Surname: Thirunavukkarasu

First Name: Hariharan

Student Number (SID): 309218683

University Email Address: hari.thiru@sydney.edu.au

Phone Number: 0431433148

Tutor: Ariadne Vromen

Tutorial Day & Time:

Unit of Study Code: Honours IV

Unit of Study Name: Thesis

Due Date of Task: 10/10/12

Date Submitted: 09/10/12

Extension Date:

CHECKLIST

✓ Student details, Unit of Study and Assessment particulars completed

✓ Plagiarism Policy Compliance Statement signed

✓ If applying for Extension or Special Consideration, student has applied via http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/special_consideration.shtml before assessment due date

STUDENT PLAGIARISM POLICY COMPLIANCE STATEMENT


I certify that:

1. I have read and understood the University of Sydney Student Plagiarism: Coursework Policy and Procedure;

2. I understand that failure to comply with the Student Plagiarism: Coursework Policy and Procedure can lead to the University commencing proceedings against me for potential student misconduct under Chapter 8 of the University of Sydney By-Law 1999 (as amended);

3. This work is substantially my own, and to the extent that any part of this work is not my own I have indicated that it is not my own by acknowledging the Source of that part or those parts of the work.

TASK WILL NOT BE PROCESSED IF COMPLIANCE STATEMENT UNSIGNED

Signature: Hariharan Thirunavukkarasu

Date: 10/10/12

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
School of Social and Political Sciences
Government and International Relations
Room 269, Merewether Bldg, H04

University of Sydney, NSW, Australia 2006
Phone: +61 2 9351 2054
Fax: +61 2 9351 3624
govt.dept@sydney.edu.au
The following is a guide to the strengths and weaknesses of the paper:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERPRETATION AND RESEARCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Relevance of answer to question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effective use of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Critical use of scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Extent of research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Development of argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Originality of argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Organisation and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Clarity of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Originality of expression (vs. paraphrase, summarising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, proof-reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Footnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Late penalty (if any)</th>
<th>% Final mark</th>
<th>Marker’s name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Responding to Riots

A Comparative Study of Elite Responses to Cronulla 2005 and England 2011

Hariharan Thirunavukkarasu

Honours IV 2012
Government and International Relations
University of Sydney

Word Count: 19,154
Student ID: 309218683
This work is substantially my own and where any art of this work is not my own, I have indicated this by acknowledging the source of that part or those parts of the work.
In recent summers, rioting around Cronulla and throughout England has sparked debates about their causes. While there has been a concerted effort to analyse these, there has been less attention on the response of political elites. Ultimately, the response of political elites determines if public policy is used to address the causes of the rioting. This study seeks to remedy this omission by conducting a comparative study of the response of political elites and the media to the Cronulla Riots of 2005 and English Riots of 2011. It contends that political elites in Australia responded to the riots by framing the riots largely as a law and order problem. In contrast, British political elites offered a greater variety of explanations in their analysis of their rioting. Similarly, media outlets in both nations explored a variety of causes for the riots, including race, class, poverty and a culture of criminality. This study claims that the anomalous response of Australian political elites elucidates certain idiosyncrasies of Australia’s political culture, including its reluctance to discuss race, and tendency to respond to complex issues through a law and order framework.
## Contents

**Abstract**  
**List of Illustrations**  
**List of Abbreviations**

**Introduction**  
**Responding to Riots**  
Posing the Problem  
Organisation of the Thesis  
Literature Review

**Chapter One**  
**2005 Cronulla Riots: Political Elite and Media Responses**  
Political Elites  
*Morris Iemma and NSW Labor*  
*Peter Debnam and the NSW Coalition*  
*John Howard and the Federal Coalition*  
*Kim Beazley and Federal Labor*  
*Backbenchers and Minor Parties*  
Media Responses to the 2005 Cronulla Riots  
*Print Media Content Analysis*  
*Television News Content Analysis*  
Conclusion

**Chapter Two**  
**2011 English Riots: Political Elite and Media Responses**  
Political Elites  
*David Cameron and the Conservatives*  
*Ed Miliband and Labour*  
*Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats*  
*Backbenchers*  
Media Responses to the 2011 English Riots  
*Print Media Content Analysis*  
Conclusion

**Chapter Three**  
**Reading the Responses: A Comparative Study**  
Comparing the Cronulla and English Riots: Questions of Validity  
Inferences from the Differences: Political Culture

**Conclusion**  
**Epilogue: Back to the Future?**

**Bibliography**
**List of Illustrations**

TABLES

- Table 1.1 Coded articles, according to newspaper and genre 23
- Table 1.2 Print media’s explanation of the riots 26
- Table 1.3 Explanation for the riots, by newspaper 27
- Table 1.4 Explanation for the riots, by genre 28
- Table 1.5 Who gets quoted, by newspaper 30
- Table 1.6 Explanation for riots, according to medium 31
- Table 1.7 Explanation for riots, by TV news program 32

Table 2.1 Coded articles, by newspaper and genre 45
Table 2.2 Print explanations of the riots 46
Table 2.3 Explanations for the riots, by newspaper 47
Table 2.4 Explanation for the riots, by newspaper 48
Table 2.5 Who was quoted, by newspaper 49

FIGURES

- Figure 1.1 Print and Online Readership 22
- Figure 3.1 Political Elites Responding to Riots: What were the causes? 54
List of Abbreviations

AAP    Australian Associated Press
ABC    Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS    Australian Bureau of Statistics
ALP    Australian Labor Party
BBC    British Broadcasting Corporation
DPM&C  Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
MLA    Member of Legislative Assembly
MLC    Member of Legislative Council
MP     Member of Parliament
MPS    Metropolitan Police Service
NSW    New South Wales
NRS    National Readership Survey
Introduction

Responding to Riots

POsing the PROblem

By and large, the concept of race has become less conspicuous in the public discourse in Australia and Britain over the last several decades. With the removal of legally permissible discrimination in many countries, it is now commonly argued that socio-economic status, not race, is more significant in shaping an individual’s life (Wilson, 2011). This has happened at a time when Australia and Britain have become more ethnically diverse. Yet two incidents – the Cronulla Riots in 2005 and the English Riots in 2011 – serve to highlight the enduring salience of race and ethnicity in both Australian and British society. These riots also provide a window on how political elites respond to mass unrest and disorder.

In developed nations, over the last several decades, riots have become inherently exceptional events. They are not ongoing processes that animate the longer-term public discourse and nor do they occur in a vacuum. Indeed, riots are important, and worthy of attention, because they often are a symptom of underlying societal problems. They are the sudden and violent manifestation of maladies that have been afflicting society. Understanding the causes of riots is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for ensuring they are addressed. To ensure they are addressed, the response of political elites must be studied. Political elites are a crucial component of the overall response to a riot, or instance of mass disorder. They shape the opinion of the broader populace, create a context in which action can be taken, and set the parameters for that action.

1 See Hall (1996) for a discussion of the difference between race and ethnicity. Despite its limitations, this study will refer to race.
How do political elites respond to riots? What accounts for the similarities and differences in their responses? What can be inferred about the nature of political elites from this? Providing answers to these questions is the central purpose of this study. A better understanding of the response of political elites to riot and their causes is of critical importance to knowing if the problems will be addressed, or continue to endure.

In this study, political elites are defined as senior elected representatives of major parties. Their response to a riot can foreshadow their likelihood of confronting those challenges. The first element required in an effective response is an accurate analysis of the causes of the riot. However, for the government this often entails implicitly accepting some criticism for not already having addressed those causes. For the government and opposition, it could set a benchmark for action which is unlikely to be met. And for politicians and the media, it could reveal a portrait of society that the public is not receptive to. These elements mean that there is an incentive for the political elite to gloss over the root causes of the riot and offer an alternative analysis that avoids the former’s pitfalls.

The case for comparing the response of political elites to the Cronulla and English Riots is compelling. Firstly, the riots were similar in nature. Both were (mainly unexpected) instances of mass disorder in countries that have largely avoided them in the last few decades. While the specific set of circumstances that led to each riot was different, the structural long-term causes of the riots had parallels. For example, social alienation and disaffection figured prominently in both. Secondly, Australia and Britain are relatively similar countries. Accordingly, Mill’s method of difference can be used to investigate the cases. There are many functional equivalencies between the two countries, which allows the inevitable contextual differences to be

---

2 This is not to imply that there are no other members of the political elite – just that this study will concentrate on senior politicians from major parties, as has been used by Putnam (1971, p. 651).
somewhat neutralised (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990, p. 133). This is helped by the common heritage, legal system, and language, similar systems of government and culture shared by the two nations. In the absence of a controlled environment that would permit use of the experimental method, comparison is the most useful approach available to social scientists (Lijphart, 1971). A comparison of Britain and Australia may not be a perfect match. However, only “overconscious thinking” would preclude comparing the two countries, considering how similar they are (Sartori, 1970).

ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the response of political elites to the Cronulla and English Riots. Chapter 1 will be a case study of the responses to Cronulla. It details how political elites responded to the riots by framing it as a law and order problem – a failure of policing. In contrast the Australian media put the riot down to a variety of factors, including racism, poor policing and social alienation. Chapter 2 examines the response of British political elites to the English Riots of 2011. It reveals how both senior politicians and the media offered a variety of explanations for the riots, including a criminal culture, a lack of moral values and poverty. Chapter 3 involves a comparison of the two cases. It elucidates what accounts for the diverging approaches of political elites in Britain and Australia to responding to the riots, and the similar approaches of the media. It will make inferences about the nature of political elites in Australia and Britain – including the elite political cultures of each country – based on their propensity to discuss certain matter, but simultaneously neglect others such as race.

In examining the response of political elites in Australia and Britain, this study will conduct a qualitative analysis of the statements, speeches and interviews given by political elites in the aftermath of each riot. This will be complemented by a quantitative analysis of select media
sources in order to assess their responses. This dual approach will enable a comparison between the politicians and media of each country, and also a comparison of the media and politicians’ responses within each country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Cronulla Riots took place from the 11th to the 13th of December, 2005 (Jackson, 2006). It began with a group of about 5000 individuals of mainly Anglo-Celtic descent attacking people they thought were of Middle Eastern descent in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla. Later that night, and over the next two nights, there were reprisal attacks in nearby suburbs. Rioting – and indeed, race rioting – has not been absent from Australia’s history (see Baker, 2006, pp. 150-187). However, it has mostly escaped post-war Australia; the two recent exceptions being the Redfern and Macquarie Fields riots (see Weatherburn, 2006). Compared to Cronulla, both of those were smaller and geographically contained. And unlike most recent riots in Western countries, the Cronulla Riots were unique as it began with a more powerful group in society targeting a weaker one (Poynting, 2006).

Scholarly opinion has coalesced around a multiplicity of causes for the riots. These have included: social alienation, male machismo, racism, Islamaphobia and xenophobia, which were fuelled by some media outlets (see Lattas, 2007; Noble, 2009; Poynting, 2006). At the time of the riots, similar analysis given by academics was also reported in the media (for example, Poynting in O'Brien & Kearney, 2005, December 13; Hage in Skelton, 2005, December 18; Jupp, Humphrey & Lumby in Stewart & Hodge, 2005, December 14). The federal bureaucracy analyses the riots in a similar fashion. A “protected” briefing notes that the “2005 Cronulla riots show the potential for real or perceived inequality to give rise to important events of protest and violence” (DPM&C in Parnell, 2012, June 23). Also, an inquiry into the police response
accepted that racial conflict played a large part in precipitating the riots (Strike Force Neil, 2006, p. 6).

The English Riots of 2011 affected various English localities, with the worst violence concentrated in London (Bloom, 2012, pp. 76-99). It started as a protest over the police killing of Mark Duggan, a black man. Over the course of several nights, the violence degenerated rapidly. While episodes of violent disorder are more commonplace in Britain than Australia, this was the worst rioting in three decades (Bloom, 2012). Though the rioting occurred just a year ago, scholarly analysis of its causal factors has been thorough – and largely accords with the analysis of commentators and academics at the time of the riots (Bloom, 2011, August 9; Berkeley, Ponticelli & Voth in Chakrabortty, 2011, August 11). Some of the factors that have been identified include: poverty, lack of opportunity for young people, social alienation, poor parenting, a materialistic culture, poor police-community relations, a failure to rehabilitate offenders (Briggs, 2012; Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012; Roberts, 2012).

Many authors briefly mention the response of politicians to the riots (for example Briggs, 2012) and some assess the role of politicians (Poynting, 2006) and the media (Kabir, 2007) in contributing to the disorder in England and Cronulla. However, literature specifically examining the response of political elites to the Cronulla and English riots is non-existent. Surprisingly, analysis of the political elites’ response to riots, more generally, is also sparse.

There is a substantial literature on the operational responses (by police, for example) to disorder (Della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Reiner, 1998). Examinations of strategic responses by elites are rarer. Boin, McConnell, and Hart (2008) provide one such exception. They look at nine case studies of the responses of political elites to crises from across the world – such as the response
to 9/11 – and conclude that the key aspect to understanding post-crisis politics is how framings of the disaster are used in an attempt to win the ‘blame game’. Whilst some of the case studies examined were of a different magnitude to the riots, the authors’ main finding provides a framework for understanding how responses to riots would tend to proceed: political elites’ response is shaped by electoral imperatives.

Whereas Boin et. al. examined post-crisis politics, Johnson (2000) has examined how Australian political elites responded to social and economic changes in the 1990s. Though the changes did not approach the level of a crisis, they caused significant upheaval in society over an extended period. The response of political elites to the changes provides insights into how they respond to long-simmering challenges. Johnson asserts that the ALP responded to the changes by stressing a national economic identity. The Liberal Party responded by emphasising the primacy of the collective social identity (p. 58). In essence, both attempted to construct a nation more unified than it actually was. Arguably, combining both the analysis of Johnson and Boin et. al. gives a better approximation of the nature of the Cronulla and English Riots – minor crises that were the result of long-simmering problems – and how political elites might respond.

A key social change in Australia in the 1990s, which Johnson identifies, was the increasing multiplicities of identities in Australia. This was partially due to higher levels of immigration of people from non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds and the reinvigoration of Indigenous identity through the Land Rights movement. Discourses on race in Australia have been moulded by its history of Indigenous dispossession and the White Australia policy (Tavan, 2005). More recently, race has been shown to form a powerful component of the electorate’s ideology (Jackman, 1998), and cultural intolerance for out-groups is high in society (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley, & McDonald, 2004). In modern Britain, discourses on race have been influenced by the immigration of people
from former colonies and the friction this has caused in society (Rich, 1990). Race has been discussed in the context of national cohesion and multiculturalism; discussions which have been fuelled and shaped by the rise of far-right political movements (Pitcher, 2009 chapters 2 & 3).

Elites – including political and media elites – are critical in society because of their capacity to determine agendas (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970). The elites of both countries have gone from explicitly talking about race to largely avoiding it as an issue. If it is discussed, it is done in coded language, according to discourse analyses of parliamentary debates on Indigenous Land Rights (LeCouteur, Rapley, & Augoustinos, 2001) and asylum-seekers (Every & Augoustinos, 2007) in Australia and Britain (Pitcher, 2009; Van Djik, 1993). A similar dynamic, of using coded language to discuss racial issues, has been found to exist in the mass media in both nations (Downing & Husband, 2005, pp. 129-143).

This emphasis on a top-down approach towards analysing the interaction of elites and race, has the potential to become what has been labelled, an “elite manipulation view” (Brubaker, 1998, p. 274). This view tends to formulate elites as rational interest groups acting to maximise their electoral prospects by delivering different message to different audiences. A contrasting way to explain elite behaviour would be using political culture, which is regarded as a “particular pattern of orientations to political action” in which “every political system is embedded” (Almond, 1956, p. 396).

Early approaches to the study of political culture tended to see it in homogenous terms and coterminous with a nation’s borders (Almond & Verba, 1963). However, it is more appropriate to say that a variety of sub-cultures co-exist within a nation-state, which is the case in Britain (Putnam, 1971) and Australia (Smith, 2001, p. 8). A key categorical distinction in political
culture research is between mass and elite political cultures. The set of politically relevant beliefs, values and habits of the elite of a political system forms a distinct political sub-culture (Putnam, 1971). In Britain, using survey research of the general population and of elected politicians, Miller et. al. (1996) shows that there is distinct elite political culture in Britain. While specific research investigating the existence of a distinct elite political culture in Australia is not available, McAllister (1991) has identified significant differences in elite and mass opinions, which may be indicative of differences in orientation towards political action. However, the same quantitative methodology appropriate for investigating mass political culture is insufficient for studying elites. Elites typically have more complex belief systems that may not be accurately conveyed using survey research. Analysis of elite political culture often relies more on interpretivism. It involves interpreting ideologies and evaluating the calculations that lie behind high-risk political behaviour (Pye, 1965, p. 16).

To this end, this thesis will conduct a qualitative analysis of the public statements of political elites in response to the riots. This will be complemented by a quantitative analysis of select media outlets. This thesis will begin with a case study of Cronulla, which will be followed by a study of the English Riots. It will conclude with a comparative study of the two cases, with an attempt to account for the similarities and differences in the responses of political elites and the media to the riots.
Chapter One

2005 Cronulla Riots: Political Elite and Media Responses

The violence that took place from the 11th to the 13th of December in parts of Sydney, is now commonly known as the Cronulla Riots (Jackson, 2006). On Sunday the 11th, a group estimated at 5000 people gathered at Cronulla beach to protest against a history of anti-social behaviour by Middle Eastern youths at the beach. Over the course of the day, individuals suspected of hailing from a Middle Eastern background were assaulted, while police and ambulance officers who tried to assist them were also attacked. The planned protest had drawn members of the media, who broadcast images of the violence across the country. Later that night, and for the following two nights, retaliatory attacks were carried out by youths of Middle Eastern descent. The violence was the lead story on all nightly television broadcasts and newspapers in Sydney for the entire week. The spectre of large mobs attacking unsuspecting victims also drew responses from political elites.

This chapter examines the responses of both political elites and the media to the Cronulla Riots. It conducts a textual analysis of the statements, speeches and interviews given in response to the riots by the leaders of the State Labor Government, State Opposition, Coalition Federal Government and Federal Opposition. The main focus of the analysis was on the parliamentary leaders of the major parties, who are generally the most ubiquitous and publicly recognised political figures. By dint of their position, they also tend to lead the response of their parties to fast-moving situations. For comparative purposes, this study also briefly examines the responses of minor parties and backbenchers. The second half of the chapter consists of a content analysis of select print media and television news broadcasts from the week following the riots. It will
show that political elites largely framed the riot as a law and order problem – a consequence of a failure in policing. This was in contrast to the broader analysis of scholars, and the media, which cited factors including racism, failure of policing and social alienation in explaining the violence.

**MORRIS IEMMA AND NSW LABOR**

The Premier of NSW, Morris Iemma, commented on the riots on the Sunday night; he was one of the first politicians to publicly respond to the riots. His initial response to the Cronulla Riots acknowledged the role of racism and “more deep-seated issues” (Iemma, 2005, December 12a). He also emphasised the government’s law and order response, and commitment to apprehend offenders, in the face of criminality and ongoing violence (Iemma, 2005, December 12b). This initial willingness to canvass other causes of the disorder gradually faded over the following week. This was highlighted in Iemma’s speech to Parliament, which was specifically recalled to pass new legislation providing enhanced police powers. These powers were described by the Police Minister as “draconian” (Scully in Nolan, 2005, December 16). Only a brief section of Iemma’s speech to Parliament contemplated a second-stage response to the riots, to follow the police response. The second-stage response he described was non-specific; it aimed to ensure there were “no first-class or second-class citizens – just Australians united by common values” (New South Wales, 2005a, p. 20622). This appeal to a unified national identity has parallels with Johnson’s (2000) analysis of how political elites responded to upheavals in the 1990s. Though the existence of multiple levels of citizenship – “no first-class or second-class citizens” – implies a stratified society, the causes of those societal cleavages were not investigated. The aim of a classless society was proffered without any acknowledgement or discussion of the realities that would warrant its need; it was discussed in generalities. This was seen, for example, when Iemma stated the need to “ensure the best of Australia comes through, that we continue to be a society based on respect, responsibility and a fair go for all.”
In an interview conducted a week after the riots, Iemma had completed his shift from his initial response, where he acknowledged “deep-seated issues” in contributing to the riots. In this interview, Iemma (2005, December 19) exclusively focused on the law and order aspect of the response. This was despite the reprisal attacks that followed the initial riots, having ceased several days earlier. This gradual transformation was crystallised by the time of the televised 2007 Election Leader’s debate (Dempster, 2007, February 16). The moderator asked a question about the lessons Iemma had learnt from the Cronulla riots. The question included an introduction by the moderator, Quentin Dempster, that brought up the “sense of alienation felt by ethnic minorities”. In answering, Iemma reverted to talking about the importance of a strong police force. His response was interrupted by Peter Debnam, the Opposition Leader, who criticised the government’s law and order record. The question on lessons learnt from Cronulla had devolved into, as Dempster interjected at the time, an “auction on police numbers” between Iemma and Debnam. Following this back-and-forth, Iemma concluded by adding a sentence about “[teaching] our kids greater respect and responsibility”. This was a brief, generalised response that failed to substantively consider deeper causal factors. Indeed, the moderator had opened the possibility for discussion on other factors through his pointed introduction to the initial question. This brief line was tacked onto a response that emphasised the importance of stronger policing. Iemma’s response in 2007 offered a more blinkered view of the riots compared to his analysis on the day after the riots, or even his analysis of the situation when Parliament was recalled. Yet, it highlighted how Iemma largely framed the riots as an exclusively law and order problem.

PETER DEBNAM AND THE NSW COALITION

Peter Debnam, Leader of the NSW Opposition, presented a consistent public analysis of the riots. His almost exclusive focus – in the aftermath of the violence and in the months following –
was on the role of the police. He attributed the events to the police’s lack of resources, incorrect policing strategies and the government’s political indebtedness to ethnic communities, which hindered the police response.

On the Monday following the weekend violence, Debnam blamed the violence on the government’s failure to tackle gang violence and the “softly-softly strategy [towards law and order], which has been embraced by Labor for a decade”, a phrase which would become a stock of his rhetorical response to the events (Debnam in Kennedy, 2005, December 12). Debnam and the state Opposition’s response represented an almost robotic approach that seemed to apply preconceived solutions without consideration of the events. This was aptly highlighted in Debnam’s speech to Parliament when it was recalled in reaction to the riots. Debnam, a Liberal, stated that he supported rushing through the bill, but “did not have a chance to read through the final draft of the bill before coming into the House this morning” (New South Wales, 2005c: 20623-4). Despite this, Debnam said that “The bill simply is not strong enough in almost all its provisions.” Admitting to not reading the final draft of legislation, described by the Police Minister as “draconian” (Scully in Nolan, 2005, December 16), but calling for greater powers, captured a distinct element of Debnam and the Opposition’s response. This response could be summarised as: more police, empowered with stronger legislation, would solve the problems showcased by Cronulla and its aftermath, and prevent its reoccurrence.

This was exemplified in Debnam’s response to a question he posed: “What are the underlying causes of the problems that have surfaced during the past 72 hours?” He posited that it was the result of “a reduction in police numbers” and, rehashing his earlier phrase, “this Government’s softly-softly strategy on ethnic crime.” He claimed this stemmed from Labor being “indebted to some ethnic groups,” linking it to branch stacking in the ALP. Subsequent to this speech, an
examination of the public record shows that Debnam did not repeat these accusations tying ethnic branch stacking in the ALP and the riots. In his response, Debnam disproportionately focused on the revenge attacks (compared to Iemma, Howard, Beazley and the media). Unlike other politicians, he also focused heavily on the ethnicity of those involved, though only of one group, by mentioning “ethnic crime”. Yet this emphasis was again in the context of talking about law and order.

Debnam’s criticisms of the police response to Cronulla continued in the weeks and months following the riots. He particularly focused on the response to the revenge attacks, which were carried out mainly by men of Middle Eastern descent. He argued that the government was “soft on ethnic crime” and was unduly focused on apprehending and prosecuting those involved in the initial violence (Clennell, 2006, January 13), who happened to be mainly of Anglo-Celtic descent. He said that the government should “lock up [the] 200 Middle Eastern thugs” who were responsible for the revenge attacks after the riots (Clennell, 2006, January 17). The tougher rhetoric in the new year, including labelling one incident “urban terrorism” (Harley, 2006, January 23), was solely focused on criticising the response to the revenge attacks to the exclusion of the original violence. When he was questioned about his focus on crimes committed by men of Middle Eastern descent, Debnam said: “I don’t care if they are Anglo-Saxon. I don’t care if they are Middle Eastern… If they are violent or intimidate someone, they should be in jail” (Debnam in Martin, 2006, February 19). In February, Channel Nine’s 60 Minutes hosted a forum discussion on the events at Cronulla, in which Debnam was a participant (Martin, 2006, February 19). Another discussant challenged Debnam by asking whether he truly believed jailing people was the “solution”. Debnam said he did. He then segued into a response that framed the riots in a law and order context and argued for the need to increase police numbers. Fourteen months after the riots, at the NSW Leaders’ Debate, when specifically asked what lessons he
learnt from Cronulla, Debnam maintained his consistency, saying that “softly-softly, doesn’t work” (Debnam in Dempster, 2007, February 16).

JOHN HOWARD AND THE COALITION FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

John Howard and the Federal Government’s response to the Cronulla Riots heavily emphasised the importance of the police response, though charted a slightly different trajectory over the longer-term. Howard’s refusal to brand those involved in the riots as racists animated much of the initial media coverage of politicians’ response to the violence (for example, Kerin & Leys, 2005, December 13). He defended himself by arguing that the term was bandied about “carelessly” (Howard, 2005, December 12). Howard moderated that position within a week, acknowledging that some of those involved in the riots were racist (Howard, 2005, December 20). The moderating of his position was also seen in his willingness to address the existence of the riot’s causal factors. When Howard was first questioned if Cronulla was a one-off, or if deeper problems existed, he responded by saying it would be a “big mistake to sort of jump to too many conclusions and it’s important that we primarily see it as a question of the law having being broken” (Howard, 2005, December 12). This view of events, implying that more effective police action would solve the problem, was slightly modified a few days later. Asked what lessons governments could learn from the episode, he indirectly acknowledged the existence of additional causes when he stated that he would reflect on those lessons “in due course” (Howard, 2005, December 14). He did not want to reflect on them “in the heat of current events.” He coupled this proviso with the advice to commentators that they should not “wallow in self-pity and self-flagellation and self-criticism” (Howard, 2005, December 15).

His commitment to reflect on the causes of the riots was fulfilled in a speech marking Australia Day at the National Press Club. Acknowledging that “some have questioned my optimism”, he
condemned racial violence while calling for a balanced response to the riots: “The criminal behaviour of last December should be met with the full force of the law. And I do not believe it calls for either national self-flagellation or moral panic” (Howard, 2006, January 25). Overall, the speech painted a rosy portrait of Australia in 2006, and didn’t directly consider the existence of any broader social problems.

Delineating between what constitutes a politician’s specific response to an exceptional event, and what is a restatement of long-held beliefs, is a murky endeavour. However, the timing of comments is often indicative of the nature of the remarks. When it emerged that Howard had given some comments about Muslim immigration to Australia to authors of a biography (Errington & Van Onselen, 2007), he made the explicit point that he gave the interview two days before the riots, saying that “I was not trying to make some kind of tawdry political point” (Howard, 2006, February 20).

In the Australia Day speech, Howard also proposed a more systematic and nationally affirming history education. This was not explicitly connected to the riots, and accorded with Howard’s previously stated beliefs about the history curriculum. Despite this, several senior journalists connected the proposal’s timing to Cronulla (Grattan, 2006, January 26; Harvey, 2006, January 26). Howard said that: “Maintaining our social cohesion will remain the highest test of the Australian achievement.” He also said that “young people are at risk of being disinherit ed from their community if that community lacks the courage and confidence to teach its history” (Howard, 2006, January 25). Howard had believed for a long time that sections of the immigrant community had not sufficiently integrated into mainstream society by adopting Australian values (Howard, 2006, February 24). Several days prior to this speech, Howard had said: “I don’t like hyphenated Australians, I just like Australians” (Howard, 2006, January 20). Taken with his
earlier commitment to reflect on the riots, it can be said that Howard’s aim in changing the history curriculum was to forge a more cohesive polity with a unified national identity. After nearly a decade in government during which these proposals could have been made, it is hard to believe that this was not, at least partially, a tangential reaction to the events at Cronulla.

This approach was consistent with Federal Treasurer Peter Costello’s response to the riots. Responding to a question asking what he thought Australia had learnt in the last week, Costello replied that “what we have learnt is that youths particularly have to obey the law, that brawling in public is unacceptable” (Costello, 2005, December 16b). Even in acknowledging that race could have played a part, he went back to law and order: “I think racial divides can easily be fanned up particularly if you let law and order get out of control.” This was underlined in remarks he made later: “The Sydney riots were an example of hoodlums who got out of control and should have been stopped…I don’t think it was caused by racism but lawlessness can breed racism and that is why you don’t want lawlessness” (Costello, 2005, December 16a).

KIM BEAZLEY AND FEDERAL LABOR
The approach of Kim Beazley in responding to the Cronulla Riots hewed to the general tenor that other elite politicians had adopted. Like Howard, Beazley, who was the Opposition Leader, declined to comment about the riots to journalists on the day they happened (Ramsey, 2005, December 14). In his initial response, Beazley asserted the riots were simply a result of criminality and urged a robust police response. Responding to the assertion that the riots represented a failure of the policy of multiculturalism, Beazley replied:

It’s just criminal behaviour. That’s what this is. This is criminal behaviour, both at Cronulla and at Maroubra, just criminal behaviour. Australian multiculturalism is alive and well…[And] the police and the New South Wales government needs to take a look at
this and look at how even more effectively they can enforce the law and enforce community calm and peacefulness” (Beazley, 2005, December 12).

However, when he next commented on the riots, Beazley’s position had shifted slightly. While still emphasising the importance of the police response to the criminality, Beazley also acknowledged the role of “community issues: the issue of respect”, and implicitly, the need for a second-stage response (Beazley, 2005, December 14). But apart from promoting the generalised ideas of increasing respect and responsibility, he did not delve into the causes of the riots. He also intimated that the need to foster greater respect and responsibility applied to a “very small minority of stirrers”. Two days later, Beazley asserted that the “antidote [was] personal responsibility” and that “what we have here is a set of individuals actions which have been unacceptable” (Beazley, 2005, December 16). This implied that there was no wider societal problem that would require a comprehensive response. The issues lay at the level of the individual and that is where they would have to be solved.

Apart from Beazley, an examination of the news reports and Federal Government Broadcast Alerts from the time reveals that no member of the Federal ALP made a substantive contribution to the debate on the causes of the Cronulla riots. Wayne Swan made some perfunctory comments supporting the state government (McGrath, 2005, December 20). Kevin Rudd insisted that the episode would damage Australia’s international reputation, contradicting Howard’s analysis (Peatling, 2005, December 14). Only Nicola Roxon, speaking in her capacity as the then Shadow Attorney-General, made any substantive comments (Donald, 2005, December 17). She called for laws that would criminalise threats to a particular racial or religious group. Tony Burke and Annette Hurley, the Labor Spokespeople for Immigration and Multiculturalism respectively, were absent from the debate. When Federal Parliament returned in the new year, Hansard shows
that the several references to the Cronulla riots during 2006 by Labor members were fleeting. No ALP member participated in a debate or delivered a speech on the event.

**BACKBENCHERS AND MINOR PARTIES**

The following section examines the response to the Cronulla riots by other political actors, namely minor party representatives and backbenchers from the Coalition. In almost all cases, these actors’ explanation of the violence was more sophisticated, recognising the complex causal factors, compared to that offered by the major parties’ leaders.

Bruce Baird, the then Federal Member for Cook, which includes Cronulla, was particularly comprehensive in his analysis of the riots, a day after the initial violence (AAP, 2005, December 12). He said that tensions had been high between Cronulla’s primarily Anglo-Saxon community and people of Middle Eastern descent for some time. He pointed to the “increasing emphasis on terrorism and our security” since September 11, and the “high-profile rape cases in Sydney” involving a group of Middle Eastern men. Recognising the more immediate triggers, he brought up the attack on lifesavers, an “icon” in the Australian imagination. Baird also stated: “Just on a straight parochial level there’s been inadequate policing at Cronulla and a very small station.” He said that the major station was 15 minutes away, which limited the deterrence capacity of police. He also noted that:

> The Sutherland Shire itself is very much an Anglo-Celtic enclave and during the week it is pretty much Anglo and on the weekends there are lots of visitors that come from elsewhere…[Shire residents] feel that the beaches belong to them…and when anybody disturbs the equilibrium…I just think that’s the match that sets alight the fuel.
Baird’s comments were widely reported by the media; he accounted for most of the quotations attributed to backbenchers in the newspaper content analysis, produced later in this chapter (table 1.5). Baird’s response cited racism, negative portrayals of Muslims, xenophobia or parochialism in the Shire, inadequate policing and the immediate triggers for the riots. Within hours of his interview, a journalist asked Howard whether he saw this as a policing problem, “or is it a more serious problem about something in our society, as Mr Baird was suggesting on radio this morning” (in Howard, 2005, December 12). Howard’s response was: “Well I heard what Mr Baird said this morning and I don’t think he was suggesting that.” Howard’s response to Baird’s comments is telling. The journalist’s summary of Baird’s comments was accurate, as evidenced in the extensive quotations provided above. However, Howard did not simply dispute the merits of the analysis; he denied it had even been made. This suggests that Howard was strongly committed to advancing his argument that the riots should be seen as a law and order issue.

Interestingly, an examination of Factiva and Parliamentary Hansard shows that Baird did not repeat his analysis during the following year. The only part he did speak about again related to the failure of policing in the lead-up to the violence (House of Representatives, 2006).

In contrast to Baird’s response, the local Liberal State MLA, Malcolm Kerr, focused on the “years” of anti-social behaviour by Middle Eastern “gangs” (Davies & Porter, 2005, December 12). He also argued that police never acted to stamp out this behaviour, which led to “simmering anger and frustration” among locals. Several months later in Parliament, Kerr put the violence solely down to inadequate police resourcing of Cronulla that failed to deal with anti-social behaviour of Middle Eastern individuals (New South Wales, 2006). Overall, Kerr’s response mirrored that of his parliamentary leader, Peter Debnam.
The debate in the NSW Legislative Council when parliament was recalled was spirited, owing to the plethora of minor parties in the chamber. Lee Rhiannon, a Greens MLC, said that “the root problem is not a lack of police power” and pointed to racism as a cause of the riots (New South Wales, 2005d, p. 20586). However her colleague, Sylvia Hale, had a more penetrating analysis of the violence, examining the underlying political, economic and social contributors to the riots (New South Wales, 2005e). The Democrats’ member, Arthur Chesterfield-Evans also linked the riots to racism, but also highlighted its nexus with economic disadvantage (New South Wales, 2005f). He decried the approach adopted by the Government and Opposition: “It is ironic that these powers are being given to the police for short-term benefit when the long-term aspects are not being considered at all” (p. 20593). Fred Nile, leader of the Christian Democrats, stated that he believed gangs were involved, and that race and alcohol were factors (New South Wales, 2005h). He also sought to distinguish between Middle Eastern Muslims and Christians, who he exonerated from being perpetrators of the violence. David Oldfield, of One Nation NSW, blamed the repeated violence and provocations on Middle Eastern Muslim gangs (New South Wales, 2005i).

MEDIAN RESPONSES TO THE 2005 CRONULLA RIOTS
To supplement the textual analysis of politicians’ responses to the Cronulla Riots, a content analysis of newspapers and television news programs was conducted to examine media responses to the riots. The aim of the content analysis was threefold. It was to identify: the politicians who were quoted; which explanations for the riots were explored; and which of those explanations were privileged. The first aim would complement the analysis of political elites and identify the extent to which their message was heard. The second and third aims would supplement the analysis of political elites, by examining the responses of another elite group in society: the media (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970). Its purpose was to contrast how media and
political elites explained the riots. The content analysis was divided into two parts. The first part focused on newspapers, while the second was based on television news transcripts.

Print Media Content Analysis Methodology

The content analysis of newspapers was based on the coverage of four metropolitan daily newspapers: Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* and *Sydney Morning Herald*; Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail*; and Melbourne’s *Age*. The *Herald* and *Age* are published by Fairfax, while the *Telegraph* and *Courier-Mail* are part of News Limited’s stable of properties. These companies have a 90% market share of newspaper circulation in the country (Tiffen & Gittens, 2004, p. 182). The newspapers chosen accounted for nearly half of all newspaper readership in the country in 2005 (Roy Morgan Research, 2006). The first pair, the *Herald* and *Telegraph*, dominate the Sydney newspaper market. The *Age* and *Courier-Mail* provide an outsider’s perspective on the events at Cronulla. The Fairfax mastheads are considered part of the quality press, which have more in-depth reporting on serious topics. This corresponds with Fairfax’s readership, which has higher incomes and is more educated, compared to the readership of News Limited’s metropolitan dailies. The weekday edition of the *Herald*, for example, has almost a quarter million more ‘AB’ readers – Roy Morgan’s category of individuals from the highest socioeconomic quintile – than the *Telegraph*, even though the latter has more readers overall (Roy Morgan Research in Fairfax Media, 2012b). Similarly, the weekday *Age* has more ‘AB’ readers than its hometown rival, the *Herald-Sun*, even though the latter has nearly double the total readership (Roy Morgan Research in Fairfax Media, 2012a). The *Courier-Mail*, being the only daily paper published in Brisbane between 1988 and 2007, occupied a middle ground, trying to accommodate the varying sensibilities of the population (Scalmer & Goot, 2004). In

---

4 Readership, which measures the number of readers of a newspaper, is distinct from circulation, which measures the number of newspapers distributed.

5 Figures used to compare the socioeconomic status of readers refer only to the print readership and are for the year ending March 2012.
Sydney’s bifurcated newspaper market, the *Telegraph* is the tabloid publication, being more sensationalistic in their reporting.

![Figure 1.1: Print and Online Readership of selected newspapers (in thousands), 2006](#)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMH</th>
<th>Telegraph</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Courier-Mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2446</td>
<td>2496</td>
<td>1601</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Roy Morgan Research (2012)

Factiva, an information database, was used to locate the relevant articles. The terms used in the search were: “Cronulla AND violence OR riot OR riots”. Using these terms, a total of 356 hits were generated over the period 12th to 18th of December. Of these, 135 were determined to be unique and addressed at least one research question. To be included, articles had to address the aims of the content analysis; they had to quote a politician and/or examine explanation(s) for the riot. Instances where this did not happen included articles that provided overly basic recitations of events and pieces that focused on the impact of the riots. For example, a raft of stories across all outlets looked at the fall in trade experienced by Cronulla businesses in the aftermath of the riots. Further, many articles were completely reproduced in the database if only a slight alteration had been made for a later edition of the newspaper. For this analysis, articles from the

---

6 This graph includes print and online figures. The content analysis did not include an examination of the websites of the publications. However, content from the newspaper is reproduced on their websites.
latest possible edition were used, while the rest were discarded. Letters to the editor were also discarded.

Table 2.1 shows the number of articles that were coded, according to genre and newspaper. The Fairfax papers have a higher proportion of feature and opinion pieces, reflecting their status as part of the ‘quality press’, which attempts to explore events and issues in greater depth. The Age has a high number of articles because they reprinted many Herald articles and also included pieces from their own journalists.

Table 1.1 Proportion of coded articles, according to genre and by newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>News</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Total Coded</th>
<th>Total Hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier-Mail</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Television News Content Analysis Methodology

The content analysis of television news was based on the broadcasts of four nightly news programs and two current affairs programs, drawn from the 11th to the 17th of December. The news programs included in the analysis were the Sydney bulletins of: Network Ten (5pm); Seven Network (6pm); Nine Network (6pm); and the ABC (7pm). While only Sydney bulletins were included, the content used in these bulletins was shared with each network’s affiliates around the country. Also, the same news crews were responsible for producing content for the early

---

7 This significantly affected the discard rate of all newspapers, but particularly the Telegraph’s, which had three editions. For example, the search generated 26 hits from the Telegraph on the 12th of December. Of these, 11 were labelled as from the first edition, while 8 were from the second edition and 7 were unique to the final edition. Out of the 26 hits, 8 were coded. The remaining were discarded: one was completely unrelated (the impact of violence on children), another 2 were basic recounts of events, 4 did not address a research question, while the remaining 11 were derivatives of a coded article.
morning, mid-morning, afternoon and late night news bulletins. These factors strengthen the representative nature of the sample. The current affairs programs, Nine Network’s *A Current Affair* and Seven Network’s *Today Tonight*, were also included in the content analysis.

The transcript of each nightly broadcast was obtained from the Electronic Media Monitoring Service. Transcripts were records of the live captioning of the programs. Therefore, their accuracy is not absolute. Despite this, the vast majority of errors in transcription were minor (such as the duplication of phrases and misspelling of proper nouns), with the intended meaning of the speaker being clearly discernible. The main shortcoming of the database was that it excludes the visuals that accompany each broadcast. Consequently, the identity of speakers was not always apparent and the editorial judgement imbued in the choice of visuals could not be assessed. This meant that only two aims of the newspaper content analysis were replicated: identifying which explanations for the riots were explored in the story and which of those explanations were privileged. This was based solely on what was spoken. For this analysis, the transcripts of all broadcasts from the sample of programs over the study period were examined. A total of 34 broadcasts were inspected, with 96 stories relating to Cronulla identified. Every broadcast had at least one story dealing with Cronulla and its aftermath.

Despite the limitations of the data, the argument for incorporating TV news into the analysis is compelling. An analysis of OzTam ratings figures during early December reveal that the four nightly news broadcasts attract well over 4 million viewers. The two current affairs shows drew around 2 million. Due to OzTam’s recent restrictions on the public reporting of ratings figures (Bodey, 2011, October 27) and the subsequent removal of archives by some online publications, these figures are not definitive. They are based on the analysis of OzTam ratings data posted on the media website TV Tonight (Knox, 2007), corporate media releases from Seven West Media (2010), and contemporary print media articles (Canning, 2006, March 8; Meade, 2005, December 1). The estimates are conservative and are only intended as an indication of overall ratings the sample of programs when the Cronulla riots occurred.
about 60% of Australia’s population in 2006 (ABS, 2008). If the viewing figures in regional and rural areas are proportionate to the metropolitan audience, the combined audience for the four network broadcasts and two current affairs shows is around 10 million, or almost half the population. The raw figures of television viewership do not adequately convey the significance of TV news in forming and shaping public opinion – combined newspaper readership was still higher (Roy Morgan Research, 2012). Surveys consistently find: more people rely on TV rather than newspapers for news; television is accorded a higher credibility; and television is the medium they would be most reluctant to do without (Rodney Tiffen, 2009, p. 85). For example, a Roy Morgan (2007) survey found that television was the most important source of information for 54% of individuals, followed by newspapers (21%), radio (16%) and the internet (10%).

PRINT MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS

The newspapers sampled provided a diversity of perspectives as to the causes of the riots, as shown in Tables 1.2 and 1.3. The print media’s dominant explanation of the riots was racism, with more than half the coded articles highlighting racism as a major factor in precipitating the riots. For three days, the Telegraph used a banner headline – “Race Riots” – at the top of every page that had riot-related content. However, there was some variation amongst media outlets as to other explanations of the riots. On the 16th of December, the Telegraph shifted to using the banner headline “Riots: Shire Crackdown”, emphasising the police response. This was emblematic of its greater emphasis on the failure of policing, as seen in Table 1.3. In contrast, the Fairfax papers gave greater space to exploring the subculture within Cronulla and its antipathy towards outsiders, regardless of their ethnicity. They also examined the role of the

9 The total does not add to 100% because of rounding.
10 The appearance of that headline, by itself, was not used to code that article under the ‘racism’ column, since they were not specifically part of each article, even as the direct headline. If they had been coded, the Telegraph’s incidence of using racism as an explanation would have been substantially higher than 25%.
11 For consistency, this headline, by itself, was not used to code the article. Doing so would not have materially changed the conclusions of the content analysis. It is noted here for transparency’s sake.
media in fuelling the riots and the general portrayal of Australians of Middle Eastern origin in the public discourse.

Table 1.2. Print media’s explanation of the riots, according to medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanations</th>
<th>What was the explanation?</th>
<th>Which explanation was privileged?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of policing</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia/Parochialism</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/Portrayal of Middle Eastern Australians/Islam</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob mentality</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Multiculturalism</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Machismo/Patriarchy</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2 also shows how some explanations were disproportionately privileged. For example, 26% of all print articles cited failure of policing as a contributor to the violence, while 21% privileged failure of policing as the explanation. This implies that amongst articles that cited policing as an issue, around four-fifths of those pieces concluded that failure of policing was the main contributor to the violence. However some explanations, like the role of alcohol, were not seen as the main cause, despite being cited in one-fifth of the articles.

---

12 This column gives the percentage of articles in which a certain explanation was provided. For example, 59% of print articles coded portrayed racism as being at least one explanation for the violence. In articles where several explanations were given, multiple recordings were made. Due to this, this column does not add up to 100%.

13 If an article placed emphasis on one explanation (for example, by only exploring one, or being structured to imply that one was more persuasive), it was coded as having privileged one explanation.
Social alienation and the failure of multiculturalism are interlinking explanations for the riots. However, they were separately coded, as each situates agency with a different group. Citing social alienation implies a failure on the part of government and society. On the other hand, the failure of multiculturalism and of migrant groups to integrate, suggests migrant groups are at fault. Table 1.3 shows that the Telegraph was more likely to cite a failure of multiculturalism, however the Herald drew attention to the social alienation of Lebanese youths. For both newspapers, the citation of these factors tended to occur in opinion pieces, as seen in table 2.4.

Mob mentality was cited as an explanation by a fifth of the coded articles, though only a small number portrayed it as the main reason for the riots. One example was a Telegraph news article headlined “Mob mentality: inside rioters’ minds”. It was largely based on an interview with a criminologist who said that most people “wouldn’t engage in this behaviour” but that “in a mob, a new set of rules…[are] developed” (Cummings, 2005, December 12). In this article, no other explanations were explored and as such, it was coded as privileging mob mentality as an explanation.
Table 1.3 also shows a striking consistency between the *Age* and *Herald* in their explanations of the riots. This is partially a result of them sharing many pieces. This similarity is seen in their citation of the negative portrayal of Middle Easterners in the media and the xenophobia of the Shire, whereas the News Limited papers largely forego these explanations. For example, versions of the same opinion piece by David Marr in the *Herald* (2005, December 13b) and *Age* (2005, December 13a), accused Alan Jones and other talkback hosts of fanning the hatred that contributed to the violence.

Table 1.4. Explanation provided, by Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>News</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of policing</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia/Parochialism</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/Portrayal of Middle Eastern Australians/Islam</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob mentality</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Multiculturalism</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Machismo/Patriarchy</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4 shows that there was variation between the explanations provided and genre of the article. Opinion pieces, as a whole, tended to be most pluralistic in their views of the riots. Features tended to emphasis different causes, such as the xenophobic culture of Cronulla. This probably results from the mix of on-the-ground reporting and in-depth analysis, a trademark of features. Both features and opinion were more likely to occur in the Fairfax newspapers, owing to their status as belonging to the ‘quality press’. Straight news pieces were inclined to examine the failure of policing and the role of the mob mentality in sparking the riots. The prevalence of the law and order explanation in news articles was partially because this genre was responsible
for conveying the words of political leaders, who emphasised this aspect, as demonstrated by this study’s qualitative analysis.

**Who Gets Quoted**

The final aim of the content analysis was to examine who was quoted in the coded articles. Coding was only completed if a direct quote from an individual was included in the article. The incidence of quotes varied according to genre. More than 80% of police quotes were in straight news articles, while three-quarters of academics’ quotes appeared in features. However, there was a contrast between where the quotes of politicians appeared. Four-fifths of all Labor politicians’ quotes appeared in news stories, while less than half of Coalition quotes surfaced in that genre. The reflected the fact that several feature and opinion pieces used John Howard’s denial of racism in the riots to criticism his blinkered perspective. The prevalence of Coalition backbencher quotes is due to the local members of Cronulla being Liberal members.

The content analysis revealed no minor party politicians were quoted in the aftermath of the riots. To qualify as a minor party in this analysis, the party must have had at least one elected represented in the NSW or Federal Parliaments. However, several articles quoted representatives of far-right groups that were involved in the riots. The lack of space given to minor party voices is significant, as the major parties gradually coalesced around a similar public interpretation of the riots, demonstrated in the qualitative analysis of their responses provided above. Though two errant major party voices, in Bruce Baird, a Liberal MP (6 out of 135 articles), and Harry Quick, a Labor MP (1 article), broke through into the media, their success was limited.

---

16 This included the Greens, Democrats, Unity, Shooters, Outdoor Recreation Party, Reform the Legal System, Christian Democrats and One Nation NSW.
Table 1.5 Who was quoted, by Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>Tele</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SMH</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coalition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontbencher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbencher</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontbencher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbencher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Party</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TELEVISION NEWS CONTENT ANALYSIS

The content analysis of television news reveals that racism and the failure of policing were the dominant explanations for the riots given by the broadcasts. Table 1.6 shows that two-thirds of all broadcasts cited each factor as an explanation. The roles of alcohol and mob mentality were further down the list as explanations. Strikingly, an examination of which explanations were privileged show marked differences with the explanations simply presented. Half of all broadcasts that privileged an explanation fingered the failure of policing for the riots, while just a quarter cited racism. All other explanations were in single digits. The prevalence of the law and order explanation for television news may result from its greater reliance on the use of the conflict frame in presenting the news. This frame emphasises the conflict between individuals and groups as a means of capturing audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Television news may rely on this frame more because the medium may struggle to convey the complexities of situations unfamiliar to audiences (Norris, 1995, p. 362).
Table 1.6 Explanation according to medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanations</th>
<th>What was the explanation?</th>
<th>Which explanation was privileged?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of policing</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia/Parochialism</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/Portrayal of Middle Eastern Australians/Islam</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob mentality</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Multiculturalism</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Machismo/Patriarchy</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.7 shows that there was a remarkable consistency across programs in the explanations that were explored, particularly considering the small sample sizes. In the process of coding the broadcasts, it was possible to identify patterns in the type (and even order) of news stories that occurred on a day, especially across the Nine and Seven Networks. This was in contrast to the results of the newspaper content analysis, which revealed that different newspapers had a tendency to emphasise varying explanations. However, the current affairs programs had a slightly higher tendency to explore varying explanations, seen by the lower percentage of stories citing racism and the breakdown of law and order, allowing them to explore alternatives. This reflects the magazine-style format of the shows, where about 5-6 minutes is devoted to a single segment, generally longer than on the nightly news programs.

---

17 This column gives the percentage of articles in which a certain explanation was provided. For example, 59% of print articles coded portrayed racism as being at least one explanation for the violence. In articles where several explanations were given, multiple recordings were made. Due to this, this column does not add up to 100%.

18 If an article placed emphasis on one explanation (for example, by only exploring one, or being structured to imply that one was more persuasive), it was coded as having privileged one explanation.
Table 1.7. Explanation according to news program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanations</th>
<th>ABC</th>
<th>Seven</th>
<th>Nine</th>
<th>Ten</th>
<th>TT/ACA</th>
<th>Total Avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of policing</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia/Parochialism</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/Portrayal of Middle Eastern Australians/Islam</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob mentality</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Multiculturalism</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Machismo/Patriarchy</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

There were clear parallels in the response of political elites – the leaders of the major parties – to the Cronulla Riots. They all tended to frame the riots in a law and order framework, for which the best response was stronger policing. More police empowered with stronger legislation and employing better strategies would have prevented the violence. This analysis of events was largely consistent in the months and years following the riots. They also largely avoided discussion about the racial element to the violence. Amongst the elite, there were minor variations in this approach. Morris Iemma, for example, initially provided a broader analysis of events. Yet within days, he was talking about the riots in an exclusively law and order context. Similarly, Peter Debnam raised the topic of race in the context of “ethnic crime”. In contrast, some backbenchers and members of minor parties offered a broader analysis of the event. They attributed the violence to racism, economic disadvantage and the portrayal of Muslims in the media. By and large, however, the response of political elites was to consistently frame the disorder as a result of inadequate policing and to avoid discussion of the racial aspects of the violence. This approach contrasted markedly with that adopted by the media.
This content analysis of print and TV news sources reveals that media outlets, taken individually or as a group, explored a variety of explanations for the riots. The most prominent explanations for the riots were racism and a failure of policing. Yet around a quarter of newspapers articles cited xenophobia and portrayal of Middle Eastern Australians as contributing to the violence. There was a greater diversity of explanations offered amongst the print media, compared to television news, which overwhelmingly focused on a failure of policing and racism. This was likely due to the constrained nature of the medium. The discrepancy between the response of political elites and the media will be explored further in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} chapter.
2011 English Riots: Political Elite and Media Responses

The English Riots of 2011 occurred between the 6th and 10th of August (Bloom, 2012, pp. 76-99). Ostensibly, the spark for the riots was the police shooting of Mark Duggan on the 5th of August. The following day, there was a rally in Tottenham to protest the killing. By nightfall, the protest had become violent. Over the next several days, the scale of the disorder ballooned and spread from London to numerous English cities, including Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool. Violent clashes with police gave way to the looting of businesses and the destruction of property. Images of parts of London aflame led the wall-to-wall media coverage of the events. Also, many political elites were forced to return from vacations to the capital to respond to the situation.

This chapter examines the responses of both political elites and the media to the English Riots. It conducts a textual analysis of the statements, speeches and interviews given in response to the riots by the parliamentary leaders of the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour Parties. The three parties dominate politics in Westminster, though not necessarily in the devolved administrations. These actors, who are among the most ubiquitous political figures in the nation, also hold the official positions of Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition respectively. By dint of their position, they also tend to lead the response of their parties, particularly in the face of fast-moving events. For comparative and consistency purposes, this chapter briefly examines the responses of some backbenchers. The second half of the chapter consists of a content analysis of select print media sources drawn from a twelve-day period. This chapter will show how political elites offered a variety of explanations for the riots. Some of

\[19\] Some sources incorrectly refer to it as the British or UK Riots.
these included: a consumerist culture that lacks basic morals, social disaffection, poverty, criminality as well as poor policing. It will also show that the media’s coverage of events, offered a similarly broad analysis of events.

DAVID CAMERON AND THE CONSERVATIVES
The initial reaction of David Cameron to the riots was delivered through press briefings and statements provided by his spokesperson. Cameron, like much of the political elite, was on holiday, in Tuscany, and he returned to London to give his first public remarks on the 9th of August. On the 7th of August, after the first night of rioting, Cameron’s spokesperson condemned the violence and said that there was “no justification for the aggression the police and the public faced” (Sparrow, 2011, August 8). The next day, the spokesperson said that the rioting was not related to Mark Duggan’s death. They made clear that “those responsible for that violence and looting would be made to face the consequences of their actions” (Prime Minister's Spokesperson, 2011, August 8). They made a point of noting the number of arrests the police had made. A late-night decision was made on the 8th for Cameron to return to London on an early morning flight (BBC News, 2011, August 8).

In his first public remarks, Cameron began by noting “I’ve come straight from a meeting of the government’s COBRA committee” and pledged to “restore order to Britain’s street and make them safe for the law abiding” (Cameron, 2011, August 9). In delivering a phrase that was widely reported, Cameron labelled the violence, “criminality, pure and simple”. He said that “it’s quite clear” more police and “more robust” police action was required, before going on to detail the number of rioters arrested and the consequences they would face. Cameron also announced

---

20 This statement does not appear on the Prime Minister’s official website (as of August 2012), or an October 4, 2011 archive of that website maintained by the UK’s National Archives agency.
21 The Cabinet Office Briefing Room is popularly known as COBRA. It coordinates the response of the UK government during a crisis, and performs a similar function to the White House’s Situation Room.
that the House of Commons would be recalled on the 11th so that a debate about the violence could be held. The previous day, Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister and highest ranking official in the country at the time, had dismissed the need to recall parliament (BBC News, 2011, August 8).

The following day, Cameron made another statement to the media and took questions. He reiterated many of the same points of the previous day’s statement, including again highlighting the number of arrests made and police on the streets (Cameron, 2011, August 10). Up until this point, Cameron had responded to the disorder with an exclusively law and order response. However, he now began to address what he thought were some of the deeper causes of the riots. He stated: “It is all too clear that we have a big problem with gangs in our country.” Arguing the riots showed that parts of society are “sick”, he stated that “the root cause of this mindless selfishness is… a complete lack of responsibility in parts of our society.” Following his remarks, one journalist questioned Cameron about what he believed to be the “cure” to this sickness. Cameron’s reply began by delving further into the causes:

- a lack of proper parenting,
- a lack of proper upbringing,
- a lack of proper ethics,
- a lack of proper morals...

There is not one trigger that can change these things... it’s about discipline in schools, it’s about making sure we have a welfare system that does not reward idleness…It is as much a moral problem as a political problem.

Cameron (2011) made a lengthy speech to Parliament on the 11th of August, the first day that order was largely restored across England. He repeated his assertion that the riots were “criminality, pure and simple” and devoted about half of his speech outlining how the government was restoring law and order, and dealing with the damage and perpetrators (column 1051). However, he spent about a quarter of his speech – a substantial period, considering its
Timing, a day after violence had subsided – addressing “the deeper problem” that caused the riots.

Responsibility for crime always lies with the criminal…But crime has a context, and we must not shy away from it…This is not about poverty; it is about culture – a culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities (column 1054).

Cameron went on to repeat his argument about needing more discipline in school, better parenting and a stronger response from the criminal justice system, all of which was “action that is necessary to help mend our broken society”. He also acknowledged that “the causes [of the violence] are complex” (column 1059).

Several days later, once the violence has completely dissipated, Cameron (2011, August 15) delivered a speech that dwelled primarily on the causes of, and longer-term response to the riots. He began by stating that:

we mustn’t oversimplify… different things were going on in different parts of the country. … These riots were not about race…These riots were not about government cuts…And these riots were not about poverty…No, this was about behaviour…people showing indifference to right and wrong; people with a twisted moral code; people with a complete absence of self-restraint.

Cameron went on to say that “Social problems that have been festering for decades have exploded in our face” and that “Our security fightback must be matched by a social fightback”. He outlined his vision for the role of government:
“Government cannot legislate to change behaviour, but it is wrong to think the State is a bystander. Because people’s behaviour does not happen in a vacuum: it is affected by the rules government sets and how they are enforced; by the services government provides and how they are delivered; and perhaps above all by the signals government sends about the kinds of behaviour that are encouraged and rewarded.”

He said moral decline and bad behaviour were “not limited to the poorest parts of society” and called it “a problem with deep roots in our society”. He linked this moral decline to high profile cases of wrongdoing, including the financial crisis, MPs’ expenses and phone hacking scandal. Cameron went on to flesh out his plans to “[address] failures in our education system…help improve parenting…[train] an army of community organisers to work in our most deprived neighbourhoods…[address the] moral hazard in our welfare system”. He detailed plans for a broad national service style program that would get young people working in their communities, which was “part of the solution to this very modern problem of alienated, angry young people”. Several months later, in Cameron’s (2011, October 5) address to the Conservative Party Conference, he reiterated the same points, though in a more concise form. However, he was now explicitly using the riots as evidence for the need to drive forward the Big Society agenda, the Conservatives’ flagship policy idea in their 2010 election manifesto.

ED MILIBAND AND THE LABOUR RESPONSE

Ed Miliband’s initial response to the riots came in the form of a short statement issued on the evening of the 8th of August (BBC News, 2011, August 8). He condemned the violence and called for a “robust” police response. On a visit to riot-hit areas the next day, he said that “Different people have different views [about the cause of the riots]…but there are no excuses”, before going on to say that “the immediate priority is to restore public order” (BBC News, 2011,
August 9). The following day, as the violence intensified, Miliband reiterated these messages, saying “We continue to need the strongest possible police response to restore calm and security” (Miliband, 2011, August 10). Miliband followed Cameron in addressing parliament on the day it was recalled. After repeating many of the points he had made previously, he spent about half the speech “on the deeper lessons we need to learn” (Miliband, 2011). He said:

The causes are complex…[we need] parental responsibility; an end to a take-what-you-can culture that needs to change from the benefits office to the board room…We need a sustained effort to tackle gangs in our cities…questions of hope and aspiration are [also] relevant… Ours must be one society. We all bear a share of responsibility for what happens within it (columns 1057-8).

The following day, in a radio interview, Miliband blamed a “me-first” culture on the riots, and said he regretted that the previous Labour government did not reduce inequality (BBC News, 2011, August 12). He continued: “There’s a debate some people are starting [about the causes of the riots]: is it culture, is it poverty and lack of opportunity? It’s probably both.”

In a set-piece speech on the riots, less than a week after order had been re-established, Miliband said that putting “the riots down to ‘criminality’ pure and simple”, the language used by Cameron, was not a “path” that he would take (Miliband, 2011, August 15). He quoted a Los Angeles police commissioner: “you cannot arrest your way out’ of a problem.” Similarly, he said he would not take another path by simply blaming others. He continued: “we all bear a share of responsibility for the society we create. Governments, Labour and Conservative. Power elites in politics, business and the media. And all of us – me and you as well.”
Like Cameron, Miliband went on to link the “me-first” culture to the excessive bonuses received by executives, the MPs’ expenses scandal and the phone hacking scandal, saying that the culture was not confined to the “so-called underclass”. He continued to link these events together in his speech to the Labour Party Conference (Miliband, 2011, September 27). However in this speech, delivered several weeks after the riots, he went further, and said: “These crises point to something deep in our country. The failure of a system.” He praised the:

vast majority of people who live [in riot affected areas, who] are decent, law-abiding, community spirited…But with such great people, how have we ended up with the problems we face? It’s because of the way we have chosen to run our country. Not just for a year or so but for decades.

In a keynote address to the Reading the Riots Conference, hosted by the London School of Economics and The Guardian newspaper, Miliband repeated many of his previous points about the riots, saying “the riots have also been a window on deeper issues facing our country” (Miliband, 2011, December 14). He emphasised the importance of ensuring opportunities were available for young people to utilise: “Circumstances matter. Opportunity matters.” He rejected as too simplistic the view that the riots were caused by government cuts. Echoing some of Cameron’s analysis, Miliband also spoke about the importance of values, families and institutions, such as schools, churches and clubs in building a stronger society.

NICK CLEGG AND THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Nick Clegg was the first senior member of government to return in London during the riots, though media reports at the time suggest this was to deal with a deteriorating situation in the financial markets (Shipman, 2011, August 8). His first public remarks, made on the 8th of August, was focused on condemning the violence and “needless, opportunistic theft – nothing
more, nothing less” (Clegg, 2011, August 8). He also said that “the violence we saw last night had absolutely nothing to do with the death of Mr Duggan” (Dodd & Davies, 2011, August 9). Unlike other senior politicians at this stage of the unrest, Clegg did not focus on the police response to the riots. Instead he lauded the resilience of the community in the face of “thieves and troublemakers.” Several days later, in an interview with the BBC’s Radio 4, Clegg said that there were “real problems with parts of our society” but there had been “healthy expressions of a strong society” in many areas impacted by the violence (Meikle, 2011, August 11). This was in contrast to the emphasis placed by Cameron, who said parts of society were “frankly sick”. Clegg refused to use the same language when pressed by the interviewer. According to an audio recording of the interview, he went on to say that the riots were “partly to do with [people’s] morality …values …upbringing …a sense of belonging; that they’ve got a sense of opportunity to make something of their lives in the community” (Naughtie, 2011, August 11). He said that there would be “sociological debates in the weeks and months ahead” but the focus now should be on restoring order.

Clegg rejected any link between police cuts and the riots (Meikle, 2011, August 11) and also broader government cuts to services and the riots: “it’s totally ludicrous to claim that young people are smashing up shops and stealing items of clothing because of cuts, many of which haven’t happened yet” (Gray, 2011, August 11). On a visit to Nottingham, Clegg argued:

“we have to ask ourselves when an 11-year-old girl or young teenagers feel they’ve got so little stake in their own neighbourhood, in their own community, they’ve got so little sense of belonging, that they have to go around trashing it…I think one of the parts of the answer, but it’s a complex picture, is to make sure that wherever possible we give people opportunities…” (Clegg, 2011, August 12).
Clegg did not address parliament when it was recalled, but he delivered a lengthy speech to Liberal Democrat party members about the riots (Clegg, 2011, August 13). He said that “there is no excuse for this behaviour” and that “much of this was pure criminality.” Notwithstanding this, he said that:

Some long-standing social problems have been thrown into sharper relief: gang culture; failing families; a welfare system that traps too many in dependency… I think the best defence against this kind of nihilistic behaviour is to ensure that everyone has a stake in society… That is why this Government has decided to focus our social policies on social mobility…[for example, by] Putting more money into schools with disadvantaged youngsters…

Clegg was the only senior politician to reference academic work in their public remarks. Clegg referred to the ‘broken windows’ effect, where one instance of law-breaking creates a cascading effect of more criminality (see Wilson & Kelling, 1982). He used this theory to link the riots to the financial crisis and MPs’ expenses scandal, and suggested that a perception existed whereby “people who break the rules can prosper”.

In a speech made almost a week after order had been restored, Clegg said politicians were inclined to adopt “cardboard cutout” positions to social problems, with one side blaming social breakdown and the other attributing it to government policy (Curtis, 2011, August 16). Clegg said he sought to chart a more empirical course, accept new information and if required, change his analysis (Clegg, 2011, August 16). For example, “Some of our early assumptions [about the age of rioters] are having to be challenged,” he said, in reference to the finding that only one-fifth of those in court were under eighteen. In light of the finding that more than 60% of adults before the courts in relation to the riots were repeat offenders, Clegg announced that the
government would augment a “rehabilitation revolution to stop this downward spiral of repeat crime.” This was significant as it implicitly acknowledged that some responsibility rested with the state to reform criminals, and that to-date, the state’s efforts had not been satisfactory. In Clegg’s (2011, September 21) keynote address to the Liberal Democrats’ Conference, he was consistent in his analysis, repeating many of the themes he had already highlighted.

BACKBENCHERS
Numerous backbench MPs from all major parties provided analysis of the riots. Many of the areas affected by violence were in Labour held constituencies; consequently, many local MPs, such as David Lammy, were in the media responding to the riots, as seen in the content analysis (see Table 2.5). By and large, backbench MPs’ response to the riots mirrored the response of their Party’s leaders. They proposed a variety of explanations for the violence including, the police shooting of Duggan, social disadvantage (David Lammy, 2011, August 8), failure of policing (Mercer in Bates, 2011, August 9), and criminal gangs (Umunna in Pickard & Warrell, 2012, June 26). Due to their similarity, this study will not investigate their responses in-depth.

MEDIA RESPONSES TO THE 2011 ENGLISH RIOTS
To supplement the textual analysis of politicians’ responses to the English riots, a content analysis of media sources was conducted to examine media responses to the riots. The aim of the content analysis was threefold. It was to identify: the politicians who were quoted; which explanations for the riots were explored; and which of those explanations were privileged. A content analysis of television news broadcasts could not be conducted as transcripts of programs were not obtainable. An examination of media responses to the English riots was conducted using a content analysis of three newspapers, over a twelve-day period, beginning from the start of the violence. The newspapers included in the analysis were all national dailies: they were the tabloid Sun, mid-market Daily Mail, and quality newspaper The Guardian. Despite the relatively
fragmented British newspaper market, these newspapers account for over half of all newspaper readership (NRS, 2012).

The newspapers selected are also representative of the broader industry (NRS, 2012). The Guardian pursues a solidly left-wing editorial position, and has never endorsed the Conservative Party at a General Election. It is also one of five daily national ‘quality’ papers in the country, which generally adopt a more serious tone and report on more substantive topics. The Guardian, like other quality papers, has a comparatively low readership of 1.1 million, but one that is more educated and wealthier. The Mail has only ever endorsed the Conservatives and is one of two daily national ‘mid-market’ papers, which straddle the divide between tabloid and quality, in terms of coverage and also readership profile. It has a readership of 4.5 million, which is comparatively older and more female. The Sun, on the other hand, has one million more male than female readers and skews towards a younger demographic. It has a total readership of 7.5 million. It has a predominantly working-class readership and is known for its shifting political allegiances, having supported every winning party since 1979. Despite this, it has a populist outlook, reflective of its tabloid pedigree; it is one of 3 national daily tabloids.

Factiva was used to obtain the relevant articles. The terms used in the search were: “riot OR riots OR violence”. Unlike the Cronulla Riots, the name of these riots changed over time, so one could not be included in the search. Also, the search period of twelve days, from the 7th to 18th of August, was longer than that used in the analysis of media responses to Cronulla. This was because the violence in the English Riots was longer. Using these terms, a total of 716 hits were generated over the search period, once articles tagged as concerning non-UK localities and

23 All demographic data in this section has been obtained from the National Readership Survey (2012). The endorsement history covers post-war Britain only (Stoddard, 2010, May 4).
duplicates were excluded (see Table 2.1).\textsuperscript{24} To make the sample size more manageable for the coding process, a random selection of articles from both the \textit{Sun} and \textit{Guardian} were analysed. While all \textit{Mail} articles were included in the sample, only every second \textit{Sun} article and every third \textit{Guardian} article were examined. More than two-thirds of these were determined to having addressed at least one aim of the content analysis. Of the remaining 150 articles: nearly a third did not addressed an aim of the content analysis (disproportionately from the \textit{Sun} and \textit{Mail}, because of the tendency for them to have shorter articles); another third were primarily about a different topic but mentioned the riots (fox example, many were about sporting fixtures); a fifth were letters to the editor; while 16\% were about something completely unrelated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>News</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Total Coded</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Total Hits</th>
<th>Sampling Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>Every Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>Every Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>716</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS}

The newspapers sampled provided a diversity of perspectives to explain the causes of the riots, as shown in Table 2.2. The main explanations cited by the print media were criminality and consumerism, or a lack of moral values. However, five other explanations were each cited by at least 10\% of coded articles. By and large, the media’s analysis and reporting of events had parallels with the analysis of British political elites, and to a lesser extent, the analysis of scholars.

\textsuperscript{24} Unlike with Australian newspapers, Factiva marked out duplicate articles for the British newspapers. Including duplicates – generally articles that had been slightly modified for a different edition of the newspaper – the total hits came to 1107.
Table 2.2 Print explanations of the riots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>What was the explanation?</th>
<th>Which explanation was privileged?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminality</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism/Lack of Moral Values</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Policing</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Disaffection/Poverty</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Shooting of Duggan</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking, Instant Messaging</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of schools/parenting/welfare dependency</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Austerity</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob Mentality</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copycat</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (human rights culture, multiculturalism, etc.)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In explaining the riots, the newspapers emphasised the role of “criminality – pure and simple”, a phrase used in a *Mail* editorial the morning of David Cameron’s speech using the same words (Daily Mail, 2011, August 11). The *Mail’s* editorial position was that “liberal policies which have held sway for 30 years have undermined the core social and moral values that define civilised behaviour” (Daily Mail, 2011, August 13). The editorial fingered the “[failure] to support the traditional family and its values”, lack of discipline in schools, a celebrity drug-culture, “mass immigration”, “multiculturalism”, “welfare dependency” and “political correctness and human rights laws” which have “emaciated” the police. This article was coded several times to reflect the different explanations canvassed – ‘lack of moral values’, ‘failure of

---

25 This column gives the percentage of articles in which a certain explanation was provided. For example, 42% of articles coded portrayed criminality as at least one explanation for the violence. In articles where multiple explanations were given, multiple recordings were made. Due to this, this column does not add up to 100%. [n = 465]

26 If an article placed emphasis on one explanation (for example, by only exploring only one cause, or being structured to imply that one was more persuasive), it was coded as having privileged one explanation. [n = 113]
policing’, ‘failure of schools, welfare dependency’ and ‘other’. It was coded as having privileged ‘other’, as it was, in the end, blaming a culture of liberalism.

The newspapers also blamed a consumerist mentality and a breakdown in moral values for the riots, with 41% of all articles citing it as a factor, and a quarter portraying it as the most important cause. This echoed the analysis of David Cameron. While *The Sun* never used the term consumerism, it had numerous short articles simply highlighting the looting of brand name stores. One article, for example, stated: “Some used shopping trolleys to wheel away TVs and clothes. Others greedily stuffed their cars with stolen goods, pulling items out of their boxes in order to fit more in” (*The Sun*, 2011, August 8). Though this did not speak about the concept of consumerism, it was coded in that category. Unlike the Australian media’s coverage of the Cronulla Riots, the British media did not cite racism as an explanation for the riots, to the same extent. Only 9% of articles did so. These articles generally talked about racial tension within society, or the killing of Duggan and the poor relationship between the black community and the policing.

Table 2.3 Explanations for the riots, by Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminality</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism/Lack of Moral Values</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Policing</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Disaffection/Poverty</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Shooting of Duggan</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking, Instant Messaging</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of schools/parenting/welfare dependency</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Austerity</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob Mentality</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copycat</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (human rights culture, multiculturalism, etc.)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4 examines the explanations provided by each newspaper. It enables a comparison of the explanations offered within each newspaper. There was a marked discrepancy between the Guardian’s and the other newspaper’s citation of poverty as a factor in the riots. While nearly one-fifth of Guardian articles mentioned it, less than one-tenth of Mail articles did so. This discrepancy was even more striking when examining articles that privileged explanations. Of the 13 articles that privileged poverty as the explanation, 11 were from the Guardian. In some ways, these figures have to be consumed with some caution. In many cases, articles cited certain explanations of the riots, before proceeding to describe why they were incorrect. This accounts for all the Mail’s citations of government austerity. It also accounts for many of the Mail’s and Sun’s citation of poverty as an explanation of the disorder. The killing of Mark Duggan by police officers, when mentioned, was portrayed as the spark that began the riots. However, there was a significant variation amongst the newspapers as to how they presented with the issue. While 11% of Guardian pieces cited the shooting as a pretext for the violence, only 5% of Sun pieces did.

Table 2.4 Explanation for the riots, by Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminality</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism/Lack of Moral Values</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Policing</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Disaffection/Poverty</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Shooting of Duggan</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking, Instant Messaging</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of schools/parenting/welfare dependency</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Austerity</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob Mentality</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copycat</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (human rights culture, multiculturalism, etc.)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4 reveals who was quoted in the sample of articles analysed. Conservative frontbenchers were the most quoted, owing to their position in government and occupation of relevant ministries in the coalition government. A relatively high number of backbenchers were also quoted. This was in contrast to the number of backbenchers quoted in the media’s coverage of the Cronulla Riots. There were no representatives of minor parties quoted. Boris Johnson, the Conservative Mayor of London, was coded separately to account for his differences with the response to Cameron. Johnson criticised Cameron’s government for police cuts in the aftermath of the riots.

Table 2.5 Who was quoted, by newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Guardian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontbencher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbencher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontbencher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbencher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontbencher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbencher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boris Johnson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Party</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

British political elites responded to the English Riots by offering a variety of explanations for the violence. However, their initial responses tended to be focused the law and order. As the violence subsided, they offered more sophisticated analyses. The three leaders examined used a version of the phrase, ‘the causes are complex’, to describe the riots. These explanations often aligned with their ideological predispositions. For example, David Cameron, a Conservative,
emphasised the failure of parenting and schools in instilling moral values in young people, which helped lead to the criminality. Similarly, Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, focused on the role social disadvantage and a lack of opportunity for individuals. Despite this, political elites, taken individually or as a group, responded to the violence by offering a variety of explanations for the riots. Their responses were not exclusively in the context of law and order.

The British media’s approach to responding to the riots largely paralleled that taken by political elites. They offered a variety of explanations for the violence. News outlets tended to focus more on explanations that accorded with their ideological persuasion and format (eg. tabloid). The similarities and differences between their approaches, and between the approaches of Australian elites, will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Reading the Responses: A Comparative Study

A comparative analysis of elite responses to the Cronulla Riots and English Riots of 2011 – both episodes of mass disorder in otherwise peaceful democracies – reveals that the political elites of Australia and Britain responded to the events differently. However, there was a distinction between how the respective political elites responded, and how the media within each country responded to the events. While the political elites of Britain and Australia had diverging responses, the media had a similar approach in both countries to reporting on and analysing the disorder. A quantitative analysis of media sources covering both the Cronulla and English Riots showed that a variety of explanations for both events were canvassed across the media. Individual news outlets were often likely to emphasise particular explanations, perhaps due to their ideological leanings. While scholarly analyses emphasised different explanations, an analysis of newspaper sources from both countries showed that, taken as a whole, newspapers offered a plurality of explanations for the disorder. This was also apparent in television news reporting of the Cronulla Riots in Australia. The remainder of this chapter will elucidate the similarities and differences in approach between and within, both the political elites and media, of each country, and seek to make inferences about the nature of each society – and political culture – based on the divergent responses.

The response of political elites to the Cronulla and English Riots was markedly different in each case. Politicians in Australia largely framed the violence through the prism of law and order: if more police were deployed with enhanced powers, the rioting would not have occurred – or at
the very least, it would have been reduced in size, intensity and duration. In contrast, senior politicians in Britain did not limit their analysis to solely focusing on law and order. Instead, they explored a multiplicity of other factors that may have contributed to the disorder. In both countries, this uniformity in approach to responding to the riots was apparent across partisan divides; nationality, not ideology, was the better indicator of the style of response. Consequently, the response of politicians from the ALP had more in common with conservative Australian politicians, than with their sister Labour Party in Britain (and vice versa).

A cross-temporal examination of the initial responses to the rioting shows that there was a variation in both Australia and Britain. Morris Iemma, the State Labor Premier of NSW, initially acknowledged the role of “deep-seated issues” in fuelling the riots (Iemma, 2005, December 12a). However within days, he was exclusively talking about the violence in the context of implementing a law and order response. That shift would persist through to the 2007 election leaders’ debate. Similarly, Cronulla’s local Liberal MP, Bruce Baird, went from providing a comprehensive analysis of the causes of the riots to ABC radio on the morning after the initial violence, to not raising the same issues in speeches to Parliament – except those relating to policing – over the following year. Likewise, Federal Labor essentially vacated the debate, implicitly conceding that the matter was a state-level law and order issue. In effect, the public response of Australian political elites coalesced relatively quickly around a single explanation for the riots – a lack of effect policing. The sole exception to this trend was seen in John Howard’s Australia Day address to the National Press Club (Howard, 2006, January 25). But his deviation from the accepted consensus was subtle and almost tangential, unlike the set-piece speeches of British political leaders. It was not a comprehensive analysis; he only offered one extra explanation for the riots – a failure of some migrants to integrate. This was still subordinate to the main cause: a failure of policing.
In Britain, a different dynamic was playing out. David Cameron and Nick Clegg, leaders of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, initially saw the violence as simply requiring a more effective police response. Clegg labelled it “needless, opportunistic theft – nothing more, nothing less” (Clegg, 2011, August 8), while Cameron called it “criminality, pure and simple” (Cameron, 2011, August 9). However within days, they had joined Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party, in not just acknowledging other contributory factors, but exploring them in detailed speeches. In Britain, the trend was for politicians to increasingly discuss additional factors that led to the riots – such as a consumerist culture or alienated young people – once the violence had subsided. The movement in the responses of Australian political elites was in the opposite direction: politicians formed a seeming consensus on a singular cause of the riots – a lack of effective policing – and stuck to it.

The diverging responses of the Australia and British political elites to the respective riots contrasted with the relatively similar approach adopted by the media in each country to responding, through their coverage, to the riots. The quantitative analysis of media in both countries showed that they canvassed a variety of explanations for the riots. This was in line with the analysis of scholars, who have found a multiplicity of factors that led to riots (for example Briggs, 2012; Roberts, 2012). Ostensibly, this does not reveal any interesting insights: the media, taken as a whole, reported on – and published opinion pieces – that reflected the variety of informed analysis about the riots. Admittedly, they did not allocate time on each explanation, as a scholar might have done – but they covered all the issues. The importance of the finding is that it serves to illuminate the anomalous nature of the politicians’ responses. More specifically, it highlights that the response of Australia’s political elite – who framed the riots in a primarily law
and order context – was the anomalous response of the four groups examined in this study, as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

![Figure 3.1: Political Elites Responding to Riots: What were the causes?](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Elites</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Britain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMPARING THE CRONULLA AND ENGLISH RIOTS: QUESTIONS OF VALIDITY

The response of Australian and British political elites to the Cronulla and English Riots was patently different. However, before trying to ascertain what accounts for these differences, it would be sound to more fully establish that the two events were similar and happened in similar context. Once this has been established, Mill’s Method of Difference, which is used to analyse two cases that are similar in most respects, but different in one, can be used to analyse them. Firstly, the divergence between the Australian and British political elite’s response to the Cronulla and English riots could be attributed to the different nature of each event. The two episodes differed in the following ways: the initial spark of the violence; the scale of violence; the variety of groups involved; and, the target of violence. If the events were fundamentally incomparable, then inferring conclusions, based on the divergent responses, would not be analytically sound. However, based on the analysis below, this study concludes that the events are comparable.
Role of Race

The most obvious distinction between the two instances of disorder was in the role played by race. The Cronulla riots and race have become inextricably linked in the public consciousness; they are now thought of as race riots. This linkage has a solid foundation in reality, as the belligerent actors at Cronulla, and its aftermath, were mainly drawn from two ethnic groups (Jackson, 2006). On the other hand, the English riots – though it did stir racial tensions – mainly did not pit one ethnic group against another; it involved a multiplicity of groups, often attacking police and businesses.\(^{30}\) This was reflected in an analysis of the 3103 people brought before English courts on riot-related charges by the 10\(^{th}\) of August, 2011. It revealed that: 41% self-described themselves as being from a white ethnic group, 39% from a black ethnic group, 12% from mixed race group, 7% from an Asian ethnic group, and 2% from another background (Ministry of Justice, 2012).\(^{31}\) The disparity in the prominence of race in each episode was also reflected in the results of the quantitative analysis of the media coverage of the riots. The Australian media was much more likely to mention racism in explaining the riots, with 59% of newspaper articles and 68% of television segments doing so. British newspapers were much less likely, with only 9% of newspaper articles citing racism as an explanation [see Tables 1.6 & 2.2]. Additionally, while there was a political debate in Australia over whether the riots were fuelled by racism, seen in the qualitative analysis of politicians’ responses, this did not occur amongst the British political elite to the same extent.

Despite this, several reasons suggest that race played a role in the English riots. The most compelling reason is that the spark for the initial protests was the police shooting of Mark

\(^{30}\) Though property was attacked in the reprisal attacks after Cronulla, property was only attacked if it was thought to belong to a member of a certain ethnic group

\(^{31}\) Hard comparative data is not available as NSW Police does not collect data on ethnicity (Neighbour, 2011, March 8).
Duggan, a black man. The relationship between the black community and the police has been toxic in Britain in the recent past. A Judicial Inquiry into the Metropolitan Police Service (also known as Scotland Yard, and which has responsibility for policing Greater London) was conducted in 1998 after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a black man, went unsolved. The inquiry produced a damning report, which concluded that the MPS and other police services were marred by “institutional racism” (Home Office, 1999, paragraph 46.1 & 46.27). The historic antipathy between the black community and the police is reflected in the present “acute mistrust” between the two groups, which was a finding of the joint London School of Economics and Guardian study into the riots (Prasad, 2011, December 5). This has been fuelled, for example, by statistics showing that black individuals were almost 30 times more likely to be stopped and searched, compared to a white person in 2011 (Townsend, 2012, January 15). Despite this discrepancy, arrest rates resulting from the searches were similar for both groups (Dodd, 2012, June 12). These factors help contextualise why violence was directed against the police.

A more obvious indicator that race was a salient feature of the riots was the high number of black rioters that were involved in the violence. The high density of rioters from a black ethnic background – 39% of those appearing before courts were black – is particularly stark, considering that people from a African and Afro-Caribbean heritage comprise 3% of the population (The Economist, 2011). A frequent refrain arguing against the role of race in the riots, and for the declining sociological significance of race more generally (Wilson, 2011), is that: it is poverty – as opposed to race – that increasingly matters. While this analysis has merit – indeed, rioters tended to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Home Office, 2011, p. 5) – it is impossible to completely discount the existence of a racial dimension in the English riots. This is

---

32 This is vividly illustrated by Rogers (2011, December 6). He has constructed an interactive map marking the location of suspects’ addresses, which is overlayed on a map of England that is coloured according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, an official measure of poverty.
particularly the case considering that riots occurred in locations in areas with high minority populations, such as Tottenham, thus accounting for the disproportionate percentage appearing before courts. However, they largely did not occur in poorer areas with predominantly white populations, such as in urban centres in the North-East of England, or, for that matter, in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

The more prominent role of race in the Cronulla riots could have made politicians more hesitant to accurately address the causes, due to the (relatively recent) historical aversion to openly discussing racial issues. While the public discourse in Australia once openly canvassed issues relating to race – until the 1960’s, *The Bulletin*’s masthead read “Australia for the White Man” – this is much less likely today, due to a heightened sensitivity to the racism associated with the previous openness (see Tavan, 2005). Additionally, it has also been suggested that creating racial categories, unnecessarily divides the nation (Johnson, 2000). For both Labor and Liberal, governing a unified nation is important to pursuing their policy goals. Consequently, in recent debates that deal with race, elites have tended to use rhetorical devices to not explicitly talk about race or ethnicity. Instead, they speak in a coded language, which allows their subliminal meaning to still be heard by the intended audience. This has been seen in debates in parliament about asylum-seekers (Every & Augoustinos, 2007) and Indigenous Australians (LeCouteur et al., 2001). While a similar dynamic has been identified in Britain (Van Djik, 1993), the immediate association of race with the riots did not occur there; therefore, the use of coded language would be unlikely.

*Scale of the Riots*

The other key difference – and perhaps more pertinent distinguishing factor between the riots – relates to scale. While it is impossible to make a completely accurate comparison due to the fast-
moving and violent nature of events, all available evidence suggests that the English riots involved more rioters and police, across a larger geographic area, and had violence that was more intense. The English Riots resulted in over 1100 individuals charged with offences, 5 deaths (Lewis, 2011, August 12) and up to 300 million pounds worth of damage in London alone (Dodd, 2011, October 24). In contrast, Cronulla resulted in 104 individuals charged (Clennell, 2006, July 19), no deaths and a minimal direct economic cost. Also, the Cronulla riots were contained within one city, though despite its name, not within one suburb. The divergent response of political elites may have been prompted by this discrepancy in scale between the two riots. As the English riots were larger, there may have been a greater imperative for British politicians to more accurately address the underlying causes. This could have been a political imperative – it is more difficult to ‘spin’, or provide a misleading interpretation of events, when it is a larger and more consequential event. Or it could have been a moral imperative – failing to address a larger riot, which is indicative of a more dysfunctional society, could risk perpetuating the same problems. Regardless, it could be asserted that the larger riot resulted in a different response by politicians.

The fallacy of using objective metrics of scale to assert that the two riots were qualitatively different lies in the reality that people’s subjective perception of events is what shapes their response. Based on the scale of Australian media’s coverage of Cronulla and its aftermath, the rioting and the threat of further violence was perceived – at the time – as an important moment for the nation. While it may be difficult to assert that there was an objective equivalence in the impact of each riot on the host society, it is contrived to only use ‘objective’ metrics to demonstrate the larger scale of one riot. At their core, both riots shocked society and, for a period, dominated discourse at both elite and mass levels.
Differences in Context

The divergence in the response of political elites to the Cronulla and English riots could also have been a result of the events being similar, but the contexts being sufficiently different. While there are many functional equivalencies between Australia and Britain, factors specific to each country could have elicited the varying responses. The most relevant of these would be the less rigid level of party discipline in Britain.

The tradition of backbenchers speaking out against the party line, or just having a different publicly stated opinion, is more evident in Britain than in Australia. This contrast is most vividly seen in the hostile questioning that British Ministers can receive from members of their own party in Parliament, compared to the elaborate system of giving prepared answers to scripted questions in Australia (McGowan, 2008). Consequently, it may be more difficult for political leaders to sustain a warped interpretation of events if members of their own party are contradicting their ‘spin’. In Britain, prominent backbench MPs, such as David Lammy (2011), who represents some of the worst riot-affected parts of London, were providing a comprehensive analysis of the riots at the outset. In contrast, backbenchers in Australia were largely silent during the Cronulla riots. The main exception was Bruce Baird, the Federal MP representing Cronulla, who gave an interview to the ABC the morning after the initial riot, in which he offered explanations that were markedly different to other members of the government and the opposition. When Howard was asked to comment on Baird’s analysis, Howard acknowledged listening to the interview, but disputed the veracity of the journalist’s (in reality, accurate) summary of Baird’s comments. Over the following year, though Baird spoke in Parliament to criticise the policing resources at Cronulla, he did not offer the same analysis, as in the initial interview. However, the greater inclination for backbench MPs to criticise government’s policies in Britain was mainly exercised in the aftermath of the riots to encourage the government to
increase police numbers and powers. This is illustrated in the type of questioning David Cameron endured for several hours on the day the Commons was recalled to discuss the riots (Cameron, 2011). Based on this, the majority of MPs – particularly of his own party – would have readily accommodated a response of political elites which privileged law and order.

**INFERANCES FROM THE DIFFERENCES: POLITICAL CULTURE**

The above analysis notwithstanding, the competing instances of disorder were similar in nature – both were largely unexpected outbreaks of mass disorder and violence, which had similar underlying causal factors – that occurred in nations where any differences are of degree, and not kind. The divergent responses to the Cronulla and English riots reveal a difference between the political elites of Australia and Britain. What can be inferred from this difference?

The Cronulla and English Riots were similar events that occurred in similar countries. While rational choice theory would suggest that the response of elites in such circumstances should be similar, the diverging responses suggest some other factor was at play. Consequently, we come to the political culture approach, part of the behavioural school of analysis, which has been suggested, at least in American political science, to be the “leading alternative to rational choice theory as a general explanatory framework for political behaviour” (Inglehart, 1990, p. 19).

Based on the analysis conducted in this study, the diverging response of political elites can be used to infer that there are distinct elite political cultures in Australia and Britain. In other words, Australian political elites framed their response to Cronulla in a largely law and order context, which contrasted with the approach taken by the British political elite, media and Australian media. This discrepancy reflects some unique aspects of Australia’s elite political culture. This is striking considering that an orthodox analysis would suggest that the two countries share a
common political culture, owning to their shared history, legal systems, language and heritage. The response of Australia’s political elites to the Cronulla riots revealed two idiosyncratic aspects of Australia’s elite political culture: firstly, a greater inclination to transpose debates about complex subjects onto a simplified law and order frame; and secondly, a proclivity for politicians to avoid explicit discussions of race. Before continuing, the standard qualification needs to be made – both these inferences need more research, specifically on these areas, to establish the robustness of the observations.

The tendency for debates about complex subjects to become reductive in Australia is not an unusual claim. Debates about public policy topics, such as drug reform, have often morphed into discussions solely about law and order, thus ignoring the multi-faceted nature of such topics (D. J. Weatherburn, 2004, pp. 103-107). Nor is this thesis claiming that this phenomenon is limited to Australia (Beckett, 1999). However, the response of Australian political elites to the Cronulla riots suggests that this inclination is more entrenched in Australia’s elite political culture, compared to Britain’s.

The second inference from the divergence of the political elites’ response – that there is a proclivity for politicians to avoid discussions of race in Australia – is more difficult to establish. The difficulty arises from the weakness of the comparison with Britain, where political elites also did not prominently cite racism as a factor. Significantly, however, the media coverage of the British riots did not cite racism as an explanation for the riots, to the same extent as Australia’s media. Though scholars linked the English Riots to racial problems (albeit to a lesser extent compared to Cronulla), the media’s failure to do so helps mitigate the British political elite’s failure to incorporate an analysis of race into their diagnosis of the riots. However, an examination of the case study of the response to Cronulla, on its own, is striking in what it
reveals: the almost steadfast refusal by political elites to talk about the racism displayed by the violence – a tendency that strengthened over time. The uniformity of this failure to discuss race, when journalists, commentators and academics were doing so, is striking. It is telling that the main exception to this was, state Liberal leader, Peter Debnam’s frequent references to “ethnic crime”. If race was to be discussed, it was in barely coded language, which was inherently one-sided. Meanwhile, when backbencher Bruce Baird obliquely touched on the subject when he talked about the portrayal of Muslims in the public discourse, his analysis was not simply disputed, but denied by the Prime Minister. The uniformity of the reluctance to seriously discuss race amongst political elites, cuts across partisan lines, and can be seen as an aspect of Australia’s elite political culture.
Conclusion

Epilogue: Back to the Future

The inferences drawn from the findings provide a greater understanding of, and have implications for the conduct of public policy in both Australia and Britain. The tendency for Australian political elites to oversimplify complex debates into a law and order frame – to a greater extent than occurs in a similar country like Britain – is a troubling indicator. This inclination has the capacity to mislead and misinform the public, create unrealistic expectations and ultimately result in inappropriate policy choices being implemented. Arguably, this has been demonstrated in the response to the Cronulla Riots. It has also been seen in other areas, such as drug reform, where the underlying causes of problems have not been addressed because of a short-sighted emphasis on the law and order response. When this occurs, those problems invariably persist.

In recent years, a renewed public debate about the viability of multiculturalism in Western societies has taken place (Bloemraad, 2011). It has been spurred by the statements of conservatives, such as David Cameron (2011, February 5) and Gerard Henderson (2011, August 2), who previously supported multiculturalism as a policy, but now believe aspects of it have failed. This debate has been joined by individuals, mainly from the political left, who have mounted a defence that has extolled the success of multiculturalism (Bowen, 2011; Southommasane, 2009). Elements of this debate were seen in the response to the Cronulla and English Riots (see Tables 1.6 & 2.2), where frequent explanations for the violence included: the failure of immigrants to integrate; and social alienation caused by poor public service delivery. Both these explanations have identified an ailment, but attribute responsibility and agency to
different actors. Regardless of how each side frames their arguments about multiculturalism, both accurately reflect something true about the state of a subset of immigrant populations in Australia and Britain. Multiculturalism has not been uniformly successful or a failure. From this study, it is evident that race, which is inextricably linked to the debate on multiculturalism, continues to be a significant variable in society. But unless political elites are able to discuss the relevant issues, openly, honestly and without resorting to contrived absolutes, these problems will certainly endure.

Arguably, Australia currently has more successful multicultural society, compared to Britain (Southphommasane, 2009). Immigrants to Australia are better integrated and have socio-economic outcomes that are closer to the national average. However, Britain’s elite political culture appears to be more open to debate about issues that will shape the form of multiculturalism into the future. Unless Australia adapts, our future may not be as bright.
Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES


Costello, P. (2005, December 16a). Doorstop Interview Transcript
Menzies Malvern, Melbourne.

Costello, P. (2005, December 16b). Interview with Catherine McGrath Transcript, AM, ABC.


Dodd, V. (2012, June 12). Police up to 28 times more likely to stop and search black people - study, Guardian, p. 10.


Donald, P. (2005, December 17). Call for laws against racial, religious threats, AM, ABC.


Henderson, G. (2011, August 2). Leaders are right to confront failure of multiculturalism, Sydney Morning Herald, p. 11.


Iemma, M. (2005, December 12a). Interview with Tony Eastley Transcript, AM, ABC.


Kennedy, J. (2005, December 12). NSW Govt, Police defend approach to riots, PM, ABC.


71


Prasad, R. (2011, December 5). English riots were 'asort of revenge' against the police, *Guardian*, p. 2.


Riots Communities and Victims Panel. (2012). After the riots: The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel. London: Riots Communities and Victims Panel.


**SECONDARY SOURCES**


