

Full Length Research Paper

Political Leaders and the Media: A Relationship that Impacts on the Nation's Consciousness

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This study aimed to further investigate the relationship between politicians and the media and its impact on the consciousness of Australians during a critical period of political events in late November 2009 and early December 2009 in Australia. The findings of this study reflect limitations in perceptions of political leaders as governed by gaps in how the media portrays leaders, leadership, and issues that are of significance to a nation, and gaps in how politicians convey information and analysis to the public through the media. The study highlights how influential the Australian media is in shaping perceptions of wide ranging issues beyond those directly covered. It points to recommendations to empower and enable effective decision-making at all levels of society.

Keywords: women, politics, perceptions, media

Introduction

In the 1930s Harold Lasswell proposed a fundamental model of public communication that was linear and deterministic. The model (Cunningham, 2008) canvassed 'who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect?' Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet 1944[1969]) went further to hypothesise a 'two step' flow between influencers like politicians and the media in general, and the public. Cunningham (2008) states that in this model of public communication, the role of opinion leaders became crucial.

Characterising this trend as being politico-centric rather than media-centric, Cunningham (2008) points out that this approach focussed on political leaders' managing the media. Tiffen (1989; 1999; 2001) and Goot (Goot and Tiffen 1992), however, indicate that this relationship is not as straightforward and assert that both the political elite and the media elite exploit and manage each other for their own benefit as they negotiate deals and power (Cunningham, 2008). This is echoed in former Prime Minister, Paul Keating's (2000) remarks of the Australian media:

"It is an industry that operates behind a cloak of secrecy and insider knowledge. It is riddled with nepotism, back-scratching and interlocking interests..." (Keating, 2000).

The political leaders-media relationship is also said to be "systemic" and "highly personal" (Cunningham, 2008). Keating (2004) alluded to this too.

"...the media is the only effective way of getting the message through to the people...The large issues in Australian life – economic and social change, constitutional reform, cultural diversity, Australia's view

of its role in the world are all worked out through the media. The best journalists are right to think about themselves as having a high purpose in life (Keating, 2000)."

Power is a dominant theme in both modernist and postmodernist analysis of the political leaders-media relationship with the former focusing on a balance of power between the state and the media and the latter focusing on the centrality of media in the political domain (Cunningham, 2008).

Politicians have learnt to regard the media as a factor they need to learn to deal with in their political life. Garreth Evans (1998) remarked in a speech to the Australian Institute of Political Science (AIPS),

"Whether we like it or not - and most political practitioners have very mixed views on the subject, probably varying with the number of bruises we are currently nursing - it's impossible to imagine a democratic polity being conducted in this or any other country around the world without the media."

Former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair (2007) spoke of the media inevitably misleading the public. Keating's (2000) statement echoes this distrust.

"The media is powerful, and like all centres of power, it needs to be watched."

Cunningham (2008) citing Riebert (2007) advises that political leaders need to lead through and for the media

interface and align their style with the protocols of “politicainment” (p. 179).

Politicians also lament about the demise of quality media coverage. Evans (1998) critiqued that *“The disappearance of hard-edge reporting about policy, as distinct from politics and personality, has been endlessly remarked upon in recent years.”* Blair (2007) argued that the changing relationship between politics, public life and the media is adverse to public life necessitating management of all stakeholders’ interests so that the public is properly and accurately informed.

Young’s (2008) findings add further support to politicians concerns of the diminishing quality of media reporting. She found in her analysis of Australian primetime TV news stories, the average election-news story is only two minutes long during which the reporter and host speak for more than half the time while politicians speak only in 7 second sound bites. She adds that the average news story about the 2007 Australian federal election devoted less than 30 seconds to letting politicians speak in their own words. The media thus appeared to control the format, timing and commentaries of the politicians’ short appearances.

The political leaders-media relationship, according to Cunningham (2008) is, however, being eroded by contemporary internet developments, particularly around the “blogosphere, citizen journalism and the extent of ‘virtual’ public communication (p. 177).” However, a closer analysis of where do people find out about what politicians are doing and saying, indicates that the majority of Australians are informed through TV. Young (2008) reported that only around 10 percent of the population in Australia takes an active interest in politics. She qualified that although there are a whole host of options for engaging with politics and political news particularly on the internet, these options need to be searched for on the internet and thus are only accessed by the dedicated seeker of political information. Data from the 2007 election which suggests about 5 percent used the internet to get election news¹ supports this assertion. With nine out of ten Australians watching TV every week², TV is still by far the most used medium in Australia and as Young (2008) comments, it is the place where the “accidental audience” (p. 5) is most likely to come across political news.

Appreciating that the relationship between political leaders and the media is vested with overt and covert influences of power; that the media is significant to politicians; that political leaders have growing concerns about the quality of media coverage relating to them and their actions; and that as a source of information about political leaders and their actions, TV is the predominant media for the Australian public; this study aimed to further investigate the perceptions Australians formed of their political leaders and their

¹Young, S. (2008) cites Ian McAllister and Juliet Clark, *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study 1987–2007*. Canberra, Australian National University, 2007, p. 4.

² Ibid.

leadership and the extent to which their perceptions was influenced by the Australian media.

The period during which this study was undertaken, 28 November 2009 to 1 December 2009 was a crucial point in Australia’s political history. Divisions had already emerged in the Liberal party over support for their leader, Malcolm Turnbull and his Emissions Trading strategy. Several of Turnbull’s senior frontbenchers and party officeholders had already resigned³ in protest at his decision that the Liberal Party would vote in favour of the Rudd government’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) legislation. The Coalition Party had also voted 48-35⁴ against a motion that the position of leader be declared vacant. When this study commenced, Turnbull was reported to have said, *“We have a duty to our country, to our planet, to our children to take effective action on climate change...I respect the views of those who believe we don’t need to ... but it is not responsible to proceed on the basis that there is nothing to be concerned about* (The Age, 28 November, 2009).” The study closed on the day when there was a second leadership spill motion in which Turnbull was defeated by Tony Abbott⁵ by one vote in a secret ballot. Immediately, Abbott then declared a secret ballot on the ETS. The motion proposed that the legislation should be delayed for three months, and if this could not be secured, then the ETS legislation should be defeated. “The motion was carried by 54 votes to 29, guaranteeing the death of the Rudd Government’s ETS.”⁶

Against this tense backdrop of negotiations, power-plays, resignations, overt and covert conflict and strategizing to overthrow the leader within the Liberal party; a high level of media interest and coverage of Turnbull and the Liberal party and to a lesser extent of Rudd government’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) legislation, this study was undertaken. In order to capture how people’s perceptions were shaped by all forms of media that is online and offline sources, media was defined in this study as referring to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, as well as online delivery of news, radio and television run by media companies.

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to further investigate:

- the extent to which perceptions of political leaders and their leadership are influenced by Australian media coverage; and
- how the Australian media’s coverage of political leaders and their leadership is regarded.

³ Davis, M. (2009) *Seven senior Liberals desert their leader*. November 27, 2009. Sydney Morning Herald.

⁴ Lane, S. (2009) *Turnbull survives but divisions remain*. 25 November 2009 ABC News. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/25/2753605.htm>

⁵ Rodgers, E. (2009) *Senior Liberals desert Turnbull*. ABC News 26 November 2009. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/26/2754654.htm>;

⁶ Coorey, P. *Shock result as Abbott wins Liberal leadership by one vote ... ETS dead*. Sydney Morning Herald, December 1, 2009

To do this, an online survey entitled, *Leadership Survey about Political Leaders* was designed to explore participants' observations and thoughts on four areas:

- how the media contributed to perceptions of leadership of a political leader
- perceptions of the style of leadership employed in the Liberal Party in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme, and its effectiveness
- perceptions of a preferred style of leadership for a political leader of a party
- perceptions of the leadership style of Labor's Climate Change Minister, Penny Wong in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme

Methods

The Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (ACLW), a virtual Centre conducted an online national Survey entitled: *Leadership Survey about Political Leaders*. The Survey which ran from 28 of November and closed on 1 December at 5pm comprised 20 questions and included open and close ended questions. Responses to the Survey were collated and analyzed using Content Analysis.

Sample

Invitations to participate in the Survey were emailed on 28 November to a select group of 270 women who were selected from the ACLW's overall national membership on the basis of participation in the ACLW's most recent online leadership activities in the latter half of 2009. As the selected group of women was engaged in leadership issues and analysis as facilitated by the Center, they were invited to contribute to an analysis of the issues dealt with by the Survey.

Of the 270 women who formed the sample, 40 women of this group responded to the online Survey which was accessed at the virtual Center via a special link only known to the invited women. Participants who responded had to provide their email address by which they received the original invitation. This email address was cross-checked against the selected sample to maintain the study's sampling.

Although the respondent participant size of 40 is small, it is important to note that the distribution was national, representative of a cross section of ages, industry and political party preferences.

Moreover, the sample's involvement in leadership issues through the Center indicates that the sample is informed about leadership and therefore has credibility in assessing the issues that the Center aimed to investigate through the *Leadership Survey about Political Leaders*.

Characteristics of the Participants

Of the 40 participants, the predominant age group was 41-50 years with 42 percent being in this age group, followed by 27 percent in the 51-60 group, and then 17 percent in the 61+ age group.

The geographical distribution of the 40 participants who responded to the Survey indicates that the sample was spread

across Australia. 35 percent of the participants were from Queensland, 25 percent were from NSW, 17 percent from Victoria, 12 percent from Western Australia, 7 percent from South Australia and 2 percent from Tasmania.

In terms of industry representation of the participants, 17 percent were in the health industry, 15 percent were in government followed by 12 percent in community services as well as in environment related industries. The positions held by the women participants were primarily in the upper echelons of the organization. 40 percent were in management, 32 percent in Directorships and 17 percent owned their own business.

Findings

Media's role in informing and influencing

70 percent of the participants indicated that the Australian media coverage of Turnbull's leadership over the Emissions Trading Scheme was their only source of information. 22 percent said no and 7 percent did not respond.

Other sources of information outside the Australian media coverage which participants said informed them included conversations with friends, family, personal contacts, and colleagues as well as government websites such as those of Turnbull, Tony Abbott. Polling sites such as Crikey and NGO's sites were also accessed. The Scientific international press was also mentioned. In some of these 'other' sources mentioned such as participants' friends, family, colleagues and polling sites, the Australian media could have contributed to the views presented, though this was not identified.

Eighty percent of the participants said that they had viewed in the media coverage comments made by Turnbull regarding his leadership of the Liberal Party over the Emissions Trading Scheme. 12 percent said that they had not and 7 percent did not answer.

Media Coverage of Turnbull's leadership of the Liberal Party over the Emissions Trading Scheme

Fifty-seven percent said that the media coverage of Turnbull's leadership of the Liberal Party over the Emissions Trading Scheme had not been objective, 17 percent said that it had. 20 percent were unsure.

When participants were asked to explain how the media was objective or unobjective, 10 participants outlined why they surmised that the coverage was objective. They felt that "all positions were discussed with the commentary explaining behind the scenes issues." "Balanced perspectives" were provided. The "Australian Financial Review" was seen to be supporting Turnbull's leadership. The "Age and "ABC" and the "Sydney-centric press" were noted as being "sympathetic" and "fairly kind to him." Although it was accepted that media journalists had their own "agendas," it was felt that because there were "many different commentators with differing views" getting "space in (the) media," all of the agenda's were "being played out." Two participants indicated that despite this, the focus was "too

much on the leadership spill” the coverage though balanced “had been "over the top."

Twenty four participants pointed out other reasons why they thought that the coverage was not objective. Primarily, it emerged that the media was more interested in “speculation”, “sensationalism”, in “following politics” and not the Emissions Trading Scheme or “the nature of the amendments put up by Turnbull and MacFarlane” or Turnbull’s leadership per se. With media coverage focusing on “leadership speculation and a potential spill” and on the “leadership/party infighting,” it was pointed out that the media was interested in the “politics of power” and not “on what was at stake and the consequences of the amendments. The content of the negotiations was secondary to the power tussle.”

Furthermore, it was felt that the media became an active participant in leading to the demise of Turnbull as the quotes below indicate.

“The intense scrutiny of Malcolm Turnbull's words "I am the leader... and as such I have made the call" was sensationalistic and typical of the Australian attitude to "tall poppies". There is little understanding of altruism in the media or Australia at large.”

“Media loves short sound bites and scare tactics even if inaccurate”

“The coverage has, in my perception, only fuelled the growing discontent within the liberal party.”

“The media has looked to the largest story and helped with the demise of democracy.”

“The media have been out to get rid of Turnbull.”

“The negotiations over ETS and Liberal party leadership all occur in private so the media is forced to build a story from impressions and door stops.”

“Engagement of Turnbull has been strange and he has been asked repeatedly to ask questions that would only be asked of an incumbent governor. His mistake was trying to answer.”

“Very unfactual.”

“(The) media are salivating over the fighting and backstabbing instead of presenting the issues ...”

“The media focus is about destructive directions and not about ETS.”

Bias in the media was stated as being evident as the coverage did not focus on “the positive things Turnbull may or may not have done in terms of leadership,” but too much on the negative and not the positive of the parties working together.” With Australian newspapers and commentators being of a certain “pro-conservative” political orientation, participants felt that the stories were biased in “analysis and writing.” It was thought that the motive for such biased coverage was because such coverage “provide(d) the audience,” and provided “news that will buy newspapers.”

Media Coverage of Turnbull’s leadership of the Liberal Party

In terms of whether there was a degree of balance in the media coverage about Turnbull’s leadership, 77% said that they had viewed coverage of comments about Turnbull's

leadership which were made by party members who supported his leadership of the Liberal Party over the Emissions Trading Scheme AND comments by party members who were not supportive.

Suggestions for Media Coverage of Political Leaders Balance and Issues oriented

The most prominent set of issues raised related to the need for media being balanced and issues oriented. Media commentary was seen as “as spruiking their own preferences” presenting a “biased Labor or Liberal view” “airing dirty laundry” and “skating over the issues and focusing on the personalities.”

It was also raised that whilst “each 'side' or 'aspect' talk about different things,” the issue became “extremely unclear due to the many assertions made on each side” making it difficult for one to “make an informed choice.” The “power tussle should have been put into the context of ETS more clearly. The playing of the personalities only is very limiting.”

Suggestions for how the media could present a balanced view were:

“use a balanced view where "balance" takes into account not just the black or the white viewpoint, but the spread of grey views and the prevalence of these grey views.”

“invite public, scientist, women's views”

“concentrate on the issues, less on the people and personalities”

“concentrate more on the performance of the individual as a representative of their electorate and less on personal traits or relationships”

“stop reporting about in fighting and start reporting on the issues that matter. Let them sort out their own fights.”

“argue more constructively”

“Media coverage of leaders has been relegated to poll results, which at best are transient and do not reflect much, except what a certain number say in response to a particular question at a particular point in time.”

“While minority views are important they should not automatically obtain the same coverage as general, moderate views.”

“So often the public only hears the noisy cog, this is the case with the leaders that are most out spoken. It would have been beneficial to hear from some of the other members in the liberal party to hear their views. Whilst I understand that the leader is the speaker, through the media we (the public) only hear from the strongest voices. Because of this the public only hears those who speak up the most and are more aggressive.”

Media shaping outcomes

The media was perceived as not only being led by what was happening but also influencing the course of outcomes and as such being quite a significant player in the events as they transpired. Some of the comments to this effect are quoted below:

“Dissention within parties causes a feeding frenzy among media.”

“Once a leader is losing loyalty of his/her members the media is relentless in its pursuit of the story. I would prefer the media to concentrate on the issues, less on the people and personalities.”

“It doesn't help to have politicians text messaging the media whilst party meetings are being held. The betrayal of trust has been palpable...”

“Perhaps the media should concentrate more on the performance of the individual as a representative of their electorate and less on personal traits or relationships.”

“The media had not made such a story of the leadership issue; Malcolm Turnbull might not be facing a leadership challenge today. Why did the media give so much coverage to a group of failed political leaders who are so unsuited to the 21st century? Did the media empower them when dying out like the dinosaur is actually more likely to happen? Turnbull behaved like a true leader but thus was not highlighted by the media.”

“The media decided it was more fun to cover a leadership challenge than the real issue of ETS and climate change. I am getting tired of the media deciding when to undermine a leader and doing so regardless of the good of the country.”

“Are they acting for the greater good?”

“They need to argue more constructively. Climate Change is the greatest issue facing us and the Liberal party defectors are a disgrace.”

“The media rarely covers leadership issues unless there is a crisis, balanced and general reporting on the processes of government and political parties may give the public a better idea of the constraints that politicians operate under and the balancing act that they have to do between what they believe, what the public believes and what the party believes. A better understanding of the processes might encourage Australians to care about politics and political issues.”

“The media have given a lot of coverage to the leadership issues, which is valid, however how this will impact on the policy issues and what this means for the public is an important next step to understand and be reported on.”

“The media governs the country, and plays a huge role in every aspect, depending on their agenda the media can break a political party- in this case the media has focused on personal issues rather than policy.”

Media being truthful

That the media “lead with truth and courage” and provide “true journalism,” “more true debate” and “not sensationalism” was urged. The perception was that “The media will not let the real truth get in the way of a story” and that “Transparency and objectivity are paramount, but rarely found!”

Investigative journalism

Participants on the whole suggested that the media “investigate the real issues” provide “active critique” “replace 'opinion' with 'analysis'” and be less “worried about the rhetoric” but more about “the substance of the debate.”

The media does a good job

A few participants stated that the media did a good job and that it should not be criticized in its approach which is democratic and fair and that it is not responsible for creating the problems which exist.

“We have a reasonably unbiased media in this country compared to other western democracies. They do a fair job on party politics and everyone gets a fair say, as well as a fair bashing when their turn comes around. Leave the media alone - this is not their problem, it's our leaders' problem.”

“should be free to cover it in whatever way they desire. There will be multiple perspectives but that is healthy for democracy.”

“It is fair game politicians are media savvy, it is up to them to manage media professionally according to party standards.”

Below are the findings of the perceptions that participants had formed of Turnbull's leadership of the Liberal Party in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme as well as that of Penny Wong, Minister of Climate Change.

Style of leadership of Turnbull

Participants were asked what style of leadership they thought that Turnbull had used to lead the Liberal Party in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme. Four distinctive perspectives emerged in the responses.

- 50 percent of the participants indicated that Turnbull was “autocratic.”
- 35 percent indicated that he needed to be autocratic in this situation.
- 10 percent indicated that he had strong leadership.
- 5 percent indicated that it was difficult to determine his leadership style as one did not have any personal insights of what was happening behind closed doors except for what the media was conveying.

Participants who described Turnbull's style of leadership as being autocratic in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme used words such as “aggressive” “arrogant” “bull dozer” “commanding” “crash through or crash” “dominant” “forceful, non-collaborative – brinkmanship.” Turnbull was described as someone who “likes to get his own way” and used a “totalitarian” and “dictatorial” style that was not “conciliatory.”

The 35 percent who were in support of Turnbull's autocratic style of leadership in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme identified reasons that justified this leadership style in this particular situation. One of the set of reasons pertained to the significance of the Emissions Trading Scheme and its relevance to the nation commending Turnbull's attempt to use “rational” “balanced” debate whilst being “outcome” focused on the “longer-term national interest” rather than “short term gain.” Turnbull was also seen as being strategic, “strong” and “decisive” in making the best of a “no-win situation” “trying to drag his party into the 21st century” and as such, aware of the “long term implications of decisions made for his party...” “Leading from the front” being the

'light on the hill' to bring his caucus with him," to "move the liberal party into a party of the future" was commended.

Turnbull's leadership was evaluated in the context of the liberal party's culture which was described as having an "immature, impulsive, culture that is still getting used to being an opposition party." In this context, Turnbull was seen as using the "best style he could, given the level of dysfunction, lack of alternatives and dissent from the party." In being "progressive, but cautious," "principled," "strong ethically," "values led" and "autocratic," Turnbull's "corporate style" of "leading" and expecting his "colleagues" to "follow" was qualified with "genuinely trying to "do the right thing" at a national level."

10 percent of the participants who indicated that Turnbull had employed strong leadership stated that it was "well informed" "clear & focused" and "strong with integrity."

Perceptions of Turnbull and Rudd working with each other on the Emissions Trading Scheme

In response to the question that sought participant's comments about the way Turnbull and Rudd worked with each other on the Emissions Trading Scheme, on the whole, it was seen to be a positive in that it involved "collaboration" "collegiate respect" "great team work" "a common goal" and the desire to "find an outcome." It was described as being "constructive" "pragmatic," a negotiation to find "a common point in the best interests of stakeholders" "a good model" "a new experience for politicians" and an "excellent example of a bi-partisan relationship that realized this issue is bigger than federal politics.

Amongst those who described Turnbull and Rudd working together as "poor," it was said that there was "no deep meaningful debate. There was a "lack of evidence and lack of answering the 'why questions'," and the bipartisan collaboration "was seen by labor voters to reek of back room deals and by conservatives as 'all about me'-ism from Turnbull." Another said that although the "approach initially (was) destructive as there was little consultation on Labor's behalf, considering the matter should have been very much a bipartisan initiative," the final outcome "was better than anticipated."

A common theme was that of gamesmanship which emerged in the descriptions used to discuss the motives and moves made by Turnbull and Rudd in their negotiation. This is evident in terms such as "Both wanting to win" "scoring points" having the "upper hand" "bargaining power" and "little room to maneuver."

Some participants said that they could not tell if Turnbull and Rudd worked well together as they did not know "enough to have an opinion" or that their working together was "invisible, not public," and that they "didn't see anything" as things were "done very privately."

Support for Turnbull from Party Members

When asked if all of the Liberal and National party members should have supported Turnbull in his Emissions Trading Scheme strategy, 57 percent said YES they should have supported Turnbull; 25 percent said NO and 17 percent were unclear.

Some of the participants who said that party members should have supported Turnbull gave different reasons as the comments indicate:

"Absolutely. Their behaviour has shown them to be old-fashioned and narrow thinkers.

"Yes - they said they would and they backed down"

"Yes, once it was public and actioned."

"Yes I do, however I understand why they did not as his style was unfortunate"

"YES, given the ETS is so critical to our global future; however, Turnbull failed to build consensus or support initially so it is understandable that they behaved like put-out children"

Some of the participants who did not think that all the party members should have supported Turnbull in his Emissions Trading Scheme strategy said that party members have the "freedom" to "reject support of a strategy" if they "didn't agree" and that the party "needed to find their own strategy that they were happy with as a party" as their current strategies were based on a "conservatively framed agenda."

Participants who did not specifically say Yes or No to this question made some very valid comments which criticized the process Turnbull used, the failure of the party to come up with an alternative and the significance of the Emissions Trading Scheme. The view that "the parties should have come to an agreed position" for Turnbull to negotiate on" was common. In addition it was also commonly considered that it was imperative that "we need a form of ETS asap" and that the Liberals "needed to come up with a real alternative before shafting their leader." The significance of the Emissions Trading Scheme is noted in the comment quoted below.

"I believe as a country we have an imperative to relinquish unsustainable energy sources including fossil fuels and therefore I am aghast at the behavior of Joyce and company in the Nationals and the deferring senior Liberals. The motivation behind these people appears as nothing but self-interest."

Participant Support for Turnbull on his Emissions Trading Strategy

When participants were asked if they supported Turnbull in his Emissions Trading strategy, 60 percent of the participants said Yes, 20 percent said No; 15 percent were unsure and 5 percent did not answer.

Participant Support for Turnbull on his leadership over Emissions Trading Strategy

Forty percent supported Turnbull in how he led the Liberal Party over the Emissions Trading Scheme; 32 percent did not

support him, 22 percent were unsure and 5 percent did not wish to answer this question.

Accountability of a Leader

In response to the question to whom should a leader of a political party be accountable to first and foremost, 67 percent indicated that a leader of a political party should be accountable to “Australia at large” followed by 15 percent saying to the “electorate”; 12 percent to their “party members.” 2 percent said to themselves and equally 2 percent were unsure.

As this question was a multiple choice question allowing only one option, it did not give respondents the option to choose more than one selection or order the items. As one participant stated, “a political leader has multiple accountabilities-to his/her party, to their electorate, and to the Parliament. It is too simplistic to say that a leader has only one accountability.”

How participants had voted and will vote

42 percent of the participants had voted for Labor in the last election; 25 percent had voted Liberal; 10 percent had voted independents and 7 percent for the Greens. 5 percent had voted National and other parties and 2 percent for the Democrats or other parties.

Participants were asked “If there is an election in the near future, which party are you likely to vote for?” 37 percent said Labor; 22 percent were unsure; 15 percent said Liberal and 15 percent said Greens. 2 percent said the independent parties, or other parties or were unsure.

It therefore emerged that in a future election, in this sample of 40 women, the Liberal party vote would be down by 10 percent and the labor party vote would be down by 5 percent. Whilst votes for the Greens would go up by 8 percent, votes for the Independents would go down by the same percentage.

Preferred Style of Political Leadership

Participants predominantly expressed that they preferred a “consultative”, “collaborative” “democratic” style of leadership which was about “acknowledging if not addressing concerns of key players,” “integrat(ing) the needs and interests of party members into the strategy,” getting “people on board” and convincing “them of his/her position.”

A number of participants qualified that whilst consultation was necessary at the initial stages of making decisions, the leader needed to after this inclusive and collaborative process, make the decision and stick to it. There were varying degrees of such nuances in the participants’ responses as indicated in the quotes below about preferred leadership style of the leader:

“consultative but with capacity to make final decisions that stick”

“Initially consultative and collaborative when deciding the party line and then hard when implementing it. His party needs to know that they have no option other than

to support him publicly, but there must be a good internal system to work through difficulties.”

“Leaders of political parties need to inspire but before all else, they need to allay fears and make backbenchers feel safe. Collaboration at first, then if the views are at odds, a well communicated platform to the party prior to a strong, unshakable and sensible stance.”

“Best results come from consensus within the party, but where consensus is lacking, the leader must “drive” the issue convincingly.”

Overall, the view was that the leader needed to be first and foremost, collaborative, well-informed and able to convince the party of the final position, but if consensus was lacking after collaboration, then the leader needed to be “principled” and make the final decision in terms of what was best for all stakeholders.

Penny Wong’s Leadership

Participant’s views about the Minister of Climate Change, Penny Wong’s leadership in the Emissions Trading Scheme was predominantly positive. Her leadership was described as being “acceptable” “excellent” “exceptional” “fantastic” “impressive,” “Good given the intense FOSSIL FUEL Lobbyists” and “purposeful.” A few participants commented that her leadership was “poor” “unsatisfactory” and “wishy washy”

Her qualities as a leader were also alluded to by a number of participants and overall were positive. Wong was seen as being “intelligent”, “strong” “focused” “consistent” “committed” “competent” and “articulate.” “She’s strong, forward thinking and unflappable - she’s clearly an intelligent and focused leader.”

Comments about Wong being “flexible” were noted amongst a number of participants as she was seen to be “willing to give the opposition the opportunity to work through their issues and thoughts.” She “listens” is “open for communication” “seems open to negotiate” is “consensus-based” and is “willing to reach a negotiated settlement.”

She was also seen as being “competent” “measured” “credible” “well briefed and informed” and expressing the “decisions and policy” “supported by evidence.”

Some participants commented on Wong’s style of leadership as being “Task-Oriented, Detached” and “realist.” A few others referred to it with having degrees of dominance:

“dominant and dictatorial initially, but more consultative when negotiations started.

“slightly dictatorial”

“at times confronting”

There was also evident in a small degree a negative evaluation of Wong’s behaviour which was judged in the context of her political ambitions. She was said to be a “follower of party lines” “jumping on the bandwagon” “Too light on in the 1 minute sound bite” “Self serving” or being used by Rudd for his gain: “I think she herself is very smart

but backed by Kevin O'Connell who is very politically savvy and I believe he is using the ETS for personal gain."

Her handling of the Emissions Trading Scheme was criticized by some participants. She did not effectively explain "why it is necessary to have a decision on an ETS before the Copenhagen meeting" nor the "complex issue" of the ETS "to the Australian people" and its "broader implications." More "meaningful debate" and a "hear(ing) from all sectors" was needed "(not just the big end of town)." It was felt that Wong really needed "to be in front, arguing for the government case, not just let Turnbull be hung out to dry. The government has been "missing in action" lately."

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is evident that the online and offline media is the most popular source of information. The media is crucial in determining and influencing perceptions on a range of significant issues that move beyond Australian political leaders and their leadership styles during a time of crisis. During a critical time in Australia's political history when an issue of national and global significance is at stake, Australians engaged in observing and analyzing the events through the media. What the media presented contributed to the formation of in-depth and wide ranging perceptions such as those listed below:

On Turnbull, the Emissions Trading Scheme and the Liberal Party

- Turnbull's leadership style was perceived to be autocratic and seen as being necessary due to the significance of the Emissions Trading Scheme on a broader level.
- The way in which Turnbull and Rudd worked together on the Emissions Trading Scheme was perceived to be collaborative.
- Predominantly, it was felt that all of the Liberal and National party members should have supported Turnbull in his Emissions Trading Scheme strategy.
- Predominantly there was more support amongst the participants of this study for Turnbull's Emissions Trading strategy than for how Turnbull led the Liberal Party over the Emissions Trading Scheme.

Voting Behaviour

- Participants predominantly had voted Labor in the last election and indicated that they would vote Labor, if there was to be an election in the near future.
- There would be a decrease in the number of women within this sample who would vote Liberal, if there was to be an election in the near future.

On the Leadership of Wong

- Wong's leadership in the Emissions Trading Scheme was predominantly perceived as being impressive.
- Wong's leadership style was perceived as being detached, task-oriented and to a certain extent dictatorial.

- Wong was perceived to be intelligent, strong, focused, consistent, committed, competent, flexible and articulate.
- In relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme, Wong had not communicated clearly the complexity of the scheme, its broader implications and need for a decision before the Copenhagen meeting.

On Preferred Style of Political Leadership

- Predominantly it was preferred that the leader needed to be consultative, collaborative, well-informed using evidence-based information, authentic, and able to convince the party of the final position, but if consensus was lacking after collaboration, then the leader needed to be principled and make the final decision in terms of what was best for all stakeholders.
- Support for the party leader was seen as developing during the collaborative process of consultation and integration of ideas and in the efforts employed by the leader to convince members of his/her decision. Party support for the leader was stated as being necessary when the leader presented the final decision as what was best for all stakeholders.

On Accountability

- Predominantly participants stated that a leader of a political party needs to be accountable, first and foremost, to "Australia at large" followed by the "electorate" then "party members."

On Media Coverage

- It was perceived that the media was more interested in speculation, sensationalism and personalities, and not the Emissions Trading Scheme or the proposed amendments.
- The media became an active participant in influencing the outcomes of the Liberal Party.
- Suggestions for improved Australian media coverage of political leaders were for media coverage to be balanced, issues oriented, based on investigative journalism, providing analysis not opinions and staying alert to issues that are driving its agenda and cognizant of its impact on the outcome of events and people's lives.

Whilst it is evident that the media contributed to perceptions of democratic governance, leadership and negotiation styles for effective decision-making within a political party, when bi-partisan political agreements should override political scoring and accountability of a political party and the government to the nation, what is also clear is the extent to which the media is valued as a reliable source. Given that the media is the most popular source of information, developing an in-depth appreciation of the motives underlying coverage would enable a critical appreciation of the information that is derived from this major source. Participant's analysis of the quality of media coverage lacked depth in terms of the extent to which the media filters what we see, hear and read. During this period Turnbull's leadership was shown to be autocratic

in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme, but this escalated to Turnbull being shown as an autocratic leader of the Liberal party per se. An analysis or portrayal of Turnbull's leadership on other issues and his management of the Party since he became leader in September 2008 did not appear to be part of a comprehensive media analysis.

Whilst it could be said that in the media 'both sides' of the story were being presented, it must also be noted that those politicians who sought the media's attention got a sounding thus reducing media content in scope and breadth. What was happening behind the scenes would lend itself to an equally interesting study in the political leaders and media relationship that was spinning frantically during this time.

It is clear that because of the significance of the ETS issue in the context of global issues related to climate change, participants in this study, predominantly indicated that Turnbull's Emissions Trading strategy and leadership of his party was acceptable, despite it being autocratic. However, given the interest in this issue, and what is considered to be vested in it, the media coverage of the actual Emissions Trading Scheme, its impact on global leadership initiatives to affect climate change is disappointing. These issues not only disappeared in terms of visibility and depth, but were presented by the media during this time through a plethora of unsubstantiated opinions heralded by a number of personalities who mostly disagreed with the issue of climate change or its impacts.

The labyrinth of elements involved in any media coverage, elements that are responsible for its truth, transparency, bias, quality, immediacy and potency in shaping the course of events operates at all times and not just during critical times in a nation's history. What this study urges is that in the interest of advancing the nation's discourse on issues, and Australians' engagement with leaders and institutions responsible for the nation's governance, that the media recognizes the immense value placed on it in bringing to the public information that is analytical, credible, broad ranging and investigative.

This study urges politicians to consider their use of the media and whether the way in which they use the media enables Australians to become more informed about issues. It urges

politicians to appreciate the feedback from the public in terms of how they evaluate the leadership models being employed. Although this study has limitations particularly in terms of size and gender, the findings give politicians, the media, leadership and media analysts a study of an unforgettable time in the nation's history to enable understanding of how perceptions of leadership of political leaders are formed in the national consciousness.

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