

# Policy Brief

## National Integrity System Assessment Bangladesh

### MEDIA



TRANSPARENCY  
INTERNATIONAL  
BANGLADESH

*Social movement against corruption*

## Media

The media in Bangladesh has been growing steadily since the 1990s, despite that half of the country's population is unable to read and too poor to own televisions and other advanced communication tools. In addition to growing diversification, there has been a significant development in the media's outlook and its focus on governance issues. Admittedly, media reporting and debates now are freer and more open, the analyses more sharp and relevant, and the presentation more attractive to the audience at large. Nonetheless, the media in Bangladesh experiences difficulties at different stages of the country's political history. The regulatory framework, ambiguous and restrictive at the same time, effectively constrains media freedom on pretexts of national security, official secrecy, and contempt of court amongst other things.

The media, being largely owned by big business houses, has become politicised over the years evident from the contents and analyses of the reports that are often overtly biased in favour of one party or the other. Media is also often found to represent in their reporting particular business interest and even unhealthy competition with each other exacerbated by multiplicity of the nature of business in which media owners are involved. This essentially clouds the objectivity of the media and raises questions regarding its independence. The absence of effective self regulatory mechanisms erodes the accountability and integrity of the media. While the media, particularly private owned ones, are vocal regarding corruption of public officials, government irregularities, and other contentious issues, it also exercises a degree of self-censorship for fear of backlash by the government and political parties.

## Strengths

- Proliferation of media outlets -- modernisation, technological advancement and institutional capacity development.
- Whistle-blowing through proactive coverage of corruption and other weaknesses in governance.

## Weaknesses

- Low wages, lack of incentive and training on ethics and integrity.
- Inadequate academic, analytical and technological skills of media personnel.
- State run media monopolised by govt.
- Media independence curtailed by
  - indiscriminate use of libel laws, cancellation of license /closure
  - dependence on govt. sponsored advertisements
  - media ownership by corporate/vested interest groups with partisan political bias
  - poor internal governance
- Lacks transparency in terms reporting, funding, and operations.
- Press Council largely dysfunctional. It lacks credibility and financial resources, has limited jurisdiction and is hostage to political manipulation.

## Recommendations

- The media must be free from the influence of the government, partisan politics, and other vested interested groups. The space for free media must be enhanced and protected.
- Clear and coherent policy and legislation must be adopted to help democratise and bring discipline to the media sector.
- There must be a transparent and logically coherent licensing regime for the media.
- The media must develop independent and voluntary codes of conduct affirming fair, balanced and accurate journalism.
- Legislation should provide for an independent body to guide and manage the public service broadcasting in radio and TV networks.



## About Policy Brief Series

One of the key strategic areas of TIB's research has always been the institutions of democracy and specialized pillars of governance and accountability, which constitute the National Integrity System (NIS), a collective of institutions and practices that are crucial to maintaining integrity and accountability in government, non-government and private sector. The NIS in Bangladesh broadly consists of the following institutions: Parliament, Executive, Judiciary, Public Administration (bureaucracy), Local Government, Police (law enforcement agency), Comptroller and Auditor General (supreme audit institution), Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, National Human Rights Commission, Information Commission, Political Parties, Civil Society, Media, and Business.

TIB has conducted a series of research, surveys and diagnostic studies on many such institutions, by which it has not only created demand, but also catalysed a number of significant legal, institutional and policy changes. Against this background, this policy brief series attempts to diagnose and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the NIS in Bangladesh and recommend implementable measures to strengthen these institutions.

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This policy brief draws on *National Integrity System Assessment Bangladesh 2014* available at: <http://ti-bangladesh.org/nicsa/2014/en/>

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