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## Watching Our Words

Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and Rear Admiral (Ret) Voreqe Bainimarama's FijiFirst party is poised to lead the country in the next four years.

Picture: MADS ANNEBERG/Republika Magazine

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■ Continued on PAGE 2

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# Watching Our Words: *Perceptions of self-censorship and media freedom in Fiji*

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*Ricardo Morris*

*Monograph Series Editor: Dr David Robie*



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# Watching Our Words: *Perceptions of self-censorship and media freedom in Fiji*

RICARDO MORRIS

## ABSTRACT

Ricardo Morris, a journalist and Thomson Reuters fellow from Fiji, has studied the perceptions and practice of self-censorship among journalists from his country in the years following the military coup in December 2006. He focused particularly on the period after the 2014 general election that returned Fiji to democratic rule. In his research paper, Morris examines how willing Fiji's media workers are to self-censor, how self-censorship works in newsrooms, and what factors are influential on journalists' work. Here is how Morris describes his research:

*The results from my survey showed a slight leaning toward self-censorship, although generally it bordered on neutrality. However, this contrasted with the responses to follow-up questions where respondents explained how self-censorship took place in various newsrooms.*

*It would appear that while in practice self-censorship does occur regularly, journalists in Fiji would in theory prefer it does not happen or actually believe that it does not occur. The results could also mean that even if journalists do not self-censor, editorial processes and decision-making result in self-censorship manifesting in other ways and at other levels.*

*Perhaps an unavoidable outcome of Fiji's draconian media law is the normalising of self-censorship among its journalists.*

*When asked about their role perceptions, Fiji's journalists without fail indicate factors such as fairness and balance, independence and fearlessness, but the perception and the practice appear to be disconnected.*

*Media capture' is well and truly embedded in many sectors of the media, and it will take time, attitudinal change and legal amendments to undo this.*

*Despite this, journalists still hang on to some veneer of their detached watchdog role while forging a media model that accords with the mood of the times: nation-building, ethnic harmony and development ideals.*



*'Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark,  
without the need for any official ban.'*

~ George Orwell,  
preface to *Animal Farm*,  
first published in the  
*Times Literary Supplement*,  
15 September 1972

*This monograph is dedicated to the memories of my numerous colleagues  
who have passed on, including Vasemaca Rarabici, Kawai Damu, Laisiasa  
Naulumatua, Sitiveni Moce and Losana McGowan.*

# Acknowledgements

This study was never going to be an easy task given the sensitivity of the subject and the state of the media in Fiji. Coupled with that were the many personal challenges I had to overcome that only those closest to me would understand. So in acknowledging those who have supported me in this endeavour, I do so from the bottom of my heart.

I acknowledge a higher power and a spiritual connection, which my family has fostered. My mum, Valerie, has been a constant pillar of love, prayers and support and pushed me to this project's completion. She has stood by me despite our separation of years and distance.

I thank my sponsors, Thomson Reuters Foundation, and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism for affording me this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of studying at Oxford, being only the second person at the Institute from Fiji since Dr Victor Lal attended in the 1980s. Special gratitude is owed to the Institute's long-suffering Dr James Painter for being extremely patient with me and to my research supervisor Dr Chris Westcott for his guidance and encouragement. I will forever treasure the experience, memories and the many new friends I have made from around the world.

I pay tribute to my close friend and business mentor Rohit Latchan for his constant support and advice. And I thank Mary Elliot and Siteri Qoro in the United States for their kind gesture.

To my media colleagues who gave so generously of their time in this research, *vinaka vakalevu*. Here's hoping we can build a media that regains its solidarity, quality and freedom. A special mention is made of Cheerieann Wilson since she was the only respondent who readily allowed me to quote her.



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# Chapter 1: Introduction and research overview

The past three decades of Fiji's history have been politically turbulent, with the country suffering four coups between 1987 and 2006, in the process earning itself the regrettable epithet of 'coup-coup land' (Fraenkel & Firth, 2009, p. 4). Despite that moniker and the images it conjures, this country of just under 900,000 people has a tourism industry that is arguably the most advanced among South Pacific nations. Tourism is an important foreign-exchange earner that usually takes a hit whenever political instability or natural disaster strikes but it remains Fiji's saving grace. Located in the South Pacific Ocean, east of Australia and north of New Zealand, Fiji is a former British colony consisting of a group of some 332 volcanic islands (about only 110 are inhabited) and even more islets, spread across an area of archipelagic waters of 130,470 square kilometres (Smith, 1984). Owing to its tempestuous recent past and its position in a region that has been rocked by political conflict, Fiji is said to be part of the so-called geopolitical 'arc of instability' that stretches from East Timor, through West Papua, Papua New Guinea and its autonomous region of Bougainville, Nauru, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, ending at Fiji (Dobell, 2007, p. 89).

At independence from the United Kingdom on 10 October 1970, the state-owned but nominally independent Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC, now Fiji Broadcasting Corporation) was the country's only broadcaster. The only national daily was *The Fiji Times*, "then a reliably pro-establishment organ" (Hunter, 2009, p. 277) and it was joined a few years later by the (original) *Fiji Sun*. Fiji did not get a television service until the early 1990s.

In July 1985, FM96, owned by Communications Fiji Limited (CFL), went on air as the first private, commercial station to be launched in the country. It was a radical change from the 'drab drivel of the government-run station' (Thompson, 2010). FM96 would become the first media organisation to break the news of Fiji's first coup on 14 May 1987, despite a reporter from the FBC being in the parliamentary chambers during the takeover. The military had apparently shut down *The Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun* newsrooms, and seized control of the FBC's studios, but had forgotten about FM96, 'the new kid on the block' (Thompson, 2010). The station's 26-year-old news editor, Sam Thompson, had hitched a ride

in a mad dash back to his newsroom after grabbing the first copy of the statement from the Ministry of Information announcing the takeover. No soldiers were around when he arrived at the small station premises, so he got the chance to tell the country and the world what had taken place, thereby depriving the coup leader, Sitiveni Rabuka, of having the first word to the nation about his actions (Thompson, 2010).

Pandora's box was opened for Fiji on 14 May 1987 and ever since then the media has been both blessed with diversity and cursed by dictatorship.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka was a little-known third ranking army officer when he walked quietly into the parliamentary chambers in the capital Suva just before 10am that May morning in 1987. As Fiji's replica of the Big Ben clock chimed in the tower above the gathered parliamentarians, Rabuka—dressed as a civilian—stood up and strode towards the Speaker's chair, announcing: 'This is a takeover...we apologise for any inconvenience caused' (Lal, 1990, p. 192).

Along with at least 10 other soldiers, Rabuka had overthrown the month-old Fiji Labour Party government led by Dr Timoci Bavadra, in the name of indigenous Fijian supremacy. While Dr Bavadra was ethnic Fijian (Taukei), the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) was dominated by ethnic Indians (Indo-Fijians), the descendants of indentured sugarcane farmers brought by the British from the Indian sub-continent between 1879 and 1916. Although he later claimed that it was a coincidence, Rabuka's coup took place exactly 108 years to the day the first 463 indentured labourers arrived in Fiji aboard the sailing ship *Leonidas*. Victor Lal (himself an Indo-Fijian), who became the first journalism fellow from Fiji in 1984 at the then Reuter Foundation, went on to write an important book about the events leading up to and following the country's first two coups. He described that Thursday of Rabuka's parliamentary takeover as the moment 'democracy died in Fiji' (Lal, 1990, p. 192). Just four months later, Rabuka struck again—removing the caretaker government that he had installed, claiming that the objectives of his takeover had not been achieved (Lal, 1990).

It can be argued that the biggest understatement in Fiji's political history was the 'inconvenience' Rabuka apologised for that May morning in 1987. Far from just an inconvenience, what happened jolted the wider Pacific and brought world attention to a region often forgotten about in the wider scheme of global geopolitics. Rabuka had chosen the Taukei phrase *kidacala*, meaning 'surprise', as the codename for his operation; those shockwaves launched three decades ago

continue to reverberate today. Since then Fiji has been doomed to experience political upheaval and its consequent economic adversity, the so-called brain drain and international isolation before picking itself up again. While Rabuka went on to be democratically elected in 1992, he had opened a Pandora's box of ills that Fiji and its media industry are still grappling with to this day.

A third takeover on 19 May 2000—this time ostensibly led by failed businessman George Speight with military elements (Robie, 2000), again supposedly to reassert indigenous control—turned out to be Fiji's bloodiest coup. Reporters covering that crisis were later accused of ethical failures because of their association with the usurpers (Gounder, 2007). Speight had the support of disgruntled elite soldiers who were part of the First Meridian Squadron (also known as the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare group), which had been set up by a Fijian former British SAS soldier after Rabuka's 1987 coup. The hostage siege of government parliamentarians lasted 56 days, but its conclusion did not mean an end to the political crisis. In November 2000, a deadly mutiny attempt by remnant rebel soldiers from the May coup was launched at the military's Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB) headquarters just outside Suva. The commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Commodore Voreqe 'Frank' Bainimarama, who was later to stage a coup of his own, narrowly escaped death and the camp was retaken by a group of loyalist soldiers several hours later. But when it was over, three loyalists and five rebels lay dead, in an event that capped what was one of Fiji's most traumatic years yet.

Finally in December 2006, the military led by Bainimarama again inserted itself into the running of the government, but in executing his coup the commander claimed it had the opposite intentions of the previous three. It was the culmination of a long-running and highly antagonistic debate in the media between banker-turned-politician Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and the Bainimarama over what the commander said were governance issues. Dubbed the 'good governance coup' and the 'coup to end all coups', Bainimarama claimed he would clean-up alleged corruption and racism in the Qarase-led government (Fraenkel, Firth, & Lal, 2009, p. 4). The Qarase administration had initially served in an interim capacity in the aftermath of the 2000 coup, having been appointed by Bainimarama after he declared martial law. In the general election of September 2001 to return Fiji to democracy, Qarase was elected through his newly formed Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party, but soon began falling out with Bainimarama over policies and matters relating to the prosecution of those who

participated in the 2000 so-called civilian takeover and mutiny. However, perhaps the major reason Bainimarama was at loggerheads with the government, at least in the final months before his takeover, was a police investigation into the role he played in the deaths by torture of the five rebel soldiers who were arrested when the QEB mutiny was put down (Callinan, 2006).

During these periods of upheaval, and even during times of democratic governance, journalists and the media companies they worked for would find themselves at the sharp end of the criticism from those in power (Fraenkel & Firth, 2007; S. Singh, 2008). Fijian governments of all hues often harangued the media or resorted to threatening legislation of some kind when they felt the media were becoming problematic.

Fiji's media industry first experienced censorship enforced through the barrel of the gun in 1987 and since then, censorship, self-censorship and regulation have at one time or another been features of the industry even as it continues to evolve. In the 27 years between the first coup in 1987 and the general election of September 2014, Fiji had spent more than half the period (169 months out of a total 328 months) under non-democratic rule with its longest period of dictatorship being Bainimarama's regime from December 2006, although it is moot whether there is much difference now that Fiji has a 'militarised democracy' (MacWilliam, 2014).

## **1.1 Objectives of the study**

This study aims to examine the perceptions and practice of self-censorship and its characteristics in Fiji after the country's return to democratic rule in September 2014 with reference to the period of dictatorship before that. At the same time, it tries to outline the perceptions of journalists about their role and that of media freedom in Fiji.

The study adopts two questionnaires merged into a single survey administered through an online form. The majority of the questions were adapted from the Worlds of Journalism study ('The Worlds of Journalism Study Questionnaire', 2014). The other portion of the survey attempts to measure how ready journalists are as individuals to censor themselves. This is attempted using the Willingness to Self-Censor Scale (WTSC) (Hayes, Glynn, & Shanahan, 2005).

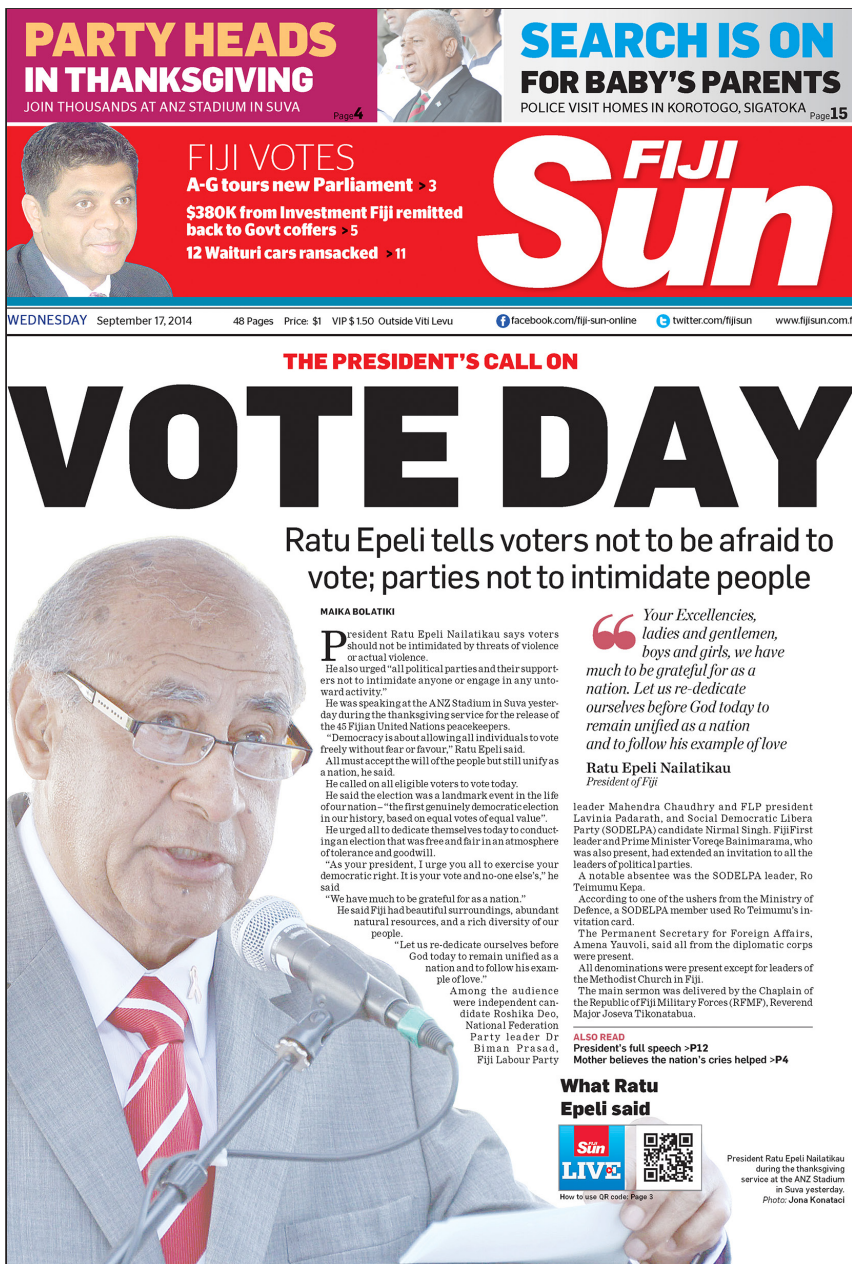


Figure 1: The pro-government Fiji Sun front page three days before the 19 September 2014 election.



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Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and Rear Admiral (Ret) Voreqe Bainimarama's FijiFirst party is poised to lead the country in the next four years.  
Picture: MAD'S ANNEBERG/Republika Magazine

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Mr Young said from their observations of both pre-polling and polling day exercises, the process was indeed free and fair. But he also said the commission would investigate claims of "serious allegations" raised by some political parties.  
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made their own observations from pre-polling to polling right throughout the divisions that's in the Central, the Eastern, the Northern and the Western and we were satisfied with ourselves that the elections were carried out in a free and fair manner," he said.

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Figure 2: The more neutral Fiji Times a day after the post-coup 2014 general election.





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Figure 3: A Fijian soldier voting in the general election.

## 1.2 Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How willing are media workers to self-censor?
2. What characterises self-censorship among Fijian journalists?
3. What factors are perceived to be influential on journalists' work?

## 1.3 Scope and limitations of the study

This study was carried out over a period of six months so is limited in its scope. However, to overcome some of the limitations, the questionnaire was administered online to allow participants to complete it at their convenience. The study focuses on the period from December 2006 to the present, with particular emphasis on practice in the period between the 2014 general election and early 2016. The short timeframe in which to carry out the study presented a severe limitation on the breadth and depth that could be pursued. It is fair to anticipate some concern about the scientific rigour of the survey and the sample size, however 40 respondents to a survey in a media environment like Fiji's could be considered indicative of several factors.

A previous study estimated journalists in Fiji at about 100 (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015). A list of more than 180 journalists, editors, photographers, and other news production workers was drawn up, with the estimated population size between 180 and 220. The deployment of the survey online brings its own drawbacks (as opposed to face-to-face interviews) while the sample selection is non-random. There was also not a chance to pre-test the deployment of the Willingness to Self-Censors Scale within the online questionnaire to gauge any possible misunderstanding of how to respond to the statements. Another limitation that could conceivably affect this study is suspicion among journalists as well as personal feelings toward the researcher, which would have caused journalists not to participate.

It must be noted that despite several brief in-person discussions about this research project with a request to interview the chairman of the Media Industry Development Authority, Ashwin Raj, this did not take place. Raj was asked if he could respond to several questions in lieu of an interview but they have remained unanswered and as such several questions directly relevant to the subject of this study are not addressed by the authority.

## **1.4 Significance of the study**

Academics agree that research in Fiji's media industry is both difficult and infrequent (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Robie, 2004). This study replicates some of the questions posed to Fijian journalists between 2008 and 2009 by Folker Hanusch and Charu Uppal (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015). It also deploys the Willingness to Self-Censor Scale developed by Andrew Hayes and his colleagues (Hayes et al., 2005) to test self-censorship tendencies among media workers without explicitly asking them about self-censorship. The two sets of questions together draw out insights into the kinds of influences journalists are subjected to, as well as their ideals about journalism culture as practiced or perceived by them. This was also followed up by a short questionnaire targeted at senior and middle ranking journalists to elicit further insight into self-censorship practices and mitigation measures.

## **1.5 Organisation of the study**

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1, this section, discusses the research questions as well as scope and limitation of the study. Chapter 2 examines the literature on self-censorship, Fiji's political and media milieu in the Pacific

context and the theoretical frameworks that encompass the topic of discussion. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach to the study: the main questionnaire administered online through Google forms. Chapter 4 examines the findings from the survey including the willingness to self-censor and perceptions of media freedom, roles and influences on journalism. Chapter 5 summarises the discussions in this paper and tries to foresee the trends in media freedom development in Fiji and the wider Pacific. The chapter also points out further areas of study identified following this study.



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**Figure 4: Supervisor of Elections Mohammed Saneem talks to journalists about the printing of ballot papers before the September 2014 general election.**

# Chapter 2: Literature review and conceptual frameworks

## 2.1 Self-censorship defined

Self-censorship is a type of free-speech restriction or ‘opinion expression inhibition’ (Hayes et al., 2005, p. 300) that is not carried out by official actors, but applied by a person or entity responsible for producing a piece of creative expression, to prevent any perceived negative reaction to that expression. In reality, all journalism contains elements of self-censorship of varying degrees brought about through the process of reporting, editing and selecting information and details to include or omit in the final published product. Self-censorship within news organisations occur for various reasons and some of the justifications for employing it have included the ‘interests of decency, taste, avoidance of unnecessary harm, to keep from whipping up a violent situation, or even at the behest of the government to protect secret operations’ (Fuller, 1997, p. 57).

Self-censorship is widely regarded as a threat to media freedom and has been described as ‘the most corrosive and insidious form of censorship’ for journalists (Cronau, 1995, p. 11). On some level, all journalists practise self-censorship through the selection and presentation of news reports (Tapsell, 2012) and for various reasons, including ‘political and economic’ pressures (F. L. F. Lee & Lin, 2006). However, self-censorship in journalism can become problematic when the information that the public should be privy to about their society and which would help inform their decision-making is withheld because of various factors. Unlike official censorship, self-censorship is considered more ‘insidious’ because of its invisibility (Cronau, 1995, p. 11) which would render audiences none the wiser about withheld or manipulated information.

While self-censorship occurs in journalism cultures globally, in ‘transitional societies’ such as Fiji’s, the news media are often under ‘severe political pressure ... combined with a commercial/commercialising media system and a professional/professionalising journalistic force’ (F. L. F. Lee & Lin, 2006). The ‘politics of self-censorship’ forces media news practitioners to adopt strategies to address these issues (F. L. F. Lee & Lin, 2006).

In their work on measuring self-censorship, Andrew Hayes and his colleagues define the phenomenon as the ‘withholding of one’s true opinion from an

audience perceived to disagree with that opinion' (Hayes et al., 2005, p. 300). For the purposes of this paper, however, self-censorship will refer to the act of journalists limiting or ignoring aspects of a story 'because they fear repercussions from those with vested interests who are cited in the report' (Tapsell, 2012, p. 229). The definition by Ross Tapsell (2012) in relation to journalism practice in Indonesia, goes further to state that 'self-censorship usually occurs when journalists believe they must adhere to the owner's agenda on certain stories, rather than report freely and comprehensively on all topics' (Tapsell, 2012, p. 229).

## **2.2 Self-censorship as a professional practice in Fiji**

In many transitional societies, self-censorship is employed as a coping mechanism and often as a survival strategy (both literally and figuratively) (C.-C. Lee, 1998; F. L. F. Lee & Lin, 2006; Skjerdal, 2010; Tapsell, 2012). In conflict-prone African societies, as Skjerdal (2010) points out, self-censorship is often morally justified and instinctively applied while covering ethnic conflict or national security issues. In Fiji, self-censorship was a reaction to the threatened and actual violence meted out to journalists and other outspoken personalities by representatives of the coup regime, most notably soldiers in the early days following the 2006 coup (Hunter, 2009; Pareti, 2009).

Self-censorship, unsurprisingly, is a sensitive topic in Fiji. Not many journalists will admit to it publicly and some would protest vociferously if accused of self-censoring. However, in private, certain journalists readily admit that it has become a part of their work culture, although they realise the ethical dilemma self-censorship places them in.

When Bainimarama seized power, he promised to uphold media freedom although his concept of it was soon progressively shown to be the military's definition – and that of the other figures behind the throne (Foster, 2007). Two essays published in a collection of articles by the Australian National University after the 2006 coup outlined how self-censorship operated in the months after the takeover. Written by experienced journalists, Samisoni Pareti (2009) and Russell Hunter (Hunter, 2009), these accounts and an earlier one by Sophie Foster (2007), paint a picture of fear and loathing in the media in the aftermath of Bainimarama's coup, and the rise of social media as a challenge to the regime's clampdown on the press.

Hunter, an expatriate Australian, who was publisher and chief executive officer of the *Fiji Sun* during the 2006 coup and who was deported in February

2008, points out that when the military seized power, it 'could not have been unaware that it did so against a background of almost unanimous media disapproval, if not outright hostility' although the media failed to put up a united front against censorship when push came to shove (Hunter, 2009, p. 279). The media had played a critical—and criticised role—in ramping up the long-running tensions between Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party and the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Commodore Bainimarama (Pareti, 2009). Pareti argues that instead of 'taking a principled stand', the news media helped fuel the tensions by reporting the tit-for-tat rhetoric of both Qarase and Bainimarama, ultimately leading to Bainimarama's takeover on 5 December 2006 (Pareti, 2009, p. 271).

The first sign for the public that the media were under pressure came on the evening of the takeover in the period after the live broadcast of Bainimarama's takeover speech at 6pm. Later that evening Fiji One's scheduled *Late News* was not broadcast and instead a message to viewers was flashed on the screen announcing that they had opted not to air the bulletin because they were under orders not to broadcast any interviews with the ousted Prime Minister Qarase or any opposing views. The following morning, *The Fiji Times* in protest over censorship did not appear, although the *Fiji Sun* had already printed the next day's edition before the censors arrived and the *Daily Post*, the smallest of the three papers and a government-owned entity, also hit the newsstands. The radio networks and online services continued their news coverage under conditions of censorship. Pareti argues that the 'short-lived boycott showed how hopelessly disunited and divided the local media was' and 'any hope of getting the news media to work in unison and truly become a force to be reckoned with—especially important in any fight to protect the freedom of the press provision of Fiji's 1997 constitution—was lost' (Pareti, 2009, p. 271).

If the military regime had any doubts about getting the media onside with its so-called 'clean-up campaign', the lack of media unity against censorship in the days and months after the takeover sealed the fate of Fiji's media industry. Three years later, the regime's Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum introduced the *Media Industry Development Decree 2010*, a decree that was to change the face of the media landscape in Fiji in the years to come.

In 2012, the allegation of self-censorship in the Fijian media sparked a furious debate that made the radio news. The controversy began when then head of journalism at the University of the South Pacific, Dr Marc Edge, a Canadian,



claimed in interviews that Fijian journalists were still afraid to report freely despite the lifting of the emergency laws that had imposed official censorship. Vijay Narayan, the news director of the country's largest private radio network, Communications Fiji Limited, took offence at the suggestion, and over the next few days used his bulletins on Legend FM to reject the claim of self-censorship (Perrottet, 2012). However, despite this denial, there have been numerous other anecdotal and documented reports of self-censorship at work in Fiji in the period before and after the 2014 general election (Hunter, 2009; Narsey, 2016b; Robie, 2015; Vuibau, 2014).

In a January 2015 interview with Radio New Zealand International, this author described how the lack of confidence among journalists to push politicians for answers reflected the level of self-censorship:

If you attend any government press conference in which some other issue apart from what was raised at that press conference is in the news during the day, you'll see self-censorship at work because if they tell you 'we will not entertain any other questions', no other journalist is going to dare ask questions, so that's the way you can see self-censorship at work. (Perrottet, 2015)

## **2.3 Media freedom and politics in post-1987 Fiji**

The period after the December 2006 coup has been profoundly different to any period before that, although the media and all previous governments have always had a tense relationship. As Singh points out, 'the freedoms historically enjoyed by the Fiji media have always been fragile, even under democratic rule':

In spite of constitutional guarantees, harsher legislation seemed inevitable, not only due to the autocratic mindset of successive governments (which has received a lot of attention), but also because certain British-inherited Fourth Estate traditions were at odds with Fiji's 'hybrid' democracy, based on a combination of Western and Indigenous systems of governance. (S. Singh, 2015, p. 127).

When he staged Fiji's first coup in May 1987, Brigadier-General Sitiveni Rabuka had been a career soldier having no direct contact with journalists, except media on United Nations peacekeeping missions. He had 'no idea at all how the media would react' and admits his naiveté saying he was 'still uninformed

enough to be open to the media directly' (Mason, 2005, p. 229). Within days he found that the previously army-friendly local media would assert its watchdog role and Rabuka would shut the newsrooms down. The *Fiji Sun* publisher later closed the business rather than continue printing under censorship.

In the years after 1987, private commercial radio began gaining ground (FM96, operated by Communications Fiji Limited), a new national newspaper was launched (*Fiji Daily Post*) and Fiji's first Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara (who lost the 1987 election with the Alliance Party and who Rabuka was to later claim urged him to seize power (Onslow, 2014)) was returned to the position by Sitiveni Rabuka, who retained his self-imposed role as army commander. In the promised 1992 election, held under the 1990 Constitution that was deliberately biased against other ethnic groups, Rabuka's new party—the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT)—won and he became prime minister.

### **2.3.1 Rabuka and the media**

Two years into his term, Rabuka was confronted with Fiji's first political sex scandal when *The Review* magazine "broke an unwritten taboo" by exposing his relationship with a woman journalist (S. Singh, 2015, p. 130). *The Review*, published by Yashwant Gaunder, made inroads in investigative journalism and was to later publish a major exposé detailing the National Bank of Fiji collapse, which is estimated to have cost taxpayers F\$400 million (S. Singh, 2005). This prompted Rabuka to claim the press was a menace and needed to be made more accountable. The government commissioned the UK's Thomson Foundation to carry out a study into media regulation.

The report recommended a self-regulating mechanism in the establishment of a media council, built on the existing but disused regulatory mechanisms already in place (Morgan & Thomas, 1996). Two years later, the Media Council of Fiji was established. However, Rabuka's government also introduced in Parliament what it called the Media Control Bill. The media was united in its opposition to the Bill and the government eventually dropped it.

### **2.3.2 Chaudhry and the media**

A founding member of the indo-Fijian-dominated and union-supported Fiji Labour Party (FLP) in 1985, Mahendra Chaudhry was appointed to Cabinet in the coalition government headed by Prime Minister Dr Timoci Bavadra, an



indigenous Fijian. Barely a month later, Rabuka led his small group of soldiers and removed the new government at gunpoint. In the 1999 general election, the FLP grabbed a landslide victory and Chaudhry become Fiji's first non-indigenous prime minister. But no sooner was he sworn in to office than Chaudhry faced a hostile media reception in a long-running dispute that is credited with playing some part in his overthrow exactly a year later by George Speight and a band of disaffected elite soldiers. In the months after his election, Chaudhry faced a barrage of media reports criticising his leadership and decisions, many of which played on ethnic divisions. And like Rabuka, he also faced his own sex scandal in the so-called 'tea lady' saga in which she was supposed to have witnessed his alleged infidelity (Robie, 2001). The hostile relationship with the media worsened when Chaudhry began signalling his intention to introduce media controls. At one point the government responded with an eight-page paid advertisement in the *Fiji Sun*, the country's third national newspaper launched that year (Chaudhry, 2000; Gounder, 2006). Titled 'Government responds to media hysteria', the advertisement said the regulatory measures proposed by Chaudhry's government were aimed not at curtailing media freedom but 'to ensure greater media responsibility in a multi-racial society' (Chaudhry, 2000, p. 146).

Six months into his rule, Chaudhry was invited to launch the Fiji Media Council Code of Ethics in Suva. He used his keynote address to confront the media about what he said was a lack of professionalism, accountability and training. Chaudhry outlined a host of examples that he said pointed to a crisis of ethics in the industry and risked fuelling ethnic tensions in a multi-ethnic society. 'My warning to the industry today is that if it will not act responsibly, then it must brace itself to face regulatory measures,' Chaudhry told a roomful of bristling executives and editors. 'The state has a duty to protect innocent people who are wronged by the media. That state also has a duty to preserve the fragile fabric of our multiracial society. My government will not hesitate to impose restraints if we feel it necessary to protect public interest' (Chaudhry, 2000, p. 142).

But Chaudhry would not have the chance to implement his legislative proposals to regulate the media because six months later Speight, who despite his ethno-nationalist claims is of mixed-ethnicity heritage, fronted the so-called civilian coup that ousted Chaudhry's government.

### 2.3.3 Qarase and the media

Laisenia Qarase was a banker until he was chosen by Bainimarama in 2000 as interim prime minister following the quashing of Speight's coup. In the general election the following year, Qarase's new party, the ethno-nationalist Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL), dominated and he was returned as prime minister. He was soon to experience and dislike the media scrutiny his government came under and by 2003 was seeking to regulate the media through the *Media Council of Fiji Bill*. The media reacted fiercely, mounting a united 'Kill the Bill' campaign, which successfully pressured the government to drop its proposal. When he was given another mandate in the 2006 general election and as tensions between him and the commander were intensified, Qarase looked set to re-introduce the *Media Bill* but Bainimarama put paid to that in December that year.

### 2.3.4 Bainimarama and the media

In the years before he seized power, Bainimarama capitalised on the media's desire for drama and readily commented and gave interviews about his views on Qarase's leadership, which he said would lead Fiji back to the dark days of 2000 and the ethnic tensions that rocked the country. In one interview in late 2004, he described the military as a 'tiger in a corner' which if provoked would strike, but denied he was seeking power for himself (Morris, 2005) "event-place": "Suva", "author": [{"family": "Morris", "given": "Ricardo"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2005", 1, 1}]}], "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json" . But this was to change—at least with certain journalists and sections of the media—once he had actually taken power. From then on, he would harshly criticise journalists and media organisations he viewed as hostile to his so-called 'clean-up coup'. Aided by his Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Bainimarama at first used 'crude, intimidatory methods, such as threats and occasional assaults on journalists to exert control' but later 'resorted to more sophisticated strategies' such as the invoking of emergency laws that culminated in the *Media Industry Development Decree 2010* (S. Singh, 2015, p. 127). What previous governments had threatened but were not able to implement, Bainimarama was able to achieve.

## 2.4 Media regulation in Fiji

The complexities of Fiji's politics and sociology are reflected in the fact that the

country's media has been labelled as both a national security threat and a champion of democracy (S. Singh, 2015). Long before the media decree was ever on the cards, the industry had been subjected to other attempts to bring it to heel, including an industry review conducted in 1996 by consultants hired by the government through the United Kingdom's Thomson Foundation. One of the report authors' recommendations was that an independent industry-sponsored media council be established, which led to the creation of the self-regulating Fiji Media Council in 1998 (S. Singh, 2005).

However, the media was finally overwhelmed when Bainimarama's military government promulgated its *Media Industry Development Decree* in 2010. If self-censorship was a problem during any period until then, with the establishment of the Media Industry Development Authority to regulate the industry, as well as fines and/or jail sentences for breaches of regulations including those aimed at protecting the so-called 'public interest', it now would be a way of life (Morris, 2012).

But the wave of media restrictions, which was to culminate in the media decree, had its immediate genesis in a highly controversial inquiry into 'media freedom and independence' by the Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC) in the months after the military takeover. The New Zealander initially earmarked to lead the inquiry withdrew from the appointment after heavy media scrutiny in New Zealand and Fiji. The then director of the FHRC, Dr Shaista Shameem, was incredulous at what she described as the media's 'hostile reaction' to news of the inquiry (Anthony, 2008). A Fiji-born Hawai'ian academic, Dr James Anthony, was eventually quietly selected to carry out the inquiry but he also faced a hostile reception from many quarters of the media. His report outlined a system of media regulation and development based on the Singapore model, including the introduction of sanctions for breach. Shameem was to hail the recommendations as a step forward for the media industry in Fiji:

The function of the Media Development Authority will be to monitor the operations of the media organisations and undertake training to raise the standard of new reporting, meet the need for skills and technical expertise required by modern media, build cooperation between government and the media, as well as the public, and to ensure media responsibility in accordance with the laws of Fiji and human rights law internationally. (Anthony, 2008, p. 7)

Just over two years after the Anthony report was published, the military-led regime introduced the *Media Industry Development Decree*, which is now more of a stick than a carrot. Shameem envisioned a media regulatory regime that would create a more 'responsible' media but it is moot whether whatever 'development' has taken place in the media has actually built a more robust news industry, capable of withstanding editorial pressures and speaking truth to power, or whether it has created a sycophantic media that must be that way in order to survive commercially.

The media operated under coercive control in the period up to April 2009, when the military regime finally dropped the pretence that it was operating constitutionally and abrogated the 1997 Constitution on Good Friday that year. The regime immediately activated existing laws to curb media freedoms, as a prelude to the substantial decree. The *Public Emergency Regulations (PER)* were enforced, allowing censors to be installed in newsrooms.

Fiji's media companies protested this censorship in various creative ways. The *Sunday Times* left blank spaces where censors had objected to stories and an editorial cartoon, the *Fiji Daily Post* published non-stories such as that of a man watching paint dry, Fiji TV refused to air its main evening bulletin (Morris, 2012). The *Fiji Sun* refused to publish any political stories, and the Suva-based Pacific News Service (Pacnews), whose journalist Pita Ligaiula had been detained over a report, also backed away from carrying political stories from Fiji (Robie, 2009). The resistance to censorship irked the powers-that-be and media executives were warned not to try such tactics again. Several days later editors and local correspondents for overseas media organisations were summoned to the information ministry where the 'journalism of hope' edict was laid out.

Three months after that, Bainimarama placed on the record his regime's vision of what journalism in Fiji should be, when he addressed the 8th Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development conference in Nadi. He told the conference the activation of the *Public Emergency Regulations* was 'merely a temporary measure to provide a stable socio-political platform conducive for nation-building initiatives to take place'. Bainimarama said the *PER* was intended to encourage the media to be more 'balanced and responsible with their reporting' and so far it was 'achieving its desired impact' (Lasaqa, 2009). 'Slowly but surely, the focus is shifting from the journalism of old to development journalism and the journalism of hope which are premised on capturing the positive contributions made at all levels of society,' Bainimarama announced (FijiLive, 2009). He added that

while his government believed in media freedom and freedom of expression as fundamentals of democracy, it also believed that ‘media freedom is not absolute and that the media must exercise this freedom and right to express oneself with greater responsibility for the stability and wellbeing of the nation’ (Lasaqa, 2009).

In December 2009, Bainimarama released his ‘Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2010-2014’ which laid out some detail how the regime intended to ‘reform’ the media industry to ‘enhance industry regulation, protect media freedoms and maintain the accountability of media organisations and journalists’ (Fijian Ministry of National Planning, 2009). That document embodied some of the ideas that were to be promulgated six months later as the *Media Industry Development Decree 2010*, a law that marked a watershed moment for the Fijian media industry.

## 2.5 Theoretical frameworks

Several theoretical frameworks exist to help explain the phenomenon of self-censorship and its context within the wider issue of media freedom. Each theory on its own may not adequately explain the current timidity in the Fijian media. While this shift to a less inquisitorial approach is a result of many factors that have compounded over the years, such as the acceptance of a more socially-cohesive or development or deliberative journalism model (S. B. Singh, 2014), the major factor has been the actions of the military-regime that was given a democratic mandate in the 2014 general election. The promulgation of media laws and, before that, the use of military and police to intimidate and impose the government’s will on the media has led to an environment in which the ‘spiral of silence’ and ‘opinion expression avoidance’ have become commonplace (Hayes, 2007; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Coupled with this ‘spiral of silence’ at work in newsrooms that prevents journalists who hold different viewpoints to the prevailing government from expressing them in their work, the closest explanation for the way the media in Fiji is today is encapsulated in the ‘captured media theory’, articulated by Andrew Finkel in his study of the Turkish media and how it ‘has become the handmaiden of the very forces it is intended to hold accountable’ (Finkel, 2015, p. 3). In a paper published a decade ago, ‘media capture’ theory was used to demonstrate the ‘features of the media market that determine the ability of the government to exercise such capture and hence to influence political outcomes’ (Besley & Pratt, 2006, p. 720).

### **2.5.1 *Spiral of silence theory***

Elisabeth Noelle-Nuemann first articulated the Spiral of Silence theory to describe the ‘social-psychological mechanism’ in which people who hold a minority opinion that contrasts with what is deemed to be the public opinion, feel increasing pressure to remain silent for fear of isolation (Noelle-Nuemann, 1974, p. 51). In her seminal paper, Noelle-Nuemann writes, ‘[t]o the individual, not isolating himself is more important than his own judgment. This appears to be a condition of life in human society’. She continues: ‘[T]his fear of isolating oneself (not only fear of separation but also doubt about one’s own capacity for judgment) is an integral part of all processes of public opinion. This is the point where an individual is vulnerable; this is where social groups can punish him for failing to toe the line’ (Noelle-Nuemann, 1974, p. 43).

Noelle-Nuemann argues that the media can ‘accelerate the muting of the minority in the spiral of silence’ and this happens ‘because opinions supported by the influential media are often overstimulated’ (Griffin, 2006, p. 374). She recognised the power of the media to drive this spiral of silence, rejecting the view that the media only reinforce pre-existing beliefs: ‘I have never found a spiral of silence that goes against the tenor of the media, for the willingness to speak out depends in part upon sensing that there is support and legitimation from the media’ (Griffin, 2006, p. 375).

Griffin elaborated Noelle-Nuemann’s critique of the ‘media’s intrusive role in democratic decision making’ and its potential to create a ‘false consensus’ by not only telling us ‘what to think about but also [providing] the sanctioned view of what everyone else is thinking’ (2006, p. 375).

Given the media’s role in crystallizing public opinion, media access become crucial for those who desire to shape the public mood. It’s no longer enough for potential opinion leaders to have well-thought-out positions and the courage of their convictions. They must be ready, willing, and able to command media attention. This gives anybody with an assault rifle, friends in high places, or inherited wealth an advantage over the average citizen in programming the quasi-statistical organ that readers and viewers possess. (Griffin, 2006, p. 375)

This recognition of the media’s outsized role in shaping and even creating public opinion is why political leaders are keen to ‘capture’ the media, which in countries like Fiji plays out in official regulation and preferential treatment of media organisations deemed pro-government.

### **2.5.2 Captured news media theory**

The media plays an essential role in democracy and government accountability and political leaders have long recognised that their ability to ‘capture’ the media can determine political outcomes (Besley & Pratt, 2006). The concept of ‘capture’ was developed in the early 1970s as a theory of economic regulation referring to the ‘propensity of regulatory agencies to further the interest not of consumers or citizens but of the industries over which they stand vigil’. The concept shows ‘how watchdog institutions are made subject to powerful or class interests’ (Finkel, 2015, p. 4). The concept’s application to the media is thus described as ‘the tension between media as a public good ... and media as an economic and political actor co-opted into the process it is meant to observe’ (Finkel, 2015, p. 4). Examples of captured media can be found in Turkey (Yanatma, 2016), Mexico, Russia, Southeast Asia—and Fiji. In Russia, for example, despite the constitutional guarantee of a censorship-free press, the media there are severely hindered in their role and tend to ‘provide a sympathetic and sometimes incomplete account of government behaviour’ (Besley & Pratt, 2006, p. 720).

Mark Nelson of the Centre for International Media Assistance, in asking why so many countries fail to create independent media that contribute to democracy and economic progress, sees an explanation in the concept of media capture, which is observable in Fiji’s media industry, most notably through the *Fiji Sun* newspaper and the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation.

Media capture is a systemic government problem where political leaders and media owners work together in a symbiotic but mutually corrupting relationship: Media owners provide supportive news coverage to political leaders in exchange for favourable government treatment of their business and political interests. The favours may include increased government advertising or other financial benefits to the media industry itself. But perhaps more typical these days, the benefits accrue not so much to the media industry, but to the non-media interests of media owners in the form of regulatory changes, legislative measures, or lucrative government contracts. All the while, the political leaders get to bask in the glow of a fawning media. (Nelson in Finkel, 2015, p. 1)

This is illustrated quite well in Fiji through the exclusive government advertising awarded to certain media companies deemed to reflect the government’s

values. The *Fiji Sun* and Fiji Broadcasting Corporation were two of the more prominent outlets that had benefitted from a *de facto* government policy to only advertise with them, preventing other organisations from benefitting from the taxpayers' money used to fund these advertisements (Narsey, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a; Parliament of Fiji, 2015). For its part, the *Fiji Sun* prints a never-ending stream of sycophantic front-page articles and photographs of government leaders, their activities and pronouncements (Dorney, 2011; Robie, 2016; S. B. Singh, 2014).



# Chapter 3: Research methodology

The main research methodology for this project involved the administration of a major survey through an online form containing mostly quantitative questions. The link to the Google Form containing the questions was sent out to more than 100 editors, journalists, producers, directors, photographers and camera-persons in Fiji—personnel whose main responsibility is to produce news (see Appendix for questionnaire). Owing to constraints of time and distance from the respondents, an online survey was deemed to be the best tool to carry out the survey. The survey link was active from 7 December 2015 until 14 February 2016 and during that period, 40 responses were collected.

## 3.1 Worlds of Journalism Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based mainly on that developed for the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) project, which has been used globally to study and compare journalism practices and perceptions across more than 18 countries, including earlier in Fiji (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). The original questionnaire was developed collaboratively through the ‘academically driven project that was founded to regularly assess the state of journalism throughout the world’ (‘Worlds of Journalism Study’, 2016). The majority of the standardised questions for the global WSJ study were adopted, although some questions were dropped. In all, the questionnaire used in this study contained 115 questions, mostly involving multiple-choice answers.

## 3.2 Willingness to Self-Censor Scale

The Willingness to Self-Censor Scale deployed in this study was developed over a decade ago to assist researchers interested in areas such as public opinion expression, media effects and political participation (Hayes et al., 2005). It ‘taps a variety of thoughts, feelings and past behaviour relevant to self-censorship’ (Hayes et al., 2005, p. 8). The scale is an eight-item self-report instrument aimed at measuring a person’s willingness to withhold one’s true opinion from an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion. Respondents are asked to

rate their responses to the eight statements that describe situations involving personal opinion expression from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Each response was given a Likert scale score: 1 for ‘strongly disagree’, 2 for ‘disagree’, 3 for ‘neither agree nor disagree’, 4 for ‘agree’ and 5 for ‘strongly agree’. ‘Higher average scores across the eight items correspond to a greater willingness to self-censor’ (Hayes et al., 2005, p. 9).

### 3.3 Qualitative questions

Embedded within the survey form was a single question asking respondents to rate what they thought should be the three most important roles of journalists in Fiji. The aim of this question was to assess the perceptions of journalistic roles of Fijian media workers without any influencing factor other than their own opinions. The responses here would be useful material to compare and contrast with responses to the closed questions, as well as personal experience and reported cases. Qualitative questions sought to answer some of the ‘how and the why’ of journalism ideals and practice from the people on the frontlines of journalism in Fiji.

A further set of five specific questions relating to self-censorship and journalism practice, were sent out to a selection of senior journalists and editors at the ‘big four’ media organisations—*The Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun*, Fiji Television and Fiji Broadcasting Corporation. In the end, five editors responded and of the five, only one was willing to be identified in this paper.

### 3.4 The sample

The sample population is drawn from journalists, editors, news designers, producers, camera operators, photographers and other people involved directly in

**Table 1: Fiji’s newsroom staff numbers 2016**

Media organisation	Newsroom staff
Communications Fiji Limited	10 - 15*
Fiji Broadcasting Corporation	36
FijiLive.com	3
Fiji Sun	32
Fiji Television Limited	28
Fiji Times Limited	73

\* Note: Estimate from two sources since no official response was received.

the newsgathering and news production process at all of the country's media outlets both large and small, with the exception of the Department of Information.

Fiji's newsroom population is estimated to be between 180 and 220, depending on who is included in the definition of 'newsroom worker' or journalist. An estimate of the current of newsroom workers was arrived at by requesting senior newsroom staff with knowledge of the workforce for their newsroom numbers. Almost all of them replied with newsroom numbers except Communications Fiji Limited and some of the smaller media operations. In total, 108 requests to participate in the survey were sent out by email and/or Facebook Messenger. Several follow-up requests were made during the survey period. At the close of the survey period, 40 media workers had participated through the online questionnaire.

# Chapter 4: Findings and analysis

## 4.1 Demographics of survey respondents

The majority of the journalists surveyed (35.9 percent) were employed as rank-and-file workers or journalists who identified themselves as having limited authority in their newsrooms (Figures 5, 6). The next largest group were senior/executive managers with strategic authority (33.9 percent), followed by junior managers with operational authority (23.1 percent).

Figure 5: Gender breakdown of respondents

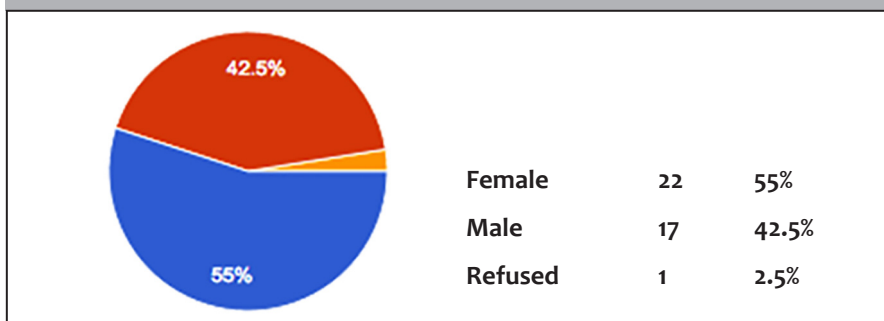
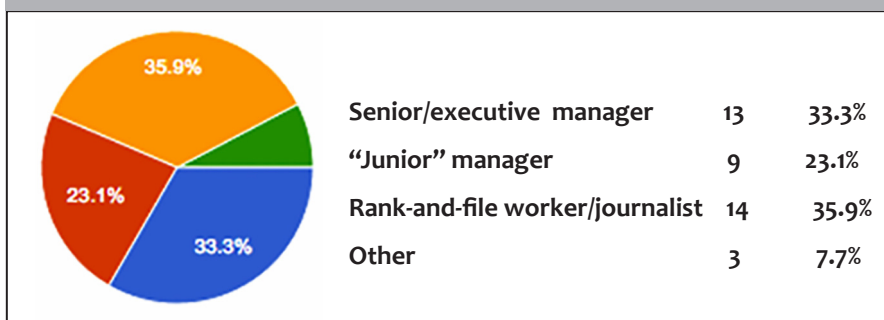


Figure 6: Job position breakdown of respondents



**Table 2: Age grouping breakdown of respondents**

Age bracket	Respondents	Percentage
20 - 24 years	3	7.5%
25 - 29 years	14	35%
30 - 34 years	8	20%
35 - 39 years	6	15%
40 - 44 years	2	5%
45 - 49 years	4	10%
50 - 54 years	1	2.5%
55 - 59 years	2	5%

More women (55 percent) than men responded to the survey, perhaps reflecting the current industry trend of more women journalists than men (Figure 5). More women identified themselves as reporters than men and there were slightly more women than men in senior management. However, there were more men in middle management than women. Most of the respondents fell into the age group from 25-29 years (35 percent), while the next biggest group consisted of journalists between 30 and 34 years (20 percent). In a 1998/9 survey of journalists in Fiji and one of the first carried out in Fiji's media workforce, University of the South Pacific journalism coordinator David Robie (2004) found the median age of journalists was 22. The results from the current survey (Table 2) show journalists are increasingly older, however they are still much younger than journalists in other countries where the WJS survey was carried out. For example, in Australia, the WJS survey found the mean age of journalists was 38; in Indonesia, 36; in Turkey, 35; and in Brazil it was 39.

## 4.2 Willingness to Self-Censor Scale

The small sample ruled out more complex analysis of the data collected from the Willingness to Self-Censor Scale questions, although the results offer some insight into the willingness of Fiji's media fraternity to self-censor (Table 3).

The section of the questionnaire aimed at measuring willingness to self-censor contained the following instructions and eight statements where survey respondents were asked to select a response that matched their views:

The responses were ranked on a Likert-type scale, with STRONGLY DIS-AGREE assigned a score of 1, DISAGREE scored 2, NEITHER AGREE NOR

**Table 3: The eight statements on willingness to self-censor.**

<p>For each statement below, please select one number per statement that reflects whether you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STRONGLY DISAGREE with the statement</li> <li>• DISAGREE with the statement</li> <li>• NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE with the statement</li> <li>• AGREE with the statement</li> <li>• STRONGLY AGREE with the the statement</li> </ul>
1. It is difficult for me to express my opinion if I think others won't agree with what I say.
2. There have been many times when I have thought others around me.
3. I'd rather go along with them than argue about it.
4. It is easy for me to express my opinion around others who I think will disagree with me. (Reverse coded)
5. I'd feel uncomfortable if someone asks my opinion and I knew that he or she wouldn't agree with me.
6. I tend to speak my opinion only around friends or other people I trust.
7. It is safer to keep quiet than publicly speak an opinion that you know most others don't share.
8. If I disagree with others, I have no problem letting them know it. (Reverse coded)

DISAGREE scored 3, AGREE scored 4, and STRONGLY AGREE scored 5. *Two of the statements were reverse coded to provide a control.*

The higher the average score for individual respondents, the greater the willingness to self-censor. The lowest possible score for a respondent was 5 (very little willingness to self-censor) with the highest being 40 (high willingness to self-censor). A respondent who remained neutral (NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE) in all questions would score 24.

The combined responses from all respondents were plotted on a graph to show the frequency of each response from STRONGLY DISAGREE to STRONGLY AGREE. The result showed the tendency of respondents to choose a neutral response (Figure 7).

The average score of all respondents out of a possible top score of 40 (high self-censorship tendency) was 22.66. Considering that a respondent's perfectly

Figure 7: Combined distribution of scores

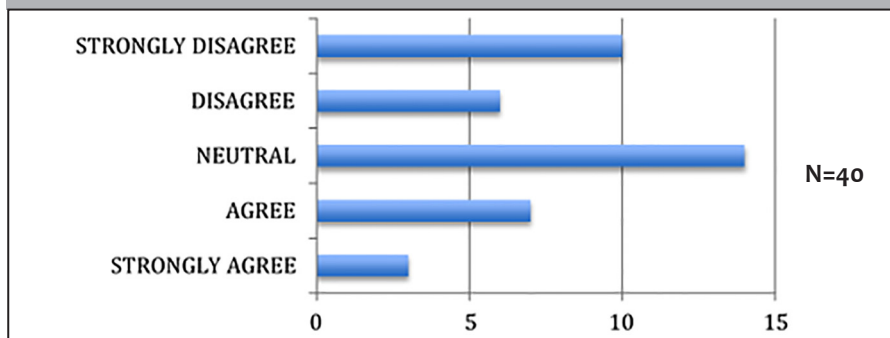


Figure 8: Male distribution of scores

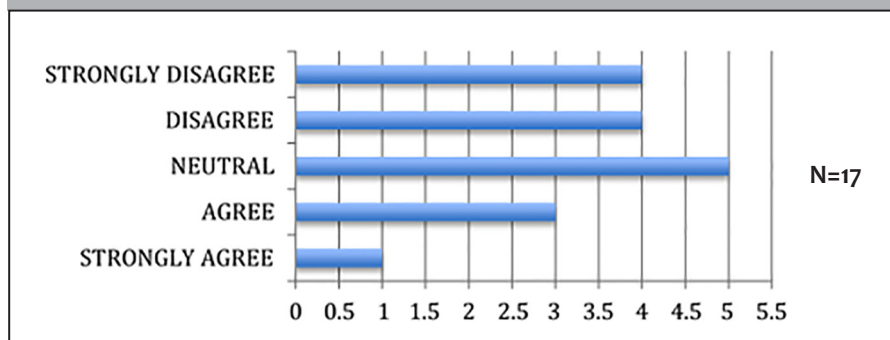
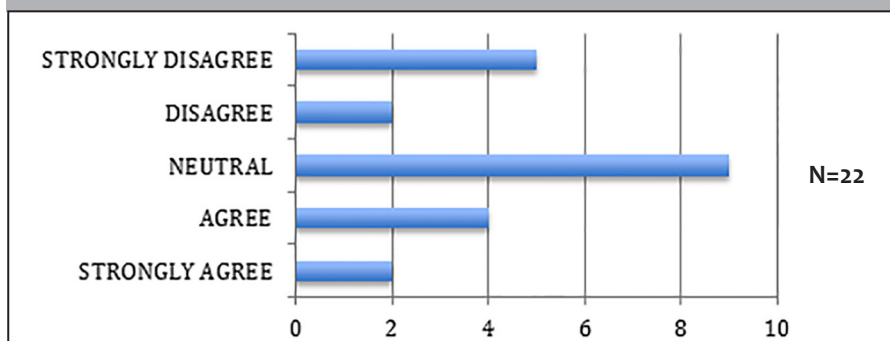


Figure 9: Female distribution of scores



neutral score would come out at 24, the mean score of all respondents showed a slight tendency toward self-censorship, although it bordered on neutrality.

At the very least, the results show the widespread wariness about questions relating to professional journalism practices in Fiji today. Most of respondents chose a neutral stance (14 of 40), with females scoring only marginally higher than males in willingness to self-censor (Figures 8,9). But while most remained neutral, the next biggest grouping of respondents strongly disagreed with self-censorship tendencies, although the overall average score tended to cancel this tendency out.

This result is interesting in light of the follow-up qualitative questions with selected senior journalists and because of what we know through widespread anecdotal and documented evidence of self-censorship in Fiji. It would appear that while in practice self-censorship does occur regularly, journalists in Fiji would in theory prefer it does not happen or actually believe that it does not occur. It could also show that even if journalists do not self-censor, editorial processes and decision-making result in self-censorship manifesting in other ways and at other levels. Another interpretation of this apparent neutrality could be the effect of central-tendency bias, however it was suggested during a presentation of the draft results that this neutrality could actually point to self-censorship at work. In other words, rather than commit to an answer on either extremes of the scale, journalists chose the safe space of the middle ground, a possible reflection of what goes on in their newsrooms.

### **4.3 Views of self-censorship in Fiji from the frontlines**

Apart from a reference to 'media laws and regulations' and 'censorship', the term 'self-censorship' itself did not appear in the online questionnaire, however some of the responses to the open-ended question on journalism role-perceptions did hint at the forces of self-censorship. In order to gauge the candid views on self-censorship of senior journalists, specific questions were emailed to five journalist/editors from different newsrooms who had agreed to participate in the follow-up interview.

All major newsrooms were represented except Communications Fiji Limited (CFL), whose news director did not respond to repeated email requests. Earlier, the only response from any CFL journalist was a curt email declining the invitation to participate in the online survey.

The five senior journalists who agreed to take the follow-up questions were



asked directly about whether they had practised or encountered self-censorship, how big a factor they thought it was and how they believed the problem could be overcome. The range of responses and the near-universal request to maintain the utmost confidentiality, showed the sensitivity of the topic in the Fiji media. Only one journalist was willing to be named, although that journalist has since left for a media role overseas.

Asked whether they thought self-censorship was an issue in their newsrooms, all of the interviewees said that it was. One broadcast journalist said: 'I believe all newsrooms to some extent self-censor their articles, although the degrees of it may differ.' A rival broadcast journalist said: 'Self-censorship continues to be an issue because we also try to avoid instances of breaking the *Media Industry Development Decree*—which regulates the work of the media in Fiji and has been viewed by many of us media professionals as regressive.' A senior print journalist answered: 'Without fear or favour? Nah. I think every journalist has to watch their back in Fiji, unless of course you work for a company that has the "politically preferred reporting style". A few journalists ... say they would like [to change their place of work] because they are tired of being censored and being told what to write.' The journalist added later: 'Every newsroom in Fiji denies the existence of censorship when it is heavily obvious...'

The cohort of journalists who responded to follow-up questions was asked whether they had experienced self-censorship and, if so, how frequently. The responses were telling. One print journalist answered rather diametrically: 'Rarely. Maybe once every three weeks.' A journalist with the state-owned broadcasting company said it depended on the type of story being covered, 'but it is something that we always keep in the back of our mind'. Another television editor said it was a daily occurrence and was the interviewee most explicit about the kinds of forces that come into play. The journalist said: 'Government keeps tab on the kinds of stories that are broadcast daily and we get a call or an email if the powers-that-be are not happy with a particular story and I can find myself having to explain in writing to the news manager then to the CEO.' However, one senior print journalist thought rather than self-censorship, it was more a problem of a 'young media industry' whose journalists had never reported in a parliamentary democracy coupled with 'a lack of understanding or effort to produce a very good story ... or pure laziness'.

Asked whether self-censorship was discussed among colleagues, the answers show that it is a deeply conflicting issue for many media workers. For example,

while some said self-censorship was discussed openly, others suggested that it was not necessarily named as such. ‘Discussions [about self-censorship] are more common when discussing how to “touch-up” a story,’ said one broadcast journalist. Another answered: ‘No but yes, we discuss laziness daily and throw back stories that need more oomph.’ A print journalist responded cryptically saying, ‘we have operated normally without this issue of self-censorship which we presumed existed. There could have been attributing factors on why certain information was not included in stories until asked, but that has changed. We report everything without fear or favour, including government stories.’

While self-censorship may be denied by some personalities in Fiji’s media, the candid—but mainly non-attributable—responses to this survey show it is undeniably a prickly issue for many journalists. Even if they are not entirely successful, however, journalists are acutely aware of how self-censorship plays out and generally claim to try to mitigate it. One print editor said self-censorship could be overcome by ‘being true to the profession ... talking about it among peers and colleagues and to question, question, question.’ Another print journalist suggested training was needed to understand the role of the media before adding that journalists should ‘grow some balls’. A television news editor, when asked how the problems associated with self-censorship could be overcome, responded with a classic description of self-censorship—‘by toning down words’. The same journalist then explained how reporters would often steer clear of using their own voice to say anything that could be deemed controversial, instead using ‘grabs’ from interviews with news subjects ‘so they tell the story in what they say’. However, ‘even then we have to rethink using grabs government may view as confrontational or “not pro-Fijian”’, which the journalist described as ‘the propaganda they preach when certain quarters do not agree with their decisions or plans’. A senior broadcast journalist from the state-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation said the method of mitigation involves chipping away: ‘Try at every minute opportunity to push the envelope, try and get away with a little bit more every time and slowly expand the so-called landscape of reporting.’ The journalist added this was important because ‘we are mentoring and grooming a pool of journalists who are taught not to write stories which may result in a slap on the wrist—or to ask the hard questions when it matters most. The difficulty (and possibly the solution itself) is to get young, up and coming journalists to keep asking the hard questions.’ If interviewees get ‘the impression that we are not backing off, they will eventually accept and expect tough stories.’

Perhaps the best summary of the impact of self-censorship on journalists in Fiji was given by a journalist with the Fiji Sun, a pro-government newspaper: 'It's there but I try my best not to let it hinder my work. It's like a cloud over your head that if you allow it, it seeps through without you even realising it.'

#### **4.4 Perceptions of ethical/unethical practices**

To understand the respondents' perceptions of what is ethical or unethical they were asked in the online questionnaire to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with four statements describing different approaches to journalism. A set of 12 questions asked that, if given an important story, which of the given scenarios would they believe to be justified on occasion and which they would not approve of under any circumstances.

On whether journalists should 'adhere to their code of professional ethics at all times regardless of situation or context', 75 per cent strongly agreed. However, when it was put to them that 'ethical journalism depends on the specific situation', 15 per cent 'strongly agreed' while 27.5 per cent 'somewhat agreed'. Most of the respondents (57.5 per cent) did not believe that 'what is ethical journalism is a matter of personal judgement'. While the majority of journalists appear to indicate their belief in the inflexibility of media code of ethics, a large proportion (45 per cent) felt it was 'acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it'.

Most journalists would never pay people for confidential information (45 per cent), although 35 per cent felt it was 'justified on occasion'. A large number of journalists (62.5 per cent) felt it was 'justified on occasion' to use 'confidential government business or government documents without authorisation', and a similar percentage (60 per cent) felt it was occasionally justified to use 'hidden microphones or cameras'.

The majority of journalists (57.5 per cent) would never claim to be somebody else, while a quarter of those surveyed believed it was justified on occasion. Just over half the respondents (55 per cent) would not approve under any circumstances 'exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story', but a good proportion (40 per cent) would do so on occasion. Half the respondents would not approve the use of personal letters or documents without permission, although 35 per cent believed it was justified on occasion.

The majority of journalists said they would never publish stories with unverified content (75 per cent), accept money from sources (82.5 per cent), alter or

fabricate quotes from sources (85 percent) or alter photographs (72.5 percent).

One interesting observation in this segment of the questionnaire was the number of respondents who either 'did not know' or 'refused' to answer some of the questions. Refusal to answer ranged from 2.5 to 17.5 percent, while 'don't know' responses ranged from 5 percent to 27.5 percent.

## **4.5 Perceptions of influences on journalism**

Respondents were asked to select an option that described how much influence each item in a list of potential sources of influence on journalism had on their work. Options available were 'not influential', 'little influential', 'somewhat influential', 'very influential', 'extremely influential', 'not relevant to my work', 'don't know' and 'refused'.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given Fiji's recent history and regulatory environment, the influence factor that the large majority of respondents considered as extremely or very influential related to media laws and regulation (70 percent). Fifty-five percent believed censorship was extremely or very influential, while 40 percent believed the same of government officials (12.5 percent believed censorship was not influential). Forty-five percent described the military, police and state security apparatus as extremely or very influential on their work, while 27.5 percent believed the same of politicians. Other highly influential factors on work include information access, feedback from the audience, audience research and data, and journalism ethics.

The most common response across the 13 items of potential influence was that they were 'somewhat influential'. Only two factors the majority of respondents believed were not influential on their work: business people and pressure groups.

## **4.6 Perceptions of journalism roles**

The majority of the 40 respondents to the structured questionnaire appeared to express an understanding of the roles of journalism and values in a media environment that can be described as the traditional Fourth Estate orientation. They used terms such as 'factual', 'fair reporting', 'balance' and 'fearless', as well as terms such as 'campaign journalism' and 'solution-driven'. This tends to confirm the findings of the survey this study was modelled on: "[...] Fijian journalists aim to combine a detached watchdog role with that of being a supporter of national development and an advocate of social change' (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015, p. 573).

**Table 4: Fijian journalists' views of their institutional roles**

<b>Journalists' views of their roles</b>	<b>Extremely/ very important</b>	<b>Fiji, 2015</b>	<b>Indonesia, 2012</b>	<b>Brazil, 2012</b>
To monitor and scrutinise political leaders	90%	87%	80.8%	89%
To monitor and scrutinise business elite.	87.5%	50.7%	60.2%	51%
To set the political agenda.	27.5%	20.8%	41.4%	24.2%
To influence public opinion.	35%	47.4%	48.5%	24%
To advocate for social change.	65%	62.4%	60.6%	52.5%
To concentrate on news that will attract the widest possible audience.	57.5%	46.8%	71.4%	19%
To convey a positive image of political leadership	20%	22.1%	13.1%	1%
To support national development.	77.5%	53.5%	22.2%	43.4%
To motivate people to participate in political activity.	40%	62.4%	63.6%	60%

Note: The comparative surveys were Fiji (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015); Indonesia (Hamitzsch et al, 2012); and Brazil (Hamitzsch, 2012).

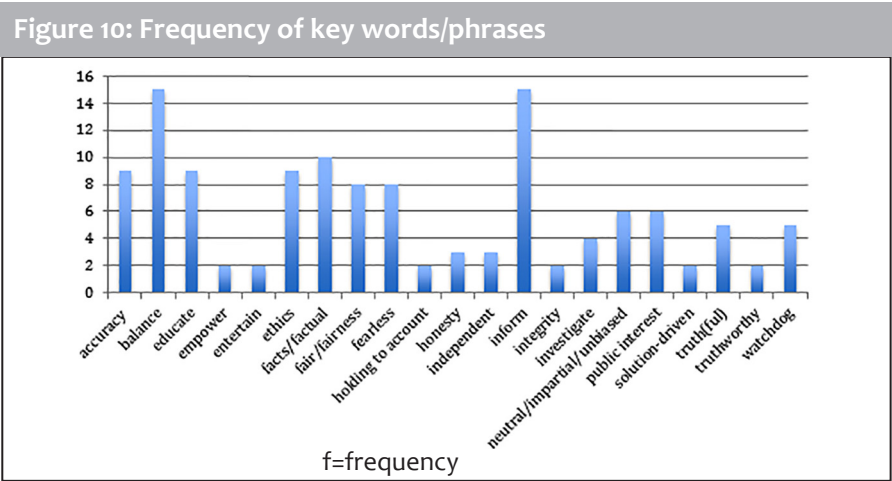
Perceptions of journalism's roles were measured in two ways in the questionnaire: through the structured questions and in an open-ended question that they were free to not answer (only two respondents refused). In the structured questionnaire, respondents were asked several questions relating to how they perceive their institutional roles as journalists. The questions asked the respondents to rank several statements related to journalism's role on a scale ranging from 'unimportant' to 'extremely important'. The statements ranged from roles deemed to be typical 'watchdog' ones to populist ones such as 'conveying a positive image of political leadership'.

The results in the current study mirrored some of those in the previous Fiji study by Hanusch and Uppal (2015) carried out in 2008 and 2009. For example, in this study 90 percent of journalists ranked their role 'to monitor and scrutinise political leaders' as 'extremely or very important', compared to 87 percent in the study carried out six years earlier. The overwhelming majority of respondents believed it was 'extremely or very important' to 'report things

as they are’ (77.5 percent). A full 90 percent believed it was ‘extremely or very important’ to ‘provide analysis of current events’, while 65 percent believed it was ‘extremely or very important’ to ‘advocate for social change’. But when it came to ‘setting the political agenda’ and ‘influencing public opinion’ respondents tended to be equivocal. The most number of respondents felt it was ‘somewhat important’ (30 percent), with 22.5 percent feeling it was of ‘little importance’ and 20 percent felt it was ‘very important’. On the question of whether they viewed their role as ‘influencing public opinion’ 22.5 percent felt it was ‘extremely important’, while 27.5 percent felt it was ‘somewhat important’ and 20 per cent believed it was ‘unimportant’.

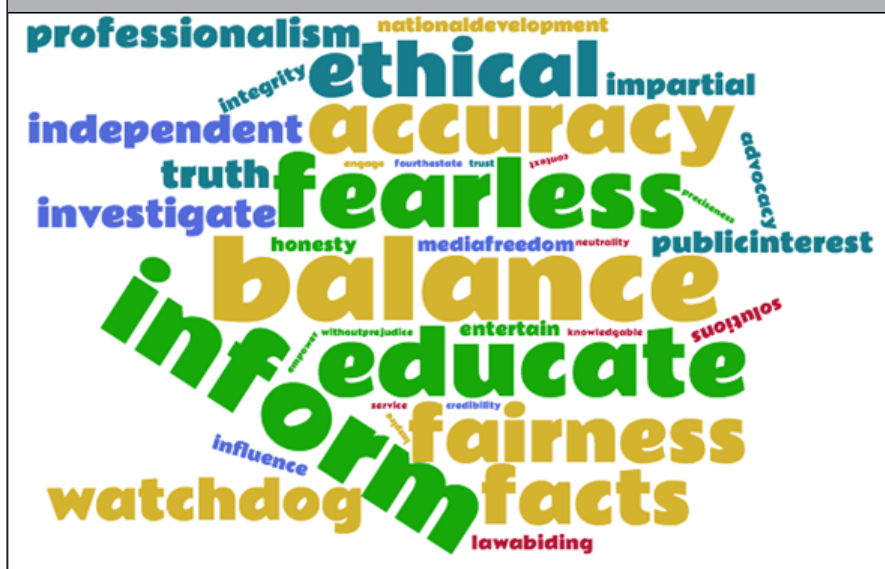
An interesting contrast occurs in the responses to two questions on whether journalists viewed their role as being an ‘adversary of government’ and ‘conveying a positive image of political leadership’. The outright majority of responses indicated it was ‘unimportant’ to be a government adversary (42.5 percent). But while these respondents may not view themselves as necessarily opposed to government, they also felt it was unimportant to ‘convey politicians in a positive light (45 percent).

A similar contrast appears in the responses to the questions about ‘supporting national development’ and ‘supporting government policy’. While 45 percent of respondents said it was ‘extremely important’ to ‘support national development’, only 7.5 percent felt the same way about ‘supporting government policy’.



Note: Responses to the question: What should be the three most important roles of journalists in Fiji?

Figure 11: Keywords/phrases on a word cloud



A study across 18 countries utilising the standard questionnaire employed in this survey showed that ‘non-involvement and the watchdog function indeed are universal. Supporting national development and advocating for social change appear to be additional, rather than substituting prisms, which journalists aim to employ in their work’ (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015, p. 573). However, it was also pointed out that the ‘answers provided by our respondents may at times have been more about journalists’ views of what they would like to do, rather than necessarily what they actually do’ (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015, p. 573).

Both the Fiji results were also in the same range as Indonesia and Brazil where the same studies about self-censorship have been conducted (Hanitzsch et al., 2011), as illustrated in Table 4.

# Chapter 5: Summary and conclusions

## 5.1 Summary

Self-censorship is a difficult subject to study, measure and analyse but some meaningful insight can still be elicited given time and resources. In Fiji, there is no doubt about the operation of self-censorship in newsrooms, whether it is acknowledged or not. The recent history of media in Fiji, from the first coup in 1987 to 2006 and onwards has been fraught with difficulties such as intimidation, regulation and demoralisation, but there have also been glimmers of hope. While media regulation has had an unmistakeable impact on how journalists carry out their work and on the kinds of news they pursue, the results of this study show they are aware of the limitations to truly operating in a free media environment. Somewhere in them lurks a yearning for a media that can embrace its true watchdog role but at the same time there exists an understanding that the media industry in Fiji has changed—or at least the protagonists' perception of its larger role has shifted—and that they must also play a part in supporting national development and social cohesiveness.

## 5.2 Future trends in media freedom development

In the period following the September 2014 general election, there has been some improvement in the media's watchdog role, but not nearly enough and not as extensive. The current industry trends are likely to continue unchanged because the *Media Industry Development Decree*, which looms large over the media, is unlikely to be amended to relax the restraints as long as the Bainimarama government is in power. Anecdotal evidence and social media interaction points to a public that largely distrusts some sections of the media or is wary of their credibility, especially when it comes to reporting on government initiatives or personalities. And social media is increasingly the place the public turns to not just to seek information or confirmation of news, but also a platform for citizen journalism—not all of it using journalism ethics.

Opposition politicians, most notably from the National Federation Party, and personalities from civil society groups have over the years continued to call for the removal of media laws but the government has largely ignored this. And



with the structure of Fiji's parliamentary democracy and the government's force of numbers, any changes to the media law are unlikely to happen. This would indicate a media industry status quo that will remain for the foreseeable future, with social media and citizen journalism becoming increasingly prominent as avenues for the population to get some aspect of freely produced media without the constraints of regulation.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The sanctions for breaches of the media law in Fiji are often described as draconian (Parliament of Fiji, 2015). Perhaps an unavoidable outcome of this is the normalising of self-censorship among Fiji's journalists. There is growing awareness of the power of the media and the need to steer clear of journalism that stirs up communal discord, brought home by the prosecution (under criminal law instead of the media law) of *The Fiji Times* and Fiji Television (censured under the media decree). However, this sense of responsibility can and is often easily used to stifle genuinely newsworthy reports. The tendency of journalists to stick to the middle ground as revealed in the survey results is possibly an indicator of self-censorship and the spiral of silence at work. When asked about their role perceptions, Fiji's journalists without fail indicate factors such as fairness and balance, independence and fearlessness, but the perception and the practice appear to be disconnected. Media capture is well and truly embedded in many sectors of the media, and it will take time, attitudinal change and legal amendments to undo this. Despite this, journalists still hang on to some veneer of their detached watchdog role while forging a media model that accords with the mood of the times: nation-building, ethnic harmony and development ideals.

### **5.4 Scope for further study**

There remains so much scope to further study the impact of self-censorship on Fiji's journalists as well as their perceptions about media freedom, influences on journalism and perceptions of journalism roles. The ever-changing demographics of the industry and the high turnover of journalists who leave for other media organisations often when they are at a senior level or who find employment outside the news industry, means only regular study of the industry can produce a body of information and meaningful data that can be used to foster a media industry that can leave behind its fear and sycophancy to speak truth to power and regain its role as the Fourth Estate.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Fiji Media Survey Online Questionnaire (full text)**

<http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Watching%20our%20Words%20-%20Perceptions%20of%20Self-Censorship%20and%20Media%20Freedom%20in%20Fiji.pdf>

## APPENDIX B

### Follow-up questions

The following questions were sent to senior journalists/editors in all the major newsrooms as a follow up to the structured survey to gain some understanding of their experiences of self-censorship:

1. Have you ever in the past three years encountered moments while working as a journalist/editor that you recognise as self-censorship? These would include times when you would stop to consider the ramifications of reporting certain facts and, after considering them, decided against reporting it or decided to rephrase to 'soften' the report? If so can you give an example?
2. If you've experienced self-censorship issues, how frequently do you have to deal with it? At least daily? At one a week? Or at least once a month?
3. Is self-censorship a topic that is discussed among your colleagues?
4. Some media personalities deny that self-censorship is a factor in their newsrooms? Do you think self-censorship is an issue in Fiji's newsrooms or do most journalists report things as they are without fear or favour?
5. How do you think journalists like yourself can overcome the problems associated with self-censorship?

## APPENDIX C

### Questions sent to the Media Industry Development Authority

The following questions were sent to the executive chairman of the Media Industry Development Authority, Ashwin Raj, but were never answered:

1. As chair of the Media Industry Development Authority, what are some major issues regarding media development and quality that are of concern to you?
2. How does the Authority plan to carry out the development aspect of its remit in the coming years?
3. Do you view self-censorship in Fiji's media as an issue that needs to be addressed? If you think it is an issue, how can this be addressed? If it is not an issue, in what ways is it not?
4. Self-censorship is often a sensitive issue, especially in the context of media freedom. Are there justifiable and unjustifiable types of self-censorship?
5. In the context of a transitioning society like Fiji's, what do you think the media's role should be?
6. You have since been appointed executive director of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. *The Fiji Sun* has reported that you do not view your holding of both positions as chair of MIDA and executive director of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRAC) as a conflict of interest. Do you still hold that view or will you eventually relinquish the chair of MIDA?