

Leveson Editorials: Newspapers anxious over Inquiry's outcome



In an analysis of national newspaper editorials covering the Leveson Inquiry, Noelle De Guzman finds an increasingly critical press at the tail end of the Inquiry.

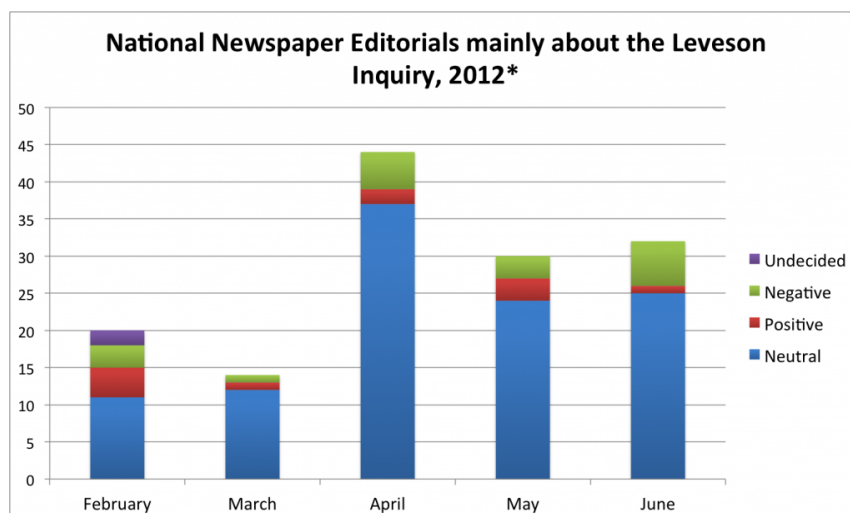
Staff-authored editorials on the Leveson Inquiry published in June, which amounted to 33 opinion pieces in total, show newspapers' growing concern over the possible outcome of the probe into press standards as Lord Justice Leveson prepares to make his own recommendations after hearing evidence for more than eight months.

While acknowledging the need for tougher sanctions for the sector, *The Independent* also cautioned against the introduction of guidelines that would ultimately serve to fence in press freedom. Should it base the parameters of engagement between the press and politicians solely on the phone-hacking scandal, the Leveson report, it warned, could inadvertently sap media's role in fostering political debate. *The Daily Mirror*, in the leading article, "Rupe the whirlwind: Cameron's judgment exposed as fatally flawed in Leveson interrogation," expressed greater unease over the matter, remarking that the entire newspaper industry should not be punished for the misdeeds of a Murdoch paper. Amidst the range of proposals that now sits on Lord Leveson's desk, *The Guardian's* Dan Sabbagh expects more difficult times ahead as the Inquiry struggles to produce a regulatory template that is agreeable to all parties. The lack of cohesion among industry players, *The Independent* observed, threatens to delay reform unless Leveson can come up with a better plan—a solution that, argued *The Times*, would itself fail to generate consensus should it come in the form of a Press Law.

Waning support for the Inquiry was conveyed in various ways, with *The Independent's* John Rentoul noting that it has begun to distract attention away from David Cameron's economic policies, and *The Times* claiming that the proceedings, which have dragged on for too long, put too much emphasis on the ties between public officials and News Corp executives. More important, however, was the explicit call for Lord Justice Leveson to address the issue of

cross-media ownership: Seeing Rupert Murdoch's decision to split News Corp as precursor to a re-launch of his BSkyB bid, *The Independent* questioned the conditions which allowed dominant media to gain so much influence over political decisions. *The Guardian's* Alan Rusbridger, in a piece entitled, "The overwhelming case for plurality," recognised that a thorough review of the press ownership structure is well beyond Lord Leveson's remit, but also stressed that it must nevertheless be dealt with if the Inquiry is intent on remodelling the self-regulatory system.

In early June, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Independent* found a common voice in decrying David Cameron's refusal to have the independent adviser on ministerial code rule on the appropriateness of Jeremy Hunt's involvement in the frustrated BSkyB deal. Amidst Cameron's efforts to dodge a proper parliamentary investigation into public officials' misdemeanour, they likewise concluded that the Inquiry, despite its flaws, has succeeded in unearthing a web of collusion between the press, politicians and the police. Triggered by more



revelations of chummy texts between Rebekah Brooks and the prime minister, newspapers again agreed on one thing towards the end of the month: The seemingly harmless Inquiry that Cameron unleashed to sniff into the conduct of the press has ended up biting him the hardest.

**Based on a key word defined sample of staff authored editorials in the following newspapers for the months shown: the Daily Telegraph, the Guardian, the Times, the Independent, the Financial Times, the Daily Mail, and the Mirror.*

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