

AT A GLANCE



1. Internet access dramatically increased



2. Misinformation and disinformation amplified in larger Pacific countries



3. Cautious engagement with artificial intelligence in newsrooms



4. Pacific print media sets benchmark for quality journalism

5. Government funding sustains and stifles Pacific media

6. Media freedom is a key concern for Pacific media

7. Media self-censorship is more likely in smaller Pacific nations



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The *State of the Media: Pacific Region* provides a regional snapshot of media in the Pacific Islands region. This regional report, and the accompanying 12 country reports, aims to serve as an accessible resource for media, civil society, and governments.

The 12 Pacific Island countries studied for this research are: the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, the Republic of Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. This study is part of the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS).¹

The study builds on findings published in the *2013 State of Media & Communication Report*, capturing shifts in the current and emerging media landscape, including changes to media access and coverage across print, broadcast and digital, current media policy and legislation, media infrastructure, the footprint of media organisations, and top-level audience consumption patterns.

METHODOLOGY

The State of the Media: Pacific Region study adopted a multi-method approach. This comprised of a desk review, 103 semi-structured interviews with media practitioners and audience members, and an audience survey, completed by 119 respondents.

The scope of the *State of the Media: Pacific Region* study was determined by ABC International Development (ABCID) informed by our Pacific partners. The University of Adelaide's (UoA) Stretton Institute implemented the study across the 12 countries. Fieldwork and data analysis approaches were designed and conducted by Priestley Habru, Claudina Aitorea Habru, Jope Tarai, and Professor Joanne Wallis.

The State of the Media: Pacific Region study is delivered as part of the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), an ABC International Development (ABCID) managed program funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Data was collected and initial findings distributed in 2024, but the reports are published in 2025.

Disclaimer: Any opinions represented in this report are those of the authors and research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government the Australian Broadcasting Corporation or the University of Adelaide.

¹ Papua New Guinea is not included in this research. Acknowledging the size of the country, ABCID conducts independent research on the PNG media landscape on a regular basis. The most recent PNG 2023 Citizen Media Engagement Study was funded under the Media Development Initiative.

STATE OF THE MEDIA PACIFIC REGION RESEARCH BRIEF



KEY FINDINGS

1. Internet access dramatically increased

Relative to the findings of the 2013 State of the Media and Communication Report, internet access has significantly increased in most Pacific countries. Fiji and Samoa, for example, now have internet access rates of 85 per cent and 75 per cent respectively, a sharp increase from 2013 figures of 28 per cent and 7 per cent. Increasing internet access is attributed by respondents to the rising number of internet service providers across the region and improved connection to submarine cables. Access to low Earth orbit satellite technology has also contributed to rising rates of internet connectivity, particularly in smaller Pacific nations such as Nauru and FSM.

2. Misinformation and disinformation amplified in larger Pacific countries

While misinformation and disinformation impact all focus countries to varying extents, these challenges are amplified in larger countries such as Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Samoa, which have active diasporas and higher penetration of foreign media sources, particularly on social media platforms owned by big tech companies. Mis/disinformation narratives were particularly rife during the COVID-19 pandemic and key political events. There have been moves in several countries to establish stronger government regulation of media to counter growing misinformation online. However, according to media practitioner respondents, these efforts risk curtailing the mainstream media's ability to cover public interest news stories and may weaken media's ability to hold government to account.

3. Cautious engagement with artificial intelligence in newsrooms

All media practitioner respondents across the 12 countries have experimented with artificial intelligence (AI) to varying degrees, specifically in aggregating, producing, and presenting news content. However, many are doubtful of AI's capacity to accurately represent Pacific names and other cultural intricacies. Additionally, there remains a gap in the industry around broader AI-related infrastructure, education, and digital initiatives essential for the efficient integration of AI into newsrooms.

4. Pacific print media sets benchmark for quality journalism

Despite viability concerns, exacerbated by decreasing revenue and rising printing costs, print media (particularly those that are independent of government funding) remain the credible 'voice of truth' amid the proliferation of online mis/disinformation. Sampled audiences recognise print media as the most consistent providers of quality journalism, balance and evidence-based reporting.

5. Government funding sustains and stifles Pacific media

Media practitioners acknowledged the critical role that government funding plays in the viability of the media industry, particularly in countries with smaller markets where media struggles to operate on a commercial basis. However, widespread concerns were raised about the relationship between government funding and the ability of media to report freely without pressure. There were concerted calls for regional and national media associations to work with governments in establishing themselves as central bodies responsible for disbursing government grants and funding for media, a move which respondents believe would ensure greater editorial independence, but also necessitate a strengthening of media associations to manage this responsibility.

6. Media freedom a key concern for Pacific media

Respondents working in media acknowledged that, while they are generally free to report on issues of public interest, media freedom is not expressly enshrined in the constitution of most Pacific countries. This exposes journalists to legal implications should their coverage be deemed to infringe laws on defamation, confidentiality, or national security. At the time of writing, Fiji, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Palau, and Tonga are the only countries where freedom of the media is explicit in the constitution. Concerns about media freedom have also impacted audience trust in mainstream media, particularly government-owned media organisations.

7. Media self-censorship more likely in smaller Pacific nations

Interviews with media practitioners revealed that journalists in Pacific nations with smaller populations are more likely to shape their reporting, or avoid covering specific topics altogether, so that stories do not inadvertently cause offence to community or family members or generate societal tension. Many saw this as a non-negotiable part of the profession, given their prominence in a closely knit community.

