

# Free, responsible media is about public interest AND public trust

 By [Michelle Solomon](#)

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Media responsibility and public trust in the media are similar to the adage of the chicken and the egg. But it's not so much a question of which comes first, but rather that the one simply cannot exist without the other.

The post-Polokwane years have seen a rise in threats against media freedom in South Africa. And those petitioning for a media appeals tribunal and the Protection of Information Act frequently [cite bad journalistic behaviour](#) as a good reason for state regulation. Consequently, the South African media has been filled with rhetoric decrying state regulation of the press.

The main reason for a free media, the media argues, is its critical role to protect the "public interest" and uphold democracy. The watchdog role of the press is fundamental, as is the belief the media is the only institution with the power to fulfil such a role. This "elevates the press to the highest rung on society's organisational chart and anoints it as the public's representative," writes Lee Bollinger, Columbia University president and freedom of speech scholar.

Stephanie Craft argues that if the media has special constitutional protections, then "it is not unreasonable to suggest that the press likewise has special, corresponding duties". Craft referred to the World War II Hutchinson Commission, or "[The Commission on Freedom of the Press](#)", which was convened in 1947 to assess the role of the media in society.

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