



TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (PNG) INC  
Lokua Avenue, Boroko, Section 54 Lot 31  
PO Box 591 Port Moresby, NCD Phone 323 7517/4917 Fax 323 4317  
E-mail: [yuambari.haihuie@transparencypng.org.pg](mailto:yuambari.haihuie@transparencypng.org.pg)  
Website: [www.transparencypng.org.pg](http://www.transparencypng.org.pg)

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# **TIPNG Media Trends Report Preliminary Statement**

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## **Introduction**

The theme for this year's World Press Freedom Day, which occurs annually on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, is "Journalism Without Fear or Favour". In line with this theme Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) is releasing a Preliminary Statement on our forthcoming report examining Media Trends in Papua New Guinea and the issue of bias in reporting on Governance issues amongst Print Media.

## **TIPNG Media Trends Report**

Mainstream newspapers have been criticised by citizens as being biased for some time now, with the intensity of feelings increasing in the lead up to the 2017 general elections and the 2018 APEC Leaders' Summit. The question that has been asked by the public is; *to what extent is there a bias in the media on governance issues, and more importantly, will it matter in the next major national event e.g. 2020 COVID-19 Emergency or 2022 Elections?*

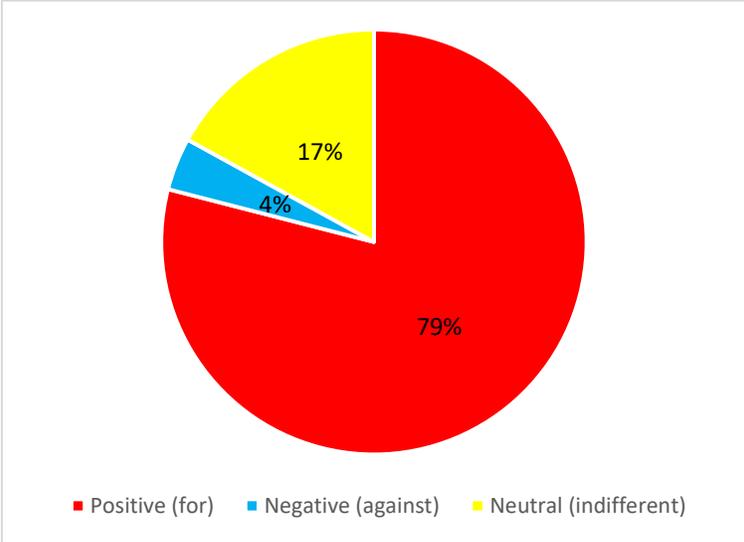
To address this question, TIPNG looked at media trends on how the daily newspapers here report on governance. In PNG, most people rely more on print media than social media for their daily dose of current affairs and information. For this reason, understanding local print media story choices and general trends is important. Examining the content of the stories on governance shows the strengths as well as weaknesses that the media can work on to improve the quality of news that informs PNG citizens, businesses and policy-makers alike.

Analysing the content of newspaper articles on; the 2017 National Elections, Politics, Law & Order, 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Summit, and Governance in general, we covered a one-year time period from June 2017 to August 2018.

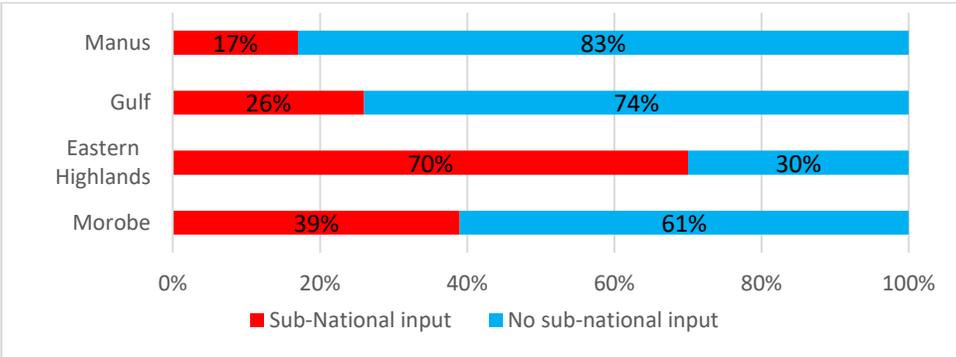
## **Preliminary Findings from TIPNG Media Report**

First, we looked at which governance topics the PNG print media write about most frequently, and which issues are overlooked. Then we examined whether there are different viewpoints expressed to enable a healthy societal debate on governance. Related to this, we assessed the extent to which a range of sources is used. Overall, we considered the evidence on bias in the newspapers in reporting on governance, and on the 2017 National Elections in particular.

This study by TIPNG on Media Trends is perhaps the first to provide Papua New Guineans an objective basis to evaluate claims of whether the media in PNG are fair.



For instance, one of the questions we examined from our data was the percentage of then Prime Minister, Peter O'Neill, related stories from positive, negative and neutral standpoints in both Newspapers which produced this pie graph (above), demonstrating an overwhelming deference to the incumbent Prime Minister.



Another area of interest examined in the report is less explicit biases such as when reporting on sub-national (at the Province, District, LLG level) governance issues whether voices from those areas are captured in reports. In this particular case we looked at the clear difference between provinces with larger populations (EHP & Morobe) and those with lower populations (Manus & Gulf) and it is clear that there is a disparity whether conscious or not.

**Threats to Media Freedom in PNG**

While PNG has enjoyed a relatively free media this has been under threat in recent years. For instance, the 2020 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), [World Press Freedom Index](#) assess PNG to have a press whose independence is 'endangered', with a corresponding drop of eight places in rank since last year. Interestingly one of the reasons cited by RSF for the diminished ranking is that "Journalists nonetheless continue to be dependent on the concerns of those who own their media."

The threats to PNG's Media Freedom are most obvious when it comes to major national events that require objective reporting in the public interest. Recent instances where the ability of the media to report have been hampered by other interests (often political) include; the 2017 national Election, the 2018 APEC Leaders Summit, the 2019 Political Transition and the 2020 COVID-19 Public Spending. Journalists in PNG are further disadvantaged by the lack of Right to Information (RTI) legislation to enable them to obtain public documents from the State. In the absence of a RTI law in PNG the media outlets are further beholden to political interests as sources of information – which further erodes public trust in news outlets.

### **Strengthening Media Freedom in PNG**

Findings like these are examined in the forthcoming report by TIPNG on Media Trends to be released later this year. It is hoped that the findings of the report will stimulate discussion about print journalism in Papua New Guinea and outline steps that can be taken to improve reporting on Governance issues, without 'fear or favour'.

TIPNG will continue to act in solidarity and support media professionals as they report on allegations of corruption and demand accountability on behalf of citizens in Papua New Guinea

TIPNG is a national chapter of the global transparency movement, with a mission to empower Papua New Guineans to act against corruption. Since TIPNG's establishment in 1997, we have worked with the media to ensure that the voices of citizens who value transparency and accountability are unrestricted and heard by those in positions of power. The role of a free media to maintaining democracy in Papua New Guinea cannot be overstated.

The quality and credibility of the news matters because the media can be a powerful force for change. Where it is able to effectively fulfil the roles of watchdog, gatekeeper and agenda-setter, the media can improve governance by raising awareness on social issues, enabling citizens to hold leaders and government to account, curbing corruption, and creating a civic forum for debate. It can also amplify the voice of marginalised and excluded groups, serving young, rural, and non-literate citizens across the country.

The media can be an influential force around elections, although impartiality of the media during electoral campaigns and after elections is difficult to achieve. Where electoral processes are flawed or outcomes are contested, the media can either exacerbate or help settle disputes, and can influence the likelihood election-related violence. To reach its potential, however, professional and ethical journalism standards need to be raised in the face of increasing political pressures.

*Authorised by:*  
*Ariane Kassman*  
*Executive Director*

*Media contact:*  
*Yuambari Haihuie*  
*Deputy Director – Policy & Advocacy*