

A group of people, including a man in a yellow shirt and several women, are gathered on a rooftop. In the background, there are rows of solar panels and a tall building. The sky is cloudy.

Fueling the Tiger Cubs: Challenges and Action Points for Energy Reporting in Southeast Asia

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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.

This cross-country study was led by 10 young journalists in Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia, who interviewed 99 editors and other journalists covering the energy sector and analyzed more than 2,700 stories published from January 2019 to July 2020. For each of our research teams, the task was not only to assess how its country's energy decisions are being reported but to look inside the region's biggest national and local newsrooms and uncover how and why the media cover energy stories the way they do.

In this report, we aim to reflect on the biggest challenges and opportunities identified by these researchers. In a media landscape covering eight mainstream media languages and an incredibly diverse range of regulatory frameworks, there is never going to be a singular solution to improving energy media coverage across the region.

What we can do, however, is identify some of the key national challenges that came out in this research and highlight what each country's journalism community believes may help to overcome them. To support these findings, we hosted participatory stakeholder engagement sessions across [the Philippines](#), [Vietnam](#), and [Indonesia](#), as well as a regional consultation in November 2020. From this consultation process, we received incredible feedback, which was incorporated into our action plan design. If you would like to assess whom we consulted across the region, please refer to the annex.

Barriers to improving or changing energy coverage exist and persist for many reasons. However, we believe that regardless of the shifting political landscape across the region and growing limitations in media freedom, independence, and financial viability, there are tangible opportunities to positively shape how one of the most important regional energy debates in the world is playing out.

Project Overview

Though sometimes monolithically viewed as one of the world's fastest-developing regions, the five tiger cub countries in Southeast Asia harbor much diversity of peoples, cultures, and media landscapes. In order to capture an accurate snapshot of energy reporting across such a diverse region, it was important for us to design a project that would include and empower young journalists and media analysts in each country to reflect on their own national industry. After a rigorous selection process and a two-week online research training, Climate Tracker and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security recruited 10 young media practitioners to work with us as media research fellows across Southeast Asia.

- Indonesia: [Ari Ulandari](#), [Cherika Hardjakusumah](#)
- Malaysia: [Ili Nadiyah Dzulfakar](#)
- The Philippines: [Angelica Yang](#), Jason Paolo Telles
- Vietnam: [Nguyen Nguyen](#), [Mi Hoang](#)
- Thailand: [Sippachai Kunnuwong](#), [Wirada Saelim](#), [Kadesiree Thossaphonpaisan](#)

Over the course of three months, Climate Tracker's 10 research fellows examined more than 2,700 articles and interviewed 99 journalists in order to answer the question, "How do Southeast Asia's leading news outlets frame coal and renewable energy development, and why?" Their research method consisted of quantitative content analysis using [our standardized coding sheet](#) and framing analysis using [our standardized template](#). For more information on the methodology of our research, consult the "Methodology" section of our [regional report](#).

A cross-country comparative analysis of their national findings together with regional consultations with stakeholders yielded a number of specific challenges and action points, which will hopefully provide specific ideas for those working on clean energy and climate issues in the region to take forward. Given the urgent need to lower emissions in the region by shifting away from coal, we hope that these action points spark discussion, collaborations, and ultimately change in these critical next few years.



National Challenges and Action Points

Indonesia

Indonesia is **the leading global exporter of thermal coal**, with some of the largest **proven coal reserves in** the world. How this reliance on coal correlated with dominant energy frames in the media was a question of interest for our researcher, **Ari Ulandari**.

Over the course of three months, Ulandari examined 350 articles from seven news outlets in Indonesia: *Kompas*, *Tribunnews*, *Liputan 6*, *Okezone*, *Sindonews*, *detikNews*, and *Kumparan*. She also interviewed 14 journalists from these outlets as well as others. Her work was supplemented by that of **Cherika Hardjakusumah**, our case study researcher, who looked at the specific case of Indonesia's reporting on the omnibus law, which would deregulate the coal mining sector. Hardjakusumah sampled 40 articles across three outlets: *Kompas*, *Tempo*, and *Bisnis*.

Based on their research, 67 percent of Indonesia's 175 coal articles from January 2019 to October 2020 framed the energy source positively, the most of all the tiger cub countries. Such articles dismissed environmental concerns about coal plants by citing "clean coal" technologies. On the other hand, there was limited understanding of renewable energy technologies, with nearly half of sampled articles merely discussing them in the abstract.

In terms of journalistic practices, a number of Indonesia's leading media conglomerates, such as **MNC** and **CT Corp**, have stakes in coal mining. Such financial ties may influence the choice of frame for energy articles, a notion acknowledged by two journalists interviewed. In general, there is a severe lack of source diversity across Indonesia's media industry, with more than half of energy articles in our analysis featuring quotes from only one source.

For more key findings, read our national report on Indonesia's energy coverage [here](#).

1st Challenge: Lack of Coal Articles That Contextualize the Issue for Indonesia

Through her interviews with journalists, Ulandari found that most were aware of coal's environmental impacts. However, the only articles in her sample that criticized coal were translations of international wire stories. In other words, mainstream journalists rarely examined coal plants and mines' impacts on the local environment in Indonesia.

For example, *detikNews* ran an article that **cited research from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air on pollution tied to coal consumption in China** but failed to mention the same findings concerning Indonesia. In our national consultation webinar, there was a consensus that lack of publicly available data and mainstream newsrooms' wariness in broaching critical narratives on coal were reasons why journalists did not feel confident writing about coal's local impacts.

● Action Point: Grants for Investigative Projects on Indonesian Coal

Our Indonesian researchers found that newer, digital platforms offer more space for bold reporting with less management oversight, as exemplified by *Kumparan*, Indonesia's first collaborative journalism platform. However, such sites typically lack the funding to run larger projects that involve heavy data collection. Our consultation webinar in Indonesia suggested that **offering grants for independent organizations and journalists to pursue months-long projects would not only result in well-researched articles that highlight and critique coal's impacts on Indonesia, they could create more-compelling news products and catalyze more-contextualized narratives in mainstream outlets as well**.

Journalist and Internews trainer Dewi Layla Sari further noted that such grants should also support collaborative work between journalists and social media figures to create products that would generate user engagement. "We need to use as many as possible creative tools provided by digital media and to break through some old traditional journalism spells and rules which are not really relevant," she said.

In our regional consultation, Kitty Bu, former Reuters reporter and global renewable energy lead for strategic communications at the European Climate Foundation, brought up the case of coal misinformation in Indonesia as an example of why supporting investigations on coal plants is necessary. "In Indonesia, there's a high volume of reporting around the ultrasupercritical technology around coal," Bu said. "That in itself is a very easy piece to bust as a myth if [journalists] look into the ultrasupercritical technology there. ... There's a lot of this knowledge and capacity that could really be brought up around the reporting in order to make our newer topics with an old system work."

2nd Challenge: Enthusiasm for Renewables, but Low Literacy

In her quantitative content analysis, Ulandari found that 98 percent of 175 renewable energy articles were framed in a positive light. However, they discussed renewables in the abstract because renewable energy is still seen as new or unfamiliar in Indonesia, with few concrete developments in recent years. An editor from *Kompas* online, Erlangga Djumena, said renewable energy “has limited sources [for journalists to cite/interview], because it is still rare. ... Not only the readers, the journalists are sometimes confused.” Because of this lack of understanding, it is difficult for journalists to dive deeper into a specific renewable energy source, to adequately cover new or prospective renewable energy projects or policies, and to craft stories that familiarize readers with the practical applications and benefits of cleaner alternatives to coal power.

● Action Point: Easy Explainers in Local Languages

Create brief and easily understandable explainers on renewable technologies, with infographics and visualizations to help journalists envision how renewables work, where they could be developed in Indonesia, and how to find more information on them.

In the context of Indonesia, these explainers would be especially useful for solar, wind, and geothermal, the renewable sources that have the most potential for growth in the country.

Arpan Rachman from Internews emphasized that such explainers should include a source list of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), activists, and local community leaders. This would also foster more information exchange between journalists and civil society that could encourage a green transition in the energy sector.

Freelance journalist Nurul Qamari also indicated in the national and regional consultation process that he had difficulty finding information on how renewables could be applied on a household scale, information that would be useful in framing human-interest stories. Additionally, he noted that he doesn’t “know any information about institutions” that can provide such knowledge and training for journalists. This could be rectified with easy explainers widely distributed within Indonesia’s journalist networks.

3rd Challenge: Energy Policy Debates Overly Politicized

The Indonesian government recently passed an omnibus law for COVID-19 recovery that streamlined businesses’ processes for obtaining coal mining permits—in effect promoting coal production in the country. Our researcher Hardjakusumah found that although the bill was highly controversial, most criticisms were directed at political issues such as the lack of legislative transparency rather than the environmental and human impacts of coal mining and coal-fired power itself.

● Action Point: Training on the Environmental Impacts of Energy Policy

Media training on energy and mining policy would be helpful for journalists wishing to cover the impacts of the omnibus law as well as better analyze any energy policy that might be up for debate in the future. The need for this training was found in our journalist interviews as well as in the consultation process.

Reporter Moh Badar Risquallah emphasized that it is important for journalists to understand the potential environmental impacts of proposed energy policies before they happen. “[The aim is to] change people’s minds by adding more coverage of environmental issues that are rarely exposed by the mainstream media or national media in Indonesia,” he said. “With this coverage, we want to provide information that environmental issues are very important and must have the same portion as other issues [in policy discourse], not only when there are [negative] cases.”



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Malaysia

In the past two years, an opposition coalition **obtained and then lost power in Malaysian government**, after six decades of one-party rule. As a result, the country has seen incredible changes in the energy and media policy space, which resulted in shake-ups in energy reporting as well. To find out the dominant energy frames in the media, our Malaysian researcher, Ili Nadiah Dzulfakhar, examined 344 energy articles across six outlets: the *Star*, the *New Straits Times*, the *Edge*, the *Malaysian Reserve*, *Malaysia Kini*, and *Free Malaysia Today*. Additionally, she interviewed 14 journalists from these outlets as well as others.

Nadiah's research revealed that Malaysia's leading media outlets were nearly evenly split in their portrayal of coal, with 46 percent of articles framing the fossil fuel positively and 40.7 percent framing it negatively. However, three-quarters of articles supporting coal development did so by exclusively quoting from business representatives and industry insiders.

For renewable energy, positive frames clearly dominated, making up 87.5 percent of all renewable energy articles. If we exclude big hydro from the mix, the positive frame was even more overwhelming, at 99 percent. In general, however, there was a lack of cross-technology comparison. Articles discussed renewables and coal in isolation rather than critically examining a transition from existing coal use to more renewables.

For more key findings, read our national report on Malaysia's energy coverage [here](#).

1st Challenge: In-Depth Articles Mostly Written by Expert Columnists

The most in-depth articles on energy and climate issues in Malaysia that presented criticisms of government policies were opinion pieces written by a few veteran columnists such as Mangai Belasegaram, a member of the Clean Energy Wire network. Staff writers, on the other hand, expressed a lack of knowledge and confidence in covering energy and climate critically, according to Nadiah's interview analysis. Limitations to article framing also included newsrooms' emphasis on revenue and article views, which may prevent journalists from using the climate angle often, as it is deemed to be less "click-baity."

● Action Point: Mentorships and Partnerships between Columnists and Staff Writers

Facilitate mentorships between veteran columnists and staff reporters at news outlets, especially younger or early career journalists. Mentorships could be complemented with support from energy, environment, and climate communication experts. Interviews with journalists indicate that this process could also result in more critical cross-technology comparison, which is currently lacking in Malaysia's energy coverage.

Our stakeholder discussion with Gurmit Singh from the Center for Environment, Technology and Development, Malaysia, and Nithi Nesadurai from the **Environmental Protection Society Malaysia** revealed that stakeholder NGOs are aware that most in-depth energy stories are written by guest contributors. They would like to support mentorships between contributors and staff writers so that more of the latter realize the importance of the energy-climate nexus as well.

Additionally, our stakeholder discussion with the Third World Network in Malaysia revealed that mentorships could help staff writers understand energy within the broader climate policy and multilateral climate negotiations framework, an underreported story that is relevant for Malaysia and other countries in the Global South.



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The Philippines

For the Philippines, an small archipelago with **coal contributing 44.5 percent of the power capacity**, narratives on coal and renewables are deeply influenced by a small number of **commercial media giants**. However, unlike Indonesian media conglomerates, which also own subsidiaries in coal mining, Filipino outlets have been more critical of coal given the **devastating effects of climate change that the country witnessed in the past two years**.

To evaluate energy reporting in the Philippines, our main researcher, Angelica Yang, sampled 1,329 articles on coal and renewables from five outlets: *INQUIRER.net*, *Philstar.com*, GMA News Online (GNO), *SunStar Philippines*, and MindaNews. Meanwhile, our case study researcher, Jason Paolo Telles, sampled 40 articles about geothermal energy in *INQUIRER.net*, GNO, ABS-CBN News Online, Rappler and the Philippines News Agency (PNA). Their combined research revealed that although each outlet tells energy stories from different perspectives, all were similar in framing the energy future of the Philippines as renewables rather than coal.

Out of the 167 coal articles analyzed, 103 (62 percent) framed coal in a negative manner as a “dirty energy source,” while solar energy was predominantly framed as a high-growth sector and a lucrative investment. Other important human-interest stories like renewables as baseload energy and job creation within the framework of a just energy transition remained underreported. Geothermal, as a more “traditional” renewable technology with a great deal of potential but slower growth in the Philippines, generated lukewarm media coverage.

For more key findings, read our national report on the Philippines’ energy coverage [here](#).

1st Challenge: Human-Interest Stories Still Lacking Despite Clear Climate Impacts

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 outlets also do not specifically assign journalists to cover environment, energy, or climate-related stories with a focus on the human impacts, even with the Philippines being among the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change. Thus, journalists seldom delve 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.

● Action Point: Energy and Climate Change Journalism Guide

Develop and distribute a guide for Filipino journalists covering energy and climate stories specifically. Through her analysis process and conversations with national stakeholders, Yang believes that an energy and climate journalism guide would greatly enhance their reporting capacity. Though there are currently many opportunities for Filipino journalists to participate in environment, climate, and energy training courses and workshops, a guide would help them synthesize and contextualize the complex and interrelated topics of energy and climate change.

Journalist and trainer Imelda Abaño from **Internews Earth Journalism Network** said that as **one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world**, the Philippines would be “a perfect laboratory of stories to humanize the impact of climate change and different energy options.”

During our national consultation webinar, Leia Margate, journalism lecturer at the **University of the Philippines**, added that journalists currently adopt “an out-of-sight out-of-mind type of coverage over news on energy, renewable sources, or geothermal sources.” Our researcher believes that an energy and climate framing guide that emphasizes human-interest narratives on energy could solve this problem by reminding journalists to be on the lookout for stories, instead of reactively waiting for big energy or climate news to happen.

2nd Challenge: Nonsolar Renewable Technologies Underreported

Through her quantitative content analysis of 399 renewable articles in the Philippines, Yang found that more than 50 percent of renewables reports focused on solar power. This represented a missed opportunity in geothermal, wind, and small-hydro reporting, especially for geothermal, which **still has much unrealized potential in the Philippines**. To paint a better picture of the renewable energy landscape in the Philippines, journalists need to report more often and more deeply on these nonsolar renewables as well.

● Action Point: Online Minicourse on Nonsolar Renewable Technologies

Design and deliver an online course on nonsolar renewables to Filipino journalists covering energy, business, environment, and technology news. Media organizations could collaborate with experts from NGOs and academia to develop such a course, which would effectively contextualize lesser-known renewable sources and their development pathways in the Philippines for reporters covering energy, business, environment, and technology news.

Riedo Panaligan, president of the Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology, indicated in our consultation process that the center would be interested in contributing to the development of a training program for journalists, drawing from institutional knowledge of designing such programs for energy planners and community leaders.

Such a course could also turn technical papers on nonsolar renewables into visual and creative knowledge products online (infographics, videos, etc.) that can easily be understood and referenced by journalists whenever needed.

3rd Challenge: Polarization of Article Frames Based on Region

Our quantitative content and framing analysis in the Philippines found that important differences existed 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. This stems from differences in editorial practices, where the former group dominantly quoted from national environmental advocates and policymakers, while the latter relied more on community-based stringers and tips. On **the issue of government-backed solar-powered irrigation systems**, for example, national outlets promoted the system's benefits while local outlets highlighted how they did not truly serve farmers as advertised.

● Action Point: National Dialogue between Energy Journalists in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao

Given the differences in editorial process and article frames seen in different outlets on the same topic, our research and consultation process in the Philippines suggests that **facilitated dialogue between journalists from different regions and backgrounds could bring about more in-depth and inclusive reporting in the nation's leading media outlets**. In the Philippines, this event could contribute to the development of collaborative reporting opportunities for urban and community-based journalists.

Abaño noted that such national journalists' dialogue and training would bring more opportunities to journalists in the countryside, who typically "don't receive as much training on energy reporting." That way, community-based journalists could also better share their experiences and perspectives, which are often sidelined or undervalued.



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Vietnam

Vietnam differs from all other countries in our analysis in that virtually all of the country's media outlets are owned or managed by the ruling Communist Party. Yet incredibly, even when the government threw its support behind coal with the [Power Master Plan 7](#), journalists at state-owned news outlets still critiqued coal power for its environmental impacts.

Our researcher Nguyen Nguyen examined 268 articles from six news outlets—the mainstream [Tuoi Tre Online](#), Dan Tri, VnExpress, and Zing News, as well as the economic outlet *Saigon Times* and weekly *Nguoi Do Thi*—to find that Vietnam's national media has largely framed renewables, not coal, as the country's energy future. Similarly, case study researcher Mi Hoang looked at 40 project-specific articles on two coal plants and two renewable projects to find that the coal plants received largely negative coverage, [while articles on renewable projects displayed a rosier tone](#).

Sixty-eight percent of 78 coal articles responded to NGO and community members' concerns about coal's impacts on the immediate environment, especially through fly ash and bottom ash. However, a growing number of articles tended to neutralize these concerns by citing new “clean coal” technologies. While [65 percent of articles on nonhydro renewables](#) (solar, wind, biomass) portrayed them positively, a growing number of articles also raised concerns about solar energy, such as inadequate grid development and battery recycling challenges.

For more key findings, read our national report on Vietnam's energy coverage [here](#).

1st Challenge: Misinformation on Coal

Although 68 percent of coal articles in Vietnam framed this fossil fuel in a negative light, the remaining positively framed articles spread misleading information on coal, driven by industry perspectives. A popular narrative, most often seen on Dan Tri and Zing, was that coal can be “clean” with the introduction of technologies such as the electrostatic precipitator and low-NO_x coal and SO_x removal systems.

A Dan Tri journalist who wished not to be named said his outlet quoted coal companies on their clean technology to offer a “balanced viewpoint,” believing that it is a journalist's job to “present all sides and perspectives to ensure fairness.”

● Action Point: Coal Explainer in Vietnamese Citing Expert Sources

While there may be bigger forces at play, there is also a lack of commonly trusted information available on energy topics. **Simple explainers, similar to the one previously proposed for Indonesian reporters but for coal energy in Vietnam, could be beneficial to journalists in this country.**

The explainer should be regularly updated to include information such as a timeline of coal development in Vietnam, definition of key coal concepts, and contextualization of energy terms like GW and KWh for Vietnam as well as the region. Such a document would act as an easy reference for all wishing to read reliable information on coal, as well as dispel the myth of false balances.

The idea of a one-pager or one-stop shop for “key facts/data/numbers/costs to help ensure accuracy” for journalists was first brought up by [Peter Ford](#), an environmental communications expert in Southeast Asia during our consultation webinar in Vietnam. Webinar attendees agreed this kind of resource could be useful to journalists if the information is trusted.

Nga Huyen Nguyen, a lecturer at the Academy of Journalism and Communications, emphasized that coal energy explainers should be sent to journalists as well as “heads of media organizations, so they can better understand how to frame and execute energy articles.” That way, journalists will have more editorial support when pitching articles that critically examine claims made by the coal power industry.

2nd Challenge: Wind Power Underreported

Journalists lack sufficient technical and contextual knowledge to report on less-visible energy stories such as the lack of wind energy development in Vietnam despite the country's high potential for wind energy growth. Through Nguyen's interview analysis, she found that journalists who have been covering energy for more than five years as well as early career journalists all agree that technical knowledge in energy reporting, especially when it comes to lesser-reported energy technologies, is a big challenge to their job.



● Action Point: Field Trips to Wind Projects

From our research and consultation process in Vietnam, we found that **journalists could benefit from field trips and reporting grants to visit and report from wind energy sites in Vietnam. Apart from providing first-hand experience of wind projects, these field trips should integrate panels with local communities, as well as domestic and foreign experts on wind energy**, to help journalists develop new sources and improve their understanding of the technical, economic, environmental, policy, and human-interest aspects of wind energy.

Energy expert and guest contributor Anh Thi Nguyen considers wind energy to be the most underreported energy story in Vietnam. He attributes this lack of coverage to the fact that policies have failed to create a strong business case for wind. Additionally, journalists cannot just see wind projects around the city the way they can see solar panels. Therefore, bringing journalists to wind power sites could be an effective way to address this lack of exposure.

For Vietnam in particular, field trip opportunities could be more impactful than online training. Compared to journalists in other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnamese journalists (except for very young ones) are not as accustomed to online engagement due to technological barriers as well as the fact that few events in Vietnam moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating little incentive for them to adjust.

Additionally, consultation webinar attendees agreed that “[newsroom] training might not be as effective if journalists are distracted by the work environment, writing on deadline, or experiencing editorial pressures to write a certain way.” Hence, field trips could yield better outcomes.

3rd Challenge: Articles Point Out Problems with Solar Policy but Lack Solutions

In our quantitative content and framing analysis, we found that Vietnam leads Southeast Asia in installed solar energy capacity as well as depth of news coverage. While mainstream outlets in most other countries only superficially cover solar as a lucrative investment, 27 percent of the 117 solar articles in Vietnam over the past two years **discussed specific policies and remaining challenges**, such as lack of transmission infrastructure and recycling plans. The challenge in this country, therefore, is not in improving journalists’ understanding of solar energy but rather a lack of solutions-focused journalism when it comes to addressing remaining barriers.

● Action Point: Solutions-Journalism Grants for Journalists Covering Solar

Given this situation, we recommend that solar energy journalism training and grants in Vietnam focus on incentivizing journalists to frame their reporting around solutions to specific challenges, rather than generally promoting existing solar energy projects. An example of this would be a competition that rewards journalists with the most innovative solutions-journalism pitches, perhaps drawing from experience across the region.

During our consultation webinar, freelance journalist Le Quynh emphasized that such grant opportunities should target younger journalists in the country who may be passionate about the environment but don’t know where to look for innovative energy-transition angles. Quynh also said any grant opportunities should include “training for journalists in negotiating skills to help them gain support from editors” in pitching new solutions-journalism stories.



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Thailand

Of all the Southeast Asian countries analyzed, Thailand is unique in never having relied much on coal. With its **considerable offshore gas supply**, the country has derived half of its energy capacity from gas, while coal makes up only 18 percent of the total output. Notably, this balance will further tilt in favor of gas in the coming years.

In order to capture a comprehensive picture of energy coverage in Thai media, our lead researcher, **Sippachai Kunnuwong**, analyzed 341 articles across five online outlets: *Khaosod*, *Thai Rath*, *Krungthep Turakij*, the Standard, and Green News Agency. His work was supplemented by two case studies.

The first was completed by Wirada Saelim, who examined coverage of the coal moratorium in southern Thailand on TV channels CH3, Thairath TV, PPTVHD36, MCOT, and Thai PBS. The other case study was researched by Kadesiree Thossaphonpaisan, who looked at 40 articles on biomass in *Krungthep Turakij*, *Prachachat Turakij*, Manager Online, Thai ProPublica, Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism, and the Isaan Record.

Overall, our research found that Thailand's energy future is not framed in terms of coal development. Only seven of 37 coal-focused articles framed coal as a necessary addition to Thailand's energy mix. The term "energy transition" is sometimes appropriated to refer to a transition from coal to more gas use. Meanwhile, renewable alternatives receive varying levels of support from the media. Solar is universally framed as a lucrative investment, while biomass development is supported by national outlets but criticized by independent or regional outlets.

For more key findings, read our national report on Thailand's energy coverage [here](#).

1st Challenge: Energy-Transition Frame Misused to Describe Coal to Gas

In Thailand specifically, our researchers found via their framing analysis that an energy-transition frame has been misused to describe a transition from coal to natural gas, as opposed to transitioning away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy sources. This trend could be explained by the fact that Thailand is a country with the most natural gas potential in the region. Though less carbon intensive than coal, gas is by no means a "clean" energy source, being responsible for **methane leaks, flaring** and a host of other **environmental issues**. These topics are not touched on in any of the eight articles that frame gas as "clean."

Interviews with 28 media practitioners in Thailand showed that half still considered topics related to an energy transition difficult to grasp, as energy intersects with several other issues ranging from the economy to the environment and business. Despite having been on energy reporting trips and offline training in the past, these journalists still struggle to find a holistic summary of energy-transition issues when they need a quick reference for their articles.

● Action Point: Online Courses on Energy Transition and Network Building

Based on these research results, journalists could benefit from **online courses aimed at helping journalists better define energy-transition pathways in Thailand—what they are and are not—and how these pathways interact with other issues related to the economy, business, and the environment**. Additionally, a **miniresearch project on gas coverage in Thailand would be useful as a lead up to this online course**, since the scope of this research project did not specifically look at gas reporting trends.

Piyaporn Wongruang, 46, veteran environmental news reporter and news editor for *Krungthep Turakij*, said offline training is now viewed in Thailand as "old school" and not as useful as learning and networking opportunities in the digital space. The benefits of an online course or community, he said, would be a living platform for journalists to reference whenever they need information or expert perspectives on energy-transition issues.

On the topic of gas, four journalists interviewed said advertising revenue from petroleum giants have made it difficult for them to report on this energy source critically. However, more understanding of gas's potential environmental impacts by editors and reporters should help the media frame this topic more accurately within the framework of an energy-transition narrative.

2nd Challenge: Energy Seen as Technical, Uninteresting

Eight journalists said energy news is still not "properly" covered by the news outlets, especially outside of the business and politics news desks. The only human impact stories focus on community struggles around power plants, rather than every citizen's long-term stake in energy development, including as it relates to carbon emissions that contribute to climate change. *Krungthep Turakij* reporter and



editor Wongruang said this might stem from some media outlets' agendas to focus on "news that sells." Wongruang portrays the energy sector as "overlooked" by the news industry—even though it serves as a base for the shift toward a new and more sustainable economy.

There seems to be a negative feedback loop whereby journalists not investing time in writing engaging, in-depth energy stories results in readers feeling "distanced" from this topic. Analysis of energy-related news articles revealed that only 25 percent of the reports incorporated people's needs and their daily lives into the news, compared to the 45 percent that discuss conflicts and activism and the 96 percent that feature money and investment components.

● Action Point: Grants for Explainer Podcasts and Vlogs

As mainstream coverage in Thailand rarely connects energy issues with the concerns of everyday people, innovating new approaches and media products could better inform the public about the human elements of energy issues and increase alternative media narratives related to the sector. Our Thai researchers suggested **grants for a combination of digital techniques and solutions journalism as an integrated approach that could empower journalists and outlets to present energy news differently, with an eye toward deepening public interest in a topic everyone has a stake in.**

This approach is backed up by journalists interviewed as part of the research. *Thai Rath's* editor Orapin Yingyongpathana said the media should show the many ways people can be involved with the energy sector to prepare them in a time of rapid energy transition. News about innovations such as renewable power storage systems and distributed solar power should be highlighted in multimedia platforms, drawing connections to daily lives at a personal level.

As suggested by an editor of the Standard—a Thai digital-only outlet—digital tools like podcasts, short-form video storytelling, and explainer videos can raise audience interest in energy issues. In addition, multimedia journalists can produce stories about solutions to energy issues and compelling innovations in ways that resonate with news consumers—making the topic more relatable and accessible.



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Summary: Regional Challenges and Action Points

While we found unique challenges and action points in each of the five countries analyzed, some cross-cutting challenges stand out through the whole region that we believe could be addressed by regional initiatives as outlined below.

1st Challenge: Business Interests Dominate Energy Reporting; Journalists Quote from a Small Number of Sources

Across all five tiger cub countries, our quantitative analysis showed that **more than half of energy articles sampled** were listed under the economy/business section and exclusively quoted from government or business sources. Our interviews of 99 journalists also confirmed this finding, as in all countries sampled, nearly all journalists who frequently cover energy **said they started doing so as part of the economy desk**.

Our quantitative content analysis showed that there was a lack of source diversity in energy articles across the region. In fact, **70 percent of all energy articles quoted exclusively** from representatives of businesses, the government, and/or state-owned organizations. In the Philippines and Vietnam, where more articles quoted from NGOs, nearly half of such articles quoted one dominant clean energy NGO. At least 20 journalists we interviewed attributed this to the fact that business reporters develop a small number of sources they go to for every energy story.

● Action Point 1: Energy Trainings for Business Journalists

Design energy-climate media trainings specifically targeting business reporters, where they are encouraged to develop more-inclusive and diverse article frames and connect with international energy reporting networks to better contextualize their coverage. These training opportunities could also result in guidebooks on energy reporting to be distributed to young journalists.

In our regional consultation webinar, all four panelists present—*Imelda Abaño*, *Internews Earth Journalism Network*; *Sven Egenter*, editor in chief, *Clean Energy Wire CLEW*; *Tammy Mayer*, communications manager, *REN21*; and *Kitty Bu*, former global renewable energy lead for strategic communications at the *European Climate Foundation*—agreed that business reporters' dominance in energy reporting is not a negative trend if these reporters have the tools necessary to contextualize energy issues.

"We want to make sure that in this economic story we have the right context," Egenter said. "If journalists understand that, they'll know why [an energy transition] is not just some environmentalist sideshow."

Similarly, Bu emphasized that focusing on economic stories isn't the problem; the problem is not doing that properly. "There is so much [for energy reporters] to dig into, in not thinking of energy as a commodity but more as a service, in thinking about the jobs we can create and not thinking solely from the supply side, in thinking of energy beyond only the power sector and into multiple sectors," she said.

● Action Point 2: Regional Database for Diverse Expert Sources

Develop an online, open, and independent information hub for the region that is maintained by a committee of journalists and NGOs in each country. The tools and resources this database can provide are limitless, but priorities would include diverse expert sources on different aspects of the energy issue, international and local energy reports/wires, terminology glossaries, visual mapping of coal power plants, and renewable energy projects across the region in terms of their installed capacity, financing, and case studies of good energy reporting. The information hub should prioritize bringing on staff writers for mainstream outlets as hub members. Training opportunities for database users could also be offered as a complement to this information resource.

This action point was succinctly proposed by our Malaysian researcher, *Ili Nadiyah Dzulfarkhar*, and agreed upon by all researchers who worked on the project. The consultation webinars also highlighted how such a database, if properly used and updated, would be of great benefit to journalists in each country.

In the Vietnam consultation webinar, *Saigoneer* Editor in Chief *Michael Tatarski* noted that "a database of reliable people to talk to, whether from NGOs, official agencies, industry, etc." could help local journalists and foreign correspondents working in the region.

Expert sources in the database could also be other media practitioners who have experience communicating about energy in the region. *Tammy Mayer*, of *REN21*, brought up the idea of a "community of communicators" around renewable energy that could facilitate the one-on-one connections necessary for broader article frames in each country.

2nd Challenge: Local Citizens' Voices Underrepresented

In our content and framing analysis, we found that few energy stories adopted a human impact frame across all the tiger cub countries. Community leaders and individual citizens were quoted in less than a fifth of the articles in all countries analyzed, even though they have a great stake in local and national energy development. Their voices were particularly underrepresented in the largest mainstream news outlets, which are mostly based in a country's capital or urban areas—far from energy plants or other sites where impacts (positive or negative) are experienced by local citizens firsthand. While journalists located in communities near energy sites are able to interview sources in person, the geographical distance between these communities and mainstream newsrooms in cities limits the inclusion of local perspectives in energy coverage.

● Action Point: Grants for Collaboration between Urban/Community-Based Journalists

Facilitate collaboration between journalists from different areas within a country and across Southeast Asian countries. This could be done through energy reporting grants to specific newsrooms and/or to journalism support organizations to foster collaboration between city-based journalists and local journalists/stringers to coreport stories on local energy projects and their community impacts.

This action point was suggested by three of our research fellows from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. In our regional consultation, this action point also received the most votes among webinar attendees responding to the question, “Which of the following actions could best support journalists covering energy issues in Southeast Asia?”

Journalist Moh Badar Risqullah, a member of the Society of Indonesian Environmental Journalists, reiterated that collaboration opportunities for urban and community-based journalists is “quite relevant,” with several cases of this model being successful in the past.

Journalist Hong Van Pham Thi from Vietnam's Tuoi Tre added that since energy is often a transnational story, grants should also facilitate collaboration between journalists based in many Southeast Asian countries.

3rd Challenge: Independent Journalists Underresourced

In all countries studied, independent journalists produced some of the **most innovative and in-depth reports on energy**. Similarly, niche, independent news outlets with subscription-based or nonprofit funding models were the ones that published high-quality energy reporting. However, these outlets and journalists typically struggle to secure the minimum level of funding to produce quality journalism and to attract a larger mainstream readership, undercutting their chances at long-term financial viability.

● Action Point: Multimedia Aggregator Website for More Visibility and Financial Support

Create an aggregator website to republish and promote outstanding energy stories in the region and their authors. This site could also feature diverse audience engagement platforms for journalists to experiment with, such as podcasts and videos.

This idea first appeared in **the Vietnam consultation webinar**, where participants concurred that it was difficult for them to find engaging, in-depth energy reports online and that an aggregator website would make this process easier. An aggregator site might also be able to integrate a subscriber-supported model similar to the content platform Patreon, creating an outlet especially for young energy and climate journalists to share and be paid for their work.

Other consultations also highlighted the need for young journalists to increase their visibility and obtain financial support through independent platforms that would not limit the framing of their stories based on ownership or advertising interest.

Thai researcher Sippachai Kunnuwong said he believes multimedia elements on such platforms would play a critical role in enhancing audience engagement. Kunnuwong cited an editor of the Standard in saying that “digital tools like podcasts and short-form video storytelling can raise the audience's interest in energy issues.” Kunnuwong would like to see support for a combination of digital techniques and solutions journalism as an integrated approach for news outlets and individual journalists to create more-compelling and diverse energy news across the region.



Road Map: What Action Steps Should Be Pursued in 2021 and 2022?

With 4 regional and 12 national action points, which actions have the most potential to address key challenges in energy reporting across Southeast Asia? From our consultation processes in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines, we propose the action plan below.

In building the action plan, we considered several principles to help us prioritize action steps over a 2-year timeframe:

Guiding principles

- Prioritize steps that address the most critical issues (misinformation, lack of source diversity).
- Concentrate on actions not dependent on COVID-19 developments, since it is still unclear how big a role the pandemic will play across Southeast Asia in 2021 and beyond.
- Work with, not against, the capacity of current media support organizations.
- Focus on lowest cost or most feasible with highest impact.
- Build on what already exists and how it currently operates, rather than trying to reinvent the media landscape.

While some actions can be pursued and accomplished in 2021, other actions may require more time or a phased approach, with steps stretching over 2021 and 2022.

● Actions for 2021

1. Set up regional database of experts and communicators.
2. Develop multimedia aggregator websites to support independent journalists/outlets.
3. Create and publish explainers on coal facts (and common points of misinformation) from trusted sources.
 - › Prioritize:
 - Indonesia, Vietnam (explainer should be in local language)
 - Malaysia, the Philippines (explainer should be contextualized but can be in English)
4. Carry out a mini media analysis on gas in Thailand's media coverage.
5. Develop and launch online courses on nonsolar renewables, prioritizing:
 - a. Wind (all countries)
 - b. Geothermal (Philippines, Indonesia)
 - c. Small-scale hydropower (Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia)
6. Organize a national dialogue of energy journalists: experience-sharing event.
 - › Especially useful for the Philippines, and likely other places as well

● Actions Phased-In Over 2021-2022

1. Design and deliver energy trainings for business reporters across the region.
 - › Focus on policy/context/human-interest frame
2. Offer grants for journalist teams to promote:
 - a. Collaboration between urban and community-based journalists
 - b. Collaboration between journalists in different Southeast Asian countries
 - c. Collaboration between business and environment beat reporters
3. Offer grants for multimedia energy reporting (podcasts/vlogs/visualizations).
4. Publish energy reporting guides for each country across the region, with slightly different focus for each:
 - a. Indonesia: Focus on coal policy impact
 - b. Vietnam: Focus on renewable energy
 - c. Malaysia: Focus on solar development
 - d. Thailand: Focus on gas-to-renewables transition
 - e. Philippines: Focus on energy/climate impact



Final note

With only three months to conduct our research, we realize that each of the five national reports and the regional report produced as part of our *Fueling the Tiger Cubs* media analysis are limited in scope and do not reflect the experience of all reporters and editors in each Southeast Asian country. Climate Tracker has worked closely with journalists across the region for the past five years and is well aware—as is the Stanley Center—of the incredible diversity of the region’s media industry. However, this research was led by young national journalists working within each of the focus countries and did include interviews with close to 100 editors and other journalists who regularly report on energy issues across the region. While there were natural differences, we believe that the trends with respect to common challenges deserve collective reflection, experimentation, and action.

More research would certainly help sharpen the action plan outlined above. This additional research could come in the form of national surveys of reporters and editors on key challenges and missed opportunities in their reporting. The data generated by such large-scale surveys would provide even more insight into the experiences of journalists covering energy at the regional and national levels and help stakeholders dive deeper into the root causes of the problems identified.

However, we are confident that our action plan captures a series of real opportunities to improve energy reporting in the region. It is our hope that the action points outlined will act as a blueprint for partners, funders, and analysts to further engage in the region. We also hope this will be done in a manner that supports and empowers local reporters rather than generalizing or overlooking the incredible potential in the region’s media future.

Thank you.



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Annex: Stakeholders Interviewed or Consulted across the Region

Country	List	Main Research
Indonesia	Journalists interviewed	<p>Rochimawati—Editor, <i>Viva</i></p> <p>Deasy Indriwati—Reporter, <i>Inidata</i></p> <p>Musthofa Aldo—Reporter, <i>Liputan6</i></p> <p>Anonymous editor, <i>detikNews</i></p> <p>Anonymous reporter, <i>detikNews</i></p> <p>Pebrianto—Editor, <i>Liputan6</i></p> <p>Anisatul—Reporter, <i>CNBC</i></p> <p>Athika Rahma—Reporter, <i>Liputan6</i></p> <p>Virna—Editor, <i>ANTARA</i></p> <p>Afut Syafril Nursyirwan—Reporter, <i>ANTARA</i></p> <p>Rully Ramli—Reporter, <i>Kompas</i></p> <p>Ema—Reporter, <i>Kumparan</i></p> <p>Lusia Arumingtyas—Reporter, <i>Mongabay Indonesia</i></p> <p>Meidella Syahni—Reporter, <i>Mongabay Indonesia</i></p> <p>Dani Jumadil Akhir—Editor, <i>Okezone</i></p> <p>Intan—Reporter, <i>Republika</i></p> <p>Norman—Reporter, <i>Jakarta Post</i></p> <p>Erlangga Djumena—Editor, <i>Kompas</i></p> <p>Retno Sulistyowati—Reporter, <i>Tempo</i></p> <p>Ichwan Susanto—Journalist, <i>Kompas</i></p> <p>Ridwan—Reporter, <i>Kontan</i></p> <p>Aris Prasetyo—Reporter, <i>Kompas</i></p> <p>Edna Tarigan—Reporter, <i>Associated Press</i></p>
	Stakeholders engaged	<p>Umar Husain—Reporter, <i>5NEWS</i></p> <p>Dewi Layla Sari—Internews</p> <p>Arpan Rachman—Earth Journalism Network</p> <p>Moh Badar Risqullah—Society of Indonesian Environmental Journalists</p>



Country	List	Main Research
Malaysia	Journalists interviewed	<p>Mangai Balasegaram—Columnist, the <i>Star</i></p> <p>Anonymous reporter, the <i>Star</i></p> <p>Shannon Teoh—Editor, <i>New Straits Times</i></p> <p>Areeshya—Reporter, the <i>Edge</i></p> <p>Anonymous reporters, the <i>Malaysian Review</i> (4)</p> <p>Anonymous reporters, the <i>Edge</i> (3)</p> <p>Anonymous reporters, Free Malaysia Today</p> <p>Anonymous reporters, Malaysia Kini</p> <p>Anonymous reporters, Malaysian SME Media Group</p>
	Stakeholders engaged	<p>Nicole Fong—Klima Action Malaysia</p> <p>Meena Raman—Third World Network</p> <p>Evelyn Teh—Third World Network</p> <p>Gurmit Singh—Center for Environment, Technology and Development, Malaysia</p> <p>Nithi Nesadurai—Environmental Protection Society Malaysia, Climate Action Network Southeast Asia</p>



Country	List	Main Research
Philippines	Journalists interviewed	<p>Gabriel Pabico Lalu—Reporter, <i>INQUIRER.net</i></p> <p>Anonymous editor—<i>INQUIRER.net</i></p> <p>James Relativo—Content Producer, <i>PhilStar.com</i></p> <p>Patricia Lourdes Viray—Editor, <i>PhilStar.com</i></p> <p>Juaniyo Arcellana—Semiretired Editor, <i>PhilStar.com</i></p> <p>Ted Cordero—Reporter, GNO</p> <p>Luis Gorgonio—Editor, GNO</p> <p>Vic Sollorano—Former Editor, GNO</p> <p>Carlo Lorenciana—Reporter, PNA</p> <p>Jun Aguirre—Stringer, <i>SunStar Cebu</i></p> <p>Ronald Reyes—Correspondent, <i>SunStar Tacloban</i></p> <p>Nicko Tubo—Editor, <i>SunStar</i></p> <p>Malu Cadelina Manar—Stringer, MindaNews</p> <p>Froilan Gallardo—Reporter, MindaNews</p> <p>Jon Viktor Cabuenas—Reporter, GNO</p> <p>Kristine Sabillo—Reporter, ABS-CBN</p> <p>Robert Jaworski Abaño—Editor, <i>INQUIRER.net</i></p> <p>Mary Judaline Partlow—Reporter, PNA</p> <p>Joann Villanueva—Reporter, PNA</p> <p>Rom Dulfo—Editor, PNA</p>
	Stakeholders engaged	<p>Imelda Abaño—Internews Earth Journalism Network</p> <p>Riedo Panaligan—Center for Renewable and Sustainable Technology</p> <p>Pats Oliva—Health Care Without Harm SE Asia</p> <p>Renee Karunungan—Loughborough University</p> <p>Leia Margate—University of the Philippines</p> <p>AC Dimatatac—Photojournalist</p> <p>Denise Fontanilla—Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities</p> <p>Joseph Pilapil—local government employee</p>



Country	List	Main Research
Vietnam	Journalists interviewed	<p>Trung Chanh—Reporter, <i>Saigon Times</i></p> <p>Lan Nhi—Reporter, <i>Saigon Times</i></p> <p>Anonymous reporter—<i>Tuoi Tre</i></p> <p>Anonymous reporter—Dan Tri</p> <p>Lê Quỳnh—Freelance journalist</p> <p>Ngoc An—Reporter, <i>Tuoi Tre</i></p> <p>Uyen Nguyen—Reporter, Zing News</p> <p>Thong Nguyen—Reporter, VnExpress</p> <p>Anonymous reporter—VnExpress</p> <p>Xuan Nguyen—Reporter, VnExpress</p> <p>Phi Tuan—Editor, <i>Tuoi Tre</i></p> <p>Le Anh Tuan—Expert Columnist, Can Tho University</p> <p>Anh Thi Nguyen—Energy expert, guest contributor</p>
	Stakeholders engaged	<p>Sen Nguyen—Freelance journalist</p> <p>Michael Tatarski—Saigoneer</p> <p>Hong Van Pham Thi—Reporter, <i>Tuoi Tre</i>; Reporter, VTC14</p> <p>Han Nguyen—SIHUB</p> <p>Peter Ford—Environmental Programme Responsible, H&M</p> <p>Đào Duy Doãn—Journalism student</p>



Country	List	Main Research
Thailand	Journalists interviewed	<p>Piyaporn Wongruang—Editor, Bangkok Biz News</p> <p>Nutnicha Donsuwan—Reporter, Bangkok Biz News</p> <p>Orapin Yingyongpathana—Editor, <i>Thai Rath Online</i></p> <p>Pratch Rujivanarom—Editor, Green News Agency</p> <p>Nicha Wachpanich—Reporter, Green News Agency</p> <p>Pornpimol Yampracha—Editor, <i>Khaosod</i> online</p> <p>Nakarin Wanakijpaibul—Editor, the Standard</p> <p>Anuchit Kaiwijit—Reporter, the Standard</p> <p>Afnan Abdulloh—Reporter, PPTV</p> <p>Panisa Aemocha—Reporter, Voice Online</p> <p>Tatikarn Dechapong—Editor, Voice Online</p> <p>Witoon Permpongsacharoen—Mekong Energy Ecology Network</p> <p>Krai Prommi—Former reporter, Thairath TV</p> <p>Chadarat Phokathanawat—Former reporter, Thairath TV</p> <p>Afnan Abdulloh—Reporter, PPTVHD35</p> <p>Pitiporn Praomatooros—Journalist, PPTVHD36</p> <p>Pongmeth Longseng—Reporter, Thai PBS</p> <p>Aruchita Auttamapokin—Editor, Thai PBS</p> <p>Chaibancha Roopkom—Editor, MCOT</p> <p>Montri Udomphong—Reporter, CH3 Thailand</p> <p>Yui Waranya—Editor, ThaiPublica</p> <p>Anonymous editor—Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism</p> <p>Hathairat Phaholtap—Journalist, Isaan Record</p> <p>Bow—Reporter, Voice TV (online)</p> <p>P'Tei—Reporter, Sarakadee</p>
	Stakeholders engaged	<p>Chalefun Ditphudee—EarthRights International</p> <p>Tara Buakamsri—Greenpeace</p> <p>Pai Deetes—International Rivers</p>



Other Stakeholders

Sven Egenter—Editor in Chief, Clean Energy Wire CLEW

Tammy Mayer—Communications Manager, REN21

Kitty Bu—former Global Renewable Energy Lead, Strategic Communications, European Climate Foundation

Neel Kamal—Journalist, India

Dhana Marcandu—Mindscape

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.

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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.

