health policy issues peaked, with 40 per cent of newspaper stories focused on health. In the 2004 election, both major party leaders made several pledges to reform Australia's healthcare system, with announcements to introduce free hospital care for Australians aged over 75 and new incentives for general practitioners to provide after-hours healthcare (Howard, 2004; Latham, 2004). In his 2004 speech, Mark Latham claimed the 2004 election was: "a battle of principle on health policy;" a fight for "a health system based on the medical needs of the patient, not the size of their bank account" and "Labor's top priority is public health" (Latham, 2004). Howard similarly

argued that dementia care was "one of the major health priorities of the Government in its next term." Political leaders clearly thought health was an important policy priority in the 2004 election, as evident by the peak in political attention in 2004 (Figure 4.4). Press outlets also placed significant emphasis on health issues in their 2004 campaign coverage.

Figure 4.4: Attention to health issues in newspaper coverage and campaign launch speeches, 2001-2013



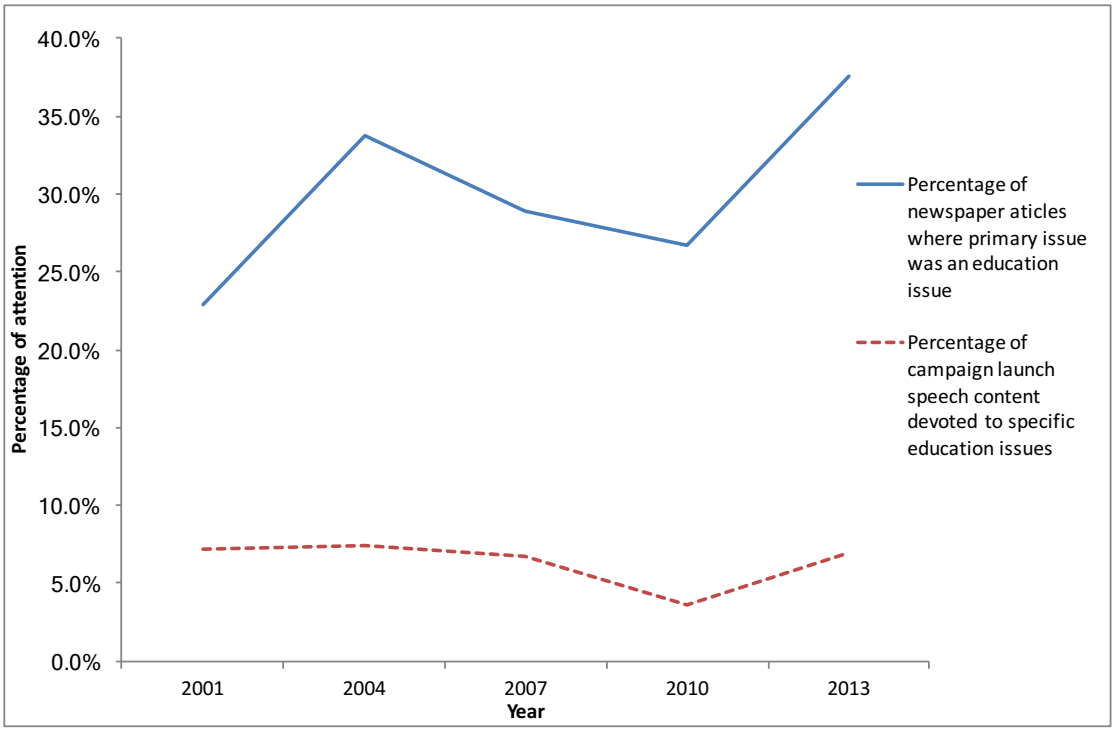
N (media)= 1270 newspaper articles, N (speeches)= 2433 quasi-statements from 10 speeches. Source: Author. Note: Labor and Liberal speeches were combined and analysed collectively.

Health was a prominent issue on the media agenda in the 2004 election. Headlines focusing on health policies were common in the campaign; for example, "Promise to slash health premiums" (Wroe, 2004, p. 13), "Latham plays for golden oldies; ALP launches $2.9b Medicare package" (Peake, 2004, p. 1), "Medicare Gold great, if it's for real" (Benson, 2004, p. 5), and "Latham croons golden oldies- Pension boost, free health care" (Dunlevy, 2004). Notable in these examples is the strategic framing, a point I return to later in this chapter. Of the 314 newspaper articles collected from the 2004 campaign, health policies featured prominently in 123 news stories. Figure 4.4 shows that the punctuations in political attention in 2004 and 2010 were largely met with similar punctuations in news coverage. Again, political attention and media reporting

of health issues were largely in step. Together with the findings of Figure 4.3, we can see that often the political and media agenda mirrored one another.

While the Australian media reporting of tax and health issues mirrored political attention, this was not always the case. Consistent with Dowding and Martin's (2017) study, I found that political and media attention to educations issues was far more independent and disconnected. Figure 4.5 highlights that political attention to education issues remained relatively stable across the 2000s, but media coverage fluctuated more independently. Media coverage of education issues followed the decline in political attention in 2010. However, press reporting was far more independent between 2001 to 2007. In 2001 and 2004, both major parties focused on education issues in their speeches. For example, Labor leader Kim Beazley launched an expansive education reform package called "Knowledge Nation" that promised to increase university funding (Beazley, 2001). But, while political attention to education issues remained relatively stable, media reporting was more erratic and volatile. On education issues, there was a clearer disconnect between the political and media agendas.

Figure 4.5: Attention to education issues in newspaper coverage and campaign launch speeches, 2001-2013



N (media)= 1270 newspaper articles, N (speeches)= 2433 quasi-statements from 10 speeches. Source: Author. Note: Labor and Liberal speeches were combined and analysed collectively.

Dowding and Martin (2017, p. 188) argue that the "disconnect" on social policy issues, such as education, is problematic because citizens "may not see these issues as important or will come to take the functioning of those systems for granted." However, I found that the media paid more attention to education issues than political elites. Any suggestion that the media were ignoring education issues can be refuted here. When political attention to education issues was low, media coverage was in fact more intense than other campaigns.

Collectively, the evidence shows that politicians and the media are largely in step with one another, but not always. Sometimes the media and political agenda can diverge. In some cases, news outlets may inform voters about issues that elites may wish to ignore, such as education problems. Rather than complicity following the political agenda, the results of Figure 4.5 suggest that news organisations may be fulfilling their democratic obligations to act as watchdogs and inform the citizenry about salient policy problems. But we should be cautious of such a claim. As will be shown in the next section, the media often simply follow the lead of politicians.

Policy Information in Speeches and News Coverage

Examining political and media attention to policy issues provides one lens to evaluate how policy news coverage intersects with political communication. We can also examine this problem from another perspective by analysing the *policy information, details, and facts* in speeches and news coverage.

Policy Information in Campaign Launch Speeches

Across the 2000s, slogans were popular in political campaign speeches. Politicians communicated with voters—and the media—through quick phrases that were adapted easily to the "soundbite" culture of election reporting. For example, leaders claimed they would "pay back the debt, stop the big new taxes, stop the boats and help struggling families" (Abbott, 2010). They would "scrap the carbon tax" (Abbott, 2013), or, lead "a government for the people, not just the powerful" (Latham, 2004). Others would "fight for the heart and soul of the Australia we all want" (Rudd, 2013). Leaders boldly announced that "fairness is in our DNA" and that the "reckless spending must stop"

(Rudd, 2007). They cried: "yes we will" (Gillard, 2010) and "love me or loathe me" (Howard, 2007) to their audiences. Previous studies have shown that these soundbite phrases were often reported verbatim in the news coverage (Young, 2011, p. 64). By framing their speeches to fit the soundbite media logic, politicians fail to provide the essential policy details needed for informed deliberation in the public sphere. In this sense, policy discussions are merely reduced to a "clash of simple slogans" (Entman, 1996, pp. 78-79).

In contrast to the speeches of 2001 and 2004, the 2010 and 2013 speeches rarely articulated the policy problems that both party leaders aimed to address. Politicians merely adopted a "shopping list" approach to outline policy objectives and measures. Abbott (2010) noted how his government would "scrap the carbon tax so your family will be $550 a year better off. We'll get the budget back under control by ending Labor's waste. We'll stop the boats. And we'll build the roads of the 21st century…." Similarly, Julia Gillard's 2010 speech contained only scant references to a "shopping list" of policies that she would implement as leader; stating:

> We will reward the best teachers because they do the hardest work of all. We will reward the schools that are improving the most so that they can benefit from having achieved for the children in their classrooms. We will of course create a prestige qualification – the Australian baccalaureate – so students in our country can get a qualification that can hold its own on the world stage while studying our curriculum, studying about this country, studying about Australia (Gillard, 2010).

In the example above, there was no mention of the implementation of the policy, the funding of the policy, or any policy details. Gillard's speech differs greatly to the speeches of earlier Labor leaders, including Beazley (2001) and Mark Latham (2004), who provided significant details about their key policy platforms. In 2004, Latham's speech contained vastly more information that Gillard's 2010 campaign address. For example, in outlining his key health policy, Medicare Gold, Latham declared:

> Federal Labor Government will take full responsibility for the hospital costs of Australians aged 75 and over….We call it Medicare Gold….Public hospitals will receive additional funding to improve the services they provide for Australians aged over 75. Labor will also pay for private hospital beds, under agreements finalised with the private hospital system. As a result, senior Australians will no longer need to take out private health insurance for hospital care. The costs will be covered by a Federal Labor Government. Medicare Gold is a great advance for our national health system. It ends the old, inefficient divide between public versus private hospitals and Commonwealth versus State funding. It will also deliver significant benefits for Australians under 75—taking the pressure off public hospitals and reducing the cost of private health insurance (Latham, 2004).

In Gillard's 2010 speech, there was less information beyond just a statement of actions to be taken. By comparison, Latham's speech highlighted what would happen, how it would happen (for example, through additional funding and individual agreements with private hospitals), and the benefits of the policy (for instance, reduced insurance premiums for all Australians by 12 per cent) (Latham, 2004).

Consider these qualitative examples in the context of our earlier observations about the policy content of campaign launch speeches (Figure 4.1). Taken together, we can see that policy content of campaign launch speeches declined over time in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The quantitative analysis showed a gradual decline in the policy content of these speeches between 2001 and 2013. In addition, the qualitative examples add more depth to the analysis. The qualitative evidence also shows that speeches from 2010 and 2013 campaigns provided less policy content than earlier elections. Collectively, the results illustrate that political communication in later campaigns was making a limited contribution to public debate. The data shows that politicians were gradually providing less policy content in their speeches with each election, with the 2010 and 2013 speeches containing fewer policy details than the speeches of earlier campaigns.

The 2010 and 2013 Labor campaign launches were later in the election cycle. This may provide one explanation for the absence and brevity of policy information in the campaign launch speeches. Compared to the 2001 and 2004 campaigns, the 2010 and 2013 Labor speeches were significantly closer to election day (five days and six days respectively). As I noted earlier, Australia's campaign funding arrangements allow political parties and incumbent politicians to claim their travel expenses from the government purse until they officially launch their campaigns (see Maiden, 2013a). Moreover, major parties have recognised that holding their campaign launches early in the election cycle works against them because it allows their opponents and the media more time to scrutinise their policies and their financial impacts (Young, 2011, p. 139). Given the proximity of these speeches to polling day in 2010 and 2013, political leaders may have been more likely to adopt small target approach to minimise any potential upsets that could occur in the final days of the campaign.

The differences between Gillard and Latham's speeches highlights a broader observation found in my analysis. Again, when we compare these speeches, the policy speeches of 2001 and 2004 provided more policy details than the speeches from latter campaigns. Political leaders also provided more information about the financial impacts of their policies in earlier election periods.

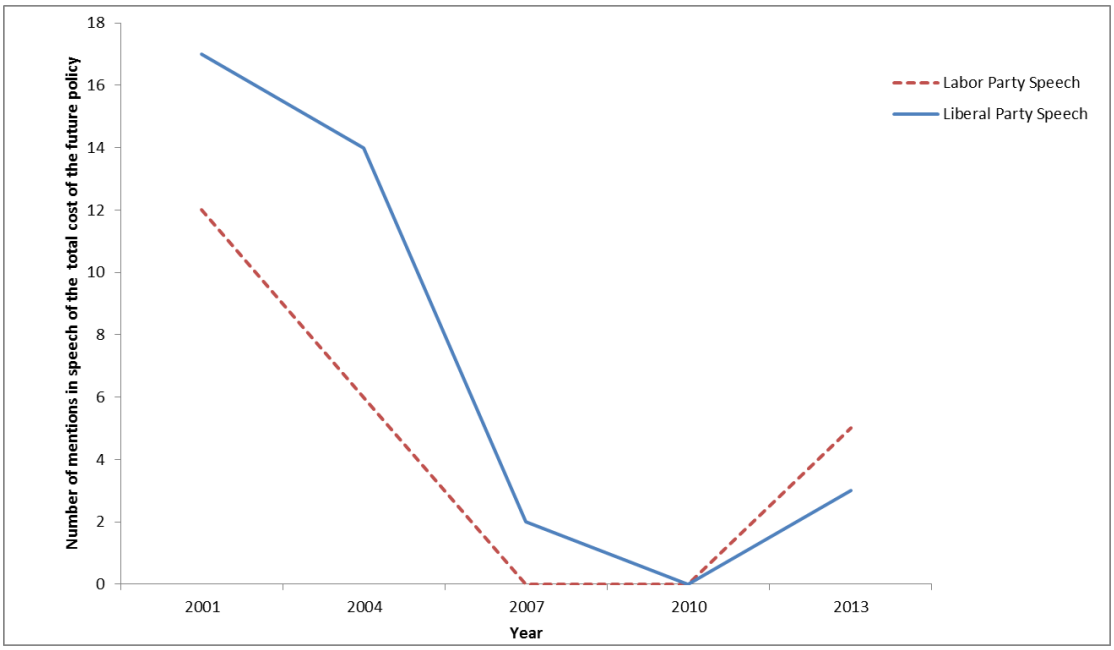
Policy Costs

Unlike other western democracies, such as Sweden or the United Kingdom, Australia's major political parties do not publish election manifestos. Much of the information voters and the media receive about a party's policies is derived from speeches, announcements, press releases, and costings documents. Policy costing documents provide information about the economic impact of a policy change (Jericho, 2013; 2016). Since the 2007-2008 GFC, the issue of government debt and economic management have become central campaign narratives in recent Australian elections (see Wanna, 2015, pp. 311-320). As such, the costing of policies is often the focus of debate between politicians (see Jericho, 2013; 2016). Providing information about the financial impact of election policies ensures that the public can evaluate proposals, call out spin, and contribute meaningfully to policy discussion. But the results presented

here suggest that politicians are increasingly unwilling to provide such important policy information.

Politicians were less likely to discuss the total costs of future policy initiatives in recent campaign launch speeches. Figure 4.6 shows the number of times the financial costs of a policy were mentioned in speeches across the 2000s. A clear declining trend is evident in Figure 4.6. Early speeches were more likely to mention the policy costs than speeches from the 2010 and 2013 campaigns. For example, Howard's 2001 address mentioned the cost of the Coalition's policy initiatives 17 times. This was slightly more than Labor leader Kim Beazley who mentioned the costs 12 times in his speech. This tended to be very brief discussions with leaders often just describing a numerical figure, such as "in the area of welfare reform, over the next term we'll invest $1.7 billion to reform Australia's welfare system" (Howard, 2001) or "the Coalition will provide $100 million over four years in additional capital funding for aged care homes" (Howard, 2001). Both party leaders provided less information in 2013 than in 2001 and 2004. We can see from this analysis that party leaders were less likely to talk about the policy problem, less likely to speak about policies in their speeches, and were also less likely to provide policy details.

Figure 4.6: Policy costs mentioned in campaign launch speeches by party and year (number of mentions), 2001-2013



N= 10 campaign launch speeches. Source: Author. Note: "future policy initiatives" include the initiatives they are proposing to implement in the next term.

Policy Information in News Coverage

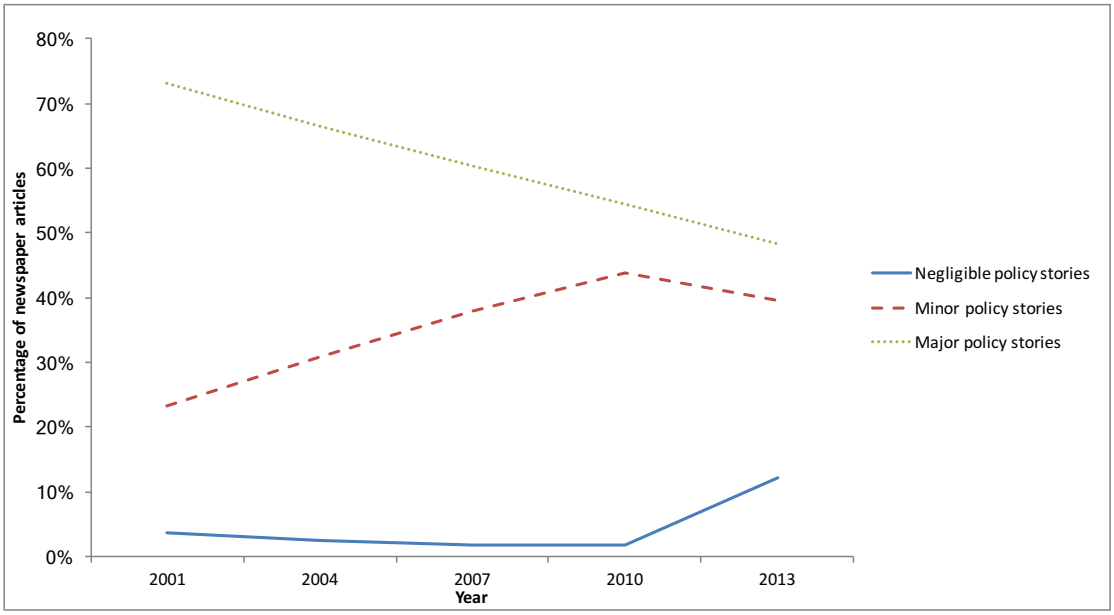
Politicians rarely provided policy information in their speeches, and rarely articulated the policy problem. Instead, politicians disseminated policy information through simple slogans, soundbites, and lists. Politicians provided less policy content in their speeches, fewer policy details, and provided much shorter speeches in later election periods. We can now examine policy information is reported in newspaper coverage. This section analyses policy details and information in newspaper coverage across the 2000s. It compares the previous findings about the speeches with media coverage.

Figure 4.7 shows the space devoted to policy reporting in news articles. All policy news stories sampled in this study were coded into one of these three categories based upon the amount of space they provided to policy reporting. This was calculated as a percentage of the total story content. For example, the total words/time an article devoted to the discussion of a policy issue divided by the length of the story. I coded each story into one of three categories: 1) negligible policy stories (stories where policy

discussion made up four per cent or less of the total news report), 2) minor policy stories (where the space devoted to policy was between five and 49 per cent of the total news report) and 3) major policy stories (where content devoted to policy made up 50 per cent or more of the total news report).

News outlets devoted less space to policy reporting with each election. Put simply, there were fewer major policy stories in later campaigns than earlier election cycles. Figure 4.7 shows a clear decline in number of major policy stories over time. In 2001, 73 per cent of newspaper articles were major policy stories (N= 284 articles from 2001). The percentage of major policy stories declined over the 2000s to 67 per cent in 2004, 60 per cent in 2007, and 54 per cent in 2010.[31] By 2013, less than half of all policy news articles were major policy news stories (48 per cent, N= 157). However, the word length of newspaper articles increased over the twenty first century.

Figure 4.7: Percentage of newspaper articles in sample that were major, minor, or negligible policy stories by year, 2001-2013



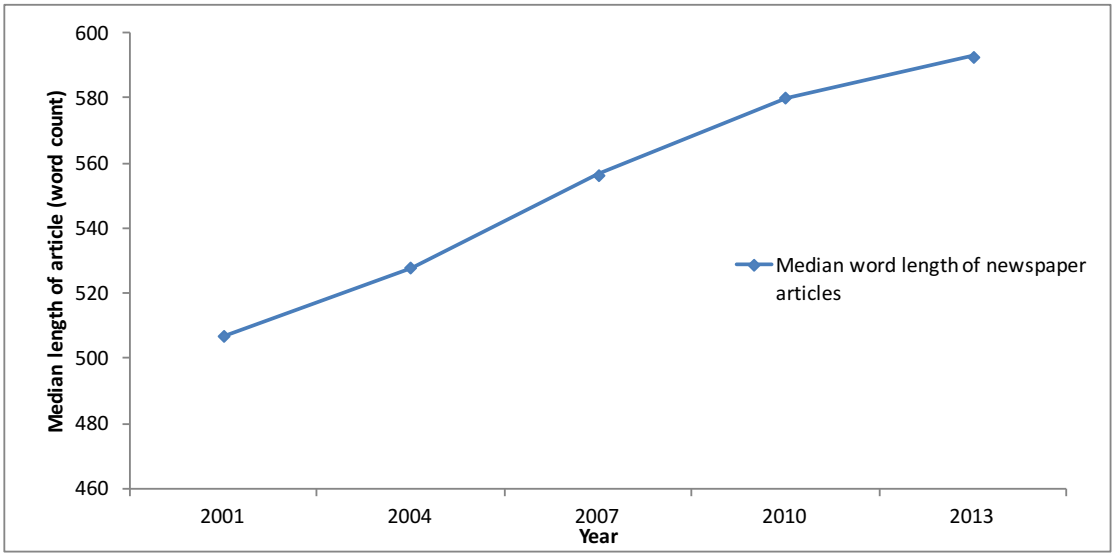
N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

[31] N (2004)= 314 newspaper articles, N(2007)= 298 newspaper articles, N(2010)= 217 newspaper articles.

According to journalism scholar Matthew Ricketson (2016, pp. 507-509, 517-518), longer forms of journalism, including book length and longer news articles, can contribute more in-depth analysis, information, more detailed investigations, and improve the public's understanding of topics, events and issues. Longer articles mean greater opportunity for longer policy reports. Yet, news organisation unfortunately did not take advantage of this opportunity. We can see that there were fewer major policy stories despite the word length of articles increasing over the 2000s.

Figure 4.8 shows the median word length of newspaper articles mentioning a tax, health or education issue. In 2001, the median length of a news article was 507 words. By 2013, the median length of news reports in my sample increased to 593 words. But, at the same time, we observed that the number of major policy stories published by news outlets was plummeting.

Figure 4.8: Median length of newspaper articles discussing tax, health or education policy issues by year, 2001-2013



N= 1270 articles. Source: Author.

Just as politicians were speaking less about policy issues in their speeches, journalists and editors were writing less about policy matters in their reports. This is an interesting empirical picture about the state of policy news in the digital age. It shows that both the politicians and the media were largely in-step. Politicians rarely discussed policy issues in their speeches and news outlets provided fewer major policy stories in later campaigns.

News outlets were devoting less space to policy reporting in the 2000s. And policy information, details, and facts were also disappearing from press coverage. The policy detail and information found in news stories was measured using a four-point scale. Each story was coded into one of four categories based upon the information that was included in the reports. The categories included 1) minimal details/facts, 2) some basic detail/facts, 3) significant amount of detail/facts, and 4) exceptional amount of detail/facts. News stories were evaluated by examining whether they included a detailed discussion of the policy/issue details; an analysis or evaluation of the policy issue or measure; expert or documentary evidence to support the information presented; or information about the costs of a policy proposal. Table 4.2 shows the scale that was used to evaluate each news story in my sample. Details are also available in appendices A and B.

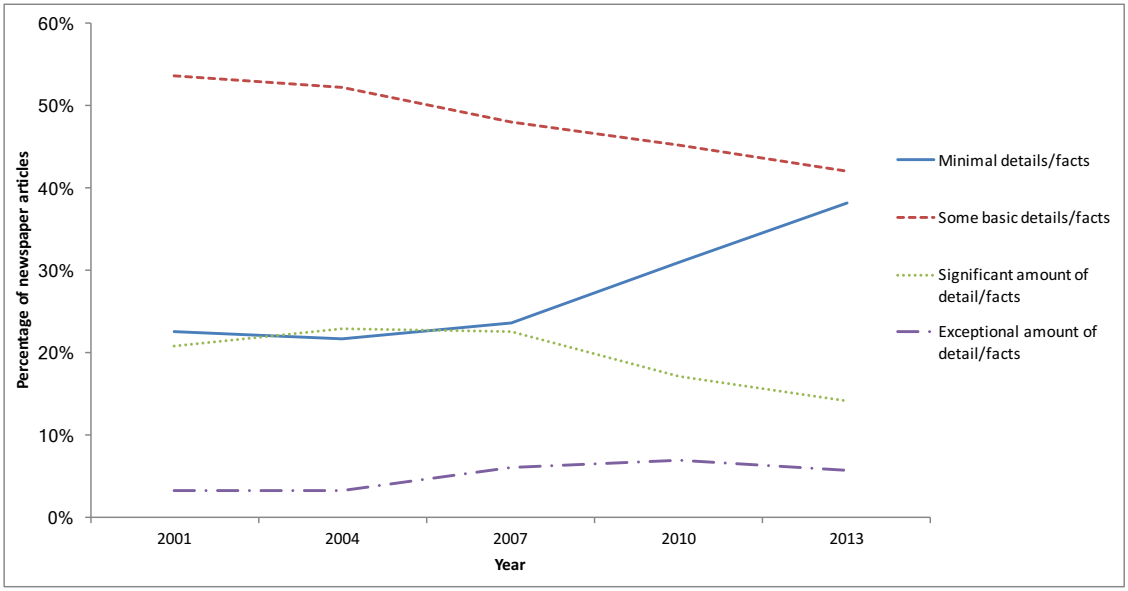
Table 4.2 Scale measuring policy detail and information in news coverage

Scale	Characteristics of News Stories in this Category
1= Minimal Details/Facts	Only mentions the name of the issues or lists policies with no substantive discussion or information. For instance, story may just mention the name such as 'carbon tax', hospital funding, company tax and so on.
2= Some Basic Details/Facts	Mentions the name of the policy/ issue as well as basic information or outline of the issue. This includes a brief summary of the policy measure or issue.
3= Significant Amount of Detail/Facts	Includes a detailed discussion of the policy issue, beyond just a summary of the basic facts or name. This includes more than a brief summary of the policy (for example, this could include an analysis, evaluation, or critique of the policy or issue). It must also include either a brief discussion of the costings of a policy (not just a simple numeric figure), OR brief discussion/reference to research, reports, documentary evidence, or brief comment(s) by an expert about the policy or issue.
4= Exceptional Amount of Detail/Facts	Provides a detailed discussion of policy measure or issue(s) beyond just the basic facts AND also provides detailed comments and discussion from multiple experts (or expert opinion as well as documentary evidence) that is not just a single comment or quote, and/or a detailed discussion of research, reports, documentary evidence. This may also include (although not always present) a discussion about the costs of a policy.

Source: Author. Note: Further details are available in appendix A and B.

Newspaper stories published in 2013 and 2010 contained less information than the stories published in earlier campaigns. Figure 4.9 highlights that the percentage of newspaper articles that provided "significant" details about a policy or issue(s) fell between 2001 and 2013. By comparison, the percentage of "exceptional" stories remained constant. The most striking trend was observed in the two bottom categories. The number of articles that included "basic facts/details" fell sharply between 2001 and 2013. In this same period, the percentage of articles that included only "minimal details" rose, especially after 2007.[32] The percentage of newspaper stories that were classified as being in the "minimal detail" category increased from 23 per cent in 2001 to 38 per cent in 2013. Policy content may have been replaced by reporting of personality and political strategy as I discuss in chapter 7. In this sense, policy information was marginalised but, as will be shown, more trivial aspects were covered more intensively by newspaper organisations in later campaigns.

Figure 4.9: Newspaper articles and their policy detail/information by year (percentage), 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

[32] In chapter 7, I return to this point and examine why 2010 marked a change in the way policy information was reported in news coverage.

The reliance on press releases combined with the time constraints placed on journalists, lack of expertise, and tightly managed campaigns means most policy news articles only publish the "basic facts." In this sense, newspaper coverage in the 2000s provided superficial coverage that presented a "narrow spectrum of information" and failed to probe or critically evaluate policies (Lawrence, 2000, p. 94; Sheppard & Bawden, 1997, p. 225; Young, 2011, pp. 199-200). This is not to say that there were no detailed policy news articles. Some journalists and news outlets did go beyond this superficial reporting. However, detailed policy journalism was the exception not the norm.

Newspaper reports rarely ventured beyond mentioning the name of a policy or issue. Like the policy speeches, the reporting of policies read more like a shopping list than an analysis. As observed in Figure 4.9, a common approach was for journalists to simply report "minimal details/information." This involved mentioning the name of a policy, such a "carbon tax" or "Medicare gold", or simply listing multiple policies and initiatives without delving into any discussion. For example, the *Sunday Mail's* reporting of the Greens' policies simply listed the various announcements without any contextualising information. Yet, the reporting still made newspaper's contempt for the party's policies clear through their choice of language:

> The Greens promised GST relief for small business and pleaded for the bombing to end in Afghanistan as they launched their national campaign. The party's only federal MP, Senator Bob Brown, was treated to two standing ovations and endless cheering as he spelt out the Greens' agenda for the next three years. He proposed to lead a multi-party mission to assess the refugee crisis in Pakistan and Indonesia after the November 10 poll, get rid of corporate donations to political parties, and restore ABC funding to 1985-86 levels. The Greens would also scrap HECS, make university courses free, and seek to halt bombing in Afghanistan for at least a month so aid could get through before winter ("Greens vow GST relief, end to bombing," 2001).

Although the report simply listed policy announcements, the use of phrases such as "pleading," "treated to two standing ovations," "endless cheering," and "scrap"

illustrate a rather critical description of the Greens' policies. This issue of partisanship in reporting was present in the next campaign. Following the 2004 election, News Corp Australia was criticised by the Australian Press Council for bias in reporting Greens' policies (Australian Press Council, 2005). The language used in policy reports matters because it can affect political knowledge, but also how citizens evaluate policy proposals. When reporting engages in overt partisanship, this can obscure information and lead to polarisation in political debates (see chapter 6).

Most news stories did go beyond the "shopping list" approach by providing *basic policy details and information* (figure 5.3), usually by incorporating a short policy summary. While this provided readers with some basic information about the policy proposal, the lack of analysis or interpretation by experts or third parties meant that the impact of the policies was frequently unclear to voters. The following example illustrates a common style of reporting found in news coverage across the 2000s. Policies would be outlined, but their overall significance or impact of the change would largely be ignored:

> Ms Gillard will today promise to introduce a scheme in which the top-performing 1000 schools across Australia will receive annual cash payments of $75,000 for each primary school and $100,000 per high school. Because of the fragile nature of the budget, the Reward for School Improvement scheme will start in 2013, when the budget is forecast to first return to surplus, with 500 schools to receive rewards (Coorey, 2010, p. 5).

The report in this example did not provide any further analysis of the policy. Rather than providing detailed analysis, the news article discussed the strategy the Labor Party was adopting stating that these "long-term policy pronouncements… [were] designed to differentiate from Mr Abbott who has adopted a small-target strategy" (Coorey, 2010, p. 5). This dearth of detailed analysis may be the result of newsroom cuts. There are simply fewer journalist available to do this kind of reporting

While there are still many experienced journalists in Australian newsrooms, the lack of evaluation or analysis in news coverage can be explained by the lack of specialist journalists. With fewer specialist reporters than ever before, generalist rounds reporters

are more likely to cover election and policy stories (see Buchanan, 2013, p. 20; Meade, 2016). Generalist reporters often do not have the same experience or expertise required for detailed policy analysis, particularly analysis of complex tax or health policies (Buchanan, 2013, p. 20; Meade, 2016). As a result, the absence of expertise means a lack of depth in policy coverage

Election campaigns also create their own unique pressures. Journalists are constantly required to file reports as they are chaperoned on the media bus from event to event (S. Jackson, 2010). As journalist Sally Jackson laments:

> Every day starts the night before with a text message at bedtime telling you when to get up….A typical day includes an announcement, a press conference, a "pic fac" (or photo opportunity) and a political function, or sometimes a couple of each. While on the road you will have to file reports on everything from reverse mortgages and family tax to recreational fishing policy. To do this, sometimes you'll be dropped with your laptop at a shopping centre and told to find a cafe with WiFi. Oh, and by the way, the coach will be leaving in 90 minutes. Welcome to journalists' fear and loathing on the campaign trail (S. Jackson, 2010).

Sally Jackson's evaluation typifies the constraints placed upon journalists during a campaign. The campaign environment leaves little time for journalists to read and analyse complex policy documents.[33] The speed and immediacy of the 24-hour news cycle along with competition from digital platforms has increased the pressure on journalists to quickly verify information and deliver breaking news to meet the demands of the rolling news cycle (see for discussion Cushion & Sambrook, 2016, pp. 1-6). In an election campaign, journalist need to provide streams of breaking news and election updates from the campaign trail (S. Jackson, 2010). Consequently, journalists have

[33] Other journalists have made similar claims to Sally Jackson regarding the intensity of the campaign environment. For example, Matt Price writes that "secrecy and stealth are all important for the campaign strategists, and reporters can't be trusted not to tip off protesters to attend the daily set pieces" (Price, 2001). He notes how "breaking a story from the bubble is extremely rare…[and] otherwise, all the media chooks are fed the same chaff" (Price, 2001). Price also comments on the nature of reporting, suggesting that "both camps' daily schedules are almost entirely focused on TV and radio - in that order" (Price, 2001). This is just further demonstration of the constraints and pressures journalists experience during an election.

become reliant upon the policy summaries presented in the press releases of parties and politicians. For example, Young's (2011, p. 164) analysis of Australian election reporting concluded that newspaper coverage of complex policies, such as tax, was often just a replication of a party's press release. Similarly, Justin Lewis and colleagues (2008a, pp. 1, 18) also found that news content is often "recycled" from press releases, with journalists heavily reliant on packaged "information subsidies."

Aware of the time and resource constraints journalists face, politicians have become adept at shaping news coverage to their advantage through communication techniques, including leaking policy information through press releases (see Young, 2011, pp. 132-133). For example, leading up to Howard's 2001 campaign launch speech, a Liberal Party press release described how "as the world changes, so do the threats facing Australia....to the old dangers of disease, illegal fishing, and crime, have been added drugs and people smuggling" (quoted in Young, 2011, p. 153). This press release was clearly flagging prominent policies of the 2001 Liberal launch speech, including the "tough on drugs programme" and border protection announcements (Howard, 2001). Similarly, news coverage on the day of the 2007 Labor launch described how Labor leader Kevin Rudd was "expected to announce policies to improve the technical and trades training facilities at government and non-government schools" (Farr, 2007). Once again, the trades training policy was a prominent proposal in Rudd's 2007 speech (Rudd, 2007). Although not all policy details were in the public domain, the news media were nonetheless aware of the key policies that party leaders intended to announce. But, even with this forewarning, news outlets tended to focus on other aspects of the campaign than policy issues.

So far, we have discussed some of the worst examples of policy reporting from Australian elections. We now turn our focus to exemplary policy reporting from the twenty-first century. Detailed articles, such as those in the "significant" category, expanded upon the basic facts to include comments from experts or professionals from various fields. This was a distinguishing feature of the way policy information was presented in news stories, and added greater depth to the news reports by providing analysis of policies rather than the simple shopping list reporting. As explored in

chapter 5, expert quotes and documentary evidence were a common feature in detailed policy news stories.

Documentary evidence was employed to illuminate the policy problem to news audiences. News outlets often published documentary evidence to highlight the benefits/disadvantages of a policy proposal and contextualise the policy announcements. Journalists flagged documentary evidence using phrases such as "an Alzheimer's Australia discussion paper has warned" (Bucci, 2010, p.3); "the report calls on both major political parties to commit $4.5 million" (Bucci, 2010, p. 3); "Poorly paid apprentices cannot afford to keep training, report says" (Sutherland, 2007, p. 15); "the report by the University of New England suggests the issue of apprentice retention…" (Sutherland, 2007, p. 15); and "the Coalition and the ALP are yet to address the fundamental factor in student performance underlined by the McKinsey report —the quality of teachers" (Ferrari, 2007, p. 4). In doing so, they were adding an important validation that supported the accounts they were presenting. Press articles in the "exceptional" category made great use of documentary evidence and clearly provided more policy information than other types of news stories.

Exceptionally detailed news articles were some of the longest stories in my sample. The median length of an "exceptional" news story was 820 words. As will be shown in chapter 6, exceptional news stories tended to be found in broadsheet publications, such as the *Australian, Age* or *Sydney Morning Herald,* who have different readership, commercial interests, and format constraints than tabloid newspapers (see chapter 6 for discussion).

Exceptional news stories often included comments and extensive analysis from several experts and/or included documentary evidence. For example, "Lost in the campaign haze" published in the *Age* during the 2010 election campaign included comments from eight experts in higher education critiquing the major parties' policies (Collins & Harrison, 2010, p. 15). While space limitations prevent one from including all the material, the example below illustrates some of the key features of an exceptional news story, including the way news outlets incorporated experts into their coverage:

> Dennis Murray of the International Education Association of Australia says neither side of politics is doing enough to fix problems in the sector, and both seem to be in denial about the challenges. “We're going to see a drop-off of at least 100,000 [students] and it will effect all sectors [and] we're looking at an estimated 35,000 Australian jobs going as well,” he says. “There's no signal from this government or the opposition parties for a whole-of-government approach [to the problem]. They're both silent on the massive potential job losses”….“If we put forward the final step of Bradley, which is the 10 per cent increase of per-student funding, we would move towards the international standard,” Universities Australia chief executive Glenn Withers says (Collins & Harrison, 2010, p. 15).

Exceptional articles often provided detailed background information about the current policy environment and elucidated information using expert comments to narrate the policy story (for example Pollard & Metherell, 2004; D. Ryan, 2007). Although exceptionally detailed news stories were rare, they were distinguishable from others purely by the amount of information presented, their inclusion of evidence, and the policy analysis incorporated.

If political news coverage is often determined by what politicians say (see Cushion, Thomas, et al., 2016, pp. 479-481; Dowding & Martin, 2017, p. 178), then my results demonstrate that politicians were not saying very much about their policies. With journalists deriving much of their content from political communication such as speeches, interviews and press releases, it is no wonder policy discussions have become often shallow and superficial. When politicians devote less space to policy discussion in their formal speeches or only present basic policy facts, then policy journalism suffers because journalists have limited information to produce stories. While journalists could always conduct their own independent research, as some do, the tight deadlines of the campaign environment and the lack of specialist policy reporters means that journalists neither have the time, resources nor knowledge to conduct such detailed policy investigations.

Telling the Policy Story

The final way we can analyse how politician shape policy news is by examining the frames, narratives and language used in speeches and media coverage. The following section briefly compares how politicians and the media tell the policy story.

Strategic and Contest Frames

In his study of the British media, Dan Jackson (2011, p. 186) found that politicians were not necessarily the "innocent victims of a strategy-obsessed media." The political communication strategies politicians use meant that they were an important source of strategically framed news (D. Jackson, 2011, pp. 181-183, 186). When politicians focused on their opponents or framed their comments around disunity, leadership, or the political contest, media coverage was more likely to incorporate their comments into a strategic or contest narrative (D. Jackson, 2011, pp. 182-183). In this sense, politicians took on an "active role" in the strategic framing of politics (D. Jackson, 2011, p.182). Consistent with Dan Jackson's (2011) conclusions, I observed many similar trends in reporting. When politicians identified target groups for their policies, newspaper coverage often framed these policy announcements in strategic terms.

Politicians often framed their policy announcements in terms of their benefits to families. News outlets followed suit by framing these policy proposals as attempts "woo" and win the "family vote." Nearly three quarters of the Australian population are classified as family households (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015b). And politicians were acutely aware of the significance of this voting population and framed their announcements accordingly. For instance, John Howard's speeches repeatedly noted "the central role of the family in the Australian community" (Howard, 2004) observing how families were "the building blocks of a good society and the policies that we've developed over the last 11 and a half years, the family tax benefits, the baby bonus and many others, have supported families at every stage of life expanding the horizons of their choice" (Howard, 2007).

While the family narrative has been more commonly associated with conservative political parties (Younane, 2008, p. 73), Labor leader Kevin Rudd also spoke at length

about families in his campaign launch speeches. Rudd framed the benefits of his policies for "working families" in his 2007 campaign launch, and pledged to assist "Australian families with cost of living pressures by keeping interest rates low, increasing the childcare rebate from 30 to 50 per cent and providing 1.3 million families with the Schoolkids Bonus each year" (Rudd, 2013). Gillard perpetuated this narrative in her 2010 speech by relating the benefits of her policy decisions to families (Gillard, 2010). Abbott also framed his discussions of policy issues using this family narrative arguing that "when I look at the benefits that all Australians rightly enjoy such as Medicare and good public schools and hospitals, I don't see "middle class welfare" but the hallmarks of a society that gives families a fair go" (Abbott, 2013). By framing policy announcements in this way, politicians were providing news organisations with further motivation to discuss their policy proposals in strategic terms. And they did.

The fragmentation of audiences across multiple media platforms means that news organisations are competing for "distracted attention" (W. L. Bennett, 2012, p. 36). As a result, they need news products that attract audiences and advertising revenues (Iyengar et al., 2004, p. 159). As noted by Patterson (1993, p. 62), policy issues generally lack "novelty" or excitement, and are often "longstanding issues" that can be difficult to explain. Therefore, strategic elements and game framing offer a way to attract new audiences by providing "elements of drama and playful public theatre… [that prevent] politics from becoming dulled by scripted performances and mind numbing details of policy issues" (W. L. Bennett, 2012, p. 36). When economic conditions are tougher for news organisations, as they were in the late 2000s, then there is more incentive to produce strategic, contest and game framed coverage to garner audience share.

Strategic frames were amongst the most prominent features of policy stories in the twenty-first century. News outlets frequently referenced the strategic value of policy proposals by using language such as "pitching" and "vote buying." This featured repeatedly in newspaper headlines (Table 4.2). Nearly 43 per cent of all policy news articles included a discussion of opinion polls, campaign strategy/tactics, or contained

contest/game language.[34] Similarly, 55 per cent of online policy news articles also included a reference or discussion of opinion polls, campaign strategy/tactics, or contained contest/game language.

Table 4.2: Examples of headlines adopting strategic language, 2001-2013

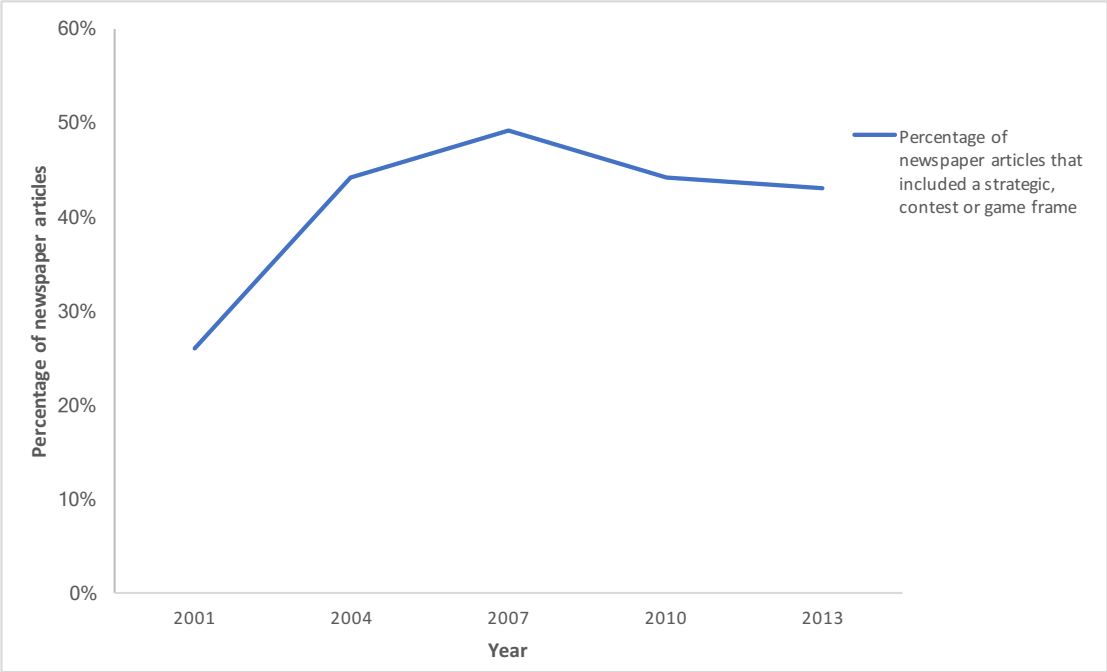
Headline	Newspaper	Date
High speed education: Rudd's pitch to families	*Advertiser*	15 November 2007
PM bets on baby bonus- $1.2bn targeted at crucial marginal	*Daily Telegraph*	14 November 2007
Abbott to play final cards on eve of poll	*Courier-Mail*	2 September 2013
PM outbids Labor for first-home buyers' vote	*Australian*	13 November 2007
Play for tradies: Lib's blue collar pitch	*Herald Sun*	2 September 2013
Economy the main issue: PM- Latham's grey power pitch- Election 2004	*Australian*	30 September 2004
Latham buys grey vote- Iraq downplayed in slick policy launch	*Australian*	30 September 2004
Grey power- Latham's $2.9bn bid to win over the elderly- ELECTION 2004	*Daily Telegraph*	30 September 2004
Abbott plays seniors card….but his daughters steal the show.	*Herald Sun*	26 August 2013
PM's $6bn to wedge Labor	*Australian*	27 September 2004

N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Policy reporting in 2010 and 2013 included more examples of strategic contest and game frames than reporting from earlier elections. Figure 4.10 shows the percentage of newspaper articles that used a strategic, content and game frame by election year. Between 2001 and 2007, the percentage of articles that included these elements increased from 36 per cent in 2001, to 44 per cent in 2004, to 49 per cent in 2007. In 2010 and 2013, this fell to 44 and 43 per cent respectively. Interestingly, the 2007 election marked somewhat of a change point, with fewer stories adopting game, contest and strategic frames than in the previous campaigns.

[34] For example, descriptions using contest/game language such as "bidding war", "the race", "the attack", "counter attack", "the offensive", "salvo", "battleground", and "race to the finish line."

Figure 4.10: Percentage of newspaper articles that included a strategic, contest, or game frame, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Like the campaign launch speeches, news coverage of tax, health and education issues placed significant emphasis on the so called "family vote." Newspapers reported how policy proposals were "winning over" families, with headlines including "Howard's bid to win over families" (2001, p.12), "Howard's $1.8bn family vote pitch" (S. Lewis, 2001, p. 1), and "Leaders pull out extra cash to woo families" (J. Wright, 2010, p. 8). In 2001, newspapers reported that Howard's policy announcements were a "pitch to young families….[and] an attention-grabber in the outlying "nappy belt" suburbs of major cities" ("Howard's bid to win over families," p. 12). Newspapers described how "a newborn child could be worth up to $12,500 in tax breaks under a $1.2 billion Howard Government appeal for the vote of young families" (Probyn & Wallace, 2001, p. 4). Moreover, online news coverage of the Coalition's "baby bonus" announcement explored the benefits of the policy for parents by structuring the article around questions such as "who gets it?" "how much do you get?" and "when do you get it?" ("Baby allowance rules," 2001) illustrating the way policy announcements were evaluated in terms of their strategic significance and framed as a contest or game. This was particularly evident in the 2004 campaign.

Newspaper coverage of Labor's 2004 Medicare Gold policy framed the announcement in terms of its strategic significance in securing the votes of older Australians. The "grey vote" narrative was pervasive in reporting, with newspapers adopting language such as "wooing", "winning", "pitching to" or "buying" the "grey vote." Headlines described the policy as an "Appeal to grey power puts Labor back in the race" (2004, p. 1), "Latham's grey vote bid" (K. Middleton, 2004, p. 1), "Latham buys grey vote- Iraq downplayed in slick policy launch" (S. Lewis & Maher, 2004, p. 1), "Chase on for those swinging oldies - Latham's grey power pitch - Election 2004" (Legge, 2004, p. 6), "Labor gold lures grey vote" (Atkins, 2004a, p. 1), "GREY POWER- Latham's $2.9bn bid to win over the elderly- ELECTION 2004" (Farr, 2004, p. 1) and "Latham plays for golden oldies; ALP launches $2.9b Medicare package" (Peake, 2004, p. 1). Reporting on the 2004 Labor campaign launch, the *Australian* observed that:

> LABOR has unveiled a $3.7billion ***plan to win over John Howard's political heartland,*** with an extension of Medicare to cover all hospital costs for the elderly and an $8-a-fortnight boost to the pension….Mr Latham will also shortly announce a big injection of funds for aged care as ***the ALP goes all out to woo the "grey vote"*** -- a constituency that has strongly backed the Coalition since 1996 (emphasis added) (S. Lewis & Maher, 2004, p. 1).

The *Australian* was not alone in reporting policy announcements using strategic language. Policies were described as a "pitch for John Howard's grey heartland" designed "to grab momentum, after a sudden drop in Coalition support among older voters" (Shanahan & Girolamo, 2004, p. 1), and descriptions of Labor's policy as "pitching for the elderly vote while also appealing to the hip pocket of younger voters" (Starick, 2004, p. 1) were typical in the 2004 election news coverage. By reporting policies in this way, the reader was invited to view the "Medicare gold" policy as simply a move or "play" in the electoral contest. The complexities of the policy were reduced to trivial narratives focused on the "clash" between political opponents, and tactics used to win votes.

Policies from other campaigns were also described in terms of their significance in securing votes. Newspapers reported how polices were merely "a series of populist measures designed to win over groups of voters threatening to stray away" (Middleton, 2001), policies were described as a "pitch to middle Australia for a third term of government", an appeal to "the elderly and the hip pockets of young families" (McKenna, 2001, p. 1), "pitch to Christian voters" (J. Gordon, 2010, p. 11), a "pitch to first-home buyers" that "targeted vulnerable suburban seats" (Parnell, 2007, p. 5), or a "pitch to blue-collar workers" (Maiden, 2013b, p. 12). Online news articles described how policy announcements were set to "woo parents" (Tingle, 2001), how the "speech was a direct assault on Labor" (Hartcher, 2010), how leaders "appealed to wavering voters" with their policy announcements (Harrison, 2013), and how a party's policy announcements were "an apparent attempt to better Labor's commitment" (Patty, 2007). They noted how proposals were "targeted at the outer-metropolitan marginal seats that Labor needs to hold and to win, with policies aimed at the blue-collar vote and the small business sector" (Hartcher, 2013); or a pitch "to young couples who lose income when they have a baby" (Grattan, 2001). Strategic frames were pervasive in news coverage over the 2000s. When politicians identified a target group in their announcements, such as "working families" (Rudd, 2007), then media would largely frame these policy announcements in strategic terms. Again, what politicians say clearly shaped how the policy story was told in the 2000s.

The "Us versus Them" Conflict Narrative in Campaign Speeches

Another common approach used by politicians was to adopt an "us versus them" narrative in their speeches, which was easily accommodated into a contest or game frame in news coverage. In their speeches, politicians discussed their policies in terms of what they were doing and what their opponents were not. For example, Howard (2001), describing the Coalition's policy to invest in science, claimed that "[Labor] talked about it, we have done something about it" (Howard, 2001). Other leaders described how they "have a long-term plan to fix our nation's hospitals" while their opponents "by contrast, has put forward no new plan" (Rudd, 2007). Leaders argued that their "long-term plan…will put schools, hospitals and families first" but their "opponents are offering short term fixes from a short term Liberal leader" (Beazley,

2001). Howard (2007) noted how "[the Coalition] have a plan to continue prosperity, we have a plan to drive unemployment even lower" while "the other side of politics, the Labor Party, has nothing more than a PR script." Gillard (2010) also adopted this narrative by suggesting that Labor would "take their schools on a journey of change, a journey of improvement, a journey to make sure that every child in every school gets a great education" while her opponent, Abbott, would "take away the things that we want to provide to children in schools."

One clear example of the "us versus them" framing approach was found in Rudd's 2013 speech, which focused on the distinctions between Labor and the Coalition:

> We believe in building the education system of the future through our $15 billion of additional investment in the Better Schools plan. Whereas Mr Abbott has stated he will cut $8 billion from the better schools plan….We believe in helping Australian families with cost of living pressures by keeping interest rates low, increasing the childcare rebate from 30 to 50 per cent and providing 1.3 million families with the Schoolkids Bonus each year. Whereas Mr Abbott has said he does not care about cost of living pressures because he is going to abolish the Schoolkids Bonus altogether and then review the Goods and Services Tax which hits the bottom line for every Australian family at the shops (Rudd, 2013).

By adopting this language in their speeches, policy proposals are easily accommodated into a strategic narrative in news coverage, as shown by my earlier examples. While scholars and politicians lament the presence of strategic and game frames in the media coverage (see for discussion Tony Blair, 2007; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Lawrence, 2000; D. Jackson 2011), politicians must also share part of the blame for engaging in this framing. Together with my earlier findings about political attention, we can see that politicians drive the policy agenda and shape how the policy story is conveyed through media coverage.

Economic Narratives and Contest Framing

The final way we can analyse how politician shape policy news is by investigating economic narratives and contest frames in speeches and media coverage. "Management of the economy" was a highly salient issue to Australian voters in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p.88). Other economic issues such as "unemployment" and especially "interest rates" were also amongst some of the most salient issues to Australian voters between 2001 and 2013 (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p.88). Given their salience, we could expect that they would be prominent narratives in these campaigns. Indeed, John Wanna (2015) found that the economy has been a central campaign narrative in recent elections, especially since the 2007-2008 GFC. Therefore, this section focuses on the way politicians used economic narratives in their speeches and how this shaped media reporting. It finds that when politicians used economic narratives in their speeches, media reporting tended to frame policies as a contest or "battle" over fiscal management. Again, we can see that the language politicians use has consequences for the way policy issues are reported by the press.

Politicians paid significant attention to interest rates and economic management, with John Howard's speeches notable for their references to interest rates.[35] For example, when making his policy announcements, John Howard frequently referred to the need for a "strong economy" to implement effective policies.[36] In his 2004 education policy announcement, Howard noted that "our strong budget position means that we can now afford to make an additional capital injection into those two categories of schools" (Howard, 2004). Other leaders also framed their policy announcements in similar economic terms.[37] They noted how certain policies were "good for the economy because it gives the population, participation and productivity boost that's necessary if Australia is to avoid the demographic issues associated with an ageing population"

[35] For example, Howard's statements such as "nothing threatens that security more directly than the prospect of rising interest rates" and "interest rates under a Labor Government would always be higher than under a Coalition Government" (Howard, 2004) highlight the importance placed on these economic issues.

[36]For instance, Howard observed that "without a strong economy, you cannot sustain the automatic indexation of the aged pension. Without a strong economy, you cannot sustain a growing investment in health and education. Without a strong economy, you cannot sustain a growing investment in roads. Without a strong economy, you cannot afford to adequately defend the nation" (Howard, 2004).

[37] For example, Mark Latham claimed that Labor were "the only party willing to respect the budget surplus" and "the only party putting downward pressure on interest rates" (Latham, 2004).

(Abbott, 2010). For example, Gillard pledged to "bring the Budget to surplus in 2013" and linked her jobs policy to economic management promising to "build that strong economy, investing in skills, investing in infrastructure, focusing on jobs, and families within the nation will be able to build their future with the benefits of work" (Gillard, 2010).[38]

The economic narratives adopted by politicians promoted contest framing in policy reporting. Newspapers often framed policies as "battle" over fiscal responsibility (see Tingle, Crowe, & Scott, 2007). For instance, news coverage of the 2007 Labor launch reported how Rudd "claimed the economic high ground in the election campaign" by only including a small number of policy announcements in his speech (Tingle et al., 2007, p. 1). Interest rates featured heavily in news coverage of tax, health and education issues, with policy announcements framed as a contest over which part could keep interest rates low. Headlines such as "Whoever wins, this frantic bidding war appears likely to mean one thing - higher interest rates" (J. Gordon, 2004, p. 11) are illustrative of this link between policy proposal, interest rates, and the broader economic contest. This contest framing was prevalent across the 2000s. Newspaper reports framed policy announcements as part of a broader spending contest (see J. Gordon, 2007; Henderson, 2007), with phrases such as "Labor leader delivered pledges only a quarter the size of those announced by the Prime Minister" (M. Franklin, 2007, p. 1). and "…Mr Howard trumped Labor's promises" (Hawthorne, 2007, p. 10).

Politicians shaped the use contest and strategic language in newspaper reporting. But newsworthiness is also determined by whether an issue is relatable to audiences (Graber, 1980, pp.62-65). Interest rates are relatable issue because many home-owning voters would be affected by any change in interest rates. Australia has relatively high rates of home ownership, and an obsession with purchasing real estate (Belot, 2017; Bluette, 2017). For example, the percentage of people owning their own home with a mortgage increased across the 2000s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015a). By linking policy issues to interest rate, news outlets were perpetuating a contest narrative

[38] Similarly, Rudd also noted that "That's why we worked hard to keep the economy strong through the Global Financial Crisis, while other economies fell like dominoes around the world. That's why we acted decisively to stimulate the economy and to protect jobs rather than allowing the mass unemployment we have seen across the rest of the world" (Rudd, 2013).

that resonated with readers. Economic consequences of policy action were linked to a rise or fall in interest rates or the management of the economy. Debates were framed as a contest between the parties who could keep interest rates low. In doing so, policies become viewed purely through an economic lens where the benefits of the policies are obscured (Patterson, 1993, p. 62). Hence, the public are not given the full picture of these issues because policy reporting is simplified to shallow economic arguments that focuses on the competition between politicians.

In a similar fashion to the earlier findings about policy information, we can see that the frames, narratives, and language used in news coverage reflected how politicians spoke about their policies in their speeches. When politicians pitch their policies to certain groups of voters, newspaper coverage was likely to frame these announcements in strategic terms. Similarly, when announcements are linked to the economy or economic conditions, policy reporting would promote a contest frame that placed politicians in "battle" over fiscal management.

In adopting these contest, game and strategy frames, critics allege that complex policy discussions are reduced to mere competitions about who is winning or losing the election race (see W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 36-44). This limits the amount of information made available to voters (see W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 36-44). When media coverage does adopt strategic frames in their policy reporting, this can have important consequences for the quality of public debate and, by extension, informed discourse in the Australian public sphere. The difficulty for news organisations is striking a balance between strategic, contest and game frames, and informative policy content (see chapter 8).

Conclusion

Politicians shape what issues the media report and how they report them. Politicians were speaking less about their policies, devoting less space to policy discussion, and providing fewer details (such as policy costings). Again, media reporting largely followed this pattern. Media reporting of tax, health and education issues mirrored political attention. The data showed that when politicians provided fewer policy details in their speeches, press outlets also provided less information in their policy coverage. Similarly, the results demonstrated that when politicians provided less policy content in their speeches, news outlets published fewer major policy stories. Moreover, politicians shaped how these policy stories were told in news coverage. Consistent with previous studies (D. Jackson, 2011), I highlighted that the way politicians discussed policy issues in their speeches appeared to shape the frames and narratives adopted in reporting. When politicians focused on their opponents, targeted specific groups, or used economic narratives, the press frequently reported policy announcements in strategic and contest terms.

Given the dependencies between political elites, institutions, the public, and the media, scholars cannot simply "blame the messenger" or attribute flaws in the political system simply to "media malaise" (Norris, 2000, pp. 3-21). These results show that press coverage of policy issues cannot be analysed in isolation because there are many factors influencing reporting, including the actions and words of politicians. But the media could also be influencing how politicians discuss policy issues. Politicians could be paying less attention or providing less information simply because the media are less likely to report policy details. Conversely, the news media are reporting less about policy issues because politicians are providing less policy information. Alternatively, both may be ignoring policy issues simply because voters may not want this information.

While the direction of this relationship is itself difficult to disentangle (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009, p. 247; Dowding & Martin, 2017, pp. 178-179; Kingdon, 1984, pp. 61-65), it does not make my observations about the state of policy discourse in the public sphere any less concerning. With less policy information, fewer details, and a policy

story that largely revolved around political strategy, the evidence shows that the quality of policy reporting and the campaign launch speeches was in decline over twenty-first century. Thus, the public sphere—as a place for the contest of diverse ideas and informed political discourse—was not being well-served by politicians or the press in the 2000s. The next chapter provides more evidence to support this contention through its examination of the sources and primary definers in policy news.

Chapter 5: Privileging the Powerful

A vibrant public sphere requires a diverse range of views, voices and opinions to facilitate healthy debate (see Habermas, 1989; McNair, 2000, pp. 105-106; Van Leuven, Deprez, & Raeymaeckers, 2014, pp. 850-851). Ideally, news outlets should offer a "channel of access" that allows a variety of opinions, comments and views to be expressed so that informed deliberation can occur (Habermas, 1989, p. 181; McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). This chapter examines how the voices of politicians, expert sources, and ordinary citizens were reported in newspaper coverage of tax, health and education issues in the 2000s. This chapter begins by analysing the political sources quoted in news coverage. It then examines the use of expert sources to narrate the policy story. Finally, it concludes by investigating how ordinary citizens were quoted in policy reporting.

This chapter contends that policy reporting was limited in its capacity to foster a contest of ideas. It finds that policy news provided a platform for the most powerful political views to be heard, while largely excluding others from policy debates. It shows that major party leaders were the primary definers of policy news in the 2000s, with 'ordinary citizens', experts, other politicians, and minor party candidates seldom quoted.[39]

[39] The "primary definers" are the primary sources quoted in a news article. They are the privileged sources that are granted media access to present their views and opinions (see Hall et al., 1978).

Political Voices in Policy News

Politicians want journalists to include them in their reports. News stories give politicians a platform to broadcast their campaign messages and views to voters (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 148). When politicians are quoted in news coverage, they are granted power, attention and visibility in the public sphere (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 148). This is particularly important during an election campaign when there are thousands of candidates competing for media attention (see Young, 2011, p. 178). Politicians want to be heard so they can ensure that their messages reach their constituents. But journalists also need political sources "to get access to information, to provide different viewpoints, to offer context and interpretations, and to validate news accounts" (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2009, p. 75).

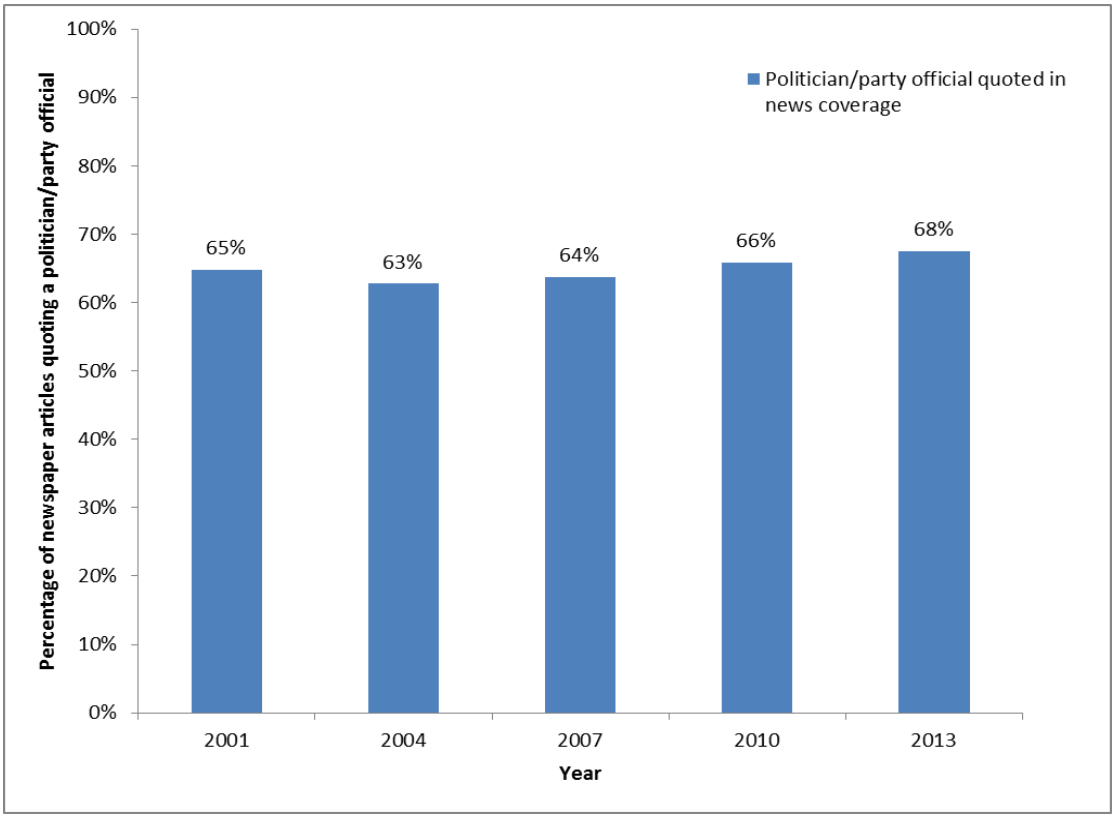
In 1978, Stuart Hall and his colleagues observed that journalists routinely consulted those in privileged and powerful institutional positions for information, which resulted in their opinions and commentary being more widely reported (Hall et al., 1978). Hall and his colleagues (1978, p. 58) argued that due to newsroom pressures, such as news deadlines and professional demands of impartiality, journalists were more likely to privilege powerful sources (primary definers) in the belief they hold "more accurate or specialised information on particular topics than the majority of the population." Like Hall et al. (1978), I find that newspaper outlets provided a platform for the most powerful political elites to be heard in policy debates.

Figure 5.1 shows that politicians/party officials[40] were more frequently quoted in news coverage of tax, health and education issues in later election cycles. In 2001, politicians or party official were quoted in 65 per cent of newspaper articles. This declined slightly in 2004 to 63 per cent before rising with each election and peaking at 68 per cent in 2013. The increase between 2004 and 2013 was small, but Figure 5.1 nonetheless demonstrates that politicians/party officials were the clear prominent voices in policy news across the 2000s. But, more specifically, it was major party leaders who were the

[40] Other party officials included people who were describe as having a role in the party, such as the National Secretary of the ALP or the campaign director.

primary definers in policy reporting. Table 5.1 also shows the politicians quoted in press coverage between 2001 and 2013 by their party position. [41]

Figure 5.1: Percentage of newspaper articles quoting a politician or party official by year, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

[41] I measured the primary, secondary and tertiary political voices quoted in each news article. Unless otherwise stated, these results report the primary political voice heard in policy news. The primary voice was the first person quoted in the news articles. Details of coding procedures are available in the appendix A.

Table 5.1: Percentage of newspaper articles quoting a politician/party official by their party position, 2001-2013

Party Position	Primary Voice	Secondary Voice	Tertiary Voice
Major Party Leader	74 %	17 %	3 %
Cabinet/Shadow Minister	17 %	15 %	4 %
Major Party Backbencher/Candidate	4 %	3 %	1%
Minor/Independent Candidate/Politician	4 %	1 %	1 %
Other Party Official	1 %	1 %	<1 %
No Secondary Voice	—	63%	—
No Tertiary Voice	—	—	92 %

N= 820 Newspaper articles that quoted a politician/party official. Note: Figures have been rounded. Primary voice is the first politician/party official quoted in the news story. Secondary voice is the second politician/party official quoted in the news story. Tertiary voice is the third politician/party official quoted in the news story.

Major party leaders were given an almost exclusive opportunity to contribute to policy reporting. They were often the only source quoted in news coverage of policy issues. Only 37 per cent of articles quoted a second politician/party official, while only eight per cent of policy articles quoted a third politician. Major party leaders were the primary source quoted in 74 per cent of press stories (N=820 newspaper articles that quoted a politician/party official). By comparison, cabinet/shadow ministers were only quoted in 17 per cent of policy stories, followed by minor party/independent candidates and politicians (four per cent), major party candidates and backbenchers (four per cent), and other party officials such as state/federal party secretaries (one per cent) (N=1270). Political seniority mattered when it came to the sources selected to narrate policy stories. Consistent with previous scholarship (see Gans, 1979), the results demonstrate that less well-known politicians or emerging candidates struggled to secure a platform to share their views and opinions with the Australian public.

Together, Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1 lend support to Hall and colleagues' (1978) "primary definer" argument. We can see that a hierarchy did exist in policy news. Consistent with the findings of Hall et al (1978), newspapers paid less attention to

politicians lower on this hierarchy, but provided more opportunity for the views of powerful major party leaders to be heard.

On the campaign trail, political leaders are ideally placed to promote their messages to the media pack, while other politicians lower on the hierarchy receive much less attention because they do not have the same resources available to influence reporting. Powerful political sources—such as major party leaders— have extensive resources available that enables them to influence news content, including teams of public relation (PR) professionals who use complex media strategies to influence the news cycle (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez; 2016; Gans, 1979; Hall et al., 1978; Johnson-Cartee, 2005; McNair, 2011). As noted earlier, PR professionals offer news organisations a low cost and easily accessible information supply and, in doing so, can manipulate the news cycle to their advantage (Ward, 1995, pp. 163-164).

The "campaign bus" typifies the extent to which political leaders can shape the news cycle. On the campaign bus, the media pack is chaperoned from event to event by media advisors and spin-doctors (Young, 2011, pp. 142-144). The advantages of the "campaign bus" for political leaders and journalists are significant. Political leaders can exert greater control over media coverage and influence the news agenda. At the same time, journalists are uniquely placed to gain insights, access, and information providing them with content they need to supply the 24-hour news cycle (see B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 14-24; Manning, 2001, p. 55; I. Ward, 1995, pp. 162-165; Young, 2011, pp. 142-144). But problems emerge when journalists report from this tightly controlled environment.

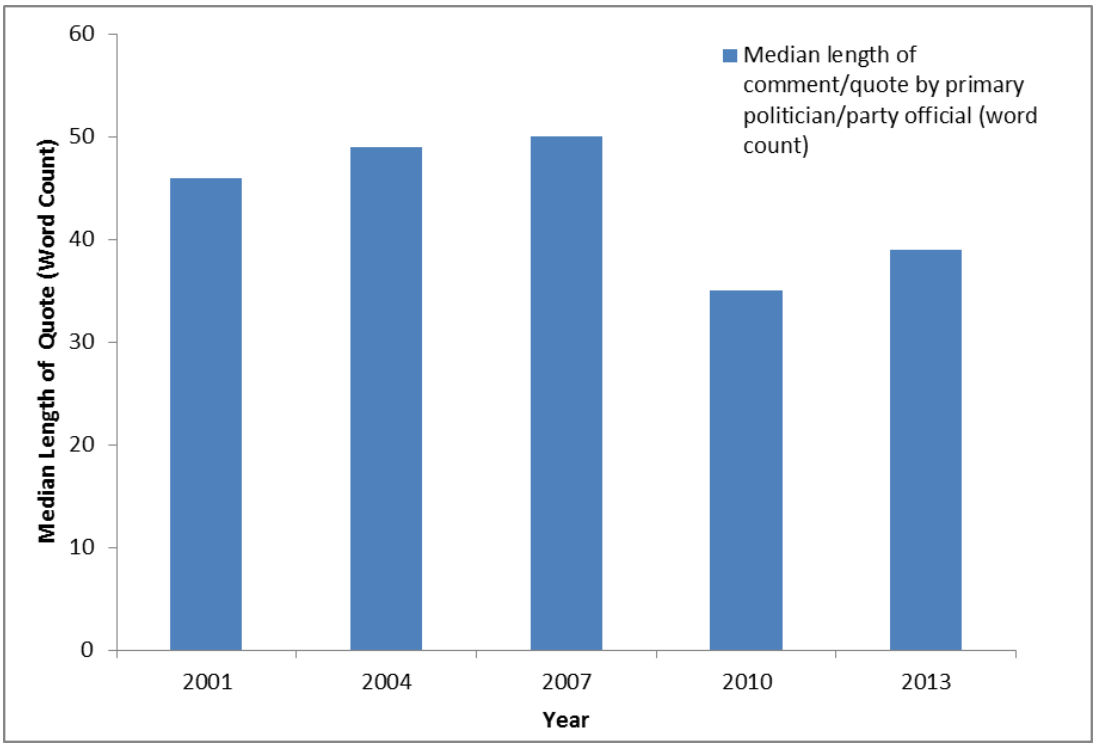
The "pack journalism" that takes place on the campaign trail means that only a handful of views are reported in news coverage. From the media pack, journalists tend to cover the same angles, same stories, and quote the same sources (Schudson, 2011, pp. 132-134). As journalist Matt Price (2001) notes, "all the media chooks are fed the same chaff" with journalists rarely breaking a unique or exclusive news story from the "bubble." Consequently, fewer voices and fewer viewpoints are heard in policy coverage because journalists are caught up in the day-to-day experiences of the

campaign trail and thereby neglect to consider how the election is unfolding from another perspective.

Length of Quotes

Powerful politicians were the primary definers of policy news in the 2000s. But, by the 2010 and 2013 election, these political sources were often voiceless in articulating their own story. Figure 5.1 found that there were more politicians and party officials quoted with each election over the twenty-first century, but Figure 5.2 demonstrates that they were given less space in news articles to communicate their ideas and messages in their own words. Figure 5.2 shows that the median length of a comment by a politician declined in the 2010 election. In 2001, the median length of a quote was 46 words, which rose to 50 words in 2007. From 2007 to 2013, newspapers published shorter quotes from Australia's political elites. Collectively, Figures 5.1 and 5.2 demnonstrate that politicians were dominating coverage in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns, but much of what they said was "mediated by journalistic discourse" (Cross, 2010, p. 428; Strömbäck & Nord, 2006, p. 154). The trend towards intrepretive journalism is undoutedly important here.

Figure 5.2: Median length of a quote by a politician or party official by year, 2001-2013



N=820 newspaper articles that included quotes from a politician/party official. Source: Author.

Journalists must report *what* has happened but also *why* it has happened (see Patterson, 2000, p. 250; Young, 2011, p. 195). Hence, interpretation or "contextual journalism" is as much as a part of contemporary reporting as description (Fink & Schudson, 2013, pp. 16-18). This provides one explanation for why the press published shorter quotes in the late 2000s. With increasing demands on their time, it is arguably easier for journalists to report the soundbites and slogans rather than transcribe and quote large sections of material. As such, interpretation becomes more important than description. As Patterson (2000, p. 250) writes:

> The interpretive style empowers journalists by giving them more control over the news message. Whereas descriptive reporting is driven by the facts, the interpretive form is driven by the theme around which the story is built…The descriptive style places the journalist in the role of an observer. The interpretive style requires the journalist to act also as an analyst.

When news outlets and journalists reduce the space for politicians to tell their own story, much of what politicians say becomes interpretation rather than description. The challenge for Australian journalists is to ensure that their interpretation clearly delineates between their own opinions and the views of those they claim to represent (Young, 2011, p. 195). Ideally, journalists should strike a balance between their commentary and leaving space/time for politicians and other actors to articulate their views in their own words (Young, 2011, p. 195).

Share of Voices

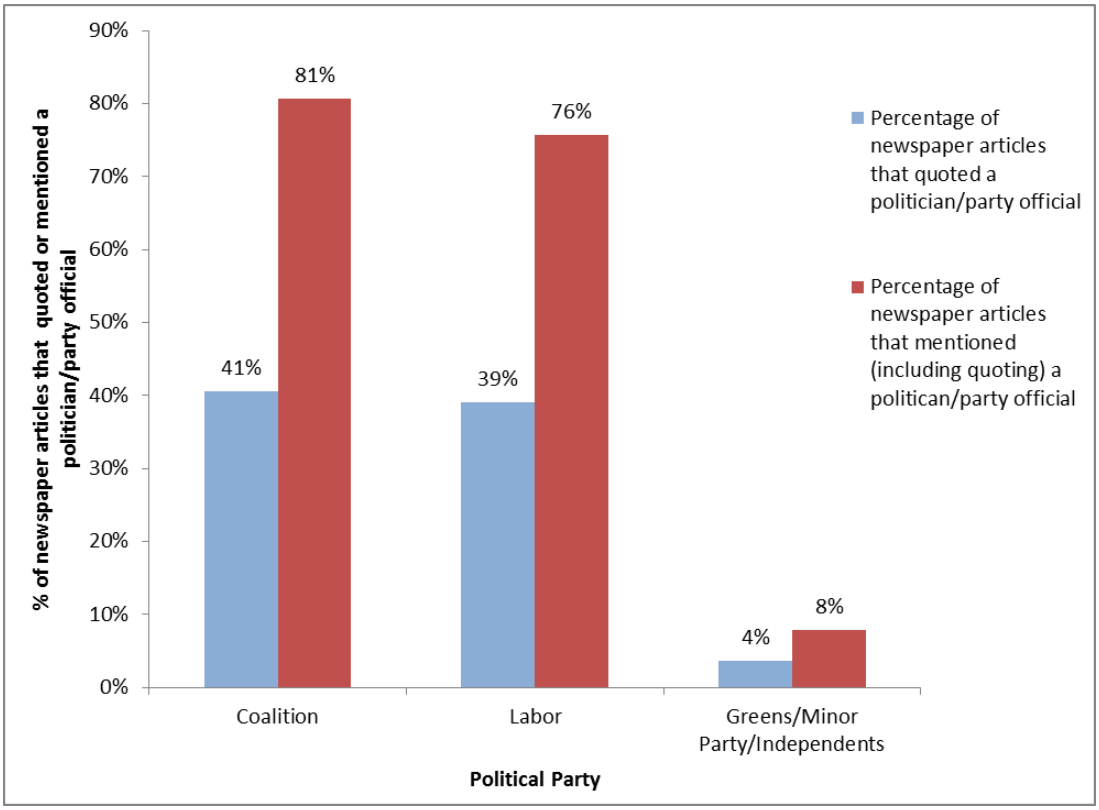
A key feature of a "well-functioning public sphere" is the ability of people to engage with opposing arguments (see Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez; 2016). When viewpoints are limited, then the potential for "democratic deliberation" is curtailed because there are fewer perspectives presented to citizens (see Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). Earlier in this chapter, my results showed that there was an absence of diversity in the political sources quoted in policy news. During elections, however, it is also important that we consider the share or balance of voices in news coverage. According to Habermasian ideals and liberal democratic principles, the media should provide the opportunity for a range of viewpoints along the political spectrum to be heard (see McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). However, the empirical data shows that news outlets quoted more Coalition politicians than other candidates/officials in their policy coverage.

Coalition politicians and party officials were more frequently quoted than their Labor counterparts. Figure 5.3 shows that nearly 41 per cent of all policy-orientated articles collected between 2001 and 2013 included a quote from a Coalition politician/official, while only 39 per cent included a quote from a Labor party politician/official.[42] I also counted the number of politicians that were quoted and/or *mentioned by name* in each newspaper article. Coalition politicians and party officials were also quoted and *mentioned* more frequently in policy reporting than Labor candidates.[43] Coalition candidates/officials were mentioned by name and/or quoted in 81 per cent of press

[42] N= 1270 newspaper articles.
[43] This included simply mentioning the name of a candidate.

policy stories, while Labor politicians or party officials were only quoted and/or mentioned in 76 per cent of stories.

Figure 5.3: Percentage of newspaper articles that quoted or mentioned a politician or party official by political party, 2001-2013

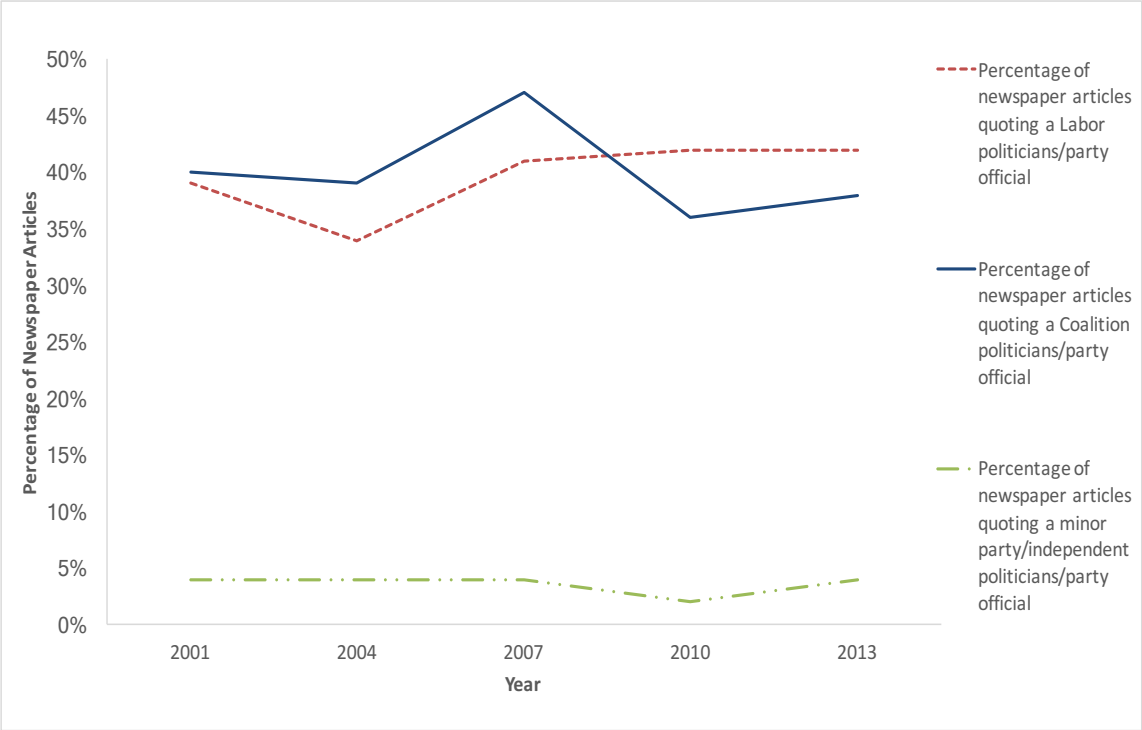


N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Figure 5.4 shows the percentage of newspaper articles quoting a politician or party official by political party and year. There was a clear spike in 2007. In 2007, Coalition politicians/party officials quoted in 47 per cent of newspaper articles and Labor politicians/party officials quoted in 41 per cent of newspaper stories. Incumbency offers one explanation for this trend.

Incumbency may explain why more Coalition politicians/party officials were quoted in news coverage across the 2000s. The Coalition was the incumbent government in the 2001, 2004, and 2007 elections. Figure 5.4 shows that in the 2001, 2004, and 2007 elections more Coalition politicians/party officials were quoted than Labor candidates/ officials. In 2010 and 2013, Labor was the incumbent government and their politicians/party officials were quoted more often than Coalition candidates/officials.

Figure 5.4: Percentage of newspaper articles quoting a politician or party official by political party and year, 2001-2013



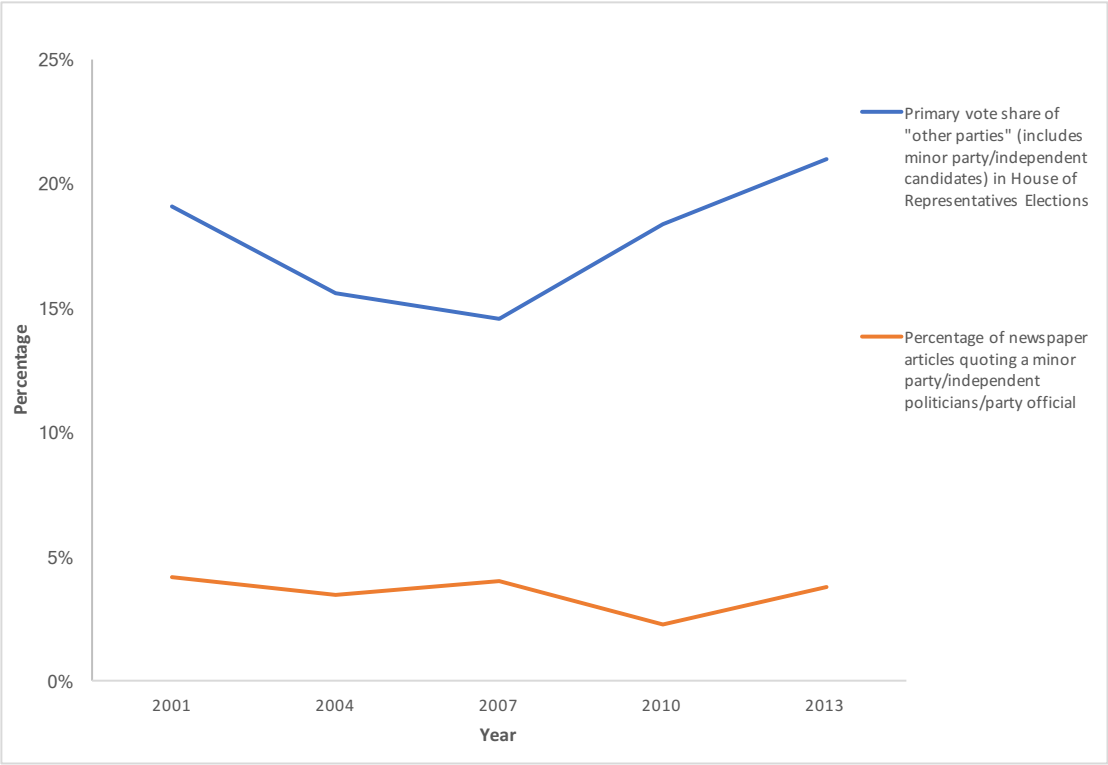
N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Both Figures 5.3 and 5.4 demonstrate that minor party and independent candidates were struggling to be heard above the noise of major party politicians. Newspapers only quoted minor party/independent candidates, politicians, and party officials in four per cent of all policy news coverage (Figure 5.3). Between 2001 and 2010, minor party or independent candidate/politician/official were less likely to be quoted in policy news coverage in later campaigns (Figure 5.4). In 2001, they were quoted in four per cent of stories. By 2010, minor/independents politicians were only quoted in just two per cent of news stories. Their fortunes improved slightly in 2013, with more minor party and independent candidates quoted in policy coverage. The number of stories quoting a minor or independent candidate increased from two per cent (2010) to 3.8 per cent (2013).

In 2010, Labor was forced to negotiate with the independents and minor parties to secure support for their minority government. Because of the decisive role minor/independent politicians had in the 2010 election outcome, minor and independent politicians may have received more opportunities to be heard in the 2013

campaign. Overall, the evidence illustrates that minor and independent candidates were less likely to be quoted in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns. This is perplexing because more Australians than ever before are voting for minor parties and independent candidates (Blumer, 2016). Figure 5.5 shows the primary voter share of "other parties" (minor and independent parties), and the percentage of newspaper articles that included a quote from a minor party or independent candidate.

Figure 5.5: Primary vote share of the minor parties/independent candidates and the percentage of newspaper articles quoting a minor party politician/party official or independent candidate by year, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source (newspaper data): Author. Source (vote data): Blumer (2016). Note: "other parties" includes minor and independent parties except for The Nationals and Country Liberal Party, which form a coalition with the Liberal Party of Australia.

The vote share for "other parties" (including minor parties and independent candidates) increased between 2007 and 2013 (Figure 5.5). But, across this same period, newspapers were less likely to include the voices of these candidates in their policy coverage. In the 2010 and 2013 elections, the primary vote for candidates from "other parties" in the House of Representatives election was 18 per cent and 21 per cent per cent respectively (Blumer, 2016). So, on the one hand, more Australians were choosing minor party and independent candidates to represent them in parliament. But, on the other hand, news outlets were persisting with coverage that solely focused on quoting major parties and largely excluded other politicians from their coverage. This suggests that there is a disconnect between the voting intentions of the Australian public, and the representation of different political viewpoints in media coverage. The analysis shows that the voices of minor party/independent candidates were largely missing from press reporting.

Major party leaders were crowding the political stage at the expense of other political sources. Like Denemark, Ward, and Bean (2007), Goot (2008) and Young (2011), I found that political seniority within a party mattered. News outlets were more likely to publish the quotes from senior major party politicians that those lower in the political hierarchy. In chapter 4, I found that the politicians often influenced the way news outlets covered policy issues by the way they framed their announcements and the policy information they provided. Together with chapter 4's findings, we can see that powerful politicians drive the policy agenda, shape the information presented, and *define* how policy stories are told through their quotes and comments. The most privileged and powerful can cement their position as primary definers of policy news.

Expert and Documentary Sources in Policy News

So far, we have focused on the key political sources defining policy news in elections. Beyond the political landscape, there were other sources contributing to policy coverage. For example, news outlets reported comments from expert and documentary sources to narrate their policy stories.[44] The focus of this section is on the types of experts included in policy news. Experts, professional and documentary sources are important because they enable journalists to legitimise interpretations presented in their articles and add authority to their reports, editorials, or opinion pieces (Albæk, 2011). As explained by Albæk (2011, p. 338) "the change in news reporting towards interpretative and investigative journalism increased journalists' need to consult experts for assistance in interpreting and explaining the news." Including expert sources in policy coverage is particularly important because journalists can use such comments to validate their opinions and analysis (Albæk, 2011, p. 338).

In this study, a "professional/expert" was defined as a person quoted in a news story where clear institutional, organisational, or other occupational affiliation was attributed and identifiable to a reader. For example, this could include representatives from business organisations, interest groups, religious organisations, academia, pollsters, political scientists, union officials, members from independent research institutes, and political insiders such as former politicians, public servants, state/territory political figures. Comments needed to be attributed to a source by referring to their institutional, organisational, or other occupational affiliation. For example, an attribution such as "Canberra Business Council chief executive Chris Faulks" ("Locked in mother of a stoush," 2013, p. 19).

Newspaper coverage seldom quoted experts when reporting on tax, health or education policy issues. Experts were quoted in less than a third of newspaper articles (28 per cent of newspaper articles, N=1270). Moreover, news outlets very rarely quoted documentary sources in their news stories, with only 14 per cent of the newspaper articles examined referring to any documentary evidence or source.[45] This included

[44] I do not examine the trend by election year here. This is done in chapter 7.
[45]Documentary evidence included references to research papers, reports, government department documents, policy documents, reports or documents from interest groups and business organisations.

references to independent research or reports (such as academic research and publication from research institutes), government department documents, and party policy publications. For example, publications from groups such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Australian Council for Education, the Australian Education Union, or Alzheimer's Australia.[46]

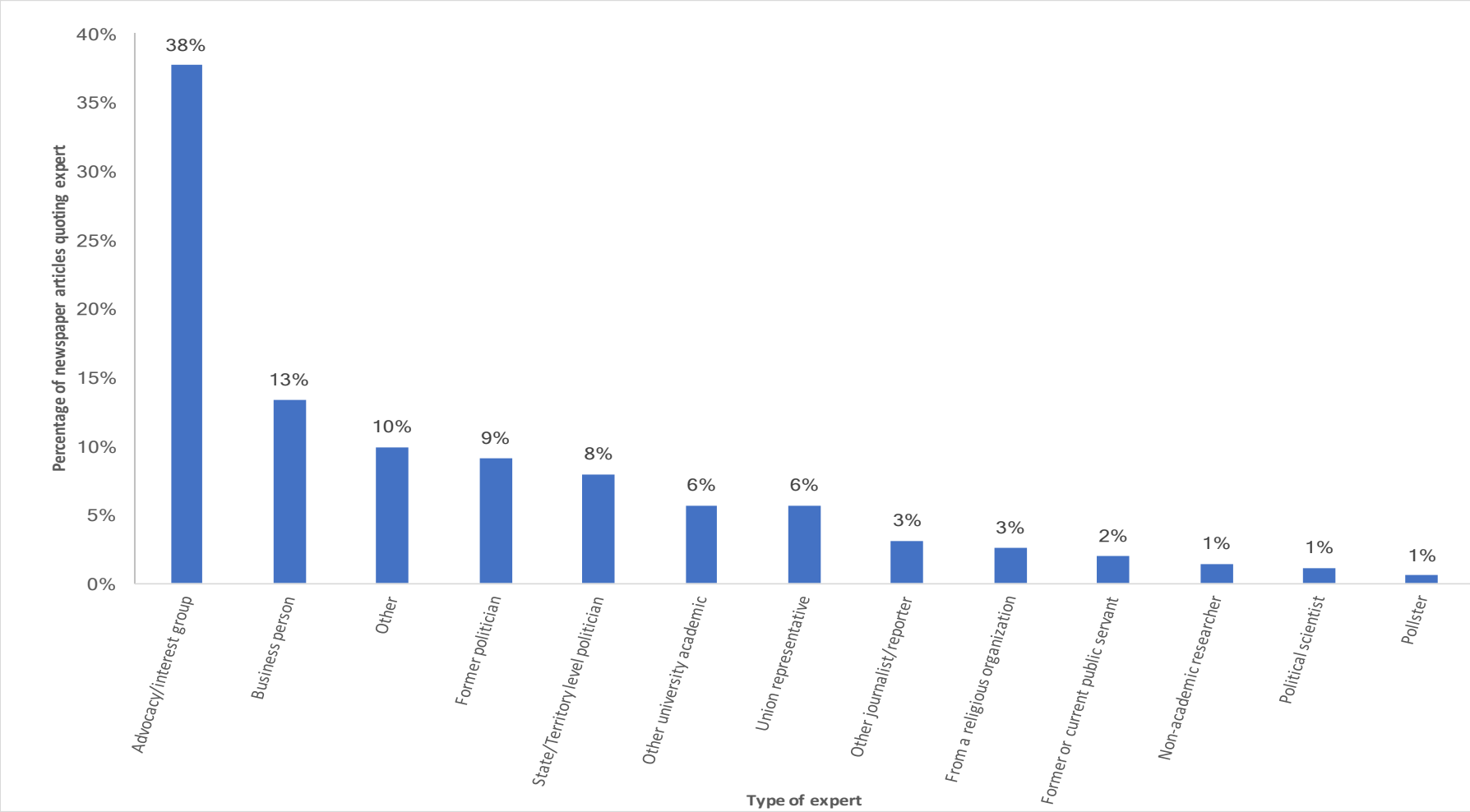
Representatives of interest/advocacy groups and associations were the experts heard the most often in press coverage of tax, health and education issues.[47] Figure 5.6 shows the type of expert quoted in newspaper coverage. Looking at the top six categories, we can see that representatives from interest/advocacy groups and other associations were quoted more than any other type of expert (N=353 newspaper articles including a comment from an expert). Nearly 38 per cent of all the primary experts quoted in press reporting were from interest/advocacy groups and other associations.[48] This was followed by members of the business community (13 per cent), representatives with "other" identifiable professional/occupational affiliation (10 per cent), former politicians (nine per cent), state or territory politicians (eight per cent), and university academics (other than political scientists) (six per cent) (N=353 newspaper articles quoting an expert).

[46] To be measured as a documentary source, news outlets needed to attribute the documentary evidence to an organisation, person, or source. For example, in discussing the 2013 health policies, news coverage reported that "according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the average annual out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare has almost doubled from about $583 in 2000 to $1075 in 2010 – $94 above the weighted OECD average of $981" or "a survey of 214 women last year by Breast Cancer Network of Australia found one in 10 had forgone an MRI because it was ''too expensive'' (Medew, 2013, p. 16). Another example from the 2010 campaign also illustrates how this evidence was discussed. For example, news coverage reported how "dementia research must be funded urgently and the disease has to be incorporated into existing programs that target cardiovascular health, diabetes and obesity, an Alzheimer's Australia discussion paper has warned. The Towards a National Dementia Preventative Health Strategy, to be issued today, finds that an impending dementia epidemic would leave Australia helpless unless the Federal Government funded a public preventative health policy. The report says that the number of Australians with dementia will increase from almost 260,000 to more than 560,000 before 2030" (Bucci, 2010, p. 3).

[47] These representatives from business or interest groups would often be used to contextualise and outline the benefits the policy proposal for the community or for their sector. For example, when discussing the Coalition's 2013 paid parental leave scheme proposal, news articles would often cite representatives from business groups to outline the advantages for the community and business. For instance, The Canberra Times reported that "Canberra Business Council chief executive Chris Faulks said a good parental leave scheme was important for the future of businesses in the ACT. "In the ACT, private sector businesses are competing all the time with the public sector, and losing staff, often women, to the public sector because the terms and conditions around parental leave and flexibility are regarded as much better," she said" ("Locked in mother of a stoush," 2013, p. 19).

[48] Primary expert quoted included the first expert quoted in a news story.

Figure 5.6: Type of primary expert quoted in newspaper coverage, 2001-2013



N= 353 newspaper articles quoting an expert. Source: Author. Note: primary expert is the first expert that was quoted in a news story.

Interest and advocacy organisations were clearly the dominant expert voices in policy coverage. The prominence of interest and advocacy group representatives in policy news could be due to their ability to influence the news cycle through their political marketing techniques (for discussion see Huckins, 1999). These organisations often issue their own press releases and media material during an election. For example, the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) released a series of press releases commenting on the various health policies of the 2010 campaign (Australian Nursing Federation, 2010). Leading up to the 2010 campaign launches, the ANF media material included comments from Assistant Secretary on the Coalition's health announcements (Australian Nursing Federation, 2010). As noted earlier, the "frenetic scramble to meet news deadlines" means journalists are reliant upon information subsidies to fill their news reports (Manning, 2001, p. 55). It is much easier for journalists to use the expert sources that offer this conveniently available material. So some experts may dominate the news cycles through these methods, while other experts will be seldom heard.

Less prominent in press coverage were policy specialists, such as public servants. Newspapers did publish commentary from current and former public servants, but their views on policy issues were rarely heard. Only two per cent of stories that quoted an expert included comments from a public servant.[49] For example, the *Australian* described how the "Director-general of the NSW education department Michael Coutts-Trotter… said the core problem was the commonwealth's system for funding universities that encouraged institutions to train as many teachers as they could" (Ferrari, 2007, p. 4). Similarly, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "John Menadue, a former senior federal bureaucrat who chaired reviews of the NSW health system in 2000 and the South Australian health system in 2003, advocates fundamental reform to bridge these gaps [in state and federal funding of health services]" (Pollard & Metherell, 2004, p. 7). These examples demonstrate that public servants were often quoted to contextualise and illuminate the policy problem. High-level public servants offer journalists authoritative insights into the key issues and provide accounts that explain the importance of the issue being addressed. Other political insiders were also included for similar purposes. However, these insiders tended to be politically-aligned.

[49] N=353 newspaper articles quoting an expert.

Political insiders frequently contributed to policy coverage. Political insiders included state and territory politicians, former politicians, and political advisers. They were quoted more frequently in recent elections than earlier campaigns. For instance, state and territory level politicians were the primary expert quoted in four per cent of news stories from the 2001 campaign (N= 69 newspaper articles that included an expert comment). In 2013, state and territory level politicians were the primary expert quoted in nearly 23 per cent of news article (N= 39 newspaper articles quoting experts in 2013). In other words, news outlets were nearly six times more likely to quote a state and territory politician in the 2013 election than in the 2001 campaign.

Politically-aligned sources were prominent definers of policy news in 2013. As illustrated by the inclusion of former politicians in the 2013 policy coverage. In 2001, former politicians were the primary expert quoted in four per cent of the news stories that contained expert commentary (N=353 newspaper stories that quoted an expert). By 2013, former politicians were quoted in 10 per cent of these policy news stories. In other words, the number of stories quoting a former politician had doubled by the 2013 campaign. Together with my earlier results, we can see that current and former politicians—specifically major party leaders—are more likely to get their messages disseminated through media in their own words. Consequently, political insiders and politicians are well-placed to define, influence and shape policy stories.

Journalists and editors used the quotes from former politicians to tell stories about campaign techniques and processes. For example, the *Hobart Mercury* reported how "John Della Bosca, a former secretary of the NSW Labor Party" thought that Labor's campaign was "run by a 'detested caste of ruthless robotic machine men'" (Akerman, 2010, p. 33). The *Sunday Times* (West Australian) described how "former prime ministers Bob Hawke and John Howard have weighed into the battle for Brand" noting that "Mr Howard said yesterday he did not think West Australians had changed their view of Mr Rudd…''(And) Mr Rudd's problem on border protection is that it was under his watch that the successful policy of the Howard government was dismantled" (Lampathakis & Spagnolo, 2013, p. 18). The *Age* reported on the issue of leadership in their coverage of the 2007 election by telling readers that "former Liberal leader John Hewson told The Age last night that it had been a mistake for Mr Howard to declare

that he would depart mid-term" (Grattan, 2007, p.1). Finally, the *Canberra Times,* reporting on the ideology behind the policies of the two major parties in the 2007 election, drew upon comments from a former Labor leader suggesting that "Mark Latham came out of retirement last week to tell us that "any attachment to radicalism and progressive reform in the Labor Party ended a long time ago. If people vote for a change in government on November 24 they will be replacing one conservative administration with another" ("No flavour to ice-cream politics", 2007, p.11).

So far, I have shown that political advisers and strategists were powerful voices in Australian election coverage. This was also typified by the rise of television programs with former advisers; for example, Sky New's *Sunday Agenda* and *Credlin Keneally,* which featured former chief of staff to the Prime Minister, Peta Credlin. Examining news programs with political insiders was beyond the scope of my study. Nonetheless, we can see that the inclusion of political insiders in print and television news coverage is part of a broader trend in Australian journalism towards the "Fox News model" style reporting, with political insiders providing "insider" commentary to voters (see Young, 2011).

Earlier in this chapter, I showed that newspapers were publishing shorter comments from politicians in their reports. Looking at the length of comments, we can see that expert commentary differed to political commentary. News outlets provided longer comments and quoted more experts with each election over the 2000s.[50] In 2001, the median word length of expert comments was 34 words. The length of comments rose to 37 words in 2004, 48 words in 2007, 62 words in 2010 and peaking at 67 words in 2013.[51] When experts were included in news coverage, expert commentary was often longer than political commentary. To put in another way, experts were given more space in articles to communicate their views to citizens in their own words.

Experts play a crucial role as authoritative voices in the public sphere. When expert voices are absent, then the quality of news coverage suffers because there are fewer

[50] I measured the total word length of all expert quotes in the newspaper articles sampled. The word count of all quoted expert comments were analysed collectively.
[51] The sample used here was 354 newspaper articles. This excludes articles where no experts were quoted.

voices engaging in a contest of ideas. Earlier I found that major party politicians dominated policy coverage with the voices of other politicians absent in policy reporting. We can add another layer to this argument. News outlets were also excluding experts from their coverage of tax, health and education issues. When experts were included, journalists turned primarily to interest or advocacy groups and politically-aligned insiders for commentary. Missing from this group were the key policy specialists, including public servants, academics, and researchers. In this sense, policy journalism was limited in its ability to inform voters about the different views and arguments that were put forward in election policy debates.

Accounting for the lack of expert commentary is difficult. But commercial factors provide one likely explanation. Time constraints and increasing demands for constantly flowing news coverage may be preventing journalists from consulting experts as frequently as they once did (see Simons, 2012; Young, 2011, p. 180-181). In this sense, the lack of expert commentary may be due to the cost-cutting in Australian newsrooms. Put simply, journalists have more work and less time to identify, contact, meet and speak to experts. Commercial interests, fewer journalists, fewer specialist reporters and falling revenues may have broader consequences for the quality of policy reporting.

Voters in Policy News

We have discussed the role of elites in contributing to policy discourse in news publications. Another important source to consider is "ordinary" citizens for whom the campaigns are ostensibly created. Featuring the voices of the citizenry in news coverage can promote positive views of citizenship and shape their understanding of "what it means to be a citizen in a democracy" (J. Lewis & Hunt, 2011, pp. 7-8). As argued by Brian McNair (2000, p. 105), the public should not just be spectators of political debates, but also have opportunities to be participants in them through different media "channels." However, this section finds that it is the views of those who matter the most in an election campaign —the voters and citizens— that were largely absent in policy reporting.

"Ordinary" citizens were missing voices in policy reporting.[52] Newspapers only reported the views of the ordinary citizens in six per cent of all press stories between 2001 and 2013 (N= 1270). When examined by election year, we can see a fluctuating trend over the 2000s. Figure 5.7 expresses the percentage of newspaper articles quoting or paraphrasing views of an ordinary citizen/voter by year. In 2001, journalists quoted or paraphrased comments from the public in nearly nine per cent of policy news stories. This declined by four points to its lowest level in 2007 (five per cent). Although the decline was small in percentage terms, it is nonetheless a decline that shows that citizens were less likely to be quoted in the 2007 election than in any other election period.

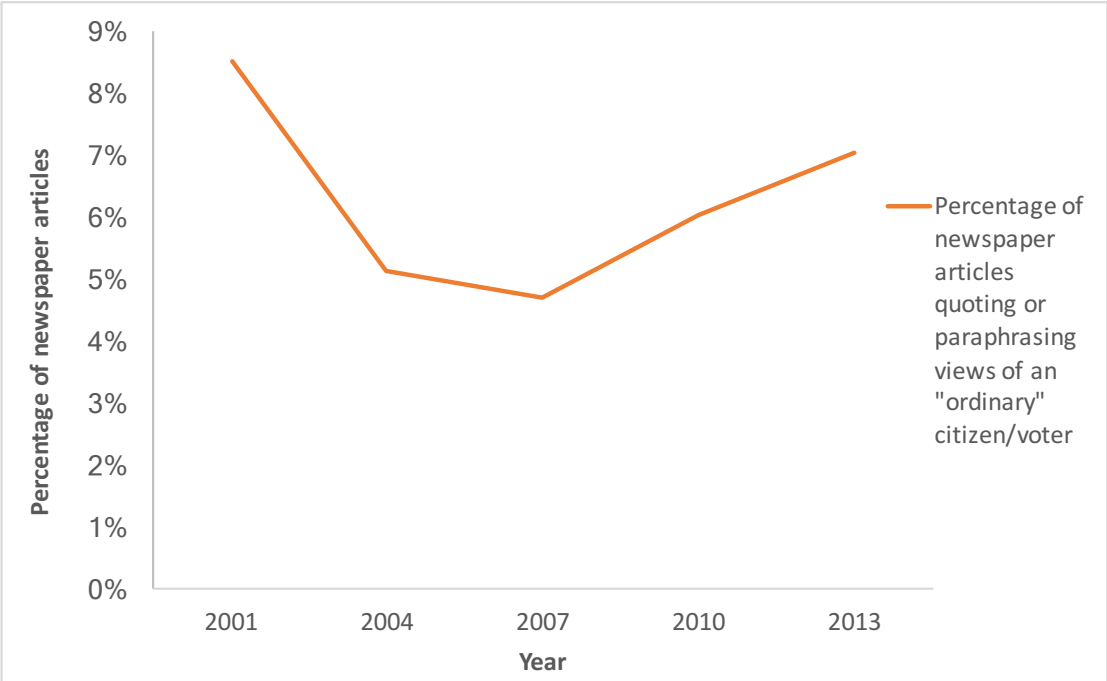
Citizens were quoted more frequently in 2010 and 2013 election coverage than in the 2007 campaign. Figure 5.7 shows a slight rise in the percentage of stories quoting a citizen in 2010 and 2013. Yet, this was only a small one percentage point increase. Reporting in 2013 still quoted fewer voters in policy discussions than reporting in 2001 campaign.

The trend in Figure 5.7 should be interpreted cautiously. The variations between each campaign are often less than four percentage points. Nonetheless, there is a broader

[52] By "ordinary" citizen, I am referring to a voter, citizen, or member of the public where there is no stated connection to a group, profession, or political party in the news coverage.

picture painted by these results. Overall, the evidence shows that very few stories quoted an ordinary citizen. As a result, citizens were struggling to make themselves heard in policy news coverage that was supposedly for their benefit.

Figure 5.7: Percentage of newspaper articles quoting or paraphrasing views of an "ordinary" citizen/voter by year, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Ordinary citizens were more likely to be heard in tabloid newspapers than in broadsheet newspapers. Of the 78 newspaper articles that included a quote or paraphrased comment from a citizen, more than half (55 per cent) were articles from tabloid newspapers. On the surface, it appears that tabloid publications offered a more diverse and inclusive public sphere to citizens than the traditional "quality" press.[53] But we also need to consider how the public's views and comments were reported.

Citizens and voters were portrayed as observers rather than active participants in policy discussions. As a result, when they were quoted, their comments were often reported in a superficial shallow manner. In most cases, newspapers published "vox pop" style interviews to report the impact potential policies would have upon a citizen's personal

[53] Chapter 6 delves deeper into this comparison between tabloid and broadsheets.

situation. When citizens' views were reported, they were often presented as part of a weekly "peoples jury" designed to comment on the campaign (for example Borensztajn, 2007, p. 8). For example, the *Herald Sun* included a vox pop style article to appraise the various policy proposals following the 2007 campaign launch:

> Father of three Peter Doughty, of Cockatoo, said John Howard's pitch had made him more likely to vote for the Liberals. "It sounds good and promising," Mr Doughty said. "They seem to have covered a lot of areas but I would like to see even more tax cuts." Mr Doughty said attention to child care and school fee rebates were the highlights. "It would sway me to Howard but we'll wait and see what the other party comes up with." Wally Gaugg, 55, from Lysterfield, who described himself as a swinging voter, said Mr Howard's latest promises confirmed his Liberal vote this election. "I think he's heading in the right direction with the first-home buyer's (account) because it's getting so difficult for young families to afford their own homes," Mr Gaugg said. "Rudd is just following the line of the Coalition. They have not got the management skills to run this country." (Borensztajn, 2007, p.8)

Other news reports also included "ordinary" citizens to contextualise the impacts of policies.[54] Yet, citizens and voters were rarely permitted to articulate their position on policy issues using their own words. For example, in discussing Howard's 2001 announcement of tax breaks for parents with children, the *Courier-Mail* reported how:

[54] News reports also used the views and voices of citizens to contextualise the problems as well as the impacts of a policy. For example, in their coverage of education policy in the 2010 election, the Sydney Morning Herald, used a story about a family's struggle to access "mainstream" education for students with a disability. The article reported the views of citizens affected by this policy issue. It reported how "Luka has "high-functioning" autism, his mother, Marian O'Connell, explains while her husband, Julian, makes coffee. Luka was diagnosed in kindy after a paediatrician missed the signs. He struggles academically in class….In the long term, his parents want to find him a place in a support class run by a special needs teacher within the campus of a mainstream public primary school, and then a mainstream high school. Such opportunities in NSW are severely limited but, Marian O'Connell argues, "it's good for both him and [regular] children to be exposed to a broad range of human experience"" (Dow, 2010, p. 15). The article then proceeded to detail the issue in depth, drawing upon expert commentary. While this is one example, it represents another approach that was used to incorporate citizens' voices in policy coverage.

> Richard and Natasha Callf of Ashgrove, who hope to have children in the next couple of years, won't change that timing after Mr Howard's policy pitch. But they said the first-child rebate, worth up to $2500 a year, would definitely be a consideration when they went to vote on November 10 (Odgers, 2001, p. 4).

This example shows how citizens were often voiceless in articulating their opinions on policy matters. Reporting on Labor's 2001 education policy, the *Daily Telegraph* similarly opened with a brief snippet quote and paraphrased the opinion of a voter (Chynoweth, 2001, p. 5). The article reported:

> Last time around Jenny Kaldor had to sit and watch while Australians voted the Coalition into power. This year the 19-year-old University of Sydney student is looking forward to taking part in the poll herself. "I will vote for a government that's trying to do something long-term for education," she said yesterday. While she supported Labor's promised changes to HECS and student rent assistance, she does not believe either major party has the answers for students and young people (Chynoweth, 2001, p. 5).

Other reports included comments from voters at the end of the article by posing questions and asking the public to respond. In a newspaper article on Labor's 2010 school policy, the *Herald Sun* included the question "do you agree with the "no school, no play" policy?" Responses from citizens were published at the end of the story; for example, "Rick King, 32, Preston "I think it's a load of rubbish. My sporting life had nothing to do with my school life"" (Jones, McDougall & Martin, 2010, p. 17). This is another example of the limited engagement citizens had in policy discussions.

Vox pop stories offer a "slice of life" and allow journalists to include voices without worrying about whether these voices are "representative" of all views (J. Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, pp. 17, 70-71). Vox pop stories permit ordinary citizens the opportunity to engage in political discussion (J. Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, pp. 17, 70-71). But that engagement is often very shallow at best. Vox pop interviews rarely permitted voters or citizens to engage in in-depth policy

discussion or analysis. Despite such limitations, these interviews were still generally the only opportunities citizens had in the campaign to have their comments quoted in reporting. As Justin Lewis and his colleagues (2005) write:

> They [vox pop interviews] depoliticise the public sphere because they place the interviewees in positions where they speak from a self-interested, personal perspective, rather than as rational citizens engaged in political discussion….Citizens primarily appear as self-interested members of society and as fans or commentators on popular culture (J. Lewis et al., 2005, p. 71).

To put it another way, news organisation see the public as observers rather than actual participants in the campaign (for further discussion see McNair, 2000, p. 105). Yet, ordinary citizens should be heard. By excluding the voices of ordinary citizens, news organisations are doing a disservice to the quality of their coverage and denying voters access to the public sphere (see J. Lewis et al., 2005; McNair, 2000).

In 'ideal' models of the media, citizens should be able to contribute to the public sphere through media platforms. The public sphere should be open, transparent, and diverse allowing a range of viewpoints to be heard (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). However, my analysis of policy coverage shows that citizens were largely denied the opportunity to contribute their views, opinions, and perspectives on policy matters in the 2000s. In fact, citizens are provided with a very limited opportunity to participate in the communication of policy information during federal elections. This suggests that the media were failing to provide an open "channel of access" for informed critical debate in the public sphere (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). Ultimately, these findings have broader implications for how we conceptualise the role of a citizen in Australian democracy. The empirical evidence presented here suggests that citizens were largely passive observers rather than active participants in policy discussions during Australian elections.

By excluding citizens' voices from their policy coverage, journalists and news organisations are disconnecting voters from the political process. As Stephen Coleman

(2005, p. 210) writes, “citizens are no longer content with the role of just being passive spectators. As the phenomenal popularity of reality TV has shown, people want to be (literally) in the picture and to have their judgments respected.” When citizens are denied the opportunity to have their voices heard in news coverage, this amplifies these feelings of dissatisfaction with democracy (see Coleman, 2005, pp. 209-210).

The way citizens are portrayed in the news also shapes their understanding of “what it means to be a citizen in a democracy” (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p. 8). As Justin Lewis and colleagues (2005, p. 135) note, if citizens are excluded from coverage, then they are encouraged to view democracy as passive spectators rather than active participants. As a result, journalists position citizens as consumers of content rather than participants in the governing process (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p.138). The absence of citizens in the news encourages a perception that they are “outsiders” in the political process (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, pp. 88-89). Consequently, citizens become disengaged and disconnected from daily politics (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, pp. 135-139). By exluding citizens from news coverage, this reinforces a notion that the public are unworthy, “too dumb” or ignorant to engage in political dialogue in the public sphere (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p. 138). In this sense, citizens are painted as an apolitical disengaged community who do not contribute to politics but react to it (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p.138). Citizens are discouraged from engaging in the political process, and the public sphere becomes limited to the voices of elites (Lewis, Inthorn, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005, p.139). As such, the power of citiznes to influence political dialogue and political decisions is contrained, and the quality of debate in Australian elections suffers.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that policy journalism was limited in its ability to foster a contest of ideas because very few voices were heard in policy reporting. In fact, news coverage of tax, health and education issues can be characterised by the absence of diversity in the 2000s. The press rarely incorporated voices beyond the most powerful politicians, they limited the discussion to major political parties, rarely reported the views of external non-partisan experts, and treated "ordinary" citizens as observers rather than participant in policy debates.

Consistent with the findings of chapter 4, we can see that these "primary definers" have a unique opportunity to sway how information is covered (Hall et al., 1978, p. 58). Political seniority seems to matter the most, with major party leaders a prominent voice in reporting. Congruent with previous studies on election reporting (see Goot, 2008; J. Lewis et al., 2005; Young, 2011), I found that minor and independent candidates were rarely heard in policy news. Consequently, policy proposal may go unchallenged because opposing opinions and dissenting views are excluded from debates (W. L. Bennett et al., 2007, p. 48).

According to one perspective, the presence of powerful politicians in political news may be viewed as "consistent with liberal democratic ideals" because these are the "preferred representatives" elected by the people "to deal with public issues" (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016, n.p). In this view, the role of the media is to merely represent the views of elected representatives so people "can make informed choices" about public affairs issues (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016, n.p). However, when powerful voices do dominate political discourse, the evidence suggests other voices are ignored. This prevents new candidates, unknown political newcomers, and non-major party politicians a fair chance to contribute to policy discourse and make their ideas heard. Before we hastily pass judgement on Australian journalists, we need to consider the contextual factors influencing policy reporting.

In the age of the 24-hour news cycle, journalists are increasingly dependent upon political sources to verify information under tight news deadlines (Manning, 2001).

When journalists need quick statements to validate their reports, it is often easier to consult sources that can respond in a timely manner (Dimitorva & Stromback, 2009, p. 76; Manning, 2001, p. 55). As Paul Manning (2001, p.55) writes:

> So, the frenetic scramble to meet the deadline is part of the routine and many of the other practices of news journalism can be understood as measures designed to ensure that fresh supplies of information are fashioned into news copy in time to meet each deadline as it rolls around… the kind of information that can easily be fashioned into news copy (Manning, 2001, p. 55).

Consequently, news outlets become targets for political elites, interest groups or other sources. In a bid to ensure wider circulation of their messages, politicians and other actors supply news outlets with press releases and briefing material that journalists can fashion into news reports (Manning, 2001, p. 56). To achieve this goal, political parties have employed more dedicated media advisors, strategists, and spin doctors to offer time poor journalists news products at a conveniently low cost (see Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez; 2016; Gans, 1979; Hall et al., 1978; Johnson-Cartee, 2005; McNair, 2011; I. Ward, 2008). Hence, the most powerful politicians with the most resources can dominate the media cycle with their comments and quotes.

Ideally, news outlets should offer a "channel of access" that allows a diverse range of opinions, comments and views to be expressed (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). But such an ideal normative goal was never realised during elections in the 2000s. Interestingly, tabloid newspapers offered more opportunities for the public to have their views on policy issues published. So, the medium may shape what policy messages are heard. As Tiffen and colleagues (2014) found, newspapers in Australia and the UK contained fewer sources in their news coverage than television reporting (Tiffen et al., 2014, pp. 387-388). Hence, the next chapter analyses how the quality of policy reporting differs across media formats and platforms.

Chapter 6: Policy News in Popular and Elite Media

In 1958, Australian politics ventured into new political territory. It was the first Australian election in which political parties used television—a medium largely in its infancy— to communicate with Australian voters (Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, 2018). In 1963, Prime Minister Robert Menzies delivered the first televised election policy speech (Hughes & Western, 1966, pp. 1-2). Since then, television has become the dominant source of election news for many Australian voters (see McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 7). But television news is vastly different to print news because it operates to a different set of news values (see Dahlgren, 2009; Cushion, Kilby, et al., 2016; Cushion and Sambrook, 2016). So, the way policy issues are reported on one medium can differ to the way they are reported on another.

The other results chapters examined news coverage over time, but it is also important to analyse how policy news is reported on different media platforms. Different platforms have different news audiences. The audience for hard news is often linked to wealth, education, and social position, with those who read hard news often more highly educated, wealthier, and more politically engaged than the general populations (Young, 2011, p. 279). The audience for soft or popular news tend to be "disproportionately poorer, less educated, and politically alienated" (Young, 2011, p. 279). So, if one group is provided with less policy content that the other, then this may limit their ability to engage in policy discussions or may exacerbate these existing political, social and economic cleavages.

This chapter examines the cleavages between popular and elite media reporting of policy issues in the 2000s. It investigates how popular media platforms (referring to tabloid newspapers and commercial television) and elite media platforms (broadsheet newspapers and public service broadcasters) report policy matters in the twenty-first century. In addressing the broader research question of this thesis, the previous results chapters found a decline in the overall quality of policy coverage provided by the press in the twenty-first century. Using the same analytical approach adopted in the earlier chapters, this chapter compares popular and elite media coverage of policy issues. In

doing so, it adds another comparative dimension to my analysis of policy reporting in Australian elections.

Print and broadcast reporting are the focus of the comparative analysis presented in this chapter. Despite exhaustive and extensive searching, online news coverage could not be collected in some years because it was not archived. Because of the gaps in this dataset, the online news data was not included in the comparative analysis presented in this chapter. Instead, this chapter examines policy reporting across print and broadcast platforms. The analysis focuses on the differences between commercial/public outlets and tabloid/broadsheet organisations.

This chapter contends that the public sphere was better served by press rather than television reporting of policy matters in Australian elections. More specifically, it argues that news audiences were better served by elite media—broadsheet and public service platforms—because their coverage of policy issues was more likely to enhance voters' understanding of policy issues.

The first section briefly reviews the different audiences for election news in Australia. It shows that the audience for election news can be divided into two groups based upon the media they consult: the popular and elite news audience. The second section compares television and newspaper coverage of tax, health and educations issues. Using my content analysis data, it examines whether print and broadcast news differ in terms of the time/space they provide to policy content in news coverage, the details each platform includes, and the types of sources they quote. The third section focuses more specifically on the differences between commercial and public service broadcasters. It compares the details and voices used in commercial and public service new coverage. The final section compares tabloid and broadsheet newspapers by examining the space devoted to policy coverage, the information included in reports, and the frames and narratives used to tell policy stories.

Elite and Popular Media

Australian election reporting research has found that the election news audience could be broadly mapped into two groups based upon their interest in politics; engagement in

elections, and preferred media platforms (Young, 2011, pp. 40-41). On the one hand, there is the highly politically interested, more politically active, politically interested, wealthier, well-educated and well-versed in public affairs issues (Young, 2011, pp. 40-41). They tend to prefer so-called "elite" media and are thus described as the elite news audience. This term is not necessarily used to denote any superiority in the news on these platforms (Young, 2011, p. 29), but rather describes the audiences of these platforms who tend to be the "key policy and decision –makers, opinion leaders, and issue definers: elites in the political, business and cultural spheres" (McNair, 2000, p. 23). This audience tend to prefer newspapers over television, and tend to favour broadsheet and public televison; platforms that traditionally have been associated with "quality" hard news that provide the "best examples of journalistic excellence" (Young, 2011, pp. 42-46).

For critical theorists, the relationship between elite news audience and "quality" platforms are not a coincidence, but another example of how the most politically, socially and economically powerful have access to a "better sources" that they can use to gather information and shape public affair (see Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Young, 2011, p. 43). The less educated and poorer citizens are provided with limited acess to public affairs information (Young, 2011, pp. 42-43). For Herman and Chomsky (1988, pp. 2-4), this elite audience, the dominant class, use the media to maintain their dominance, control, and "manufacture consent." Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 2) trace how the dominant and powerful use the media to pursue their interests thereby filtering out "news fit to print" and pursuing undemocratic ends. In this view, "quality" news and information is restricted to elites, while the general population are led to popular news platforms who, so it is claimed, put commercial interests over normative goals of informing citizens (Young, 2011, p. 43).

On the other hand, the popular election news audience are much larger than the elite sphere. As described in chapter 1, the popular election news audience predominantly work in blue-collar jobs, have smaller incomes, are less educated, seek more entertainment focused news sources, and are less likely to engage in political activity (Young, 2011, pp. 30-37). The popular news audience tend to rely more heavily on commercial news programs, radio, and tabloid newspapers (Young, 2011, p. 83).

Popular media also tend to have larger audiences than elite media sources (Young, 2011, pp. 30-37, 83). Television is the most preferred medium for popular news audiences, with commercial television programs the most relied upon election source (Young, 2011, pp. 70-72). Because of its perceived importance, I begin my analysis by comparing television and newspaper coverage of tax, health and education issues.

A Comparison of Television and Newspaper Coverage

Print and broadcast platforms are distinctly different media. They have different commercial interests, editorial requirements, and audiences, (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-7; Cushion, Kilby, et al., 2016, p. 2-5; Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 52-53). They also operate to different commercial frameworks, guidelines, news values and format constraints (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-7; Cushion, Kilby, et al., 2016, p. 2-5; Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 52-53). It is these difference that can shape the way political news is reported.

Previous studies have found that the type of platform is important because it can influence the information contained in news stories (see for example Tiffen et al., 2014). In their comparative research of television and newspaper coverage, Elaine Sheppard and David Bawden (1997) examined whether news reporting of war and conflict issues differed in their provision of basic information, description, context, comment, and analysis (Sheppard & Bawden, 1997, p. 219). It is important to note that Sheppard and Bawden (1997) did not examine election cycles, so this limits the comparison that can be drawn between my study and their work. Nonetheless, their conclusions were supported by Australian election studies. They found television news only enabled a "one-dimensional pattern of information delivery" that focused on "superficial information", basic description and emphasising stories that were "more visually dramatic" (Sheppard & Bawden, 1997, p. 225). Although not strictly comparable to Sheppard and Bawden's (1997) study, Australian research on election reporting has found that television news programs generally offered less political and election news content than newspapers (Young, 2011, pp. 174-175).

Before outlining the findings of my comparison, I note that commercial media are the primary focus of the analysis presented in this section. Given that the data used in this

study is primarily from commercial television and commercial newspaper organisations, the findings presented in this section largely reflect changes in the commercial media landscape. As I discuss later in this chapter, commercial media contributed significantly to the decline in the quality of policy news. As will be shown, publicly funded news organisation, such as public broadcasters, provided some of the best examples of detailed policy news compared to their commercial counterparts.

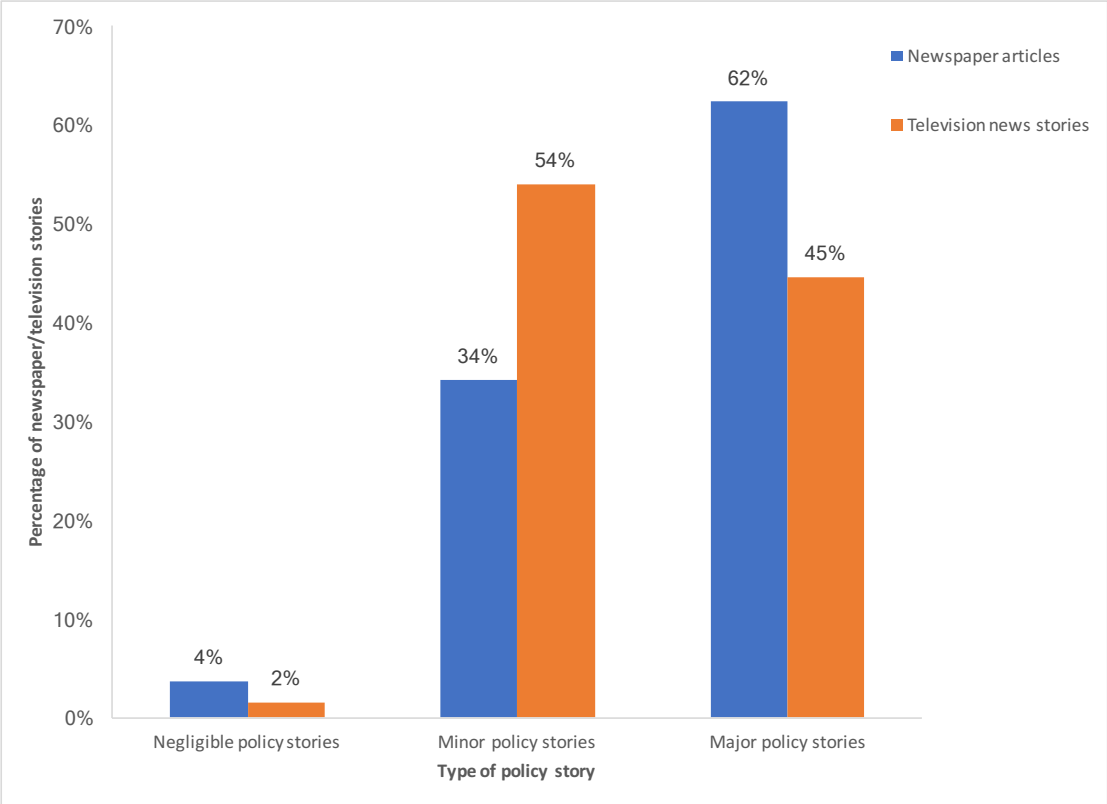
Comparing Policy Information in Press and Television Coverage

Figure 6.1 shows the percentage of newspaper and television news stories that were either negligible, minor or major policy stories. To recap, I coded each policy story into one of these three categories by examining the amount of space they provided to policy reporting. This was calculated as a percentage of the total story content. I calculated this by measuring the total words/time they devoted in an article to the discussion of a policy issue divided by the length of the story. "Negligible policy stories" were stories where policy discussion made up four per cent or less of the total news content. "Minor policy stories" were stories where the space devoted to policy news was between 5 and 49 per cent of the total story content. And "major policy stories" were stories where 50 per cent or more of the total news content was policy related (see chapter 4).

If voters did seek out policy news, they were better served by reading a newspaper than by watching a television news program. Figure 6.1 shows that newspapers provided more space for policy content than broadcast news outlets in the 2000s. Sixty two per cent of newspaper articles were major policy stores, but only 45 per cent of television news stories were major policy stories.[55] In this sense, press outlets were perhaps closer to delivering on their promises to provide coverage that informs political discourse because they simply devoted more space for policy discussion (see Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b).[56] Yet, it is the facts/details that are included in these reports are also important to consider when evaluating this coverage.

[55] N (newspapers)= 1270 newspaper articles. N (television)= 128 television news clips.
[56] As I noted in chapter 2, news organisation frequently promised to offer "in depth" coverage that is of "high-quality" and informs the citizenry (see Young, 2011, pp. 3-4).

Figure 6.1: Percentage of television and newspaper stories that were either a negligible, minor or major policy story, 2001-2013



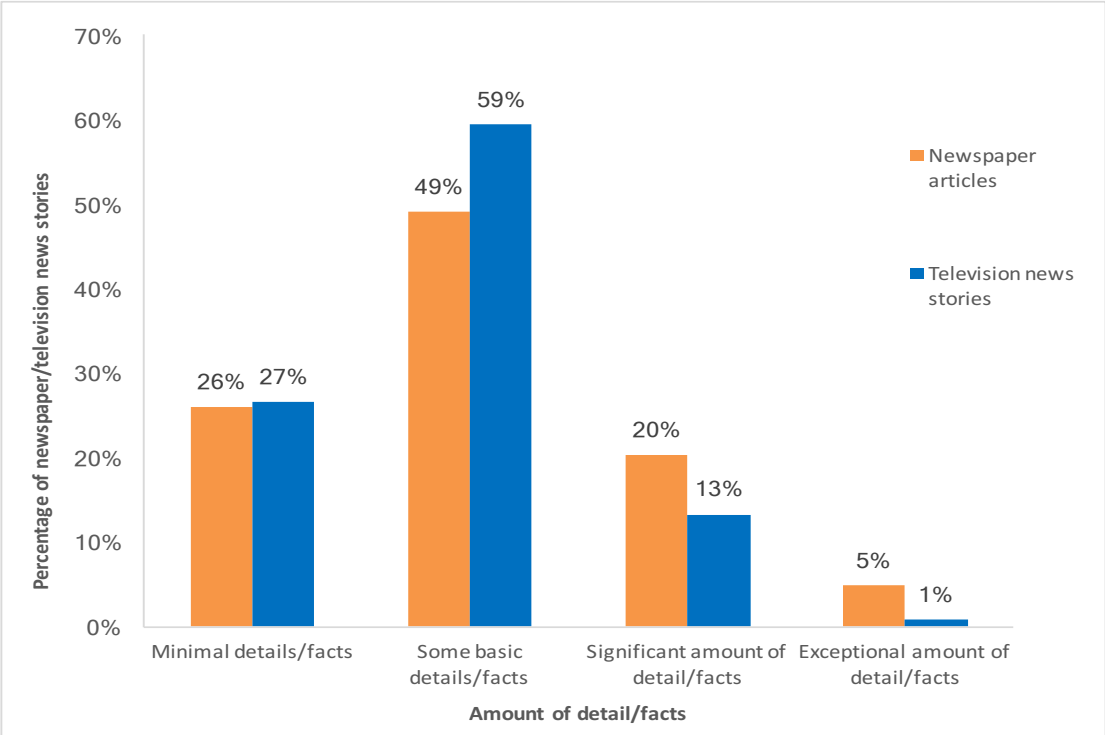
N=1270 newspaper articles, 128 television news clips. Source: Author.

Newspapers not only offer more space for policy reporting, but provide more detail in coverage of tax, health and education issues. Figure 6.2 shows that print coverage was five times more likely to include an "exceptional" amount of detail or facts in their reporting than television platforms.[57] For example, five per cent of newspaper articles reported an "exceptional" amount of detail and fact. By comparison, only one per cent of television news stories reported an "exceptional" amount of detail. This was evaluated by examining the policy details provided in the report, whether it provided an analysis or evaluation, the type of details provided such policy costs, and whether the article provided evidence to support the accounts presented (see Table 4.2). Additionally, we can also see from Figure 6.2 that press coverage was more likely to include a "significant" amount of policy detail compared to television platforms (20 per

[57] As I discussed in chapter 4, the information content of policy news was coded into four categories based upon the amount of policy details/information they contained (Table 4.2, chapter 4): 1) minimal details/facts, 2) some basic details/facts, 3) significant amount of details/facts, and 4) exceptional amount of details/facts.

cent and 13 per cent respectively), while television news stories commonly included "some" or "minimal" details and facts. This illustrates how the medium matters. The fact that newspaper and television coverage not only differs in the amount of space/time provided to policy reporting but also by the amount of policy information/detail in these reports shows distinctive differences in the way policy issues are reported in newspaper and television coverage.

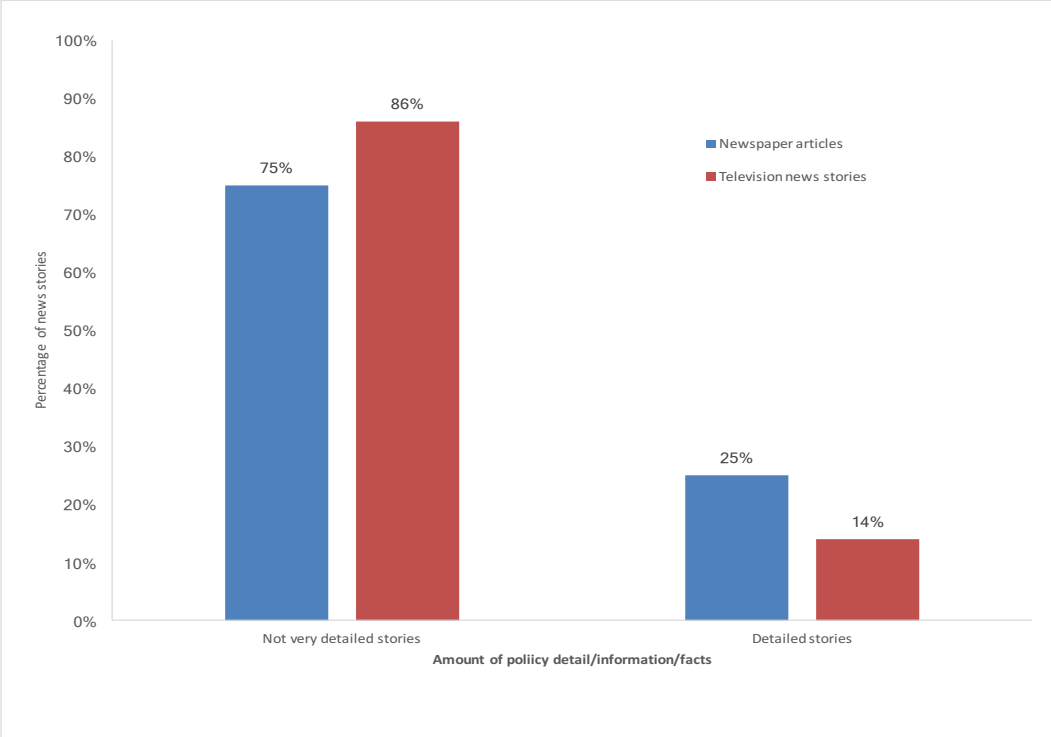
Figure 6.2: The amount of policy detail/information reported in television and newspaper policy stories (percentage), 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles, 128 television news clips. Source: Author.

Newspapers published more detailed policy stories than television news programs. Figure 6.3 shows the percentage of stories that were coded as either "detailed" or "not very detailed" stories.[58] Nearly a quarter of all policy stories published in newspapers were "detailed policy articles." By comparison, only 14 per cent of television reports were "detailed policy stories." Policy journalism on both platforms arguably provided a very limited contribution to informed policy discourse because there were relatively few "detailed policy stories." Nonetheless, the results of Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 show television stations trail the press in the quantity (space/words devoted to policy issues) and quality of policy news.

Figure 6.3: Percentage of 'detailed' or 'not very detailed' policy stories in television and newspaper coverage, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles, 128 television news clips. Source: Author. Note: "Not very detailed stories" includes those news stories that were coded as "minimal details/facts" and "some basic details/facts." "Detailed stories" include stories that were coded as "exceptional amount of detail/facts" or "significant amount of detail/facts."

[58] "Not very detailed stories" includes news stories that were coded as "minimal details/facts" and "some basic details/facts." "Detailed stories" include stories that were coded as "exceptional amount of detail/facts" or "significant amount of detail/facts."

Voters in election campaigns across the 2000s received few policy details from television news stories. The evidence suggests that Australian citizens were better served by press reporting of policy issues than television policy coverage. Yet, television is the most popular media for election news (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 7). So, if television news platforms are the most widely watched election news source but contain the least amount of information, then this raises questions as to whether there are fewer politically knowledgeable citizens as a result.

The findings of my study differ to the conclusions drawn in other cross-national election reporting research. For example, Jesper Strömbäck and Peter van Aelst's (2010) cross-nationtial study of European media systems found that television—public service media—provided more substantive news coverage of policies than tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. By contrast, my findings suggest that newspapers provided better policy coverage than televisions news. In addition to their findings about policy and election content, Strömbäck and van Aelst (2010) also found that there were very marginal differences in the framing of election coverage in television and print media (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). This is an important aspect of coverage to compare because it can influence how information is retained by voters (Valentino et al., 2001, pp. 104-105).

Frames, Sources and Voices in Television and Newspaper Coverage

Print and broadcast media tell policy stories differently. Strategy and game frames were more popular in broadcast coverage than print news. This is another example of how television and print coverage diverges. Over half of all television policy news stories discussed opinion polls, campaign strategy, and/or adopted game/contest language (56 per cent, N= 128 television news stories). By comparison, less than half (43 per cent) of newspaper stories reporting opinions polls or used a strategic, game or contest frame.[59]

[59] Using language such as "wooing", "pitching", "back in the race," "play for tradies" "grey vote bid", "buys grey vote," "Chase," "lures grey vote," "bid to win over the elderly" and "plays for golden oldies"("Appeal to grey power puts Labor back in the race," 2004, p. 1; Atkins, 2004a, 2004b; Farr, 2004, p. 1; Legge, 2004, p. 6; S. Lewis and Maher, 2004, p. 1; Middleton, 2004, p. 1; Peake, 2004, p. 1).

Television news reports described how Labor was "worried about winning over older voters" (Henne, 2004); how policies were a "big ticket pitch to John Howard's natural constituency" (J. Middleton, 2004); and how "John Howard was exploiting his school fees tax break in a bid to dislodge aspirational voters flirting with a switch to Kevin Rudd (J. Middleton, 2007). Television coverage reported how "the veteran parliamentary warrior" was "outbidding Labor" (Riley, 2007). As illustrated by the quantitative findings, this strategic and contest language was very common in policy coverage on television platforms.

Given the prevalence on strategic and contest frames, lack of policy information, limited space of policy reporting, I argue television news stories offered policy content of less informative value to the Australian public sphere than the press. When policy information was included in television reporting, the stories were more likely to be framed in strategic terms which can promote more cynicism and mistrust amongst voters (see Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). We can see from this data that newspapers clearly provided distinctly different policy coverage than television news programs in the studied period.

Another way we can examine the divergences in policy reporting between television and print is to analyse the sources quoted in news coverage. To do so, I examine whether television news programs or print outlets provide more opportunities for citizens, politicians and experts to contribute to policy discourse.

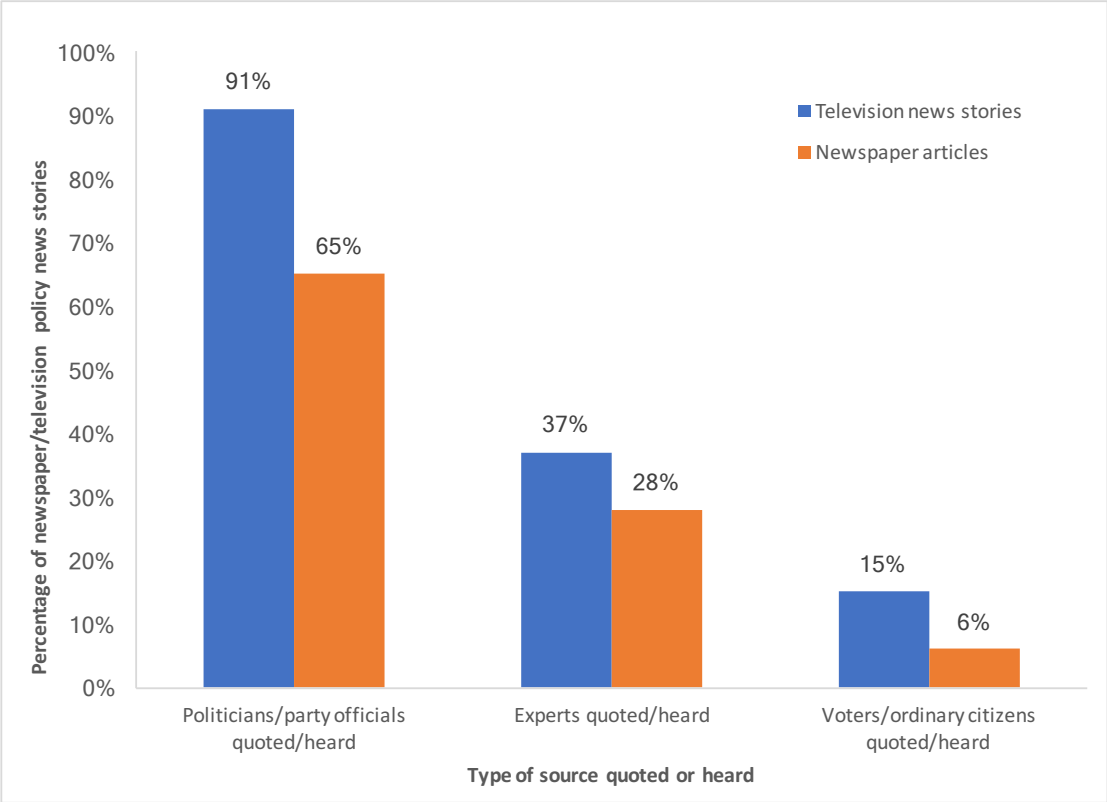
The nature of television as a medium and its use of visual imagery means that news coverage requires narration (Hallin, 1992; Kerbel et al., 2013). Journalists often fulfil the narrating role. Yet, there are times when sources are required to enliven and validate information (see Kerbel et al., 2000, p. 22-27). In an increasingly fragmented media market, contemporary television news requires a clear engaging story line to engage and communicate information to the public (see Hallin, 1992, pp. 9-11). The statements and quotes of politicians, experts, and voters from the campaign trail can be easily carved up into soundbites used alongside visuals to produce an engaging narrative (see Hallin, 1992, pp. 9-11). As found by Kerbel et al. (2000, p. 27), the use of sources—particularly candidates' voices—in television coverage further emphasises the role

politicians play as rhetorical storytellers in campaign news. My findings demonstrate that politicians do fill this narrating role in television reporting of policy matters.

Politicians/party officials were more likely to be quoted in television than print coverage. Hence, television news is where politicians and party official could sway coverage to their advantage. Figure 6.4 shows that politicians were the primary definers of policy news on television platforms. This was consistent with chapter five's conclusions, which showed that politicians—predominantly major party leaders—were the primary definers of policy news content. Between 2001 and 2013, nearly 91 per cent of television stories about policy issues included at least one statement from a politician or party official in their own words (N=128 television news stories). By comparison, politicians and party officials were quoted in two-thirds of press articles examined (65 per cent, N=1270 newspaper).

Despite being dominated by the voices of politicians, television news offered more opportunities for voters to contribute their views to policy debates than press coverage. Television coverage of policy issues quoted more citizens and experts than newspaper reporting. Figure 6.4 highlights that nearly 15 per cent of television reports contained a quote from a voter compared to a mere six per cent of newspaper articles. Similarly, experts were more likely to be heard/quoted in television news stories (37 per cent included a quote from an expert) than in newspaper articles (28 per cent).

Figure 6.4: Percentage of television and newspaper stories quoting a politician/party official, expert, or voter/ordinary citizen, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles, 128 television news clips. Source: Author.

Chapter five showed that the diversity of views in election coverage was largely inadequate because press coverage lacked a range of voices and perspectives. We can now add some caveats to this argument. The diversity of viewpoints in news coverage appears to be contingent upon the type of media. Again, this points to our observation that the medium matters in election reporting.

Television and newspaper coverage produced distinctly different policy news during election campaigns in the twenty-first century. Press reporting offered more space for policy discussion and more information, while television news provided more access for voters and experts to share their views on policy issues. Overall, the results find that Australian citizens were better served by press reporting of policy issues than television coverage because it was provided more information about policy issues. But there are commercial imperatives, media logic, and news values that matter here. The next section delves deeper by examining news formats and organisations.

A Comparison of Public and Commercial Television Broadcasters

Public service and commercial broadcasters have different regulatory requirements and operate to distinctly different business models. As a result, they face different challenges (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 17-42). This has consequences for how public service and commercial broadcasters report news. Previous research found that public service media provide more content of "democratic value" than news platforms in "market-driven systems" (Cushion, 2012, pp. 203-205). Cushion (2012, pp. 203-205) found that public service media provided a more in-depth and diverse "picture of the world" than commercial broadcasters. He argued that public service media provided more policy-orientated news stories and less strategy and game framed coverage in election campaigns, with "content that was more likely to advance informed citizenship than provided by market-driven systems" (Cushion 2012, pp. 204-206).

Other research on public and commercial broadcasters has also shown that significant variations exists in the way policy issues are reported. Cushion and Thomas (2015, p. 16) and Cushion, Kilby, et al. (2016, p. 10) found public broadcasters were more likely to offer a policy-orientated agenda than their commercial counterparts. Cushion and Thomas (2015, pp. 16-17) argued that the British public service broadcaster, the BBC, covered more hard news topics—including more policy orientated news stories— than commercial broadcasters such as Channel 4 and Channel 5. Moreover, the public broadcasters were also found to be "least likely to cover the same policy stories as newspapers" and thus provided different policy coverage to commercial stations (Cushion, Kilby, et al., 2016, p. 16).

Studies of other media systems have also drawn similar conclusions about commercial and public service media (see Cushion, 2012; Esser, 2008; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011; Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). For example, Esser's (2008) comparative study of German, UK, US, and French election coverage found that there were some clear and distitictive differences between the different media systems in the way they reported campaign news. Of interest to my study is Esser's (2008) conclusions about commercial and public service media. Overall, Esser (2008) found that public service media devoted more time, space and attention to election news coverage than

commercial news outlets. However, there were some important variations between the different media systems. Esser (2008) noted that national journalistic cultures appeared to shape the way news was reported. But, despite these differences, he also observed significant differences between public and commercia media across all countries examined (Esser, 2008). This suggests that any study of policy news needs to also consider how policy issues are reported across different broadcast platforms. Therefore, this section analyses policy reporting on public and commercial news platforms.

Consistent with Cushion (2012), Cushion, Kilby, et al. (2016, p. 10), Esser (2008), and Cushion and Thomas' (2015, p. 16) research, I find that public service broadcasters differed to commercial television news in the way they reported policy issues. The data and analysis found that public service broadcasters provided policy content that was more likely to facilitate a contest of ideas and improve voters' understanding of policy issues in Australian elections. Commercial interests appear to be a priority over normative democratic goals to foster diverse political discourse. Commercial stations provided the least amount of policy content and least amount of policy information in their election news. Yet, as discussed earlier, a significant proportion of voters relied upon commercial television news platforms in elections across the 2000s (Young, 2011, pp. 71-83). So, if voters relied solely on commercial news outlets for their election news, then many voters may have been less informed about the key policy debates. As a result, policy platforms may escape adequate scrutiny, and the promises politicians make may go unchallenged (W. L. Bennett et al., 2007, p. 48; Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016).

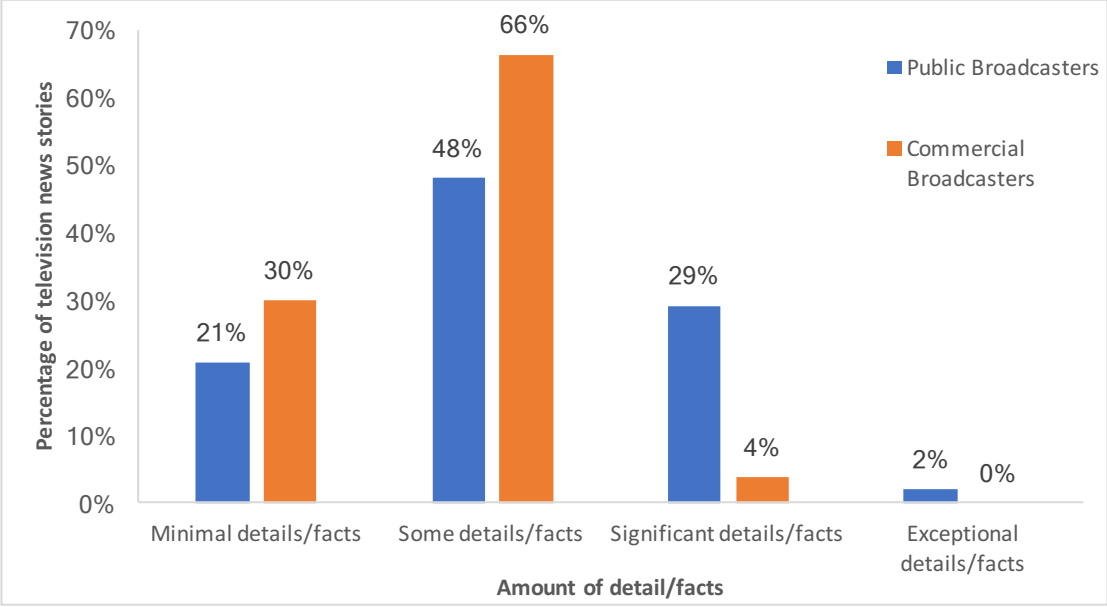
Australia's public service broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, provided more space for policy reporting than commercial stations: Channel 7, Channel 9 and Channel 10.[60] Policy stories on publicly funded news programs provided more major policy stories (50 per cent) and fewer minor policy stories (48 per cent). By comparison, commercial news programs were more likely to be broadcast minor policy stories, which only briefly mentioned policy (58 per cent), than major policy stories (41 per cent).

[60] SBS is primarily public funded, but also relies upon commercial activities including advertising and sponsorship as well as government subsidies (see SBS, 2018).

Public broadcasters also provided more policy information in their election coverage than their commercial counterparts. Figure 6.5 shows that 29 per cent of policy news stories on the ABC and SBS contained significant policy details and facts. By comparison, few commercial news programs ran detailed coverage (four per cent). We can see that most policy stories from commercial news programs only provided the basic facts or details about policy issues (66 per cent). There were no exceptionally detailed stories found in the sample collected.

In conjunction with the earlier findings, we can see that commercial stations rarely provide air time for policy reporting and rarely produce detailed policy coverage. So policy news on commercial platforms was limited in its capacity to inform voters about tax, health and education issues during Australian elections in the 2000s.

Figure 6.5: The amount of policy detail/information reported in public and commercial television policy news stories (percentage), 2001-2013



N=128 television news clips. Source: Author.

Commercial news organisation tailor their content to increase viewership. Commercial stations want to appeal to a broad news audience. Higher ratings garners more advertising revenue. Election audience research shows Australia's popular television election news audiences tend to be less interested in political news coverage than press audiences, especially broadsheet readers (Young, 2011, pp. 27-33). When "political

news junkies" do turn to television, they tend to choose public broadcasters over commercial channels (Young, 2011, pp. 27-29). Consequently, commercial stations are less inclined to report political content. There is no commercial incentive to do so. It is in the commercial interests of television stations to provide news that is palatable and keeps their audiences watching. Commercial stations have no commercial incentive to provide political content because Australian commercial television audiences are generally less interested in political news (Young, 2011, pp. 29-33). This offers one explanation for the lack of policy reporting and information in television coverage. It also suggests a vicious circle operates that means commercial television is less likely to offer detailed policy news because its audience are not interested in it. As discussed in the next section, newspaper organisations make similar presumptions about their audiences and this affects the type of news they provide.

Situating these findings within the broader international context illuminates the degree to which the Australian media system conforms as well as diverges from other western liberal democracies. In a similar fashion to Strömbäck and van Aelst's (2010) cross-national study of Sweden and Belgium, I also found that public service media provided more substantive policy coverage than commercial media outlets. Yet, unlike Strömbäck and van Aelst's (2010) study, my findings showed that print media were still providing more detail in their policy coverage than television news. So, on the one hand, commercial influences appear to have had a detrimental impact upon policy reporting during Australian elections. But, on the other hand, the media format was still an important factor shaping the information included in policy coverage.

Overall, the results presented here are broadly consistent with the conclusion derived by other scholars. For example, a large scale cross-national study of 26 European media systems found that public service media in 21 countries provided more substantive coverage of European Union elections than commerical news outlets (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 116-117). Other cross-national studies of different western liberal media systems have arrived at similar conclusions suggesting that "public service television, for the most part, covered more issue-based stories than commercial news outlets at election time, with less emphasis on game or strategy framing of politics" (Cushion, 2012, pp. 122-123). For the most part, public service media in Australia did provide

more substantive policy coverage than their commercial counterparts. And this has wide reaching implications for political knowledge in Australian elections.

If we judge the quality of policy news coverage by its democratic value—news that has "informative quality" that improves citizens' understanding of issues (Cushion 2012, pp. 204-206)—then we see that public broadcasters provided some of the best quality policy news. They also provided more opportunity for the contest of ideas to occur. Public-broadcasters offered a greater variety of sources to narrate their reports. Experts were quoted in 71 per cent of policy news stories on public broadcasters compared to 16 per cent of policy news stories on commercial television channels. Moreover, voters were quoted in 21 per cent of policy news stories on the public channels, while only 11 per cent of policy reports on commercial channels included voters' quotes. The results may not be surprising to observers of election reporting. My findings are largely consistent with other cross-national media studies, and they empirically support arguments in the literature about the difference between public and commercial media (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 98-123; Cushion & Thomas, 2015, pp. 16-17).

The results also have implications for how we consider the accountablity of politcal representatives and the development of politcal knowledge in election campaigns in the twenty-first century. Commercial news platforms are some of the most popular sources of election news (Young, 2012, pp. 32-33), but provide limited news of democratic value. This has significant consequences for informed debate in the public sphere. As Cushion (2012, p. 191) notes, the news public and commercial broadcasters produce has consequences for an informed citizenship. The absence of information on these platforms limits the ability of the broader popular news audience to engage in policy deliberations and does little to encourage engagement in Australian election campaigns. The implications of this for civic engagement and trust in democracy are discussed in chapter 8.

A Comparison of Broadsheet and Tabloid Reporting

Traditionally, "quality" political news has been associated with elite broadsheet publications (McNair, 2000, p. 14). And for good reason. The evidence presented here

demonstrates that broadsheets news outlets provide much more detailed policy coverage than the tabloid press, and taxpayer funded broadcasters offered more detail than commercial outlets. This section examines how coverage of policy issues differed between news organisations, Fairfax and News Corp. It finds that commercial interests and the presumptions news outlets made about their audiences influenced the policy issues that news organisations report. This section also explores how broadsheets and tabloids differ in terms of the policy details, frames and sources reported in their stories.

News Organisations and Commercial Interests

Commercial imperatives lead news organisations to pursue different policy agendas to garner audience share. As a result, news organisations make presumptions about their audiences—based upon audience research—which influence the political content they report (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011). Tabloid and broadsheet journalism is often driven by the belief that audiences prefer entertainment and sensational news over news about politics and public affairs (Entman, 2005, pp. 49, 60-61). On the one hand, broadsheet outlets consider that their core audiences want political information so they may allocate more resources to reporting political content (Entman, 2005, p. 60-61). On the other hand, tabloid news organisations presume that their audience is less interested in politics and, consequently, they are less likely to report on political issues (see Entman, 2005, pp. 49, 60). This is the vicious circle described earlier. Tabloid outlets view political news as a "turn off" to their audiences, who they believe are not interested in "boring" politics and want content that is entertaining and "humorous" (Young, 2011, pp. 61-63). For example, News Corp Australia's mostly tabloid newspapers have a readership that is less likely to be university educated, generally have lower incomes than broadsheet readers, and more likely to be unemployed or in blue-collar jobs (Young, 2011, p. 64). Their daily experience differs substantially to broadsheet readers because they tend to work in insecure jobs, rely on public healthcare, and send their children to public schooling (Young, 2011, pp. 64, 155-156).

By making assumptions about their audiences' preferences and tailoring content based on these demographics, news organisations limit their audiences' awareness of other

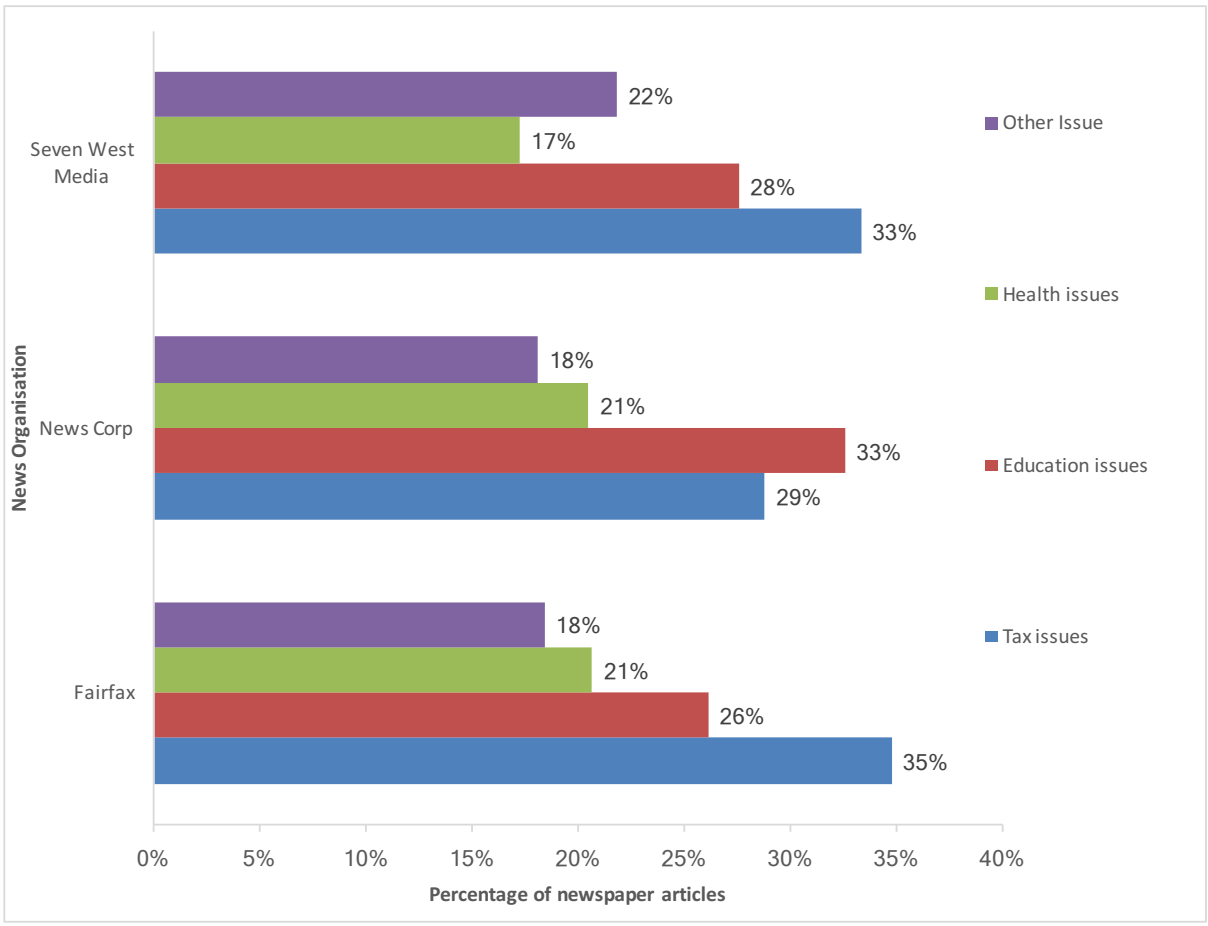
salient policy issues (see Entman, 2005, pp. 49, 60).[61] While people do get their information and news from a range of sources (see chapter 1; Figure 1.1), large survey data still shows that traditional media are the primary source of general and election news for most Australians (Blunsdon, 2014; McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 72-75; Phillips et al., 2007). So, the issues that news outlets cover can clearly have an important impact on what issues people think about (see McCombs, 2014).

Figure 6.6 shows that the way news organisations covered different policy issues in election campaigns over the 2000s. In this sense, news orgnaisations' commercial interests were shaping the policy agendas reported. News organisations report different policy issues in the 2000s. Figure 6.6 shows that newspaper attention to health, education, tax or 'other' issues diverged across Australia's three main newspaper organisations: News Corp Australia, Fairfax, and Seven West Media. While Seven West Media (the *West Australian*) focused primarily on tax issues, the most interesting variations were between Australia's media duopoly: News Corp Australia and Fairfax.

Fairfax's broadsheet newspapers (the *Age, Sydney Morning Herald,* and *Australian Financial Review*) focused more on tax issues than News Corp's publications. Of the 440 Fairfax newspaper articles, tax was the primary issue (35 per cent of policy stories), especially for the *Australian Financial Review* (41 per cent of articles were about tax). News Corp's mostly tabloid newspapers devoted more attention to education policy areas. Of the 663 News Corp articles, education was the primary issue in 33 per cent of policy articles.

[61] Pablo Boczkowski and Eugenia Mitchelstein (2013, pp. 1-7) also argue that this can lead to a "supply-demand" gap between what news outlets provide and what news consumers want.[61] Journalists may prefer public affairs news, but the public often want non-public affairs coverage (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013, pp. 16-18).

Figure 6.6: Percentage of newspaper articles where the primary issue was a tax, health, education or 'other' issue by news organisation, 2001-2013



N= 1190 newspaper articles. Source: Author. Note: 80 articles from The Canberra Times were excluded from this analysis because ownership of this newspaper changed over this period. News Corp was previously known as News Limited. Seven West Media was previously known as West Australian Newspaper Holdings Limited.

News organisations paid different levels of attention in quantitative terms to the issues that affect the daily lives of their audiences. But the benefits of these policy for their readers was often obscured by the way news outlets framed these policy issues. For example, News Corp Australia's 2004 coverage of Labor's education policies was highly critical of Opposition ALP leader Mark Latham's so called "hit-list" of rich schools even though taxing wealthy private schools and investing in public education would presumably be of more advantage to their less wealthy readers who are less likely to send their children to private schools (see Seccombe, 2001, p. 6). The *Herald Sun* noted how Labor was engaging in "class war" with a "hit-list that would strip them [private schools] of half a billion dollars in federal funds" (Frenkel & Hockley, 2004,

p. 1). Similarly, the *Herald Sun* reported that "independent schools on an ALP funding cuts hit-list say they will be forced to hit families with higher fees" and how Labor's "divisive policy based on 19th century 'class warfare'" would make "schools struggle" (Hockley, 2004, p. 28). There are broader implications here for political knowledge. If tabloid newspapers were the only form of news voters engaged with during the 2004 election, then they would be left with a skewed view of a Labor policy that ultimately benefits them the most. In qualitative terms, the attention paid by News Corp papers overall coverage did little to support a policy that arguably benefited their readers who were more likely to send their children to public schools (see Seccombe, 2001, p. 6).[62] Again, we can see that commercial interest may shape the media agenda.

Newspapers also have a commercial incentive to report on policies and issues that benefit their organisations. The obvious examples here are media policy and employment law. It is advantage for news organisations to concentrate their ownership through new competition and negotiate advantageous condition through employment laws. This explains why these issues may become salient in news coverage. This was the case in 2007 when News Corp Australia and Fairfax newspapers argued that people were "better off" under the industrial relations policy *WorkChoices* that allowed organisations to bypass unions in contract negotiations with employers (Young, 2011, p. 240). For example, editorials in the *Courier-Mail* called for "some courage on the economy" and "wider tax reform" claiming that it is "time to talk again about further productivity and labour market reform, about competition policy and trade liberalisation" ("Time for some courage on the economy," 2010, p. 22). These issues of competition, trade, labour, and market reform all have tangible benefits to news organisations who may wish to consolidate their ownership of other platforms and reduce the size of their newsrooms (as they did in 2012).

[62] Similarly, Labor's 2001 education policy centrepiece "Knowledge Nation" also received rather pessimistic coverage from News Corp Australia's newspapers. But most of the benefits of Labor's 2001 education policy was targeted at public education. For instance, the *Australian* described the plan with the headline "Labor's little knowledge won't go far" (2001, p. 12). The editorial argued that "Mr Beazley's Knowledge Nation will not deliver" and that the plan is "only tinkering at the edges" of education, that the plan is "empty" and ignores "the 30 per cent of parents who choose to send their children to private schools and the many others who aspire to ("Labor's little knowledge won't go far," 2001, p. 12). The *Australian* reported how "individual Australians must make the personal commitment to invest their own scarce time and money in their own education…[and] a knowledgeable nation would never fall for a plan which so easily compromises its worthy goals" ("Labor's little knowledge won't go far," 2001, p. 12).

Another example of this pursuit of commercial interests is tax reform. In 2004, the *Australian* and *Daily Telegraph* ran a campaign to reduce the income tax rates for high-income earners (Young, 2011, pp. 240-241). This was interesting given most of the readers of the *Daily Telegraph* are on lower incomes that would not fall in the top tax bracket (Young, 2011, pp. 240-241). A similar campaign was run in 2007. For example, in 2007 news organisations frequently referred to the need for tax reform. The *Australian* reported that "people have simply abandoned financial responsibility" and that "politics of individual aspiration are being replaced with the politics of government dependency" (Albrechtsen, 2007, p. 14). The *Australian* argued that Australia's "abundance of wealth has been met with a paucity of ideas from both the Government and the Opposition;" and called for more "genuine reform of the personal income tax system…[by] lowering the rates" ("Saving For The Future - Time to learn some of the virtues of Asian neighbours," 2007, p. 15). Reforming the top tax bracket and lowering rates may have more financial benefit for news organisations and their executives than their readers (see Young, 2011, pp. 240-241). Hence, the commercial interests and personal interests of news executives may influence the issues news organisations prioritise in their coverage. There is another point to be made here about media bias.

Partisanship in election news is not inherently problematic provided that is overt and readers can make their own judgements (Young, 2011, p. 254). However, the problem here is when bias in reporting is not overt. Bias can "can skew and thwart the democratic process" by presenting misinformation, promoting interests of one person or group over another, and by omitting details and facts to shape perceptions of issues (Street, 2011, p. 25). The evidence presented here suggests news organisations tended to provide more scrutiny to policy strengths of the party that they editorially opposed. However, we should be cautious with this interpretation. As Young (2011, p. 253-254) correctly points out, "for every perceived example of bias, there is usually another indicator pointing the other way." Nonetheless, what my findings show is an association between editorial endorsements and the issue agendas prioritised in news coverage, which could be described as partisan behaviour by news outlets.

Large public opinion surveys show Australian voters perceive the Labor Party as stronger on social policy issues, while the Liberal Party is a better manager of the

economy and more effective on economic issues such as tax (McAllister, 2011, pp. 175-180, 204-207). News Corp Australia's newspapers provided more attention to social policy issues that have traditionally been viewed as strengths of the Labor Party; yet, only backed Labor in one election. News Corp Australia was a strong advocate for the conservative political parties across the five elections examined. In all but one campaign (the 2007 election), News Corp Australia's editorials advocated for a Coalition vote (Young, 2011, pp. 237-246). This was either overtly through front-page headlines such as "Australia needs Tony [Abbott]" (2013) or through editorial endorsements (for example "Editorial: Tony Abbott should become Australia's Prime Minister," 2013). Fairfax's newspapers, although more ambivalent in their support, tended to lean towards the Labor Party in their editorial endorsements (Young, 2011, pp. 248-249). But Fairfax's newspaper coverage provided more attention to the Coalition's policy strengths, including paying more attention to tax issues. If a newspaper editorially opposed a party's election, their coverage would generally provide more scrutiny of that party's policy strengths. For example, News Corp editorially opposed the election of Labor in the 2004 campaign. In qualitative terms, the coverage of Labor's key 2004 school's policy was not favourable. In this sense, there may be some degree of bias in the way news outlets reported on certain policy issues. Again, this is another example of the way news organisations vary in the issues they report.

Policy Information in Broadsheets and Tabloid Newspaper Coverage

So far, we have focused on the way news outlets pay attention to policy issues. But it is the information they provided that arguably has the biggest implications for informed debate in the public sphere. Again, there is a clear divide between the popular and elite media, with reporting shaped by commercial values and aspects of media logic such as platform choice.

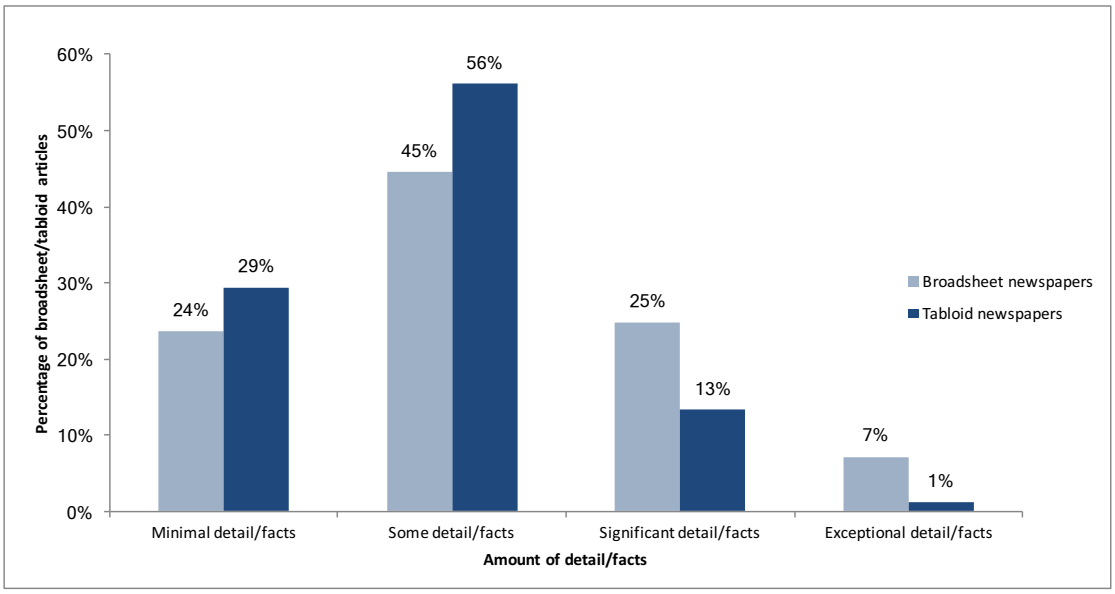
Scholars have traditionally viewed broadsheet newspapers as the "quality" press because of their tendency to provide more in depth coverage of hard news, including about policies and politics (Beecher, 2005, pp. 8-26; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014). Marta Fraile and Shanto Iyengar (2014) found that broadsheets and public broadcasters provided more hard news, including political information, than tabloid newspapers and

commercial stations.[63] We can see that Fraile and Iyengar's (2014) arguments are consistent with the results here. The assumptions made about the"quality" press are empircally tested in the Australian context and upheld.

Broadsheet newspaper articles offered more policy details than their tabloid counterparts. There was a clear statistically significant correlation between the format of the newspaper and the amount of detail offered in its news (pearson correlation (r)= -.177, p-value (two-tailed)=.000, N=1270).[64] This is illustrated by Figure 6.7. Broadsheet newspaper articles (seven per cent) were more likely to be exceptionally detailed policy news stories than tabloid newspaper articles (one per cent). In this sense, broadsheet policy articles were seven times more likely than tabloid stories to be exceptionally detailed. By comparison, tabloid newspapers (29 per cent) were inclined to include minimally detailed policy news stories than broadsheet newspapers articles (24 per cent). Over half of all tabloid newspaper articles were found to include "some detail/facts" (56 per cent compared to 45 per cent broadsheets). Earlier, Figure 6.5 showed public service television coverage provided some of the most in-depth detailed policy reporting. Consistent with my earlier analysis, we can see that elite news platforms, such as broadsheet newspapers, were more detailed in their coverage of tax, health and education issues in the 2000s.

[63] They also argued that exposure to broadsheet newspapers and public broadcasters increased political knowledge of "elite" media audiences (Fraile & Iyengar, 2014, p. 289).
[64] This was a negative correlation due to the coding of the variable 'newspaper type.'

Figure 6.7: The amount of policy detail/information reported in broadsheet and tabloid policy news stories, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author

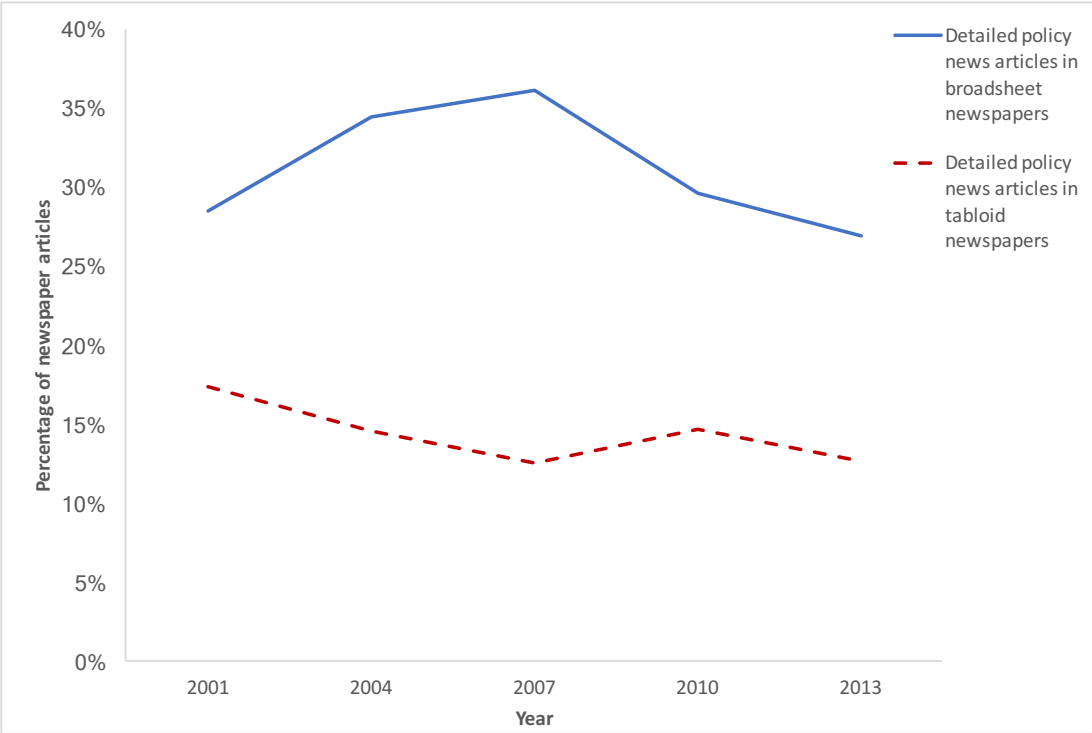
One significant result, however, was that broadsheet as well as tabloid newspapers published fewer detailed policy stories after the 2010 and 2013 elections. Figure 6.8 shows the percentage of tabloid and broadsheet newspaper articles that were "detailed" policy news stories.[65] Between 2001 and 2007, the percentage of detailed policy news articles found in broadsheet newspapers increased. Yet, following the 2007 election, there were very few detailed policy news stories published in Australia's broadsheet newspapers. Looking at tabloid newspapers, the percentage of detailed policy news articles fell across the 2000s despite a very slight rise in 2010.

[65] To reiterate, this "detailed" category was the aggregation of the stories coded into the categories "significant details/facts" and "exceptional details/facts."

Chapter 7 explores the trend in greater detail. Suffice to say, Fairfax—who owns most of Australia's broadsheets—considerably restructured their news operations in 2008 and 2012 (see Hogan, 2007; Norrie, 2012a; 2012b). For example, Fairfax converted its broadsheets to "compact formats" which to many scholars was viewed as a step towards tabloidisation and the diminishing of quality news (for discussion Carson, 2013a). Arguably this restructure has contributed to a decline in detailed broadsheet policy coverage (see chapter 8).

Figure 6.8 also provides more empirical evidence to support the argument advance in this chapter that, overall, elite media platforms—in this case broadsheet newspapers—were more likely to produce policy news that enhances citizens' understanding of policy issues in Australian elections. Compared to the tabloids, broadsheets provided policy content that was more likely to "advance informed citizenship" (terms coined by Cushion, 2012, p. 206).

Figure 6.8: Percentage of "detailed" tax, health and education policy articles in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers by year, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Framing and Voices in Broadsheet and Tabloid Coverage

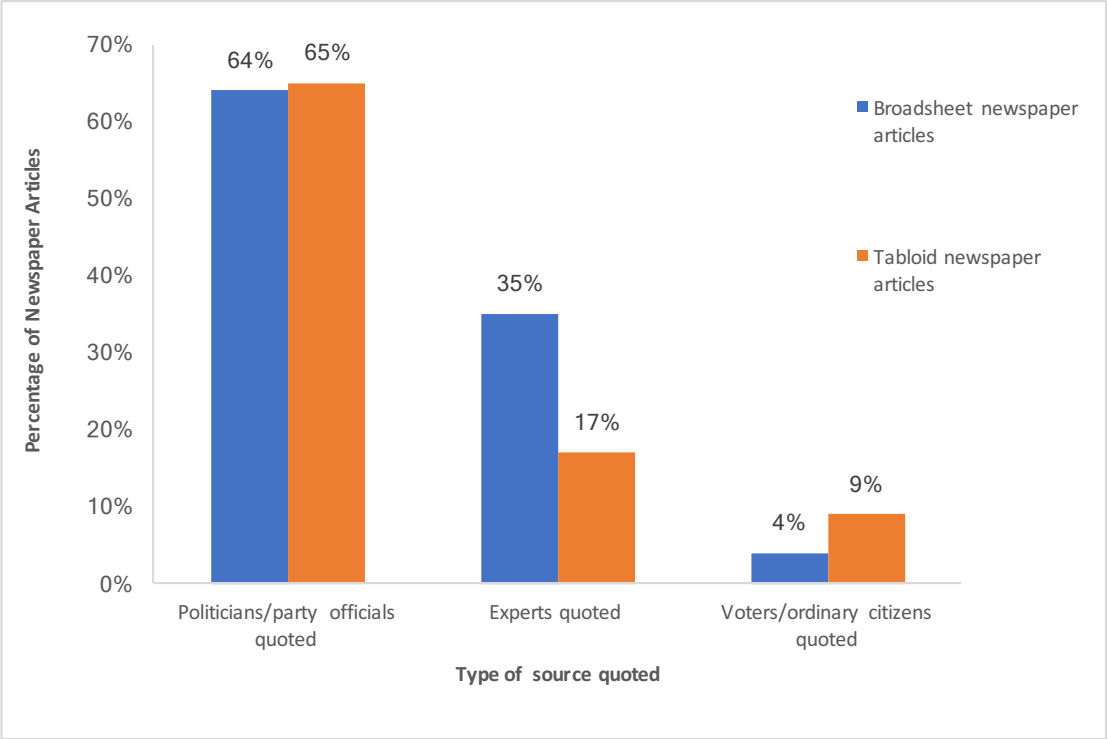
An unexpected finding was that broadsheets and tabloids did not substantially differ in their adoption of strategic, contest or game frames. Dan Jackson (2011, p. 173) argued that "quality" broadsheet newspapers are more reliant upon advertising revenue, while tabloids are more reliant on newsstand sales and must compete for readers' attention and money. Therefore, he suggests that tabloids newspapers have more of a financial incentive to produce news that is entertaining and headline grabbing, so they are more likely to adopt strategic and game frames (D. Jackson, 2011, p. 173). Yet, Jackson's (2011, p. 185) content analysis of the British media's coverage demonstrated that the framing of coverage in tabloid and broadsheets did not substantially differ. In Australia, the story is a little different with newspapers barely covering the distribution costs by their cover price, with both broadsheet and tabloid highly dependent on advertising revenues (Carson, 2013b, p. 2). Nonetheless, Australian newspapers still need to demonstrate to advertisers that they are a viable advertising platform. In this sense, they are motivated to sell newspaper to improve their audience metrics.

Consistent with Dan Jackson's (2011) research I found that tabloid newspaper coverage of policy issues was only very slightly more likely than broadsheet coverage to include a strategy, game, or contest frame (43.1 per cent of tabloid articles discussed strategy, opinion polls, or adopted game or contest language compared to 43.0 per cent of broadsheets articles). Broadsheets and tabloid newspaper coverage was also similar in terms of the political sources that were quoted. Figure 6.9 confirms that tabloid and broadsheet newspapers quoted politicians/party officials in 65 per cent and 64 per cent of policy stories. Only a one percentage point variation between the two formats. But the similarities between the two newspaper formats largely end here.

Broadsheet and tabloid newspapers differed in terms of the experts and citizens that were quoted in their coverage. To reiterate a point made in chapter 5, the tabloid press offered voters a more accessible platform to air grievances and views on policy issues. Figure 6.9 shows that voters were twice as likely to be quoted in tabloid articles than broadsheet policy stories. Yet, broadsheets quoted more experts than the tabloid press. Thirty-five per cent of broadsheet articles included a quote from an expert compared to a 17 per cent of tabloid articles.

Collectively, the sum of the findings presented in this section suggest that policy deliberation in the Australian public sphere was curtailed by tabloid coverage of policy debates. Tabloid coverage did contain some policy detail and was more likely to quote voters in policy stories. But, by comparison, the elite public sphere—informed by broadsheet publications—contained substantially more detailed policy stories and more experts narrating policy coverage. In short, the evidence suggests that broadsheets provided policy news content that was more likely to facilitate informed debate in the public sphere.

Figure 6.9: Percentage of tabloid and broadsheet newspaper articles quoting a politician/party official, expert or voter/ordinary citizen, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Conclusion

Broadsheets newspapers, the tabloid press, public service broadcasters and commercial television are distinctly different media. They have different business models, commercial interests, news values, format constraints, editorial requirements, aesthetics, audiences, resources, and guidelines to which they operate (see Cushion, Kilby, et al., 2016, p. 2-5; Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 52-53). The variations between the formats and platforms mean that they hold diverse assumptions that influence how they report political news. This chapter finds the quality of policy news in the twenty-first century is shaped by the medium and news format.

Television and newspaper coverage produced distinctly different policy reporting. Press coverage contained more space for policy discussion and more information, while television offered a more accessible platform for voters and experts to share their views on issues. The evidence suggests that Australian voters were better served by press reporting of policy issues than by television coverage. The biggest differences were between the popular and elite media.

Policy journalism on Australia's popular media platforms (commercial television and tabloid newspapers) was limited in its capacity to inform voters. The starkest differences were between the commercial and public broadcasters. Public service broadcasters provided more space for policy reporting, more policy detail in their reporting, and quoted more expert sources and voters in their coverage than commercial counterparts. These findings are largely consistent with other cross-national studies of western liberal media systems.

Across western liberal media systems, it appears than public service media provide more substantive election coverage of democratic value than commercial news outlets (Cushion, 2012, pp. 120-123). Many international comparative studies of public service and commercial media have tended to "paint public service media in a good 'democratic light'" (Cushion, 2012, p. 123). It is important to remember, however, that there are differences between these media systems that may shape reporting. For instance, national journalistic cultures and political structures can influence the degree to which

public service media emulate commercial media reporting (Cushion, 2012, p. 123; Esser, 2008). We must therefore take care when extrapolating these findings beyond the Australian context. Nonetheless, the results of this chapter are comparable with the broader arguments made in the international scholarship. Put simply, publicly funded media often provide better quality policy news than commercial outlets.

Broadsheet and tabloid newspapers also differed in their coverage of policy matters. Broadsheets provided far more policy information in their reporting over the 2000s, and quoted more experts in their coverage than tabloid reporting. Yet, tabloid newspapers quoted more voters in their reporting. There were also variations between companies, with each organisation reporting on different types of policy issues. In the 2000s, broadsheet newspapers and public service broadcasters provided policy content that was more likely to facilitate informed debate and a contest of diverse ideas than the election coverage on popular news platforms.

"Elite" news audiences received more detailed policy news than popular news audiences. In this sense, elite news audiences were better served by the policy coverage provided during election campaigns. The "popular public sphere" who need policy information the most—the tabloid and commercial audiences who tend to be politically alienated, poorer, and less educated (Young, 2011, p. 279)— received content that was less likely to improve their understanding of policy matters. Public service broadcasters and broadsheet newspaper tend to attract news audiences that are already highly politically interested and engaged (see Young, 2011, pp. 23-41). Hence, those already politically-engaged were provided with more informative policy news (a victorious circle), while tabloid and commercial television audiences received limited political information to help guide their voting choices (a vicious circle). This chapter found policy reporting in broadsheet newspapers changed in latter elections. The next chapter examines whether there was a decisive moment when the quality of policy reporting declined.

Chapter 7: The 2007 Election- A Turning Point

Political parties were campaigning in new and exciting ways in the 2007, 2010 and 2013 elections. These campaigns were unique for their professionalism, their presidential nature, and for the way parties adopted new technologies to communicate to voters and bypass the media (see Kissane, 2009; Mills, 2014, pp. 212-213, 264; Williams, 2008). The period of 2007-2013 was also a turbulent era in the history of Australian journalism as evident by widespread job losses across the sector. But did changes in political campaigning and Australian journalism also foster new styles of political reporting? What impact have these changes in campaigning had for election coverage? What does this mean for the future of Australian election reporting? More specifically, was there a turning point in the way news organisations covered policy issues in the twenty-first century?

The previous chapters have shown that policy stories were told and narrated differently over the 2000s. This chapter concentrates on whether there was a "turning point" in policy reporting—that is, a clear point in the 2000s when the quality of policy news began to decline. Chapter 7 purposefully uses the same analytical tools of the previous three chapters. It analyses newspaper reporting by examining media attention, the information content of news coverage, the sources/voices used in these stories, and the frames used in policy coverage.[66]

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section shows that 2007 to 2013 was a period of innovations in Australian political campaigning. It also highlights some the key developments in Australian journalism over this period that were identified in chapter 1. The second section analyses press coverage of policy issues across the 2000s. It beings by examining whether the reporting of policy issues on the front-page changed over the 2000s. As will be discussed, front-page attention is an important indicator of the salience news organisations attribute to policy issues (John et al., 2013, p. 52).

[66] As with chapters 4 and 5, the focus here is on newspaper coverage. Newspaper articles are the primary dataset and provide the largest sample of material (N= 1270). Newspapers are also important inter-media agenda-setters in the public sphere (McCombs, 2014, p. 129). The introduction of this thesis provides further details about the scope and justification of my focus.

Following this analysis of front-page coverage, this chapter examines the how the policy information in news coverage has changed over this period and identifies the critical point when the amount of information in policy news coverage began to decline. This chapter concludes by focusing on personality narratives in news coverage and the expert voices narrating policy stories. This chapter finds that the 2007 election marked a critical point in Australian policy journalism. The quality of policy reporting deteriorated significantly following the 2007 election, with a ripple effect that had consequences for the 2010 and 2013 campaigns.

Innovations in Australian Campaigning, 2007-2013

On the 24 November 2007, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was on the cusp of electoral victory. A victory ending four consecutive terms and over 11 years of conservative government in Australia (Walsh, 2007). The election that led the ALP to victory in 2007 was unlike any previous Labor campaign (Jackman, 2008, p. vii).

Political Campaigning Techniques in the 2007, 2010 and 2013 Elections

Labor has generally been viewed as the "party of technological innovation" (Mills, 2014, p. 264). The 2007 campaign was no exception. Labor was clearly the more professional party in 2007, implementing many of the new technical skills it had learnt during the previous campaigns, incorporating websites, social media and micro-targeting into its election strategies (Mills, 2014, pp. 212-213). Innovations in strategy, communication techniques, and campaigning continued throughout the 2010 and 2013 elections. One of the most innovative features of the 2007, 2010 and 2013 campaigns was the incorporation of new digital technologies.

The 2007, 2010 and 2013 elections were unique in the way political parties communicated with voters. New digital platforms, including social media and video-sharing sites such as *YouTube,* emerged during the 2007 campaign and were widely adopted in subsequent elections (see Macnamara and Kenning, 2011). [67] These digital

[67] The effectiveness of these technologies in winning votes in election campaigns has been debated extensively by scholars (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011; Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Kissane, 2009, p. 144; Macnamara & Kenning, 2011), with some scholars noting that Australian politicians still use these

platforms were prominent in the lead-up to the 2007 election, with John Howard launching a *YouTube* video outlining the Coalitions' climate change policy and Labor launching the interactive Kevin07 website, *Facebook* page and *YouTube* channel (Flew, 2008; Gibson & McAllister, 2011, p. 231; Kissane, 2009, p. 144). Social media platforms offered new opportunities for political parties to communicate with voters directly. Experimentation began. Political parties targeted social media with advertising, utilised online video-sharing platforms, and tailored their messages for groups of voters using data-driven profiling (Young, 2015, p. 101). By using social media, political parties were clearly bypassing the traditional media to communicate more directly with voters (Lukamto & Carson, 2016, p. 191-193). As will be shown, this had some important consequences for the way policy information was communicated to voters through the mainstream media.

The 2007, 2010 and 2013 campaigns were also noteworthy for their highly presidential nature. While leadership was an important factor in campaigns prior to 2007, to many scholars, the 2007 election was "more than most Australian electoral contests…a "presidential" race where the personal traits, integrity and future visions of the major party leaders came under unprecedented scrutiny" (Williams, 2008, p. 108). Labor's choice of its election slogan *Kevin07* exemplifies this. It put the Labor leader front and centre in the campaign, emphasising leadership, and demonstrated "the extent to which campaigns can become personalised" (Kefford, 2013, p. 143). As Glenn Kefford (2013, p. 141) observed, Labor focused its re-election strategy on marketing Kevin Rudd as soon as he took on the leadership, launching a series of television commercials featuring Rudd explaining education policies and his "economic conservative" values. This was followed with a marketing blitz using t-shirts, social media, websites and blogs such as 'KMAIL' (Jackman, 2008, p. 159; Kefford, 2013, p. 141). Labor "pushed the boundaries" of campaigning in 2007, with Rudd appearing on youth television programs, such as *Rove Live,* to communicate his campaign message to younger voters (Kefford, 2013, p. 141). Labor ran a "deeply personalised" election campaign (Kefford,

platforms to broadcast messages rather than interact with voters (Lukamto & Carson, 2016, p. 208; Macnamara & Kenning, 2014, p. 63-68).

2013, p. 141). This level of personalisation was sustained in the 2010 and 2013 election campaigns. Put simply:

> In Australia, we have grown accustomed over recent decades to media representations of each national election as a new high water mark in "presidential" campaigning. The 2013 campaign was certainly no exception; the term "presidential" was a ubiquitous reference point for journalists, especially in their descriptions of the Labor Party's pitch for re-election (Strangio & Walter, 2015, p. 49).

The next section shows that this noticeable shift to personality driven campaigning also had implications for the way the Australian media reported policy issues.

Political parties were also using big data in new ways to target voters. The rise of "big data" marketing strategies and micro-targeting techniques has allowed political parties new ways to communicate and engage voters (Young, 2015, pp. 95, 101). Labor's former National Secretary George Wright (2013) argued the 2013 election campaign was a further step into "third generation campaigning." Unlike previous campaigns that exploited advertising or demographic targeting, the 2007 campaign "relie[d] more heavily on direct and individual, one-on-one conversation and voter engagement, and the micro-targeting of information and messages to individuals." Micro-targeting combines the collection of demographic data and, through new technological advancements, the collection of individual-level data to create "mega" datasets of voter information (Mills, 2014, pp. 243-244). Political parties use large datasets to directly target individual voters through phone calls, social media, email and text messages, and face-to-face methods such as door knocking (Mills, 2014, pp. 243-244).[68]

Observing the 2008 and 2012 American presidential campaigns of Barak Obama, Australian political parties have included similar targeting techniques in their own

[68] Micro-targeting and grassroots campaigns were trialled in the Australian Council of Trade Unions' (ACTU) 2007 "Your Rights at Work" campaign which complemented and ran in parallel to Labor's 2007 election strategy (Mills, 2014, pp. 236, 244). In 2010 and 2013, these techniques were then widely adopted in Labor's national campaign strategy (Mills, 2014, pp. 236, 244). The Liberal Party has taken a more cautious approach and, although adopting these methods, has not "matched the intensity of Labor's on-the-ground efforts" (Mills, 2014, p.246).

election strategies (Mills, 2014, p. 244). For example, they have assembled teams of volunteers and a grass-roots network, with Labor establishing its Community Action Network (CAN) to mobilise and implement this micro-targeting approach (Australian Labor Party, 2018). As a result, political parties no longer needed to rely as heavily upon the mainstream media to broadcast their policy messages.

By using new technologies, politicians directly communicated and targeted key voters in key marginal electorates. Hence, there was less incentive for politicians to provide detailed policy information through traditional news platforms.

Australian Journalism between 2007 and 2013

As chapter 1 described, the period of 2007 to 2013 was a challenging time for Australia's traditional media organisations. News outlets experienced some of the biggest falls in advertising revenues as new digital competitors entered the media landscape (see Carson, 2015a, p. 1023; PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), 2014, p. 44). Indeed, scholars have suggested that the years 2009 and 2010 marked "critical moments in the practice of journalism" in Australia (Young & Carson, 2018, p. 453). Again, Fairfax and News Corp Australia slashed staff numbers through several redundancy rounds during this period (Hogan, 2007; Norrie, 2012a). The evidence suggests that there was a crisis in Australian journalism, especially between 2007 and 2012.

Political elites, industry professionals and government department heads have also made similar claims about the decline of Australia's traditional media. All have linked the decline of journalism resources with the decline in the quality of policy news coverage (see Murphy, 2017). For example, former Treasury head and current Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), Dr Martin Parkinson, acknowledged that changes in newsrooms have impacted upon the quality of policy reporting and policy development (Murphy, 2017). Parkinson argued:

> …if you look around now, the journalists don't have the opportunity, they don't have the time to do those thoughtful pieces…and that makes it much, much harder to do this sort of thoughtful, careful analysis and policy design that in the past we were able to do (Murphy, 2017).

Parkinson concluded that digital disruption and upheaval in the Australian media landscape had a detrimental impact on policy debate in the public sphere (Murphy, 2017). The period of 2007 to 2013 signalled a new wave in political campaigning; a new way in which politicians could communicate with voters; and a new period of journalism. Such changes inevitably have consequences. A claim put forward in the journalism scholarship is that 2010 represented a "critical moment" in Australian journalism (Young & Carson, 2018, p. 453). The next section shows that the 2007 election was also a decisive turning point for Australian policy journalism.

The 2007 Election and the Quality of Policy News

The following section analyses news coverage of tax, health and education issues between 2007 and 2013. In prosecuting my case, I analyse news coverage of policy issues from four perspectives: 1) attention paid to policy on the front-page, 2) the policy information in news coverage, 3) the way the policy story was told, and 4) the expert voices used in reporting policy stories.

Reporting Policy Issues on the Front-Page

Examining front-page coverage allows us to evaluate how much news organisations care about policy issues (Graber, 1980, pp. 130-133; John et al., 2013, p. 52). As noted in chapter 4, front-page news coverage is important because the more often issues appear on the front-page, the more likely the public will pay attention to these topics, and the more likely they will view those issues as important (Graber, 1980, pp. 130-133; Young, 2011, p. 146). It also provides a useful measure of the salience news organisations attribute to issues (John et al., 2013, p. 52). In chapter 4, I found that newspaper articles covering tax, health or education issues were more likely to appear beyond the first seven pages of the newspaper rarely making the front-page.

Focusing on front-page coverage by election year, I find that the 2007 election marked a seminal turning point in the attention news outlets paid to health, tax, and education policy issues. Figure 7.1 shows the percentage of front-page articles reporting on a tax, health or education issue by year. From 2001 and 2013, the percentage of policy news articles published on front-pages increased from 13 per cent (2001) to 16 per cent

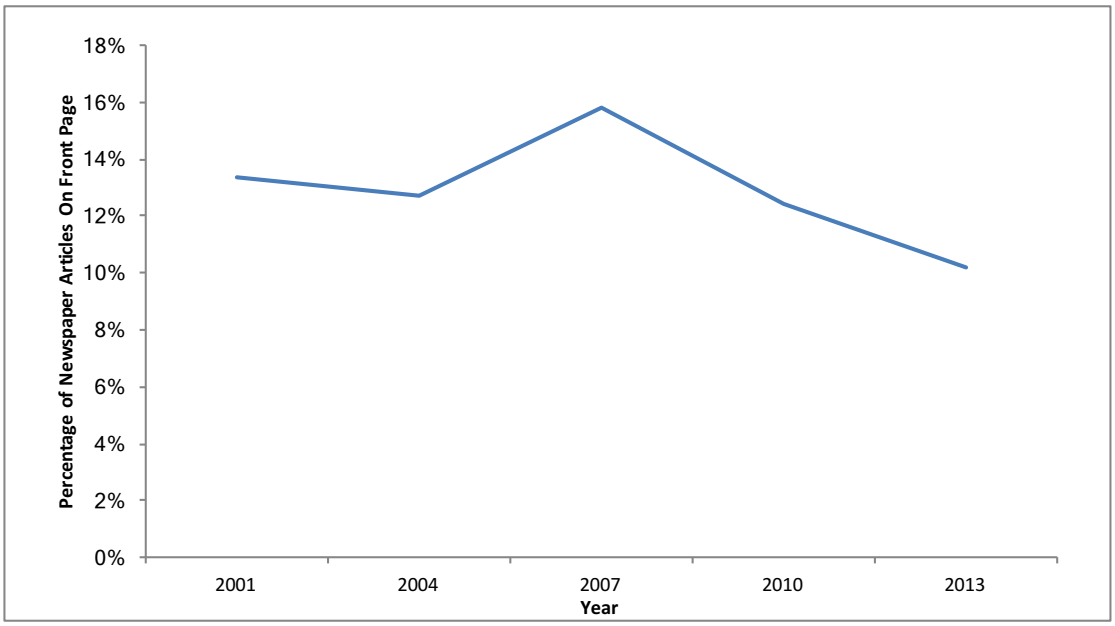
(2007). Interestingly, Figure 7.1 shows a spike in front-page coverage in 2007. The 2007 election was unique for the high degree of policy convergence between the two major parties, with commentators and journalists dubbing it a "me too" campaign (S. Bennett & Barber, 2009, pp. 16-19). According to some researchers, policy was a less prominent feature in the 2007 election. For example, Scott Bennett and Stephen Barber argue that:

> The 2007 Commonwealth election was therefore one in which policy matters, and the differences between the parties, seemed to play a lesser role than is often the case (S. Bennett & Barber, 2009, p. 19).

In other words, there were fewer policy issues competing for space on the media agenda and this may explain the spike in front-page coverage of tax, health and education issues in 2007. Because the campaigns were less focused on policy issues, when policies were reported this coverage may have been considered more novel, more newsworthy, and therefore more likely to make the front-page. Turning our focus back to the overall trend, we can see that there were fewer front-page policy stories in later election cycles.

Following the 2007 election, newspapers were less likely to publish tax, health and education policy stories on their front-page. The number of front-page articles hit a low point in 2013 (10 per cent of policy newspaper articles appeared on the front-page). Newspapers attributed less importance to these policy concerns in 2010 and 2013 compared to earlier campaigns. Yet, these issues were still the most salient to Australian voters according to the Australian Election Study (AES) survey data (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, pp. 88-89).

Figure 7.1: Percentage of policy news stories that appeared on the front-page by year, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

In chapter 4, I found that there was a disconnect between the media and political agendas on education issues. In a similar fashion, the decline in front-page coverage suggests that there was a disconnect between the media and public agendas in 2010 and 2013. On the one hand, the AES data shows that voters viewed tax, health and education issues as highly salient in the 2010 and 2013. Table 7.1 shows the percentage of respondents who identified tax, health or education issues as the most important election issues in these campaigns

Table 7.1: Percentage of Australian Election Study respondents who identified health, education or taxation as the most important election issue in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns

Most Important Election Issues	2010	2013
Health and Medicare	23 (%)	19 (%)
Education	12.6	14.9
Taxation	7.3	10.6
Sample (N)	1911	3619

Source: McAllister and Cameron (2014, p. 88). Question wording: "Still thinking about these 13 (2007: 14, 2010: 12, 2013: 10) issues, which of these issues has been most important to you and your family during the election campaign?"

In 2010, "health and medicare" was identified as the most important election issue of the entire campaign (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). Similarly, "health and medicare," "education," and "taxation" were also among the most important issues to Australian voters in 2013 (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). Nineteen per cent of AES respondents viewed "health and medicare" as the most salient issue, while 15 per cent believed "education" was the key issue of the campaign. Tax, health and education issues made the top five list of important issues in the 2010 election and top four list of important issues in the 2013 campaign (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 88). Despite their salience to voters, newspaper coverage was attributing less importance tax, health, and education policy articles in the 2010 and 2013 elections.

The public and media agenda were perhaps functioning more independently when it came to the salience they attributed to different policy domains. While a comparison of the media and public agenda is beyond the scope of my analysis, Figure 7.1 does demonstrate support for my contention that the 2007 election marked an important turning point for policy journalism in Australia. Examining policy details provided in news coverage also further supports this claim.

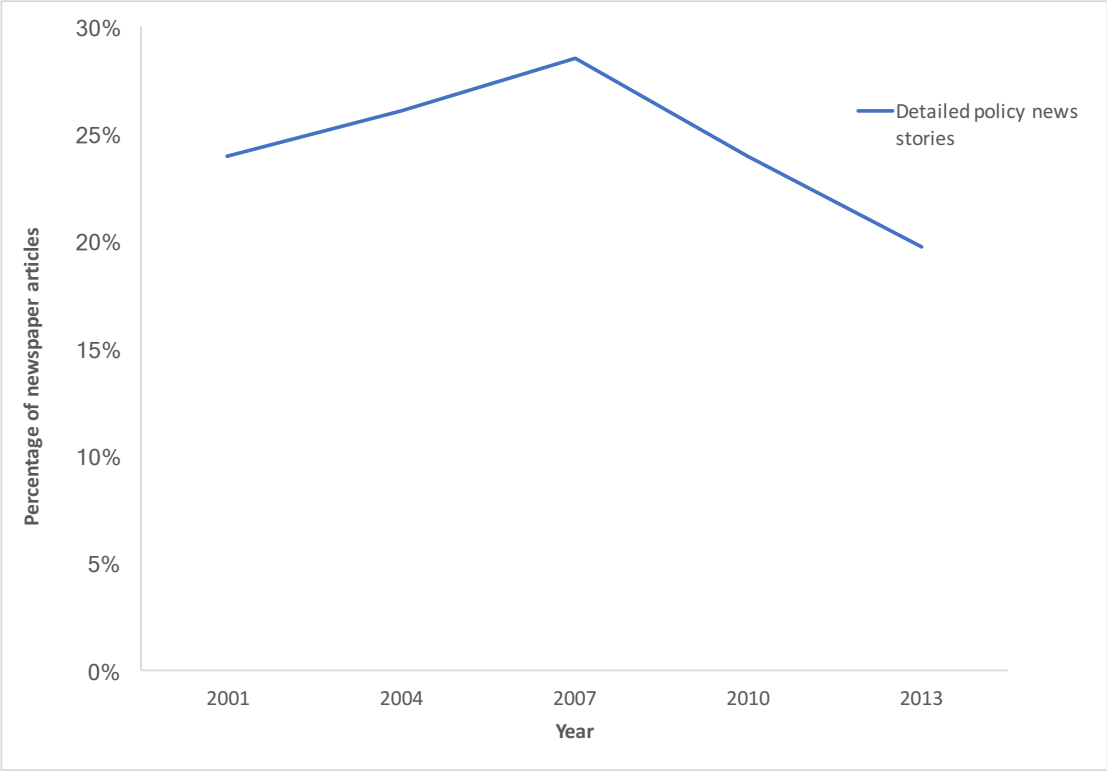
Policy Information and Detailed Policy Stories

In the previous results chapters, I focused on how different platforms conveyed policy information (chapter 6). I also compared how politicians shape the policy information published in news coverage through their speeches (chapter 4). This section takes a slightly different approach than the previous chapters. Although it uses the same analytical tools, it analyses the number of "detailed" policy news stories over time to determine when policy reporting began to change.[69] These are the information-rich policy stories that are vital to informed debate in the public sphere. If newspapers publish fewer detailed policy stories, then this may have broader implications for political knowledge and, by extension, the quality of policy discourse.

Figure 7.2 shows the percentage of newspaper articles that were detailed policy stories by election year. The trend shows that the 2007 election marked a critical point in policy reporting. From 2001 to 2007, the percentage of newspaper articles that were "detailed policy stories" increased two points from 24 per cent in 2001, to 26 per cent in 2004, and peaked at 29 per cent in 2007. However, in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns, the number of detailed policy stories fell by 9 points in 2013 (20 per cent of articles were detailed policy news stories, N= 1270). In conjunction with my finding about front-page coverage, these results show that policy news in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns was less likely to appear on the front page and less likely to contain in-depth policy coverage than reporting from earlier election cycles.

[69] "Detailed" policy news stories were articles coded as containing "exceptional amount of detail/facts" or "significant amount of detail/facts" (see appendices A and B).

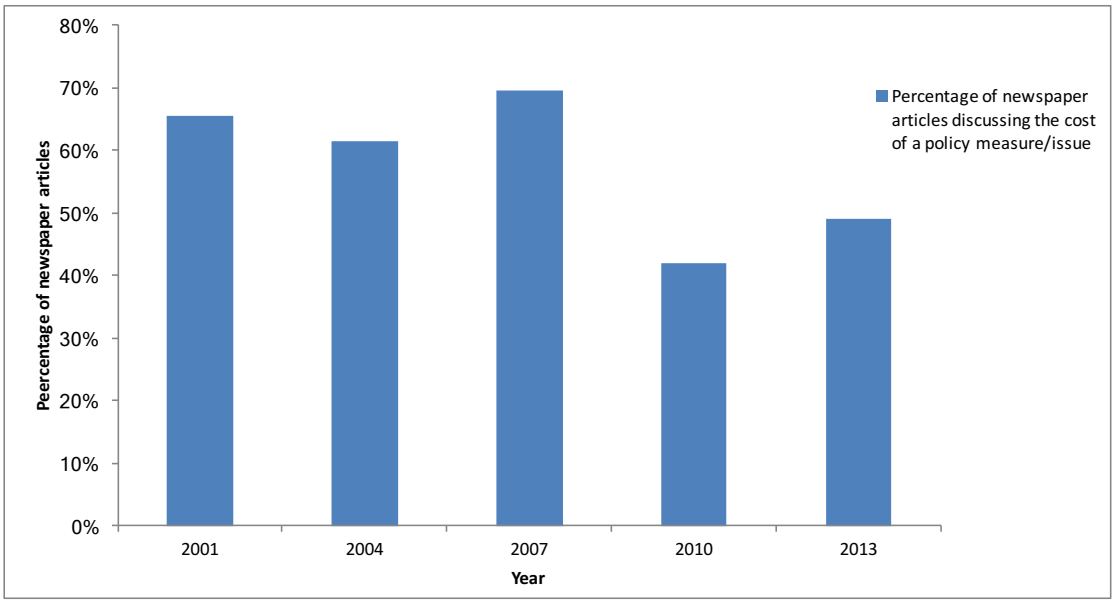
Figure 7.2: Percentage of "detailed" policy news stories in newspaper articles by year, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author. Note: 'Detailed' stories include those articles coded as either 'significant amount of detail/facts' or 'exceptional amount of detail/facts' into this one category.

Further evidence of a turning point is found by examining the content of news reports. For example, Figure 7.3 shows the percentage of newspaper articles reporting the costs of policy initiatives by year. Fewer articles cited the cost of a policy in the 2010 and 2013 coverage compared to earlier campaigns (2001 and 2004). In 2001, 65 per cent of articles mentioned the cost of a policy measure. In 2010, this figure declined by 23 points to 42 per cent before rising slightly to 49 per cent in 2013. These results, together with Figures 7.2 and 7.3, provide additional empirical weight to my argument that the 2007 election marked the beginning of a downward shift in the quality of policy news. With less detailed policy news reported in these campaigns, the public sphere was arguably less well-served by the press coverage in latter elections.

Figure 7.3: Percentage of newspaper articles reporting the policy costs by year, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

Considering these results in the context of the earlier discussion of political campaigning, we can see a link between political elites' campaign techniques and the decline in the quality of policy coverage. Between 2007 and 2013, political parties were engaging in new "third generation" campaign techniques, employing more technical experts and campaign professionals, adopting small target strategies, communicating with voters in different ways, and placing greater emphasis on the "presidential" aspects of the election race (see Jackman, 2008, p. 159; Kefford, 2013; G. Wright, 2013; Mills, 2014). As a result, policy information from the parties was produced and disseminated in a more tightly controlled manner (see also Johnson et al, 2015a). What I suggest here is that the rise of new political campaigning techniques appears to have fostered a decline in the quality of reporting. As new political campaigning techniques emerged, the amount of detailed policy news stories plummeted.

Personality Narratives in Policy News

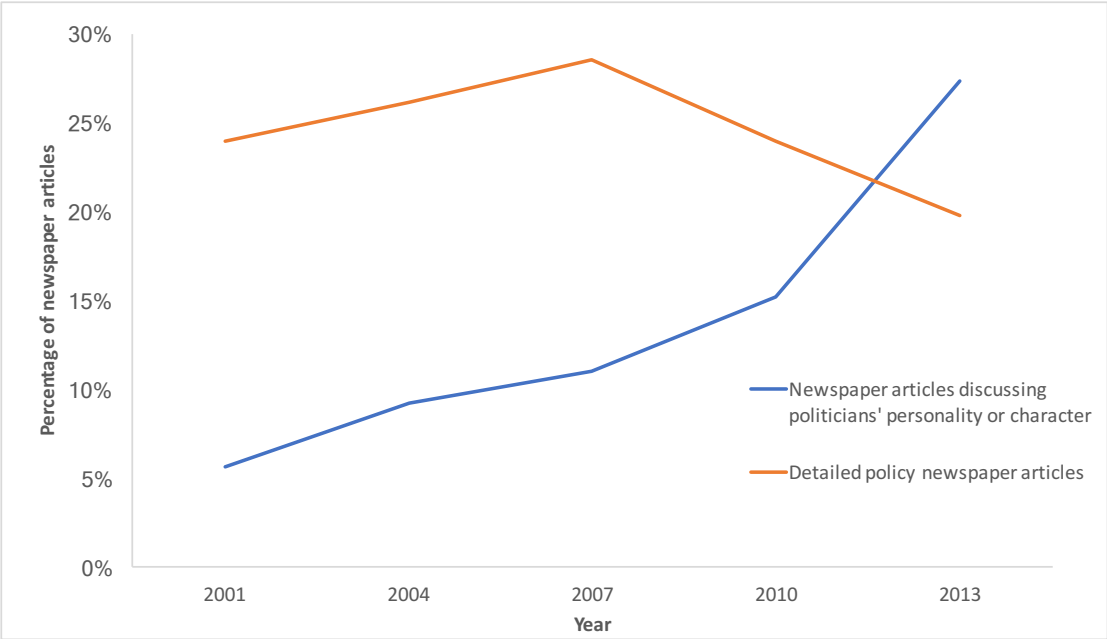
So far, I have shown that 2007 marked the beginning of a change in policy journalism by focusing on front-page articles and story content. Examining how the story is told another dimension to consider when advancing this turning point argument. To do so, I examine the use of personality-focused narratives in policy news. At the beginning of this chapter, I showed that one of the most significant changes in political campaigning was the shift to personality driven strategies. Australian studies by Jackman (2008), Kefford (2013) and Strangio and Walter (2015, p. 49) found that presidentialised and personality-focused campaigning had intensified over the twenty-first century. Consequently, Strangio and Walter (2015, p. 49) argued that the media often framed their stories about the election using personality narratives.

By using personality-focused narratives, information becomes presented in fragments where patterns and trends are ignored, stories are presented as "self-contained capsules," and the picture becomes focused around "individual pieces" rather than the overall whole (W. L. Bennett, 2012, p. 59). This makes it difficult to present a coherent picture that encapsulates all the information about a policy problem (W. L. Bennett, 2012, p. 59). As a result, the focus of reporting becomes on what action authorities (politicians, governments and so on) are taking and "whether this is moving in an orderly and reassuring or disorderly and disturbing direction" (W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 62-63). Moreover, perceptions of the political process become distorted by reporting of "pseudo-issues" such as leadership or personality (W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 64-66). This has negative implications for the way information is presented in the public sphere by encouraging politicians to engage in superficial and emotionally driven PR techniques over substantive political discussion (W. L. Bennett, 2012, p. 69). Therefore, we need to understand how the Australian media report policy issues using personality narratives because it could have broader consequences for how policy information is presented to voters and how much information voters retain (Valentino et al., 2001).

Policy news coverage contained more coverage of a politician's personality or character. Personality framing increased substantially in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns. Figure 7.4 compares the percentage of press articles that reported or mentioned a politician's personality or character with the percentage of "detailed" policy news

stories over the 2000s. More newspaper articles reported on personality in their coverage of tax, health and education issues. The sharpest rise occurred in 2010 and 2013. Between 2001 and 2007, the percentage of newspaper articles covering personality gradually rose five points from six to 11 per cent. However, from 2007 to 2013 there was a steep increase in these types of personality-framed articles, with references to personality or character increasing 10 points to 27 per cent in 2013.

Figure 7.4: Percentage of newspaper articles reporting on a politician's personality or character and the percentage of detailed policy newspaper articles by year, 2001-2013



N= 1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

At the same time as this rise in personality narratives was occurring, Figure 7.4 shows there was a big decline in the number of detailed policy stories. This was consistent with my earlier finding that showed a sharp decline in the number of front-page reports on tax, health and education issues (Figure7.2). This indicates that personality-focused news coverage was supplanting detailed policy news.

Collectively, the findings about attention, information content, and personality framing paint a dismal picture about the state of informed policy debate in the public sphere. Linking the findings together empirically shows that 2007 marked a critical turning point in policy journalism, with changes that had consequences for the next campaign.

Following the 2007 election, the press paid great attention to personality and character attributes such as competency, work ethic, personal values, age and trust. For example, in 2010 the *Australian* reported on how Abbott had "re-cast himself" and how the "once divisive and muscular" person "now projects himself as a leader of stability and 'real action'" (Maley, 2010, p. 4). The focus on personality was particularly evident in the reporting on Gillard's 2010 campaign launch speech. The *Age* reported that Gillard "believed in the power of work to define and lift the human spirit, she believed in building a country where every child had the benefit of a great education, just as she had enjoyed, and she believed in a nation of people who showed each other care and concern, best represented by her intention to improve the health system" (T. Wright, 2010, p.1). The *Herald Sun* described "Ms Gillard said her values and vision centred around jobs, education and 'not being afraid of the future'" (Hudson, 2010, p. 5). Journalist Mia Freedman adopted a personality-focused narrative describing the importance of Gillard's values: "she begins to detail a practical list of familiar Gillard values including 'firm beliefs about work and the dignity of work' and a passion about education and the transformation that's been in my own life" (Freedman, 2010). Similarly, the *Sydney Morning Herald* framed its story about Labor's 2010 policies in the 2010 election by focusing its coverage on Gillard's values and religious beliefs (Marr, 2010).

The focus on personality and character intensified in the 2013 campaign (see Figrue 7.4). For example, the *Advertiser* reported how Kevin Rudd was a "dysfunctional, self-obsessed, contemptuous and even psychotic" (Kenny, 2013, p. 60). The *Australian* also reported how "Abbott offers the Australian people not inspiration but trust" and how he demonstrates his "competence, trust, no surprises and a leader 'who doesn't talk down to you'" (Kelly, 2013, p. 1).

Consistent with the arguments of Strangio and Walter (2015), Figure 7.4 shows that policy news coverage from the 2013 campaign contained more coverage that fixated on a politician's personality or character than in the previous elections studied. The findings show that 2013 policy coverage did appear to reach the "high water mark" (see Strangio and Walter, 2015, p.49).

The argument has some limitations. While there were more personality-focused narratives in 2010 and 2013, this was part of a broader upward trend that was present since 2001. Although there is evidence to show that 2007 represented a turning point in terms of the amount of personality-focused coverage, the trends and observations are not as clear cut as those shown in previous sections of this chapter. Nevertheless, there was still a sharp increase in personality coverage that has important implications for news quality.

Political news, some critics claim, lacks substantive policy reporting because it focuses on the most "visible institutional figures" (Neveu, 2002, pp. 34-36). Some commentators have defended personality-focused reporting arguing that non-policy aspects of politics like leadership and personality are just as important for the media to cover (Tim Blair, 2010, p. 25). Yet, by focusing on personalities and human interest elements, the public are presented with a "distorted view" of politics that neglects key policy issues (W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 45,53). As W. L. Bennett (2012, pp. 46, 56-58) argues, by reporting on dramatic elements (such as characters, plots, violence or conflict), "complex policy information" is downplayed and trivialised in news coverage, with information shaped to fit within a dramatized story. This distracts reporters from focusing on the information about the causes of a problem and leads to news articles that promote a "false sense of understanding" about these issues (W. L. Bennett, 2012, p. 58).

This was typified by the reporting of the 2010 Labor launch. For example, the *Age* described how "the heart replaced the spin doctors" focusing the narrative of the article around Gillard's values, sincerity and authenticity over substantive policy information (M. Gordon, 2010, p. 6). Journalists, Michael Gordon, described how Gillard was an "an authentic, conviction politician whose credo is founded on four pillars: hard work, a belief in the 'transformative' power of education, respect for others and optimism" (M. Gordon, 2010, p. 6). Policy solutions were framed in terms of their relationship to the values of "optimism" and "respect for others" (M. Gordon, 2010, p. 6). The *Age* reported how "Gillard's aim was to 'speak from the heart' about her values and vision, and to present Labor's priorities in this campaign — the economy, education and health

— as her the priorities of her life" (M. Gordon, 2010, p. 6). Any reporting of substantive policy details was obscured by the focus on beliefs, sincerity and authenticity.

"Pseudo-issues" such as personality can distract and distort information (W. L. Bennett, 2012, pp. 64-66). From this view, the more an article concerns personality and personal characteristics the less likely it will contain policy details. In many ways, this claim appears correct in the Australian context. Figure 7.2 and 7.4 show that as policy reporting focused more intensely on aspects of personality and character between 2007 and 2013, the number of detailed policy stories declined significantly. In the 2010 and 2013 elections, personality and character became more prominent in press coverage (Figure 7.4). Similarly, reports offered less policy information in the 2010 and 2013 elections than in any other election period examined. To adopt W. L. Bennett's (2012, p. 45) phrase, these personalities were "crowding the centre stage" at the expense of serious policy analysis.

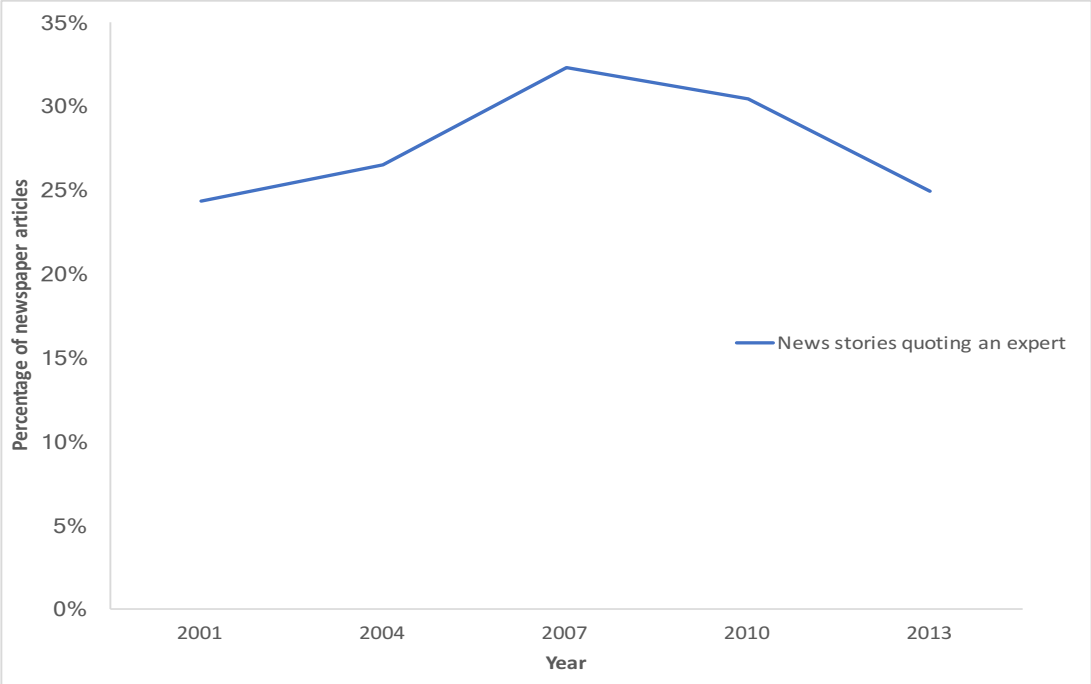
Experts Voicing the Policy Story

The final way I show that the 2007 election marked a decisive turning point in policy reporting is through my examination of the expert quoted in news stories. International research has found that quoting professionals or experts in news reports is on the rise (see Albæk, 2011; Albæk, Christiansen, & Togeby, 2003; Hallin, 1992). However, previous Australian research on election reporting has drawn different conclusions to international studies. For example, Young (2011, p. 180) found a decline in the percentage of front-page news reports quoting an expert. A tension exists here between the international and Australian scholarship. Therefore, I investigate how experts were included in policy news across the 2000s, and the types of experts narrating this coverage. In so doing, I contribute another perspective to the scholarship by investigating this empirical puzzle about source selection from a new angle.

In chapter 5, I discussed the role of experts in articulating and defining the policy news. I employ the same analytical tools to examine the turning points in policy coverage. Yet, unlike the results presented in chapter 5, in this section I examine the experts quoted in policy reporting by election year. Figure 7.5 shows the percentage of expert voices quoted in newspaper coverage by election year. Like my results above, Figure

7.5 also provides further evidence to show that the 2010 election marked a critical point in policy reporting.

Figure 7.5: Percentage of newspaper articles that contained a quote from an "expert" by year, 2001-2013



N=1270 newspaper articles. Source: Author.

From 2001 to 2007, the percentage of experts quoted in news coverage was rising. The percentage of press reports quoting experts increased between 2001 and 2007, from 24 per cent to 26 in 2004 and peaking at 32 per cent in 2007. However, the 2007 election marked the beginning of a critical shift in this trend. Following the 2007 election, the percentage of news stories quoting experts declined seven points from 32 to 25 per cent in 2013 (see Figure 7.5).

While my observation is supported by previous studies of Australian election reporting (for example Young, 2011, pp. 180-181), the initial increase in expert commentary across the early 2000s is more consistent with international studies than Australian research (see Albæk, 2011; Hallin, 1992). These findings nonetheless point to a decline in the percentage of news stories quoting experts following the 2007 election. This decline is also supported by my analysis of front-page coverage (Figure 7.1) and the information content of policy news (Figure 7.2 and 7.4). Together, we can see that press

reporting of policy issues was doing little to foster policy deliberation in the 2010 and 2013 campaigns. The exclusion of expert opinions is a pointed example of this.

Including expert views in news coverage is important. Eric Albæk (2011, p. 338) explains that the move towards more interpretive styles of journalism means that experts are needed to narrate and interpret issues and events. International research has demonstrated that the number of experts or profession sources quoted in news has been rising across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Albæk, 2011; Hallin, 1992). However, when it comes to news coverage of policy issues, Australia is different to other western democracies. Australian newspapers initially followed the trend toward the use of more expert commentary in political coverage, but deviated in 2010.

The disparity between my Australian research and the international literature is intriguing. It is a new finding that differs to existing Australian and international studies. Australian research has shown a decline in the percentage of experts quoted in election coverage between 2001 and 2007 (Young, 2011, pp. 180-181). But my focus on policy coverage reveals a new story about expert voices in election reporting. Rather than just a general decline over the 2000s, there was defining moment in which policy reporting changed. We can explain these findings by placing them in the broader campaign context.

As stated earlier, the economic decline of media business models has consequences for policy journalism. Organisational pressures combined with the importance of "obtaining information rich in news values" lead many journalists to depend upon political actors for information over other sources (Manning, 2001, p. 55). As noted in chapter 5, the tight deadlines of the news cycle and constant need for "breaking news'" from the campaign trail mean that it is much easier for journalists to use press material they receive from a political adviser than identify, meet/call, and interview an expert on a policy topic (see S. Jackson, 2010). With fewer journalists and less specialist reporters in Australian newsrooms (see Meade, 2016), reporters may not have the same specialised contacts to draw upon when researching a story. Therefore, journalists may have been less likely to seek information from experts because they simply had more

work and less time to do so. Consequently, voters are provided with fewer perspectives on policy problems and issues.

Conclusion

Former politician John Hewson wrote that "2010 may rate as one of the most disappointing years in [Australian] politics…[the] year was a policy-free zone" (Hewson, 2010, p. 62). Critics and commentators made similar claims throughout the 2010 and 2013 elections, observing that Australian campaigns were largely "policy-free", void of information, scant with details, driven by slogans, and lacking any policy discussion (for example see Neales, 2010, p. 24; Rayner & Wanna, 2015, p. 17-18; T. Wright, 2010, p. 22). In this chapter, I showed that many of the claims are supported empirically.

In the 2010 and 2013 elections, policy news was reported differently. The biggest and most consequential shift was the decline in detailed policy stories. In 2010, news outlets published fewer detailed policy stories and included fewer details like policy costs in their coverage compared to coverage from the 2007 election. The decline in the information content of policy news continued in the 2013 campaign. At the same time, policy news was less likely to appear on the front-page. In other words, voters were less likely to find detailed policy stories in newspaper coverage and less likely to find policy-orientated news articles on the front-page.

The policy story was also told differently. It was more focused on the personalities of politicians, with more articles reporting on personality traits in their coverage of tax, health and education issues. There were also fewer expert voices narrating policy stories. In isolation, the various findings say little about the state of policy coverage. Together, they demonstrate that the period following the 2007 election was one of significant change in Australian policy journalism.

Defending the Australian media's election reporting in 2010, journalists blamed politicians and their advisers for the lack of policy information, for releasing policies late in the campaign, and for not allowing sufficient time for in-depth questioning (S. Jackson, 2010, p. 32). This was a strong argument to make. Political campaigning did

appear to have some implications for the way policy news was reported. This was especially true when it came to the inclusion of personality driven narratives in news coverage. As campaigning strategies focused on politicians' personalities and character, so too did news coverage. But these findings must be considered within the broader context in which policy reporting took place.

At the same time the quality of policy reporting was declining, political campaigning and Australian journalism were transforming. Campaigning was becoming more targeted as political parties employed "big data" strategies (Mills, 2014, pp. 212-213). Policies were released in a very tightly controlled manner as political parties adopted small target strategies (see Johnson et al., 2015a, p. 9). And campaigns were more personality centred (Kefford, 2013, p. 143). Rather than using traditional forms of communication, political parties were also bypassing the news media to communicate directly with voters using social media platforms (Lukamto & Carson, 2016, pp. 191-193). As new campaigning methods and tools emerged, policy information was communicated differently by the Australian media.

The period 2007 to 2013 was also a dire economic time for Australia's press organisations (Carson, 2014; Carson & Muller, 2017; Young & Carson, 2018; Zion, Dodd, et al., 2016). As discussed in the next chapter, the economic decline of Australia's traditional media had important consequences for policy news and election reporting.

By including less political or policy information in their reporting, news outlets were doing a disservice to the Australian public sphere. If there is less information in news coverage, then there are arguably fewer informed citizens participating in public policy debates. The next chapter summarises the key trends in policy reporting across the twenty-first century, links the findings together, explains the factors contributing to these trends, situates my findings in their broader theoretical context, and identifies the implications of these results for civic engagement, political trust, and Australian democracy.

Chapter 8: Reporting Policy in the Twenty-first Century

Australia's traditional media organisations are "at the crossroads" (Simons, 2012). Business models are collapsing and newsrooms are shrinking (Carson, 2014, 2016; Gawenda, 2012, pp. 1-5; Scott, 2015; Simons, 2012, pp. 7-10; 2015a; Zion, Dodd, et al., 2016, p. 117). But these were not the only challenges Australia's news organisations faced. Political campaigns have become more focused on the strategic-targeting of messages rather than creating informed deliberation in the public sphere (see Mills, 2014, p. 18). In this new style of campaigning, policy information is more tightly controlled (see Mills, 2014). It is within this context that I examined media reporting of tax, health and education policy issues.

In academic and popular discourse, news outlets are charged with "dumbing down" political content by focusing on the trivial over the substantive, framing politics around strategy, and neglecting policy issues and substantive debates (for example discussion see Graber, 2012; Lawrence, 2000; Neveu, 2002; Patterson, 1993, pp. 24-27,93; Thussu, 2007, pp. 10-11; Trimble & Sampert, 2004; Williams, 2014, p. 110). Yet, there is a lack of Australian research specifically examining these claims in relation to the reporting of policy issues in Australian elections in the twenty-first century. Very few studies have examined policy news over several campaign periods, platforms, and policy domains. Hence, there is limited empirical evidence to support many of the Australian claims about policy reporting beyond one election cycle or one news platform. Therefore, this thesis fills an important gap in the Australian and international scholarship. It aimed to address this gap in the literature by examining *what, if anything, has happened to traditional news media reporting of policy issues during Australian federal elections in the twenty-first century?*

The empirical data shows that the overall quality of policy reporting declined in the twenty-first century. In short, policy news in later campaigns contained less policy information, quoted fewer voices, and focused more on non-substantive elements than coverage from earlier elections. Across the 2000s, news outlets provided policy journalism that made a limited contribution to informed debate in the public sphere. If policy reporting is evaluated against the standards journalists promised to uphold—

standards that are based on public sphere ideals—then the evidence suggests that policy reporting was falling short. This dearth of detail and absence of diverse viewpoints in policy coverage has implications for the contest of ideas and, by extension, the quality of public policy debates in the Australian public sphere. Yet, journalists were not entirely to blame for the decline in the quality of policy news. A range of factors including commercial pressures in the media landscape and changes in political campaigning adversely impacted on policy reporting in the twenty-first century. As shown in chapter 7, many of the trends in policy journalism were more pronounced following periods of immense commercial turmoil in the media sector.

The following chapter discusses my findings within the broader context of the background, theory and literature. The first section of this chapter discusses and summarises the key trends in policy coverage in relation to the existing scholarship. The second section examines how market pressures in the media landscape, changes in political campaigning, and audience demand shape policy reporting. The third section examines the broader implications my findings pose for the vibrancy of Australian democracy. The final section offers some concluding remarks and identifies avenues for further research.

Key Findings and Trends in Policy Reporting, 2001-2013

1. *There were fewer detailed policy news stories in latter election cycles than earlier campaigns, especially in the 2010 and 2013 elections.*

In the news quality literature, political journalism scholars argue the news media fail to report on matters of policy substance (see for example Benoit et al., 2013, pp. 206-207; Entman, 1996; Graber, 2012, pp. 46-47, 56-60). Patterson (1993), W. L. Bennett (2012) and Entman (1996) contend that, with the rise of horserace/game narratives and shift towards interpretive forms of journalism, the policy substance of news coverage has diminished over time. To test these claims, I examined the policy information in election news and found many arguments to be substantiated. Chapter 4 showed that news coverage contained fewer policy details and less information with each election this century. In chapter 7, I found that the percentage of detailed news stories declined

dramatically in the 2010 election and 2013 campaigns. In short, I found that the 2007 election marked a decisive turning point in the way the media reported policy matters. Together, the findings support the argument that there was a decline in the overall quality of policy reporting provided by the press in Australian elections. To borrow Cushion's (2012, p.2) term, there were simply fewer policy stories of "informative quality" during latter election campaigns. These findings are concerning, especially given that the media act as a conduit of information for those inside and outside politics (see for discussion Dowding & Martin, 2017, pp. 174-176; Kingdon, 1984, pp. 61-64). But the findings are not unique to Australia and are largely consistent with international scholarship.

Research on election reporting in other western liberal democracies also yielded similar results. For example, Doris Graber finds that, while the breadth of political news may be adequate, reporting is often very "thin", lacking substance and depth (Graber, 2012, pp. 46-47, 56-60). W. L. Bennett et al. (2007) and the earlier works of Entman (1996) have observed similar patterns in the decline in information substance of political news. Indeed, Entman (1996, pp. 78-79) has been highly critical of political journalism. He argues that reporting trivialises policy issues thereby reducing policy debates to a "clash of simple slogans (Entman, 1996, pp. 78-79). These criticisms were largely substantiated by my examination of policy news content. Even though newspaper policy stories were getting longer over the twenty-first century, press coverage was publishing fewer policy details (chapter 4).

While technological and format constraints are a determinant in the news selection process (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 52-53), the conventional wisdom that the media do not report policies because they have limited time or space to do so is not supported by my observations. With more space than ever before, newspaper outlets were making a choice to publish content on other aspects of the election over substantive policy information. This shows that other factors beyond space and time constraints shaped how policy news was reported.

In liberal democratic theory, the media are viewed as an important platform for the dissemination of information that allows citizens to educate themselves about politics

(McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). While the amount of information that citizens should be expected to retain is the source of many theoretical debates in the academic scholarship (for example see Schudson, 1998; Zaller, 2003), the media are nonetheless a crucial "communication device" that disseminate information between actors in the political system (Dowding & Martin, 2017, p. 176; Kingdon, 1984, pp. 61-64). In this "ideal" view, the media facilitate rational-critical debate by providing the necessary information about key political issues that enables citizens to form views on public affairs issues (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). When details or facts are omitted from election and policy coverage, the robustness of public debate suffers and, by extension, deliberation and participation in the public sphere is constrained.

2. *Policy reporting was increasingly dominated by the most powerful political voices, and failed to include a diverse range of viewpoints.*

News outlets published fewer detailed policy stories, but they also quoted fewer voices in their coverage. Hall et al. (1978), Manning (2001, pp. 14-17,138-139), Johnson-Cartee (2005), W. L. Bennett et al. (2007), and Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2009) argued that the news media tend to depend upon powerful politicians because they are viewed as holding credible information and are often conveniently available to respond to requests in a timely matter (through their press officials) to meet the tight deadlines of the news cycle. Australian research by Denemark and his colleagues (2007) drew similar conclusions from their examination of television news coverage in the 2001 election. Powerful political sources dominate the news cycle, with the same political elites continually quoted in news coverage (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, pp. 231-233).

According to Zaller (2003, p. 122), "journalists should routinely seek to cover non-emergency but important issues by means of coverage that is intensely focused, dramatic, and entertaining and *that affords the parties and responsible interest groups, especially political parties, ample opportunity for expression of opposing views*" (emphasis added). But the Australian media provided limited opportunity for diverse views to be heard.

As demonstrated by chapter five's results, the more prominent and powerful the person was within a major political party, the more likely they were to be mentioned or quoted in policy news. The conclusions presented in chapter 5 were consistent with the theories of Hall and his colleagues (1978) regarding the role of "primary definers" in news coverage and the "hierarchy of credibility" used in source selection. I found that politicians higher on the "hierarchy", such as major party leaders, were more likely to be heard in policy news than other less powerful figures, such as backbenchers or minor party candidates. Thus, these powerful figures had a unique opportunity to shape policy discourse while other groups, including minor party candidates, interest groups and the public, were excluded from policy debates.

This poses a significant threat to the vibrancy of public debate. Put simply by Manning (2001, p. 137), "the health and vitality of the public sphere depends upon the success of a diverse range of political groups and organisations in submitting their arguments and evidence to the news media." This includes the ability for a diverse range of views, including dissenting opinions, to be given a platform for communication to the citizenry (McNair, 2011, pp. 18-25). Moreover, citizens should engage with political debates as both spectators *and participants* (McNair, 2000, p. 105). Yet, my results show that media coverage rarely provided citizens with the opportunity to participate in policy deliberations. Fewer people could make their voices heard above the noise of powerful political elites during Australian election campaigns in the 2000s. Major party politicians dominated policy discussions, influenced the agenda, marginalised dissenting viewpoints, and consequently limited the ability of citizenry to learn about different perspectives on different policy issues. This also had a secondary consequence of introducing what I categorise as bias into media reporting.

Allegations of media bias were prominent in discussions of Australian election and political reporting (for example see Aitkin, 1972; Simms & Bolger, 2000; Tiffen, 1987). Because of Australia's high concentration of media ownership, bias has arguably a bigger impact in the Australia media landscape than other more diverse media markets such as the US (Young, 2011, p. 232). Some scholars view the Australian news media as "quite centrist" in their reporting of political news (J. S. Gans & Leigh, 2012, pp. 140-141). Moreover, examinations of media bias in Australia have shown that the press

are generally less partisan than their UK or US counterparts (for example see Australian Press Council, 2007, p. 38; J. S. Gans & Leigh, 2012; Turner, 2005, pp. 105-109). Yet, other Australian scholars have contested these claims (see Mayer et al., 1973). For example, Simms and Bolger (2000, pp. 29-30) found that the Coalition received more positive coverage than the Australian Labor Party in the 1998 election. Similarly, Denemark and his colleagues (2007, p. 102) showed that news coverage of the 2001 campaign tended to provide more airtime to Coalition rather than Labor leaders. They argued that Australia's news media (television news) focused almost exclusively on major party leaders, largely excluding minor parties from the discussion (Denemark et al., 2007, pp. 95-98). Young's (2011, pp. 251-254) study also drew similar conclusions, with the results demonstrating that Coalition voices received more airtime on election news broadcasts that other politicians. Chapter 5 analysed these claims through its examination of the share of voices in policy news.

Consistent with Denemark and his colleagues (2007, p. 102), the evidence presented in chapter 5 demonstrated that there was a degree of bias in the reporting of political sources. I found newspaper coverage was more likely to include the voices of Coalition politicians than Labor or minor party candidates. The voices quoted in policy coverage were not only the most powerful political figures, but they were also largely from one political party. Policy coverage largely favoured one side of the political spectrum. In this sense, the results support the argument that the Australian news media provided a very limited platform for diverse debate to occur during elections in the twenty-first century. It was a platform accessibly to a few, not the many. As noted by Tiffen and colleagues (2014, p. 376), McNair (2011), and Dekavalla and Jelen-Sanchez (2016), the quantity and diversity of sources can often act as a proxy for news quality. In this respect, the quality of policy journalism during in election campaigns was falling very short. Without a range of partisan views expressed in policy reporting, public opinion and political knowledge suffers because the information made available does not paint a complete picture about the issues being debated.

Policy news stories rarely quoted more than one political voice. And this was also the case with expert sources. My results differed to international research, which suggests that there is something uniquely narrow about Australian political reporting. In his

longitudinal studies of Danish news coverage, Albæk (2011) found that the presence of expert commentary in news coverage increased over time. However, as demonstrated in chapter 5, experts were rarely heard in Australian news reporting of tax, health and education issues. Chapter 7 also showed that there were fewer stories quoting an expert in the 2010 and 2013 elections. While the percentage of stories that quoted experts increased between 2001 and 2007, the percentage of stories including expert commentary declined in 2010 and 2013. In other words, policy news was more likely to quote an expert in earlier election cycles rather than recent campaigns. Considered in the broader context of the other findings, the empirical data suggests that the 2007 election marked a turning point in policy reporting.

Australian news coverage also rarely included the public—who the news is ostensibly for— in policy reporting. As demonstrated by my findings, the public were largely observers rather than participants in political and election debates (see work of J. Lewis et al., 2005, pp. 48-50; McNair, 2011, pp. 105-121). This has implications for participation in Australian democracy because the absence of ordinary citizens' viewpoints in news coverage often hinders political engagement (J. Lewis et al., 2005, pp. 48-50; McNair, 2000, pp. 105-121). However, it was the medium that also shaped how the policy story was narrated. For example, chapter 6 showed that citizens were more likely to be quoted on popular media platforms— such as tabloid newspaper— than in broadsheet news coverage. In this sense, tabloid newspapers provided a more accessible public sphere than their broadsheet counterparts because tabloid reporting provided citizens the opportunity to express their views on policy matters in their own words. Overall, citizens and voters were rarely quoted in policy news in the twenty-first century. Even though many policy issues may have had a direct impact upon voters, they were often unable to have their opinions heard in these policy debates.

3. *Policy information was reported as part of a broader story focused on personality, strategy, contest, and the political game. There was more strategic, game, personality and contest framed news coverage in later election cycles than earlier campaigns.*

A central criticism of the scholarly discourse on political news quality was that the news media focus too heavily on strategy, the horserace, and game over issues of policy substance (see Benoit et al., 2013, pp. 205-206; Lawrence, 2000, pp. 93-95). Critics allege that strategic and game framing is detrimental to news quality and the public sphere because it limits the amount of policy information in public debate by focusing on non-substantive content; presents information in a conflict frame that focuses on the contest over issue substance; and results in increased political cynicism amongst voters (see Borah, 2011; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, pp. 230-234; D. Jackson, 2010, 2011; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008). Examining news coverage of welfare policy, Regina Lawrence (2000) found that journalists were more likely to frame their news reports by discussing the political contest or political strategy (Lawrence, 2000, pp. 93-94). Lawrence observed that:

> Campaign trail discussions of welfare reform were rarely presented in a way that served to deepen the public's understanding of the issue; instead, the aim of coverage seemed to be to deepen their understanding of the strategic reasons that politicians supported or opposed welfare reform (Lawrence, 2000, p. 102).

Other empirical research has also concluded that politics is frequently reported in game, strategic and horserace terms (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, pp. 33-35). For example, Trimble and Sampert (2004, p. 53) also found that newspapers "embraced a game frame" to the "neglect of campaign issues and the ideological distinctions between parties." Moreover, Dan Jackson (2011, p. 188) argued that there was substantial policy focused coverage during the period analysed; however, coverage was "generally tainted by the presence of strategic frames." He concluded that politicians often steered the discussions to elements that fit the strategic frame such as focusing on the internal divisions and the contest between parties (D. Jackson, 2011, pp. 188-189). Moreover,

Hollander (2006, p. 570) suggested that when presented using these frames, policy is viewed as just another tool to buy votes. Similarly, Nicholas Valentino and his colleagues (2001, pp. 104-105) argued that "strategy-based coverage" reduces the amount of information people acquire about policy issues and leads to more negative evaluations of candidates and political campaigns. Yet, some scholars held more positive assessments of game and strategic framing (see Iyengar et al., 2004, pp. 173-174; Matthews et al., 2012).

The results of my study were largely consistent with previous election reporting research, which also observed a similar trend towards a greater use of conflict, game, and strategic narratives in election news (studies such as Lawrence, 2000; Hollander, 2006; Young, 2011, pp. 186-192). News outlets did focus heavily on elements of the contest, game, or strategy in their policy coverage. In chapter 6, I found that over half of all television news stories contained a discussion of opinion polls, campaign strategy, or adopted game/contest language. Furthermore, the evidence presented in chapter 4 suggested that percentage of election policy stories that included a strategic, contest or game frame increased over the 2000s, peaking in 2007. However, my study added a new finding to this scholarly debate. The use of these strategic, contest, and game frames in policy coverage tapered off in the 2010 and 2013 elections. In addition, chapter 7 showed that there were also more personality-focused narratives in policy news from the 2010 and 2013 elections. Chapter 7 showed that as this rise in personality narratives was occurring, there was a big decline in the number of stories containing detailed policy information. Therefore, the conclusions drawn in chapters 4, 6, and 7, further support the argument that policy issues were reported as part of a broader story that focused heavily on personality, strategy, and the political game.

Including strategic, contest, game or personality narratives in policy reporting is not inherently problematic. As J. Scott Matthews and his colleagues (2012) found, longer stories reporting polls can often be "richer in substantive content than comparable non-poll stories" thereby informing voters. Polling stories may also engage voters through entertainment driven reporting (see J. Scott Matthews et al., 2012). While critics lament this approach, entertainment values "[hold] the promise of increasing the number of people involved in the nation's business" (Zaller, 2003, p. 129). Other scholars have

also drawn similar conclusions regarding the potential entertainment news values to attract attention and engage otherwise politically inattentive news audiences (see Baum, 2002, 2003).

Making policy news entertaining is not a problematic goal. As observed by Dan Jackson (2011, p. 184), even news stories that employ a strategic frame contained some information about policy issues without "displacing issues completely." As Zaller (2003) suggests, political news should be engaging, alarming and entertaining because it allows news organisations to promote learning, in turn developing the political knowledge of the citizenry. Matthew Baum (2002) also argued that we should not fear soft news or infotainment because it has the potential to expose "entertainment-seeking audiences" to political issues and policy problems (quoted in Brandenburg, 2007, p. 222).

The problem emerges when entertainment values marginalise other aspects of reporting, such as policy information (see Cushion, 2012, p. 59). When entertainment values distort information or compromise the impartiality of reporting, then this news becomes of less democratic value to citizens because they only receive a partial picture or a "misinformed" view of the world (Cushion, 2012, p. 59). The findings suggest this was the case with policy reporting in the twenty-first century. Chapters 7 demonstrated that there were fewer detailed policy stories as reporting focused more heavily on aspects of personality and character. In this sense, these narratives were "crowding the centre stage" at the expense of serious policy analysis (see W. L. Bennett's, 2012, p. 45).

This has implications for the way scholars and commentators view policy news and its ability to contribute meaningful information to public debate. In chapter 4, I showed that when policy announcements were reported in news coverage, they were more likely to be framed in terms of strategic significance in the political game. As suggested by previous experimental research, strategic framing reduces the amount of policy information retained by voters (Valentino et al., 2001, pp. 104-105). By portraying the election as a game, journalists invite news audiences to conceive the election in simplified terms, with players, objectives, rules, and scores (see Lawrence, 2000;

Trimble & Sampert, 2004). When these frames alter the focus of coverage from the substantive to the trivial, policy discussion becomes an absent feature.

4. *Policy reporting differed across popular and elite media, with the format, news audience and commercial interests impacting policy coverage. Elite media were more likely to provide detailed reporting that would inform voters about policy matters.*

Different platforms and media devoted different levels of attention to policy issues, provided different policy information, and used different voices and frames to articulate the policy story. News organisations write for their audiences, making assumptions about what their audiences want which often shapes the political content found in their coverage (see Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Entman, 2005, p. 60-61). Conversely, news audiences make assumption about different media. Those who are interested in political news tend to choose the media that devote the most space to political discussions, with "political news junkies" preferring public service broadcasters over commercial channels, and broadsheets over tabloids (Young, 2011, pp. 27-29). Different news organisations tailor their political content based upon these assumptions. Chapter 6 showed this was the case with policy coverage in the 2000s.

In their comparison of television and newspaper coverage, Sheppard and Bawden (1997, p. 225) argued that television news only provided basic descriptions and stories that were "more visually dramatic" than informative. Sheppard and Bawden (1997, pp. 226-227) concluded newspapers provided more in depth coverage of issues, such as war and conflict, than television news reports. Looking at political news, Australian research also found that television news programs provided less political and election news content than newspapers (for example Young, 2011, pp. 174-175).

Congruent with these studies, the evidence presented in chapter 6 showed that television performed poorly when it came to the delivery of policy information. In chapter 6, I compared to newspaper and television reporting of tax, health and education issues. I found that television contained less detailed policy stories than press reports. Television outlets also devoted less space in their coverage to policy discussion than print outlets,

with fewer major policy stories. If news audiences wanted policy information and detailed policy discussion, they were better served by reading a newspaper than by watching a television news program. Again, this was a clear indication of the cleavages between more popular and elite media coverage of policy issues. The medium clearly matters here.

In his study of political news on television and newspaper coverage, Dan Jackson (2011, pp. 177-179) found that television news was far more likely than newspapers reports to frame political debates in strategic terms. The results presented in chapter 6 supported this argument. In chapter 6, I found that television news coverage of policy issues contained more strategic, game and contest language. Televisions news narrated stories differently, and included different voices in their reportage. Compared to newspaper coverage, television coverage quoted more citizens and experts. Together with the earlier findings, we can see that the medium matters to informed debate in the public sphere about policy issues. It also matters when providing citizens, politicians and experts a platform to contribute to policy debates.

Commercial interests also dictated how policy was reported during elections. This was evident when we examined the differences between public and commercial broadcasters, and tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. In his study of public service media, Cushion (2012, pp. 203-204) argued that public service media provided more content of "democratic value" than news platforms in "market-driven systems." Cushion (2012, pp. 203-204) suggested that "news of democratic value" can be defined as news of "informative quality" that "conveys information likely to enhance people's understanding of the world on issues likely to empower them as citizens in a democracy." Drawing upon the democratic value concept, I compared policy reporting in public service and commercial news programs, and tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.

Although not strictly comparable to Cushion's (2012) study, my findings were broadly consistent with his argument. The evidence suggested that elite media platforms—public service broadcasters and broadsheet newspapers—provided more policy reporting of democratic value than popular media outlets, such as tabloid newspapers

and commercial television news programs. To put it another way, the elite media were more likely to provide policy content in election campaigns that would foster informed political discourse compared with content found on popular news platforms. There were striking differences between tabloid and broadsheet, and public and commercial broadcasters. Drawing comparable conclusions to the work of Cushion and Thomas (2015, pp. 16-17), Fraile and Shanto Iyengar (2014) and Beecher (2005, pp. 8-26),[70] my observations in chapter 6 demonstrated that, broadsheet newspapers and public service broadcasters provided more detailed policy stories, devoted more space to the reporting of policy issues, and quoted more experts and other voices in their policy coverage. The evidence suggested that commercial interests and audience demand clearly influenced the way the policy stories were conveyed to the public, a point I return to in the next section.

It was clear that many of the trends identified in this study were also supported by US focused research. Drawing comparable conclusions to my study, Sotirovic and McLeod's (2008, pp. 28-29) analysis of US broadcasters found that public broadcasters provided more substantive coverage of policy issues than commercial news programs. Similarly, Kerbel and colleagues' (2000) study of US television news also showed that public service channels provided more substantive issue coverage than the commercial television networks. However, Kerbel et al. (2000) noted that public broadcasters were increasingly framing their election coverage as a political contest rather than a battle of policy ideas. This suggests that public service news channels in the US were slowly adopting many of the same commercial techniques and reporting styles in their election reporting (see Cushion, 2012, pp. 120-122).

Looking at other European media systems, it was clear that same trends emerged whereby public service media provided distinctively different election coverage than their commercial counterparts (see Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). For example, Strömbäck and van Aelst (2010, p. 51) found that public service television news contained more policy coverage than commercial media, including tabloid newspapers.

[70] These scholars argued that broadsheets and public broadcasters generally provide more hard news, including political information, than tabloid newspapers and commercial stations (Beecher, 2005, pp. 8-26; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014; Cushion and Thomas, 2015, pp. 16-17).

Overall, they concluded that public service television news programs provided more substantive issue coverage, with less personalised and game-framed reporting than commercial news outlets (Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010, p. 51). This thesis' findings are broadly congruent with these arguments. Collectivelty, these studies and my research show that publicly funded news programs provide a distintively different type and, in many respects, quality of election coverage than commercial news outlets (see Cushion, 2012, p. 122). In short, publicly funded media are "leading the way" in their reporting of elections (Cushion, 2012, p. 124). This raises a number of questions for us to consider about the state of the public sphere in Australia.

We can see that Australia's "elite publics"—those who read Australian broadsheets and watch public service television—were provided with more informative policy content in terms of the policy details the coverage contained. In other words, there was an information gap between "those who know" and "those who accept" (Keane, 1999, p. 5). A large gap between the elite audience who read/watch detailed policy news in broadsheets and public service news programs, and the popular audience who were less likely to be exposed to policy discussion on commercial television programs and in tabloid newspapers. News organisations were arguably disempowering tabloid and commercial news audiences, and limiting their capacity to participate in informed political discourse. As discussed later in this chapter, there are broader implications for political knowledge and democratic engagement. Yet, attributing all the woes of political reporting exclusively to news outlets and Australian journalists overlooks the importance of politicians and political parties in influencing policy reporting.

5. *News coverage largely mirrored the way politicians paid attention to policy issues and discussed policy matters, demonstrating how politicians can drive the media agenda and shape reporting.*

Politicians shaped the way the policy story was told in the twenty-first century through their actions, campaign techniques, and words. When politicians paid less attention to policy issues or provided fewer policy details in their speeches, media reporting followed this lead. Chapter 4 focused on the attention, framing and information provided in policy news and campaign launch speeches. The evidence suggested that

much of what the news media reported mirrored how politicians engaged in policy discussions. This was typified by the attention politicians and the media paid to different policy issues. Media attention to tax, health and education policy issues followed political attention (see chapter 4). In this sense, politicians often drive the policy agenda. This relationship was also evident in other aspects of reporting.

When politicians provided fewer policy details in their speeches, newspapers provided less policy information in their reports. In chapter 4, we saw that politicians spoke less about policy issues provided fewer details about their policy proposals in their speeches across the 2000s. The media followed this pattern. Chapter 4 demonstrated that the media provided fewer policy details and information in their reporting with each election. This adds further evidence to support the argument that journalists are not solely to blame for the lack of policy coverage. As noted by Tiffen (1989, pp. 197-198), to attribute all the perils of democracy to the media ignores the role that political elites have in shaping political debates. If politicians and political provide less information available to the media, then there is simply less information available to report.

In his study of political news, Dan Jackson (2011, pp. 188-189) concluded that politicians often steered or framed their comments in a way that was easily reported using strategic frame. Consistent with Dan Jackson's (2011) study, I also found that politicians were also an important source of strategic-framed news. Politicians often framed their policy announcements using contest narratives, and frequently emphasised the importance of their policies for specific groups of voters. As a result, media reporting would frame these announcements in strategic and contest terms. Journalists drew upon elements of conflict in much the same way as politicians did in their campaign launch speeches, to animate the policy discussion by pitting the parties against one another in a "battle" over policies. When we examine these three aspects of reporting, the findings suggest that what politicians say about policy issues clearly matters for the quality of policy reporting. Collectively, the findings support previous theories and research on agenda setting, which also found that national leaders were highly influential in shaping the agenda of media coverage (for summary see Dearing & Rogers, 1996, pp. 33-39; McCombs, 2005, 2014, pp. 111-133

There is a mutually dependent relationship between politicians and the media. On the one hand, politicians want to be included in news coverage to ensure their visibility in the public sphere. To do so, politicians adopt language, narratives and frames in their speeches that are easily accommodated in election coverage. This was evident by the widespread use of soundbites and slogans in campaigns across the 2000s, especially during the 2013 election (chapter 4). On the hand, journalists need politicians for information which they use to develop their stories. As Manning (2001, p. 55) notes, the "frenetic scramble to meet the deadlines" combined with resource and time-constraints placed upon journalists means that they become dependent upon political sources and their press material because it can be "easily fashioned into news copy"

To some theorists, the dependent relationship between politicians and journalists is problematic because this merely serves elite minority interests over the interests of the majority (McNair, 2009, pp. 24-25). According to this view, journalists should go beyond just the reporting of facts and events. In the absence of information, journalists should find the story, uncover policy material, and provide interpretation to speculate on policy outcomes. Failure to do so represents lazy journalism. Yet, this view fails to recognise the everyday realities of the election environment and pressures journalists face.

In a tightly controlled election environment, the news media are largely reliant upon political elites for information to meet their news deadlines. If political elites provide less policy information or focus on other non-substantive issues, then it is also reasonable to expect media coverage to follow the same pattern. Put simply by Tiffen (1989, pp. 197-198):

> It is important to grasp the balance between the news media's independence and dependence, their vulnerability as well as their limited autonomy… It is silly to lay all the evils of the political system at the feet of the media (Tiffen, 1989, pp. 197-198).

To attribute the problems in reporting to lazy journalism overlooks the dependent relationship between politicians and journalists. Moreover, it ignores the obvious

commercial pressures contemporary journalists face. It is these pressures that shape policy reporting.

Market Pressures, Political Campaigning, and Audience Demand

This study has found that the policy reporting provided in elections in the 2000s was limited in its ability to inform voters on policy matters. But to lay blame at the feet of journalists overlooks broader problems in the media and political landscape that were influential here. Political communication is largely shaped by 1) the structures of the news industry, 2) the style of political campaigning, and 3) news audiences (see Norris, 2000, pp. 13-21). This section examines the commercial and political factors influencing news coverage. It synthesises some of the previous themes, literature, and discussions of earlier chapters to examine how each of these elements may influence policy reporting in the 2000s.

1. Market Pressure, Commercial Upheaval, and Digital Disruption

Commercial news organisations are fighting for their survival in the twenty-first century. A point I have made throughout this thesis. As outlined in chapter 1, these organisations "no longer have a monopoly over advertising, or even the delivery of news" (Carson, 2014, p. 728). Circulation and viewership figures are falling, fewer people are paying for news content, stock prices are plummeting, and advertising revenues are in decline (see Carson, 2013b, p. 38; 2015a, p. 1026; Tiffen, 2010b, p. 84; Young, 2009, p. 152). Moreover, the fragmentation of their advertising revenue across digital and traditional platforms means that competition has driven down the "unit price" for advertising thereby eroding the revenue streams of traditional news organisations (Carson, 2014, p. 729). In total, the newspaper sector alone has lost close to $A 1.1 billion in revenue streams (Carson, 2015a, p. 1024). The business models of Australia's traditional media organisations are clearly collapsing. The statistics paint a picture of a traditional news sector in turmoil and policy news coverage appears to be paying the price

According to Alex Jones (2009, pp. 3-10) the economic decline of the traditional news media poses the most significant threat to what he calls the "iron core" of news reporting. The "iron core" is everything necessary to feed democracy, including information and hard news which "gives the core its weight" (A.S Jones, 2009, pp. 2-10). Yet, the rise of digital platforms, so it is claimed, has undermined the business models that support the creation of "iron core" journalism (A. S. Jones, 2009, pp. 17-18). Consequently, as the long-term economic viability of traditional news organisations declines, the public lose their reliable sources of information and "accountability news" (A. S. Jones, 2009, pp. 26-27). While new forms of digital journalism may replace traditional journalism, Alex Jones (2009, pp. 21-22) argued that we are losing hard news or "iron core" journalism faster than new forms of journalism are replacing it.

Declining revenues and rising digital competition has disrupted the operations of traditional news organisations and prompted shifts to new organisational models. This was compounded by new digital-only entrants to the Australian media market, including *Crikey* and *BuzzFeed*, and the prevalence of aggregating news sites, such as *Google News*. In 2012, Fairfax Media launched its "digital first" business model to mitigate its losses, which has resulted in the "transformation of newsrooms, introduction of compact-format newspapers and digital subscriptions for its mastheads," and a greater emphasis on publication on digital platforms (Lannin & Hobday, 2012; Myllylahti, 2014). News Corp Australia also pursued a similar approach to restructure their news operation ("News Limited shake-up: as it happened," 2012). In 2012, News Corp Australia CEO Kim Williams noted that they would:

> Adopt a one city, one newsroom strategy with a focus on producing the best quality local content essential to meeting our new challenges…This single newsroom concept will transform our existing metro newsrooms…It will unlock the rival knowledge and connections. It will give us local strength which cannot be matched by any other news organisation in Australia ("News Limited shake-up: as it happened," 2012).

Williams argued that news outlets need to adopt a mixed digital and print focused news model that "responds to consumers" and ensures that high quality content is "pervasively available" ("News Limited shake-up: as it happened," 2012). The adoption of new business models resulted in several waves of redundancies and job losses (Buchanan, 2013, pp. 15-17; Carson, 2016). These commercial developments had significant implications for the quality of political reporting.

The post-2007 period was important for the "iron core" of Australian journalism. As I noted in chapter 1, a substantial proportion of Australia's newspaper workforce was being made redundant over this period (Zion, Dodd, et al., 2016; Zion, Sherwood, et al., 2016). The results suggest that the implications for policy journalism were profound. Following the economic upheavals of 2007 and 2012, Australian journalism was —to use Alex Jones' (2009) terminology— being "hollowed out." Compared to earlier periods, there was less space for policy discussion in news articles, fewer major policy news stories, and less detailed policy reports in later campaigns (see chapter 4 and 7).

Widespread job losses and redundancies were also limiting the capacity of news organisations to report on policy news. In a 2017 Senate inquiry into the future of public interest journalism in Australia, the MEAA representative, Matthew Chester, noted that between 2007 and 2016 the Fairfax news organisation had spent approximately $A 455.5 million dollars on redundancy packages and exit payments (Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2017). Put simply, there are fewer people who are working harder with shorter time frames to meet the demands of the 24-hour news cycle (see Buchanan, 2013, pp. 20-21). The consequences of these changes were evident in my results.

The commercial upheaval between 2007 and 2012 coincided with many profound changes in policy reporting. For example, the evidence showed a sharp decline in the percentage of detailed policy stories, a decline in the number of policy articles that appeared on the front-page, and a decline in the use of expert commentary. There were also fewer policy details, such as policy costs, reported in these later campaigns. These trends appear to have begun during a period of immense upheaval in the media

landscape (see chapter 1). Economic turmoil in the media landscape appears to be undermining Australia's democratic culture, and news outlets' capacity to inform the public sphere about policy issues.

A lack of basic resources means the ability for news organisations to provide detailed policy information—and especially policy analysis—is severely hampered. This resulted in very superficial coverage of policies and policy issues. With a constant demand for news and increased workloads, there is simply not enough journalists report news or seek out complex policy information (see Buchanan, 2013, p. 20). Less specialist and more generalist reporters in news rooms means that reporters covering a round for months instead of years (Buchanan, 2013, p. 20; Meade, 2016). Consequently, journalists are covering policy areas with which they have limited prior knowledge or experience. Journalist with less knowledge and expertise in the policy field do not have the same established expert networks to rely upon (see Boesman, d'Haenens, & Van Gorp, 2015; Davis, 2009). This may explain why there were fewer expert sources and fewer detailed policy stories in later campaigns. The lack of specialist journalists also reflects a shift in the industry from pursuing quality news to pursuing profitable news.

Commercial news organisations are profit-seeking entities that are accountable to their shareholders and less concerned with public affairs news, which is often harder to sell (Hamilton, 2004, pp. 2-5). As Hamilton (2004, pp. 4-5) writes:

> Advertisers are willing to pay much more for association with search results about products or entertainment topics than about public affairs information. A person interested in product information is a valuable target for advertisers. The attention of a voter searching for information about global warming or tax policy is worth less on the Internet, however, since his or her influence on these topics is so small (Hamilton, 2004, pp. 4-5).

In a news market where circulation and readership is declining, every new reader or audience member is crucial. In this sense, commercial interests take precedent over the delivery of political content. This was evident by the way news organisations

incorporated strategic, contest and personality frames in their policy reports. Framing policy news around strategic, conflict and contest narratives is often motivated by profit seeking. As Shanto Iyengar and his colleagues (2004, pp. 173-174) observed, news audiences often seek out this form of strategic and horserace-focused news coverage over issue-centred reporting. By adopting these strategic and contest frames to report policy, news organisations are trying to ensure they attract and hold the attention of these audiences so they can sustain their business models. Commercial interest thus becomes more important than creating informative policy reporting. While commercial factors are amongst the most powerful forces shaping political reporting in the 2000s, political campaigning was also highly influential.

2. *Political Campaigning*

The emergence of new campaigning styles and strategies accounts for many the declines we have observed in the quality of policy reporting. In this new era of campaigning, political intuition has been replaced by data, polling and scientific methods; broad communication strategies have been replaced by carefully targeted strategies to win strategically important undecided voters; and the speeches and interviews have been supplanted by press releases, carefully designed leaks, and events designed largely for media coverage rather than expanding upon policy detail (Mills, 1986; 2014, pp. 19, 256-257).

Resource and time-poor journalists have become increasingly dependent upon political elites for policy information. For example, Justin Lewis and colleagues (2008a) examined the way public relations material shaped news coverage over a two-week period. They found that 17 per cent of broadcast news and close to one in five print news stories were wholly or mainly derived directly from public relations (PR) material, including verbatim copies of press releases (J. Lewis et al., 2008a, p. 7). Moreover, other studies have concluded that the political information found in news coverage was often determined by what political elites provided or said (J. Lewis et al., 2008a; J. Lewis et al., 2008b). Scholars have claimed that "the processes of news gathering" has become so tied up with political elites and public relations officials that "any meaningful independent journalistic activity by the media is the exception rather than the rule" (J. Lewis et al., 2008a, pp. 17-18). The lack of independent journalistic activity was highlighted in chapter 4, which showed media coverage largely mirrors what politicians say and what issues they pay attention to.

Australian news outlets relied heavily upon press releases and information subsidies from political parties in the 2007 and 2010 elections. For example, Young's (2011, p. 164) content analysis of the 2007 Australian election campaign found that 47 per cent of words in front-page newspaper stories on election announcements were from verbal statement made by party leaders, which were later transcribed into press releases. Additionally, this research found that 45 per cent of front-page newspaper stories on the day after the Coalition's tax policy launch were derived from statement and PR

material (Young, 2011, p. 164). On the day after the Labor's tax policy launch, 55 per cent of tax policy focused newspaper material was found to be derived from PR material, with a large proportion of policy and election material is simply a replication of PR statements (Young, 2011, p. 164).

Politicians and other political elites have capitalised on this, reshaping their approach to campaigning to fit the logic of the contemporary media landscape. This has consequences for political reporting. As J. Schultz (1994, p. 36) observes, "political actors have reshaped politics 'to fit the practices and expectations of the media, reducing politics and the discussion of ideas and issues to a media-driven format which maximises conflict, significance, timeliness and prominence'" (quoted in Hollander, 2006, p. 570).

With the competing demands for media attention, the packaging of messages becomes crucial to gaining favourable media coverage. This manifest itself in the adaptation of political rhetoric "to suitable soundbites of a suitable length and visuals with dramatic impact" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 53). But the soundbite culture has fostered an environment in which the policy substance of campaign launch speeches is neglected because political parties have become more concerned with messaging strategies. The result of chapter 4 and 7 demonstrated this point. Put simply, messaging took precedence over policy information. There was less policy content and fewer details in the speeches, which had a stronger focus on values, leadership, and the political contests in later campaigns.

A hallmark of postmodern political campaigns is the professionalisation of political communication (Norris, 2000, p. 159). Governments and political parties have increasingly become aware of the need to "package politics" to gain favourable media attention (B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 5-6), and has transformed Australian political parties affecting their structures, organisations, processes, and ways they engage with voters (Mills, 2014, pp. 18-19). Stephen Mills (2014, pp. 18-19) contends that the rise of the "professional campaign model" has displaced grassroots volunteers and amateurs, shifted the bureaucratic hierarchy of the party machine, and shifted the relationship between parties and voters (Mills, 2014, pp. 18-19). With the rise of the professional

model, parties could ignore or "take for granted many voters" while attempting to win over and woo those undecided voters or those voters who lived in locations of strategic importance (Mills, 2014, p. 19). Old traditions, such as the "stump" speech, have given way to new techniques, including polling, strategic-targeting of messages, direct marketing, television advertising, focus groups, online communication, and direct mail (Mills, 1986, pp. 3-17; 2014, pp. 18-20).

In such a controlled political environment, raw unpackaged policy information becomes a scare commodity. The consequences for political and policy reporting were evident by the lack of policy content in news coverage (see chapter 4, 6 and 7). Put succinctly by Bob Franklin (2004, p. 11), "image has supplanted substance; the manicure is everything." The presentation of policy information becomes more important than the actual information itself. Thus, it is very difficult for journalists to report on policy details because much of the policy material they receive has already been heavily "packaged" and shaped by media advisors.

Packing information oversimplifies issues, impoverishes political debate, and limits the direct knowledge citizens can gain about public affairs (B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 12-14). Instead of reporting the details, journalists become the subject of manipulation often leading to the reporting of "political spin" rather than raw policy material (see B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 12-14). Policies become subject to "packaging" with the desire effect of winning approval, and thus the line between information and "party propaganda" becomes increasingly blurred (B. Franklin, 2004, pp. 73,83).

The lack of policy detail was exacerbated when parties adopted small target strategies. As I have pointed out in chapter 1 and subsequent chapters, small target strategies are another characteristic of the postmodern political campaign in Australia, particularly since the 1993 federal election (see Tiffen, 2008, p. 119). This was the case in the 2001, 1998, and 1996 elections when both the Liberal and Labor parties adopted small target strategies (Young, 2011, p. 140). Party leaders in subsequent elections in the 2000s continued to adopt a small target approach. Small target approaches were evident in 2010 and more so in 2013 with the Liberal opposition under the leadership of Tony Abbott (Johnson et al., 2015a, p. 9). This had implications for policy reporting. For

example, chapter 4 and 7 showed that the number of detailed policy news stories declined in both campaigns. So the way politicians campaigned and the way they discussed issues clearly matters for the quality of policy coverage.

Fewer policy announcements meant fewer policy-centred stories to report. In the absence of raw policy information, journalists need to fill their news quotas with packaged information and other non-substantive elements, such as reporting on personalities, strategies and the horserace. These stories largely become framed around campaigning rather than the policy announcements. But audience demand also plays a role in shaping the topics media outlets cover.

3. Audience Demand for Policy and Election News

Another factor to consider when evaluating the trends in policy reporting is audience demand for political news. In one of the most extensive accounts of the political news audience in Australia, Young (2011, p. 40) found that only 20 per cent of Australians actively followed political news through the mass media with more than half turning to "elite" news sources (broadsheets and public broadcasters). Across the early 2000s, the highly politically-interested news audience were "a shrinking group" while those who were only "casually interested in following the election through the media grew" (Young, 2011, p. 41). Overall, fewer people were likely to follow election news through the media (Young, 2011, pp. 37-41).

Faced with ever shrinking news audiences, it is in the commercial interests of news organisations to focus on stories that have greater appeal in attracting and maintain audience figures over stories that have limited audience appeal (Iyengar et al., 2004, pp. 173-174). For example, news outlet may be more incentivised to provide entertaining stories about strategy, conflict or scandal over stories that include detailed policy analysis because they may perceive these entertainment driven narratives to be more appealing to their news audiences (see Iyengar et al., 2004, pp. 173-174). Thus, commercial interests and audience demand for political news are two factors that may explain the dearth of in-depth policy reporting (see chapters 4, 6 and 7).

Consulting, watching, reading and participating in politics takes a lesser priority in a person's daily routine as they follow other pursuits (Schudson, 1998, p. 312). Michael Schudson (1998, p. 310) argues that this is not problematic as citizens can still be engaged in public affairs and undertake their civic duty when required, but we should not expect them to be "political backpackers" informed about all the intricacies of politics. Schudson (1998, pp. 311-312) proposes a less active form of citizenship which he dubs the "monitorial citizen" whereby citizens are "defensive rather than proactive." A "monitorial citizen engages in environmental surveillance more than information gathering" (Schudson, 1998, pp. 310-311). A "monitorial citizen" is poised for action and ready to mobilise when required (Schudson, 1998, pp. 310-311). They scan the "informational environment" rather than constantly gathering, reading, and watching the news (Schudson, 1998, pp. 310-311).

Australian scholars have argued that the public sphere contained far more monitorial than informed citizens during Australian elections in the twenty-first century (Young, 2011, p. 278). In the absence of demand, commercial and public news outlets have little incentive to provide policy coverage. Therefore, news outlets provide less space in their coverage and dedicate fewer resources to covering policy issues. This has broader implications for the way politicians engage in policy discussions.

Fewer people are watching and reading political news, so political elites may pay less attention to policy because there is a lack of public demand for policy information. Consequently, news outlets do not cover policy issues in-depth or provide space for policy reporting because there is no appetite for policy news, and no commercial incentive to report this information. Hence, the public becomes conditioned to accept the situation and do not demand more policy news from the media or political elites. It is a vicious circle whereby each party becomes complicit in creating an environment where an absence of policy information is the norm.

Broader Implications for Trust, Civic Engagement, and Democracy

If we hold policy journalism up to liberal democratic ideals, the very same principles news outlets and journalists promised to uphold in their codes of ethics, then my results show that there is reason for concern. Policy reporting in the twenty-first century was clearly falling short of the standards and values that the media supported. The evidence shows that there was an overall decline in the quality of policy news provided by the press during elections in the 2000s. The empirical evidence suggests that the policy news provided in later election cycles was limited in its capacity to facilitate a contest of ideas and inform voters about policy matters. This section examines the broader implications this decline in news quality had for civic engagement, trust in media, and support for democracy in the twenty-first century.

The media are an integral political institution (McNair, 2011, pp. 19-20), but trust in this institution is at its lowest point and lower than many other comparable democracies (Dawson, 2017; Fisher, 2016; Spurr, 2017; Wake & Carson, 2017). A 2017 report by *Essential Research* found that trust in daily newspapers fell from 62 per cent in 2010 to 47 per cent in 2017. In a similar fashion, trust in commercial television news fell from 64 per cent (2010) to 42 per cent (2017) (Dawson, 2017; Edelman, 2017; Wake & Carson, 2017). In addition to this study, research by the *Reuters Institute* demonstrated that trust in Australia's traditional media organisations is amongst the lowest in the world, with Australia ranking 15th among 26 other comparable countries (Fisher & Watkins, 2016). Various surveys, including the *World Values Survey*, have drawn similar conclusions (Hanitzsch, 2013, pp. 205-206).[71] Public confidence in Australia's traditional media sector is faltering and this could be exacerbated by media reporting.

If the Australian media continue to frame policy discussions using strategic, contest or personality narratives, then trust in media and satisfaction with politics may decline even further. Framing politics around strategy and personality can contribute to increased political cynicism, distrust, and dissatisfaction amongst news audiences (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, pp. 230-234; Jebril et al., 2013; Patterson, 1993, p. 22).

[71] Scholars have also shown that trust in the media is correlated with the number of media organisations and type of voting or political system (see for example Hanitzsch, 2013, pp. 205-206; Muller, 2013, pp. 25-26).

For example, Patterson (1993), Cappella and Jamieson (1997, pp. 230-234), and Nael Jebril and colleagues (2013) showed that the way the media frame politics can often lead to increased apathy towards political leaders and institutions. Cappella and Jamieson (1997, pp. 230-232) argued that strategic framing increases dissatisfaction with politics. Moreover, Jebril and colleagues (2013, pp. 114-115) found that the focus of media coverage on politicians' private lives and scandals exacerbates political cynicism news audiences. In this sense, the framing of political reporting has significant implications for democracy because it can lead to and erosion of support for its institutions (see Ariely, 2015, p. 438).

Fewer Australians trust traditional media, but younger Australians are more dissatisfied and critical of liberal democracy than their older counterparts (Foa & Mounk, 2017, p. 6). While Australians are generally more supportive of democracy compared to other established democracies, support is waning with each generation (Foa & Mounk, 2017, pp. 6-8). In Anglo-American and European countries, there is growing dissatisfaction with liberal democracy (Foa & Mounk, 2017, p. 6). For example, Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk (2016, p. 7) found that citizens in North America and Western Europe have become more dissatisfied with their political leaders and "more cynical about the value of democracy as a political system, less hopeful that anything they do might influence public policy, and more willing to express support for authoritarian alternatives." Foa and Mounk (2016, pp. 14-17) concluded that we may be entering a period of "democratic deconsolidation" whereby citizens who historically supported democracy may be less inclined to do so in the future.

Although Foa and Mounk (2016, 2017) do not examine the impact of the media in this process, previous research has found that media coverage of politics has significant implications for satisfaction with politics and political cynicism (for example study see Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), with media commercialisation also having negative consequences for political trust (Ariely, 2015, p. 438). If political news stories continue to be reported as stories of conflict and news organisations continue to pursue profits over quality political content, then voters may experience even greater dissatisfaction with Australian democracy and its institutions.

Four Possible Recommendations to Address the News Quality Problem

The quality of policy reporting in Australian elections declined over the 2000s and this has broader implications for trust in Australia's important democratic institutions. This section offers four possible recommendations to improve the quality of policy reporting in the digital age. This is neither an exhaustive nor prescriptive list. There are several other options available that could address this quality problem; for example, by creating more specialised media outlets and publications, incorporating new technologies in news programs, and providing journalism that is "much more than breaking news" (for discussion see Vehkoo, 2010, pp. 68-77). This section discusses four recommendations that may improve policy reporting in Australia.

1. Invest in Australia's professional media workforce

Throughout this study, I have pointed out that a significant portion of Australia's journalism workforce have been made redundant (see Carson & Muller, 2017, p. 8). Indeed, international research by Johanna Vehkoo (2010, p. 74) found that many newsroom editors are worried about the future of their profession. It may be no coincidence that the quality of policy reporting in Australian election campaigns has declined as Australian newsrooms shrank and more journalists lost their jobs.

The provision of highly quality reporting is, in many respects, contingent upon having the necessary resources and labour available to report information (see for discussion Buchanan, 2013, p. 20; Meyer, 2009, pp. 1-5, 33-35). When newsrooms lack these resources, then this compromises their ability to deliver important information to the public sphere (Buchanan, 2013, p. 20). As my analysis has shown, many of the key declines in quality of policy news took place following significant job losses in the Australian media landscape. Chapter 7 showed that many of these trends began between the 2007 and 2010 elections; a period of immense change in Australian newsrooms.

Preserving journalists in Australian newsrooms is key to improving the quality of political news coverage. We need a professional media workforce that complements the news reported via social media platforms and citizen journalists. Reducing the size

of newsrooms and cost-cutting does more harm to Australia's democratic culture than good. As Margaret Simons (2012, pp. 122-123) notes, the future of quality Australian journalism lies in not only encouraging and fostering the "journalistic capacity of society as a whole," but also in preserving the role of the professional journalist in this society. Citizen journalists complement rather than replace professional journalists. Therefore, we should invest in a professional media workforce and promote a society that values the role of these media professionals.

2. Value and develop expertise

In his recent work, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters*, Tom Nichols (2017, pp. 3-7) claims that we are witnessing the "death of the ideal of expertise," a retreat from public engagement with experts/intellectuals, an erosion of the dialogue between experts and citizens, and an attack on established knowledge. Nichols (2017) argues that journalism, in part, needs to share some of this blame. He suggests that the rise of entertainment driven news narratives, the devaluation of expert advice in the media, the decline of specialist journalists, and the rise of 24-hour news programs have contributed to this "death of expertise" (Nichols, 2017, pp. 134-169).

While Nichols' arguments may seem harshly pessimistic about the future of expertise in society, he makes several valid points about the importance of expertise in media reporting. As my research showed in chapters 5 and 7, experts were seldom quoted in policy coverage with few policy news stories reporting expert comments in latter election campaigns. Therefore, we can improve the quality of policy and political reporting by valuing expert opinion and incorporating more experts in news coverage. In so doing, journalists can provide readers with authoritative and verifiable sources of information. Valuing expertise also means developing knowledge amongst professional journalists.

Journalists must specialise. We need different types of specialist journalists in newsrooms, including journalists who are proficient policy experts. They need to garner in-depth knowledge of policy fields, draw upon the wisdom of others, and establish their networks to leverage policy information and develop their expertise (see Vehkoo,

2010, pp.73-74). As Vehkoo (2010, pp. 73-74) finds, expertise is crucial to the future of quality journalism. Journalist themselves have acknowledged the importance of specialists in newsrooms. As veteran journalist Charlotte Higgins from the *Guardian* notes, expertise is important and valuable because it "can't easily be replicate," it is "a valued commodity and people will be pay money to have a bit of it" (quoted in Vehkoo, 2010, p.74). Similarly, journalism academic Charlie Beckett contends that "in a world of complex information, one of the problems of journalism is that we're just not literate enough" (quoted in Vehkoo, 2010, p.74). Newsroom need literate policy experts to interpret policy information, probe the details, and analyse the facts. By fostering the knowledge of policy expertise amongst journalists, training them to become policy experts, and investing in specialist reporters, news organisation can improve the quality of their news coverage.

3. Invest in publicly funded media

As I noted in chapter 1, publicly funded broadcasters are not immune from the challenges faced by commercial media organisations. While historically public service media had limited competition from other media outlets, the growth of digital news outlets has increased the competition for their news audiences (Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-7; Jacka, 2003, pp. 178-179; Lowe, 2010). Many public service broadcasters lost a significant proportion of their revenue as a result of cost-cutting in the public sector following the 2007-2008 GFC (Cushion, 2012, pp. 3-7). At the time of writing, the government had announced an $A84 million freeze on funding for Australia's public funded broadcasters, the ABC ("Budget 2018: ABC funding frozen in $84 million hit to bottom line", 2018). This was described by the ABC's managing director, Michelle Guthrie, as akin to a "budget cut" that may result in further "efficiency measures" and cost-cutting in ABC newsrooms ("Budget 2018: ABC funding frozen in $84 million hit to bottom line", 2018). But governments and the broader community should support Australia's public service media.

Publicly funded media provide an important contribution to policy debates in the Australian public sphere. As demonstrated in chapter 6, publicly funded broadcasters provided substantially more space and time for policy discussion in their news reports. Indeed, public broadcasters provided more policy details in their news reports than their

commercial counterparts. Consistent with international scholarship (for example Cushion & Thomas, 2015, p. 16), I found that public broadcasters provided some of the best examples of detailed policy news. As Cushion and Thomas (2015, p. 16) and Cushion, Kilby, et al. (2016, p. 10) observed, public broadcasters are often more likely to offer a policy-orientated agenda than their commercial counterparts. Consequently, governments need to support public media and invest in their journalism. This may improve the quality of policy debates in the Australian public sphere.

4. Abandon small target strategies and top-down one-way political communication methods

So far, I have focused on the ways news organisations can create an environment that fosters better quality political and policy reporting. Yet, the problems identified in this thesis were also exacerbated by the way politicians communicated policy information, the campaign strategies they employed, and the language they adopted. As noted throughout this study, journalists themselves are not entirely to blame for the decline in the quality of policy coverage with many of these changes occurring over a period of immense change in political campaigning. Consequently, I argue that to improve the quality of policy reporting politicians need to change the way they communicate policy issues.

According to Bennett and Pfetsch (2018, pp. 243-245), political communication is entering a new era. An era where politicians can bypass the intermediaries and gatekeeper, audiences are fragmented, and a period where mass parties are being "hollowed out" as party membership declines. As Bennett and Pfestsch (2018, p. 244) write, "in this precarious democratic context, the professional communication methods centered on spin and complex news management that shored up what Blumler and Kanavagh (1999) termed the "third age of political communication" no longer work effectively." Therefore, it is time to rethink political communication in this new communication era (Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018). Consequently, I argue that politicians should 1) abandon small target campaigning, and 2) use new media tools more effectively to enhance civic dialogue and participation.

One of the biggest shifts in political campaigning in recent years was the increase use of small target strategies by Australian politicians (see Rayner & Wanna, 2015, p. 17-18). In so doing, policy information has become more tightly controlled. Yet, this is doing more harm to policy discourse and debate. Without adequate policy information, voters are left with little detail beyond soundbites and slogans. For example, commentators and journalists have remarked that recent election campaigns were devoid of policy substance and largely "policy-free" (for example see Hewson, 2010, p. 62; Neales, 2010, p. 24; Rayner & Wanna, 2015, p. 17-18; T. Wright, 2010, p. 22).

Improving the quality of policy reporting requires politicians to provide more policy information, discuss policy issues, highlight the policy problems, and put policy at the centre of their election strategies. While I acknowledge that politicians do provide some policy information through their websites and other documents, this information needs to be publicised more effectively. Policy should form the centrepiece of their campaign launch speeches, interviews, and doorstop press conferences. Australian elections are unique for their absence of party manifestos that detail all the party's policy pledges and proposals. Therefore, politicians could improve political communication by producing and publicising policy manifesto documents during election campaigns.

There is a broader question here about whether voters want this policy information. According to Pablo Boczkowski and Eugenia Mitchelstein (2013, pp. 1-7), journalists may prefer to report on public affairs issues, but often the public want non-public affairs coverage (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013, pp. 16-18). Yet, survey and focus group research has shown that voters do want a campaigns that are "substantive and participatory" (Lipsitz , Trost , Grossmann & Sides, 2005, p. 350). This research shows that voters do not want campaigns where politicians constantly attack one another in negative ways (see Lipsitz, Trost, Grossmann & Sides, 2005, pp. 343-344). In fact, scholars Lipsitz, Trost, Grossmann and Sides (2005, pp. 350-3512) show that voters desire more substantive election campaigning. Voters want debates, town hall meetings, and information about policy issues, but they want this information to be distilled and easily conveyed (Lipsitz, Trost, Grossmann & Sides, 2005, pp. 350-351). When information and substantive discussion is missing from these campaigns, voters become more dissatisfied and disenchanted with the campaign process (Lipsitz, Trost,

Grossmann & Sides, 2005, pp. 350-351). So, by abandoning small target strategies, politicians may not only improve the political knowledge of the citizenry, but they may also help foster more engagement in campaigns and greater satisfaction with politics amongst voters.

Politicians must also shift the focus of their political communication strategies from the one-way top-down broadcasting of political messages to engaging in a two-way dialogue with voters and journalists. To improve political communications and the quality of policy reporting, politicians must more effectively leverage the potential of new social media technologies. Existing research shows that Australian politicians primarily use social media platforms as a one-way broadcast tool rather than a platform for two-way engagement and dialogue (Macnamara & Kenning, 2014, pp. 69-72). Rather than broadcasting messages about policy, politicians should engage in deliberation about policy issues with voters and journalists, respond to critiques, and answer questions about policy matters. By taking this approach, politicians could create a more participatory public sphere, develop political knowledge, and foster a more inclusive political culture (see Macnamara & Kenning, 2014, pp. 59-61, 69-72).

By leveraging these new technologies and shifting their political communication strategies from one-way broadcasts to two-way engagement, there may be flow on effects that could improve the quality of reporting provided by traditional media platforms in the twenty-first century. This could increase the amount of policy information in the public sphere, place citizens at the centre of the communication process, and provide traditional media journalists with more information and voices to include in their reports.

The possible recommendations offered here may mitigate the decline in the quality of policy reporting. While this is not an exhaustive list, it nonetheless provides a starting point for further discussions and research into the future of policy reporting and political communication in the digital age. The research presented throughout this thesis suggests that political communication is undergoing a dramatic transformation. At the same time, the traditional media landscape is experiencing unprecedented economic

disruption. But the problems experienced by Australia's media organisations may only intensify over the coming decades.

Concluding Remarks

The commercial environment is likely to get tougher for Australia's traditional media organisations. Advertising revenue are likely to shrink further placing more pressure on news organisations to limit their expenditure (Carson, 2015a, p. 1024). If traditional media organisations are unable to stabilise their revenue losses or adapt to the new campaign environment more effectively, then the quality of policy journalism may continue to suffer the consequences. More must be done to help strengthen the commercial viability of Australia's media.

Some tenuous steps have already been taken to address these commercial concerns. In September 2017, the Australian government amended media ownership laws in a bid to help improve commercial stability in the media market ("Government's media ownership law changes pass Senate with help from NXT, One Nation," 2017). The amendments included the removal of "75 per cent reach rule" (where media organisations cannot hold a commercial television licence that reaches over 75 per cent of the Australian population) and the "two out of three" rule (where no media organisation, company or person can control more than two traditional media platforms) (Dwyer, 2016, 2017a).

The government and industry professionals in favour of these amendments argued that it would help traditional media organisations consolidate their organisational structures, improve their efficiency, and support their ability to compete with new entrants (including digital entrants) by allowing them to achieve the necessary scale to remain competitive (Department of Communications and the Arts, 2017). However, media scholar Tim Dwyer has suggested that the law amendments may simply lead to more acquisitions and mergers that will further concentrate media ownership in two to three dominant players (Dwyer, 2016, 2017a). Moreover, legislative changes alone do not lessen the impact of digital news platforms on news business models as digital entrants, such as *Facebook* and *Google*, already "control around 90 [per cent] of the growth in

the online advertising market" (Dwyer, 2017b). Nor do the legislative amendments address the structural issues threatening the commercial viability of traditional news organisations. Rather than rely on legislative changes, news organisations need to take their own steps to consolidate their financial position.

News organisations must adjust more quickly and effectively to the new environment in a way that does not continue to undermine political journalism through cost-cutting measures. The thesis' findings suggest that cutting expenditure and reducing the size of newsrooms has an adverse impact on election reporting and informed political discourse. Many news organisations have pursued digital strategies to help address the revenue issues. While digital platforms offer potential for greater diversity and new forms of citizen journalism (see for example Flew & Wilson, 2008), the potential of online news sites to produce new revenue streams has largely been overstated (for discussion see Singer, 2003; S. Ward and Vedel, 2006, p. 210; S. Wright, 2012, pp. 245-247).

A democracy without its traditional media is unimaginable. Traditional media outlets play an important role in the media ecology (McCombs, 2014, pp. 128-129; Tiffen, 2010b, p. 94). They are important inter-media agenda-setters in the public sphere that influence the reporting of other media organisations (McCombs, 2014, p. 129). While online news platforms and social media has changed the way audiences access content, much of this online content still "feed[s] off reporting from traditional news media." (Young, 2011, pp. 223-228). Additionally, many Australians still consult television and newspapers for news and information about public affairs, especially in elections (Cameron & McAllister, 2016; Young, 2011, pp. 36-41). This changed slightly in the 2016 election, but voters were still more likely to follow the 2016 Australian election using traditional media rather than internet platforms (Cameron & McAllister, 2016, p. 8).

Without a traditional media sector, there is also the question of who fills the void. In an age where 86 per cent of all Australian households have access to the internet (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Ewing, 2016), there is arguably the ability for every citizen to act as a journalist. However, this poses its own problems particularly

in relation to professional standards and credibility (for a discussion of citizen journalism see Flew & Wilson, 2008). Without traditional news organisations, less credible sources may become the "gatekeepers" of political information, including so called "fake news" platforms, who may spread misinformation thereby exacerbating a "wider crisis of trust" in the media and democracy (McNair, 2018, p. x).

Avenues for further research

This thesis focused on the Australian media system as few studies had undertaken research specifically examining policy news coverage within Australian elections. This study was primarily concerned with how policy issues were reported in news coverage over the 2000s; therefore, content analysis was naturally the most appropriate method given the large volumes of material collected. This has led to the creation of a unique dataset of tax, health and education policy news from five election campaigns in the twenty-first century. This dataset can now be used for future comparative and longitudinal research examining election and policy news.

A comparative study of Anglo-American media systems, such as the United States or United Kingdom, provides an interesting area for further investigation. Future studies of policy reporting could use the dataset created by my study and apply the same methodology to other countries to determine whether differences in media systems impact upon the quality of policy reporting. Australia has a unique media landscape with high ownership concentration. So scholars may wish to explore whether more diverse media markets produce different types of policy journalism.

Future research could also adopt computerised methodologies, including text scraping and machine-based coding, to expand the dataset and time frame to include more policy material (for further discussion see Günther & Quandt, 2016; Wilkerson & Casas, 2017). Studies of election and policy reporting in the digital age could apply big-N text analysis computer programs to build upon my dataset.

While the aim of my study was to examine *media content* over multiple election cycles, future research may wish to investigate how policy content affects political knowledge. Experimental research designs, such as survey experiments, could be employed to

explore how specific variations in policy news articles impact upon the attitudes and knowledge of news audiences (for example study see Horiuchi, Imai, & Taniguchi, 2007).

In addition, other scholarship could analyse the influence of professional culture on reporting. Conducting semi-structured interviews would add depth to the findings of my analysis and allow researchers to explore the impact organisational factors upon policy content. For example, research could interview journalists and editors about their perceptions of news quality.

Future scholarship could also expand my dataset to include the recent 2016 Australian federal election campaign. This was one of the more policy-focused election campaigns in recent history, with the Labor party launching its own dedicated policy website early in the campaign titled *100 Positive Policies*. In addition, the dataset could be expanded to include online social media platforms, such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, which are increasingly becoming key platforms for the dissemination of news. These provide some potential directions for future studies of policy news and election reporting that build upon the important research that I have undertaken.

Policy News in the 2000s

This thesis identified an important empirical gap in the Australian election reporting scholarship. In the vast literature on election reporting, few studies had specifically examined media coverage of policy issues during Australian campaigns. There was a lack of Australian studies specifically focusing on the way policy issues were reported over five election cycles in the twenty-first century. Importantly, there was a death of scholarship focusing on news coverage of tax, health and educations issues during election campaigns in the late 2000s. This was another oversight because the late twenty-first century was a period of immense commercial upheaval in the media sector, and a period of significant change in Australian political campaigning. Consequently, this thesis filled an important empirical gap in the literature through its investigation of policy news from five election cycles between 2001 and 2013. The primary aim of this thesis was to examine news coverage of tax, health and education issues in election campaigns over the 2000s. A secondary of this study was to investigate how policy

news coverage intersected with the changes in political campaigning. This is an important empirical problem worth investigating because the way policy issues are reported by the media could have a profound impact upon the quality of informed debate in the public sphere and, by extension, the health of Australian democracy.

According to "ideal" models, the media should provide news that informs and citizens on public affairs, provide a platform for "public political discourse" to facilitate the formation of public opinion, and offer a platform for the contest of ideas (see for summary McNair, 2011, pp. 18-20). Informed by these ideals and previous research (for example Cushion, 2011, pp. 43-61), I argued that "quality" policy news was news of democratic value that informs the public debate, enables a channel for various viewpoints to be expressed and, in so doing, facilitates a contest of diverse ideas (see chapter 2). The definition I adopted was based upon normative scholarship and theory, but also upon the principles Australian news outlets themselves have promised to uphold in their professional codes (see Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, 2017b; Young, 2011, p. 3). This theoretical approach underpinned by empirical examination of policy news in the twenty-first.

To address the empirical gaps in the scholarship, this study adopted qualitative and quantitative methods to examine policy reporting in 1270 newspaper articles, 128 television stories and 86 online news articles. In doing so, it made a methodological contribution by creating a large unique dataset of tax, health and education policy coverage from five election periods. I examined news courage from four perspectives including 1) media attention to policy issues, 2) the policy details provided in news coverage, 3) the sources quoted in reporting, and 4) the frames and narratives used in policy stories. The data revealed some broad overarching trends about the state of policy coverage in the twenty-first century. The results were far from encouraging.

This study found an overall decline in the quality of policy news provided by the press during elections in the 2000s. The data showed that policy reporting in later campaigns contained less policy information, less space for policy reporting, quoted fewer voices, and used more strategy and game frames than coverage from earlier election cycles. The 2007 election was also identified as important turning point in policy reporting,

with the most consequential shift— the decline in detailed policy stories—following this campaign. Moreover, the results showed that policy reporting varied by platform and medium. The evidence suggested that the policy journalism provided by "popular" news media (commercial television and tabloid newspapers) was limited in its capacity to inform voters about policy matters.

Many of these faults in policy reporting cannot be laid purely at the feet of Australian journalists. The results suggest that what politicians said about policy issues and how they campaigned can adversely impact policy reporting. Politicians were speaking less about their policies in their campaign launch speeches with each election. They provided fewer policy details, devoted less space to policy discussion, and adopted narratives that were easily accommodated into game and strategic frames. The analysis showed that media reporting largely followed suit. However, it is the commercial upheaval in the media landscape that poses one of the biggest threats to the future of policy debate in the Australian public sphere.

Australia's traditional news media has served the public sphere for over two centuries. But their business models are faltering, newsrooms are shrinking, and revenues are evaporating. News organisations continually point to digital disruption as the causes of many of the problems, and rightly so. Attempting to stem their losses, they have frantically sought to cut expenditure and downsize their operations. However, the old "rivers of gold" are not coming back (Gawenda, 2012, pp. 1-5). Continually cutting jobs and resources from traditional news organisations is clearly not the answer because doing so hinders political reporting.

If traditional media organisations are to fulfil their promise to inform the public sphere, they need to more effectively balance this tension between commercial interests and quality reporting. They need a new model that values and preserves the role of the journalist, but recognises that the "old" business model is no longer a commercially viable option (see Simons, 2012, p. 121). Digital journalism holds much promise for new forms of journalism (Carson & Muller, 2017), but it only supplements, not replaces, existing traditional news outlets. Australian journalism is clearly at a crisis point, but failure to adapt is simply not an option. News outlets need to find a way

forward that leads to better policy journalism that enriches public debate and election discourse. They need to balance these commercial demands, but still provide election news that nourishes the Australian public sphere. Indeed, this is one of the greatest challenges for Australian journalism in the twenty-first century. If traditional news organisations are unable to meet this challenge, then the quality of policy journalism may continue to decline.

Appendix A: Content Analysis Coding Guide for News Stories

(V1): ID Number

Format: [Coder Initials][Newspaper (N) OR TV (T) OR Online News (I)][Number]

(V2): Election Year

1= 1993	5= 2004
2= 1996	6= 2007
3= 1998	7= 2010
4= 2001	8= 2013

(V3): Week of Campaign

1= Pre-election campaign	5= Week 4
2= Week 1	6= Week 5
3= Week 2	7= Week 6
4= Week 3	8= Post- Election

(V4): Date of Story: dd.mm.yyyy

(V4A): Labor or Liberal Launch

1= Labor

2= Liberal

(V5): YEAR

(V6): Day of the Week

1= Monday

2= Tuesday

3= Wednesday

4= Thursday

5= Friday

6= Saturday

7= Sunday

NEWSPAPERS

(V7): Newspaper

0= Not Applicable/ Not Relevant

1= The Age

2= The Herald Sun

3= The Sydney Morning Herald

4= The Daily Telegraph

5= Courier-Mail

6= The West Australian

7= The Adelaide Advertiser

8= The Northern Territory News

9= The Mercury

10= The Canberra Times

11= The Australian

12= The Australian Financial Review

13= Other

14= Unknown

(V7A): News Organistion

0= Missing/Not applicable

1= Fairfax

2= News Corp

3= Seven West Media

10= The Canberra Times**

13= Other

14= Unknown

**Note: The Canberra Times changes ownership across this period and therefore should be coded separately

(V7b): Tabloid/Broadsheet (ONLY APPLIES TO NEWSPAPER COVERAGE)

0= Missing/Not applicable

1= Broadsheet Newspaper

2= Tabloid Newspaper

13= Other

14= Unknown

(V8): Prominence of Story

On what page did the story first appear? If it is a continuing story (i.e from page 1), list the page where the story first appeared.

(V9): Headline

ONLINE NEWS SITE

(V10): Online News Site

0= Not Applicable/ Not Relevant

1= The Age Online

2= The Herald Sun online

3= The Sydney Morning Herald Online

4= The Daily Telegraph Online

5= Courier-Mail Online

6= The West Australian Online

7= The Adelaide Advertiser Online

8= The Northern Territory News Online

9= The Mercury Online

10= The Canberra Times Online

11= The Australian Online

12= The Australian Financial Review Online

13= Unknown

14= Other

(V11): Headline

(V12):Online: Embedded Multimedia

Did the story include embedded video or audio (that is, video or audio on the same page as the story)?

0= Not Relevant

1= Yes

2= No

TV

(V13): TV Channel

0= Not Relevant

1= ABC

2= SBS

3= Channel 7

4= Channel 9

5= Channel 10

6= Sky News

7= Other Free to Air

8= Other Pay TV

(V13a): Public or Commercial Broadcasters

0= Not Relevant

1= Public Broadcaster

2= Commercial Broadcaster

(V14): City

0= Not Relevant

1= Melbourne

2= Sydney

3=Canberra

4= Brisbane

5= Darwin

6= Perth

7= Hobart

8= Adelaide

9= National

10= Unknown

11= Other

(V15):News Type

Which of the following best describes the type of TV news program:

0=Not Relevant

1= Breakfast news (6am to 9am)

2= Morning News (9am to 11am)

3= Midday News (11am to 1pm)

4= Afternoon News (1pm to 5pm)

5= Evening News (6pm to 8pm

6= Late news (8pm to 12am)

7= Current Affairs Program

8= Entertainment (light hearted/ comedic) (DO NOT include Breakfast TV News Programs).

9 = Other

10= Unknown

ALL MEDIA

(V16): Type of News Story

Which of the following best describes the type of news story? Please choose the one that is most appropriate.

1= Straight news story

2= Editorial (i.e identified by the absence of a by-line)

3= Opinion Column/Comment piece

4= Straight News segment followed by/or introduced after an interview/analysis with **reporter (TV Only)**

5= Straight News segment followed by interview/analysis with **politician/party member (TV Only)**

6= Straight News segment followed by interview/analysis with **expert/interest group (TV Only)**

7= Stand-alone Fact Checking/ Promise tracking Segment/ Story

8= Straight News segment followed by related **Fact Checking/Promise Tracking Segment (TV Only)**

9= Other

(V17): Story/Article Length (Word Count or Time).

For newspaper articles, use word count reported in database (i.e Factiva).

Time expressed as Minutes:Seconds (Round to the nearest second)

POLICY INFORMATION

Offering a single definition of a "policy issue" is a somewhat conceptually difficult task (Guinaudeaua and Persicob, 2014, p. 314). Policy issues can be defined in several ways, including by their saliency, by their complexity, by the issue type such as "valence" or "wedge" issues, or by the way political actors approach a public policy problem (Guinaudeaua and Persicob, 2014, p. 314). Guinaudeaua and Persicob (2014, pp. 314-315) observe that a policy issues can include a) broad themes, such as welfare or international relations; b) specific policy sectors such as health, transport or immigration; c) or specific policy problems such as the management of railways, business tax cuts (Guinaudeaua and Persicob, 2014, pp. 314-315). They define a "policy issue" as "a question of public policy, as demarcated, defined and specified by political actors" (Guinaudeaua and Persicob, 2014, p. 316).

Informed by the work of Guinaudeaua and Persicob (2014), this thesis defines policy issue as a "question of public policy" that can be isolated to a policy theme and a more specific objective or measure (Guinaudeaua and Persicob, 2014, p. 316). A policy issue in this study is defined as containing: 1) a broad policy theme (e.g tax, education, healthcare), and 2) a specific policy objectives (e.g lower inflation, high educational results, decreased hospital wait times) or policy measure (the means: monetary policies, school programs, health training schemes).

(V18): Number of Policy Issues Discussed

Number of policy issues (see definition above) discussed in the story.

0= No discussion of a policy issue

1= Discusses 1 issue

2= Discusses 2 Issues

3= Discusses 3 or 4 issues

4= Discusses 5 or 6 issues

5= Discusses more than 7 policy issues.

(V18_RECODE): Number of Policy Issues Discussed

0= No discussion of a policy issue

1= Discusses 1 or 2 issues

2= Discusses 3 to 6 issues

3= Discusses more than 7 policy issues.

(V19): Primary Issue Theme (Major Code)

0= Not relevant/ applicable

1=Taxation

2= Education

3= Health

4= Other

(V20): Primary Issue Objective/ Policy Instrument/Focus (Minor Code)

The primary policy focus/ policy objective/ or policy instrument discussed in the news story (most content devoted to in the story) is:

Note: Please choose ONE code that is most appropriate. If the story deals with multiple issues, please use the secondary and tertiary variables below (v21 to v24).

If selected 4 (other) in v19, please code as 999= other non-tax, non-health, non-education issues. 0= Not applicable

TAXATION	EDUCATION	HEALTH
101=Company/Small Business Tax Rate Reform **102=**Government commissioned independent tax review/inquiry **103=**Reform of Income Taxation Rates **104=**Environmental Levy/ Carbon Pollution Tax/ Resource Minerals Tax **105**=Family/First-Child Tax/Baby Bonus Tax Rebate measure (Do NOT include childcare rebate/family tax benfit part A or B). **106=** Goods and Services Tax (GST) **107=** Medicare Levy Rate **108**= Tax Administration/Red Tape **109=** Superannuation Tax Issues **110=** Petrol and Gas Excise **111=** Capital Gains Tax Reform **112=** Education Tax Rebate **113**= Payroll Tax Reform **114=** Fringe benefits tax **115-** Other Taxation Issue not listed	**201**= Higher Education: Commonwealth funding arrangements/research funding AND/OR Regulation (**NOT** HECs/Loan Issues) **202**= HECS/ Higher Education/ Vocational Education Loans Scheme/ Tertiary Fees **203**= Secondary and Primary School Funding **204**= Secondary and Primary School Teacher Salary **205**= Secondary and Primary School/Teacher Performance and Teacher Training **206**= Secondary and Primary School Autonomy **207**= National school Curriculum **208**= School Facilities/Buildings Development **209=** Early Childhood (Pre School) Care/ Funding **210=** Training for Early Childhood workers. **211**= Vocational Education and TAFE Funding **212**= Establishing New Vocational/ TAFE Facilities **213**= Education and underprivileged students/ communities. **214**= After-hours school care programs **215**= Other Education Issue not listed	**301**= Medicare Reform **302**= Funding of Existing Hospitals/Primary Healthcare Services **303**= Construction of new OR upgrade of existing medical/ hospital/ GP/Aged Care homes and facilities **304**= Hospital Beds **305**= Hospital Surgery Waiting Lists **306=**Manpower/Staff shortages and/or Training of Healthcare staff **307**= Mental Health Funding **308**= Mental Health frontline service provision **309**= Responsibility for administration of hospitals/ state-federal healthcare responsibility arrangements. **310**= Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme **311**= Aged Care funding AND/OR Regulation. **312**= Funding of Research and Development in Health Sector. **313**= Private Health Insurance Reform **314**= Immunisation Program **315=**Other Health Issue not listed

(V21): Secondary Issue Theme (Major Code)

0= Not relevant/ applicable

1=Taxation

2= Education

3= Health

4= Other

(V22): Secondary Issue Objective/ Policy Instrument/Focus (Minor Code)

The secondary policy focus/ policy objective/ or policy instrument discussed in the news story (second most covered issue in story) is:

If selected 4 (other) in v21, please code as 999= other non-tax, non-health, non-education issues. 0= Not applicable

0= Not applicable

TAXATION	EDUCATION	HEALTH
101= Company/Small Business Tax Rate Reform **102=** Government commissioned independent tax review/inquiry **103=** Reform of Income Taxation Rates **104=** Environmental Levy/ Carbon Pollution Tax/ Resource Minerals Tax **105**= Family/First-Child Tax/Baby Bonus Tax Rebate measure (Do NOT include childcare rebate/family tax benfit part A or B). **106=** Goods and Services Tax (GST) **107=** Medicare Levy Rate **108**= Tax Administration/Red Tape **109=** Superannuation Tax Issues **110=** Petrol and Gas Excise **111=** Capital Gains Tax Reform **112=** Education Tax Rebate **113**= Payroll Tax Reform **114=** Fringe benefits tax **115-** Other Taxation Issue not listed	**201**= Higher Education: Commonwealth funding arrangements/research funding AND/OR Regulation (**NOT** HECs/Loan Issues) **202**= HECS/ Higher Education/ Vocational Education Loans Scheme/ Tertiary Fees **203**= Secondary and Primary School Funding **204**= Secondary and Primary School Teacher Salary **205**= Secondary and Primary School/Teacher Performance and Teacher Training **206**= Secondary and Primary School Autonomy **207**= National school Curriculum **208**= School Facilities/Buildings Development **209=** Early Childhood (Pre School) Care/ Funding **210=** Training for Early Childhood workers. **211**= Vocational Education and TAFE Funding **212**= Establishing New Vocational/ TAFE Facilities **213**= Education and underprivileged students/ communities. **214**= After-hours school care programs **215**= Other Education Issue not listed	**301**= Medicare Reform **302**= Funding of Existing Hospitals/ Primary Healthcare Services **303**= Construction of new OR upgrade of existing medical/ hospital/ GP/Aged Care homes and facilities **304**= Hospital Beds **305**= Hospital Surgery Waiting Lists **306**= Manpower/Staff shortages and/or Training of Healthcare staff **307**= Mental Health Funding **308**= Mental Health frontline service provision **309**= Responsibility for administration of hospitals state-federal healthcare responsibility arrangements. **310**= Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme **311**= Aged Care funding AND/OR Regulation. **312**= Funding of Research and Development in Health Sector. **313**= Private Health Insurance Reform **314**= Immunisation Program **315=**Other Health Issue not listed

(V23): Tertiary Issue Theme (Major Code)

0= Not relevant/ applicable

1=Taxation

2= Education

3= Health

4= Other

(V24): Tertiary Issue Objective/ Policy Instrument/Focus (Minor Code)

The tertiary policy focus/ policy objective/ or policy instrument discussed in the news story (third most covered issue in story) is:

If selected 4 (other) in v23, please code as 999= other non-tax, non-health, non-education issues. 0= Not applicable

TAXATION	EDUCATION	HEALTH
101= Company/Small Business Tax Rate Reform **102=** Government commissioned independent tax review/inquiry **103=** Reform of Income Taxation Rates **104=** Environmental Levy/ Carbon Pollution Tax/ Resource Minerals Tax **105=** Family/First-Child Tax/Baby Bonus Tax Rebate measure (Do NOT include childcare rebate/family tax benfit part A or B). **106=** Goods and Services Tax (GST) **107=** Medicare Levy Rate **108=** Tax Administration/Red Tape **109=** Superannuation Tax Issues **110=** Petrol and Gas Excise **111=** Capital Gains Tax Reform **112=** Education Tax Rebate **113=** Payroll Tax Reform **114=** Fringe benefits tax **115-** Other Taxation Issue not listed	**201=** Higher Education: Commonwealth funding arrangements/ research funding AND/OR Regulation (**NOT** HECs/Loan Issues) **202=** HECS/ Higher Education/ Vocational Education Loans Scheme/ Tertiary Fees **203=** Secondary and Primary School Funding **204=** Secondary and Primary School Teacher Salary **205=** Secondary and Primary School/Teacher Performance and teacher Training **206=** Secondary and Primary School Autonomy **207=** National school Curriculum **208=** School Facilities/Buildings Development **209=** Early Childhood (Pre School) Care/ Funding **210=** Training for Early Childhood workers. **211=** Vocational Education and TAFE Funding **212=** Establishing New Vocational/ TAFE Facilities **213=** Education and underprivileged students/ communities. **214=** After-hours school care programs **215=** Other Education Issue not listed	**301=** Medicare Reform **302=** Funding of Existing Hospitals/ Primary Healthcare Services **303=** Construction of new OR upgrade of existing medical/ hospital/ GP/Aged Care homes and facilities **304=** Hospital Beds **305=** Hospital Surgery Waiting Lists **306=** Manpower/Staff shortages and/or Training of Healthcare staff **307=** Mental Health Funding **308=** Mental Health frontline service provision **309=** Responsibility for administration of hospitals state-federal healthcare responsibility arrangements. **310=** Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme **311=** Aged Care funding AND/OR Regulation. **312=** Funding of Research and Development in Health Sector. **313=** Private Health Insurance Reform **314=** Immunisation Program **315=**Other Health Issue not listed

(V25): Policy Content

0=Not applicable

1= No substantial discussion of policy/policy problem (devotes less than 4% of content)

2= Minor policy story (limited discussion of policy issue to 5 to 24 percent of content).

3= Significant minor policy story (story devotes 25 to 49 percent of content to policy issue).

4= Major policy story where policy/policy problem is the main focus (story devotes 50 to 100 percent of content to policy issue).

V25_RECODE: Policy Content

1= No substantial discussion of policy/policy problem (devotes less than 4% of content)

2= Minor policy story (limited discussion of policy issue to 5 to 49 percent of content to policy issue).

3= Major policy story where policy/policy problem is the main focus (story devotes 50 to 100 percent of content to policy issue).

(V26): Specificity of Policy Story

If a story does discuss a particular policy/ policies/ policy problem, how many policy details are included in the report?

0= Not relevant

1= **minimal**: includes

a) ONLY provides the name/description of the policy/issue. For example, mental health funding, cutting of company tax etc

2= **some**: includes

a) Name of policy/issue.
b) AND a **brief summary** (basic facts/ basic outline) of policy/policies/issue.

3= **significant**: includes:

a) Name of policy/issue AND
b) **Detailed outline/discussion** of policy/issue. This includes more than a brief summary of the policy (for example, this could include an analysis, evaluation, or critique of the policy or issue).
c) AND either a brief discussion, not just a numerical figure, about the policy cost AND/OR brief comments by an expert on the policy/policy issue AND/OR brief discussion/reference to research/report relating to policy/issue.

4= **exceptional**:

a) Provides a detailed **analysis or evaluation** of the policy or policies (not just a summary or outline of facts). This may include detailed notes about the policy or policies, and the information about the issue(s).
b) AND a detailed discussion (beyond just an outline of their comments and not just one single comment or quote) of **multiple** expert opinions, views, AND/OR research/reports,
c) AND may (although not always necessary) include detailed discussion about the cost of the policy.

(V27): Details: Policy Costings

Did the policy story mention how much the policy/policy implementation would cost?

1= Yes

2= No

(V29): Details: Charts and Graphs

Did the policy story include any charts or graphs displaying policy details?

1= Yes

2= No

(V30): Detail: TV/Online: Visual Slides

Did the policy story include slide(s) outlining the policy details? Slides: defined as visual aids with dot point information written on them.

0= Not relevant

1= Yes

2= No

INTERTEXTUALITY / DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Note: the article must explicitly attribute the paraphrased and/or quoted material to a source (i.e report, document, press release) in order to be coded under these variables (v31 to v42).

(V31): Documentary Sources: Interest Groups and associations

Does the article include any quoted, partly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from interest groups, business associations, or trade unions reports/documents?

1= Yes

2= No

(V32): Percentage of coverage: interest groups, business associations, or trade unions

What percentage of story content was directly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from interest groups, business associations, or trade unions reports/documents? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time in story)

0= Not relevant

1= Less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V33): Documentary Sources: Independent research/reports

Does the article include any quoted, partly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from independent research/reports?

1= Yes

2= No

(V34): Percentage of coverage: independent research/reports

What percentage of story content was directly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from independent research/reports? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time in story)

0= Not relevant

1= Less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V35): Documentary Sources: Government departments

Does the article include any quoted, partly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from government department reports?

1= Yes

2= No

(V36): Percentage of coverage: government departments

What percentage of story content was directly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from government department reports? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time in story)

0= Not relevant

1= Less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V37): Documentary Sources: Party Policy documents

Does the article include any quoted, partly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from party policy or platform documents?

1= Yes

2= No

(V38): Percentage of coverage: Party Policy Document

What percentage of story content was directly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from party policy documents? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time in story)

0= Not relevant

1= Less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V39): Documentary Sources: Political Party Press Releases

Does the article include any quoted, partly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from political party press releases?

1= Yes

2= No

(V40): Documentary Sources Percentage of coverage: Political Party Press Releases

What percentage of story content was directly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from party press releases? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time in story)

0= Not relevant

1= Less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V41): Documentary Sources: Other

Does the article include any quoted, partly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from any other sources not previously listed above?

1= Yes

2= No

(V42): Documentary Sources (Total percentage of coverage)

Taking all of the documentary sources listed in previous variables (v31 to v41) into account, what is the total percentage of story content that was directly quoted or paraphrased (but attributed to source) from all the documentary sources listed above in variables 31 to 41? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time in story)

0= Not relevant

1= Less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V43): Follow up feature: Policy Document Link

Does the story include links to official party policy documents? Link defined as a written URL, clickable button directing to another page (if online site), or embedded policy document that appears on same story page (if online site) to official party policy documents.

1= Yes

2= No

(V44): Follow up feature: Party Websites

Does the story include links to official party websites? Link defined as a written URL, or clickable button directing to party webpage (if online site).

1= Yes

2= No

FRAMING

(V45): Frame (Game)

Does the story make reference to any of the following:

0= Not relevant/ No mention

1= Opinion polls

2= Campaign Strategy

3= Use of 'contest' or 'game' language

4= All/Mixture of the above.

(V45_RECODE): Frame (Game)

Does the story make reference to opinion polls, campaign strategy, 'contest' or 'game' language?

1= Yes

2= No

(V46): Personality

What estimated percentage of story content was devoted to an analysis of a party leader or politician's character, personality, and/or non-policy related issue concerning leader/politician's character? To estimate consider (time/words devoted personality) / (total word/time)

0= No discussion/ Not applicable

1= Negligible discussion of personality factors/ characteristics (Less than 15 percent

2= Moderate discussion of personality (15 to 50 percent)

3= Substantial discussion of personality (greater than 51 percent)

(V46 RECODE): Personality

Does any of the story content reference a party leader or politician's character, personality, and/or non-policy related issue concerning leader/politician's character?

1= Yes

2= No

ACTORS, EXPERTS, AND SOURCES IN POLICY COVERAGE

(V49-GP/GV): General Public/Voters

Does the story include paraphrased, directly quoted, or partly quoted views/voice of the general public or general voters (i.e general public with no stated affiliation in the story to business, organizations, political parties, a member of political leader's family, research institutions, other media outlets or any of the categories listed in v52)?

Note: these have to be attributed by name to a specific person/ member of the general public.

0= No

1= Yes, includes directly/partially quoted material, which may also include some paraphrased material, from members of the general public.

2= Yes, but only includes paraphrased material, with no direct/partial quotations, from members of the general public.

(V49): Expert Opinion

Does the story include directly quoted or partly quoted views/voice of an academic and/or non-academic 'expert'?

1= Yes

2=No

(V50): Number of Experts

How many expert sources/speakers were quoted in the story?

(V51): Experts (Proportion of Coverage)

How much of the total time (or words) were from experts? (If timing, round to the nearest second)

(V52): Primary Expert (Background)

The primary expert (the first expert referred to in the story) is best described as (or describe in the story as):

0=Not relevant

1= Political scientist (University or affiliated university institute)

2= Advocate from an advocacy/interest group

3= Member of an independent research institute

4= Associated with polling company

5= Former politician

6= Former political adviser

7= Independent commentator

8= Media- other journalist/reporter

9=Other University Academic

10= Business person

11= Member representing religious organization

12= Union representative

13=Former or Current Public Servant

14= State/Territory level Politician

15=Other
16= Unknown

(V53): Secondary Expert (Background)

The secondary expert (the expert referred to second in the story) is best described as (or describe in the story as):

0=Not relevant

1= Political scientist (University or affiliated university institute)

2= Advocate from an advocacy/interest group

3= Member of an independent research institute

4= Associated with polling company

5= Former politician

6= Former political adviser

8= Media commentator or journalist

9= Other University Academic

10= Business person

11= Member representing religious organization

12= Union representative

13=Former or Current Public Servant

14= State/Territory level Politician

15=Other
16= Unknown

(V54): Expert: (Prominence in Story)

Where was an expert first mentioned in the story?

0= No mention of expert

1= Headline

2= Leading Paragraph/ Opening Introduction to Story (if TV)

3= Second Paragraph/ First footage of Story, i.e within the first few frames or first minute (if TV)

4= Other section/ Latter section of story

(V55): Expert (Nature of Comments)

The comments offered by the primary expert were:

0=Not applicable/ Did not comment on policy

1= Limited: provided very brief comments on policy

2= Moderate- discussed and analysed the details of a policy

3= Substantive and Detailed- discussed details but also appraised policy and weighed up benefits and disadvantages.

4= Adopted Contest/Game frame language

5=Mixed: limited, substantive or substantive/critical policy discussion that included reference to the contest/game

(V56): Politician's Views

Did the article/story include a direct quotation or partly quoted material from a political candidate/leader/party offcial?

1= Yes

2= No

(V57): ALP POLITICIANS QUOTES

Total Number of ALP Politicians/Representatives **DIRECTLY OR PARTIALLY quoted** in story

(V57A) ALP POLITICIANS MENTIONED

Total Number of ALP Politicians/Representatives **MENTIONED** (include politicians whose quoted comments and paraphrased comments attributed to them, and/or simply mentioned by their name in the story) in the story

(V58): COALTION POLITICIANS QUOTED

Total Number of Coalition Politicians/Representatives **DIRECTLY OR PARTIALLY** quoted in story

(V58A) COALITION POLITICIANS MENTIONED

Total Number of Coalition Politicians/Representatives **MENTIONED** (include politicians whose quoted comments and paraphrased comments attributed to them, and/or simply mentioned by their name) in the story

(V59): MINOR PARTY/INDEPENDENT POLITICIANS QUOTED

Total Number of Minor Party/Independent Politicians/Representatives **DIRECTLY OR PARTIALLY** quoted in story

(V59A) MINOR PARTY/INDEPENDENT POLITICIANS MENTIONED

Total Number of Minor Party/Independent Politicians/Representatives **MENTIONED** (include politicians whose quoted comments and paraphrased comments attributed to them, and/or simply mentioned by their name) in the story

(V60A POL SOURCES QUOTED TOTAL): Total number of political sources quoted

Total Number of Politicians/Representatives **DIRECTLY OR PARTIALLY** quoted in story

(v60B TOTAL POL MENTIONED): Total number of political sources mentioned

Total Number of Politicians/Representatives **MENTIONED** (include politicians whose quoted comments and paraphrased comments attributed to them, and/or simply mentioned by their name) in the story

(V60): Primary Politician Quoted

Who was the primary politician directly or partially quoted in the story? I.e the first politician to be directly/partly quoted in the story or appears at the beginning of story.

0=Not relevant

1= Leader of ALP

2=Leader of Coalition

3= Leader of Greens

4= Leader of other minor party

5= ALP Minister/Shadow Minister

6= Coalition Minister/ Shadow Minister

7= ALP Backbencher/ Other ALP Candidate

8= Coalition Backbencher/ Other Coalition Candidate

9= Greens Candidate

10= Other minor party/ independent candidate

11= Other party official (e.g current party secretary, campaign spokesperson etc)

12= Unknown

(V60C LIB LAB MINOR): Was the primary voice was a Coalition, Labor, Minor or Other Politician?

0=No Primary Voice

1= Labor

2= Coalition

3= Greens

4= other minor party

11= Other Party official

12= Unknown

(V61): Length Words/Time Quoted in Story (Primary):

(If timing, round to the nearest second)

(V62): Secondary Politician Quoted

Who was the second politician directly or partially quoted in the story? I.e the second politician to be directly/partly quoted in the story.

0=Not relevant

1= Leader of ALP

2=Leader of Coalition

3= Leader of Greens

4= Leader of other minor party

5= ALP Minister/Shadow Minister

6= Coalition Minister/ Shadow Minister

7= ALP Backbencher/ Other ALP Candidate

8= Coalition Backbencher/ Other Coalition Candidate

9= Greens Candidate

10= Other minor party/ independent candidate

11= Other party official (e.g current party secretary, campaign spokesperson etc)

12= Unknown

(V62A LIB LAB MINOR): Was the secondary voice was a Coalition, Labor, Minor or Other Politician?

0=No Primary Voice

1= Labor

2= Coalition

3= Greens

4= other minor party

11= Other Party official

12= Unknown

(V63):Length Words/Time Quoted in Story (Secondary):

(If timing, round to the nearest second)

(V64): Tertiary Politician Quoted

Who was the primary politician directly or partially quoted in the story? I.e the third politician to be directly/partly quoted in the story or appears at the end of story.

0=Not relevant

1= Leader of ALP

2=Leader of Coalition

3= Leader of Greens

4= Leader of other minor party

5= ALP Minister/Shadow Minister

6= Coalition Minister/ Shadow Minister

7= ALP Backbencher/ Other ALP Candidate

8= Coalition Backbencher/ Other Coalition Candidate

9= Greens Candidate

10= Other minor party/ independent candidate

11= Other party official (e.g current party secretary, campaign spokesperson etc)

12= Unknown

(V64A_LIB_LAB_MINOR): Was the tertiary/third voice was a Coalition, Labor, Minor or Other Politician?

0=No Primary Voice

1= Labor

2= Coalition

3= Greens

4= other minor party

11= Other Party official

12= Unknown

(V65): Length Words/Time Quoted in Story (Tertiary):

(If timing, round to the nearest second)

(V66): Focus of Quotes: Analysis/Description

Did any of the direct quote(s) from politician(s) presented in the story offer analysis and/or description of their policy/policies?

0= Not relevant

1= Yes

2= No

(V67): Focus of Quotes: Defense of Record

Did any of the direct quote(s) from politician(s) presented in the story discuss or defend their policy record?

0= Not relevant

1= Yes

2= No

(V68): Focus of Quotes: Criticise Opponent

Did any of the direct quote(s) from politician(s) presented in the story criticize their opponent or opponent's policy/policies?

0= Not relevant

1= Yes

2= No

(V69): Focus of Quotes: Strategy/Campaign/ Polling

Did any of the direct quote(s) from politician(s) presented in the story comment on campaign strategy or polling?

0= Not relevant

1= Yes

2= No

(V70): Focus of Quotes: Leadership Issues

Did any of the direct quote(s) from politician(s) presented in the story comment on party leadership or leadership related issues?

0= Not relevant

1= Yes

2= N

POLICY LAUNCH SPEECH/ CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

(Only apply to analysis of major party (ALP and Coalition) launches)

(V71): Major Parties Campaign Launch Speech

Where was the leader's policy speech (campaign launch) speech first mentioned in the story?

0= No mention of speech

1= Headline

2= Leading Paragraph/ Opening Introduction to Story (if TV)

3= Second Paragraph/ First footage of Story, i.e within the first few frames or first minute (if TV)

4= Other section/ Latter section of story

(V71: RECODE) Major Parties Campaign Launch Speech

Was the leader's policy speech (campaign launch) speech mentioned in the story?

1= Yes

2= No

(V72): Percentage of coverage (campaign launch)

If so, what percentage of story content is devoted to the coverage of the campaign launch event?

0= Not relevant/None

1= Negligible: less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V73): Percentage Quoted

What percentage of story content was directly quoted from the leader's policy speech? (Calculate as a percentage of total word count/ time)

0= Not relevant/None

1= Negligible: less than 5 %

2= Under 25%

3= 26 to 50%

4= 51 to 74%

5= Greater than 75%

(V74): Story Duplicates

ALL DUPLICATES SHOULD NOT BE CODED IF FOUND.

A duplicate story is defined as a story that is exactly the same, or the same with only very minor variations (such as the headline or less than 10 percent of the body of the story was changed compared to the other copy).

Were there any duplicated stories found from the exact same newspaper/TV program/ Website, or other duplicated stories from different newspapers?

1= Yes

2= No

Appendix B: Content Analysis Coding Instructions for News Stories

Please use this booklet in conjunction with the Content Analysis Coding Guide.

This instruction booklet explains the coding guide in greater detail; however, coding should be done according to the variables outlined in the coding guide.

Definition of a Policy Story

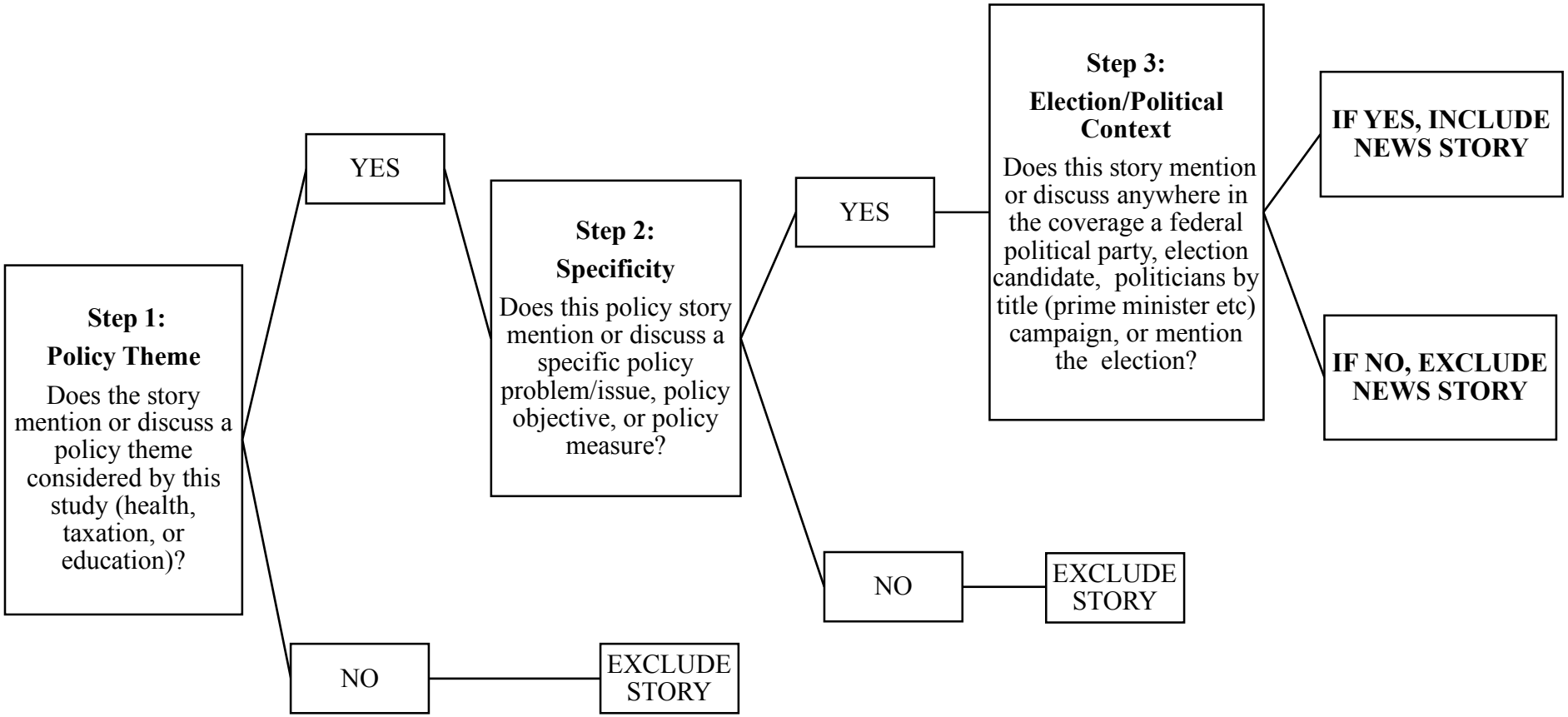
For a story to be included in the sample, it needed to be based on a policy issue which can be isolated to a policy theme and a specific objective/or means to achieve change via government action. Simply including the word "health", "tax" or "education" in the story with no discussion of a specific policy or policy issue did not qualify for inclusion in the sample. A degree of specificity was required, even if this was just mentioning the name of a policy program or measure. While some news stories may have covered several policy themes, to be included they had to specify a policy measure (for example, reform GST rates, lower income tax, cut company tax, lower thresholds for student loan repayments), issue, or policy problem (for example, oversupply of graduates with lack of places, two-tiered health funding system and so on).

News stories also needed to mention or discuss the election or political context. I am concerned with media coverage of policy issues *during election periods*. This study is researching policy news stories in election reporting and how the media cover the campaign issues, so to be included the stories need a connection to the election context in which they were reported. Policy news stories needed to mention or discuss the federal election, a federal political party, or a candidate or politician. This could have simply included a mention of a word such as "election", "government candidate" "independent candidate," "campaign", "prime minister" "minister" "Labor" or "Liberal" in the headline or body of the text/television story. I deliberately kept this category broad to ensure that I included as many relevant tax, health and education

policy stories from each election. While I there is a potential to exclude some policy stories by including this final step, it was deemed necessary to ensure the feasibility of the project and collect the policy stories that dealt with the election campaign issues. Other election studies have also followed a similar approach by placing limits on the types of election stories collected during the election (Denemark et al., 2007; Hollander, 2006). The requirements for a story to be included in the sample are summarised in Figure 3.1.

1. To ascertain whether a story should be coded, please use the following chart:

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING WHETHER TO CODE POLICY STORY:



2.. Often articles included other issues along side the issues that were relevant to this thesis (tax, health, education). These were often coded as 'other' . For example, some articles focused on company tax, but also included a discussion about paid parental leave (which was first coded as tax and second coded as other)

Sample

3. To begin, remove/exclude material from sample if is any of the following

a) 'Letter to', 'sms to' and 'texts to' the editor or 'Tweet of the week" articles. That is, short statement from readers sent in to the newspaper and published under 'letters' or 'SMS/Texts/Tweets'
b) Sports story that contains no discussion of a policy issue (see definition)
c) Entertainment/celebrity news articles that contain no policy coverage.
d) Incomplete articles (i.e those which were corrupted or missing half of the text).
e) Financial shares index or listings
f) Financial stories with no reference/discussion of election and policy issue (as per criteria)
g) 'Quote of the Week' also appear as 'They said it' articles. These are not news stories, but merely transcripts/excerpts of conversation.
h) Stories that are based around state politics (with no reference to the federal election), such as the reporting of State budgets etc. This thesis is focused on the analysis of policy reporting on a federal level.
i) "TODAY's POLL" or the results of a poll that have no article attached. These articles were not included because they were not deemed to be a news story. If a news story included a discussion of polls in its article, then these were coded under the appropriate variables.
j) Articles that report campaign spending with no discussion of any issue but only the daily tally result. For example, SPEND O- METER' OR ELECTION SPENDING TALLY. Only include if they were part of an attached news story or article.
k) Articles on State politics or State level government policy decisions with no mention of federal politics/federal party/federal election
l) Sports results lists
m) Eulogies
n) Court reports (unless they are about a challenge to a particular government policy and meet above criteria (e.g mining tax challenge etc)

4.INCLUDE articles that are:

a) Straight news story
b) Editorials (i.e identified by the absence of a by-line)
c) Opinion Column

d) Straight News segment followed by/or introduced after an interview/analysis with reporter (TV Only)
e) Straight News segment followed by interview/analysis with politician/party member (TV Only)
f) Straight News segment followed by interview/analysis with expert/interest group (TV Only)
g) Stand-alone Fact Checking/ Promise tracking Segment/ Story
h) Straight News segment followed by related Fact Checking/Promise Tracking Segment (TV Only)

5.Include all editions that were found, regardless of the edition because it was too difficult to limit the editions to only first edition articles.

6. Duplicates: A duplicate story is defined as a story that is exactly the same, or the same with only very minor variations (such as the headline or less than 10 Exclude all duplicates stories. Note any duplicate of already coded stories in v74.

If the story does vary more than the above (i.e more than 10 percent of the body is different from the earliest/original edition), please code both the original story and the varied story.

7.Weekend editions: code under their corresponding weekday titles. Make a note of the day using variable 6 (Day of the Week).

8. When coding the election week, in this thesis the week begins on Monday and ends on Sunday. Week 1 is the first week of the campaign commencing after or on the day of the issue of writs.

9. After relevant articles are excluded/included in the sample, apply the policy criteria outlined in step 1 above to the stories in the sample.

General Coding Instructions and Notes

9. Code media data according to the instruction outlined in the coding guide. The instruction below provides information on some of these variables.

Policy Information

10. When coding for the number of policy issues in a story (v18), include all policy issues mention even if they fall outside of the defined policy scope of this study (tax, health and education). Count specific measures or objectives (i.e increase the GST rate, train more doctors, company tax rate policy, increase refugee intake etc), not the overall themes presented in the article (tax, health, education).

11. When coding primary, secondary and tertiary policy focus (v19 to v24), code according to the amount of content devoted to the tope three issues. i.e if most content is devoted to tax then tax is the primary issue, followed the second and third most covered issue in the story.

12. When coding primary, secondary and tertiary policy themes (v20, v21, and v23), only use the other code when coding articles that also have a reference to tax, health or education. This code is only used in conjunction with stories that contain mention of these themes because this thesis is primarily dealing with these issues.

13. When coding for the overall policy content in the story (v25), code based on the estimated space given to a particular issue. To estimate, approximate the time/words devoted to issue divided by the total length of the story.

14. When coding for the amount of policy detail (v26), consider whether the story includes facts, names of policies, politician's views, expert opinions, details about the cost of the policy, and the overall length of the discussion about these elements. It is important to note that some stories may provide an exceptional deep discussion of an issue using expert opinions, but may only briefly refer to the cost; however, this may still be considered an exceptionally detailed policy story. Refer to the coding guide for further instructions.

Documentary Sources,

15. When coding for documentary sources (v31 to v42), code paraphrased material but only when it was directly attributed to a documentary source. These are often longer documents and the more often paraphrased than directly quoted.

16. When coding for documentary sources (v31 to v42), approximate the percentage of content in the story that paraphrase or quotes material from documentary sources.

17. When coding for policy links (v43 and v44), also consider whether the story provides links to policy documents or party websites. A "Link" is defined as a written URL, clickable button directing to another page (if online site), or embedded policy document that appears on same story page (if online site) to official party policy documents or party websites.

Framing

18. When coding for the presence of game or contest framing (v45), consider whether the story uses language denoting a contest, battle, win or loss, game, and so on. You should keep qualitative examples for further analysis.

19. When coding for the presence of opinion polls or campaign strategy (v45), consider whether the story mentions a poll or poll result. Also consider whether the story mentions campaign tactics, such as advertising, campaign agenda, strategy, and so on. You should keep some qualitative examples for further analysis.

20. When coding for personality (v46), consider whether the story made any statements about the leader's or politician's character, values, or personal characteristics. Do not include mentions or discussion about leadership challenges here. Only focus on the whether the story included any discussion of the leader/politician's character, personality, or values. Code no matter how brief the discussion.

21. When coding for party specific feedback (v47 and v48), consider the following question: *if you were an ALP/Coalition member/candidate would you find this story to*

be a positive, negative, balanced or purely descriptive story about your party or your party's policies?

To code direction of feedback, first look for mentions of the ALP/Coalition by party name, or associated politician, such as "leader of the opposition", "Tony Abbott", the "Prime minister" "Opposition leader XYZ" etc. If it does not mention either the party name, politician office/name, or there is no obvious connection to a party, code as 0= no mention.

Expert, and Political Voices

22. When coding for expert/ politicians, only coded if they were directly/partially quoted using quotation marks, or (for TV) when the person speaks directly and is recorded on camera. That is, only coded direct or partly quoted material. It was deemed that this quoted material would be a more accurate representation of the politicians/elite's views than the interpretations offered by the journalist.

23. When identifying experts, do not include members of the general public unless it is explicitly stated in the story that they represent an organisation, have links to a business, affiliation with an organisation/research institution, or affiliated with some other organisation. Members of the public are quoted under a different variable.

24. When coding political voices/experts in a story, do not include members of a leader's/politician's family or extended family.

25. When coding for the nature of expert's comments (v55), consider the type of appraisal of policy that they offer. Was it a brief descriptive comment (limited)? Did the comments provide a substantive analysis? Did the comments weigh up the benefits and disadvantages of a policy (substantive and critical)?

26. When coding political voices in a story, also code for mentions of politicians by name in a story (see variables 57a, 58a, 59a). Include politicians whose quoted comments and paraphrased comments are attributed to them, and/or simply mentioned by their name in the story. For example, Tony Abbott, Kevin Rudd etc.

27. When coding for the length of time/words quoted by a politician (v61, v63, and v65), count/time the number of words directly quoted from the politician.

28. When coding for the focus of politicians' comments (v66 to v70), consider the focus of the direct quotations presented in the story. Were they descriptive comments on policy? Were they critical of the opposition? Did they offer a defence of the party policy record? Did they discuss strategy or leadership? And so on.

Campaign Launch

29. When coding for campaign launch (v71 to v73), consider where in the story the launch was first mentioned. Approximate the amount of overall space of discussion dedicated to reporting of the campaign launch. Also consider the percentage of direct quotations (quotations that use quotation marks or, for TV, politicians showed commenting on launch) present in the story as an overall percentage of the total time/word count.

Appendix C: Coding Guide for Campaign Launch Speeches

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CODING OF INDIVIDUAL SPEECHES

1. Code each quasi-sentence of the policy speech by themes identified in the guide below. Pay attention to non-policy issues.
2. **Unit of Analysis:** Maximum length that can be coded is a single sentence. There is no double coding. However, sentences may be broken down to code the sentence and code its clauses if it deals with separate specific policy issues/measures. If two joining sentences have the same topic then it can be given the same code, but coded individually.
3. **CODING STATEMENTS:** Only code as a policy statement/theme if it specifically mentions (or discusses in context) a policy objective, specific issue (i.e income tax inequality, medicare reform etc), specific previous achievement, or specific future policy measure. For example, cuts in income tax, funding increase of Australian universities etc.
   - The key is specificity. There has to be an identifiable specific measure/objective in the statement not just a broad theme or rhetorical statement. When a policy theme/ issue is identified, ask yourself whether this statement is specific enough to be testable? Am I able to follow up on this to prove or disprove this statement?
   - For example, simply stating taxes are lower is not a testable statement because it is not specifying which tax. Some taxes may have risen, others may have fallen. However, this could be coded under the general theme of tax and coded accordingly in V4 as 2= General policy theme.
   - **<u>EXCEPTIONS</u>: if V4_ (Specificity of Statement) is coded as 2= General policy theme, please add the relevant major theme code. DO NOT add a minor code to this, only a major code. Code minor code as 0 in this instance.**
4. Code statements about opponents policies/objectives
5. **FOR V4_SPECIFICITY**: if it mentions a specific measure as per the definition above, code as 1. If it mentions a general area (e.g welfare reform, taxation reform) but no specific measure, code as 2= General policy theme. In this case, only add a general major code. If it it in anyway discusses the economy, code as 4. All other non-policy issues are coded as 0.
6. Tally the number of specific policy statement codes in speech and enter into summary spreadsheet variables (v6 to v28).

FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL SPEECH

V1_TEXT:

This is the text of the speech (divided into quasi-sentences). Code each quasi-sentence statement.

V2_ Major Code

Please code into ONE of the major policy themes as follows. Each major theme has a corresponding sub-code (minor code)

Taxation Issues (Code= 1-107)

Health Issues (Code= 3)

Education Issues (Code= 6)

Economy (DO NOT INCLUDE TAX) (Code=1):

Civil Rights Issues (Code= 2)

Agriculture Issues (Code=4)

Labor and Immigration Issues (Code= 5)

Environment Issues (Code= 7)

Energy Issues (Code= 8)

Transportation Issues (Code= 10)

Law, Crime and Family Issues (code= 12)

Social Welfare Issues (Code= 13)

Community development and Housing Issues (Code= 14)

Banking, Finance and Domestic Commerce Issues (Code= 15)

Defence Issues (Code= 16)

Space, Science and Technology Issues (Code= 17)

Foreign Trade Issues (Code= 18)

International Affairs Issues (Code= 19)

Government Operations Issues (Code= 20)

Public Lands, Water Management, Colonial and Territorial Issues (code= 21)

Non Policy Issue: Leadership/Personality/ Leader Character/characteristics and Leader's values(Code= 99)

Non Policy Issue: Leadership Issue specifically about leadership challenge/deposition (code 96)

Contest/Game/Battle Language/Strategy (Code= 98)

V3_ Minor Code

Please code into ONE of the major policy themes with the corresponding sub-code (minor code)

Taxation Issues (Major Code= 1-107)

Code with following minor code:

TAXATION
107-101= Company/Small Business Tax Rate Reform **107-102=** Government commissioned independent tax review/inquiry **107-103=** Reform of Income Taxation Rates **107-104=** Environmental Levy/ Carbon Pollution Tax/ Resource Minerals Tax **107-105**= Family/First-Child Tax/Baby Bonus Tax Rebate measure (Do NOT include childcare rebate/family tax benfit part A or B). **107-106=** Goods and Services Tax (GST) **107-107=** Medicare Levy Rate **107-108**= Tax Administration/Red Tape **107-109=** Superannuation Tax Issues **107-110=** Petrol and Gas Excise **107-111=** Capital Gains Tax Reform **107-112=** Education Tax Rebate **107-113**= Payroll Tax Reform **107-114=** Fringe benefits tax **107-115-** Other Taxation Issue not listed

Health Issues (Major Code= 3)
Code with following minor code:

HEALTH
301= Medicare Reform **302**= Funding of Existing Hospitals/ Primary Healthcare Services **303**= Construction of new OR upgrade of existing medical/ hospital/ GP/Aged Care homes and facilities **304**= Hospital Beds **305**= Hospital Surgery Waiting Lists **306**= Manpower/Staff shortages and/or Training of Healthcare staff **307**= Mental Health Funding **308**= Mental Health frontline service provision **309**= Responsibility for administration of hospitals state-federal healthcare responsibility arrangements. **310**= Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme **311**= Aged Care funding AND/OR Regulation. **312**= Funding of Research and Development in Health Sector. **313**= Private Health Insurance Reform **314**= Immunisation Program **315=**Other Health Issue not listed

Education Issues (Major Code= 6)

Code with following minor code:

EDUCATION
6-201= Higher Education: Commonwealth funding arrangements/research funding AND/OR Regulation (**NOT** HECs/Loan Issues) **6-202**= HECS/ Higher Education/ Vocational Education Loans Scheme/ Tertiary Fees **6-203**= Secondary and Primary School Funding **6-204**= Secondary and Primary School Teacher Salary **6-205**= Secondary and Primary School/Teacher Performance and Teacher Training **6-206**= Secondary and Primary School Autonomy **6-207**= National school Curriculum **6-208**= School Facilities/Buildings Development **6-209=** Early Childhood (Pre School) Care/ Funding **6-210=** Training for Early Childhood workers. **6-211**= Vocational Education and TAFE Funding **6-212**= Establishing New Vocational/ TAFE Facilities **6-213**= Education and underprivileged students/ communities. **6-214**= After-hours school care programs **6-215**= Other Education Issue not listed

OTHER AREAS

The following minor codes were coded using the Australian Policy Agendas Codebook (see also Dowding and Martin, 2017). Further information is available from the author on request.

Economy (DO NOT INCLUDE TAX) (Code=1):

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Civil Rights Issues (Major Code= 2)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Agriculture Issues (Major Code=4)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Labor and Immigration Issues (Major Code= 5)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Environment Issues (Major Code= 7)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Energy Issues (Major Code= 8)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Transportation Issues (Major Code= 10)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Law, Crime and Family Issues (Major code= 12)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Social Welfare Issues (Major Code= 13)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Community development and Housing Issues (Major Code= 14)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Banking, Finance and Domestic Commerce Issues (Major Code= 15)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Defence Issues (Major Code= 16)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Space, Science and Technology Issues (Major Code= 17)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Foreign Trade Issues (Major Code= 18)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

International Affairs Issues (Major Code= 19)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Government Operations Issues (Major Code= 20)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Public Lands, Water Management, Colonial and Territorial Issues (Major code= 21)

Code with minor code as per corresponding Policy Agendas Codebook

Non-Policy Issue: Leadership/Personality/ Leader Character/characteristics and Leader's values(Major and Minor Code= 99)

Non-Policy Issue: Leadership Issue specifically about leadership challenge/deposition (Major and Minor code= 96)

Non-Policy Issue: Political Party values (where not directly related specifically to leader)(Major and Minor Code= 97)

Non-Policy Contest/Game/Battle Language/Strategy (Major and Minor Code= 98)

Non-Policy Issue: Other (Major and Minor Code= 0)

V4_ Specificity of Statement

0= Non-policy

1= Specific policy issue/measure/specific objective/ specific achievement

2= General Policy Theme: there is no specific measure, but mentions a general theme (e.g health, defence, education).

4= Statement about Economy: includes statement about the state of the economy or general economic issues (such as deficits, surpluses, interest rates etc).

V5_ Past Achievement/Future Statment

If coded as a specific statement (coded as 1) in V4, does this statement mention a past achievement/result/outcomes, future policy/programme/ measure, or comment on the current policy situation?

0= Not Applicable OR Does not include a clear statement about past or future in conjunction with a policy measures/ policy theme.

1= Past Policy Achievement/Stance/Result/Past policy related issue (including of other parties). E.g 'They have', We have,

2= Statement/Commitments about future programmes/policy measures/ future policies of other opposition parties. For example, 'we will' 'we pledge' 'we want to' 'we hope'

3= Comments on the current policy situation

FOR AGGREGATED SUMMARY SPREADSHEET

When tallying the codes in the summary spreadsheet, please enter into the following.

V1: CODER ID

V2: ELECTION YEAR

V3: Date Speech Given

V4: Name of Speaker: Surname, Initial e.g Abbott, T.

V5: Party of Speaker

1= Liberal Party

2= Labor Party

3= Other

V6: Number of Mentions: Taxation Issues (Code= 1-107)

V7: Number of Mentions: Health Issues (Code= 3)

V8: Number of Mentions: Education Issues (Code= 6)

V10 Number of Mentions: Civil Rights Issues (Code= 2)

V11 Number of Mentions: Agriculture Issues (Code=4)

V12: Number of Mentions: Labor and Immigration Issues (Code= 5)

V13: Number of Mentions: Environment Issues (Code= 7)

V14: Number of Mentions: Energy Issues (Code= 8)

V15 Number of Mentions: Transportation Issues (Code= 10)

V16: Number of Mentions: Law, Crime and Family Issues (code= 12)

V17: Number of Mentions: Social Welfare Issues (Code= 13)

V18: Number of Mentions: Community development and Housing Issues (Code= 14)

V19: Number of Mentions: Banking, Finance and Domestic Commerce Issues (Code= 15)

V20: Number of Mentions: Defence Issues (Code= 16)

V21: Number of Mentions: Space, Science and Technology Issues (Code= 17)

V22: Number of Mentions: Foreign Trade Issues (Code= 18)

V23: Number of Mentions: International Affairs Issues (Code= 19)

V24: Number of Mentions: Government Operations Issues (Code= 20)

V25: Number of Mentions: Public Lands, Water Management, Colonial and Territorial Issues (code= 21)

V26: Non Policy Issue: Leadership/Personality/ Leader Character/characteristics and Leader's values(Code= 99)

V26A: Non-Policy Issue: Leadership Issue specifically about leadership challenge/deposition (code 96)

V28: Non-Policy Issue: Values/ideology statement about political party (other than leader): (Code= 97)

V29: Non-Policy Issue: Other (Code= 0)

V30: General Mentions: Economy (Other than tax.) Issues (Code=1):

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