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<http://www.rsf.org/fiji-authorities-ban-all-election-16-09-2014,46965.html>

Asia - Fiji

Media blackout

Authorities ban all election coverage 48 hours ahead of historic poll

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Journalists face jail sentences and fines if they contravene the draconian ban

Reporters Without Borders condemns the drastic media blackout that Fiji's government imposed yesterday on tomorrow's parliamentary elections. From this morning until close of polls tomorrow, news media and journalists could be jailed or fined if they provide any election coverage.

The government's grounds for imposing the ban 48 hours ahead of these historic elections are to prevent excessive influence on voters.

As well as banning any ads promoting political parties and candidates, [election decree No. 11](#) forbids interviews and political debates about the elections. The ban also applies to all news websites and online social networks, although how this aspect of the decree will be enforced is not explained.

The decree also applies to foreign journalists if their media are accessible to the Fijian public. The Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) has said that media may publish information provided by the national electoral office if they submit their reports to the MIDA prior to publication.

Paragraph 4 says anyone contravening the decree could face up to 10 years in prison or a fine of 50,000 Fijian dollars (20,000 euros).

"The scale of the censorship imposed by this decree is out of all proportion," said Benjamin Ismaïl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"While restrictions on publishing opinion polls, projections, partial results and even political advertising are completely understandable, banning all political commenting for several days and introducing prior censorship is both draconian and unenforceable."

A total of 450 journalists, including 37 foreign journalists, have been accredited to cover the elections, according to the [Café Pacific blog](#) of David Robie, an academic who runs the [Pacific Media Centre](#).

Although the blackout has been in effect for several hours, several online information sources report that posts on online social networks are directly violating the decree. Nonetheless, no one has so far been punished.

Reporters Without Borders and the Pacific Media Centre have recommended a constitutional amendment and adoption of a freedom of information law in Fiji in their [joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council](#) ahead of Fiji's Universal Periodic Review by the council next month.

Fiji is 107th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
