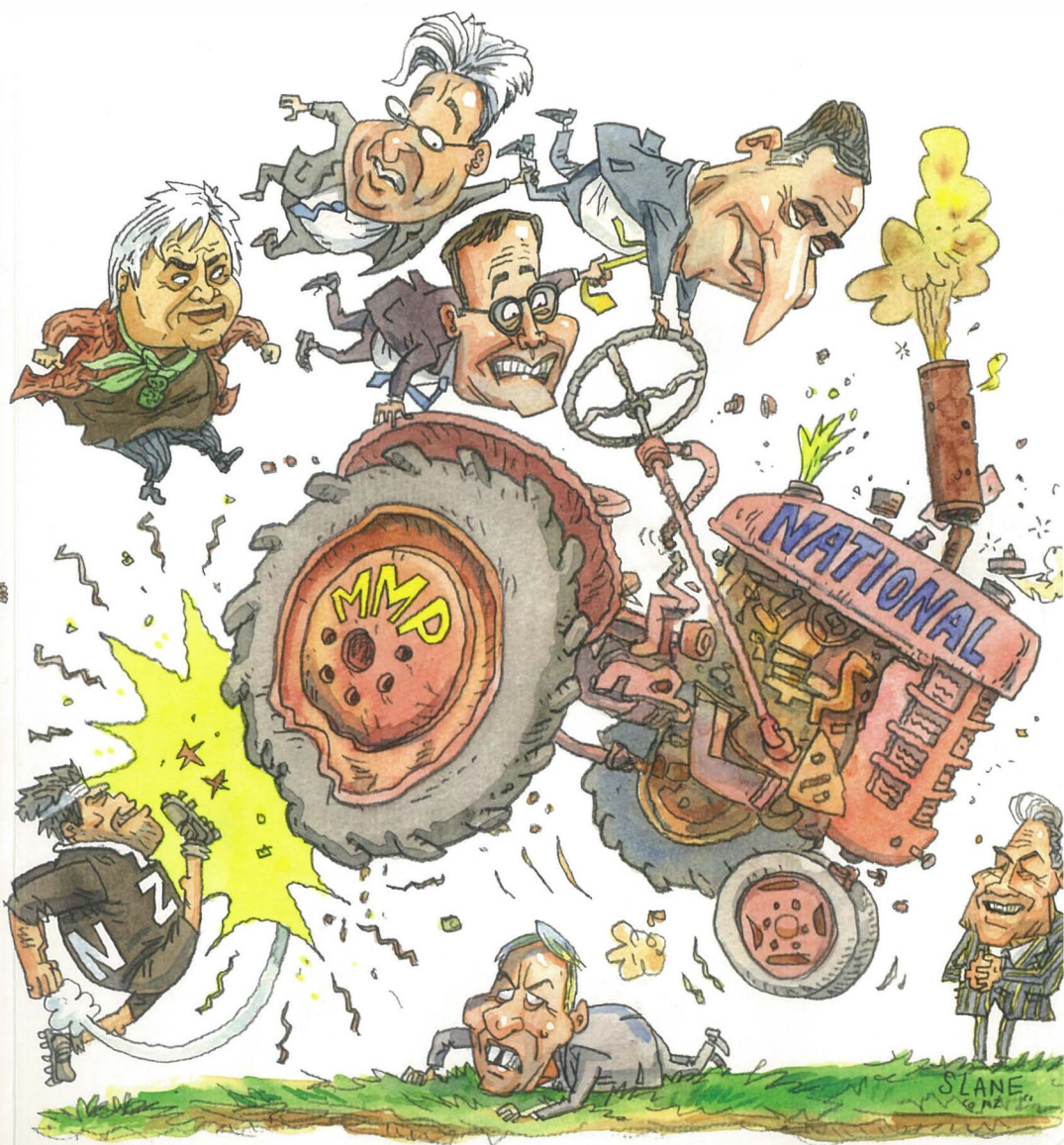


# KICKING THE TYRES

THE NEW ZEALAND GENERAL ELECTION  
AND ELECTORAL REFERENDUM OF 2011

EDITED BY JON JOHANSSON AND STEPHEN LEVINE





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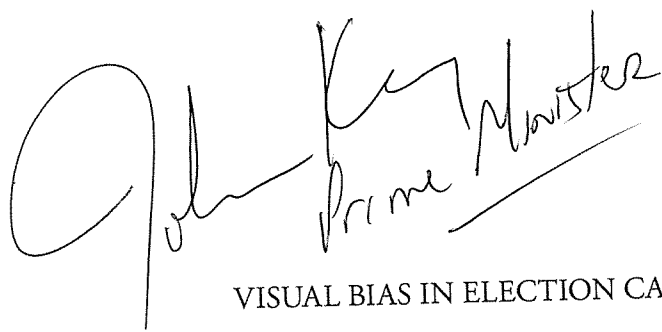
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To  
my granddaughter Ivy,  
a further contribution to  
'building a brighter future'

—Stephen Levine

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15

## THE EYES HAVE IT: VISUAL BIAS IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

Claire Robinson

During the campaign a number of letters to the editor were published in the largest of New Zealand's daily papers, the *New Zealand Herald*, alleging biased coverage in favour of the incumbent National Party and its leader, Prime Minister John Key. The *Herald's* editor replied: 'Over many thousands of words in this campaign, coverage has been equally detailed and exacting of the major parties' (*New Zealand Herald*, 7 November 2011, p. A8). Responding to this, reader Clyde Scott of Birkenhead raised the example of a photo on the paper's front page featuring Key and a baby, with the pullout caption 'The eyes have it' next to a box with a tick in it in election-orange colours. Scott wrote: 'This is clever, subliminal manipulation. It is just one example of many instances of the *Herald's* obvious bias towards John Key, and can be seen in constant misuse of its function as a provider of news, and its responsibility to its readers to be objective in its reporting' (*New Zealand Herald*, 9 November 2011, p. A10). The editor did not answer the claim about balance in the *Herald's* visual image coverage. This chapter, however, does precisely that, examining the question of visual bias in the coverage of the two major party leaders in both the Auckland and Wellington daily newspapers over the official 2011 election campaign period.

### Background

An independent news media is a key ingredient in the development of a well-functioning democracy. Its primary role in election campaigns is to act on behalf of the citizenry: ensuring they have access to all the information they need about candidates, parties and platforms to enable an informed vote to be made on election day; holding the government accountable for its performance in office; interpreting political events

and debating the merits of parties and candidates publicly and openly; assisting all those with an interest in the outcomes of an election to participate in the expression of views in an election campaign; and ensuring no party or candidate has improper or undue advantage over another party, thus contributing to their participation in a fair contest.

In order to discharge this role with credibility, the news media seeks to be as fair, balanced and objective as possible (Jenkins 1999), but of course, there is no such thing as absolute objectivity when it comes to the news media's reporting on election campaigns. With constraints on time, space and budget, news media content creators and editors constantly make subjective decisions about what is newsworthy. In a process commonly known as 'gate-keeping' or 'agenda setting' they select which stories to include, and which to exclude, on any given news day. They also 'frame' stories in a particular way, selecting some of the attributes of a story to emphasise while ignoring or minimising the importance of others. This process of selection and editing is informed by years of training, experience and expertise in reporting on elections; the standards, expectations and ethics of the profession; and knowledge about the type of stories, angles and images editors know will resonate with audiences, and contribute to media and advertising sales.

In an election campaign, when many citizens turn to the news media for information, the process of agenda setting and framing has the potential to significantly influence voter attitude and behaviour. It is at this time that the issue of news media bias (the promotion of particular interests over and above the objective reporting of news) becomes critical. While no one expects bias to be completely absent on any given day, it is generally expected that over a period of time (e.g., the length of an election campaign period) 'there should be as many overtly opinionated statements about one side as the other if media reports are to be considered to be balanced or unbiased' (D'Alessio and Allen 2000, p. 138).

Where there is disproportionate coverage of one party or candidate over another, where balance and fairness are compromised and objectivity skewed, the citizenry has the right to ask whether the news media has been serving them as well as it could and, more importantly, whether the information received has had an impact on their ability to make a well informed and objective voting choice. Likewise, political parties and candidates have the right to ask whether their ability to participate in a fair contest has been compromised.

New Zealand news media outlets take seriously their responsibility to provide fair and balanced reporting in election campaigns. In covering elections, New Zealand's print media are guided by the New Zealand Press Council principle that states: 'An independent press plays a vital role in a democracy. The proper fulfillment of that role requires a fundamental responsibility for the press to maintain high standards of accuracy, fairness and balance and public faith in those standards' (New Zealand Press Council 2012).

Academic studies of bias in the print media tend to support the notion that the New Zealand news media is on the whole balanced and non-partisan (Rudd and Hayward 2009, Sharp 2004). These studies, like most international assessments, and like the *Herald's* own professed measure, assess bias largely in terms of the printed (or spoken) word: the number of words devoted to each candidate or party, which may be easily counted in column inches or centimetres (or minutes of airtime in the case of broadcast media); the use of negative, positive and neutral words; and the location of a story in terms of lineup. When the press was a predominantly written medium, assessing bias through word measurement was entirely appropriate. Today, however, it is just as important to measure *image* bias as *word* bias. News creators now render the world visually as well as verbally, and audiences will frequently make assessments of political candidates' competence, integrity and fitness for office from visual images (Graber 1988, Ballew and Todorov 2001, Mendelson and Thorson 2004, Bucy and Grabe 2007, Perloff 2008, Banning and Coleman 2009, Grabe and Bucy 2009, Olivola and Todorov 2010, Riggio and Riggio 2010). If bias is calculated in words but not images, there is a risk that a media outlet may be deluding itself and its audience about its overall objectivity.

Measuring visual image balance is slightly more difficult than measuring word balance. Images are by their nature 'polysemic': that is, they may convey many possible meanings, all of them contestable and subject to change depending on context. Nonetheless images, like words, have dominant meanings that most people will understand, and there are ways of determining how the various elements in an image work to create cognitive meaning. It is now possible, if not yet widely practiced (Barber 2008), to make accurate assessments of bias in the presentation of visual images, in terms of both content and coverage.

### 2011 election coverage

There are a number of factors that make the 2011 New Zealand election interesting to study in relation to visual bias. The first is the issue raised by the letters to the editor referred to in this chapter's introduction. There is a popular perception that the *New Zealand Herald*, as the newspaper of the city (Auckland) that contains the largest number of private sector businesses and wealthy individuals in New Zealand, is inherently biased towards the more right-wing, business-friendly National Party. The *Dominion Post*, on the other hand, as the newspaper of the capital city, Wellington, with a more socially liberal, public-sector audience, is popularly perceived to be inherently biased towards the more left-wing Labour Party. The *Herald's* editor claimed that the paper was 'equally detailed and exacting of the major parties' in its word coverage. But this still left a question mark around the images – is there evidence to prove that the *Herald* had a bias in favour of John Key in its visual image coverage?

Secondly, the 2011 election was fought between a challenger with a weak public image (Phil Goff) and an image-savvy and popular incumbent leader (John Key), who had effectively enjoyed a three-year-long news media honeymoon. At the commencement of the election campaign Key's support as preferred prime minister was 52.7 per cent, while Goff's was 9.8 per cent (*3 News*). There was also a 22.1 per cent gap in popular support between Key's National Party (52.3 per cent) and Goff's opposition Labour Party (30.2 per cent). So aware was the Labour Party of the difficulty of campaigning against such a popular prime minister that it admitted at the outset of the campaign that it was not going to campaign on popularity, and would focus on the policy differences between the parties instead (Trevett 2011). This leads to two research questions: was the large gap in public support between the two leaders reflected in increased visual coverage for the incumbent leader? And did Labour's decision to campaign on policy, not popularity, influence the amount of visual coverage accorded to its leader?

Lastly, despite the news media's benign and largely positive relationship with the prime minister over the 2008–11 period, the Newmarket café 'Cuppagate' incident (described elsewhere in this book) without question soured that relationship. At its core this was a disagreement between the prime minister and the news media about the boundaries between what is public and private political information when a story has been

set up as a 'photo opportunity' devised for maximum media exposure. This disagreement catapulted the New Zealand news media out of its supposedly neutral role in reporting on the election campaign, and transformed it into a self-interested political actor. The story and images dominated the news media for ten days, leading to opposition parties feeling that they had been unfairly starved of media 'oxygen' at the very time that they needed to be communicating with the voting public. This leads to a research question: did the media's self-interest in this event alter the balance of leadership coverage during and after the event, and if so which leader subsequently benefited the most?

### Method

Selected for this study were all the major party leader images featured in two large metropolitan daily newspapers and their Sunday editions: the *New Zealand Herald* (the *Herald*) and the *Herald on Sunday* (*HoS*) from the APN stable of publications, and the *Dominion Post* (*DomPost*) and *Sunday Star Times* (*SST*) from the Fairfax group. The *Herald* has the largest newspaper circulation in New Zealand. In the October–December 2011 official readership figures the *Herald's* print readership was 570,000, and the *Herald on Sunday's* was 382,000. The *Dominion Post* is the capital city's newspaper, with official fourth-quarter 2011 circulation figures of 232,000. With a readership of 537,000, the *Sunday Star Times* is the most widely read Sunday paper (Nielsen 2012).

The study covered the period from Thursday, 27 October (the day after Writ Day, when the Governor-General issues formal direction to the Electoral Commission to hold the election, electoral rolls close for printing, and television and radio advertising may start) to Friday, 25 November (the day before election day, and the last day on which the media were allowed to publish election-related stories). In total, the study covered 30 days and 60 editions.

The unit of analysis was the individual photographic image, featuring either National Party leader John Key or Labour Party leader Phil Goff, or in some instances both. This amounted to 218 leader appearances in published newspaper photographs. The study was limited to the images of the leaders of the two major parties because they represent the majority of popular voting support and leadership coverage in the print media. It is acknowledged that New Zealand's elections are run under a proportional electoral system and that many more leaders and parties

contested the 2011 general election. The lack of media attention paid to minor party leaders in the print media is an issue for another study.

### Data analysis

A combination of quantitative (content) and qualitative (textual) analysis was used in this study. The leader images were measured and compared by number, size, proportion and location. The images were also analysed for positive, neutral or negative tone (Druckman and Parkin 2005), determined by a set of visual criteria drawn from previous research into non-verbal, interpersonal communication in leader images (Bucy and Grabe 2007, 2008, Robinson 2012). The content of the visual images was also analysed in relation to time and context.

#### *Geographical/partisan interest*

To find evidence of what will be termed here 'geo/partisan' interest, where the media reflects the partisan interests of its dominant geographical audience, the study analysed the differences in the quantity and tone of coverage each newspaper family gave to the respective leaders. It was hypothesised that if the papers were not influenced by geo/partisan bias there would be minimal difference in quantity and tone of leadership coverage. If, however, there was geo/partisan bias it would be evident in a substantially different coverage profile between the two paper stables, with the *Herald/HoS* containing more positive images of National leader Key and the *DomPost/SST* containing more favourable images of Labour Party leader Goff.

#### *Public interest*

The news media will pay more attention to activities, initiatives and events involving incumbent leaders over challenger leaders simply because the incumbent leader already represents the government, and is therefore of national interest (Hopmann et al. 2011, Jenkins 1999). It was hypothesised that if the news media were reflecting this public interest it would be evident in a greater number of images, as well as advantages of size, proportion and location, for the incumbent over the challenger. This is a similar assumption to that used in studies measuring for word bias.

Such measurement factors reflect audience exposure to leader images, and repeated exposure increases attention. But exposure and attention alone do not equal impact or influence. To understand potential impact

and influence, the meaning conveyed by the content of the images also needs to be analysed. Based on what is known about how audiences respond to non-verbal, interpersonal communication in leader images (Robinson 2012), it was hypothesised that bias would be found in the selection of images that either positively or negatively communicated a party leader's ability to relate socially to others. The study assumed that positive interest in the incumbent political leader would be expressed through selection of images that communicated positive character traits, including facial expressions such as laughter, smiles, images of touching, physical interaction and interpersonal and small group social interaction, as well as images that communicated authority: neutral facial expressions, contemplation, and large group interactions. Conversely, negative impressions about the less favoured leader would be expressed in the selection of unflattering images, including grumpy and fearful facial expressions, aggressive physical postures, and a lack of social engagement (Bucy and Grabe 2007, Grabe and Bucy 2009).

The above measures were also related to the public popularity of the respective parties at the outset of the campaign. In a recent study into the amount of 'bonus' media exposure incumbent Danish governments received over oppositions in election campaigns, it was found that relative to its standing in the opinion polls, and over a number of national elections, the Danish government experienced an average positive incumbency bonus of seven percentage points, whereas the opposition experienced a parallel disadvantage of the same amount (Hopmann et al. 2011). Was this reflected in a similar media coverage bonus for the incumbent leader, John Key, in the 2011 New Zealand election campaign?

#### *Self-interest*

Lastly, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative measures, and in relation to this specific election, this study hypothesised that balanced media coverage would be affected by the media's self-interested reaction to the Newmarket café incident. This would be measured by a reduction in the quantity of images, and the proportion of favourable images, of National leader John Key throughout the period of the media's disagreement with him over the taping incident; more favourable coverage of opposition leader Phil Goff during this period; and a distinctly different character to the coverage of both leaders following the event when compared to the period immediately preceding it. To study this

aspect, the election campaign was divided up into three phases: (i) the period from the day after Writ Day to the day Prime Minister John Key met with ACT leader John Banks in the Newmarket café (27 October–11 November); (ii) the period immediately following the incident until the last week of the campaign (12–20 November); and (iii) the final week of the election campaign (21–25 November).

## **Results**

### *Number and proportion*

Looking at the image coverage given by the two newspaper groups, the *Herald/HoS* was responsible for the majority (61.9 per cent) of the images in this sample, with the *DomPost/SST* responsible for the remaining 38.1 per cent. John Key's image was by far the most published by both papers, Key featuring in 61.5 per cent of the *Herald/HoS*'s leadership images, and 66.3 per cent of the *DomPost/SST*'s. Phil Goff featured in 38.5 per cent of the *Herald/HoS*'s leadership images, and 33.7 per cent of the *DomPost/SST*'s. The *DomPost/SST*'s image numbers were proportionally more favourable to Key than those of the *Herald/HoS*, with the *DomPost/SST* featuring almost twice as many images of Key as of Goff (Table 15.1).

John Key's average number of images over the two papers (63.3 per cent) was 26.6 percentage points higher than Goff's average coverage (36.7 per cent). This was close to the opinion poll gap between the National and Labour parties (22.1 per cent) but somewhat less than the opinion poll divide between the two men as preferred prime minister (42.9 per cent). Key's image numbers were approximately 11 points higher than his opinion poll ranking of 52.7 per cent and the National Party's standing of 52.3 per cent. Phil Goff's image numbers were a significant 26.9 points higher than his preferred prime minister rating of 9.8 per cent and 6.5 points higher than the Labour Party's rating of 30.2 per cent (*3 News* 2011).

How did the numbers change over the three phases of the campaign? Phase 1 (Table 15.2) comprised 16 days, representing 53.3 per cent of the 30-day campaign period and 42.7 per cent of the total number of images. The *Herald/HoS* was responsible for 50.5 per cent of the images in this phase, with the *DomPost/SST* responsible for 49.5 per cent. This was a much more even coverage between the two papers than the overall coverage noted in Table 15.1. John Key received the most coverage in both newspapers, but the *Herald/HoS*'s split between Key and Goff was much closer than the overall split shown in Table 15.1.

**Table 15.1: Number (proportion) of Key and Goff images in both papers over whole campaign**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	83 (61.48%)	52 (38.52%)	135 (61.9%)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	55 (66.27%)	28 (33.73%)	83 (38.1%)
Combined newspapers	138 (63.3%)	80 (36.7%)	218 (100%)

**Table 15.2: Number (proportion) of images in Phase 1, 27 October to 11 November (16 days/53.3% of campaign)**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	26 (55.3%)	21 (44.7%)	47 (50.5% of phase 1 images)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	29 (63%)	17 (37%)	46 (49.5% of phase 1 images)
Combined newspapers	55 (59.1%)	38 (40.9%)	93 (42.7% of total images)

**Table 15.3: Number (proportion) of images in Phase 2, 12 to 20 November (9 days/30% of campaign)**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	43 (68.3%)	20 (31.7%)	63 (73.3% of phase 2 images)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	18 (78.3%)	5 (21.7%)	23 (26.7% of phase 2 images)
Combined newspapers	61 (70.9%)	25 (29.1%)	86 (39.4% of total images)

**Table 15.4: Number (proportion) of images in Phase 3, 21 to 25 November (5 days/16.7% of campaign)**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	14 (56%)	11 (44%)	25 (64.1% of phase 3 images)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	8 (57%)	6 (43%)	14 (35.9% of phase 3 images)
Combined newspapers	22 (56.4%)	17 (43.6%)	39 (17.9% of total images)

Phase 2 (Table 15.3) comprised nine days. Although this represented 30 per cent of the campaign, a disproportionate number of leader images (39.4 per cent) were published during this period. The *Herald/HoS* was responsible for 73.3 per cent of the images in this phase, and the *DomPost/SST* for 26.7 per cent. The increased coverage of Key in phase 2 was not matched by increased coverage of Goff. The overall proportion of Key images rose from 59.1 per cent in phase 1 to 70.9 per cent of the images in phase 2, while the proportion of Goff images dropped from 40.9 per cent in phase 1 to 29.1 per cent in phase 2. Of particular note, the *DomPost/SST* featured only five images of Goff in phase 2, representing 5.8 per cent of the total Key/Goff images published in both papers over this period.

Phase 3 (Table 15.4) comprised only five days, representing 16.7 per cent of the campaign and 17.9 per cent of the total images. The *Herald/HoS* was responsible for 64.1 per cent of the images in this phase, and the *DomPost/SST* 35.9 per cent. While the coverage was still in favour of Key, the difference in coverage between him and Goff was lowest in this phase.

#### Area

Image size is used by newspaper compositors to both attract attention to a story and emphasise its prominence and key features. Needless to say, large images attract more attention than small images. The significance of the high numbers of Key images in relation to Goff images needs to be related to the size of the images. If Goff's fewer images were larger in size than Key's, that might have a greater impact on readers than Key's larger number of smaller images. There is no evidence to suggest that this occurred, however. Images of Key dominated those of Goff when measured by area just as they had when measured by number, and in almost identical proportions (63.35 per cent versus 36.65 per cent; see Table 15.5).

This pattern continued when the data were split into three phases. In phase 1 (Table 15.6) the space devoted to leader images was again roughly the same for both newspapers although this time the *DomPost/SST* had slightly more coverage (52.1 per cent) than the *Herald/HoS* (47.9 per cent). Overall, both papers devoted more space to images of Key (61 per cent) than to images of Goff (39 per cent), but the *Herald/HoS*'s coverage was more evenly split between the two leaders (55.5 per cent Key: 45.5 per cent Goff) than the *DomPost/SST*'s coverage (66 per cent Key: 34 per cent Goff).



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**Table 15.3: Number (proportion) of images in Phase 2, 12 to 20 November (9 days/30% of campaign)**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
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**Table 15.5: Area in cm<sup>2</sup> (proportion) of Key and Goff images in both newspapers over whole campaign**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	13,270.88 (59.63%)	8,982.86 (40.37%)	22,253.74 (60.2%)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	10,163.90 (68.97%)	4,573.03 (31.03%)	14,736.93 (39.8%)
Combined newspapers	23,434.78 (63.35%)	13,555.89 (36.65%)	36,990.67 (100%)

**Table 15.6: Area of images in cm<sup>2</sup> (proportion) in Phase 1, 27 October to 11 November (16 days/53.3% of campaign)**

	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	4,067.52 (55.5%)	3,260.79 (44.5%)	7,328.31 (47.9%)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	5,270.38 (66%)	2,704.58 (34%)	7,974.96 (52.1%)
Combined newspapers	9,337.90 (61%)	5,965.37 (39%)	15,303.27 (100%)

**Table 15.7: Area of images in cm<sup>2</sup> (proportion) in Phase 2, 12 to 20 November (9 days/30% of campaign)**

Total (cm <sup>2</sup> )	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	6,936.02 (65%)	3,749.38 (35%)	10,685.40 (74.3%)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	3,199.52 (86.7%)	491.87 (13.3%)	3,691.39 (25.7%)
Combined newspapers	10,135.54 (70.5%)	4,241.25 (29.5%)	14,376.79 (100%)

**Table 15.8: Area of images in cm<sup>2</sup> (proportion) in Phase 3, 21 to 25 November (5 days/16.7% of campaign)**

Total (cm <sup>2</sup> )	John Key	Phil Goff	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	2,239.25 (51.8%)	2,086.84 (48.2%)	4,326.09 (58.5%)
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	1,694.00 (55.2%)	1,376.58 (44.8%)	3,070.58 (41.5%)
Combined newspapers	3,933.25 (53.2%)	3,463.42 (46.8%)	7,396.67 (100%)

In phase 2 (Table 15.7) both newspapers once again devoted more space to images of Key than to images of Goff, and this difference was more marked than in phase 1. The *Herald/HoS* was again responsible for most of the area used for leader images (74.3 per cent) in this phase. Of the images published in the *DomPost/SST*, most of the area went to Key (86.7 per cent) – the *DomPost/SST*'s coverage of Goff in phase 2 represented a paltry 3.4 per cent of the total area given to Key/Goff images by both newspapers.

In phase 3 (Table 15.8) the papers were more balanced in the amount of space given to Key/Goff images, although Key still received slightly more space overall (53.2 per cent) than did Goff (46.8 per cent).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of this campaign was Labour's decision to not feature Phil Goff's image in its billboards or print advertising, as part of its strategy to focus on policy rather than leadership popularity. When advertisements and images featuring Key's portrait on National Party billboards are added to National's proportion of images in the newspapers, the proportion of total visual coverage for Key over Goff rose from 63.35 per cent to 70.3 per cent, compared to Goff's 29.7 per cent (Table 15.9).

**Table 15.9: Proportion of total area of images over whole campaign, including paid advertisements**

	John Key no ads	John Key with ads	Phil Goff no ads
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	59.63%	66.11%	33.89%
<i>Dominion Post/SST</i>	68.97%	76.5%	23.5%
Combined newspapers	63.35%	70.3%	29.7%

Also worth reviewing is the number of front-page leader images (Table 15.10), which indicate the importance of the subject matter. The *Herald/HoS* featured images of the leaders on the front page 15 times throughout the campaign, and 13 of those times the featured leader was John Key. In contrast, the *DomPost/SST* featured Key 10 times and Goff 8 times.

But numbers, proportion and location still only tell part of the story. It is possible for a leader to have their image scattered liberally and prominently throughout the media, and still have a negative impact, depending on the messages conveyed by the content of the images. Measurement variables,

while they lead to attention, do not fully account for the communication of meaning.

Table 15.10: Number of leader images on the front pages over 3 phases

John Key	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	5	5	3	13
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	5	0	5	10
Phil Goff	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	1	0	1	2
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	5	0	3	8

### Content

Over the whole campaign, both newspapers had similar proportions of positive, neutral and negative coverage for each leader (Table 15.11). The two newspapers combined showed positive images of Key and Goff just over half of the time (56.9 per cent), with the rest of their coverage of the leaders split fairly evenly between negative (19.3 per cent) and neutral (23.9 per cent) images.

Table 15.11: Tone of images over the entire campaign

	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>NZ Herald/HoS</i>	77 (57.04%)	33 (24.44%)	110 (81.48%)	25 (18.52%)	135
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	47 (56.63%)	19 (22.89%)	66 (79.52%)	17 (20.48%)	83
Combined newspapers	124 (56.88%)	52 (23.85%)	176 (80.73%)	42 (19.26%)	218

Both papers gave substantially greater positive and neutral coverage to John Key than negative coverage (Table 15.12). The *Herald/HoS* had greater positive and neutral coverage of John Key (totalling 84.3 per cent) than the *DomPost/SST* (totalling 72.7 per cent). Phil Goff was also given substantially greater positive and neutral coverage than negative coverage in both papers. The *DomPost/SST*'s positive and neutral coverage of Goff was substantially higher (92.6 per cent) than its positive and neutral

coverage of Key (72.73 per cent). The *Herald/HoS* had proportionally more negative coverage of Goff (12 images, 23 per cent of its Goff coverage) than Key (13 images, 15.6 per cent of its Key coverage). With only two negative images, the *DomPost/SST*'s negative coverage of Goff was almost non-existent.

Table 15.12: Tone of images for each leader over the entire campaign

John Key	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	49 (59.04%)	21 (25.3%)	70 (84.33%)	13 (15.66%)	83 (60.1%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	29 (52.73%)	11 (20%)	40 (72.73%)	15 (27.27%)	55 (39.9%)
Combined newspapers	78 (56.52%)	32 (23.19%)	110 (79.71)	28 (20.29%)	138 (100%)
Phil Goff	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	28 (53.85%)	12 (23.07%)	40 (76.92%)	12 (23.07%)	52 (65%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	18 (64.28%)	8 (28.57%)	26 (92.96%)	2 (7.14%)	28 (35%)
Combined newspapers	46 (57.5%)	20 (25%)	66 (82.5%)	14 (17.5%)	80 (100%)

In phase 1, both papers were consistent with their positive coverage of John Key (Table 15.13). Approximately 54 per cent of the *Herald/HoS*'s images of Key in phase 1 were positive. Likewise, approximately 55 per cent of the *DomPost/SST*'s images of Key in phase 1 were positive. Combined, the papers published twice as many positive images of Key as of Goff. There was a difference between the papers in terms of negative treatment, however. The *Herald/HoS* only published four negative images of Key in phase 1 (15 per cent), while the *DomPost/SST* published almost twice as many (27 per cent) in the same period.

The opposite was true for images of Goff: only 46.6 per cent of the *Herald/HoS*'s images of Goff in phase 1 were positive or neutral, compared with 88.2 per cent for the *DomPost/SST*. And of the 13 negative images of Goff published during phase 1, 11 (78.6 per cent) were published by the *Herald/HoS*, and only 2 (11.8 per cent) by the *DomPost/SST*.

Table 15.13: Tone of images in Phase 1,  
27 October to 11 November (16 days/53.3% of campaign)

John Key	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	14 (53.84%)	8 (30.76%)	22 (84.62%)	4 (15.38%)	26 (47.3%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	16 (55.17%)	5 (17.24%)	21 (72.42%)	8 (27.58%)	29 (52.7%)
Combined	30 (54.54%)	13 (23.63%)	43 (78.18%)	12 (21.82%)	55 (100%)
Phil Goff	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	7 (33.33%)	3 (14.28%)	10 (46.62%)	11 (53.38%)	21 (55.3%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	9 (52.94%)	6 (35.29%)	15 (88.24%)	2 (11.76%)	17 (44.7%)
Combined	16 (42.1%)	9 (23.68%)	25 (65.8%)	13 (34.2%)	38 (100%)

Table 15.14: Tone of images in Phase 2,  
12 to 20 November (9 days/30% of campaign)

John Key	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	25 (58.12%)	11 (25.58%)	36 (83.73%)	7 (16.27%)	43 (70.5%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	7 (38.88%)	5 (27.77%)	12 (66.67%)	6 (33.33%)	18 (29.5%)
Combined	32 (52.45%)	16 (26.23%)	48 (78.69%)	13 (21.31%)	61 (100%)
Phil Goff	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	14 (70%)	5 (25%)	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	20 (80%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	5 (20%)
Combined	17 (68%)	7 (28%)	24 (96%)	1 (4%)	25 (100%)

Table 15.15: Tone of images in Phase 3,  
21 to 25 November (5 days/16.7% of campaign)

John Key	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	10 (71.43%)	2 (14.28%)	12 (85.71%)	2 (14.28%)	14 (63.6%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	6 (75%)	1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	8 (36.4%)
Combined	16 (72.72%)	3 (13.63%)	19 (86.36%)	3 (13.63%)	22 (100%)
Phil Goff	Positive	Neutral	Pos+ Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Herald/HoS</i>	7 (63.64%)	4 (36.36%)	11 (100%)	0	11 (64.7%)
<i>DomPost/SST</i>	6 (100%)	0	6 (100%)	0	6 (35.3%)
Combined	13 (76.47%)	4 (25.53%)	17 (100%)	0	17 (100%)

In phase 2 (Table 15.14), when the *Herald on Sunday* was in conflict with the prime minister over the Newmarket café taping incident, the *Herald/HoS* continued to publish mostly images that portrayed Key in a positive or neutral light (83.7 per cent of their images of Key were positive or neutral and only 16.3 per cent were negative). This was only slightly different from the tone of their coverage in phase 1. The *DomPost/SST* slightly increased its negative coverage of coverage of Key in relation to its positive/neutral coverage (from 27.6 per cent in phase 1 to 33.3 per cent in phase 2). The real shift happened in relation to images of Goff. The *Herald/HoS* published 19 positive or neutral images of Goff in phase 2 (95 per cent) and only one negative image – double the positive and neutral coverage, and less than a tenth of the negative coverage, that they gave him in phase 1, before the taping incident. And the *DomPost/SST* contained no negative images at all of Goff during phase 2, although the number of images of Goff it published in this period was greatly reduced.

In phase 3 – the final days of the election campaign – the papers were relatively even in terms of their positive, neutral and negative coverage of both Key and Goff (Table 15.15). Although continuing to publish neutral and negative images of Key during this period, neither newspaper

contained any negative images of Goff in the last week of the campaign. The *DomPost/SST* only published positive images of Goff.

### Image coverage, bias and media self-interest

This study sought to answer three primary questions: Is there evidence that the *Herald's* image coverage had a geo/partisan bias in favour of John Key? Was the large gap in public support between the two leaders reflected in increased media coverage of the incumbent leader? Did the media's self-interest in the Newmarket café event significantly alter the balance of leadership coverage during and after the event, and if so which leader benefited most?

The evidence shows a substantial imbalance in the image coverage of both newspapers in favour of Prime Minister John Key. In terms of number, proportion and area, Key received around 75 per cent more editorial image coverage than Labour's Phil Goff over the whole election campaign. In terms of front-page coverage, Key received 130 per cent more editorial image coverage than Goff. For Labour, the findings become even more depressing when the proportion of coverage devoted to John Key is augmented by the area devoted to National's and the anti-MMP campaign's paid advertisements, thereby increasing Key's total image coverage to 136 per cent more than Goff's.

How much of the editorial coverage can be put down to an incumbency bonus – the media exposure benefit gained simply by virtue of being the country's incumbent leader? Key's 63.3 per cent average image coverage was 11 per cent higher than National's opinion poll standing, and Goff's 36.7 per cent average image coverage was 6.5 per cent higher than Labour's opinion poll ranking. It is not possible to find any similarity between this finding and the 7 per cent average incumbency bonus (and disadvantage) identified in the 2011 Danish study. Interestingly, however, heading into the campaign National's opinion poll standing was 75 per cent higher than Labour's, which is the same amount as the difference in image coverage between Key and Goff over the whole election campaign. There is a potential relationship here between amount of image coverage and major party opinion poll gap that deserves to be tested in the next general election.

There is evidence to suggest that Labour's decision to campaign on policy rather than leadership popularity had an impact on the amount of image coverage accorded to Phil Goff, but in a way probably

unanticipated. Stories about the campaign in general often featured images of party hoardings, and more often than not a National billboard was in the frame. Given that National's billboards contained images of Key, this added another image of Key to the total number of images run by the papers. More significantly, National's party vote advertisement in the *Herald/HoS* and *DomPost/SST* was a half-page advertisement featuring a portrait of John Key and smaller vignette images of him. The anti-MMP campaign, as noted, also featured Key's image in its half-page newspaper ads. When these advertising images are added to Key's overall coverage statistics, the ratio of Key/Goff images becomes even greater.

The evidence shows that while the papers were similar in the proportion of coverage they gave to each leader, there were a few differences in their coverage to suggest some support for the 'geo/partisan bias' hypothesis. Notably, over the whole campaign the *Herald/HoS* considered Key's image more deserving of front-page treatment than Goff's, and by a substantial margin. The *DomPost/SST* was more even in its front-page image coverage of the two leaders.

Phase 1 represents the period most unaffected by the later events of the campaign, thus making it the period most likely to reveal any inherent geo/partisan bias. Although phase 1 image numbers were almost identical between the two papers, the *Herald/HoS* was more positive towards Key than the *DomPost/SST*. In terms of images of Key, the *Herald/HoS* had the highest proportion of positive and neutral images and the lowest proportion of negative images; the *DomPost/SST* had a lower proportion of positive/neutral Key images than the *Herald/HoS* and a higher proportion of negative Key images. An even greater divide can be seen in the coverage of Goff. In phase 1 the *Herald/HoS* published more negative Goff images than positive/neutral ones. During this time the *Herald/HoS* published only one front-page image of Goff, compared with five of Key. In contrast, the *DomPost/SST's* coverage of Goff was overwhelmingly positive/neutral. This lends some support to the popular perception that the *Herald/HoS* was inherently more inclined towards National and the *DomPost/SST* towards Labour.

While phase 1 numbers were almost identical between the two papers, in phase 2 the *Herald/HoS* published almost three times as many leader images as the *DomPost/SST*, and in phase 3 the *Herald/HoS* published almost two-thirds as many leader images as the *DomPost/SST*. During phase 2, the *Herald* published five front-page images of Key (three of

them related to the Newmarket café meeting), and none at all of Goff. In comparison, the *DomPost/SST* published no front-page images of either leader during this period.

Given the even coverage in phase 1, it is unlikely that the *Herald/HoS*'s substantially increased image coverage for Key in phase 2 reflects a surge of partisan bias towards National. But it could well represent a geographical bias towards the interests of its Auckland readers, as the Newmarket café story took place in and about a locally relevant Auckland electorate (Epsom – home to many *Herald* readers), featuring the prime minister and John Banks, a high profile Auckland candidate (and the city's former mayor). Of the 43 Key images published in the *Herald/HoS* in phase 2, 15 (35 per cent) were of Key at the Newmarket café meeting with John Banks.

The Newmarket café story was not just an Auckland story, however. During the same period the *DomPost/SST* published eight images of the café meeting, accounting for 44.4 per cent of the *DomPost/SST*'s images of Key in phase 2. No other event in the 2011 campaign dominated the newspaper images as much as this one. It was hypothesised that balanced media coverage would be affected by this event, evident in both a reduced quantity and more unfavourable images of National leader John Key throughout the period of the media's disagreement with him; more favourable coverage of opposition leader Phil Goff during this period; and a distinctly different character to the coverage both leaders received following the event when compared to the period immediately prior to it.

In phase 2 the proportion and area of images focused on Key in both newspapers increased. But contrary to the expectation that there would be more negative Key images in phase 2, there was little difference between phases 1 and 2 in terms of the *Herald/HoS*'s tonal coverage of him. Even the *DomPost/SST*, which did reduce the proportion of positive Key images in phase 2, barely increased the proportion of neutral and negative Key images during this period. To explain this we need to look at the images contextually. Fifteen of the 43 *Herald/HoS* Key images and eight of the 18 *DomPost/SST* Key images published in phase 2 were of Key at the Newmarket café meeting with John Banks. Although these images accompanied written stories that were critical of the prime minister's handling of the event, 19 of the 23 Newmarket images featured Key and/or Banks smiling (see, for example, Image 15.1). Even

the figure of four negative Newmarket images is a bit misleading. Three of the four negative images published were in fact the same image, treated slightly differently on three different days by the *Herald/HoS*. That image aside, the overwhelming impression left by these images was of a positive or neutral event, not a negative one.

Image 15.1: John Banks (left) and John Key (right), November 2011



Source: *New Zealand Herald*, 12 November 2011. Picture: Dean Purcell

In phase 3 the proportion of Key images in the *Herald/HoS* returned to phase 1 levels. The *Herald/HoS*'s positive image coverage of Key was at its highest, and its negative coverage was at its lowest, in this phase. The proportion of Key images in the *DomPost/SST* was at its lowest in phase 3, but of the images published, most were positive, to the point where the *DomPost/SST* had a higher proportion of positive coverage of Key than the *Herald/HoS* did.

There is no evidence to suggest that Goff benefited a great deal in phase 2 from the media's disagreement with Key. In fact, the *DomPost/SST* effectively froze Goff out of its coverage. Only five images of the Labour leader featured in the *DomPost/SST* in phase 2, representing 21.7 per cent of its leader images in terms of number and 13.3 per cent in terms of area. This compared to 18 images of Key in the *DomPost/*

SST, and 20 images of Goff in the *Herald/HoS*, in the same period. It should be noted, however, that none of those five *DomPost/SST* images was negative, and only one negative image of him was published by the *Herald/HoS*, compared to the 11 negative images it published in phase 1.

In the final period, phase 3, the newspapers' coverage of Goff became a lot more balanced. In terms of proportion and area, the *Herald/HoS* coverage of Goff returned to phase 1 levels, and the *DomPost/SST* coverage was the highest it had been since the start of the campaign. In the final days of the campaign there were almost as many images published of Goff as there were of Key in both newspapers. Significantly, neither paper published a negative image of Goff in phase 3, which was a substantial shift from phase 1 when 36.84 per cent of images of Goff were negative. The evidence therefore suggests that media coverage was indeed affected by the Newmarket café event. Increased coverage of John Key relative to Phil Goff in phase 2 led to greater exposure of Key's image and less exposure of Goff's image over the whole campaign. While coverage of Goff recovered in the last week of the campaign, it was not enough to correct the overall imbalance.

### Conclusion

Substantial image coverage bias was found in all four newspapers, most of it in favour of incumbent leader John Key. This finding gives reason for Labour and Phil Goff to feel that they were unfairly treated in print media coverage, especially in the *Herald/HoS*. This study thus raises serious questions about the objectivity of the print media's visual coverage of New Zealand election campaigns and of the major party leaders, matters worthy of wider consideration and public discussion. It should also give the print media pause for thought about how to guard against imbalance when it moves from a neutral observer role to one of an involved protagonist in a widely reported political incident.

## THE MEDIA IN 2011: COMPLICITY IN AN INANE CAMPAIGN

Jane Clifton

Christine Fletcher once said that what many of her male colleagues in Parliament needed was a good dose of worm medicine. She should have included the media in that prescription. For though the novelty factor of the viewer-operated 'worm' in New Zealand leaders' debates has long since worn off, it was trotted out yet again for 2011 – by no means the only piece of mendacity connived at by the politicians and the media, but possibly the most outrageous.

More than any other I've covered, this campaign suffered from a widespread lack of genuineness and authenticity. The desperation of politicians in election campaigns is a given, but this time that quality was matched by the media. Internet- and recession-wrought commercial difficulties for the whole media industry have given rise to some unhealthy and misleading reporting practices.

It's impossible to address any of these without starting with the 'teapot' tape saga since, in many ways, it epitomises the problem. The MMP rule wrinkle that National and ACT have been taking advantage of for several elections with respect to the Epsom electorate has given rise to a little ritual: the National leader meets the ACT candidate for a ceremonial nudge-nudge-wink-wink photo opportunity to signal to Epsom's National voters that National really wants them to vote for the ACT candidate.

This is a gimmick, and rightly derided as such by the media. But it's also a gimmick in which the media is utterly complicit. Reporters had repeatedly asked when and where this election's ceremonial cup of tea was going to take place, and accordingly plastered themselves to the café window like those ghastly Garfield sucker toys so as not to miss a sip.

If the media genuinely disdained such gimmicks, they wouldn't take place. But television in particular, with its need for pictures in the talking-