

## SPECIAL REPORT

# Watchdogs under pressure

## Pacific Islands journalists' demographic profiles and professional views

**Abstract:** While global scholarship on journalists' professional views has expanded tremendously over recent decades, the Pacific Islands remains somewhat of a blind spot, with only sporadic research. To address this gap in our knowledge, this study reports the results of a comprehensive survey of 206 Pacific Islands journalists in nine countries, providing a much-needed update of journalists' demographic profiles, role conceptions, ethical views and perceived influences. Our analysis finds that while journalists are now older, more experienced and better educated than 30 years ago, they are still younger and less well-educated than their counterparts in many other parts of the globe. In the digital age, some old challenges persist in relation to their roles: While journalists are committed to holding power to account and aiding in the development of their countries, they continue to face political and economic challenges that make their tasks difficult and sometimes even perilous.

**Keywords:** Cook Islands, demographic profiles, ethics, Fiji, journalism studies, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Pacific journalists, Papua New Guinea, political influence, Samoa, professionalism, regional studies, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

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SCHOLARSHIP on journalists' demographics, professional views, ethical stances and the perceived influences on their work has experienced considerable growth over the past decade or so. With their origins in countless national case studies, accounts of these journalistic cultures have increasingly become more internationalised, leading to important comparative insights into journalists' lived experiences and perceptions of their work (see, for example, Weaver & Willnat, 2012; Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad & de Beer, 2019a). However, while these studies have undoubtedly extended our understanding of journalistic cultures beyond a simplistic Western-centric view of journalism,

there still remain considerable blind spots in relation to some parts of the world.

One of these blind spots lies in the Pacific Islands, a region that has forever struggled to gain attention in journalism scholarship beyond its immediate neighbours in Australia and New Zealand. The last major study of journalists in the region was conducted in 1992—nearly 30 years ago (Layton, 1995). Another regional study was conducted in 2013 (Tacchi et al., 2013), while other studies have usually focused on major regional powers, such as Fiji or Papua New Guinea (see, for example, Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Robie, 2003, 2004; Singh, 2015). Much has changed in journalism in the Pacific Islands over the past 30 years, including major national and regional events impinging on media freedom, shifting geo-political priorities, technological developments, including the proliferation of social media, improved training capacities and tighter media legislation, and much more. In the face of these transformations, we have a largely incomplete understanding of how journalists' professional views may be changing with time and trends in the region.

To address this gap, this article presents the findings from the most ambitious attempt to take account of Pacific Island journalism cultures in recent years. Drawing on standardised surveys with 206 journalists across nine Pacific Island countries, our aim is to provide an up-to-date snapshot of journalists' demographic profiles, their role perceptions, ethical views, and perceived influences on their work.

## **Background**

Dating back more than 60 years (Cohen, 1963), studies of journalists' professional views have been a key focus of journalism scholarship, with countless studies conducted first in national contexts in the West (for example, Henningham, 1996; Johnstone et al., 1976; Weischenberg et al., 1998), and also later in the global South (e.g. Ramaprasad, 2001; Herscovitz, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2005). More recently, large-scale comparative analyses have emerged, substantially advancing our understanding of the wide variety of journalistic cultures across the globe, including across non-Western contexts (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a; Weaver, 1998; Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

When it comes to the Pacific Islands, however, it is noticeable that even these broader efforts have so far been unable to include any countries from the region. While Layton's (1998) study was part of Weaver's (1998) foundational *Global Journalist* volume, which reported results of journalist surveys from 21 countries and territories around the world, Weaver & Willnat's (2012) follow-up volume did not report any insights into the region. Similarly, the Worlds of Journalism Study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a), perhaps the most ambitious undertaking in the field as yet, which gathered evidence from 67 countries, also did not include the Pacific Islands. This dearth of consistent research on Pacific Islands journalists in recent years has resulted in a substantial gap in our knowledge of how journalistic

culture has evolved over the past 30 years. Before moving to our own analysis of the status quo, however, it is important to review the evidence that does exist in relation to the region's journalists.

While there were early studies by Vusoniwailala (1976) and Waqavonovono (1981), many scholars date the history of scholarly journalist studies in the Pacific back to Phinney's (1985) survey of 42 Papua New Guinean newspaper and radio journalists. Broader cross-regional studies emerged early, beginning with Masterton's (1989) survey of newspaper readers, radio listeners and journalists in the 10 Pacific Island nations. Soon after, Layton (1995) surveyed 164 journalist in eight countries in the region—American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Fiji, Guam, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Western Samoa. More recently, the 2013 'The State of Media and Communication Study' was published (Tacchi, et al., 2013). Jointly undertaken by RMIT University (Australia), the University of Goroka (UoG, Papua New Guinea) and Unitec (New Zealand), it covered 14 countries with 212 individual interviews, around 80 of whom were classified as media managers and professionals. Besides these, empirical work has been undertaken relatively sporadically, predominantly focusing on national contexts. This includes Robie's (1999) survey of 59 Fijian and 65 Papua New Guinean journalists, which was followed up in 2001 with his 908-page Pacific journalism study (Robie, 2003, 2004); Hanusch & Uppal's (2015) survey of 77 Fijian journalists' role perceptions; and Singh's (2015) survey of 72 Fijian journalists.

Broadly, studies have tended to find a relatively young journalistic workforce in most countries, which lacks work experience and qualifications (Robie, 2003, 2004), although the most recent evidence suggests this may be changing, with at least Fijian journalists older, more experienced and better educated than 20 years before (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Singh, 2015). Previously, in terms of regional comparisons, Layton (1995) had found Fijian journalists to be younger than their counterparts in PNG or Guam. Across the region, men dominated journalism, but this was more pronounced in Melanesia than Polynesia or Micronesia. Further, educational levels differed significantly, with Fijian journalists far less likely to have been university-educated than their counterparts in PNG or Guam (Layton, 1998).

In relation to role perceptions, Layton (1994, p. 404) argued that a 'Pacific style' of journalism was emerging, which meant journalists supported the critical role of the press, but interwove this with traditional cultural models. Robie later developed a *talanoa* Pacific journalism model (2014, p. 332-333). Being an adversary or providing entertainment were values that scored relatively low, while national unity was high on journalists' agenda. Similarly, Robie (2003, 2004) found the watchdog role to be the most supported by journalists in Fiji and PNG, followed by the role of the educator, defender of truth and nation builder.

Yet, Singh's interviews with Fijian journalists found journalists had 'a flexible attitude about going beyond being a detached observer of events to proactively contributing to efforts to build a better society' (Singh, 2011, p. 273). According to Hanusch and Uppal's (2015) findings, Fijian journalists carefully tread a line between Western journalistic ideals and development journalism goals. This related specifically to the combination of being an objective watchdog with being a supporter of national development and advocating for social change. In his study of how journalism had changed in Fiji since the 2006 coup and the promulgation of the punitive 2010 Media Decree, Singh (2021) found a cornered media weaned on the Anglo-American watchdog tradition under constant pressure to produce development journalism to avoid sanction, resulting in a possible identity crisis within Fiji's national journalist corps.

While all these studies have been incredibly valuable in gathering evidence on Pacific Islands journalist profiles and professional views, the review presented here also demonstrates that there is: a) an urgent need for a more up-to-date understanding of these issues in the Pacific, and b) a need for a cross-regional and comparative approach that can go beyond the dominant powers in the region. Journalism finds itself in a time of major transformations around the globe, in terms of political, economic, technological and societal change and it is thus crucial to better understand how journalists' professional orientations may be changing with the situation.

This is vital in a region where the news media sector is beset by entrenched problems—cultural, political and financial. Due to small advertising markets, limited profit margins, low salaries and high staff turnover rates, a typically young, inexperienced and underqualified journalist corps is usually in the front-lines of news coverage (Singh, 2020). In spite of all the challenges, the Pacific news media are still regarded as a pillar of democracy and good governance, and through this survey, we aim to provide journalism researchers, educators and policy-makers with a better understanding of these issues to make well-informed decisions going forward.

To this end, we draw on the existing body of recent global scholarship in aiming to paint a clearer picture of journalism culture (Hanitzsch, 2007) in the Pacific Islands region and to provide a basis for comparisons beyond it. Thus, we developed the following four research questions to study the trends:

**RQ1:** What are the demographic profiles of Pacific Islands journalists?

**RQ2:** What are Pacific Islands journalists' perceptions of their role?

**RQ3:** What are Pacific Islands journalists' views of controversial reporting practices?

**RQ4:** What are Pacific Islands journalists' perceptions of influences on their work?

## Method

To answer our research questions, we draw on the results of a survey of 206 Pacific Islands journalists in nine regional countries, gathered as part of a study funded by the University of the South Pacific, the United States Embassy in Fiji and the Pacific Media Centre, formerly based at the Auckland University of Technology. All nine countries are members of USP: Cook Islands, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Three of the 12 remaining member countries—Niue, Kiribati and Tokelau—could not be surveyed largely due to logistical challenges. Despite several attempts, we were unsuccessful in obtaining a research permit in Kiribati on time. The surveys were conducted between mid-2016 and mid-2018. Researchers travelled to seven countries to conduct the survey in-person. Resident research assistants conducted the surveys in Nauru and Tuvalu.

To qualify as a journalist, we adopted the approach employed by the seminal studies in the field (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; Hanitzsch et al., 2019a), defining professional journalists as those who had at least some editorial responsibility for the content they produced, who were involved in producing or editing journalistic content, or who worked in an editorial supervision and coordination role. In accordance with Hanitzsch et al. (2019a), we excluded those who were citizen journalists or bloggers, or who only worked in journalism as a side job. Owing to the relative sizes of the media markets in the studied countries, the number of respondents in each of the nine countries varied considerably. The largest number of respondents came from Fiji (60 respondents; 29.1 percent of the total number of respondents), followed by Tonga (39; 18.9 percent), Samoa (27; 13.1 percent), Solomon Islands (25; 12.1 percent), Vanuatu (20; 9.7 percent), Cook Islands (14; 6.8 percent), Tuvalu (11; 5.3 percent), Nauru (7; 3.4 percent) and Marshall Islands (3; 1.5 percent). Response rates in individual countries ranged between 70 percent (Solomon Islands) and 100 percent (Nauru), with an overall response rate of 79 percent. While we believe our samples are representative for each country, their absolute numbers are relatively low and thus any statistical testing is limited. Hence, we will only refer to those differences among our national samples where they can be meaningfully measured. In terms of job profiles, one-quarter of our respondents (25.6 percent) worked in a management function (editor-in-chief, managing editor, desk head or assignment editor, department head or senior editor), while the remainder were non-management staff (producers, reporters, news writers, subeditors, or trainees).

The questionnaire was based closely on the one used by the global Worlds of Journalism Study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a). Beyond gathering information on demographic aspects, such as age, gender, education, employment status and work experience, we focused on role perceptions, ethical views and perceived influences. To account for journalists' role perceptions, we presented journalists with a list of

19 institutional roles and asked them to tell us, on a five-point scale, how important each of these was in their work. Respondents had a choice of five answer options: ‘extremely important’, ‘very important’, ‘somewhat important’, ‘little important’ and ‘unimportant’. To study journalists’ views of potentially controversial reporting practices, we asked them: ‘Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?’ Respondents were given a list of 10 items and were able to choose from one of three answer options: ‘always justified’, ‘justified on occasion’ or ‘not approve under any circumstances’. Finally, to measure journalists’ perceptions of a range of influence on their work, we asked: ‘Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work’. The list included 27 items, with respondents asked to pick one of five options: ‘extremely influential’, ‘very influential’, ‘somewhat influential’, ‘little influential’, or ‘not influential’.

## Findings

### *Demographic profiles*

Our results suggest a marked change from earlier studies in terms of key demographic aspects. Over the past 30 years, Pacific journalists have become substantially older and much better educated (Table 1).

The median age of nearly 34 years is significantly higher than the median range of 20-29 years found by Layton (1998). Closer inspection reveals important

**Table 1: Demographic profile of Pacific Islands journalists**

Age (years)	36.69 (Median 34)
Gender (female)	49%
Work experience (years)	9.12 (Median 6)
Full-time employment	93.6%
Highest education level	
Not completed high school	2%
High School	21.8%
Bachelor’s degree	44.1%
Master’s degree	4%
Doctorate	0.5%
Some undergraduate studies, no degree	27.7%
Specialisation at university	
Journalism	43%
Another communications field	8.6%
Journalism and another communications field	20.5%
Not in these fields	27.8%
Member of a professional association	75%



differences across the nine countries studied here, however. At an average age of 33.4 years, Fijian journalists are the youngest, though even this figure indicates an increase from the average of 27.9 years found by Hanusch & Uppal (2015) and a mean age of 31 found by Singh (2015). One reason for the relatively younger age is the high turnover rate of journalists in the Fijian media (Singh, 2015). The Solomon Islands (34.6 years) and Nauru (34 years) are similar to Fiji, while the oldest age profiles were found in the Cook Islands (42.5 years) and Tonga (40.9 years). Samoa (36 years) and Vanuatu (36.5 years) rank somewhere in the middle. These figures correspond broadly with journalists' work experience. Across the region, journalists have worked in the job for an average of 9.12 years, but work experience is lowest in Fiji (7.81 years), the Solomon Islands (7.04 years) and Nauru (7.14 years). Those who have been the longest in the job come from Vanuatu (12.7 years), the Cook Islands (11.8 years) and Tonga (9.8 years).

In terms of education, past studies (Layton, 1994; Robie, 2003, 2004) found low completion rates in tertiary education, but it appears that now nearly half of all journalists hold a tertiary degree—arguably testament to the success of the University of the South Pacific, as well as the other technical and vocational institutes that teach journalism in the region. This result is consistent with Singh's (2015) findings, which showed that 49 percent of Fiji journalists had some form of tertiary qualification: 18 percent held diplomas; 17 percent degrees; 11 percent certificates; and 3 percent postgraduate qualifications.

What is more, this general growth in tertiary education is accompanied by a substantial focus on journalism. Of those who have studied at university, nearly two-thirds studied journalism, and only one-quarter did not specialise in any communication studies. While still lagging behind their large neighbours in Australia and New Zealand, where tertiary participation rates are around 80-90 percent (Hanusch, 2013; Hollings et al., 2016), it appears that Pacific Islands journalists are also increasingly highly educated, in line with a global trend (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a). Noticeably, however, journalists in Samoa and the Solomon Islands were the most-educated, with 69.2 and 68 percent, respectively, having completed at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent. An interesting picture emerges in Fiji, where nearly half (49.2 percent) have completed a degree, but when all journalists who have had at least some tertiary education, but not necessarily a degree are counted, that figure rises to 86.4 percent, which is on a par with Samoa (88.5 percent) and the Solomon Islands (88 percent). It appears that leaving university without completing a degree is a much more common occurrence for journalists in Fiji than the other countries. For comparison, 46.2 percent of Tongan journalists hold a degree, while 64.1 percent have undertaken some tertiary studies—more in line with the trends in Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

As for gender, the overall figures suggest broad gender parity across the Pacific Islands, but again, there are large discrepancies when we examine individual

countries. Women are actually in a slight majority in Fiji (51.7 percent) confirming Hanusch & Uppal's (2015) findings. They are also in a clear majority in Tuvalu (9 of 11 are women) and Nauru (6 out of 7), as well as in Samoa (61.5 percent, or 16 out of 26). In all other countries, however, women are in a minority. This is most pronounced in the Solomon Islands, where only four of 25 respondents were female (16 percent). In Tonga, women made up 46.2 percent of the workforce, in Vanuatu 47.1 percent (8 out of 17) and in the Cook Islands 42.9 percent (6 out of 14).

Just as in other parts of the globe, however (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a), women are still largely disadvantaged in terms of power within the field. Across the region, only four of 10 journalists in a management position were women. What is more, of the 21 women in our sample who had a managerial role, 17 were either in Tonga (7) or Fiji (10). In general, across our sample women tended to be younger ( $M=34.6$ ) compared to men ( $M=38.6$ ), but only slightly less experienced (Women:  $M=8.65$ ; Men:  $M=9.25$ ). However, 99 percent of women were in full-time employment, compared with 88 percent of men. We could not find any meaningful differences in educational levels, with men and women similarly likely to have completed a tertiary education and to have specialised in journalism during their studies in the various countries of our sample.

As for other demographic parameters, our results indicate a relatively high commitment to professional associations, with 75 per cent of respondents stating they were a member of an organisation or association that was primarily for people in journalism or the communications field. This compares favourably with journalists in Australia, where the number was just below 50 per cent (Hanusch, 2013), and New Zealand, where at 33 percent it was even lower (Hollings et al., 2016).

### *Role perceptions*

Past studies have noted the difficult situation in which Pacific Islands journalists find themselves. Faced with increased pressure from governments and limitations of media freedom, journalists have tended to display a mix of watchdog ideals and developmental goals (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015, Layton, 1998; Robie, 2004; Singh, 2015). Our results lend some support for this assumption (Table 2).

The most popular roles include the desire to be an adversary of the government, as well as monitoring and scrutinising political leaders. But journalists also want to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, as well as advocate for social change—roles that fall in the realm of development journalism (Kalyango et al., 2017). It is notable, however, that the role 'Support national development' received relatively little support from our respondents. Journalists also take a typically Western, detached standpoint when they say it is important to report things as they are and to be a detached observer. At the same time, three-quarters think it is important to provide entertainment and relaxation, a marked departure from the very low support for this role in the past (Robie, 2003, 2004). In line with journalists around the world, among the least popular statements we found



**Table 2: Pacific Islands journalists' role perceptions**

Role perceptions	N	Mean	SD	Very important/ Extremely important (%)
Let people express their views	196	4.56	0.65	92.4
Be an adversary of the government	192	4.4	0.88	86.5
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	194	4.4	0.82	88.2
Provide analysis of current affairs	193	4.39	0.78	88.1
Report things as they are	194	4.37	0.85	85.6
Provide entertainment and relaxation	196	4.21	1.06	76
Advocate for social change	191	4.19	0.98	76.9
Monitor and scrutinise political leaders	191	4.18	1.07	77
Be a detached observer	168	4.13	0.96	80.4
Provide information people need to make political decisions	189	4.09	1.05	75.1
Provide advice, orientation and direc- tion for daily life	191	4.06	0.90	74.8
Monitor and scrutinise business	187	3.9	1.13	66.3
Influence public opinion	184	3.77	1.35	64.1
Motivate people to participate in politi- cal activity	185	3.5	1.25	50.8
Convey a positive image of political leadership	188	3.38	1.27	44.6
Support government policy	190	3.32	1.28	41.5
Set the political agenda	172	3.29	1.35	47.7
Support national development	187	3.17	1.37	41.2
Provide news that attracts the largest audience	175	2.93	1.39	33.7

were the so-called collaborative roles, such as supporting government policy or conveying a positive image of political leadership.

To further analyse journalists' role perceptions in a global context, we constructed four indices previously developed by Hanitzsch et al. (2019b). These indices account for 13 of the 19 role perceptions posed to our respondents and will serve to provide a clearer overview of the role dimensions across the different countries in our study. Indices were built by adding up journalists' responses to the individual items in an index and then dividing by the number of items, so as to ensure easier interpretation. The monitorial role was built from four state-

ments, which included ‘Provide political information’, ‘Monitor and scrutinise politics’, ‘Monitor and scrutinise business’ and ‘Motivate people to participate in politics’. The collaborative role index is made up of ‘Support government policy’ and ‘Convey a positive image of political leaders’, whereas the index representing an interventionist role contains four statements: ‘Advocate for social change’, ‘Influence public opinion’, ‘Set the political agenda’ and ‘Support national development’. The accommodative role is based on the indicators ‘Provide entertainment and relaxation’, ‘Provide news that attract largest audience’ and ‘Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life’. It should be noted that, following Hanitzsch et al. (2019b), these are formative indices that are based on conceptual considerations. Table 3 displays our results.

Very much in line with results from across the globe (Hanitzsch et al., 2019b), and with the role-by-role results presented earlier, we find the monitorial role is also the most supported in the Pacific Islands. This corresponds with what appears to be an almost universal understanding of journalism as holding those in power to account. Conversely, the collaborative role is the least supported, also in line with global trends. There is little to separate our respondents on the accommodative and interventionist roles, indicating at least broadly similar support.

In terms of differences across the countries in our sample, we find little meaningful differences in journalists’ support for the monitorial role. As noted earlier, any statistical tests are affected by the relatively small group sizes, which in some cases, such as for the Marshall Islands, Nauru or Tuvalu are impossible. Still, in terms of the collaborative role, we find that Fijian journalists are significantly less supportive of this role than their colleagues in Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Historically, Fijian journalists have been weaned on the Anglo-American media tradition, where the watchdog role is central. Fijian journalists’ lack of support for the collaborative role could stem from disillusionment with the government due to the media restrictions endured since the 2006 coup, culminating with the promulgation of the punitive 2010 Media Industry Development Decree, which prescribes hefty fines and jail terms for breaches. It can perhaps be said that this has left some journalists in no mood to ‘collaborate’ with the government, and that ‘collaboration’ is not voluntary, but enforced through the media decree (Singh, 2015; 2021).

In relation to the interventionist role, Samoa stands out. Samoan journalists consider this role as roughly similarly important to the monitorial role. In contrast, Fijian and Cook Islands journalists do not consider interventionist roles as similarly important. We find significant differences here between them and their counterparts in Samoa and Tonga. In similar ways, Fijian and Cook Islands journalists are significantly less likely to support the accommodative role than their colleagues in Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

**Table 3: Journalists' role dimensions**

Countries	Monitorial			Accommodative			Interventionist			Collaborative		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Marshall Islands	3	3.83	0.88	2	2.33	0.94	2	2.38	1.24	2	3.00	0.00
Cook Islands	10	4.10	0.67	12	3.11	0.91	11	3.09	1.18	14	2.96	0.95
Vanuatu	14	4.00	0.94	15	4.02	0.77	17	3.71	0.99	15	3.57	1.13
Tuvalu	7	3.75	1.02	6	4.06	0.57	5	3.55	1.08	8	4.19	0.70
Samoa	22	4.40	0.80	22	4.50	0.63	18	4.39	0.86	25	3.94	1.16
Nauru	5	3.30	0.74	5	3.80	0.18	6	3.29	0.43	7	3.36	0.48
Solomon Islands	24	4.45	0.60	23	3.90	0.69	23	4.01	0.74	24	3.63	0.84
Tonga	33	4.24	0.66	32	3.97	0.80	31	4.06	0.75	35	3.71	0.99
Fiji	55	4.06	0.75	48	3.34	0.61	42	3.01	0.88	51	2.58	0.96
<b>Total</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>1.10</b>

### *Ethical views*

Journalism scholarship has for some time been interested in journalists' views of a range of reporting practices, which may be considered controversial by some. In line with previous research (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a; Weaver, 1998; Weaver & Willnat, 2012) we therefore asked our respondents to what extent they felt certain practices might be justifiable. Very little research has engaged with such practices in the Pacific Islands context, making any longitudinal comparison or interpretation difficult. What our results do show, is that there is extremely little cross-country variation, suggesting a relatively homogenous approach to these issues across the region (Table 4).

We can see that the practice of using confidential business or government documents without authorisation is considered the least controversial of the practices presented to our respondents. Only around half of the surveyed journalists said they would not approve of this practice under any circumstances. Obviously, such practices go to the heart of journalism's monitorial role, which, as we have seen, receives widespread support in our sample. It is, however, still considerably more controversial than for the global average reported by Ramaprasad et al. (2019). In their study, only 34.9 percent of journalists globally would not approve of the practice, with 51.9 percent saying it was justified on occasion, and 13.1 per cent saying it was always justified. In contrast, among our respondents, only 8.5 percent said it was always justified, and 39.7 percent said it was justified on occasion. In New Zealand, 93 percent of journalists thought it was acceptable (Hollings et al., 2016). Our findings thus seem to support a key argument put forward by Ramaprasad et al. (2019)—that such investigative techniques tended to be generally more accepted in the Global North, where they were part of journalism's monitorial role. While Pacific Islands journalists also favoured the monitorial role, there are clear practical limits on what they can do and this may lead to greater disavowal of such investigative practices. Put more simply: While they want to monitor those in power, they are not always able to, either due to cultural reasons that respect authority and authority figures, lack of whistleblower protections, punitive media laws, or even the lack of training, experience and qualifications. Younger and less experienced journalists may perhaps be more risk-averse in this context. Such a cohort is also likely to be less cognisant about their public interest responsibilities, as well as less capable of fully accomplishing the more complex forms of journalism that require obtaining and using confidential information.

Indeed, it seems that Pacific Islands journalists are generally more risk-averse than their colleagues elsewhere, because even the second-least controversial practice—using hidden microphones or cameras – was seen to be justifiable by only around 40 percent, compared to 66 percent of the globe (Ramaprasad et al., 2019). The most controversial practices were 'publishing stories with unverified

**Table 4: Pacific Islands journalists' views of reporting practices**

Views of reporting practices	N	Would not approve (%)	Justified on occasion (%)	Always justified (%)
Using confidential business or government documents without authorisation	189	51.9	39.7	8.5
Using hidden microphones or cameras	184	59.8	32.6	7.6
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	185	63.8	30.8	5.4
Using re-creations or dramatisations of news by actors	170	65.3	31.2	3.5
Paying people for confidential information	188	68.1	26.6	5.3
Getting employed in an organisation to gain inside information	180	69.4	25.6	5
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	187	75.4	19.3	5.3
Claiming to be somebody else	183	83.6	12	4.4
Accepting money from sources	187	84	10.7	5.3
Publishing stories with unverified content	190	90	6.3	3.7

content', 'accepting money from sources' and 'claiming to be somebody else'. In their rejection of these professional practices, our respondents exhibited considerable similarities to their colleagues in New Zealand (Hollings et al., 2016), as well as to slightly lesser extent in Australia (Hanusch, 2013).

### *Perceived influences*

To examine journalists' perceived influences on their work, we asked them to rate each of 27 items in terms of how influential they thought it was. Following Hanitzsch et al. (2019c), we subsequently developed indices to provide for easier interpretation of the results. Table 5 lists the results for individual items, as well as for the indices. To develop the indices, we applied Hanitzsch et al.'s (2019c) conceptualisation, arriving at five dimensions of influences. The political influences dimensions includes pressures from 'politicians', 'government officials', 'pressure groups' and 'business representatives'. Economic influences are constituted by 'profit expectations', 'advertising considerations' and 'audience research and data.' Organisational influences include perceived pressures from 'managers of the news organisation', 'supervisors and higher editors', 'owners of news organisations' and 'editorial policy'. Procedural influences are

‘information access’, ‘journalism ethics’, ‘media laws and regulation’, ‘available news-gathering resources’ and ‘time limits.’ Personal networks influences are constituted by ‘friends, acquaintances, family,’ ‘colleagues in other media’ and ‘peers on the staff.’

Our findings confirm previous research which found that those influences which journalists experience most directly tend to be the ones they see as most influential. Hence, journalists feel procedures and organisational influences—such as deadlines, media laws, access to information, resources and editorial policy—have the most impact on their work. This is followed by economic influences which tend to interact with organisational pressures. In contrast to the global average, which saw journalists place political pressures well below personal networks influences (Hanitzsch et al., 2019c), journalists in our sample ranked them as actually more influential. This suggests the more prominent role that political pressures play in Pacific Islands journalism cultures and is in line with other findings discussed earlier.

Comparative results between the countries in our study reveal that in terms of political influences, we can identify significant differences between journalists in Samoa on the one hand and the Cook Islands and Tonga on the other. Samoan journalists ( $M=3.79$ ) are far more likely to perceive pressure from political sources than those in the Cook Islands ( $M=2.30$ ) and Tonga ( $M=2.68$ ). Samoa’s Human Rights Protection Party had been in power for nearly 40 years and Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sai’ilele Malielegaoi, one of the world’s longest-serving leaders for more than two decades until losing the April 2021 election, is a harsh and constant critic of the national media. As for economic influences, we can see that Samoan journalists ( $M=3.92$ ) also rank these more highly than journalists in the Cook Islands ( $M=2.71$ ) or Solomon Islands (3.08). For organisational influences, we also find Samoan journalists ( $M=4.16$ ) perceive them as being significantly more influential than their colleagues in the Cook Islands (2.94). No significant differences could be found for the dimensions of procedural or personal networks influences. Further, it should be noted that the individual differences identified here should not be overestimated. In terms of their relative ranking, journalists in all countries ascribed supreme importance to procedural and organisational influences, followed by economic influences. Small differences existed in terms of whether political or personal networks influences were placed last, but these, particularly given the small group sizes, do not have overly large effects. Even then, a unique challenge of Pacific journalism is the closeness and cohesiveness in relationships in small societies, where people are more likely to be related, known to each other, or connected in some way, sometimes putting journalists in a difficult professional position with regards to criticising people.



**Table 5: Pacific journalists' perceived influences on their work**

Perceived influences	N	Mean	SD	Very influential/ Extremely influential (%)
Time limits	192	4.36	0.92	82.8
Media laws and regulation	193	4.09	1.09	77.2
Information access	194	3.99	1.05	75.2
Availability of news gathering resources	190	3.97	1.01	70.5
Audience research and data	186	3.9	1.01	66.7
Editorial policy	182	3.77	1.15	67.6
Feedback from the audience	193	3.75	1.10	62.1
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	184	3.64	1.16	60.9
Public relations	197	3.54	1.23	55.8
Religious considerations	184	3.45	1.15	51.1
Personal values and beliefs	180	3.42	1.17	48.9
Managers of your news organisations	179	3.39	1.22	49.2
Owners of your news organisations	181	3.34	1.33	48.1
Competing news organisations	190	3.29	1.32	44.7
Journalism ethics	184	3.27	1.24	44.5
Censorship	184	3.24	1.33	46.2
Business people	192	3.19	1.27	43.2
Profit expectations	177	3.02	1.23	34.4
The military, police and state security	190	3.02	1.34	39.5
Government officials	193	3.01	1.23	38.4
Advertising considerations	181	2.91	1.19	29.8
Relationships with news sources	186	2.82	1.30	30.6
Peers on the staff	184	2.81	1.11	27.7
Pressure groups	191	2.79	1.25	28.8
Politicians	190	2.79	1.27	30
Friends, acquaintances and family	196	2.77	1.27	30.6
Colleagues in other media	195	2.69	1.21	25.6
Procedural influences	174	3.96	0.75	
<i>Organisational influences</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>3.55</i>	<i>0.98</i>	
<i>Economic influences</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>3.29</i>	<i>0.94</i>	
<i>Political influences</i>	<i>185</i>	<i>2.96</i>	<i>1.10</i>	
<i>Personal influences</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>2.80</i>	<i>0.95</i>	

## Conclusions

Our overview of the current state of Pacific Islands journalism culture thus points to some key insights, the main one perhaps being that the more things change, the more they stay the same. We found that overall, journalists in the region have become older, more experienced and better educated than they were 30 years ago. In a global contexts, however, they are still considerably younger, less experienced and less well-educated, reinforcing difficulties for journalism's role as a fourth estate across the region, especially in the face of looming crises, such as climate change. What is more, we found some considerable differences, in particular with respect to Fiji, the most populous country in our sample, and a regional power. Here, journalists remain younger than their colleagues in other countries and are also less well-educated, possibly due to the country's well-known coup culture and punitive media laws.

Across the Pacific Islands, journalists exhibit strong support for their role in holding power to account, but this continues to be mixed with views that journalism also needs to play a developmental role for communities. While they want to be watchdogs, the political realities of their work—as shown through their risk-averse views on the acceptability of various reporting practices, as well as perceived influences on their work—make this a difficult exercise. In many Pacific Island nations, governments still severely restrict or at least hinder the press from playing this crucial Fourth Estate role, ensuring a continuing battle for journalists committed to being watchdogs.

In providing the first broader regional snapshot of journalism cultures for 30 years, our study has thus shown that while much has changed in journalism over this time, journalists' professional views remain somewhat similar.

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