

2022

ELECTION REPORTING GUIDE FOR FIJIAN JOURNALISTS

Guidelines for
Effective and Equitable
Coverage of the 2022
General Elections



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1

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

National elections are one of **the most**, if not the most important event for journalists and media organisations to cover. This is because normally, elections are the most impactful event for a country and its people, and as a result, highly significant and newsworthy, demanding round-the-clock updates.

IMPORTANT JOURNALIST ROLE

Election results decide the future direction of a country, and as such a national election affects just about every individual, every community and every family in the nation— financially, socially and otherwise. As watchdogs of society, the media have a core function in this most important of events in the national calendar of any country. By providing the right information on which to choose or reject candidates, the media enable voters to actualise a significant and unalienable political right.

We know that journalists carry a huge responsibility on their shoulders in their everyday work with regards to providing accurate, timely and relevant information to the public to help in their decision-making. This is one of the key ways in which the media empower citizens. The media give meaning to the term 'information is power' provided they do their job

correctly. Conversely, if media and journalists fail in their professional responsibilities, the people are disempowered for lack of information on which to make sound decisions.

The responsibility of the media and journalists are magnified when it comes to elections, being mindful that in the case of Fiji, elections are about choosing the right national leaders for the next four years. It goes without saying that in order to progress, a country and its people need honest and effective leaders. As such, it falls upon journalists do their duty by the people through keeping them informed and engaged so that they understand the issues at stake, and act accordingly on polling day.

So, neither the importance of elections, nor the role of the media and journalists in elections should ever be underestimated — not by the public, nor by the media themselves.

OPERATING WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF THE LAW

Elections demand the best from journalists, including prior preparation and thorough knowledge of not just current affairs, but history/context as well, not the least because the stakes are so high. The media owe it to the public to do their work honestly and diligently, without fear or favour. Because there is heightened, concentrated, round-the-clock media coverage and reporting of critical and complex national issues, journalists are required to be on top of their game day-by-day, hour-by-hour, week-in, week-out for the entire duration of the campaign. Journalists, of all people, must be on top of the issues, before they can even think about informing the masses as a reliable source of news.

To be on top of the game requires not only keeping abreast of the issues on hand, (which in Fiji's case range from the economy, the national debt, to minimum wage, poverty

reduction and non-communicable diseases), but a thorough knowledge of media law and ethics in the national context. The need to be able to apply media law and ethics in the field is a journalistic professional duty not only to the public but to one's-self as well: journalists with a poor knowledge of media law and ethics are a disservice to the public and a danger to themselves and their organisations — a disservice to the public because poorly-informed journalists will not be able to report effectively and impactfully, and a disservice to themselves/their organisations because breaching law and ethics not only means loss of credibility but possible legal reprimand.

This is highly pertinent in Fiji due to the Fiji Media Industry Development Act 2010, the core legislation governing the practice of journalism and the conduct of journalists in the country. It is for individual journalists and media organisations to familiarise themselves with all the relevant laws pertaining to their work in order to be able to operate within the parameters of the law. Especially during the coverage of elections.

For the more complex legal matters, media organisations usually engage their lawyers before broadcast or publication, but journalists should have sufficient working knowledge to be able to operate within the boundaries of the law, rather than be hampered and covered by lack of know-how, especially when it comes to important public interest stories in elections coverage.

A sound knowledge of media law and ethics is imperative in Fiji given that the media act criminalises what were once considered journalism ethics. For example, under the Act, balanced reporting is no longer just an ethical consideration, but a legal requirement. Article 24 in the Act is one of several articles setting out penalties for violations: fines up to \$100,000 for media organisations (or in the case of editors or publishers, \$25,000) plus the possibility of a prison term of up to two years.

Because of the usually charged and pressured nature of elections coverage, journalists need to take extra care to not fall foul of the law even as they draw attention to critical and often contentious national issues, including criticism of government performance.

SOCIETAL TENSIONS

Fijian journalists operate in a complex environment and they should also be mindful of the societal tensions in the country, which tend to come to a head during elections, and this reality should inform their reporting at all times.

Elections are an intense form of political contest that take place at regular, four-year intervals and with each political party vying for the reins of power, the atmosphere is often filled with rising tensions, political rhetoric and even hate speech. In Fiji's fragile multiethnic society, it is crucial that journalists do not recklessly exacerbate tense situations. This does not mean undue censorship of important societal issues, but verifying information and presenting it in a balanced, unbiased, circumspect and informed manner.

Towards this end, the guidelines in this handbook are designed to specifically assist Fijian media organisations and journalists meet their professional obligations in fair, transparent and ethical manner, all in the interest of democracy.

The handbook is developed by Dialogue Fiji, which works in the inclusive and sustainable democracy, democratic institution building, human rights, conflict transformation and climate change, which constitute key areas for peacebuilding work in the Fijian context. This project is in line with Dialogue Fiji's vision of "a Fiji where people respect each others' differences and share a common will to build a free, just, peaceful, and inclusive nation".

The handbook consists of the following sections:

- »» Electoral System and Processes in Fiji
- »» Media Laws in Elections Reporting
- »» The Ethics in Election Coverage
- »» Gender Balance in Elections Reporting
- »» Planning and Executing Your Coverage

It is our hope that this handbook is useful to prepare journalists and media organisations for the challenges of election coverage and carry out their important work in a professional manner.

Main points :

- »» National elections critical for every country, demanding the best from journalists.
- »» Journalist need to understand their crucial role in providing people the right information to make choices.
- »» As part of their public responsibility, journalists owe it to their people to be well prepared and perform to their very best in this most demanding of assignments.
- »» Besides knowledge of history/context and current affairs, journalists must understand and apply media law and ethics in everyday coverage.
- »» Journalists should be mindful of the societal tensions in Fiji and this reality should inform their reporting.
- »» Neither the importance of elections, nor the role of journalists in elections should be underestimated.

2

ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND PROCESSES IN FIJI

2. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND PROCESSES IN FIJI

Fiji adopted an Open List Proportional Representation system through the 2013 Constitution. This was a significant change as, throughout its post-independence history, Fiji had elected members of its legislature using plurality/majoritarian electoral systems. The constitution prescribes a 5% election threshold—this means that a party or independent candidate need to receive at least 5% of the total votes cast to qualify for a seat in parliament.

The members of parliament are elected from a single multi-member electoral district which constitutes the entire country. The constitution prescribed that for the first election under its provisions, the total number of members of parliament elected would be 50. For subsequent elections, the 2013 constitution requires that “the ratio of the number of members of Parliament to the population of Fiji is the same as the ratio of the number of members of Parliament to the population of Fiji at the date of the first general election held” under it. Consequently, 51 members were elected in the 2018 elections, and it has been determined by the Electoral Commission that the 2022 elections would need to elect 55 members of parliament.

Voting in Fiji is not compulsory. Under the previous system, voting was compulsory. Despite this change, voter turnout in

Fiji has been relatively high in the 2014 and 2018 elections, and have, in fact, been higher than the global average of 66%. Under the new electoral rules, the voting age has been reduced to 18 years from the previous threshold of 21 years. The term of parliament has also been reduced to four years from the previous term of five years.

BALLOT DESIGN AND SEAT ALLOCATION METHOD

The ballot paper is a grid of numbers which are allocated to contesting candidates through a public drawing of lots. The ballot design enables voters to vote for their candidate of choice. The allocation of seats, however, is based on the proportion of votes received by each contesting party or independent candidate. This effectively means that every vote goes towards electing a member of parliament except those that are cast for parties and independent candidates that fail to cross the election threshold. The apportionment of seats is done using a modified D'Hondt system.

CONTESTING POLITICAL PARTIES

At the end of March 2022, there were seven registered political parties in Fiji, with the registration of a new party under consideration by the Registrar of Political Parties. Only duly registered parties under the provisions of the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding & Disclosures) Act 2013 can contest elections, alongside duly nominated independent candidates. Each party can nominate up to 55 candidates for the upcoming elections.

ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Voting registration is open throughout the electoral cycle, only closing on the day the Writ of Elections is issued by the President of Fiji. An election day is announced which is usually

a public holiday. Following the issuance of writ of elections, nominations of election candidates are submitted to the Supervisor of Elections. A National Candidates List draw is done following the finalization of candidates for election by the SOE. A three digit number is allocated to each contesting candidate through this draw. Final voter lists and ballot papers are then produced.

Every voter is allocated a polling station where they can cast their ballots. Each polling station is allocated a maximum of 500 voters to keep voting and counting processes at every polling station manageable, and reduce waiting times for voters. Whilst the vast majority of votes are cast on Election Day, early voting (which is called “pre-poll voting” in Fiji) is facilitated by the elections office in the week before the election day for remotely located populations of Fiji. In addition, overseas based voters and those who are unable to visit their polling venues to cast votes on Election Day have the option to use postal voting.

VOTING AND VOTE COUNTING

Voting begins at 7.30AM on Election Day and concludes at 6PM after the last voter in queue has voted. Votes are counted at polling stations immediately following the conclusion of voting. The Presiding officer for the polling station records results from their polling station in the Protocol of Results and reports the same to the National Tally Centre. The protocol of results are also displayed outside polling stations for public consumption. The voting and counting processes happen in full view of party polling agents and election observers. The counting of postal and pre-poll ballots is done at the National Count Centre.

On election night, provisional election results are published by the FEO through its mobile phone application – FEO App. Provisional results are released until 7AM the next day following which the FEO begins publishing final results directly from

the protocol of results. After all results from polling stations and the National Tally Center are received, the FEO compiles the Final National Results Tally and submits it to the Electoral Commission. The Commission uses this tally to determine which candidates have been elected members of parliament. The election process concludes with the Return of Writ of Elections to the President of Fiji.

Box 1: Fiji's Electoral System	
Electoral System:	Open List Proportional Representation System
District Magnitude:	55 (for 2022 election)
Number of Electoral Districts:	1 (entire country)
Election Threshold:	5%
Seat Allocation Formula:	Modified D'Hondt system
Voting Age:	18 years
Number of registered political parties:	7 (as at March 31, 2022)

3 MEDIA LAWS IN ELECTIONS REPORTING

3. MEDIA LAWS IN ELECTIONS REPORTING

All media organisations and journalists in Fiji are bound by the exact same laws as any other citizen in the country, at any given time. It should be remembered that there are no special privileges or exemptions for media organisations or media workers when it comes to the application of the laws of the land.

MEDIA INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT ACT AND ELECTORAL ACT

The overarching legislation for Fiji's national news media is the Media Industry Development Act, first promulgated as a decree in June 2010. All other written laws in Fiji, including those that relate directly to the work of the news media, apply equally to the country's journalists and media organisations. This is clearly stipulated in Section 21(1) in the media act:

The provisions of this Act relating to codes of standards for the media do not displace any other written law or rule of law relating to obscenity, blasphemy, incitement to commit a crime, the publication of details of court cases, protection of witnesses, defamation, sedition or any other law relating to the media whatsoever.

Under 21(2) the media act specifically draws attention to the

following laws:

- » Official Secrets Act;
- » Public Order Act 1969;
- » Defamation Act 1971;
- » Broadcasting Commission Act 1952; and
- » Television Act 1992.

The Electoral Act 2014 is another key legislation that Fijian journalists should be familiar with and abide by in their coverage, without fail. Directly relevant to the work of journalists is Section 144A.—(1):

A person or a political party must not publish any information in or outside Fiji and is accessible in Fiji, knowing or having reason to believe the information is a false statement which is likely to influence the outcome of an election or diminish public confidence in the performance of any duty or function of the Supervisor and the Electoral Commission. (2) The Supervisor may direct a person, including a service provider, or a political party to remove or correct any statement or information published under subsection (1) and the person must immediately remove or correct the statement or information. (3) The person or political party may request the Electoral Commission to review the decision of the Supervisor under subsection (2), and the Electoral Commission must within 24 hours review the decision and inform the Supervisor and the person or political party of its decision in writing. (4) Any person or political party that contravenes this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$50,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or both.

From a media standpoint, this is a highly risky provision for various reasons, including no clear definition of what constitutes a 'false' statement and how it will be determined that the said 'false' statement influenced the outcome of an election or diminished confidence in the Supervisor and the Electoral Commission. From the wording of the legislation, the

false statement does not have to influence the outcome of the election. Having 'likely' influenced the election is sufficient to warrant a charge.

The best thing journalists can do to protect themselves from the maximum \$50,000 fine and/or maximum 5-year jail term, is to adhere to the basics of journalism — factual, fair, balanced and objective news stories. Double-check your sources, verify the facts as many times as needed and for any risky stories get legal advice. Provide a disclaimer where necessary.

Indeed, as part of preparations for the coverage of elections, the onus is on news media organisations and journalists to acquaint (or re-acquaint) themselves with these and all other relevant laws to ensure that political issues are covered with due accuracy and impartiality, and that the political parties/candidates are not unfairly marginalised or maligned, so as not to negatively affect their chances in the poll.

Under the media act, the responsible Minister establishes a Media Industry Development Authority to monitor/regulate the national media, while the Attorney General nominates the Media Tribunal to conduct hearings, with the legal right to impose fines, jail terms and compensation payments.

Under Article 24, fines up to \$100,000 apply for media organisations (or in the case of editors or publishers, \$25,000) plus the possibility of a prison term of up to two years. The Tribunal can also order media organisations and publishers/editors to pay maximum compensations of \$100,000, and \$25,000 respectively, besides issuing orders for corrections and apologies to the aggrieved parties.

Although no one has been charged under the media act to date, for as long as the Act is in place, the risk is alive. Media organisations and journalists should not take the Act lightly, but rather, abide by it at all times. More so given the concerns

about some provisions in the Act, including impreciseness of its language, which requires media to be vigilant. For example, Section 22, which states:

The content of any media service must not include material which is:

- a) is against the public interest or order;
- b) is against national interest, or;
- c) creates communal discord.

The key terms like ‘public interest or order’, and ‘national interest’ are not clearly defined, which leaves media organisations and journalists on uncertain grounds. Besides the vagueness of the provision, what is ‘for’ or ‘against’ the national interest can be a subjective issue, with the media, the government and the public all having different views about it. Because it is a core requirement of media organisations and journalists to critique/criticise government, especially during elections, they are well-advised to be mindful of the gaps in Sections 22 and consider legal counsel before going to print or air.

PUBLIC ORDER ACT AND RISK OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Outside of the media Act, another piece of legislation relevant to elections coverage is the Public Order Act and its various provisions, especially those covering incitement to violence and racial antagonism. Section 15 looks at malicious publications, including “false news or false reporting tending to create or foster public alarm, public anxiety or disaffection”.

In Fiji, political tensions and ethnic differences can peak during elections, and media organisations and journalists need to be vigilant to not fall foul of the law, as well as avoid inflaming communal conflicts, which have been blamed for Fiji’s coup culture and stunted growth.

Fiji’s context requires journalists to be acutely alert about both the positive and negative impacts of their reporting.

Sensitive topics, such as ethnicity and religion, and indigenous rights, culture and values, are potential flashpoints for violent conflict. It is not that these issues should not be reported, but the language should be neutral and circumspect. Journalists should seek multiple views and perspectives that should be reflected in their stories, rather than rely on one-sided accounts. This standard journalistic approach will help meet requirements in Schedule 1 of the media act on Codes of Ethics and Practice:

- a) Media organisations shall avoid discriminatory or denigrating references to people’s gender, ethnicity, colour, religion, sexual orientation or preference, physical or mental disability or illness, or age.
- b) Media organisations shall not refer to a person’s gender, ethnicity, colour, religion, sexual orientation, or physical or mental illness or age in a prejudicial or pejorative context except where it is strictly relevant to the matter reported or adds significantly to readers’, viewers’ or listeners’ understanding of that matter.
- c) While media organisations are free to report and comment on all matters of public interest, it is their duty not to publish or broadcast material in a form likely to promote or encourage communal hatred or discord.

Similarly, under ‘Religion’ (13), the media act states:

- a) While all public institutions are properly subject to scrutiny, inquiry and comment, media organisations shall approach and refer to religious bodies in a balanced, fair and sensitive manner....
- b) Journalists and broadcasters shall avoid intentionally giving offence to believers of all faiths by casual, gratuitous and expletive references to deities, which are unnecessary or unjustified by the context.
- c) Recognition of the need for sensitive and balanced treatment of religions and religious affairs is necessary.

As stated previously, the Fijian context demands that journalists are not just cognizant of the media act’s provisions on gender,

ethnicity and religion, but apply them in their everyday work, including coverage of elections, both for self-protection and professional requirement to not do unnecessary harm. It bears repeating that these sensitive topics are not off-limits, only that they should be handled in a considerate, inclusive and legal manner. This is consistent with the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics to “Balance the public’s need for information against potential harm or discomfort”. In other words, the “Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness”.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Another provision in the Media Act that media organisations and journalists should be aware is the disclosure provision. Under Section 26(1), the Authority can compel the surrender of relevant documents and information, and under 27(1,2) it can, on the strength of a court warrant, enter and search any premises, as well as seize documents and equipment. Likewise, under 28(1, 2), the Authority can seek a Tribunal order to force the media to disclose confidential sources. Under Section 28(4) media are exempt from disclosures relating to corruption/abuse by a public officer.

As a safeguard, any confidential documents should not be used without first obtaining legal advice. And journalists should not give any news source a full guarantee of confidentiality, unless the journalist is willing to uphold the guarantee at all costs, including the risk of breaching the law, and a possible fine/prison sentence. If journalists are not willing to break the law or risk jail to uphold confidentiality, they should clearly communicate this to the source beforehand, not to mention, they should not procure or use the confidential information.

DEFAMATION AND THE CRIMINALISATION OF JOURNALISM ETHICS

Journalists and media organisations should note that the media act criminalises what were once considered journalism ethics, such as imbalanced reporting. This means that in Fiji, balanced reporting is no longer just an ethical requirement, but a legal obligation. Running unbalanced stories risks jail and/or fines for editors, publishers and media organisations.

Unbalanced stories that contain allegations of improper behaviour or illegality increase the risk of defamation, which concern an area of law covering false statements and/or unsubstantiated claims that damage people’s reputation. The risk of defamation can be deemed to be higher during elections not only because the volume and intensity of news coverage under strict deadlines is greater than normal, but also due to the fact that the topics being debated can be controversial and contentious.

During the electoral contest, the political candidates are often hurling accusations at each other in order to get ahead in the race. Some of these allegations may be unsubstantiated or unfair, and the media need to be careful of any undue finger-pointing. Accusations of criminal acts are especially risky because of their serious nature and potential harm to reputations. Media would not publish such allegations unless supported by facts and solid evidence. This is evidence that will need to hold up in court since “truth” is the strongest defence against defamation. The evidence is necessary not only to protect media from legal liability, but to ensure that the candidates and parties are not unfairly denigrated and disadvantaged — that any allegations that are published/broadcast are based on proof.

Again, this is not to say that media cannot question the performance of candidates vying for public office, or criticise their record, but it has to be done in a proper manner, in the

interest of the public. Reasonable and realistic criticism is legally defensible under qualified privilege, which is accorded to discussions and communications that take place in the interest of society, without any malicious intent (ulterior motive).

Another defence against defamation is 'fair comment'. According to the Law Handbook by Fitzroy Legal Service in Victoria, Australia, 'fair comment' defence concerns comments or opinions on matters of public interest. The handbook states that the name of this defence is misleading as the comment does not need to be fair (i.e., it doesn't need to be reasonable or just). It only needs to be an opinion that a person, however prejudiced, could honestly hold. As the handbook states:

A person may publish any comment/opinion to the world at large, even if the meanings conveyed are defamatory and false, provided that the comment concerns a matter of public interest. This includes comments about the government, the administration of public services and institutions, and matters submitted to public criticism (e.g., books, plays, concerts and films).

Furthermore, the defamatory imputation is understood (by those to whom it is published) to be a comment (i.e., an opinion, not a statement of fact). Statements of fact are not protected by the fair comment defence and must be proved to be true. The Law Handbook clarifies that:

"...like qualified privilege, the defence of fair comment can be defeated if the plaintiff can establish that the defendant made the defamatory comment maliciously. In the context of fair comment, 'malice' means that the 'publisher did not honestly hold the opinion that was published'."

As much as possible, all potentially defamatory statements, whether seemingly protected by qualified privilege or fair comment, need to be treated carefully, in compliance with the laws of Fiji. If necessary, professional legal advice should be sought before publication or broadcast. This is more so with

elections coverage, when the performance of government is fair game, and comes under intense scrutiny. In the interest of fairness, balance and truth, journalists should take all the necessary measures to verify the information before making them public. They should also include a response from all those who are being criticised. Ideally, stories should include a response to every single allegation that is published or broadcast.

As mentioned previously, media ethics are no longer optional, but a legal requirement under the Fiji Media Act. In journalism, there is a strong co-relation between media law and ethics, and the two areas often overlap. One way of complying with the media Act is by observing the ethical norms of journalism, which are discussed in the next section.

Main points:

- » Media ethics are no longer optional, but a legal requirement under the Fiji media act.
- » All Fijian media organisations and journalists are bound by the same laws as any other citizen.
- » Journalists should also understand laws relating to obscenity, blasphemy, incitement to commit a crime, defamation and sedition.
- » Although no one has been charged under the media act, it is a risk for as long as it is in place.
- » Journalists should be aware of the Public Order Act, especially Section 15 on malicious publications, false news or false reporting.
- » Journalists need to be vigilant to not inflame communal conflicts and treat sensitive topics with due care.
- » Journalists should not give any news source a full guarantee of confidentiality unless the journalist is willing to uphold the guarantee at the risk of breaching the law.
- » All potentially defamatory statements need to be treated carefully, in compliance with the law.

4 JOURNALISM ETHICS IN ELECTIONS REPORTING

4. JOURNALISM ETHICS IN ELECTIONS REPORTING

It goes without saying that elections coverage demands the highest level of ethical standards and professional norms with regards to full, fair and impartial news reporting. The public have a right to the truth and put their faith in journalists to be factual, reliable and trustworthy all times. As emphasised by the Society of Professional Journalists, seeking the truth and reporting it is one of the foundations of ethical journalism.

Of course, the truth can be complex rather than plain or simple; hidden rather than obvious or clear; and contested rather than settled or established, more so in the heat of elections campaigning. Different groups and individuals may have their own understanding of what is the truth, with more than one version of the truth, or several shades of it. So how does a journalist get to the 'bottom of the truth', especially during elections, when 'truth' as a commodity is so hotly contested?

ACHIEVING FAIRNESS AND BALANCE

The Society of Professional Journalists guidelines for ethical reporting outlines a series of steps to take in order to be fair and accurate in your reporting, which helps get as close to the truth as possible. These steps emphasise regular exchange of accurate and fair information — in timely fashion.

They require journalists to:

- »» Be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.
- »» Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources as much as possible.
- »» Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarising a story.
- »» Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
- »» Be cautious when making promises but keep the promises that are made.
- »» Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- »» Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- »» Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
- »» Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
- »» Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- »» Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government.

These guidelines apply in everyday journalism as much as they do in major national events such as the general elections. Most, if not all the many checks and balances are indispensable if the goal is fair and impartial coverage of elections, since the stakes for the country and its people are higher than usual, with no room for cutting corners.

IMPARTIALITY, OBJECTIVITY AND BALANCE

The key terms in ethical journalism — impartiality, objectivity and balance — apply equally, if not more to general elections coverage. In simple terms, objectivity means not allowing your own personal views, convictions and beliefs to cloud your news reporting. It requires avoiding subjectivity by leaving out any personal opinions in news stories and reporting just the facts. Impartiality means not taking sides on any issue but presenting all sides of an argument fairly. Practicing objectivity and impartiality helps achieve balance, which, as discussed previously, is not just an ethical requirement in Fiji, but a legal obligation under the media act.

While the standard journalistic values of objectivity and impartiality sound simple in theory, they are much more challenging to achieve in the real sense due to various reasons. For one, journalists are human beings with personal feelings that they are not always able to fully divorce from their professional practice—at least not on each and every occasion. Besides, deadline demands coupled with space and time constraints can lead to inadvertent bias. While pure objectivity may not be achievable, it is still worth striving for and if journalists try hard enough, acceptable levels of objectivity are achievable more often than not. This is evident in the news media on a daily basis.

Good practices in journalism, such as inclusiveness and variety of views, help achieve objectivity and impartiality. In elections, this means reporting party manifestos and political debates in an equitable manner so that the voters have a good understanding of all the options before them, instead of partial information. Well-informed voters can compare and contrast the choices before them, prior to reaching a final decision on which way to vote.

JOURNALISM'S FIRST LOYALTY IS TO CITIZENS

When it comes to good practices, journalists should not flinch to present the problems facing the country, neither baulk at reporting in a critical manner the solutions being proposed by those vying for the spoils of office, mindful that the media's first loyalty is to the people, not to a political party or candidate. Always remember that the journalistic search for 'truth' is guided and underpinned by the public interest, first and foremost. The pursuit of truth in elections coverage demands that the reporting is not biased in favour of, or against any party or candidate, both in tone and in the allocation of time, space and prominence.

Balanced reporting demands that news, interviews and information programmes do not unduly favour any one party or candidate. Usually, the bigger political parties and the more prominent candidates tend to dominate coverage, but care should be taken to ensure that the smaller parties and less established candidates are not marginalised. At the very least they should receive equitable and proportionate coverage. This is a fundamental principle of free, fair and transparent elections that cannot be compromised. It is essential practice for protecting the interests of both voters and candidates.

Main points:

- »» Elections coverage demands the highest level of ethical standards and professional norms.
- »» Seeking the truth and reporting it is one of the foundations of ethical journalism.
- »» The goal in elections coverage is fair and impartial reporting. Given the stakes, there is no room for cutting corners.
- »» Practicing objectivity and impartiality in elections reporting helps achieve balance and get as close to the 'truth' as possible.

- »» Inclusiveness and a variety of views in stories could help achieve objectivity and impartiality.
- »» Journalists should report the solutions being proposed by those vying for the spoils of office in a critical manner.
- »» Journalists should always remember that the media's first loyalty is to the people, not to a political party or candidate.
- »» The journalistic search for 'truth' should be guided by the public interest.

5

HATE SPEECH AND INFLAMMATORY LANGUAGE

5. HATE SPEECH AND INFLAMMATORY LANGUAGE

In the Fijian context, a major challenge for journalists has been how to report inflammatory comments during political campaigns that could incite hatred or intolerance in the community. In a multi-ethnic country such as a Fiji with a history on military coups, the risk of conflict is ever present. It is even higher during elections.

LANGUAGE AND IMAGES

Media deal with language and images which are powerful tools that should be handled carefully and responsibly. The Fijian media need to be aware that inciting hatred or intolerance is a crime under the Media Act and various other laws. As a journalist, it is no defence that you did not cause harm or that you were simply quoting someone. You are culpable for your professional failings and for propagating the hateful comments, which could make you prone to criminal charges.

While journalists apply and uphold the right to freedom of expression, it is not an absolute right, and it needs to be exercised responsibly in the interest of the public, more so in post-conflict scenarios and during tense situations, such as elections.

Especially risky is hate speech, which is vilifying a person

or a group on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or some other characteristics. The dilemma facing journalists is thus: reporting the comments/statements could endanger groups or individuals on the basis of race, religion, or political affiliation whereas not reporting it could be akin to allowing the tensions to simmer undetected, thus suppressing or covering up potential for the outbreak of serious social conflict in future. The media are sometimes referred to as a 'conflict alarm system' because their reports can alert the authorities of pending conflict, and with the opportunity to be forewarned, steps can be taken to avert or minimise damage.

Depending on the situation and subject matter, media would decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not to report hate speeches and inflammatory comments. The decision would include not reporting the comments in their entirety, that is, leave certain sections out, or to throw out the entire speech. This may require careful deliberation by the entire editorial team, as wholesale censorship is often not the answer.

What the media should not do is to report inflammatory speeches indiscriminately, without balancing comments/rebuttals, or if need be, condemnation in the editorial sections, as this would be against journalism tenets to minimise harm.

The thing to keep in mind is that "hate speech is not free speech."

HANDLING CONFLICT FLASHPOINTS AND SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM

Specific to Fiji, the flashpoints include ethnicity, demography, the land issue, perceived threat to indigenous culture, perceived Indo-Fijian dominance of the economy, affirmative action, cultural assimilation and contestations for political and economic power. These are complex issues giving rise

to intractable conflicts in Fiji over the course of the country's history. Usually, they are hotly debated during elections, and the Fijian media have, on occasion, misrepresented the facts, fuelling the tensions.

Research indicates that the Fijian media tend to emphasise the ethnic angle in conflicts when in reality, conflict is usually more deeply rooted, with multiple triggers due to a steady build-up and manifestation of social, political and economic influences grounded in history – rather than a series of isolated events driven solely or largely by ethnic hatred.

In a conflict-prone society like Fiji, the media should consider adopting a constructive approach to contentious issues, especially during elections. This means challenging some assertions by getting a cross-section of views, doing your own fact-finding and including in your interviews questions about possible solutions to the problems on hand.

This approach is based on 'solutions journalism' which "investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, how people try to solve widely shared problems". Traditionally, journalists define news as "what's gone wrong," while solutions journalism tries to expand that definition to try to understand how things can be made right. Adherents believe that by "adding rigorous coverage of solutions, journalists can tell the whole story". The principles and emphasis of solutions journalism seem suited for divided societies that are prone to conflict, such as Fiji, and the ideas are worth trying, especially during elections, at least concerning the major issues.

HANDLING HATE SPEECH

The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance of Australia's general guidelines on reporting hate speech and extremism is handy to assist Fiji journalists in the course of their reporting. They are

based on the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland)'s guidelines on reporting race. Excerpts of the guidelines follow:

- »» Only include a person's race, religion or ethnicity if it is relevant.
- »» Avoid emotive or pejorative terms to describe groups of people, especially in contexts where there can be a conflation of ethnicity, race, religion and criminality.
- »» Strive for diversity and balance in your reporting, especially on social issues.
- »» Remember that within communities there are diverse opinions, experiences, and treatment.
- »» Exercise care, balance and proportionality when covering race issues.
- »» Do not publish or broadcast comments that contain racist hate speech.
- »» Be sensitive to religion and culture.

In an article on “covering hate speech without amplifying it” in the Centre for Journalism Ethics website Abigail Steinberg (June 2020) discusses the challenges of covering hate speech, “a delicate business full of fine lines journalists must walk”.

Steinberg adds that when done correctly, hate speech reporting can fight the spread of prejudiced ideas and educate the public. When it misses the mark, reporting on hate speech can contribute to radicalisation and amplify the hateful viewpoints it is meant to condemn. To avoid that, journalists should stick to the basics of fairness, balance and impartiality in the pursuit of truth, taking great care to not cause any undue harm.

Main points:

- »» In multiethnic societies, reporting inflammatory comments is a major risk, especially during political campaigns.
- »» Language and images are powerful tools that media and journalists should treat carefully.

- »» Inciting hatred or intolerance is a crime under the Fiji media act and various other laws.
- »» The right to freedom of expression is not an absolute right. It needs to be exercised responsibly in the interest of the public.
- »» The media are seen as a ‘conflict alarm system’ because their reports can alert the authorities of pending conflict and take preventive measures.
- »» Media should never report inflammatory speeches indiscriminately as it is against journalism tenets to minimise harm.
- »» Research indicates that the Fijian media tend to emphasise the ethnic angle in conflicts when in reality, conflict is deeply rooted, with multiple triggers.
- »» ‘Solutions journalism’ investigates and explains how people try to solve widely shared problems.
- »» Journalists should stick to the basics of fairness, balance and impartiality in the pursuit of truth, taking great care to not cause any undue harm.

6 THE GENDER ISSUE

6. THE GENDER ISSUE

A major issue about media coverage of elections is the portrayal of female candidates in the contest. Research in Fiji and around the world indicates that women candidates are either underrepresented or misrepresented, which hinders their chances of winning office. 'Symbolic Annihilation' is the term used to describe women's erasure or absence from the media. Development experts believe that this absence/underrepresentation has contributed to keeping women powerless or socially disempowered.

Research as far back as 1978 indicates that most media portrayed women in traditional roles, did not offer many positive images of women in the public sphere, and generally defined women in relation to their roles with men, which can be particularly delimiting for female election candidates.

INVISIBILITY OF FEMALE CANDIDATES IN FIJI

In Fiji, research by Shazia Usman published in 2013 looked at the coverage of female election candidates in the 2006 general election in The Fiji Times and the Fiji Sun. After analysing the data, Usman concluded that female candidates were virtually invisible in both the newspapers during the selected time period. The few articles published on women or quoting

them were mostly clichéd, lacked critical analysis and were stereotypical in nature. The news media could help correct the imbalance with sufficient, proper coverage rather than insufficient, inappropriate coverage. But first, the media need some understanding of the problem.

Globally, the low representation of women can be partly explained by the low presence of women candidates in many countries. The Pacific, including Fiji, has the lowest rates in the world. While the Inter-Parliamentary Union lists the global average of women's representation in national parliaments at 25 per cent, research by the Australian National University's Dr Kerryn Baker indicates that across the Pacific, the average is just 6.7 per cent. This means that only one in 20 Pacific parliamentarians are female, compared to one in five globally.

FIGHTING GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Women's disadvantaged position in society and the many historic and contemporary discriminations and obstacles that they face are deemed responsible for their lack of representation in politics. This is not often understood, even by media, because society has normalised gender discrimination to a certain extent, with most women forced to accept their lower status. Historically, this situation was not sufficiently questioned or interrogated, although awareness has been increasing in recent years.

Specific to Fiji, Usman outlines several possible reasons why there are so few women in Fiji's Parliament—the country's cultural environment, the nature of its political parties and electoral systems, and its culture and tradition, which reinforce patriarchy.

According to Usman:

The patriarchal system means a general acceptance by both men and women that politics is the domain of men, and over

the years, this attitude has been proven difficult to alter.

A major milestone in trying to improve media coverage of females was the UN International decade for Women from 1985 to 1994. It played a crucial role in drawing international attention to the underrepresentation of women at all levels in media organisations. Section J of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action on 'Women and the Media' set two major goals:

- Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media.
- Promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

The above measures are certainly called for, both globally as well in Fiji, with research showing that the activities of female candidates receive not only less coverage than men, but inappropriate coverage as well.

Researchers have observed that “women politicians tend to be portrayed in accordance with a number of stereotypes that have nothing to do with the office they are running for. Women politicians receive more attention for their appearance, sex, private life and family life compared to men. Furthermore, a woman politician's success is frequently attributed to reasons other than her professional accomplishments, such as her family ties or relationships to the men in their lives. Given the rise in infotainment, such stereotypes can only be reinforced when political programme comes second, and personalisation of politics comes first”.

Furthermore, women politicians are often portrayed as extraordinary or achieving spectacular results. They are, in fact, too often referred to as “women politicians”. It conveys the wrong message that their presence is not a natural trend and implies that their coverage should focus on what makes them new instead of focusing on their programme and ideas.

RE-EXAMINING AND REVAMPING COVERAGE

Based on the research findings it can be argued that if women candidates are unfairly portrayed by the media, the media may actually be hindering their ability to obtain political office. This could be having some major repercussions at national level. As Usman wrote, Fiji's leadership has always been male-dominated. Given women's recognised importance in development in the region, how do the news media handle this issue? What is the media's stand on it? Do the media take up the cause in favour of women, or do they perpetuate the imbalance?

These pertinent questions that should inform the Fiji media's reporting of the 2022 elections so that they have a better understanding of the situation and approach it in a more nuanced and balanced manner in future.

In covering female election candidates, journalists should be mindful of their communicating power and the responsibilities that go with it. While Fiji's political parties pursuing direct contact with voters through rallies and constituency visits, and even though social media also making a big impact, mainstream media coverage remains a particularly influential part of the election effort and potentially decide the fate of the candidates.

In their coverage, the Fijian media are not asked to give women a free pass, but rather apply the same standards applied to males, with regards journalism ethics and professional norms such as balance, objectivity and fairness.

In other words, treat women as equals and on their own merit.

For one, do not ignore female candidates and for another do not focus on their dress or relationships only, but on their record, be it qualifications, experience, talents and community service.

Media could help change status quo which disadvantages female candidates by offering more in-depth reporting on issues such as gender equality and be more diligent in giving voice to the opinions and comments of the many educated, intelligent and powerful women on national matters. Media are quick to label men as 'experts'. They should consider the same for women where such a title is warranted.

Main points:

- »» Research indicates that women candidates are both underrepresented and misrepresented in the media.
- »» This includes defining women in relation to their roles with men or how they dress.
- »» Women's disadvantaged position in society is deemed responsible for their lack of representation in politics.
- »» Fiji's cultural and traditions and the nature of its political parties and electoral systems disadvantage women.
- »» Media need to question if their portrayal of female candidates is hindering their ability to obtain political office.
- »» Media should get behind Section J of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action with balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.
- »» Media should not give women a free pass but treat them as equals and report them on their merits.

7

PLANNING AND EXECUTING YOUR COVERAGE

7. PLANNING AND EXECUTING YOUR COVERAGE

Covering something as big and as important as an election, which occurs on a national scale, and requires round the clock reporting, needs significant prior planning and preparation, both organisationally, and as an individual journalist, if the project is to be executed successfully, without undue problems.

Not all Fijian media organisations have in-house election reporting guidelines regulating the behaviour of their journalists during campaigning. This is because even though elections are significant events, they are infrequent, held once every four years in the case of Fiji. In the absence of in-house guidelines and procedures, media organisations could organise regular editorial planning meetings in the run up to the elections and while polling is in process. The code of ethics in the Fiji Media Act and international guidelines/benchmarks, such as the Society of Professional Journalists, could serve as references for discussions and planning.

PAYMENTS AND GIFTS

Some of the hazards of election reporting that journalists should be warned about in advance, especially young inexperienced journalists, are not accepting any payments and gifts from the candidates or their representatives, and

to report to the editor any such overtures, should they occur. Unless journalists are alerted in advance, they could be caught by surprise in the face any such offers. They should be clear guidelines about how to deal with corrupt practices — what actions to take and where/how to report them.

POLITICAL RIGHTS

Being journalists does not mean having to forgo your political affiliation or your voting rights, but if covering the event, ethically and professionally you are not supposed to take part in any political campaigning or activism on behalf of any party or candidate. This may be known to experienced journalists, but not so much known by inexperienced journalists, especially with no training or academic qualifications in journalism. Any display or partiality on the journalists' part tarnishes not only their credibility but brings into question their media organisations' neutrality as a whole. This diminishes trust in their news.

SAFETY RISKS

In the case of Fiji, elections are conceivably one of the riskier assignments for journalists and the preparations must include a thorough discussion of some of the dangers to anticipate, and possible ways to deal with them. If the journalists are forewarned, they are better prepared for any nasty situations that may arise in the field of work. These could range from hostile election candidates, violent political supporters and so forth. Media should also be prepared for any crackdowns from the security forces, including arbitrary arrests and detentions. Journalists should know beforehand where to get help, what their legal rights are and what sort of legal assistance is available for them.

STORY COVERAGE

Certain stories may be riskier than others and it important that the editorial team discusses any such assignments beforehand, assesses the potential for problems and works out possible responses so that in a worst-case scenario, the news reporting team is alert rather than caught off-guard. Media organisation should record and report to the authorities any threats or violence against staff members.

STORY PREPARATION

Preparation is the key to writing good stories that are relevant to the people casting their votes. Journalists should be well versed about the key issues on hand and they should be able to challenge the candidates on some of the promises that they will be making to the electorate. Are these 'pie-in-the-sky' pronouncements or are they viable? This kind of critical reporting requires reading and research well before the elections to not just ask the right questions, but to situate the stories in their proper contexts. In the case of Fiji, the government delivered a mini budget prior to the elections. Journalists should not only be familiar with this budget, but what critics and commentators are saying about it, and formulate questions on this basis.

As part of their preparations, journalists should certainly read all the party manifestos as there is a lot of material there for interrogation. Ideally, the newsroom should organise regular brainstorming sessions about potential stories and story angles, as well as logistical matters.

REPORTING THE RUNNING OF ELECTIONS

Besides the national issues at stake, journalists should make it a point to understand Fiji's electoral system, which

is summarised earlier in this handbook. This is because an important element of elections coverage is reporting on the running of the elections itself. In addition, it is strongly advised that every journalist covering elections in Fiji arms themselves with a copy of the Media Handbook produced by the Fijian Elections Office. The FEO Media Handbook contains important information such as the media code of conduct, media accreditation process, media rights and restrictions, and election day processes.

Journalists must be careful to not break any electoral laws in their reporting, which could get them in trouble, such as breaching the blackout period, when reporting on campaigning is banned. For instance, journalists would check on and report any discrepancies in voter lists, especially if any voters are disenfranchised, not through any fault of theirs, but because of flaws in the system. Journalists would be on the lookout for voter fraud, voter impersonation and elections rigging, but careful to not speculate or circulate misinformation. To report these effectively requires prior discussion and preparation.

Journalists would check whether the ballots are understood by voters who may be illiterate or physically impaired; whether there are enough ballots, ballot boxes and officials to observe the voting and count the ballots; whether there are adequate security arrangements in place to protect voters; and whether the Electoral Commission is responsive to complaints from the media, the voters and the political parties about any alleged violations. To monitor all these effectively and report on them properly requires prior understanding of Fiji's electoral system.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to revisit Section 144A of the Electoral Act, which was earlier discussed in this manual: A person or a political party must not publish any information in or outside Fiji and is accessible in Fiji, knowing or having reason to believe the information is a false statement which

is likely to influence the outcome of an election or diminish public confidence...

Any breach of this section is liable on conviction to a fine of up to \$50,000 or imprisonment for up to five years, or both.

This requires journalists to be vigilant and not report speculation or misinformation. Journalists must check all the facts and verify them before even thinking of going to print or on air, as mistakes can be costly in more ways than one.

As part of their preparation, media must thoroughly discuss and understand S144A and all other laws relating to the coverage of elections, such as the Media Act. S144A is being specifically emphasized because this is a new legislative provision that will apply in the 2022 general elections, and was not in application during the past two elections in 2014 and 2018.

CHECKLIST FOR EDITORS

The International Federation of Journalists lists the following elements that editors need to address before the start of an election campaign coverage:

- »» Check key dates of the election process: registration, nomination, campaign period, polling day, announcement of results etc.
- »» Check the regulations and laws affecting election coverage.
- »» Set a budget for election coverage.
- »» Identify the team who will cover the election – as well as political staff, other specialised reporters will need to cover particular aspects of the campaign.
- »» Identify the team in charge of election coverage – senior editors who will decide on any sensitive matters that emerge in the course of the campaign.
- »» Plan technical and operational arrangements.
- »» Recruit additional personnel.

- »» Contact resource people, such as election experts and pundits, who can advise you on election matters.
- »» Contract a reputable company to run opinion polls for you.
- »» Check photo and video libraries.
- »» Plan for emergencies.

Main points:

- »» In election reporting journalists should be prepared in advance about attempts to bribe and other means to influence coverage.
- »» Being journalists does not mean having to forgo your voting rights do not openly take part in any political campaigning or activism.
- »» Some dangers to anticipate include hostile election candidates, violent political supporters and crackdowns from the security forces. Journalists should know beforehand where to get help.
- »» Media organisation should report to the authorities any threats or violence against staff.
- »» Elections require critical reporting which requires reading/ research well before the elections.
- »» Reporting the running of elections is an important part of the coverage.
- »» Be mindful of Section 144A of the Electoral Act, which bars the publication of false information likely to influence the outcome of an election or diminish public confidence.

APPENDIX 1

Electoral Act provisions of consequence to journalists and media houses

1. S110 - Restrictions on Opinion Polling

- 110 (1) It shall be unlawful for any person to publish the results of any election related opinion on the polls on any day during the 7 days prior to the polling day and on the polling day until the close of polling at all polling stations.
- (2) Any person who contravenes this section commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years, or to both.

2. S118 - Media Blackout before Election Day

- 118 (1) During the 48 hour period prior to the polling day and on the polling day until the close of polling at all polling stations, it is prohibited for any media organisation to publish, print or broadcast any campaign advertisement, debate, opinion or interview on any election issue or on any political party or candidate.
- (2) During the 48 hour period prior to polling day and on the polling day until the close of polling at all polling stations, any publication or broadcast by any media organisation relating to the election must obtain the prior approval of the Media Industry Development Authority to ensure compliance with subsection (1).
- (3) The Media Industry Development Authority must ensure that all media organisations comply with the provisions of this section.

- (4) If any media organisation contravenes this section, the editor, publisher or the owner of the media organisation (as the case may be) commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years.

3. S117 - Paid campaign advertisement

- 117 Any broadcast or print advertisement paid for by a political party or candidate must clearly indicate that it is a paid political advertisement and include the name of the political party, the authorising officer of the party or the candidate who authorised and paid for the advertisement.

4. S112 - Campaign materials

- 112 (1) Any campaign material published and distributed by political parties and candidates must include, in a print size easily legible, the following information—
- (a) name and address of the person and organisation who authorised and paid for printing of the material;
 - (b) name of the company that printed the material and their business address; and
 - (c) date of issue.
- (2) Political parties and candidates may place their campaign posters and flags on private premises, with permission of the owner of any such private premises.
- (3) It shall be unlawful for any person, any political party or any candidate (or any person on behalf of the political party including any office holder of the political party or any person on behalf of any candidate) to place campaign posters and flags on public buildings, monuments, electricity or lamp posts, and other public structures, except in public places specifically

designated by the Supervisor for placement of campaign material.

- (4) Any person who contravenes this section commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years, or to both.

5. S143 - Heading to electoral advertisements

- 143 Any editor, publisher and proprietor of a media organisation who fails to cause the word “electoral advertisement” to be published or broadcast as a headline or heading to each article, advertisement, publication, broadcast or notice in the publication or broadcast—
- (a) that contains electoral matter; and
 - (b) that is, or is to be, paid for or for which any reward, compensation or promise of reward or compensation is or is to be made, commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years, or to both.

6. S144A - Publication of False Statements

- 144 (1) A person or a political party must not publish any information in or outside Fiji and is accessible in Fiji, knowing or having reason to believe the information is a false statement which is likely to influence the outcome of an election or diminish public confidence in the performance of any duty or function of the Supervisor and the Electoral Commission.
- (2) The Supervisor may direct a person, including a service provider, or a political party to remove or correct any statement or information published under subsection (1) and the person must immediately remove or correct the statement or information.

- (3) The person or political party may request the Electoral Commission to review the decision of the Supervisor under subsection (2), and the Electoral Commission must within 24 hours review the decision and inform the Supervisor and the person or political party of its decision in writing.
- (4) Any person or political party that contravenes this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$50,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or both”.

ABOUT DIALOGUE FIJI

Dialogue Fiji is a civil society organisation based in Suva, Fiji. The organisation has the mission to engage with others to create inclusive spaces for dialogue and peace building, and develop capacities in Fiji’s society for a culture of dialogue, resulting in dialogue processes being applied to increase understanding, respect and collaboration across divides. The vision of the organisation is “a Fiji where people respect each others’ differences and share a common will to build a free, just, peaceful, and inclusive nation”.

Dialogue Fiji’s current projects are in a range of areas such as inclusive and sustainable democracy, democratic institution building, human rights, electoral processes, conflict transformation and climate change, which constitute key areas for peacebuilding work in the Fijian context. Our work involves convening dialogues, engaging in advocacy, providing community education, facilitating community engagement with statutory actors, undertaking research, social and political commentaries, policy analysis, media analysis, amongst other activities.

Dialogue Fiji promotes the use of dialogue and other deliberative processes to encourage and facilitate civic engagement in Fiji to strengthen a democratic culture, build social cohesion and advocate for the use of peaceful ways of dealing with conflict.



Dialogue Fiji

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