

**PACIFIC
ISLANDS
MEDIA
FREEDOM
INDEX
2023**



FOR

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BY

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ABOUT

US

2023

**PACIFIC
ISLANDS
MEDIA
FREEDOM
INDEX**

PACIFIC
ISLANDS
MEDIA
FREEDOM
INDEX

00

Foreword
Page 05

01

Introduction
Page 09

02

Executive Summary
Page 11

03

Context
Page 14



04

Methodology
Page 19

05

Analysis
Page 22

06

A Pacific Media Freedom Index
Page 32

07

Next steps
Page 40



PIMFI Partners

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Pacific Freedom Forum is inspired and guided by Article 19 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights as it applies in our island newsrooms. Founded in 2008 as an online media alert monitoring network, as media freedoms drastically worsened in Fiji, we have, since then, monitored and responded to more than a decade of media and freedom of expression challenges across the Pacific region. The Pacific Islands Media Freedom survey, index and report is our first regionwide collaboration to capture the direct experiences of Pacific Islands journalists and media workers across the region.

Internews is a global media support nonprofit committed to supporting and strengthening independent media around the world for the past 40 years. Working in more than 100 countries, we train journalists, tackle disinformation, and help media outlets become financially sustainable – so that everyone has trustworthy information to make informed decisions and hold power to account. We are privileged to be partnering with PFF to produce this inaugural Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index and Report.

Foreword

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The Pacific Islands' media landscape is unique, presenting us with distinct challenges as well as opportunities for growth as we respond in ways that are grounded in our realities, using the best of what we have.

At the Pacific Freedom Forum (PFF) our mission is to safeguard and uphold the principles of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This article enshrines the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information as fundamental human rights, a cause to which we are deeply committed and actively promoting.

The Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index, For Us, By Us, About Us, was created to close the gap, specifically, in the annual reporting of Pacific Islands media freedom issues. On behalf of my fellow co-chairs, I must note our thanks and appreciation to our colleagues in the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) for the opportunity to launch this, our inaugural report, at the 7th Pacific Media Summit in Niue on 23 September 2024.

The inauguration of a Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index (PIMFI) signifies a very important achievement for all Pacific Islands journalists. We at PFF and our partner, Internews, have only been able to coordinate this work because 73 individuals stepped up and took the time to share the reality of their professional lives with us and have their say. To each and every one of them, this report is yours. The PIMFI is for all the Pacific Islanders, but it is built upon your words, your ideas and aspirations for our newsrooms to be able to do better, and to be better; to do the job - freely and without constraint - they we are meant to do.

The first of its kind to be carried out for and by Pacific Island newsrooms, this report underscores the importance of a Pacific Islands-based group capturing the voices of Pacific Islanders across the blue ocean regarding the current state of

media freedom in our islands. From Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, I believe these findings confirm and reflect a closer fit to our realities than any such reporting has previously revealed. None of this would have been possible without the commitment of PFF Coordinator, Bernadette Carreon, who has worked tirelessly these past months to bring this inaugural survey, index and report to fruition.

This first PIMFI is a pilot, a starting point that can undoubtedly help us to grow the base of knowledge about media freedom in our region to inform and stimulate a healthy democratic debate about how best to address the challenges identified in this index. We want to do more, to grow the participation in this annual study and we will, but the most important step was getting started. Now, let's continue and build upon this to bring more of the Pacific media family with us along this important journey.

Like any research, this Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index, For Us, By Us, About Us, has uncovered some very interesting findings that need our thoughtful attention as well as that of our stakeholders across our region. We hope these lessons will also help us to build upon the strengths it has identified so that going forward we can work together to improve and fortify media freedoms in all our countries, for the good of all our island communities.

Happy reading.

Robert Iroga
Pacific Freedom Forum Chair
(Melanesia)



Robert Luke Iroga in 2015 founded the Solomon Business Magazine and SBMOnline, one of the leading online news platforms in the Solomon Islands. Iroga holds a Master's Degree in International Politics, from CERIS University in Brussels, a Bachelor of Communications (Journalism) from the Divine Word University of Papua New Guinea, and a Diploma in Journalism from Manukau Institute of Technology in New Zealand. Iroga is the Chair of the regional media watchdog Pacific Freedom Forum, Vice President of the Pacific Islands News Association, and was the Media and Communications Chair for the 2023 Pacific Games.



“As a young person growing up in a rapidly changing world, I believe media freedom is crucial for my generation. It means we have access to a variety of perspectives and can engage in meaningful conversations about the issues that matter to us. When media is free, it empowers us to question, learn, and contribute to our communities with a more informed and open mindset.”

Introduction

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Talanoa and talking can bring issues to the collective table, but without measurement or tracking indicators, progress and solutions are difficult to implement.

This is especially true when speaking of the state of media freedom in the Pacific. 'Hotspots' in the wider Asia-Pacific context which include some of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist, are often used to express how comparatively lucky we are that we aren't being shot at, jailed and 'disappeared'.

For Pacific Islands media, the challenge has been less about fighting for our lives, and more about fighting to recognise the threats to our independence. From traditional and culturally reinforced gender stereotypes, the weight of relationships and community standing and very real economic realities that underpin lives in the Pacific to mindsets, conscious and unconscious bias, and self-censorship; many factors continue to challenge independent reporting without fear or favour, in the

Pacific Islands news context. These intrinsic constraints do not match the intensity of the life-threatening daily threats confronting so many of our media colleagues globally, but they pack an insidious and very real impact on balanced, independent journalism, carrying weight and consequences for quality news coverage and Pacific narratives tethered to our very identity as Pacific peoples.

This inaugural Pacific Media Freedom Survey provides valuable insight into what is important to Pacific Islands journalists in identifying the challenges to media freedom in our region, but the survey was also designed so that participants could share responses to thematic issues that also inform global monitoring on the same issues.

What exactly are we talking about when we speak of media freedom? How do we identify, learn, and guard against threats to that freedom? What are the trending issues which have beset us the most? What are emerging trends that are dictating change, transformation, and attention for those newsrooms who face no choice but to move with the times, or be left behind? These are just some of the issues to which the survey sets out to capture a Pacific response.

As Pacific media leaders look to set more relevant and realistic values for upholding global human rights commitments such as Article 19 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, it is hoped this inaugural Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index will help to illuminate and inform their policy making. Founded as an online media alert monitoring network in 2008 as the situation worsened for media in Fiji the Pacific Freedom Forum, taking its cue from Article 19, has been monitoring and responding to almost two decades of media and freedom of expression challenges across the Pacific region. This year, to help deepen the impact and engagement of this voluntary online network, it was decided the PFF would institute what was designed

to be a quick, easy and fun survey to help measure what matters most when we speak of media freedom in the Pacific.

The results were sobering. Affirming there are challenges, despite in some cases great progress. That even as a nation like Fiji can- following the revoking of the Media Industry Development Act in April 2023 - celebrate the return of media freedom after almost two decades of intense repression, there remains the impact of a generation of censorship to undo. The call from respondents for specific attention to social media and disinformation, fake news, and AI is sounding a clarion call for a far greater awareness of the fundamental importance of media freedom in the face of the very real challenges - old and new - that confront us in this era of rapid digital change as the very tools we use to tell our stories and hold those in power to account morph and grow in ways we could never have anticipated.

Lisa Leilani Williams
Founding Coordinator
Pacific Freedom Forum



Lisa Leilani Williams was the founding coordinator of the Pacific Freedom Forum, which was established in 2008. She is currently the Public Affairs Advisor to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.



Executive Summary

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The Pacific Islands Media Freedom Survey 2024 was shared online by PFF and media partners in August 2024, as an opt-in invitation to participate.

The survey examines media freedom through five thematic areas: Legal frameworks, political contexts, economic pressures, safety of journalists, and the social and cultural environment for those working in news media across the Pacific. Participants were asked to complete the 12-question survey online and given assurance they would not be identified. The survey was opened from early August to the end of the month. The gender balance of respondents was relatively even - 51% identified as female, 47% male, and 2% preferred not to say. The majority of respondents (47%), come from media executive and managerial roles, with 30% stating they were reporters and the rest in other positions related to news production.

Economic factors and social-cultural issues were the leading concerns affecting media freedom in the Pacific as identified by respondents followed closely by political and legal issues.

Executive Summary cont.

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Key Findings and Recommendations

Safety of Journalists:

Economic Challenges:

Sociocultural Barriers:



Fiji journalists celebrating the lifting of the draconian media decree in April 2023.

Legal Context- Respondents from several countries cited weak legal protections for free speech and media as a significant challenge, with issues around defamation laws, targeted investigations of journalists, and lack of legal recourse for crimes against media workers.

Recommendation: Governments should review and strengthen legal frameworks to protect media freedom, including decriminalizing defamation and ensuring robust protections for whistleblowers and investigative journalists.

Political interference in editorial independence, unequal access to state media, and lack of advertising support for independent outlets were reported as common problems for journalists.

Recommendation: Policies must guarantee the editorial autonomy of state-funded media and ensure equitable distribution of advertising and other resources to support a diverse media landscape.

Respondents from several countries reported physical assaults, equipment damage, online harassment, and other threats against media workers, especially women journalists.

Recommendation: Governments and media organizations should establish comprehensive safety protocols, provide security training, and ensure swift investigation and prosecution of crimes against journalists.

Governments and news organisations can introduce digital and cyber policies and audits that cover ethics and encourage journalists' awareness of their mental health and safety to help recognise and report cyber-bullying and online abuse of journalists, particularly given the gendered nature of online abuse.

Lack of advertising revenue, high operational costs, and financial insecurity are major hurdles, leading to self-censorship and risk of undue influence.

Recommendation: Innovative funding mechanisms, tax incentives, and other measures should support independent media's financial sustainability.

Governments should apply a media diversity policy regarding ownership and information services, and support advertising and funding for their paid media outreach beyond their own news channels.

Media organizations should also diversify revenue streams and strengthen financial management.

Employers are urged to encourage financial literacy among their staff and introduce feedback loops or flexible working solutions where relevant.

Gender-based discrimination, cultural sensitivities, and lack of public trust in media were identified as significant challenges for respondents.

Recommendation: Media organizations should grow staff awareness sessions reporting conflicted situations relating to family, gender roles, or election periods, and implement policies to promote gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity.

Outreach and engagement efforts are needed to rebuild public trust in the media.

Overall, the survey highlights the need for a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, media organizations, civil society, and international partners to address the complex and interrelated challenges facing media freedom in the Pacific region.

Sustained commitment and collaborative action will be crucial to safeguarding the vital role of independent media in Pacific Islands nations, particularly those with small, remote communities away from a commercial centre.

Details of these results are provided in the analysis along with some recommendations for consideration. A further set of process-related recommendations based on findings from the approach and methodology, is also provided in the conclusion of this report.

Context

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The 14 Pacific Island nations referenced in this survey are the sovereign independent member nations forming the ‘Blue Pacific Continent’ of Oceania other than Australia, New Zealand, and territories.



A Pacific journalist conducts an interview during the Pandemic.

These nations, the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, are some of the youngest democracies in the world and have transitioned from traditional to digital technologies in a few short decades – a mere blink of the eye in the context of Pasifika oral histories.

The challenges facing this region are many and complex, with nuanced levels of communication contexts ranging from the highest levels of oratory and Indigenous languages to cultural and non-verbal semantics. It is a space where modern digital journalism and media values have been confronted by Pacific traditional concept of information and power: Who holds the stories? Who tells them? How they are shared?

Through membership of the Pacific Islands News Association(PINA), and the Pacific Freedom Forum(PFF) to the International Free Expression body(IFEX), as well as the International Federation of Journalists,(IFJ), there has been sporadic Pacific-led and owned monitoring by newsroom practitioners of media freedom, but the advocacy of press freedom tends to revolve around the global UN date for observance events, or specific, isolated challenges as they come up.

Globally, a handful of Pacific nations feature in Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) surveys and the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which takes a rights-based, gender focus. UNESCO, through its Apia office, hosts a World Press Freedom mention but does not actively promote the level of engagement evident when it had a communications adviser role based in the Pacific. The excellent Asia Pacific Media Centre (APMC) and its commentary and research led by Professor David Robie was recently disestablished but continues as a citizen-led initiative of its founder and support network. This passion for the region is echoed in the will of the Pacific Freedom Forum,

which runs on the voluntary efforts of journalists across the Pacific, who believe in the necessity of monitoring what has been called a ‘fragile’ but hard-fought freedom.

Being intentional with Pacific ownership and Pacific voice should not mean being oblivious to the global context of Pacific journalism. The media family is a global one, and PFF/PINA both enjoy membership of global media freedom bodies, as well as the expertise of Pacific-facing global media thinkers who acknowledge and respect an Oceanian worldview. There is also growing recognition of the opportunities and challenges that

connectivity to digital/social media technologies – primarily through and post-COVID, have wrought, transforming the Pacific media and news sector and creating local experts who create content for global platforms, with a strong sense of story ‘sovereignty’ and leadership. The timing is good for looking to global practice – not just to help inspire, warn, shape or initiate, but to partner with, to test and guide questions around the Pacific efforts in the media freedom spaces we have created with our collective media monitoring and reporting work in mind.

Journalists in Palau attend a media workshop. Training forms an important part of media strengthening in the Pacific but is only one element needed to preserve and protect media freedoms.





“As a village mother, I see the value of media freedom every day. It gives us a voice and allows us to share our stories, concerns, and dreams with the wider world. When media is free, it helps us advocate for our needs and brings attention to the issues affecting our communities. It’s a way for us to stay informed, support each other, and ensure our children have a better future.”



Methodology

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The survey approach was derived from desk-based research and readings of previous Pacific media freedom surveys.

The first Pacific Media Freedom qualitative report with PFF and IFJ was delivered under the EU-funded Pacific Human Rights and Development Project which wrapped in early 2013, around the time of the PACMAS Informing Citizens Report. Particular attention was given to the methodology and approach for the RSF 2024 Survey and Report, and we were able to adapt for a more Pacific fit.

The survey was the result of a collaborative effort between PFF and Internews, which discussed the suitability of the proposed survey. This collaboration attempted to merge the context/infrastructure focus of the UNESCO Media Development Indicators (MDIs), but also retain a 'For us. By us. About us' focus for the survey, as per the RSF report. The Questionnaire was extensive and detailed and would have easily taken at least 30 minutes to complete. The Pacific version needed to be under 10 questions and under 5 minutes to complete. In the end a balance was struck of 12 questions taking under 9 minutes to complete, to enable a deeper detailed understanding of the context and existing support for national reporting.

The 73 respondents were just under a level of statistical significance. However, direct conversations with a wide range of active journalists over the years, as well as during the response collection period, provided a level of feedback that fortified this scene-setting exercise striving for a baseline index, moving us in the right direction. A level of anonymity was ensured, with a handful of respondents providing follow up identifying detail in the qualitative comments sections and very useful feedback on the areas to consider for ongoing versions of the survey.

Of the 73 respondents, 3 came from outside the 14 focus countries. Most of the respondents – 44 of the 73, came from the Melanesia subregion – Papua New Guinea (14), Solomon Islands (13) and Fiji (11), with Vanuatu at six responses. Of the Small Islands and big Ocean States, with significantly lower populations than anywhere in Melanesia, Palau's participation was high (10), demonstrating the high level of media awareness and engagement

Methodology cont.

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for the survey. Some respondents were the sole participants from their country, others were among a literal handful – but in countries where a handful or solo operator puts out the national news, we believe one respondent to be a statistically sound voice for a country of two or three news journalists, particularly for the national newspapers in RMI and FSM.

The gender breakdown saw females (39) slightly outnumber males (34), with no respondents taking up the gender-neutral or no response options. With the opt-in nature of the survey, we had anticipated that participation would reflect a heavier presence of female respondents, which did not eventuate. We know from training workshops and meetings that women dominate the ranks but not necessarily the media leadership.

The strong uptake by women and by men became clearer in question on organisation level – 28 of the 73 respondents were at editor level – 23 of the 28 saying they were in executive management and the rest saying they were in middle management. The second biggest group, 19 of the 73 respondents, listed themselves at reporting-mid level while 18 of the respondents chose 'other' and listed a range of senior roles, including a founder,

publisher and co-founder, senior production, team manager. The comments on being executive level illuminate the Pacific context of media leadership:

"I edit my content on my platform. I am also deputy editor of an independent, local vernacular publication. I am also a seasoned photographer and videographer, and I am also a reporter focused on investigating corruption. I do all of these under the arrangement of a Freelancer!"

Said another media veteran: *"While I am the managing Editor, which doesn't mean much. I'm also the only full-time employee at the FSM's only independent news source."*

And yet another comment on being a media leader in a Pacific context:

With this Pacific focus in mind, the opening questions also revealed a very large opt-in participation from respondents with more experience in newsrooms and thus more awareness of what a media freedom index represents. – thirty-three of the 73 respondents were from 30-44 year-old age bracket, with 25 from 45-59 year-old, together representing 58 of the 73 Survey

"As a small news organisation, you are expected to play many roles in making whole your small newsroom, and the title is more a focal point in the community, not really in the sense of an Editor in a newsroom".

respondents. Of this elder group, many had spent a career in media, 18 of the 58 had been in media more than 20 years. Of the 11 respondents aged from under 18 to 29, most had been less than 5 years in media.

Questions on individual earnings were not included in this, noting from previous survey work with GMMP that income parity is a sensitive topic. More than half the respondent group (38 of the 73) did note their funding source as commercial revenues via advertising and grouped in independent media. A further 16 of the 73 listed themselves as

independent, non-profit media, with 11 of the 73 declaring state media, govt-funded status and a further 10 declaring themselves freelancers and media content providers for various platforms. It is worth noting these funding sources in the upcoming responses around economic pressures to media





Analysis

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State of media freedom, what are the key challenges?

Respondents were asked to rank the list of issues from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most challenging and 5 being the least challenging. For the Pacific media freedom survey respondents, the economic costs of staying in business and social-cultural pressures were listed as the first and second most challenging issues for Pacific newsrooms, followed by political and legal challenges.

One comment on the Legal, Political, Safety, economic, and Social-Cultural sectors presented was that, for some, the options were at equally challenging levels rather than ranked differently.

There was some confusion on this question – not all respondents ranked all five issues. It should be noted that while 29 respondents ranked social and cultural issues either 1st or 2nd, 25 ranked them 4th or 5th of the challenges to media freedom in their country. This suggests the topic was relevant to a high number of respondents but that there was a fairly wide divergence of views on its ranking.

Analysis cont.

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Safety of journalists, media workers

This theme addresses assaults, threats, and harms against journalists. The questions were grouped around a series of statements covering common safety issues for Pacific journalists.

Two comments to the safety question were received in the survey responses, but many have been received in 2023 by PFF on safety challenges for journalists. The two comments to the survey raise the harassment of women journalists as a safety issue, noting there was no safety net or counselling options available to media workers.

Rule of law or legal:

This theme features statements looking at the laws and constitutional protections of free speech for media, and for whistleblowers. While most respondents (from 55% to 74% said they did not know or confirmed there was no basis for statements around abuse of journalists, there was a smaller band of certainty that breaches of journalists' safety were happening in Fiji. Two comments were provided by respondents. One noted a journalist should have an accreditation or registration like other trades/professions, to serve as identification. A second comment shared the experience of being taken to court over refusal to take down online content – the case was dismissed by the courts. In one country, journalists spoke to the PFF about being harassed and intimidated by law enforcement officers 'doing their jobs'.

Economic:

This theme covers economic challenges around advertising, capital costs, subsidies, admin, and fiscal pressures, which often provide entry points for corruption incentives and bribes. Respondents were asked to rank statements veracity on a sliding scale from 'no, this is not true' and 'no, it's a bit 50-50' though 'neutral, not sure' to 'yes, somewhat true' to 'yes, this is very true'. There were comments from two respondents, both are self-explanatory and demonstrate the levels of media resilience in our newsrooms whatever the situation – whether juggling the demands of volunteerism or waiting on resourcing for building back from disasters, our media ranks are filled with realism and recognition of a status quo that often blurs the lines between what is ethical, and what demands doing in the moment, as the statements and responses below testify:

In 2023, Editors at all media outlets exercised editorial decisions without constraints from owners or politicians.

47 per cent of respondents agree this is somewhat to very true while 16 per cent say it is NOT true.

In 2023, internet access for journalists to support their work was fast, reliable and affordable.

55 per cent of respondents say this is somewhat true to very true; 12 per cent say it is NOT true and a further 22 per cent say it is not correct to say

their internet was fast, reliable and affordable as service was only 50-50

In 2023, Politicians often pressured advertisers to favour certain media outlets.

39 per cent of respondents were not sure or neutral on this statement: 33 per cent said it was very true and 16 per cent say it's NOT true.

In 2023, Corruption continued to be a significant issue for media organisations and journalists in my country.

25 per cent of the respondents say this is very true, another 25 are unsure and 13 per cent said it's NOT true.

In 2023, Media ownership of all platforms in the country is widely known, public knowledge.

29 per cent of respondents say this is very true and 5 per cent said it's NOT true.

In 2023, financial insecurity of news platforms opened up risk of influence and corruption.

31 per cent of respondents said this statement is somewhat true; 17 per cent say it's NOT true.

In 2023, my newsroom had the resources it needed to cover the news to the highest possible standard.

56 per cent of respondents say this is NOT true compared with 14 per cent who say it is true.

Analysis cont.

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Political

This theme and statements cover State and Government policy, the editorial balance of public media, licensing policies, and elections. As with questions on the economic theme, respondents were asked to rank statements veracity on a sliding scale from 'no, this is not true' and 'no, it's a bit 50-50' though 'neutral, not sure' to 'yes, somewhat true' to 'yes, this is very true'. Often, in survey approaches for press freedoms, the political section begins to overlap with the institutions and frameworks, as in the legal context. For each of the statements, the key spectrum of negative and positive responses are shown.

In 2023, govt ministries and state bodies have worked hard to battle disinformation and fake information online.

46 per cent of respondents said this was somewhat true to very true compared with 17 per cent who said this was NOT true.

In 2023, political leaders ridiculed, shamed or encouraged public disrespect for members of the press.

51 per cent of respondents said this was somewhat to very true while 18 per cent said it was NOT true.

In 2023, govt officials have done their best to support safety of journalists from any attacks and abuse in their work, especially women journalists and those online.

30 per cent of respondents said this was NOT true, while 20 per cent said it was somewhat to very true

In 2023, state-funded media entities have enjoyed editorial independence, covering govt and opposition views and reflecting diversity, across their news content platforms.

39 per cent of respondents say this is somewhat to very true and 26 per cent say it is NOT true.

In 2023, state-funded media platforms ignored major stories regarded as too sensitive for govt, reported by private sector news platforms.

59 per cent of respondents said this was somewhat or very true and 15 per cent said it was NOT true.

In 2023 government figures gave equal access to independent media and state funded news orgs.

30 per cent of respondents said this is NOT true; 25 per cent said it was somewhat to very true.

In 2023 govt provided equal advertising revenue streams to both independent media and state funded news orgs.

30 per cent of respondents said this is NOT true; while 24 per cent said it was somewhat true to very true.

In 2023, licensing and sectoral resourcing and support for media was opened up to encourage diversity and quality of information for citizens.

32 per cent of respondents said this was NOT true; 20 per cent said it was somewhat true or very true.

In 2023, media leaders and board chairs at all levels enjoyed autonomy from govt interference and influence.

32 per cent of the respondents said this statement was NOT true, as opposed to 21 per cent who said it was somewhat true or very true.

In 2023, citizens enjoyed easy access to state and private sector or other news outlets, sharing their voices, compliments and criticisms of govt and non-state leaders.

53 per cent of respondents - 38 people - said this was somewhat to very true and 16 per cent - 12 people - said it was NOT true.

Analysis cont.

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SOCIAL and CULTURAL (including gender)

This theme looks at public trust and credibility of the news industry, gender, diversity, nepotism, and cultural sensitivities with statements that cover each area. For each statement, respondents were asked to tick the column matching their response. (not true, no, its 50-50, neutral, somewhat true, very true). The statements are shared below, with responses highlighting the dilemma faced by many in terms of the socio-cultural pressures which impact media practice.

In 2023, media workers and news platforms enjoyed a high level of trust and credibility from 'everyday' people.

Almost half the 73 respondents said it was somewhat true or very true, while 11 were not sure and 24 felt it was more 50-50, like a love hate relationship.

In 2023, women and young girls working in media found it hard to fully pursue and practice journalism due to workloads, transport and restrictions on movement at night/weekends.

43% of the respondents said it was somewhat true or very true, while 35 per cent said they were not sure or felt it was 50-50...almost 25 per cent or 18 of the 75 respondents said this was not true.

In 2023, women and gender-diverse workers find it hard to progress or get stories done due to gender-bullying, shaming and abuse.

Almost 39% of the respondents said this was somewhat true or very true; 36 % of respondents said they were neutral or felt it was 50-50, and 26% said it was not true at all.

In 2023, Journalists often practiced self-censorship due to social and cultural pressures. (From not true to 50/50 to not sure to somewhat to very true)

A whopping 60 per cent of the respondents said this was either somewhat true or very true. 33 per cent said it was more like 50/50 or neutral, not sure. Five of the 73 said it was not true.

In 2023, journalists often practiced self-censorship due to fear of reprisals from their communities, families, and others

The trend was close to the previous statement; 58 per cent said it was true or somewhat true, 35 per cent said it was more than 50-50 or not sure, and 8 per cent said it was not true.

In 2023, journalists found it difficult to maintain editorial independence when relatives, friends, or familiar faces form part of their investigations.



60

Sixty per cent of journalists said they 'often practiced self-censorship' in 2023 due to fear of reprisals from their communities, families, and others including their governments.



40 per cent of the respondents said this was somewhat true or very true; 46 per cent said they were neutral or not sure, or 50-50.

In 2023, journalists always declared all gifts and support received for their stories and coverage. Most journos were not sure or neutral on the topic of declaring gifts - 23 of the 73 said this. 19 said it was somewhat or very true and 21 respondents said it was not true.



“As a young person today, I believe media freedom is crucial for fighting corruption and promoting transparency. It allows us to expose wrongdoings, hold those in power accountable, and ensure that our voices are heard. Free media helps shine a light on issues that might otherwise remain hidden, giving us the tools to demand integrity and drive positive change in our communities.”





Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index

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Setting the baseline: 5 thematic areas. 14 countries. 1 Pacific press freedom index. As an initial attempt to construct a Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index using only the survey results – and recognising significant differences between each of the countries – it was decided that a country's performance would be ranked with equal weighting across the five thematic areas:

1. Legal Environment

(20%) assessing the rule of law and the strength of legal protections for free speech and media, for editorial independence of state-funded media and equitable access and support for independent media.

2. Safety of Journalists

(20%): Assessing the prevalence of physical attacks, equipment damage, and professional harm, reporting of emotional duress from harassment and abuse, and the effectiveness of safety protocols and support systems.

3. Economic Factors

(20%) Assessing the financial sustainability of media organizations - Access to affordable and reliable internet - Transparency and fairness in advertising/funding distribution

4. Sociocultural Conditions

(20%) Assessing the level of public trust in news platforms and credibility of media, the relationships and perceptions in host communities and given those cultural sensitivities, the self-censorship pressures as well as rights-based workplace diversity and inclusion policies addressing age, health, diversity and cultural sensitivities/self-censorship pressures.

5. Gender in content and workplace

(20%) - Representation of women and diverse groups in leadership - Workplace policies and support for gender inclusion - Addressing gender-based discrimination and harassment.

Using the survey data, each of the 14 Pacific countries was scored on a scale of 1-5 for each dimension, with 5 indicating a robust and enabling environment for media freedom and 1 representing significant challenges. The overall index score for the country is the average of the five proposed dimension scores.

The Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index seeks to rank the state of media freedoms in Pacific Island nations as experienced by each country's own media practitioners. Collectively these on-the-ground assessments, as reflected in the survey responses, provide for the first time, a comparative snapshot of media freedom – and the challenges to it – in each of the 14 Pacific Island nations and collectively across the region.

o1	Palau - 4.2
o2	Niue - 4.0
o3	Cook Islands - 3.8
o4	Samoa - 3.6
o5	Fiji 3.5
o5	Rep. of Marshall Islands 3.5
o5	Fed. States of Micronesia 3.5
o6	Tonga - 3.4
o7	Vanuatu - 3.2
o8	Solomon Islands - 3.0
09	Kiribati - 2.8
10	Tuvalu - 2.6
11	Papua New Guinea - 2.4
12	Nauru - 2.2

01

Palau - 4.2
Social, cultural, and economic pressures pose the biggest challenges to media freedom, with no major legal, political, or safety issues reported.



05

Fiji - 3.5
Economic pressures are the biggest challenge, with social/cultural issues and lack of trust also problematic; political and legal barriers are less severe, and media freedom has somewhat improved over the last 5 years.



07

Vanuatu - 3.2
Legal protections for free speech are the biggest challenge, with threats to journalists and social/cultural factors like public trust also significant issues.



11

Papua New Guinea - 2.4
Journalist safety and attacks are the biggest challenges, with social/cultural issues and less severe political and legal barriers; media freedom has declined over the last 5 years.

02

Niue - 4.0
Legal protections are the biggest challenge, with minimal safety threats but some economic and cultural pressures; media freedom has somewhat declined in the last 5 years.



05

Republic of Marshall Islands - 3.5
Economic factors like advertising, costs, and corruption pose the biggest challenges, with media freedom conditions remaining stable over the last 5 years and no major barriers reported.



08

Solomon Islands - 3.0
Political and legal factors are the biggest challenges, with social/cultural pressures and self-censorship also major issues; media freedom has declined.



12

Nauru - 2.2
Political factors are the top challenge, with some economic and social pressures; media freedom has remained stable over the last 5 years.

03

Cook Islands - 3.8
Economic pressures are the biggest challenge, followed by legal and political issues, with little change in media freedom over the last 5 years.



05

Fed. States of Micronesia - 3.6
Economic factors like advertising, costs, and corruption are the top challenges, with some social/cultural pressures; media freedom has seen little change over the last 5 years.



09

Kiribati - 2.8
Social/cultural factors, including self-censorship, are the biggest challenge to media freedom, with economic insecurity also major; there has been little change in media freedom.



04

Samoa - 3.6
Economic pressures, including advertising, costs, and corruption, are the top challenge, with social/cultural factors like public trust and self-censorship also significant.



06

Tonga - 3.4
Economic pressures, including advertising, costs, and corruption, are the biggest challenge, with social/cultural issues like public trust and self-censorship also reported; overall



10

Tuvalu - 2.6
Social and cultural factors are the main challenges, with some economic pressures; legal and political barriers are less severe, and media freedom has been stable.



Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index

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The top-performing countries generally demonstrate strong legal frameworks, effective safety mechanisms, financial sustainability, and inclusive sociocultural environments for media. Mid-tier countries show a mix of strengths and challenges, while the lowest-ranked nations face significant hurdles across multiple dimensions.

As an early indication of a Pacific Media Freedom Index that derives only from Pacific journalists and their assessment of rankings covering the five areas above, the rankings open up space for more detailed analysis and rigour. The journey beyond this provisional ranking is the exciting next step, seeking partners and support from the Pacific media family. The rankings represent a significant signpost for our next stage of this journey, noted in the recommendations which end this report.

The survey results, actual alerts and issues raised via the PFF, PINA and global media, and all the possible non-specific conversations and related reports will ensure a survey of integrity, inclusion and statistical credence.

The index does NOT factor in media freedom developments since Dec 2023, and the survey group does NOT currently include researchers, academics and development stakeholders of Pacific newsrooms.





“Even though I’m just a child, I understand that media freedom is important because it helps people know the truth and make good choices. When media can share stories and news freely, it means that everyone, including kids like me, can learn about what’s really happening and have a fair chance to be heard and make a difference.”

Next steps

xxx

While recognising that the inaugural Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index is a valid starting point towards a solid benchmarking tool to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and foster regional collaboration to advance media Freedom in the Pacific Islands, the PFF and our partners recognize that this is very much a work in progress and that we already have many important lessons to apply for next year's survey and index.



Pacific Islands radio reporter broadcasts to her nation. Radio is one of the most far reaching mediums for the dissemination of news in the Pacific.

From the Survey findings alone, the affirmations and confirmations of existing conversations and past experiences, both documented and undocumented, raised the recommendations listed in the executive summary for consideration alongside the next steps for process and approach listed below.

What did we learn from the process?

This inaugural index for assessing the state of media freedom in the Pacific was a journey of discovery. For next steps towards strengthening the template and approach for the survey and its support information gathering actions, there needs to be a longer lead-in time frame with a broadened scope for ensuring voice, participation, and spaces for engagement.

Based on the survey's key findings shared in the executive summary, key recommendations relating to the responses were provided. Based on the process and approach of the survey and research, recommendations for the next report (covering the Jan-Dec 2024 reporting period) are offered here,

noting a key facet of the approach is ensuring PFF and Internews achieve the 'For Us, By Us, About Us' focus of the work.

- Formation of an Advisory Group of Pacific media leaders ensuring representation, ownership and MEL capacity for the work involved.
- Commencement of the 2025 report now, beginning with constructive feedback to this first report – inviting people to have their say and share their stories via a QR code and formation of email list.
- Ensuring a wider, deeper approach, resourced with time and people to do what is required for a gold-standard that is for us, by us, and about us. Consider incorporating the best practice qualitative approach of the PFF-IFJ effort via focus groups with data able to shapeshift from national to subregional and regional – broadening the survey, from media to researchers, stakeholders and

academics as well as teachers and friends of media. Work on parallel public sector surveys around trust in institutions, step up TED Talk or other public event to deepen public safe talanoa and visit schools to talk about social and AI, trust in the media, combatting disinformation and misinformation, and community partnerships for safety and children online.

- Ensure coordination support for the Expert Advisory Group and a process for delivering early confirmation of the next template for the survey moving forward: discuss questions, ratings and weightings and all stages of collection, collation, interpretation of the raw data for analysis and infographics.
- Engage on TORs for specific skills – stats and infographics people to clean raw data and prep it for reporting and engagement. Ensure that EAG includes statistical research experts to help weigh and clean raw data and provide a detailed methodology to support the analysis.
- Link the work to social media promotion and conversation build-up in the months beforehand to 'prime' the stakeholders and ensure better engagement with the survey.
- Incentivise to allow more engagement and ownership of the launch of the report and share widely. Work to a special date, save the date, and host an event. WPF, World RTI Day, or World Human Rights Day, to build buzz and followings.

– Ensure revival of PFF/PINA/IFJ and IFEX monitoring partnerships for alerts and any required capacity training for Media on recognizing and reporting threats.

– Keep the report on the radar, with updates to organizations and networks, stakeholders, and development partners via newsfeeds, observance day engagement, and partnerships for collective unity to help break the self-censorship and silence from whistleblowers or those singled out for persecution.

– Ensure local language and J-school reporting of the media freedom indicators and what they mean for people listening in.

– Activate strategic partnerships with PINA, NSA group at PIF, and other SIDS collectives on key research survey value-adds for outreach.

Finally, and not least, to all our colleagues and partners in the region, we recognise that our first Pacific Islands Media Freedom survey, index and report is very much a beginning. We welcome your feedback and trust that together we can journey towards an annual Pacific Islands Media Freedom Index and Report that is for us, by us, and about us.



Annexes

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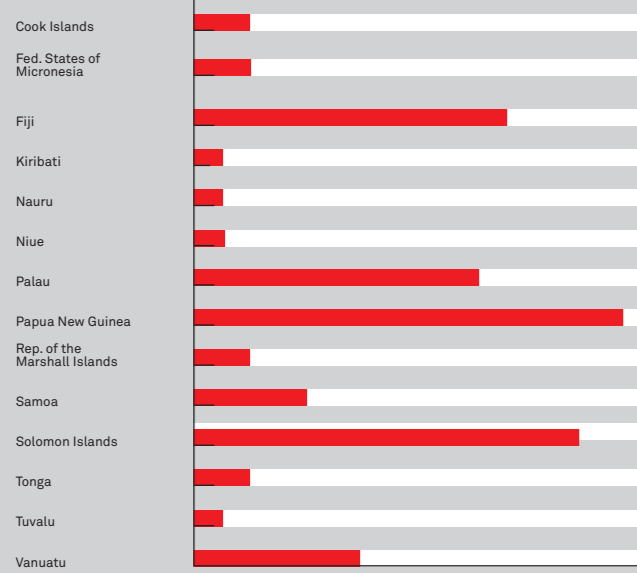
- Survey
- Greatest challenges to media freedom
- References



Survey

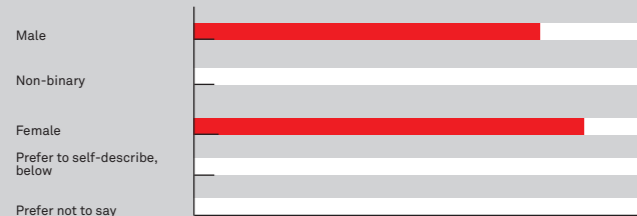
XXX

Q1. Media workers and the RULE OF LAW in 2023: For each of the statements below, please tick the column that applies to you/colleagues.



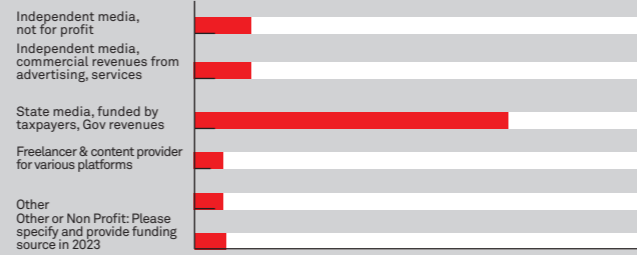
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Q2. Gender: How do you identify?



XXX

Q3. Please indicate the KEY funding source of the media organisation you worked for in 2023.



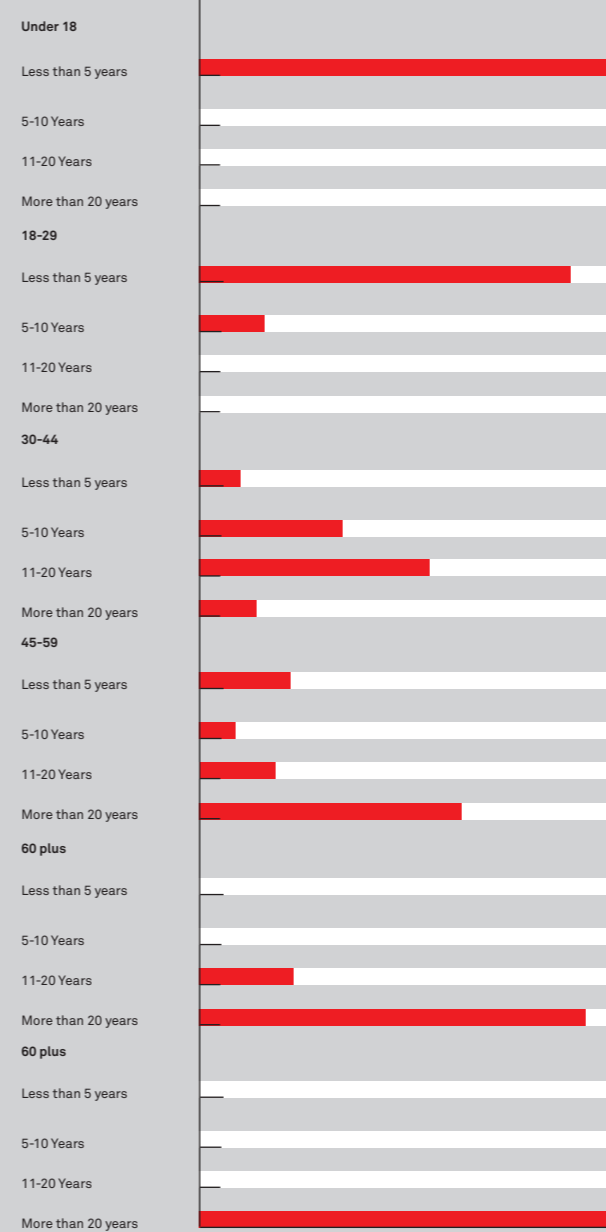
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Q4. Please tell us your role and level within your organisation, in 2023



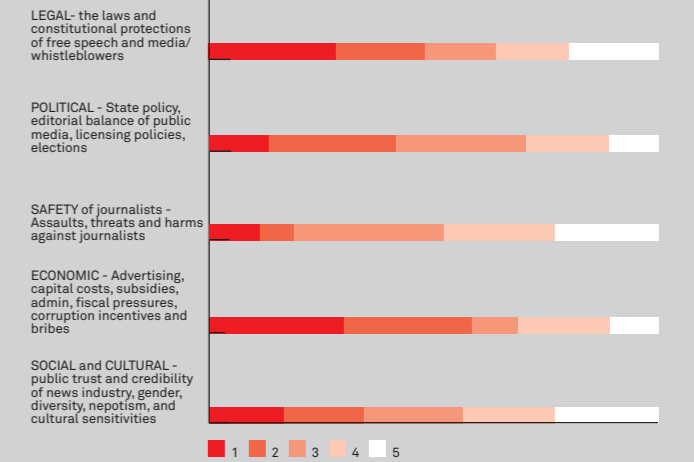
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Q5. Please tell us your age and years in the media industry as of Dec 2023



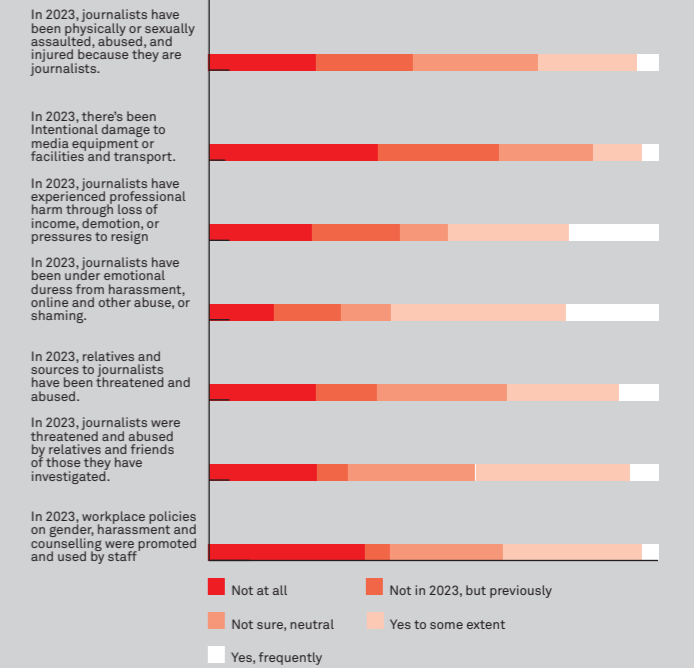
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Q6. Consider the state of media freedom in your country in 2023, then rank the sectors below from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most challenging.



XXX

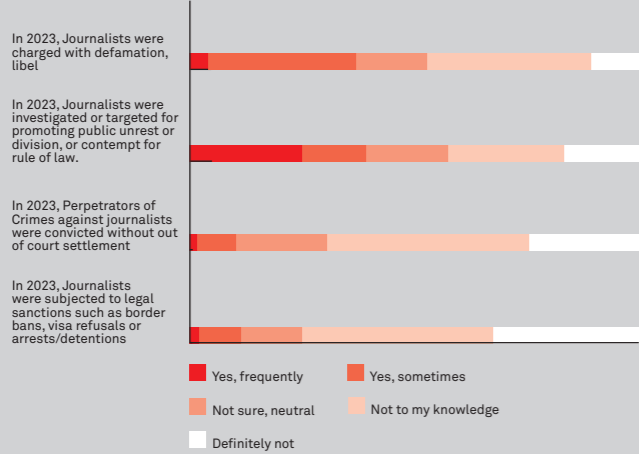
Q7. SAFETY of Media Workers in 2023: For each of the threats below, please tick the column that applies to you/colleagues



Survey

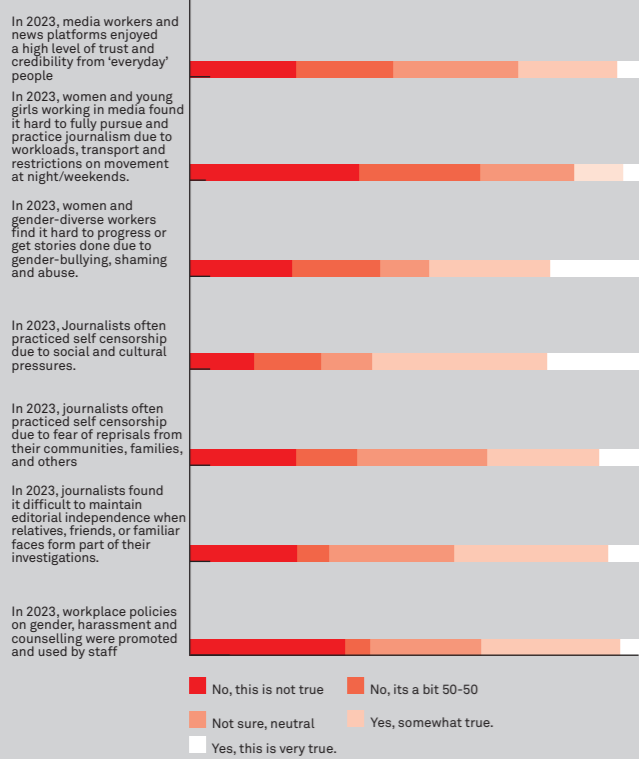
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Q8. Media workers and the RULE OF LAW in 2023: For each of the statements below, please tick the column that applies to you/colleagues.



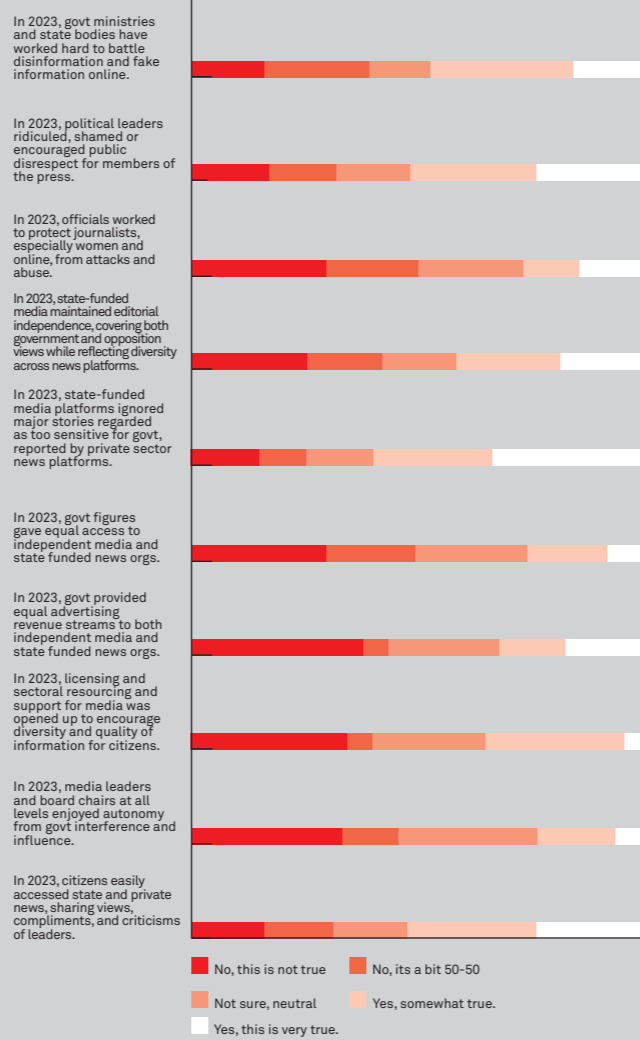
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Q9. SOCIETY, CULTURE and Pacific Media Freedom in 2023: For each of the threats below, please tick the column that applies to you/colleagues.



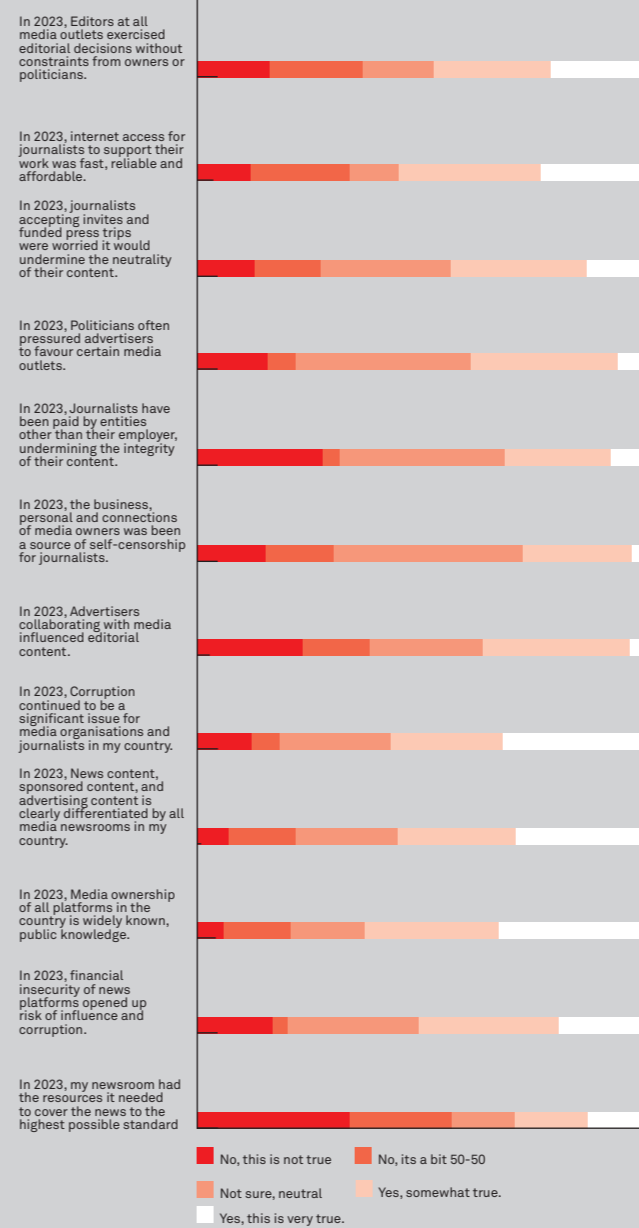
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Q10. POLITICS and Pacific Media Freedom in 2023: For each of the statements below please tick the column which best reflects your/industry position.



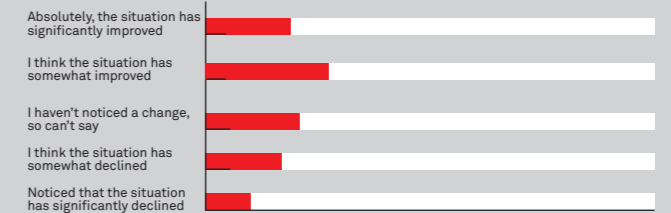
XXX

Q11. The ECONOMIC context of Pacific Media Freedom in 2023: For each of the statements below please tick the column which best reflects your/industry position.



XXX

Q12. And finally, has there been a noticeable change in media freedom in your country in the last 5 years to December 2023?



Greatest challenges to media freedom

xxx

Economic and financial pressure on media businesses emerged as the biggest threat to Pacific media freedom in 2023, closely followed by social and cultural pressures.

Specifically, the survey found:

Economic and financial pressures on media – including pressures from advertising, capital costs, subsidies, administration, fiscal pressure, corruption incentives and bribes – ranked as the top challenge to media freedom. That they were ranked either 1 or 2 by the highest number of respondents suggests these pressures are intense

Social and cultural pressures ranked second overall with a larger number of respondents concerned about their impact (59 in total compared to 48 for economic pressures). They are placed a close second to economic pressures as concern was evenly spread over all 5 ranks

Political and legal pressures were of significant concern with political pressures – including State policy, editorial balance of public media, licensing policies, elections – ranking third and legal pressures ranking a close fourth

	1-MOST	2	3	4	5- LEAST	RANKING
LEGAL- the laws and constitutional protections of free speech and media/whistleblowers	29.03%	19.35%	16.13%	16.13%	19.35%	4
POLITICAL - State policy, editorial balance of public media, licensing policies, elections	13.89%	27.78%	30.56%	16.67%	11.11%	3
SAFETY of journalists - Assaults, threats and harms against journalists	12.20%	7.32%	34.15%	24.39%	21.95%	5
ECONOMIC - Advertising, capital costs, subsidies, admin, fiscal pressures, corruption incentives and bribes	31.25%	27.08%	10.42%	20.83%	10.42%	1
SOCIAL and CULTURAL - public trust and credibility of news industry, gender, diversity, nepotism, and cultural sensitivities	16.95%	18.64%	22.03%	20.34%	22.03%	2

Greatest challenges to media freedom

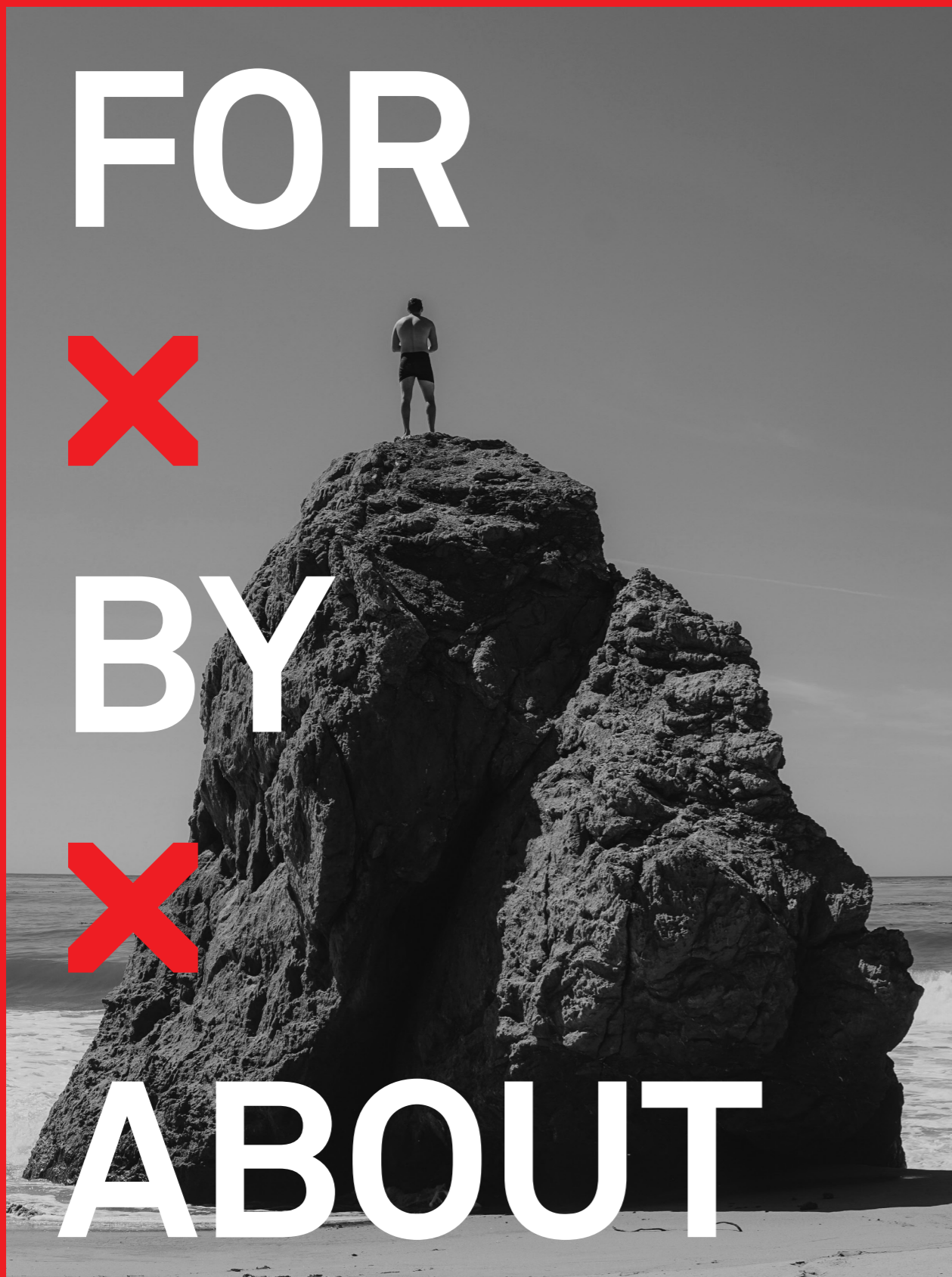


	NOT AT ALL	NOT IN 2023, BUT PREV.	NOT SURE, NEUTRAL	YES TO SOME EXTENT	YES, FREQ.	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
In 2023, journalists have been physically or sexually assaulted, abused, and injured because they are journalists.	24.66%	21.92%	28.77%	20.55%	4.11%	2.58
In 2023, there's been intentional damage to media equipment or facilities and transport.	38.36%	27.40%	21.92%	9.59%	2.74%	2.11
In 2023, journalists have experienced professional harm through loss of income, demotion, or pressures to resign	23.29%	19.18%	10.96%	27.40%	19.18%	3.00
In 2023, journalists have been under emotional duress from harassment, online and other abuse, or shaming.	15.07%	10.96%	15.07%	39.73%	19.18%	3.37
In 2023, relatives and sources to journalists have been threatened and abused.	23.29%	13.70%	30.14%	24.66%	8.22%	2.81
In 2023, journalists were threatened and abused by relatives and friends of those they have investigated.	24.66%	6.85%	28.77%	34.25%	5.48%	2.89
In 2023, workplace policies on gender, harassment and counselling were promoted and used by staff	35.21%	5.63%	25.35%	30.99%	2.82%	2.82%

References

1. UNESCO Media Development Indicators <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-development-indicators>
2. Act to Repeal 2010 MIDA Legislation, April 2023, Parliament of Fiji <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Bill-No.-1-Media-Industry-Development-Repeal-2023.pdf>
3. World Press Freedom Day statement celebrates Fiji, Islands Business <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/world-press-freedom-day-5/#:~:text=World%20Press%20Freedom%20Day:%20Fiji%20success%20leads%20celebrations%20in%202023>
4. RSF World Press Freedom Report, 2024 <https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure>

	NO, THIS IS NOT TRUE	NO, ITS A BIT 50-50	NOT SURE, NEUTRAL	YES, SOMEWHAT TRUE.	YES, THIS IS VERY TRUE.	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
In 2023, gov't ministries and state bodies have worked hard to battle disinformation and fake information online.	16.67%	23.61%	13.89%	31.94%	13.89%	3.03
In 2023, political leaders ridiculed, shamed or encouraged public disrespect for members of the press.	17.81%	15.07%	16.44%	28.77%	21.92%	3.22
In 2023, gov't officials have done their best to support safety of journalists from any attacks and abuse in their work, especially women journalists and those online.	30.14%	20.55%	28.77%	12.33%	8.22%	2.48
In 2023, state-funded media entities have enjoyed editorial independence, covering gov't and opposition views and reflecting diversity, across their news content platforms.	26.03%	16.44%	19.18%	23.29%	15.07%	2.85
In 2023, state-funded media platforms ignored major stories regarded as too sensitive for gov't, reported by private sector news platforms.	15.07%	10.96%	15.07%	26.03%	32.88%	3.51
In 2023, gov't figures gave equal access to independent media and state funded news orgs.	30.14%	20.55%	24.66%	17.81%	6.85%	2.51
In 2023, gov't provided equal advertising revenue streams to both independent media and state funded news orgs.	38.36%	9.59%	28.77%	15.07%	8.22%	2.45
In 2023, licensing and sectoral resourcing and support for media was opened up to encourage diversity and quality of information for citizens.	31.94%	11.11%	37.50%	13.89%	5.56%	2.50
In 2023, media leaders and board chairs at all levels enjoyed autonomy from gov't interference and influence.	31.51%	17.81%	27.40%	15.07%	8.22%	2.51
In 2023, citizens enjoyed easy access to state and private sector or other news outlets, sharing their voices, compliments and criticisms of gov't and non-state leaders.	16.44%	15.07%	16.44%	28.77%	23.29%	3.27



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