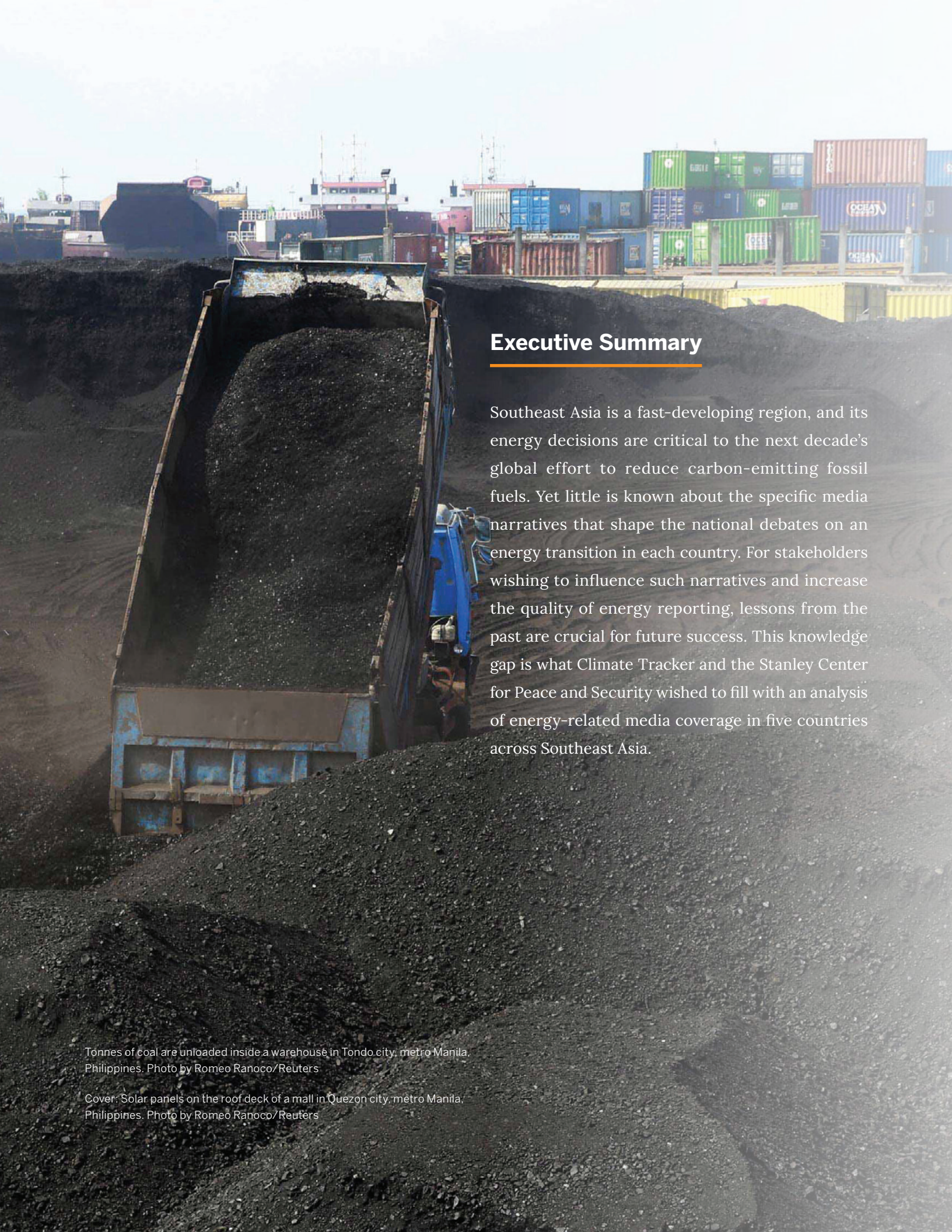
An aerial photograph of a cityscape. In the foreground, a large rooftop is covered with rows of blue solar panels. To the right, a man in a light blue shirt is leaning over a white ledge, looking out over the city. Below the rooftop, a multi-lane highway with several cars is visible. In the background, there are various buildings, including a tall construction crane and a telecommunications tower, under a hazy sky.

COAL AND RENEWABLE ENERGY REPORTING IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Angelica Y. Yang with Jason Paolo Telles
Climate Tracker Fellows



Executive Summary

Southeast Asia is a fast-developing region, and its energy decisions are critical to the next decade's global effort to reduce carbon-emitting fossil fuels. Yet little is known about the specific media narratives that shape the national debates on an energy transition in each country. For stakeholders wishing to influence such narratives and increase the quality of energy reporting, lessons from the past are crucial for future success. This knowledge gap is what Climate Tracker and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security wished to fill with an analysis of energy-related media coverage in five countries across Southeast Asia.

Tonnes of coal are unloaded inside a warehouse in Tondo city, metro Manila, Philippines. Photo by Romeo Ranoco/Reuters

Cover: Solar panels on the roof deck of a mall in Quezon city, metro Manila, Philippines. Photo by Romeo Ranoco/Reuters

This report on the Philippines is the first in a series commissioned by the Stanley Center and produced by Climate Tracker that will be copublished as part of “Fueling the Tiger Cubs: How Southeast Asia’s Media Is Covering Coal’s Last Frontier,” a multicountry media analysis led by young journalists from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Each of the Southeast Asian countries in our study has a unique media landscape with different challenges and opportunities for energy reporting. For the Philippines—a small archipelago with **coal contributing more than half of the total energy output**—narratives on coal and renewables are deeply influenced by a small number of **commercial media giants**. Thus, it was no surprise when we found that the vast majority of energy stories were told from a business frame.

However, important differences exist between the narrative priorities of Metro Manila-based heavyweights like *INQUIRER.net* and the *Philippines Star* and smaller outlets from the more remote Visayas islands and Mindanao. With the advent of digital media, independent news sites have begun to play a more active role, exemplified by the social news network Rappler, which began as a Facebook page and has grown into the second-largest online media platform in the country. State-owned players such as the Philippine News Agency (PNA) also contribute to the narrative, although they no longer hold such a monopoly as they once did under dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Two Filipino researchers, Angelica Yang and Jason Paolo Telles, examined more than 1,350 articles across eight news outlets from all the above categories. Here are their key takeaways:

- Electricity prices and power availability are major concerns of more than half of the energy stories.
- Although the Philippines is heavily reliant on coal, the narrative surrounding this fossil fuel tends to highlight its negative social impacts over economic benefits.
- Regional Mindanao and Visayas-based news outlets led the way in broadcasting communities’ daily suffering around major coal plants, while mainstream sources GMA News Online (GNO) and *Philstar.com* quoted from national environmental advocates and policymakers.
- Only the Manila-based *INQUIRER* stood out for going against this trend, running a considerable number of articles with a “coal remains indispensable” framing that cited sources such as the World Coal Association. This cannot be attributed to one single reason. However, an interview with one *INQUIRER* editor suggested that the paper rarely focuses on environmental impacts when reporting on energy.
- After the 2019 power outages, which saw coal plants unable to handle peak demand, we saw a narrative shift toward renewable energy within a national energy security framing. This narrative grew off increasing concern for electricity prices.
- We were surprised that in the 20 months studied, there were three times as many renewable energy stories as there were coal stories reported.
- Although geothermal has the biggest market share of all renewable technologies in the Philippines, solar power attracts the most media attention because it is a new technology with the **highest forecasted growth rate**.
- Manila-based commercial news outlets often frame solar as a lucrative investment for businesses and consumers.
- In Mindanao, where private solar investment is not as robust, *MindaNews* journalists take on critical locals-versus-government frames while discussing how government solar projects have not benefited the community as advertised. Interestingly, the environmental frame, when utilized, only receives secondary attention in most renewable energy articles.
- Compared to solar, geothermal is heavily underreported by commercial news outlets and most often receives attention from the state-owned PNA. PNA differs from other news outlets in its explicit emphasis of “development journalism,” which one correspondent describes as “articles that would help promote the programs of the government.” Geothermal development has been one such program since the late 1970s.
- From interviewing the authors of various energy articles, we found that journalists’ personal viewpoints could influence the choice of energy frame. Some journalists, including editors, view it as their duty to advocate for a clean energy transition in the Philippines through exposing the negative impacts of coal.
- Beyond that personal aspect, regional differences determine where journalists go for tips and quotes, with Manila-based outlets relying more on press releases and business leaders, while Visayas and Mindanao outlets get alerts from community members.
- The only news outlets that feature an environment section are the independent digital platform Rappler, the government-owned PNA, and the regional *MindaNews*. All the mainstream commercial outlets examined do not have either an energy or an environment section—potentially indicating ownership interest influencing editorial decisions. Some also do not specifically assign journalists to these topics. Thus, these journalists seldom dive deeper into the long-term, science-based environmental and climate implications of various energy forms, stopping at highlighting the obvious damages caused by coal to surrounding communities.



Methodology

Climate Tracker's media research included four key phases:

- Sampling.
- Content analysis.
- Framing analysis.
- Interviews with journalists.

The research was conducted by Angelica Yang, who examined coal and general renewable coverage with a focus on solar power, and Jason Paolo Telles, who studied the specific case of geothermal reporting. The time frame of interest for the research was January 2019 to August 2020.

1. Sampling

Yang sampled 1,329 online articles from commercial news outlets that shone a light on various coal, renewable energy, and electricity topics. Those outlets were:

- *INQUIRER.net*, the digital news version of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the country's top national newspaper.
- *Philstar.com*, the digital news version of the *Philippines Star*, also a top national newspaper.
- GMA News Online (GNO), the digital news division of the GMA broadcasting network.
- *SunStar Philippines*, specifically the Visayas networks.
- *MindaNews*.

News outlets *INQUIRER.net*, *Philstar.com*, and GNO are all based in Metro Manila and were chosen as representative of the broader national media coverage, while *SunStar* represented the Visayas region and *MindaNews* the Mindanao region. The stories were manually reviewed through online archives of the five media outlets and all news, features, and special reports about current events related to the topics of interest were encoded. Wire service stories, as well as public-relations stories or explicitly branded content, were excluded from the analysis.

In his supplementary research, Paolo Telles examined 42 articles about geothermal energy from:

- *INQUIRER.net*.
- GNO.
- ABS-CBN News Online, the digital news division of ABS-CBN and a top news website.
- Rappler, the Philippines' flagship independent online news site.
- Philippine News Agency (PNA), the official news agency of the Philippines government.

2. Content Analysis

For the content analysis, all Climate Tracker media researchers utilized a standardized **coding method** developed with the researchers' input. Using this coding method, they analyzed articles according to 22 parameters in five categories: Article Type, Thematic Focus, Broader Framing, Energy Literacy, and Sources Used.

3. Framing Analysis

A representative sample of 120 articles was then selected for a framing analysis. The researchers each selected a representative sample of all articles collected—80 of 1,329 articles for Yang and 20 of 42 articles for Paolo Telles—to conduct more in-depth framing analysis, which involved asking questions about the articles' choice of sources, source placement, and discursive strategies. Their framing analysis template can be found [here](#).

4. Interviews with Journalists

In total, 19 journalists were interviewed throughout this research. Yang interviewed 14 journalists, including editors, from the five media outlets she analyzed while Paolo Telles interviewed five. The interviewees were chosen based on the frequency of their bylines. Sources were asked about their experiences in writing energy stories and newsroom practices in their respective media outlets.



Angelica Yang | @angelicayang

Angelica Y. Yang is a multimedia reporter at *BusinessWorld*. In addition to being Climate Tracker's Media Research Fellow, she was its Journalism Fellow for the One Earth Program in 2020. Prior to that, she was a junior content producer at GMA News Online for several months.



Introduction

Over my three months as a Climate Tracker media research fellow, I conducted a mixed-method study that aimed to answer the question, “How did Philippine-based media outlets present energy issues related to coal and renewables from January 1, 2019, to July 1, 2020?”

After analyzing 1,329 articles and interviewing 14 media practitioners, it became clear that there has been a marked shift away from coal in the national and regional media discourse. However, renewable energy is mostly presented as a lucrative investment for power providers and consumers rather than a sustainable, long-term policy. Environmental frames for stories, when adopted, usually highlight the local impact of coal, while the need for climate change mitigation is explained in only eight articles.

These media narratives played out in a country still heavily reliant on fossil fuels: coal made up 44.5 percent of the national power generation mix as of 2015 and natural gas 22.9 percent, according to the [Philippines Energy Department](#). Geothermal contributed the largest portion of renewable energy at 13.4 percent, while hydro made up 10.5 percent, and solar 0.2 percent. If the country is to meet its own decarbonization goals, [an energy transition toward renewables](#) is clearly needed.

Although solar currently makes up a small percentage of the power output, it is seen as a fast-growing market and attracted lots of attention from *INQUIRER.net*, *Philstar.com*, and GNO—large media conglomerates that typically highlight business's interests. At these news outlets, energy articles are typically written by journalists who cover the business sector. For Mindanao and Visayas-based newspapers, however, communities' perspectives on energy projects are emphasized more by journalists who get news from local tipsters. Understanding such key differences is essential for stakeholders wishing to influence the media narrative surrounding an energy transition in the Philippines.

Discussion

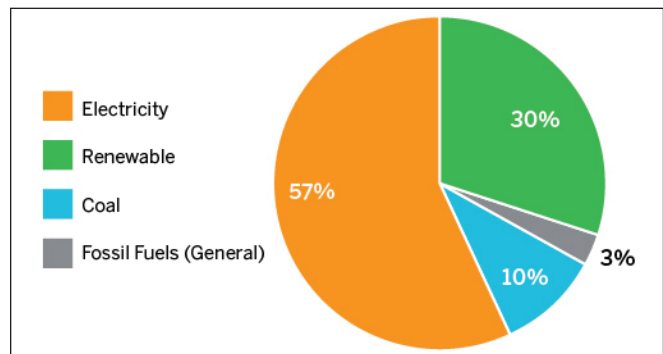
Quantitative Analysis: Story Types and Prevalence

Story type by content focus: High percentage of electricity stories

Most news outlets were interested in hard news electricity stories, which made up more than half (57%) of the total energy stories published in all five online media outlets. *INQUIRER.net*, *Philstar.com* and GNO—the three largest news outlets—often discussed electricity in terms of the rise or fall of energy prices, which directly affected power suppliers and consumers. These stories were most often based on press releases and statements of the Philippine Energy Regulatory Commission and the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines.

At left: Construction of a coal fired power plant in the Philippines. Photo by cpaulfell/Shutterstock

Topics covered in Philippine-based energy reports published from January 1, 2019, to July 1, 2020

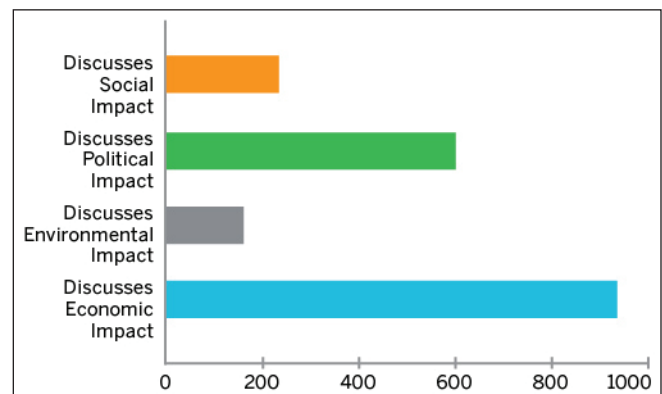


Luis Gorgonio, a GNO news editor, said stories about electricity usually focus on “rising power rates, poor services, the unfair percentage [50%] of electric charges from systems loss or pilfered electricity, and the complex charging scheme that most people don't understand.”

For regional outlets such as *SunStar* and *MindaNews*, the discussion about electricity usually revolved around electric cooperatives, which are privately owned, nonstock, nonprofit entities that supply power to their respective communities. Surprisingly, for the Mindanao-based *MindaNews*, electricity only ranked second in quantity after the newspaper's renewable energy coverage; the latter, at 21 stories, made up more than half of its total energy stories.

Story type by impact discussed: Economic impact dominates

Number of Philippine-based energy reports published from January 1, 2019, to July 1, 2020, that discuss various impacts



Of the published reports, nearly half discussed the economic [implications](#) of energy supply changes; these are mostly stories that focus on electricity rates, outages, and the general supply of and demand for power.

Many media practitioners, including Gorgonio from GNO and Gabriel Pabico Lalu from *INQUIRER.net*, believe that this is what their readers—all of whom are energy consumers—care most

about. Environmental impacts were discussed the least, after economic, political, and social impacts. This was confirmed by an anonymous editor at INQUIRER.net, who noted that the paper's energy stories rarely focused on the environmental impacts.

Qualitative Analysis: Common Energy Story Frames

Coal criticized as environmental and health hazard; overall reliability questioned

Although the environmental frame was not used as often as others, many of the stories that did utilize it were coal stories. Of the 167 coal articles analyzed, 103 (62%) framed coal in a negative manner as a “dirty energy source,” despite its contributing nearly half the country's power output. In making this claim, the reports, both local and national, heavily quoted from clean energy advocates, concerned citizens, and religious officials who highlight the destructive effects of coal in communities—although mainstream

outlets usually rely more on national figures of authority. Prominent clean energy advocates such as Gerry Arances from the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development were quoted in 46 articles—around half of all those that adopted an anticoal frame.

Other national figures of authority also contributed their voice in these critical reports. The influential Roman Catholic Church, which claims **86 percent of the population** as followers, has taken a strong stand against coal in the media. This is seen in 22 INQUIRER.net, Philstar.com, and GNO reports citing religious officials such as the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Carlos City Bishop Gerardo Alminaza, and the Mindoro priest Father Edu Gariguez.

For regional outlets, local government officials and communities living around coal plants are the loudest voices opposing coal.

One **report** by the SunStar Cebu emphasized the struggles of three communities in Barangay Toledo in living beside the Therna Visayas Inc. coal plant, which was emitting a foul stench. In this story, the energy source was framed as a health hazard.



Protesters organize against a 1,200-MW coal-fired power facility in Atimonan, Quezon Province, Philippines. Photo by 350.org/Flickr/
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>.

MindaNews, meanwhile, ran a **special report** that mentioned environmental activist and tribal leader Datu Victor Danyan, who was shot dead after he opposed a proposed coal mining project. In this story, coal was represented as a contested energy source with powerful backers, suggesting that opposition to coal could lead to grave repercussions for indigenous peoples.

This difference in sources quoted could be explained by how regional versus mainstream media outlets look for stories. Journalists from the regional *SunStar* and *MindaNews* regularly get story ideas from tipsters or citizen sources, in addition to prominent environmental groups or advocates, according to Ronald Reyes, *SunStar*'s Tacloban correspondent, and Malu Cadelina-Manar, a stringer for *MindaNews*. Cadelina-Manar said she would often look to “texters” or sources on the ground who would inform her about updates in the area.

Meanwhile, all the writers from *INQUIRER.net*, *GNO*, and *Philstar.com* said they relied more on press releases, press conferences, and an established network of authoritative voices in the public and private sector for news.

Within this group, *GNO* stands out for publishing 13 of 27 articles that covered coal plants that are not spared by outages when power reserves are low—perhaps because of the broadcasting channel's focus on electricity availability. Meanwhile, a *Philstar.com* **report** took it one step further and explicitly identified coal as a barrier to achieving national energy security. Using an economic framing that calls on nationalistic sentiments, it blames coal for making the Philippines dependent on other countries for its energy supply, as the nation **imports 75 percent of its coal supply**.

Climate mitigation angle broached by government official

Though many articles cite coal's environmental impacts and relevant climate treaties, only eight explicitly adopted a climate mitigation frame when discussing a need to reduce coal use. A notable example comes from *SunStar*'s Negros bureau, where the coal debate was centered on Governor Alfredo Maranon Jr., who actively opposed coal in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Negros governor signed an executive order that pushed for a coal-free province, which generated mixed reactions among politicians in the area. As this story dealt with regional politics, however, no major Manila-based news outlet picked it up.

Some articles framed coal as “good for the economy”

Although 62 percent of the 167 coal articles adopt a negative frame, 13 percent, or 21 articles, still portrayed that energy source as “good for the economy.” Nearly 40 percent of all procoal stories, however, come from one of the five media outlets, *INQUIRER.net*. Procoal articles generally push readers to assume that coal development is “inevitable” because it is cheap and cannot be phased

out in developing countries. Articles cite several new **coal plants** as well as statements from interest groups such as the **World Coal Association** to support this claim.

In fact, *INQUIRER.net* is the only publication among the ones examined that featured a statement from Michelle Manook, chief executive of the coal association, who said “coal greatly contributes to economic growth and everyday life.” The news outlet also published a large number of articles (34%) that, while promoting renewable energy, dismiss the possibility that it could completely replace coal in the goal of total national electrification.

Journalists' personal views affect coal story angle

Journalists' personal views could decide the coal story angle—an opinion expressed by two editors and one reporter interviewed. Victor Sollorano is a former senior news editor at *GNO* who edited a number of energy reports from January to December 2019. He said coal is “dirty and hazardous, and its extraction puts a great toll on Mother Earth, particularly open-pit mining.” Semiretired *Philstar.com* science editor Juaniyo Arcellana opined in an interview that the shift to renewables is “the natural order of things.”

Meanwhile, Ted Cordero, a *GNO* business reporter who wrote 132 energy stories from January 1, 2019, to July 1, 2020, argued that since coal is considered a dirty fuel in many countries, the negative framing of coal stories “is a conscious effort by journalists to call the attention of authorities to its adverse effects on environment and public health.”

Renewable energy criticized in regional media; framed as lucrative by mainstream outlets

Renewable energy story framing varies widely between the Mindanao and Visayas-based newspapers, which emphasize local communities' perspectives, and the Metro Manila-based newspapers, which mostly frame renewables as a source for profit.

As mentioned, renewable energy is the top energy topic for *MindaNews*, although the paper publishes much fewer stories overall than the Philippines' largest media houses, with only 40 energy articles compared to *INQUIRER.net*'s 330. Stories about local renewable projects account for more than half of these 40—many of them critical.

A reason might be the paper's interest in utilizing the locals-versus-government theme to cover government-backed development projects, exemplified by nine articles on renewables. This includes a lengthy report on how the government's Solar-powered Irrigation Systems, contrary to high expectations, failed local farmers and prevented growth.

MindaNews's three stories from October–November 2019 about the planned Mt. Apo geothermal plant provided more clear examples of the community-versus-government angle. Reporter Malu Cadelina-Manar explained that before going online, this geothermal plant had experienced opposition from several tribes, which

became a focus for her coverage. Eventually, phase 3 of the power plant was set aside.

For the Manila-based *INQUIRER.net*, *Philstar.com*, and GNO, meanwhile, renewable energy stories made up only about 30 percent of total energy stories published; most of those used the business frame to describe renewables as a lucrative investment for power suppliers like Aboitiz, MGen Renewable, and Vivant.

Meanwhile, there were 12 reports on foreign companies based abroad, as well as foreign companies with a local presence, that were seeking to invest in the renewable energy landscape in the Philippines. This is not surprising considering that Manila is the country's economic hub.

Reports often used an economic angle to shine a spotlight on local companies that were shifting to clean energy in efforts to **beef up their portfolio**—a phrase mentioned twice by *Philippine Daily Inquirer* business reporter Ronnel W. Domingo in his energy stories—as well as communities that were reaping the economic and environmental benefits from clean energy sources. In *Philstar.com*, energy stories featured local companies setting up new renewable plants around the country.

One mainstream media reporter and two mainstream media editors viewed renewables in a more positive light compared to

coal, expressing strong belief in the science that says renewable is sustainable and technological advances will lead to an imminent decrease in solar panel prices.

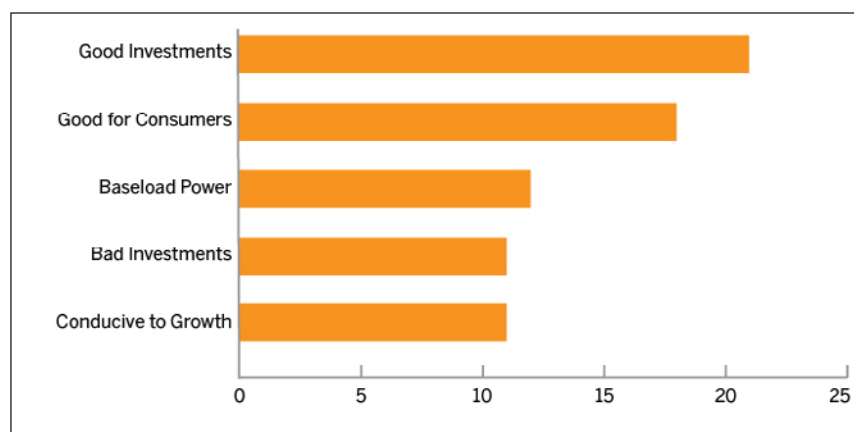
Sollorano, the former GNO editor, said renewable energy held much promise in the country's energy landscape, even as it was just growing out of its infancy. "MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] research showed the price of photovoltaic modules have dropped by 99 percent in the past 40 years or so. The study also hinted that solar could be the second-largest source of global electricity by 2050 after wind, accounting for 25 percent in total," he explained.

Solar Energy: A Major Source of Interest

Of all the renewable energy sources examined in this study, solar generates the most media coverage, despite contributing the least to the Philippines' current energy output. This one renewable energy type accounted for more than 50 percent of all the renewable energy articles published. Five dominant frames emerged when examining solar energy coverage. Ranked in order of prevalence, they describe solar as a good investment (21 articles), good for consumers to save money (18 articles), able to augment baseload power (12 articles), a bad investment (11 articles), and conducive to economic growth (11 articles). The frames were not mutually exclusive.



Five dominant frames in solar energy coverage



The 21 stories that presented solar as profitable for investors, typically published in mainstream newspapers, focused on firms that either invested in renewable energy or struck agreements with companies in efforts to “boost their renewable energy portfolio.” The most common sources in these stories were business representatives who talked about the economic and environmental impacts of renewable.

The 18 articles that portrayed solar as good for consumers depicted solar as cheap, going against the popular belief that coal and fossil fuels are the cheapest in the market. In a GNO report, a deal between Solar Philippines and Meralco, the largest electricity provider in Metro Manila, is said to have brought electricity prices for consumers to a record low. The 12 stories that depicted solar as an energy source that can augment baseload power focused on how adding solar to the national grid could lessen the risk of prolonged power outages.

In addition, 11 articles portrayed solar as supporting growth in remote areas—7 of which were published by regional newspapers. However, as there hasn’t been as much private investment in solar projects in these regions, these stories mostly focus on the pros and cons of development projects. In a MindaNews report, journalists examined a solar power project supported by the European Union that promised to provide household beneficiaries with a solar home system unit and livelihood projects that will greatly benefit indigenous peoples.

Commonly cited challenges preventing more solar growth were complicated approval processes from the Energy Department and high feed-in tariffs, according to MindaNews journalist Froilan Gallardo. Interestingly, difficulties in connecting the existing grid to solar power technology, its reliability, and its power-generation capacity compared to fossil fuels were not mentioned in any of the articles.

At left: A trader reads a newspaper as stock prices fall at the Philippine Stock Exchange in Manila’s Makati Central Business District. Photo by Erik de Castro/Reuters

Qualitative Analysis: Article Quality

Most stories explained difficult energy concepts clearly

All 14 media practitioners interviewed for the study considered the explanation of difficult concepts—such as the FIT-All, net metering, and the implications of various alerts issued by the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines—a hallmark of a good news story. Three-quarters of all articles that were examined sufficiently explained challenging energy concepts for their readers. However, the rest failed to thoroughly

define some technical terms, and 1 percent of all articles were full of jargon.

These incomprehensible reports, frequently found in the business sections of their media outlets, mostly talked about electricity generation charges or updates on power outages in the area, using technical language in showing how those issues would affect power suppliers and consumers. The authors assumed that their target audience was already familiar with the terms.

Most stories gave sufficient context and background

A sizable number of reports that were examined gave context on the subjects or policies that they were discussing. More often than not, these stories contained a brief overview of past events, provided background information on energy policies, or included hyperlinks in relevant keywords throughout the story.

The regional MindaNews, in particular, stood out for delivering significant context for its local readers. More than half of its articles gave relevant national and regional context for readers, while only 36 percent of the articles from other sources did so.

For example, a news story on the readiness of power transmission facilities that was written by MindaNews journalist Antonio L. Colina IV included explanations of the current power supply of the Mindanao grid and the Energy Department circular that announced formation of a task force that would ensure a steady supply during elections. Background information such as this helps readers understand the story as a whole.

Compared to other online media outlets, GNO published the most stories (51%) that gave no context. Several of these reports covered the power situation in Metro Manila, based on the red and yellow alerts issued by the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines and updates from Meralco. These articles generally featured quotes from only one source—either a business representative or an organization’s social media post.





Palinpinon Geothermal Power Plant in Valencia, Negros Oriental Province, Philippines. Photo by Mike Gonzalez/TheCoffee/Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported



Lava flows from the crater of the Mt. Mayon Volcano during a new eruption in Legazpi City, Albay Province. Photo by Romeo Ranoco/Reuters

COVERAGE OF GEOTHERMAL ENERGY: A CASE STUDY

By Jason Paolo Telles | Climate Tracker Fellow

As a country in the [Pacific Ring of Fire](#), the Philippines is one of the world's top producers of geothermal power, an important clean energy source. While coal dominates the Philippines' energy mix, geothermal currently makes up 13.4 percent of the total energy output, the most of any renewable energy. But how do the media cover the production, distribution, and utilization of this energy source? My research set out to investigate trends in media coverage of geothermal energy from January 2019 through August 2020.

Discussion

State-owned PNA does the most geothermal reporting, emphasizes environmental frame

In general, commercial online media companies rarely report on geothermal energy: each of the news companies analyzed in this research published an average of only 6.4 articles on geothermal energy projects from January 2019 through August 2020. The state-owned PNA had more articles on geothermal than all commercial outlets, with 30 percent more stories than the national average over 20 months.

Not only does PNA stand out in having had the most geothermal articles, it also most commonly used an environmental frame to write about this energy form. In fact, five of its nine reports on geothermal mostly talked about the need to shift to renewable energy for a sustainable Philippines.

Three main reasons could explain PNA's record. PNA-Dumaguete bureau chief Mary Judaline Partlow said that as a news agency, it entertains topics related to geothermal because renewable energy is "the trend" in the Philippines and the world. This belief could be attributed to the agency's journalists, some of whom, like Partlow and PNA correspondent Elvie Roman-Roa, think of environmentally conscious reporting as a form of advocacy.

The second reason for their record on geothermal is PNA's offices' proximity to geothermal power plants, with Partlow based in Negros Oriental and Roman-Roa based in Leyte. Both provinces host large geothermal plants of the Energy Development Corporation, the country's leading producer of geothermal and other forms of renewable energy.

The third and most compelling reason is the agency's championing of "development journalism," which, according to Roman-Roa, indicates "articles that would help promote the programs of the government." This view was shared by Partlow, but for her, "development journalism" meant the reportage of activities, programs, events, and projects, most of which are government initiated, related to local and national development. Development journalism has been one of the duties of PNA since its establishment in 1973 under Ferdinand Marcos's regime. This is evident in PNA's coverage of geothermal, which frames geothermal plants as development projects with national benefits.

Economic frame dominates in commercial news outlets

The dominant news frame used by Philippine commercial news websites is the economic frame, which treats geothermal energy as a business investment. This could be observed in 16 news articles by commercial news outlets, most of which are placed in the business or money sections of their media outlets.

Jon Viktor Cabuenas, news producer at GNO, explained this by saying that the renewable energy industry "is mostly backed by companies and corporations." Angela Baylon of GNO News, in an interview conducted for earlier research, claimed the economic frame is also due to convenience.

Kristine Sabillo at ABS-CBN said reporters assigned to the business beat are usually the ones who directly receive press releases and updates from the companies or business organizations themselves. Sabillo said "the reason why it's mostly business reporters who [report on energy] is because they're the ones who have the technical expertise to understand" terminology and information about the energy business.

There is no energy or environmental beat in the Philippines' leading commercial outlets, which could explain the lack of stories reported from an environmental frame. Even Sabillo, one of the most prolific producers of news on energy and the environment, is officially assigned to a "general assignments" beat, which means energy and the environment are not her main focus.

Scientific frame comes in the form of expert features

Only two news outlets—ABS-CBN and *INQUIRER.net*—used a science and technology frame during the period studied, and both focused these stories on the opinion of one prominent scientific expert. ABS-CBN published a feature article about a recipient of a research grant from the Balik Scientist Program of the Philippines' Department of Science and Technology and his view of the need for the country to fully shift to renewable energy, which includes geothermal. *INQUIRER.net*'s article, using a science frame, talked about a geologist's opinion that the country needs to "make a deal with China" in exploring and developing natural gas under bodies of water within Philippine territories. Here, geothermal is mentioned as a missed opportunity. The geologist added that

geothermal is "the best option at the moment" and emphasized the possibility of gathering at least "4,000 megawatts" of energy from all geothermal resources in the country.

Political frame features Duterte's meeting with ambassadors; local voices omitted

The political frame is only used when content producers reported on the meeting of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte with ambassadors where the representative from New Zealand expressed interest in having bilateral activities with the Philippines, including geothermal energy development. These reports were brief, however, as journalists only quoted a press statement from the office of the president.

In commercial and state-owned media, other stakeholders such as those residing in host communities of geothermal plants, as well as consumers of geothermal energy, were not interviewed. Cabuenas of GNO admitted this could be due to the fact that the whole GNO media operation is based in Metro Manila, though he said they need to do a better job as local voices to "offer another point of view on...the local [geothermal] industry."

PNA journalists also noted geographical constraints, with Partlow saying "the power plants are too far away, you cannot just go there anytime." She also said they do not have a vehicle that could take them to those communities. It is simply easier to contact the corporate communications officers of the Energy Development Corporation.

So we see that the reportage on geothermal energy in commercial news agencies in the Philippines is noticeably minuscule. Commercial news outlets are constrained by economic, logistical, and institutional factors. On the other hand, state-owned media have more access to government announcements and communities that are close to geothermal plants and companies—as well as a focus on development journalism.



Jason Paolo Telles | @jpaotelles

Jason Paolo Telles is Assistant Professor of Broadcast Communication at the University of the Philippines. He has many years of experience in broadcast and print journalism, having worked for many of the Philippines' top news outlets, including ABS-CBN, GMA, and *SunStar*.

Conclusion

Overall, an in-depth analysis of coal, solar, and geothermal energy coverage in the Philippines highlights how economic interests drive reporting from national news outlets such as *INQUIRER.net*, *Philstar.com*, GNO, and ABS-CBN—all of them commercially run.

This is the result of a reporting process whereby journalists, usually those assigned to the business beat, get news from power suppliers' press releases and conferences and then quote from company leaders for their articles. As a result of this relationship, climate change mitigation is rarely included as a key theme in most articles, even those that cite international climate change treaties and prominent environmental activists.

Solar power, with **the highest forecast annual market growth rate among all energy types in the Philippines (13.4%)**, generates the most media attention and is commonly framed as a good investment for power suppliers and investors.

Coal, with a forecasted growth rate half as large as solar but with a much larger share of the existing energy market, gets some positive coverage but is more often negatively framed for its environmental and social impacts.

Geothermal is barely covered in commercial outlets but receives more attention from the state-owned PNA as part of the government's development program.

A different picture appears when examining the regional newspapers in Visayas and Mindanao, *SunStar* and *MindaNews*. Situated farther from most Manila-based enterprises, journalists here rely more on community tipsters, stringers, and social media for newsworthy ideas and closely follow local complaints against coal as well as renewable energy projects. Thus, their articles sometimes question solar's benefits for the local community despite acknowledging its role in the country's sustainable future.

MindaNews, in particular, stands out as doing a good job of providing necessary context for readers to draw their own conclusion about various energy projects and policies. Despite publishing fewer energy articles overall, it prioritizes in-depth analyses of various energy types over simplistic hard news articles.

Research for this report was carried out under the guidance of Climate Tracker, a network of 12,000+ young climate journalists around the globe. This report is part of a regional media analysis commissioned by the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and produced by Climate Tracker.



About Us

The Stanley Center for Peace and Security partners with people, organizations, and the greater global community to drive policy progress in three issue areas—mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The center was created in 1956 and maintains its independence while developing forums for diverse perspectives and ideas. To learn more about our recent publications and upcoming events, please visit stanleycenter.org.



About Climate Tracker

Climate Tracker is the largest youth-based climate journalism project in the world. We train and competitively empower young people around the world to influence their national debates about climate change, and publish their ideas in national media. We send the most impressive young people to international conferences where they can have a direct influence on decision makers and get a hands-on experience in shaping national and international policy. ClimateTracker.org.

