

2000 RETROSPECTIVE**Coup Coup Land: The Press and the Putsch in Fiji****David Robie***Abstract*

On 19 May 2000, an insurrection led by failed businessman George Speight and renegade members of the elite 1st Meridian Squadron Special Forces engulfed the Fiji Islands in turmoil for three months. Speight and his armed conspirators stormed Parliament and seized the Labour-led Mahendra Chaudhry Government, keeping members hostage for 56 days. On Chaudhry's release from captivity, he blamed the media in part for the overthrow of his government. Some sectors of the media were accused of waging a bitter campaign against the Fiji Labour Party-led administration and its roll-back of privatization. In the early weeks of insurrection, the media enjoyed an unusually close relationship with Speight and the hostage-takers, raising ethical questions. Dilemmas faced by Fiji and the foreign journalists were more complex than during the 1987 military coups. As Fiji faced a fresh general election in August 2001, this article examined the reportage of the Coalition Government's year in office, media issues over coverage of the putsch, and a controversy over the author's analysis presented at a Journalism Education Association (JEA) conference in Australia in December 2000.

THE government of kidnapped Prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry, Fiji's only Indo-Fijian prime minister in thirty years of independence, achieved economic successes in its one year in office. Indo-Fijians make up a minority 44 percent of the island nation's 800,000 population. But on Friday, 19 May 2000, failed businessman and kailoma (part-Fijian) George Speight, along with renegade soldiers from the elite 1st Meridian Squadron forces stormed Parliament and took the Chaudhry Government

hostage in the name of indigenous Fijian supremacy. 'We're not going to apologise to anybody and we're not going to step back, and we're not going to be daunted by accusations of racism, or one-sidedness,' Speight declared. 'At the end of the day, it is about the supreme rights of our indigenous people in Fiji, the desire that it be returned—wholesome and preserved for the future' (Robie, 2000a: 19).

Many of Speight's group, like their leader, had dubious reputations: only five days before the coup, Speight had appeared in Suva's High Court on charges of extortion. He also had a grievance against Chaudhry's government for his dismissal as chief executive from Fiji Hardwood Corporation Ltd, and from Fiji Pine Ltd. Speight's chiefly associates stood to lose lucrative timber deals if Chaudhry remained in office.

However Speight essentially achieved his aims, before releasing his hostages: abrogation of the multiracial 1997 Constitution, written after the coup of 1987 and replacing the 1990 Constitution which enshrined Fijian paramountcy (but kept Fiji excluded from the Commonwealth); the removal of the 80-year old President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara; a non-elected indigenous administration; and an amnesty for the kidnappers. (The core group was later charged with treason, [then] a capital offence in Fiji.) Meanwhile, the country was plunged into economic chaos.

A year after the attempted coup, an interim regime installed by the military and declared illegal by the Fiji Court of Appeal on 1 March 2001, had been reinstated by President Josefa Iloilo as a caretaker government to steer the country uncertainty towards a general election on August 26. Hundreds of impoverished families were 'living in atrocious conditions... because of the madcap escapades of George Speight and his goons' (Turaga, 2001). Preliminary treason court hearings had been opened against 12 alleged plotters and Suva newspaper retrospectives were reluctant to look too closely at the controversy over the media's performance during the crisis.

When Chaudhry was released from captivity on July 14, he partly blamed the media for the overthrow of his government (*Fiji One News*, 2000). Some sectors of the media were alleged to have waged a bitter campaign against the People's Coalition Government and its roll-back of privatisation in the year after the Fiji Labour Party-led coalition had been elected in a landslide victory in May 1999 (*Pacific Journalism Review*, 2000: 134-164). In the early weeks of the insurrection, the media enjoyed an unusually close relationship with Speight and the hostage-takers, raising ethical questions (see Field, 2000b; Parkinson, 2000; Robie, 2000b).

This article examines the media controversy leading up to the putsch, the coverage of the crisis itself and the analyses and role of the media as a factor in the upheaval. It also considers the political sympathies of the journalists, news organisations and the hostile response from some media industry executives in Fiji to an earlier version of the article (full text at www.asiapac.org.fj/cafecapacific/resources/aspac/fiji3148a.html) delivered at the Journalism Education Association (JEA) conference at Mooloolaba, Queensland, in December 2000.

Fiji Islands and the Media

Fiji has a highly developed media industry compared with most other Pacific countries. Until 2000, it had four major monthly or bi-monthly news magazine groups, *Islands Business International*, *Pacific Islands Monthly* (Murdoch), *The Review* and *Fiji First* (both locally owned). However, *Fiji First* faded from the public eye and *PIM*, the region's oldest and for many years the most influential magazine, announced its closure a month after the putsch. *Islands Business* was relaunched as the southern edition of *Pacific Magazine* in January 2000 after a merger with the Hawai'i-based publisher, Pacific Basin Communications. The three daily newspapers are *The Fiji Times* owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp (circulation reportedly up to 55,000 during the Fiji crisis but usually around 32,000 weekdays) and the struggling Fiji government-owned *Daily Post*, with a third daily, *The Sun*, which was launched in September 1999. *The Sun* is owned by a consortium of Indo-Fijian importers, C J Patel and Co Ltd and Vinod Patel and Co Ltd, and the flagship company of Fiji's caretaker regime, Fijian Holdings Ltd.) The two smaller dailies do not have independently audited sales, but are both believed to sell around 6000 copies a day. Broadcasters are Fiji Television Ltd, which has one free-to-air channel and two pay channels; private Communications Fiji Ltd (FM96) radio group; and the state-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation. The *Daily Post* and the *Review* news magazines share a website, *Fijilive*, while the *Fiji Times* is hosted at FM96's *Fiji Village* website.

On 15 May 1987, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka's regime ordered both newspapers, *The Fiji Times* and the original *Fiji Sun*, to stop publishing indefinitely while armed troops and the police occupied the two offices. The next day, May 16, became the first time (apart from once during a hurricane in January 1986) in more than a century that the *Fiji*

Times was not published. The military regime began a purge of political critics and opponents by arresting them without charge. The *Fiji Sun*, jointly owned by Hong Kong-based Sally Aw Sian publishing empire and New Zealand publisher Phillip Harkness, eventually closed rather than publish under self-censorship restrictions.

There was an exodus of experienced journalists from Fiji after the Rabuka coups. At the start of the Speight's attempted coup, the bulk of Fiji journalists were young, relatively untrained and limited experience. The median age of journalists was 22 with a large bulge in the 21-25 age group. Almost half of Fiji's journalists (47 per cent) had no professional or educational qualifications at all, and the median experience was 2.5 years (Robie, 1999a: 183).

Chaudhry and the Media

In May 1999, the Fiji Labour Party won the largest electoral mandate since the country became independent in 1970. After more than a decade as an opposition leader, and a seemingly good working relationship with journalists, Mahendra Chaudhry got off on the wrong foot with the media industry virtually from the day he took office. The appointment of his son, Rajendra, as his Private Secretary deeply damaged his credibility with the media and the public. Political commentator Jone Dakuvula observes that the Coalition government was on the defensive from day one: 'There was no honeymoon period' (Dakuvula, 2000a). But Chaudhry and the People's Coalition had the most concern over *The Fiji Times*, arguably the country's most influential news organisation. Over the next few months, *The Fiji Times* appeared to wage a campaign against the fledgling government. According to deposed National Planning Minister Dr Ganesh Chand, an economist and former academic at the University of South Pacific:

One of their lines was that we were not delivering our manifesto immediately; numerous editorials were written on this, and the general tenor of the articles, the locations, the pictures, focus, and most of all, the inaccuracies, all were anti-government. I complained to the [Fiji] Media Council numerous times and judgments against *The Fiji Times* began coming out (Chand, 2000).¹

¹ Adjudications were made by the (Fiji) Media Council over three complaints by Dr Chand against *The Fiji Times* and two against Fiji Television. In the case of the three complaints against *The Fiji Times*, No 90 on 11 November 1999 was upheld, No 101

According to researcher Nwomye Obini of USP's Department of Development Studies, who conducted a content analysis of *Fiji Times* coverage on the Chaudhry government's year in office and the coup, the newspaper bombarded the prime minister with problems in editorials and news reports, a contrast to its treatment of previous governments (Obini, 2000). As the date of the coup approached, the tension grew day by day. Nurses kept making threats, and finally went on strike on May 12, a week before the coup... 'A rift was even reported between the Commissioner of Police and the Prime Minister' (Obini, 2000: 15).

Michael Field, a veteran Pacific Affairs reporter from Agence France-Presse news agency, considers several events were covered with a fixed approach which encouraged an unfairly negative perception of the Coalition: 'One was the infamous tea lady incident which helped create an air, I suppose, of corruption or immorality in the newly elected government. My own view of this was that it was something of a set-up job in which the media went along for a ride, and may have, in the longer run, helped to destabilise the government...' (Field, 2000a).

Field also makes the point that the election result was 'remarkably clear but the media, or elements of it, were reluctant to accept it'. Some sections of the media were, in his view 'arrogantly anti-democratic'. Also some of the journalistic decision-making was personal. Dakuvula regards *The Fiji Times* as an example of a newspaper which was blatantly antagonistic to the government:

The agenda of the *Fiji Times* was to delegitimise the elected Government by creating a climate of scandal, loathing and fear so the Fiji Labour party, at least would not be able to effectively implement its manifesto (Dakuvula, 2000b).

Part of the blame lay with the Coalition Government itself. There was no evidence that the administration tried to develop a media strategy to establish positive relationships with journalists and use contemporary 'spin' techniques to sell its reforms to the public. But sociologist Dr Sivitveni Ratuva argues that the Chaudhry Government's poor relationship with the media was a weakness shared with the previous Rabuka administration.

Both governments had information ministers who did not know how to handle public relation matters, especially how to deal

(undated, 2000) partially upheld, and No 102 (undated, 2000) dismissed; however both complaints against Fiji Television (Nos 99 and 100, undated) were upheld.

with the media. They were both confrontational. The media's response also took the same line—confrontational. The media portrayed Rabuka and company as corrupt and inefficient and Chaudhry as arrogant and anti-Fijian (Ratuva, 2000).

According to Ratuva, the portrayal of Chaudhry fed into the rising tide of ethno-nationalist mobilisation. Although the media did not create the conditions for the ethno-nationalist upsurge, it did provide the nationalists with the legitimacy to roll on. For media analyst Dr Pramila Devi, this was nothing new. In a paper almost a decade earlier, analysing the 1992 general election campaign, she had found *The Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* both practised self-censorship with a bias towards a certain ideology: 'It is the same ideology that is shared by the (Great) Council of Chiefs, the military, the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) and large segments of the ethnic Fijian population. That putting this ideology in practice relegates half of the Fiji's population to a third class citizenry did not matter' (Devi, 1992: 35).

Decisions by the Chaudhry Government not to review the work permit for reappointed *Fiji Times* editor-in-chief, Russell Hunter, a former senior journalist on *The Australian*, and to block Canadian Ken Clark's work permit after he was appointed chief executive of Fiji Television Ltd—both cases leading to legal action—further alienated the media from the government.² Another important factor was the commercial interests of large businesses, major advertisers and corporate opponents of the Coalition Government's efforts at rolling back the privatization policies adopted by the Rabuka Government.

As the government's relationship with the media soured further, payback time finally came for the press. Chaudhry chose an invitation by the Media Council to launch the Fiji General Media Code of Ethics and Practice on 26 October 1999 to deliver an extraordinary speech damning the Fiji news media generally, singling out three media organisations and prominent individual journalists. Chaudhry indicated that his government was considering establishing swift justice media tribunal to provide remedies in defamation cases. Moves were also considered to licence foreign-owned media with an annual fee of \$20,000 (*The Sun*, 1999a).

The tribunal proposal, in particular, prompted Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) president William Parkinson to complain:

² Ken Clark was eventually granted a two-year work permit, although he was on a three-year contract; Russell Hunter returned to Fiji in August 2000 on a further three-year-contract after he appealed to the interim authorities.

‘[Chaudhry]’s attacks against the media were draconian to say the least. We have not had those threats made since the military government in 1987’ (ibid.) Parkinson, managing director of Communications (Fiji) Ltd, owners of FM96 in Fiji and stakeholders in radio stations in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, said he was seriously concerned. Chaudhry questioned whether international media and local media were suffering a crisis of ethics and falling credibility: ‘When, day after day, a particular reporter writes nothing but anti-government stories with facts manipulated and distorted to discredit and embarrass the government, one is left in little doubt as to what the agenda of the particular reporter is’ (Chaudhry, 1999).

Senior political reporter Margaret Wise, who had close links with the party founded by former coup leader and prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka, Soqosoqo Ni Vakavulewa Ni Taukei (SVT), was clearly the journalist Chaudhry had in mind. He named her later in the speech (see Robie, 1999c: 115). Hinting that the newspaper could be breaching the Public Order Act, Chaudhry said:

That matter is even more serious than a breach of media ethics and my Government is quite concerned at what is happening. Is *The Fiji Times* carrying the torch for people engaged in seditious activities? The newspaper needs to take serious look at where it is headed. Is it not fanning the fires of sedition and communalism by giving undue prominence to stories that are really non-stories? (Chaudhry, 1999).

Reaction was confined to defensive statements from media industry people, but there was no initial publication of the speech. Nor did the media canvas civil society opinions. The government responded to what it called media hysteria with eight-page advertisements—including the speech—in the *Sun* and the *Daily Post*, costing the taxpayer \$16,000 (*Fiji Sun*, 2000).

The *Fiji Times* voluntarily published Chaudhry’s speech after four days and responded with a two-page editorial. Describing the speech as a ‘rambling diatribe riddled with contradictions, half-truths and untruths’, the editorial added: ‘Chaudhry has been escalating his attacks on the media—in particular the country’s most successful news organisation, *The Fiji Times*—in an effort to create a climate in which the public would be softened up for his draconian legislation’ (*Fiji Times*, 1999).

However, the self-interest of media responses did not go unnoticed by the president of the Fiji chapter of Transparency International, Ikkal

Jannif: ‘It seems to me the media wants accountability for everyone—except itself’ (Jannif, 1999: 164).

The Coup Coverage

After putschist Speight and his gunmen kidnapped the Coalition Government, it was astonishing how ‘captive’ some of the journalists were to Speight (see Robie, 2000b, 2000d; Parkinson; Woodley; Field 2000b). In a sense they were hostages too, even providing a human shield at times of confrontation between the rebel group and the military at checkpoints: ‘The media pack offered Speight a profile and credibility—it aided the rebel leader’s propagandist war.’

Even though essentially it was struggle for power within the indigenous Fijian community, and a conflict between tradition and modernity, the inevitable polarisation of races undermined objectivity. It was apparent to then *Daily Post* editor Jale Moala that many local reporters had become ‘confused by the heightened emotion at the time, the use of emotive language and the pleadings of the opposing forces’, as they were drawn into different sides (Moala, 2000). This, he recalls, was true of both indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian reporters.

Fear may have played a role. As a result, the perpetrators of the terrorist action, led by George Speight, received publicity that at the time seemed to legitimise their actions and their existence. Some argued that the situation may not have deteriorated as quickly as it did if the media had played a more responsible role.

But therein lies the dilemmas of Pacific Islands political journalism: the extended family system, the tribal and chiefly system and customary obligations may blur the view of the journalist, especially if he or she is indigenous (Moala, 2000: 125-126).

Moala (2001: 127) points to an example of a Fijian journalist falling foul of a high chief. Josefa Nata, an investigative journalist and journalism trainer who had cut his teeth at the original *Fiji Sun* newspaper, exposed the business dealings of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who at the time had been Fiji’s prime minister since independence from Britain in 1970. He was treated as an outcast. Nata gained notoriety as Speight’s media

spin doctor and awaited trial for treason.³

For Moala, lack of leadership in some newsrooms was a significant factor. Observed Michael Field: 'I left [Fiji, after two months, and as the longest-serving foreign reporter] wondering how much of the coup and its twists and turns was the product of the media itself' (Field, 2000c). International journalists highlighted the inexperience of some local reporters. According to *The Australian's* Brian Woodley: 'They got on with reporting the story, a corps of dedicated youngsters with hardly a gram of experience among them. Most are not long out of high school' (Woodley, 2000).

Indeed, there was a steep learning curve for Fiji journalists with many showing remarkable courage and commitment. It was a harrowing and testing time for the country's media—the dilemmas were far more complex than during the 1987 coups. Radio Fiji's general manager (public broadcasting) Francis Herman said: 'Our journalists have been threatened, abused, beaten, had stones thrown at them—it goes with the job' (Herman, 2000). But it was also a time when professionalism needed to rise another notch. Moala considered some reports stayed too long in the parliamentary complex, 'making the outside world believe they were enjoying the hospitality of the terrorists and becoming too familiar with them' (Moala, 2001: 129). At times, there was strong sympathy among some journalists for the cause, even among some senior editorial executives. There was tension between the role of objective journalist and an instinctive feeling about what should happen in the country.

One of the news organisations that drafted the policy to cope with the crisis was the *Daily Post*. It covered the putsch with perhaps greater caution than some other local media. In the early stages, the newspaper established guidelines for reporters, photographers and subeditors. Along with the code, it sought greater emphasis on the effects of the crisis on the people and the economy and down-played events inside the parliamentary complex. Guidelines were not formally written, in case they got into the hands of rebels and became a source of threats and reprisals as happened in the trashing of Fiji Television on 28 November 2000 (Robie, 2000b: 8). The guidelines were:

1. The newspaper would not use the word 'coup' in its coverage.
2. The events of May 19 would be reported as a kidnapping and

³ Josefa Nata was previously coordinator of the Fiji Journalism Institute, the training arm of the Fiji Islands Media Association (FIMA), which had been defunct since 1998 amid controversy over its donor provided funds. (He was jailed for treason since the first publication of this article).

hostage crisis; George Speight was to be reported as the leader of either the kidnapers, the gunmen or the hostage takers, but never as 'coup leader' to avoid giving him legitimacy in the minds of indigenous Fijians.

3. The group who stormed the Parliament was to be described as 'gunmen', 'terrorists' and 'kidnappers'.
4. Use of photographs of George Speight and his supporters inside the parliamentary complex were to be restricted to avoid giving them too much publicity.
5. George Speight was never to be described as a nationalist working for indigenous Fijian interests; he was to be reported as Suva businessman George Speight, leader of the kidnapers, or leader of the terrorists (Moala, 2001: 131).

Some news media regularly switched reporters covering events inside the parliamentary complex to prevent them getting too close to the rebels. But in spite of precautions taken by news media groups to defend their integrity—FM96 ran editorial policy notices on air, effectively saying 'trust us'—news media credibility was eroded.

A senior executive and two news staff of Radio Fiji were detained by the military on October 20 in an attempt to intimidate them into revealing their sources about a major split in the military. Although the highly sensitive news story itself was evidently well-sourced—demonstrated by a mutiny two weeks later on November 2, which claimed the lives of eight soldiers—it lacked balance, such as official comment.

Deposed minister Dr Ganesh Chand accused *The Fiji Times* of destabilising the Coalition Government during its one year in office before being ousted, by waging a war through articles and the courts when the government refused to extend editor-in-chief Russell Hunter's work permit; losing some complaints lodged by his government with the Fiji Media Council; employing a senior journalist alleged to have close relationships with two prominent political personalities; and with its northern reporter riding around with rebels at Labasa on Vanua Levu island (Coalition Government, 2000). Publisher Alan Robinson described the attack as grossly defamatory, adding that the allegations contained 'not the tiniest grain of truth' (*Fiji Times*, 2000a). The following day, *The Fiji Times* published a front page story, alleging the police were investigating the stripping of government-owned furniture and household goods from Chand's state home (*Fiji Times*, 2000b). Chand filed a defamation writ

against the newspaper (High Court, 2000) and the police investigation was dropped.

In another incident, two journalists based in Labasa were arrested. The *Fiji Times* and Radio Fiji's northern correspondents were charged on November 13 with unlawful assembly and unlawful use of a motor vehicle over the seizure of a military barracks by rebels (*Pacific Media Watch*, 2000). They were publicly defended by their editors, but it took almost six months for the charges to be eventually withdrawn on May 11.

The Media Response

After this paper was originally presented at the Journalism Education Association (JEA) conference on December 6, 2000, a *PINA Nius Online* e-mail report misrepresenting the paper was distributed to Pacific newspapers five days later stirring up a political storm (*Café Pacific*, 2001). A campaign of bitter personal attacks against the author followed on the JEANet and Penang Commonwealth editors e-mail list-servers over the next two weeks. A two-page article published in *Pacific* magazine characterised the furore as a 12-round boxing match fought out on the internet, heavily slanted in favour of *The Fiji Times* and *PINA* (*Pacific*, 2001). The magazine cited a formal complaint by the newspaper's expatriate publisher and editor-in-chief to the University of South Pacific, alleging manufactured evidence to establish an erroneous conclusion. This was rejected by the university. The magazine did not interview the author or seek a copy of the paper, nor did it canvas views of other media commentators supporting the analysis.

The author replied to the attacks in an interview with Myrna Mortensen, broadcast on Radio Australia's *Pacific Beat*, saying it was an irony that news organisations claiming to support media freedom were trying to gag a journalism academic (Radio Australia, 21 December 2000). *New Zealand Herald* columnist Gordon McLauchlan wrote that the university had courageously upheld academic freedom and firmly opposed this deplorable attempt at censorship by journalists (McLauchlan, 2001).

Rejecting *The Fiji Times* criticisms and protesting against *Pacific* magazine's misrepresentations, Association of University of South Pacific Staff (AUSPS) spokesperson, Associate Professor Scott Mac William, said in a letter to the editor: 'AUSPS is concerned that, while *The Fiji Times* and other news organizations purport to support the freedom to express opinions, such opinions are only acceptable if they sustain the

same organizations' views of themselves' (Mac William, 2001).

While the author's main arguments were never published in the Fiji media, other views of foreign journalists who do not live in Fiji but which supported the *Fiji Times*-*PINA* perspective were featured (see Dobell, 2001; *The Sun*, 2001a, 2001b). Reprisals were threatened against the journalism programme at USP but there is no evidence that students suffered from the controversy. USP journalism students had also covered the putsch crisis, winning Osier Awards for their efforts, and graduates are employed at 15 news organizations across the Pacific (Robie, 2000d).

On the first anniversary of the attempted coup, Fiji newspapers were reluctant to debate the shortcomings of crisis coverage. In the only article published examining the media and the coup, the *Sun*'s Samisen Paretic cited two diplomats as supporting the view that coverage was not that bad. However, Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, writing in *The Australian*, had earlier questioned whether the local press should bear some of the responsibility for the political turmoil that had engulfed the South Pacific (O'Callaghan, 2000). Michael Field remarked in *The Fiji Times*: 'The problem is that in Fiji there are more and more politicians, supported by a cabal in the local media that makes war on other reporters, who say they are not part of this world and wish to be left alone' (Field, 2001).

Conclusion

The media climate after the general election in May 1999 arguably carries some responsibility for misconceptions about the people's Coalition Government in Fiji. No journalist seriously analysed the manifesto of the Fiji Labour Party in order to help public understanding of what the government had pledged to do. It had been the intention of the Coalition Government to publish a special supplement in *The Fiji Times* marking its achievements after one year in office. However, the printed supplement dated May 20, the day after the putsch took place, was dumped and never distributed publicly. The only serious analysis of the deposed government's performance was written by *Fiji Times* features editor Bernadette Hussain and published in a USP journalism programme training newspaper (*Wansolwara*, 2000b). It was matched by Agence France-Presse.

Hussain concluded that the Coalition Government had been seriously misrepresented. Outlining many of the achievements—such as scholarships and an integrated village development project totalling F\$12 million for affirmative action; reducing the cost of living for poor people of all races by removing customs duty and value added tax for essential

food items such as rice, flour, cooking oil, tinned fish, powdered milk and tea; and increasing welfare allocations for the disadvantaged from F\$3.3 million to F\$11 million—it was clear that the Government was genuinely concerned about the plight of ordinary citizens. In the nine months since Hussein's article, few journalists attempted to analyse the privatization policies reasserted by the Qarase Government without a mandate. The best expose was the 53-minute video documentary *In the Name of Growth*, about the exploitation of indigenous women workers by an indigenous company, the PAFCO tuna canning plant at Lavaca. This was made by filmmaker 'Ate Emberson-Bain, a deposed Labour senator and former USP academic (Emberson-Bain, 2001).

While the news media was fairly diligent, and at times courageous when reporting hard news developments and the views of prominent politicians and political parties during the conflict, it was not so effective at covering civil society's perspectives. Fiji lacks enough critically thinking journalists who can provide in-depth, perceptive and balanced articles and commentaries. Most serious commentaries and analyses during the crisis were provided by academics and non-journalists.

The political scene in Fiji is still highly uncertain and there are confusing scenarios about the result of the forthcoming election, even rumours of a further coup should the Fiji Labour Party retain a majority. It is critical that the Fiji news media maintain independent coverage of political and socio-economic developments. But it is also equally vital that independent journalists, media commentators, and academics sustain critical assessments of the role of the media in the wake of the putsch and in future nation-building.

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