

**EXCLUSIVE YOUNG TEENS DRIVE VIOLENT CRIME WAVE**

Police apprehend a young suspect.  
Picture: VALERIU CAMPAN

# 15 AND OUT OF CONTROL

**Thugs compete to commit brutal attacks** | **Strangers hook up on social media for sprees**

**Herald Sun** CHILDREN aged just 15 are Victoria's most prolific youth criminals.

And girls are responsible for one in five youth crimes, startling new figures compiled for the Herald Sun have revealed.

Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton, who is holding a Youth Crime Summit on Thursday, said it was time for bold change to deal with youths being "locked out" of society and trapped on a crime treadmill so bad that some police were operating a "sausage machine... arresting the same, again and again".

Possible measures he has flagged include high-supervision bail laws and closer monitoring of social media.

A four-month Herald Sun investigation of youth crime, in partnership with Victoria Police, found:

A "LIVE now, die young" mentality is driving youths to "one-up" each other and commit increasingly violent and dangerous acts.

FIFTEEN-year-olds are the most prolific youth offenders, each law breaker being responsible for an average of three incidents a year.

THOSE aged 14 and 15 also account for more than a third of youth offenders; major spikes in offending occur between ages 13 and 15.

STRANGERS are "swarming" on social media to carry out impromptu crime sprees.

GANGSTER wannabes are blowing cash from robberies on trivial items such as designer shoes and hats.

YOUTH criminals are pleading guilty early to dodge strict bail conditions, so they can reoffend sooner.

Mr Ashton said the depth of the problem struck him when he saw an image shared by a young criminal.

"There was a photo of a really flash house, like one of those really big McMansions, that one offender had been showing another offender and the message with that was: 'We keep stealing, we'll end up in houses like this,'" Mr Ashton (above) said.

**CONTINUED PAGE 6**

## *Framing Youth Crime: Investigating the Relationship between Media Portrayals and Public Response*

*SOSC3202 project in partnership with Anglicare Southern Queensland*

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## Executive Summary

This research examines the portrayal of youth crime in Queensland's news media and public discourse. The purpose is to provide Anglicare Southern Queensland with evidence for their advocacy against 'tough on crime' policies due to the frequent coverage of youth crime and policy shifts in the state. Employing Norman Fairclough's multidimensional discourse analysis model, we dissect an array of news articles (from varied outlets) and associated public comments (via outlet websites and Reddit). Our findings reveal a strong alignment between media narratives, public sentiment, and the prevailing policy discourse, predominantly favouring punitive 'tough on crime' policy. This bias leads to an overshadowing of alternative approaches like prevention and rehabilitation in policy discussions. The findings underscore the need for ongoing exploration into how media representation and public discourse influence policy decisions, particularly concerning youth crime in Queensland.

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# Introduction

Within the recent news cycle, there has been a noticeable increase in reports of youth crime. As subject to sensationalist reporting, youth crime stories pique the interest of the public through ‘fear mongering’ and selective framing of offenders (Glassner, 2004, p. 820). The subsequent fear and public apprehension shaped by the media reflects the implementation of ‘tough on crime’ policy in Queensland (Hickey and Wallis, 2023). Research is needed to unveil the dominating and overlapping discourses of the Queensland media and general public, and the arising synergies with policy debates and changes (Mucie, 2008, p. 107). To begin, we will contextualise youth crime and policy within Queensland, provide insight into Queensland news media and the role of comment sections, and introduce our research.

## Youth Crime in Queensland

Contextualising youth crime in Queensland is essential to understanding how debates arise. As reported within the *Crime report, Queensland, 2021-2022* (2023), during this period, the rate of unique child offenders in Queensland was at the lowest level recorded in the past decade. As further reported by The Queensland Government Statistician’s Office, in 2021, majority of offences were “against property (58.9%),” whilst approximately 8.8% of offences were against another person. Paradoxically, the rates of detention for youth offenders rises. According to the Productivity Commission (cited in Eaton & Utting, 2023), the “daily average number” of youth offenders within detention in Queensland was 287 between 2021-2022. Indigenous youth were significantly overrepresented in detention, making up almost two-thirds of the 100,457 nights that youth offenders spent in detention (Eaton & Utting, 2023). Ultimately, the disparities between offence and detention rates can be applied to an analysis of arising discourse and debates.

Further, whilst previous governmental strategies, such as the *Youth Justice Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023*, have focused on rehabilitation and prevention, recent public discourse has pushed for ‘tougher’ policies (Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2019). Up until 2018, 17-year-olds were considered adults under Queensland criminal justice law, a practice that does not align with either national or international standards regarding the rights of children (Farmer, 2018; Hutchinson, 2015, p. 137). And yet, similar policies have persisted. The

*Strengthening Community Safety Act*, enacted in March 2023, aims to end the cycle of repeat offending via harsher measures. Implemented measures include (1) the breach of bail becoming an offence for youth, (2) increased penalties for unlawful uses of motor vehicles, and (3) deeper consideration of an offender's criminal and bail history when sentencing (CYJMA, 2023). The elected government seeks to respond to growing public fear, as Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk emphasised in her introduction of the measures, "My government is listening and we are acting" (Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory, 2022). Alternate voices have advocated for early intervention and context-driven support programs which seek to limit youth contact with the criminal justice system (Atkinson, 2018). Yet, throughout media coverage, young people have been portrayed as threatening toward the existing social order as they challenge norms and the status quo. As a result, decision-making and change in Queensland are influenced by both news media and the subsequent public opinion.

## Queensland Media and Comment Sections

Research indicates that news media strategies influence public discourse, and wields significant ideological power to affect societal change (Schissel, 1997, p. 173). Queensland news media outlets have been shown to exert pressure on governmental authorities, particularly in crime reporting (Scindeler & Ewart, 2014, p. 29). The media embeds politically charged images into the public subconsciousness, with the diversity of media ownership leading to varied ideological coverage. It is debated whether such coverage shapes a dominant public discourse to attain "political attention" (Scindeler & Ewart, 2014, p. 27). Further, sensationalism in Queensland's news media fosters a homogenous political online commentary (Jakob, Dobbrick, & Wessler, 2023, p. 595). Outlets promote "objectivity" in online comments to bolster their narratives, influencing perceptions of, for instance, youth offenders (Schudson, 2001 cited in Muddiman & Stroud, 2017, p. 587). News media capitalises on public sentiment for policy influence and discourse dominance.

## Our Research Aims and Questions

Thus, our research seeks to establish an understanding of how varied news media outlets frame youth crime and offenders in Queensland. We seek to investigate whether media discourse on youth crime is similar to or differs from general public discourse. We aim to provide Anglicare Southern Queensland with concrete evidence on the ways in which youth crime is discussed within news media and public discourses. Such will inform their own advocacy work against ‘tough on crime’ policies within Queensland. We aim to thoroughly investigate the discourses surrounding youth crime in Queensland to ultimately present insightful findings to our partner organisation.

To accomplish this, our research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What frames are used within news articles published in Queensland regarding youth crime?
  - a. How are youth offenders framed in news media articles?
  - b. How do differing publishing houses/news companies in Queensland differ in their coverage of youth crime?
2. How does public framing of youth crime in Queensland (such as comment sections) differ from the media frames used in news articles?

## Literature Review

As addressed, youth crime is a growing issue within Queensland and emerges frequently within news media and public discourses. Analysis of said discourses is integral to understanding the framing of and responses to youth crime. Thus, we present the empirical works that have informed the field of research thus far, to indicate the importance of the subject.

## Defining Youth Crime

To begin, youth crime can be defined as illegal activities conducted by an individual who is “under the age of criminal majority, when a person is legally considered an adult” (Young, Greer, & Church, 2018, p. 21). Yet, offenders are of an age at which they can be deemed responsible (Young, Greer, & Church, 2018, p. 21). In Queensland, the minimum age of responsibility is 10 years old, as persists after the Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill was denied from passing into legislation. The Bill sought to raise

the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age (Queensland Legislation, 2021). Despite reflecting, “current medical understanding of child development and contemporary human rights standards,” the Bill was not passed (Queensland Legislation, 2021). On this, prior research has investigated the ways through which young people are severely “disenfranchised” by the system, as can drive recidivism (Javdani, 2009, p. 67). Criminal behaviour varies from “mundane acts of vandalism to the most egregious acts of violence” (Faucher, 2009, p. 439).

## Attribution Theory and Its Application to Critical Discourse Analyses (CDA)

On the impacts of the system and on recidivism, prior research has indicated the necessity of analysis into how social factors contribute to youth crime. Researchers have found that the situational circumstances and social statuses of youth play a role in determining their “propensity” for crime (Damm & Dustmann, 2014, p. 1807). As a theoretical approach, Fritz Heider proposes attribution theory. Heider theories that behaviours are always “intentional” with “motivating factor[s]” behind them (Banerjee, Gidwani, & Rao, 2020, p. 278). Interpretations of the “factor[s]” are connected to the internal (personal traits and motivations) or external (social context) causes of behaviours.

The application of attributions is evident within prior CDAs, as justifies the value of its theoretical approach to our research. Throughout existing works, the “attribution of blame” emerges frequently (Donyai et al., 2013, p. 185). Corry Azzopardia (2022, p. 1651) indicates, through an analysis of child sexual abuse cases, how blame is shifted onto the victims. To further this, Seama Mowri and Ajay Bailey (2023, p. 268) report on blame attributions as impacted by “unequal relations of gender, privilege and power.” Jelena Kleut and Brankica Drašković (2021, p. 49) address the “blame-makers,” who utilise “a variety of linguistic tools” to frame vulnerable subjects. The existing research provides insight into how operating powers frame blame and responsibility, as attributed to individuals rather than their contextual circumstances. Yet, the research focuses on victims of incidents or suffering, rather than perpetrators. We can anticipate alternative findings given that our research will centralise offenders, not victims.



## Impacts of media discussion on public response

Further, prior research has revealed the significant role news media plays in influencing public understandings of and responses to youth crime. Such influences are shaped by various theoretical and empirical factors. As an applicable example and as described by Christopher Hart (2023), framing involves the presenting of scenarios through varied linguistic expressions and knowledge structures. Erving Goffman (1974) furthers the concept by indicating the role of frames as interpretation schemas. Further, Robert Entman (1993) defines framing as placing emphasis on certain realities to shape public opinion. The theoretical approach, as applied to CDA, can address where and how framing occurs within news media strategies (Hart, 2023).

Moreover, to address existing research, prior studies show that citizens often struggle with processing political information, and the media may not provide adequate political content (Iyengae et al., 2009). Observed public discourses, as the subjects of existing works, note the subsequent impacts of news media providing either substantive or narrow arguments. As public discourse occurs within the media realms, it necessitates the practice of news media to uphold a standard of diversity and constructive dialogue (Stromer-Galley, 2007; Wessler, 2008). Researchers have posited that media adherence to deliberative norms can improve the shaping of public discourse and its depth (Van Der Wurff et. al., 2018)

However, concerns arise from sensationalist reporting, which can incite public fear and lead to rash policymaking (Schlesinger et al., 1991). The portrayal of youth as 'other' incites moral panic among the public, leading to an outcry for harsher punishments (Silcox, 2022, p. 99). Media coverage can exaggerate societal threats and encourage audience retention through ongoing coverage (Jewkes, 2004). While news outlets are expected to provide unbiased reporting, sensationalism aimed at boosting consumption is prevalent, particularly in “tabloid-style reporting” by private news entities like News Corp (LeMonde, 2021, p. 139). Such coverage prioritises audience engagement over factual accuracy. In contrast, public broadcasters, like ABC News, are less prone to sensationalism due to reduced “market pressures” (Spigelman, 2013, p. 18). This trend signifies a tension between the role of news media in political communication, and its strategies for building audiences and hence, gives justification to continued analysis of its role in shaping public discourse (Schlesinger et al., 1991).

## Synergies between media and public discourses, and policy debates

Further, prior research indicates the media's power within agenda setting and decision making processes (Chung, 2009). This dynamic is particularly evident in the context of crime news, where Ales Bucar Ručman (2013) identified the emphasis on extreme violent crimes, often sidelining expert insights and broader social critiques. In terms of the media acting as a conduit between public and crime reporting, Hari Bakti Mardikantoro et al. (2022) highlight how journalists' biases are embedded in the framing of violence. This is echoed by Nadya Inda Syartanti (2021) who notes that the media's linguistic choices can significantly tilt public discussions, with implications for public opinion and policy making. Such selectivity often results in an omission of broader socioeconomic critiques or considerations, and seeks to narrow the subsequent public discussion. On this, Melanie Brown (1996) warns of the impact of news media's narrow portrayals of violence on viewer behaviours, though his analysis does not extend to the nuances of online media interactions today.

To address this, online comment sections provide a forum for public deliberation but can also reflect societal biases and power structures, as Kate O'Farrell (2022) points out. Altman Yuzhu Peng (2020) suggests that these platforms reveal ideological divergences in public sentiment. In the Australian context, Murni Wan Mohd Nor and Peter Gale (2021) discuss how news media forums emphasise audience engagement and newsworthiness over ethical reporting. The rapid changes in digital platform technology necessitate that academic research adapt quickly to understand the influence of these forums on public discourse (Peng, 2020, p. 1357). As we move further into the digital age, the need for such research becomes increasingly crucial.

# Key Concepts

## Social Constructivism

Social constructivism compels a critical lens for interpreting the world and our place within it. It posits that knowledge is a byproduct of social interactions, and is tailored by historical and cultural contexts as leads to varied "versions of knowledge" (Burr, 2015, p. 5). This perspective challenges the ideal of journalistic objectivity, which advocates for impartial and unbiased reporting—a standard that often falls short in practice (Williams & Stroud, 2020). News narratives are influenced by factors like political and ideological biases, or economic motives (Mardikantoro et al., 2022). Such demonstrates that the construction of knowledge is intertwined with power dynamics (Burr, 2015). This power enables news outlets to significantly influence the societal discourse on youth crime, as affects both public sentiment and policy decisions.

## Critical Theory

Critical theory scrutinises the societal structures that foster social inequalities, and advocates for "human emancipation" from domination and oppression, and the fulfilment of human potential and needs (Horkheimer, 1972 [1992, p.246] cited in Bohman, 2021). It focuses on the dynamics between democracy and justice, and the steering of society toward greater social equity (Bohman, 2021). Within this framework, critical criminology posits that societal inequalities propagate crime, influencing the criminal justice system's response to deviance (Long, 2015, p.1). Historically, it has been observed that individuals from lower socioeconomic classes are more frequently criminalised and subjected to more severe punishments (Bonger, 1916 cited in Long, 2015). Applying a critical approach, media analysis interrogates how news content and public discourse reflect and perpetuate these disparities. This method is integral to our examination of news articles and commentary.

## Discourse

Scholarly literature offers diverse interpretations of CDA. Teun A. van Dijk (1993) contends that CDA must adopt a sociopolitical lens, focusing on social issues like dominance and inequality. Martin Reisigl & Ruth Wodak's (2017) discourse-historical approach (DHA) leverages critical theory's socio-philosophical principles to elucidate why certain interpretations of discursive events are deemed more legitimate. Among these varied approaches, our research will be grounded in the framework established by Fairclough (1992), and will utilise his definition to guide our analysis.

## Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional analysis approach will be undertaken to analyse news articles and the comment sections. Fairclough (1992, p. 87) examines how discourse contributes to the "production, reproduction or transformation" of power relations. Fairclough maintains that discourses are simultaneously a piece of text, a discursive practice, and a social practice (see Figure 1).

### Microstructural Dimension (Text Analysis)

The first level analyses the language used, such as semantics and morphology within the text (Hassan et al., 2019). While the term "text" is used, this encompasses all forms of communication including spoken, written, and visual methods. Textual analysis refers to the form and meaning of text.

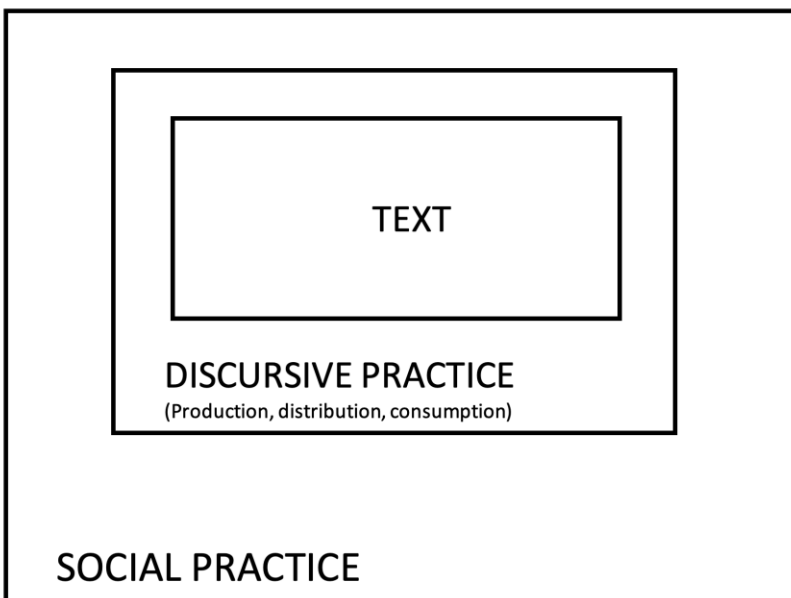
### Mesostructural Dimension (Discursive Practice)

Discursive practice refers to the underlying social contexts that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of text (including the norms, resources, and social structures within the production processes). In our research, this refers to news outlets' political leanings, the fast-paced nature of online news, and the evidential support and resources presented in the articles.

## Macrostructural Dimension (Social Practice)

Social practice refers to the broader social contexts and dominant hierarchies (gender, race, and class) within a specific social domain (location/community). Critical discourse analysis takes upon an explicitly political position to analyse how power relations and dominant belief systems are reproduced, challenged, or overlooked within text.

Figure 1: Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse



## Methodology

Our methodology leverages Fairclough's three-dimensions of discourse to analyse media representations and public comment responses to four youth crime incidents in Queensland. We sought to undertake a thorough data collection and analysis process to identify evidence and traceable themes that could be effectively utilised within a three-dimensional analysis.

## Data Collection

### Collation of Article Sample

The sample of news media content consists of articles from five major news outlets based in the Queensland region. The sample includes the ABC News, the Brisbane Times, the Bulletin (Gold Coast and Townsville), the Courier Mail, and the Guardian. These outlets were selected due to their prominence within Queensland, and due to their variance along the political spectrum, as founded on existing research. The collation of the articles entailed two overarching steps; (1) identifying the coverage of youth crime within Queensland, and (2) finalising and refining an article sample. **The first step** began with the identification of articles from the five outlets through a search of two databases (Factiva and Google). A review of articles with the terms ‘youth crime,’ and ‘Queensland’ published between September 2022 and August 2023 revealed that incidents that had resulted in the death of a civilian were the most widely reported within the news media. This distinct pattern of media reporting led the team to limit the potential case studies to only youth crime offences that resulted in a death (nine incidents within the aforementioned time period). Via the Factiva database and Google, the number of articles published by the five outlets on each of these nine incidents was recorded (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Publications for Youth Crime Incidents that Resulted in the Death of a Civilian between September 2022 and August 2023

Month of Incident	Number of Publications					Total Articles Published
	ABC News	Bulletin (Gold Coast and Townsville)	Brisbane Times	Courier Mail	The Guardian	
September 2022	2			1		3
September 2022		3		10		13
December 2022	11	16	11	62	10	110
January 2023	2		4			6
February 2023	4	1	3	10	3	21
February 2023	2		1	10		13
February 2023	4		1	5		10
April 2023	5	4	2	20	4	35
April 2023	1	1				2
Total Publications	31	25	22	118	17	213

Continuing on to the **second step**, refining our article sample, our case studies (Cases A-D) were selected due to having the largest quantity of publications across at least three of the selected news outlets (selected cases detailed in table 2). This provided an original sample of 179 news articles.

Table 2: Finalised Case Studies

Case	Location	Year	Victim/s	Offender/s	Total Articles
Case A	Moreton Bay	2022	A middle aged woman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two 17-year-old boys</li> </ul>	110
Case B	Toowoomba	2023	An elderly man	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An 18-year-old boy</li> <li>• Two 16-year-old boys</li> <li>• A 17-year-old boy</li> </ul>	21
Case C	Maryborough	2023	Three women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 13-year-old boy</li> </ul>	35
Case D	Logan	2023	A 20-year-old man	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 16-year-old boy</li> <li>• A 15-year-old boy</li> </ul>	13

This original sample underwent three rounds of review (detailed in Figure 2). **The first review** required the removal of all articles shorter than 200 words. **The second review** was then conducted during which the headlines and first paragraphs of all articles were reviewed to reduce the sample to only one article published by each news outlet per day. News reporting on incidents such as a criminal offence is largely time-focused with many outlets publishing numerous articles of similar content in very short time periods. This second review sought to ensure that the final sample did not only contain the initial facts of the incident but rather the broader discussion following each case. **The third and final review** entailed determining the availability of online comment sections for each article. A prominent focus of this study is the way in which the Queensland public reacts and responds to coverage of youth crime within the news media. Thus, the articles most interacted with by the public were of interest. It must be noted that not all articles within the final sample have linked comment sections. The three reviews resulted in a final sample of 40 news articles (10 articles per case study) (see table 3).



Figure 2: Process of Refining Article Sample

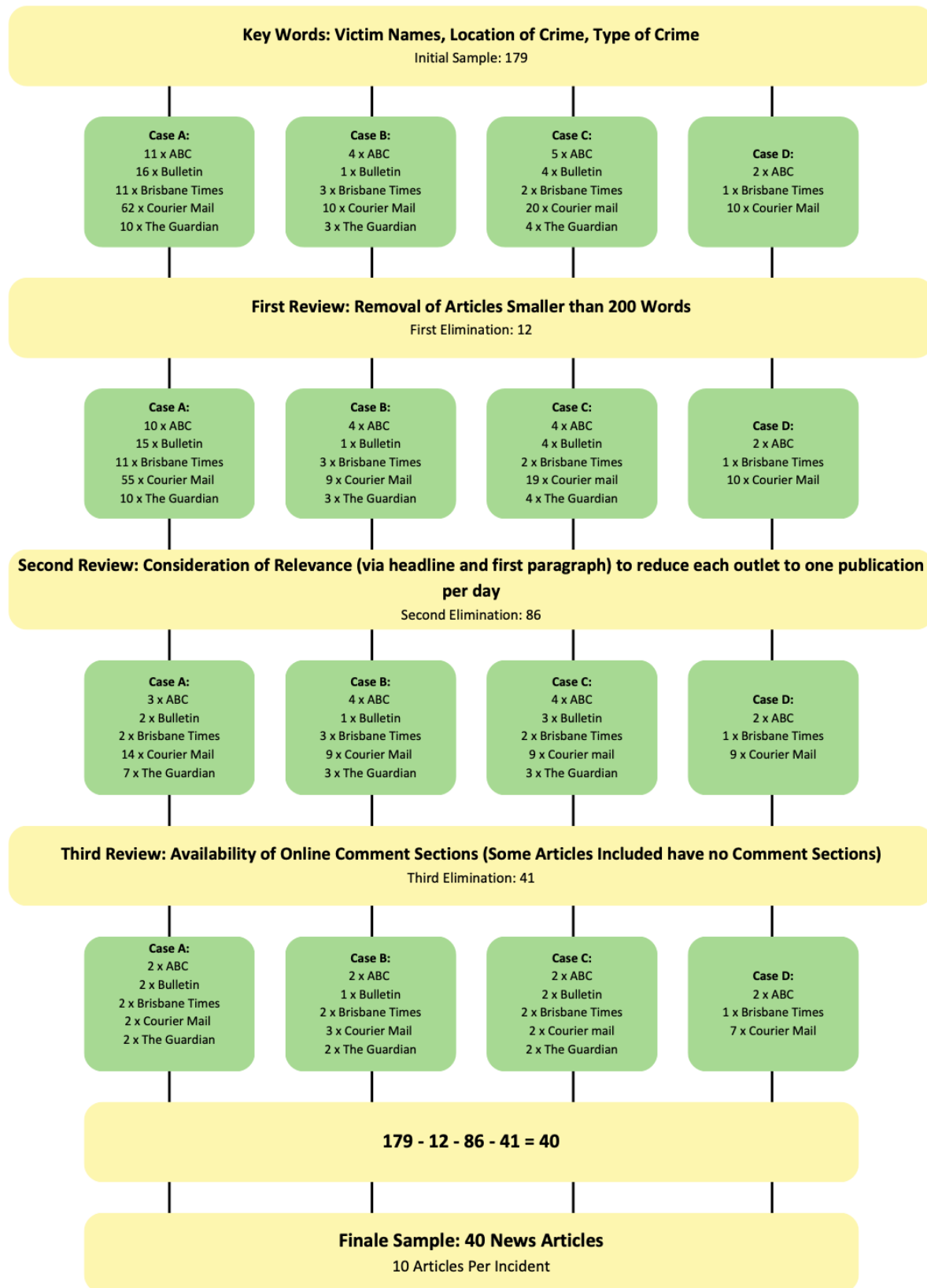


Table 3: News Article Sample Distribution Across Outlets

News Outlet	Quantity	Ownership
ABC News	8	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Bulletin (Gold Coast and Townsville)	5	NewsCorp
Brisbane Times	7	Nine Publishing Co
Courier Mail	14	NewsCorp
The Guardian	6	Guardian Media Group

## Collation of Online Comment Sample

The comment sample collection process entailed three methods.

### First Method: Collecting all Available Comments

The first method required the team to collect all available comments from on-site comment sections. Of the news outlets selected for the study, only the Courier Mail, the Brisbane Times, and the Bulletin enabled on-site comments. Of the news article sample, eight articles had corresponding comment sections which were collected.

### Second Method: Manual Search on Reddit

The second method required a manual search of the Reddit platform for any discussion boards directly linked to the articles within the sample. This manual search resulted in a total of four linked discussion boards that correlated with cases A, C, and D (two article-linked discussion boards for case A). These linked discussion boards were responding to ABC News articles as well as one Guardian article. Although no articles from the news article sample for case B were linked on Reddit, a discussion board linked to a Queensland based NewsCorp outlet publication (neither the Courier Mail nor the Bulletin) was found. These comments were included within the comment sample to ensure the public's response to each of the cases was included.

### Third Method: Use of Analytical Software

The final method required the use of analytical software developed at the Digital Observatory Research Facility operated by QUT Research Infrastructure. This analytical software enabled the collection of article-linked comment sections on Reddit to be collected en masse.

These three methods of collection resulted in a pool of online comments that were sourced from 19 news articles. Some of these comment forums were linked to articles from within the sample, and others were not (see Table 4).

Table 4: Linkages between Articles and Comment Samples

Location of Comment Forum	Quantity of Comment Forums
Linked to Articles from within the sample (Cases A-D)	12
Linked to Articles from outside the sample	6
Linked to Articles from other outlets that are not present within the sample	1 (News-Corp owned outlet)

In line with the research questions and theoretical framework, a model of inductive thematic saturation was applied to the comment data. This model of saturation focuses on the identification of new codes or themes, and thus further comment collection was halted when no new codes or themes were found (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1986).

# Data Analysis

## Coding Practices

A preliminary analysis of the 10 news articles and a portion of the comment sample was conducted. Within this preliminary review, the samples were independently read by the authors of this research paper and then discussed collectively to identify relevant themes and examine differences in interpretations. A method of consensus building in which the research team discussed differences of interpretations to obtain a consensus was used to ensure consistency of coding of qualitative data (Clarke et al., 2023). To conduct the coding process, NVivo was utilised as the supporting software. The research team continued to meet periodically as more of the sample was analysed to ensure codes were continually reviewed. Overarching codes applied, as indicated the overall perspective of each article, were ‘Complex/Nuanced,’ ‘Fact-Based’ and ‘One-Dimensional’ (see definitions in Table 5). These codes, as were developed by the team, provided insight into the coverage of the outlets, and their approaches to youth crime, offenders and policy responses. Individual conclusions on these codes were compared between at least two team members to ensure that a justifiable consensus could be reached.

Table 5: ‘Complex/Nuanced,’ ‘Fact-Based’ and One-Dimensional’ Codes

Codes	Definition
Complex/Nuanced	Discusses youth crime as a complex issue, possibly referring to the causes of youth crime, the impacts of incarceration on continuing crime. Does not have to discuss all of these aspects, but at least discusses youth crime as an extremely complex social phenomenon that cannot be solved overnight
Fact Based	Depicts the facts of the case (there was an incident, there was a victim, there was an offender). Is neither explicitly positive or negative in nature. Relatively non-emotive language. Focuses primarily on the incident, not so much on the issue of youth crime.
One-Dimensional	One-dimensional accounts of offences and offenders. No thoughts regarding the causes of youth crime nor the difficulty to solve the issue.

## Applying Fairclough's Three Dimensions of Discourse

Throughout these analyses the researchers applied Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse approach. Text is analysed via linguistic features including "vocabulary, semantics and sentence" (Hamid et al., 2021, p. 3). Discursive practice requires the examination of the text production process and the impacts that these have on the framing of an issue. The third stage of analysis—sociocultural—requires the research team to examine the situational contexts that impact discourse in the media including cultural impacts, political systems and social institutions. This three dimensional approach to discourse provides an understanding of the relationships between the three dimensions, and reveals the role of discourse as a political practice that "establishes, sustains and changes power relations" (Ručman, 2012; Fairclough, 1992, p. 67).

## Ethics

For ethical reasons it is important to note that this research does not aim to remark upon the actions, motivations, experiences or morals of any depicted individuals (either victim or offender). Moreover, for reasons of confidentiality, the names of victims, offenders and any individuals quoted within the news publications will not be used within this research. The research project has been reviewed and approved by the UQ HASS LNR ethics committee (Project Number: 2023/HE00767).

## Findings

Our results seek to uncover the news media and public discourses on youth crime in Queensland through analyses of several cases covered by varied outlets and discussed within linked comments. To do so, the results are presented through Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse approach, (1) microstructural dimension (text analysis), (2) mesostructural dimension (discursive practice), and (3) macrostructural dimension (sociocultural analysis).

## Microstructural Dimension (Text Analysis)

The first stage of analysis focuses upon the textual dimensions of youth crime reporting in Queensland. This entails a linguistic analysis of the news article sample, focusing on the vocabulary, grammar, structure, and syntactic function (Syartanti, 2021, p. 129).

It was found that many news articles described youth offenders according to a formulaic structure which enabled a neutral depiction of offenders that did not threaten to reveal their identities:

Figure 3: Formulaic structure

**Number of Offenders + Gender of Offender/s + Age of Offender/s + Suburb of Offender/s Residence + Have Been Charged with Offence (In Legal Terms).**

Example: Two teenage boys, aged 15 and 16, from Bundaberg have been charged with grievous bodily harm.\*

\*Example is made up and not representative of any case within this study.

While all the news outlets studied use this standardised portrayal of youth, some also incorporated different identity terms to influence how their readers perceive youth crime in Queensland. In addition to the description of age in number of years, many articles employed the terms ‘young’, ‘juvenile’, or ‘teenager’ to depict an offender’s age. These terms were generally linked to a description of criminality which resulted in depictions of a ‘juvenile intruder’, ‘killer teen’, or ‘young recidivist offender.’

*“These **kids** should be locked up because they’re killing people, they’re terrorising communities.”* (Bulletin, Case C)

*“But sadly it is the state in which we now live, a state under siege from **violent youths** who, after years of a revolving-door system caused by government policies, have developed a fearless disregard for the justice system...”* (Bulletin Case B)

Yet other ways to describe individuals, far more nuanced than age, pertain to class-based and racial descriptions of youth offenders. First, class identifiers are covertly used to describe youth offenders. Some of the offenders depicted within the news articles were living in ‘government-funded’ homes that support children under the age of 16. Whilst this does not directly denote an offender as belonging to a particular class, it does infer that the offender does not have any familial support and is therefore, of a lower socio-economic status.

*“At least one of the boys has been linked to a government-funded house, which provides “supported independent living” to children under 16. According to Queensland Government data, it is a “placement service” which provides out of home care to children “in need of protection” to ensure they feel “supported and safe”.*” (Courier Mail, Case A).

Further, to address racialised depictions of offenders, within the news article sample, only one article explicitly mentions the race of an offender. This description is in relation to the potential deportation of the offender due to his status as a ‘refugee’ from a Middle Eastern country. Whilst the remaining articles never overtly note an offender’s racial identity, several articles allude to it via the use of locational information that would require a reader to hold certain levels of place-specific knowledge to decode. Within the selected case studies three youth offenders are described as living in Queensland suburbs that have higher Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations than the state average; two of these offenders are from suburbs with particularly high populations of young people that identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Contrary to news articles in which the identifying categories of race were only covertly mentioned, the comment sections explicitly brought race into the discussion.

*“Intergenerational trauma. Colonisers need to accept their responsibility in this.”* (ABC News, Case B).

Within this discussion thread, many commenters voiced support for this form of control as *“we already openly practice eugenics as a society, I don’t see the harm in extending it a little”*

(ABC News, Case C). Although, there were also many who objected to use of eugenic-minded forms of control. Such discourse surrounding race arose in multiple discussions across all news outlets with some commenters entirely dismissing the social factors that contribute to youth crime stating:

*“the reason that there are so many Indigenous kids in jail is they are the ones committing crime ... Its not because we are locking them up because of skin colour”* (Courier Mail, Case B).

Further, the discussion between commenters drew in contemporary debates concerning race. Whilst some commenters engaged with the debate by drawing upon the historical context as to why many Indigenous communities are disengaged from wider society, a central discussion point regarding the Voice to Parliament also arose:

*“address Indigenous youth crime before spending more \$\$\$\$ on another unnecessary, ineffective Aboriginal Department, i.e. the Voice”* (Courier Mail, Case C).

Moving beyond the depictions of youth offenders themselves, the issue of youth crime in Queensland is described by the news media according to a narrative of increasing crime—both regarding frequency and violence. Several news articles depicted youth crime via alarmist terms such as ‘epidemic’ and ‘crime wave’-- a trend reflected within the comment sections. Further, the use of disease metaphors (e.g., “*epidemic*”, “*scourge*”, “*plaguing*”, “*state of decay*”) can be evidenced throughout the article sample. As an indication of the news media’s shaping of public discourse, the use of disease metaphors similarly arose throughout the comment sample.

*“Yes I agree with the spine that not all crime can be prevented, but juvenile crime has now become a **plague** with more and more youths becoming involved and it is well past time to send a strong message about the consequences for such actions.”* (Courier Mail, Case C)

*“There are strong rules and laws in place against bikies, why can’t the same attention be given to this **plague** of youth criminals?”* (Bulletin, Case B).



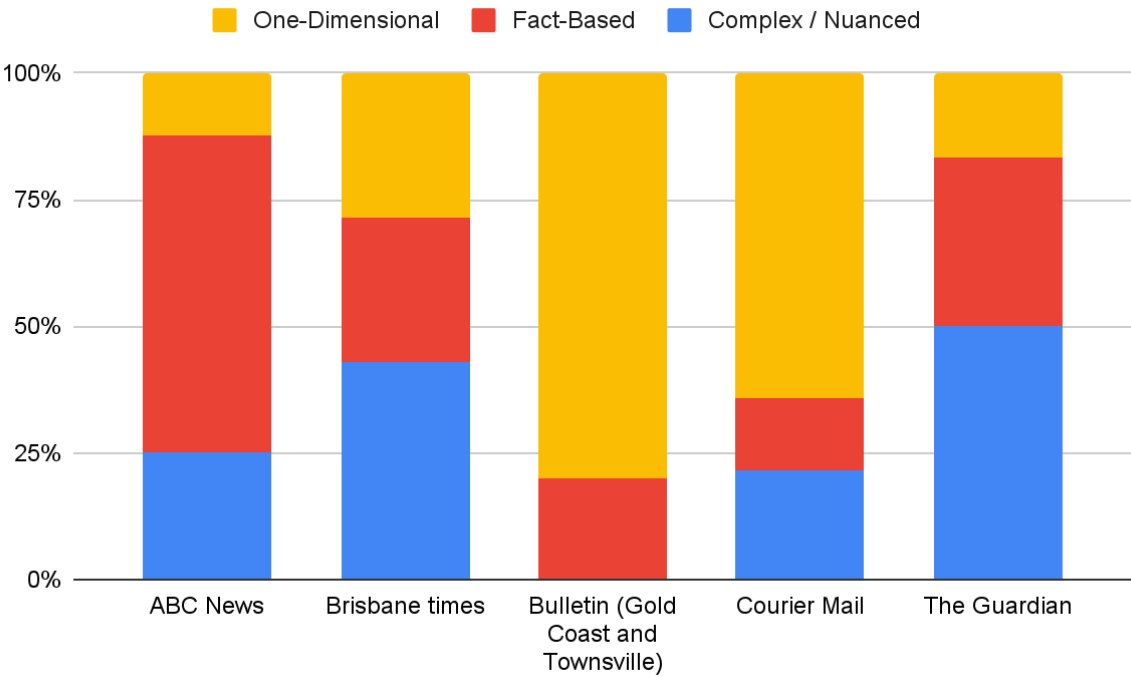
These disease metaphors, as well as water metaphors (e.g., the repeated use of “crime wave” as well as “surge”), throughout both discourses, position the issue of youth crime as a force of nature that unless addressed immediately, could have devastating impacts upon all individuals within the community as the violence of nature is indiscriminate in its attack.

## Mesostructural Dimension (Discursive Practice)

Moving beyond the microstructural, the mesostructural dimension focuses on the contexts that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of text. In the instance of news media, outputs are shaped by the fast-paced nature of online news as well as the political leanings and ideologies held by publishers and journalists (Mardikantoro et al., 2022, p. 9).

As the central finding, Figure 4 provides an overview of the proportion of each news outlet articles within the sample that were coded as Complex/Nuanced, Fact Based, or One-Dimensional. From this coding, it is evident that the two News Corp-owned news outlets (Courier Mail and the Bulletin) published the highest proportion of One-Dimensional articles. ABC News published the highest proportion of Fact Based articles, and the Brisbane Times and the Guardian published the greatest proportion of Complex/Nuanced articles.

Figure 4: Proportion of each News Outlet that published articles coded as either Complex/Nuanced, Fact Based, and One-Dimensional.



One-dimensional portrayals of youth offenders included depictions that were solely related to violence and threat. Thus, offenders were subject to existing stereotypes.

*“16-year-old Queensland boy accused of the **cold-blooded** stabbing murder in a random **attack** in the early hours of the morning allegedly **taunted** his victim.”* (Courier Mail, Case D)

Further, limited accounts of judiciary and legal processes were detailed which served to frame the issues of youth crime as a fault of the elected government, rather than of the underlying causes of youth crime.

*“The state is still struggling to understand when there will be meaningful action taken on juvenile justice and when someone from the Palaszczuk government will be accountable for the youth crime plaguing Queensland”* (Courier Mail, Case A)

Further, articles that adopted a Complex/Nuanced perspective on youth crime provided statistical evidence and included relevant ‘expert’ voices (academic, criminologists, youth service providers), to speak to the complexity of the issue and potential solutions.

*“The latest data sets, which have limitations, show kids’ share of total charges increased from 16 per cent in December to about 26 per cent by February. This was still down from the May 2022 peak of 33 per cent and comparable with other spikes going back to early 2020.”* (Brisbane Times, Case B)

*“Yesterday the Queensland police assistant commissioner, Cheryl Scanlon, said youth crime was “complex and multifaceted” and not something to be “fixed overnight.”* (The Guardian, Case A)

Similar contrasts between the One-Dimensional and the Complex/Neutral were identified within the comment sample. Comments sourced from the Courier Mail and the Bulletin, as protected by a paywall, predominantly indicated support for ‘tough on crime’ measures, including, *“bring[ing] back labour camps”* (Courier Mail, Case C) and the need for *“minimum mandatory sentencing”* (Courier Mail, Case A). Alternatively, a diversity of reflections on alternate solutions were evident within forums linked to the Guardian and ABC News articles, as sourced from Reddit. Whilst some commenters indicated their *“favour of the harshest possible punishments, to the point where we go back to full mediaeval and bring back some “controversial punishments”* (ABC News, Case D), others argued that *“we need to find out the best ways to stop children following in [offender in Case C] path... band-aids like incarceration simply don’t work”* (The Guardian, Case C). Through a mesostructural analysis, it is evident that the strategies employed by news outlets inform the “news consumption” taking place (Robertson, et al., 2023, p. 812). One-sided approaches to youth crime contributes to a narrowed understanding of the issue, as driven by the competitive markets and political environments (Belair-Gagnon, Nelson, & Lewis, 2019, p. 559).

## Macrostructural Dimension (Sociocultural Analysis)

To finalise, the macrostructural dimension focuses on the way in which discourse is integral to sociocultural practices, at the situational, institutional, and social levels (Fairclough, 2001). Thus, we can understand how social contexts outside the media interact with the creation, dissemination, and understanding of discourse.

Situational refers to both the historical and immediate context and production surrounding a discourse. Important factors contributing to the structure and acceptability of the youth crime depictions in Queensland news media are the political and social events occurring. Much of the sampled coverage reflects on the political activities, and perceived failures, of the elected government amidst increasing election pressures.

*“Ms Palaszczuk said “no-one is going to stop youth crime” as she stood by her government’s record on the problem, and sidestepped questions over secrecy surrounding court appearances by alleged juvenile criminals.”* (Courier Mail, Case C)

Additionally, such valuing of historical tough on crime initiatives is reflected within the comment sample with several commenters proclaiming that *“Campbell Newman [Queensland Premier in 2012] has the right answers to fixing the problem... we now find Qld in this mess* (Courier Mail, Case B). Prior electoral victories, as were spurred by electoral promises on punitive measures within this context, are integral to the generated discourse (Hutchinson and Richards, 2013).

At the institutional level, focus is placed on the influence of institutions—both internally and externally—upon discourse. The article sample has a dual institutional structure—that of broadcasting (via the news format) and politics (via the focus upon policy response and the privileging of politician voices). Within the articles, the voices of political parties constitute a significant portion of the discussion with 17 of the 40 news articles utilising quotations from politicians.

*“Community safety is paramount here and today we stand with the community and we stand with the [VICTIM NAME] family, an absolute tragedy that I know has gripped this state,” Palaszczuk said, “The time for action is now.””* (The Guardian, Case A)

*“Crisafulli said break of bail needed to be an offence under Queensland juvenile law. “It enables the court to impose some conditions that there are consequences for, because at the moment, the changes to the Youth Justice Act mean that until a young offender steals that other car or breaks into that other home, they can’t be held accountable for those conditions that were set,” he said.”* (Brisbane Times, Case A).

On this, political influence was evidenced within the comment sample, as many commenters expressed an extremely politicised understanding of youth crime in Queensland, as driven by party politics. Throughout these comments, solutions were framed as simply transferring governing power from the Labor Party to the Liberal National Party (LNP). When specific policy initiatives enter the comment discussions, significant focus is placed on the current *“soft laws”* (ABC News, Case D) being employed by the Labor Government, and the need to *“bring back boot camps in the outback”* (Courier Mail, Case C) and enforce *“hard labour”* (Courier Mail, Case B) for convicted offenders. Rehabilitative and prevention policies are framed by commenters as politicians pandering to *“bleeding hearts”* (Courier Mail, Case A) who value the rights of *“sub humans”* (Courier Mail, Case A) over the rights of the community.

Rather, at the social level (the influence of societal macrosystems), an ideological shift can potentially be identified within the comment sample. Many commenters call for youth offenders to be *“held accountable no matter what their age”* (Courier Mail, Case A) and *“regardless of their upbringing”* (Courier Mail, Case A). It is evident that the social factors that frequently contribute to youth crime are valued less than accountability and responsibility by engaged members of the public, as influenced by the outlets themselves.

# Discussion

Throughout our analysis, we found that Fairclough's three-dimensional model offered an insightful framework for delving into this complex issue. From our collated findings across the levels of analysis, we can conduct an in depth discussion in answer to our guiding research questions. Here, we will explore the portrayal of youth offenders, the variances between news outlets and their political leanings, and the operating societal and political structures. Ultimately, we seek to draw conclusions on how notions of acceptability and appropriateness arise within media and public discourses in regard to policy responses.

## Discussing the Portrayals of Youth Crime

News media's textual choices shape public perceptions of youth offenders. The terms used to denote age, like 'juvenile' instead of 'child', influence the perceived responsibility attributed to offenders. Faucher (2009, p. 446) suggests that calling an offender a 'juvenile' aligns with assigning them more responsibility, as opposed to recognising the psychosocial immaturity associated with children. Therefore, the language in articles concerning an offender's age highlights the level of responsibility and accountability deemed suitable for them.

Further on this, the language used by news media can further exaggerate the frequency, impact, and violence of youth crime, fostering fear among readers who might then see themselves as potential victims. Such reporting can lead to moral panics over perceived societal threats (Jewkes, 2004, p. 58). By focusing on particularly deviant cases, the media can distort public understanding and generate fear, prompting youth justice responses that reflect these skewed perceptions rather than the actual evidence or a balanced view of youth offenders.

Moreover, news media often subtly depict youth offenders as coming from marginalised racial or socio-economic backgrounds. These stereotypical portrayals, combined with mature age labels and sensationalist language, influence public and policymaker perceptions of appropriate policy responses. The significant role of underlying issues, such as racial marginalisation and economic disadvantage, in criminal behaviour is frequently overlooked (Damm and Dustmann, 2014, p. 1807). For example, youth homes—rather than being framed as a vital service providing safety to vulnerable children in our community—are framed as draining public funds and

harbouring criminals capable of committing the worst crimes. Media narratives create a 'fear of crime' cycle that prioritises fear as a focus for governance, overshadowing the social roots of youth crime and thereby, supporting punitive crime policies (Lee, 2001, p. 481).

## Discussing the Variances Between News Outlets and their Political Ideologies

We can reflect on each outlets' established style of reporting, and political or ideological motivations. Expressions of ideology, through inclusions or exclusions of emotion, and explorations or absence of complexity, influences public discourse and policy outcomes. Throughout the samples, politicised framings of youth crime were highly evident and revealed the commitments outlets and commenters retain to their "ideological stance" (McKnight, 2021, p. 313). Political tensions and party politics are drawn upon, and less weight is given to the complexities of youth crime and its solutions.

To begin, News Corp-owned outlets, Courier Mail and The Bulletin (Gold Coast and Townsville located), have traditionally engaged in "'tabloid-style' reporting" (LeMonde, 2021, p. 139). Relevant journalists rely heavily on sensationalism in an effort to engage readers (LeMonde, 2021, p. 139). In analyses of News Corp figurehead Rupert Murdoch, his self-portrayal as a friend "of the ordinary, of the people, continually battling away against the vested interests" has been noted (Du Gay, 2008 cited in McKnight, 2010, p. 312). News Corp-owned outlets traditionally adopt right-leaning perspectives, driven to protect the liberties of "ordinary" or 'everyday Australians.' In regard to youth crime, right-leaning ideology gives less weight to addressing the causes and solutions but rather, seeks to eradicate the 'threats' to society.

Conversely, ABC News, as a publicly owned outlet, sought to retain its neutrality. The majority of articles sourced from the outlet were factually-based (Spigelman, 2013). ABC News is alleviated of "market pressures," and thus, does not extensively contribute to the fear generation that can increase reader engagement (Spigelman, 2013, p. 18). Consequently, youth crime is framed as an occurring social and political issue, with limited emotive or fear-based depictions.

Additionally, both the Guardian and the Brisbane Times employ similar ideological perspectives to one another when covering youth crime. From the sample, both outlets can be

considered left of centre due to their in depth exploration of the causes of youth crime, and consideration of potential solutions in contrast to ‘tough on crime’ policies. The framing of youth crime is undertaken with accountability and truth at the forefront (Wilner, Wallace, Lacasa-Mas, & Goldstein, 2021, p. 1679).

The comments sampled generally mirrored the ideological slant of their corresponding articles. On-site comments for the Courier Mail and The Bulletin, which are paywall-protected, may lead to insular communities where participants echo and amplify similar political beliefs, reinforcing group ideologies to gain social standing (Birzneiks, 2020, p. 9). This contrasts with the ABC, the Guardian, and the Brisbane Times, which sporadically provide comment sections, leading to the collection of commentary from open, linked Reddit discussions. Reddit’s open forum allows for a more diverse political engagement. Despite the different levels of access, it is clear that the ideological positions of the news outlets permeate the discourse on both closed and open discussion platforms.

Discursive practices in the news media reveal how discussions are shaped and the impact they have on readers' understandings of youth crime. Articles and comments often reflect political leanings, directing the conversation according to established ideological stances. This slant tends to oversimplify the issue and overlook the complex social factors, within “the social milieu” of an offender, that contribute to youth crime (Banerjee, Gidwani, & Rao, 2020, p. 278). Conversely, when news media delves into the complexities and context of youth crime, a more nuanced picture emerges (Banerjee, Gidwani, & Rao, 2020, p. 278). This disparity illustrates the influence of political ideology on public discourse. The tendency of news media outlets to tailor content to their audience's preferences can result in politically charged and biased narratives on youth crime.



## Discussing the Impacts of Societal and Political Structures

An analysis of the pervasive societal structures reveals the fundamental roles of news media in preserving said structures, influencing public discourse and leveraging particular policy outcomes. Whilst it is understood within research that youth crime is spurred by a variety of complex factors, many commenters within the sample argued that it was simply the result of an ‘inept’ and ‘incompetent’ government that needed to be removed from power. Such represents a particularly one-dimensional approach to discussing the issue, and demonstrates the ways in which news media frames the issue as predominantly a political problem rather than a social issue. In turn, public discussion is constrained and predominantly remains within this space.

To further address the political structures, the positioning of political parties as the central institutions within the discussions has implications for the ways in which solutions to youth crime are considered. Within the article sample, the Labour Government stands in support of the *Strengthening Community Safety Act*, advocating for its implementation within the articles for the Cases A-C, and—within the articles for Case D—asking for time to allow for the new policies to come into action. Throughout this stance, the focus is primarily on policies rooted in a ‘tough on crime’ ideology. While rehabilitation and preventative policies are mentioned in the Act and by Labor politicians, they are often secondary to the ‘tough on crime’ policies and receive less attention in the coverage. At the same time, the LNP advocates for various policies, including naming and shaming youth offenders, breach of bail policy, and the removal of detention as a last resort. These policy bundles from the two dominant parties in Queensland primarily emphasise tough or tougher measures for addressing youth crime, with little attention given to rehabilitation and prevention. This concentration within the political sphere limits the inclusion of solutions from external areas such as academia, which could address structural drivers of crime like social disadvantage and poverty, and thus restricts potential solutions.

To conclude, ideological shifts have also reflected the delegitimisation of the welfare state and the establishment of an unsympathetic system that places higher levels of responsibility on individual offenders (Bell, 2011; Faucher, 2009). Over the past 50 years, Queensland, like much of the Western world, has moved away from the welfare state towards a neoliberal framework that relies on market imperatives and views individuals as rational actors (Faucher, 2009, p. 448). This shift has transformed narratives of responsibility from social solidarity to individual accountability (Bell, 2011). Prioritising individual responsibility over addressing social issues and inequities contributes to determining the most appropriate policy initiatives for addressing youth crime. The focus on accountability and responsibility, as mentioned earlier, allows for the acceptance of more punitive measures. Thus, the shift towards neoliberal ideals reveals the interconnectedness of discourse, ideology, and the framing of suitable policy initiatives, which limit the public discussion of youth crime in Queensland to a punitive stance.

## Drawing Conclusions on Policy Implications and its Presence within Discourse

This research has unravelled the intricate construction of news discourse and reader interactions in Queensland, underscoring the media's influential role which transcends mere information dissemination. News outlets meticulously sculpt narratives at various levels, impacting policy discussions, especially in propagating 'tough on crime' ideologies.

Our analysis reveals the media's inclination to portray stringent punitive actions as the sole effective strategy in youth crime management. Even when acknowledging the importance of preventive or rehabilitative tactics, these approaches are invariably depicted as subordinate to the more severe 'tough on crime' approaches. This skewed presentation hinders the independent evaluation and consideration of these alternative strategies. Consequently, we advocate for a synergistic effort between media professionals and policymakers to evaluate the effect of such biased reportage and to foster a more balanced discourse on efficacious crime solutions.

Nonetheless, quantifying the precise influence of media narratives on public opinion remains an elusive task. Our study encounters limitations in pinpointing the exact manners in which online commenters express their viewpoints and engage in intellectual exchanges, as noted by Hoye (2005, p. 1499). The realm of text-based, digital communication in social research

introduces unique challenges: the lack of non-verbal cues, the anonymity afforded to users, and the diverse interpretations that arise. This aspect gains particular significance in discussions about youth crime, where discerning the intention and sentiment behind comments is vital. A deeper comprehension in this area would shed light on public consensus regarding suitable policy approaches. Moving forward, our objective is to foster a more balanced discourse surrounding youth crime in Queensland, bridging the gap between media narratives and public dialogue.

## Recommendations

As we conclude our research, it is clear that there are several avenues for future research worth exploring to build on our findings. To delve deeper into the discourse within Queensland, future research could examine a different array of media outlets, including regional bulletins. Additionally, due to the evolving nature of policy development, ongoing research is needed to monitor how changes may impact news discourse, and vice versa. It would be invaluable to continue investigating the shifts in news and public discourse in response to new policies. To gain insight into nationwide discourse, future research could compare Queensland to other states that may have less emphasis on being 'tough on crime,' in order to reveal differences in the framing of policy acceptability and appropriateness. In conclusion, our research has aimed to provide Anglicare Southern Queensland with informed and impactful advocacy projects on youth crime. Deepening their work within the realm of news media is crucial to respond to negative or narrow-minded discussions about this vulnerable community.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Finalised Participant Summary Sheet

The summary sheet features a header with logos for The University of Queensland Australia and Anglicare Southern Queensland. The title is 'Investigating the "Youth Crime Epidemic" in QLD: the Impacts of News Media'. The content is organized into sections: Background Information, Research Aims, Research Questions, Methods, and Key Themes and Findings. The Research Questions section is highlighted with a dark blue background. The Key Themes and Findings section includes a circular graphic with the text 'The Focus on Extreme Deviance'.

**THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA** **Anglicare Southern Queensland**

### Investigating the "Youth Crime Epidemic" in QLD: the Impacts of News Media

#### Background Information

**Youth crime in Queensland** is a pressing issue that has been a prominent feature within the Queensland news media landscape for the past several years. Between the years 2021-22, Queensland had the highest number of young people in detention across Australia and had a recorded 10,304 youth offenders (aged 10-17) that accounted for 13% of total offences that year [1]. Despite the fact that Indigenous youth comprise less than 10% of the total population, they were notably overrepresented within the Queensland criminal justice system with nearly two-thirds of detained youth identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander [2].

**The Strengthening Community Safety Act 2023** was enacted by the Queensland Government in response to increased concern of safety from the media and the public. This Act—which makes the breach of bail for children an offence—aligns government policy with the shift away from rehabilitative and preventative strategies toward tough on crime policies that contravene the state's Human Rights Act [3]. This shift towards tougher penalties has been spurred by increased media attention on this space that has contributed to mass fear generation among the Queensland public [4]. Hence this research, conducted in partnership with Anglicare Southern Queensland, seeks to analyse the media framing adopted by news media outlets in Queensland as well as how the public responds to youth crime reporting.

#### Research Aims

Our research seeks to establish an understanding of how varied media outlets frame youth crime and offenders in Queensland, and how such correlates with or differs from public frames.

We aim to provide Anglicare with concrete evidence to **inform their advocacy work against 'tough on crime' policies within Queensland**. We aim to thoroughly investigate the dialogues surrounding youth crime in Queensland to ultimately present insightful findings to Anglicare.

#### Research Questions

- 1. What frames are used within news articles published in Queensland regarding youth crime?**
  - a. How are youth offenders framed in news media articles?
  - b. How do differing publishing houses/news companies in Queensland differ in their coverage of youth crime?
- 2. How does public framing of youth crime in Queensland (such as comment sections) differ from the media frames used in news articles?**

#### Methods

To understand how news outlets framed the issue of youth crime we selected **four cases of youth crime** that had occurred in the previous year in Queensland. For each of these incidents we collected **10 articles** published by **five news outlets** (ABC News, Brisbane Times, Bulletin, Courier Mail, and The Guardian). The **news comments** published on the on-site comment sections as well as those on article-linked reddit discussion boards for 19 articles were collected to understand how the Queensland public reacts and responds to news coverage of youth crime. Critical Discourse and Frame Analysis was used to analyse the articles and news comments.

#### Key Themes and Findings

##### The Focus on Extreme Deviance

From the case studies selected, most of the youth crime incidents that were reported within news media were those that resulted in **the death of a civilian**.

This is despite the fact that serious offences (such as assault, homicide, and offences against the person) account for the smallest portion of offences perpetrated by youth offenders in Queensland (8.8%) [5].

This focus on extreme deviance within published news media invites the public to view extreme cases of violence as the norm, which contributes to an **'othering' of youth offenders as extremely violent, brutal, and not deserving of soft or rehabilitative sentencing** [6].

**References:** <https://anglicaresq.org.au/about-us/advocacy/children-and-young-people/youth-crime-media/>

### The Absence of Identity Information

Most articles within the sample abided by the standards of journalistic neutrality and made no mention of the race or class of the youth offenders. Only one article referred to a youth offender's asylum seeker status, with the remaining offenders' race being entirely absent. A youth offender's class, whilst never explicitly mentioned, was alluded to via their living situation (most commonly their presence within a government-funded house).

This absence or minimal reference to race or class is not mirrored within the comment sample, with several comments expressing overtly racialised and classist ideations of youth criminals. Despite the minimal racial or class information provided within the news articles, commenters immediately indicate single parent households and race as leading causes of youth crime in Queensland.

This linking of youth criminals with single parent households and Indigenous youth within the comments despite there being minimal reference to these within the news articles aligns with the work of Graber (1980) that found readers tended to remember information that aligns with their own pre-existing views of criminals regardless of the actual depictions within news articles [7].

"Meanwhile, as 'Rome burns', Mr Albanese is dancing around the countryside trying to tell us that 'The Voice' will fix ALL our problems!" - Bulletin comment

"The reason that there are so many indigenous kids in jail is they are the ones committing crime" — Courier Mail comment

"I am all in favour of requiring a licence to have and raise children, and stronger penalties for youth crime." - ABC News comment

"The fabric of the nuclear family is no longer... Kids without both parents.. this is the root issue..." - Courier Mail comment

### Implications

News media serves as an informative source and influences the public's perception of issues. The criteria used to determine newsworthiness can contribute to the generation of fear. Certain media outlets frame the issue in a way that aligns with their political leanings.

This can impact how readers of each outlet comprehend what policy responses are considered acceptable and appropriate.

### The Research Team

Genevieve Ryan, Hanna Luise Möhrke, Patt Vana-Ukrit, Tana Allard, Victoria Gendle, and Xiaorong Gu.

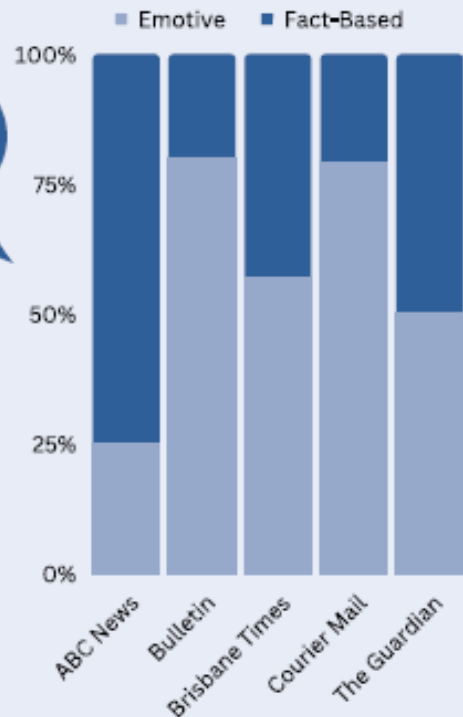
If you would like to receive additional information or have further questions, please contact us at [SO5C3201\\_Anglicare@unq.edu.au](mailto:SO5C3201_Anglicare@unq.edu.au)

### The Presence of Political Ideology

Highlighting the absence or presence of emotive language and its role within relevant articles provided insight into variations in media outlet framing of youth crime. Both fact-based and emotive language were identified across the articles and outlets.

The graph below conducts a comparison between fact-based and emotive language by exhibiting the proportion of articles from each outlet that use each language type. While fact-based language appeared more frequently in ABC articles (75% of ABC articles in the sample), emotive language was prevalent in Courier Mail articles (79% of Courier Mail articles), using terms like "horrific," "shocking," and "cold-blooded." The findings suggest that emotive language, in contrast to fact-based language, aims to shape the image of youth offenders and influence reader perspectives [8]. Linguistic choices and the supported framings might be influenced by the outlet's objectives and ideological perspectives.

Through linguistic analysis and comparison, the research intends to explore how outlets differ in their framings and to understand the rationale behind these variations. Such insights are applicable to comment analysis, considering that the absence or presence of emotive content might also influence the comments sourced from the outlet.



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