

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY, THE CONSTITUTION AND ELECTORAL ENGINEERING IN FIJI: 2014 AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to ensure all citizens are equally represented and their interests accommodated in a multicultural setting, Fiji changed its electoral system four times since flag independence. The first three electoral systems used in 1970, 1990 and 1999 were First Past the Post (FPTP), a system of ethnic based rolls and seats using FPTP, and Alternative Voting (AV) respectively. These were systems with communally assigned seats because of the country's ethnic configuration. Leaders then justified their adoption as a way to facilitate fair representation of all citizens. The 2014 election was contested under a new electoral system of proportional representation and eliminated reserved ethnic seats. This paper critically examines the results of the 2014 elections under the new open list proportional representation system. It analyses the intentions of the electoral system under the 2013 constitution and the extent to which its targets were achieved in the 2014 election results. The paper also highlights lessons from constitutional and electoral engineered systems in other Pacific island countries and compares these with Fiji's new electoral and political party system. It concludes with possible future scenarios for the country under the current constitution and electoral system.

Keywords: *electoral system; proportional representation; electoral engineering; political stability; ethnic politics; political parties*

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the process of electoral and political party engineering with a specific focus on the outcomes of the Fiji national elections under the 2014 electoral system. It is a system hailed by its designers as one that embraces all ethnicities where representation is captured in the catchphrase ‘Fiji for All Fijians’. The electoral system and political party arrangements were engineered through the provisions of the 2013 Constitution and the 2014 Electoral Decree ostensibly to rid the country of ethnic politics (i.e. ethnic based seats and political parties) and promote equal representation for all Fijians. The paper briefly revisits three previous electoral systems (1970, 1990 and 1999) before describing the current electoral system. The newly introduced electoral and political party system is discussed in detail and its first use in the 2014 elections is commented on. More importantly, the results of the elections are critically analysed to ascertain the impacts of the new system. This would allow for brief comparisons with other Pacific island states that have also engineered their party and electoral systems. The article ends with a discussion of possible scenarios that could arise in the future as a result of this new electoral system.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL ENGINEERING

Electoral engineering refers to the process of developing and implementing “... constitutional and legal provisions for electoral systems frameworks that are targeted at achieving specific societal goals” (Wall & Salih, 2007, p.6). The desire to ensure equal representation of diverse groups and an opportunity to govern under politically stable environments where representatives articulate the interests of their constituents led to recent efforts in electoral and political party engineering in the Pacific. Good governance, accountability and fair representation of citizens in political decision making are usual considerations of constitutional and electoral engineering undertakings. Some political engineering was done through constitutions as was the case in Fiji and Kiribati. Others like Samoa and Papua New Guinea (PNG) have separate legislations aimed at similar outcomes for stable and orderly governments. Political parties in most Pacific island states are fluid and loosely organised at the extreme opposite of what Scott Mainwaring (1998) referred to as an ‘institutionalized continuum’. He argued that in ‘third wave’ countries (most PICs included), the political party systems are often fluid because of: (i) the recent political and socio-economic history operating as a nation state; (ii) the way political actors use its structure and respond to the way the state was established; and (iii) a consequence of a pervasive ‘anti-organisational political culture’ (Mainwaring, 1999; Okole, 2005, p.366). The tendencies by politicians to avoid accountability to strong political parties weaken party systems.

There are other explanations put forward, for example by Arend Lijphart (1999), as to why political parties emerge and are institutionalised. This is usually called the ‘sociological school’ view. He argued that party systems emerge as consequences of social cleavages and he identified seven distinct ‘issue dimensions’ as critical in shaping modern parties. These are: cleavages that arise from socio-economic dimension; religious dimension; cultural-ethnic dimension; urban-rural dimension; the dimension of regime support; the foreign policy dimension; and the materialist versus post-materialistic dimension (1999, p.79-86). Making reference to PNG’s

party system, Lijphart stated that socio-economic, cultural-ethnic, religious and ethno-linguistic fractionalisation was so great that it fails to serve as a viable basis for national-level party political mobilisation (see Okole, 2005).

What happens in most PICs is that since electoral democracies were introduced by colonial governments, parliamentary groups emerged and are organised like political parties. Political parties are mostly fluid and voters may not necessarily vote for political party policies but individual candidates in these political parties. This may partly explain the government instability that is continuously being experienced in countries like the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. The obvious lack of institutionalised party systems that resulted in voters voting for individuals with no political affiliations prompted some PICs to engineer their electoral systems to strengthen political parties and encourage parliamentary stability. They often adopt systems that discipline floor crossing and votes of no confidence in parliament. Below is a brief overview of electoral and political parties' engineering attempts in PNG and Samoa to enable us to compare the potential long term effect and sustainability of the Fiji electoral and political party system.

ELECTORAL ENGINEERING IN SAMOA

A good overview of the Samoan electoral system and its complexities since independence has been provided by So'o and Fraenkel (2005). Political engineering in Samoa took place around 2005 when the electoral system was reviewed and amended. The *Electoral Amendment Act 2005* made some changes to the status of candidates and provisions on switching membership of parties with corresponding penalties. Since that review, a candidate is required to remain affiliated to his/her political party after the election. In the event that an MP defects to another party after an election, he/she faces the consequence of being disqualified and a by-election is called (Sioa, 2010, p.198). If an MP wishes to quit his or her party, the only option available is to become an independent MP. Independent MPs are not allowed by law to form political parties. Independents are not allowed to switch to another party, nor allowed to hold a ministerial post in the ruling party. There is also a provision for political party registration. Political parties must be formed by election time in order to be legally recognized as official parties. The electoral commissioner keeps the register of all political parties. In the parliamentary Standing Orders, it is a requirement that before a political party is recognized in parliament, a party must secure a threshold of 8 MPs in the house (Sioa, 2010, p.198). These incremental legislative controls that discouraged the defections of MPs have ensured political stability in Samoa in that the Human Right Protection Party (HRPP) has ruled since 1982 (see So'o 2009). On the other hand, it gave rise to the establishment of a one party system in the country.

ELECTORAL ENGINEERING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Similar to Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea had been struggling with political stability and no confidence votes since independence (see Van Trease 2005; Nanau 2010). As Standish observed, "[t]he major concern has been political instability, which leads to policy flip-flops and rotating elites ruthlessly exploiting the spoils of office" (2002, p.30). To address the

institutional weakness of PNG's party system, a new law called the *2001 Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates* (OLIPPAC) was introduced under the leadership of PM Morauta (ibid). His government wanted to address social and economic issues confronting the country but realised that political instability was the core obstacle. The fluid and fluctuating party system was seen as the major cause of this rampant instability and floor crossing. As such, the Morauta Government introduced the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) with the following key provisions: (1) party registration; (2) funding of parties and candidates; (3) strengthening political parties in Parliament; and (4) incentives for female candidates.

The primary intention of OLIPPAC was to strengthen the political party system using its provisions to outlaw MPs moving from party to party and associating with more than one party at a given time. A critical provision that should ensure stability is the binding of MPs to stick to the prime minister they voted for in the first place. If there is a vote of no confidence, a vote on the national budget or a vote on constitutional changes, MPs on the government side cannot vote against their prime minister (Standish 2002, p.30). For PNG, the noble intentions of OLIPPAC became problematic when implemented. Indeed, its implementation almost invalidated relevant provisions of the legislation. Henry Okole (2012) for instance highlighted that parliamentary behaviour from late 2003 onwards appears to disregard the law. It can potentially allow an unethical or dangerous prime minister to be in office for five years. Standish (2002, p.30) also pointed out that under OLIPPAC, MPs can actually change their loyalties if they do so collectively as members of a political party - a loophole that was not foreseen.

To support the OLIPPAC, the electoral system was also changed from First Past the Post (FPTP) to Limited Preferential Voting (LPV). The need for this change was due to the realisation that the electoral votes that parties obtained since 1977 have declined over time and most MPs secured seats with less than 20 percent of the votes (see Gelu, 2003; Standish, 2002; Okole, 2002). To avoid this, the LPV system encouraged broader based support for winning candidates. In other words, candidates had to campaign in a collective manner with candidates potentially gaining each other's preferences (Standish, 2002). The engineering of PNG's electoral system is such that it complements the OLIPPAC. LPV and OLIPPAC cannot be effective in isolation and they are meant to bolster one another. Like Samoa, PNG is experimenting with its electoral system to determine an appropriate role and niche for political parties. Of course the outcomes of these attempts are mixed. They range from providing stable governments to that of potentially encouraging one party rule.

FIJI: OLDER ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Fiji's previous constitutions, political party and electoral systems also faced similar challenges and concerns as those 'addressed' through engineering in Kiribati, Samoa and PNG. Political parties and elections prior to and after independence were usually based around issues of ethnicity, ancient *iTaukei* rivalries and class consciousness (Durutalo, 2010). The electoral system of the 1970 Constitution for instance was FPTP with ethnic constituency seats. Arguably, representation under that system followed the resemblance theory (Baradat, 2009) as MPs are

seen as representatives that resemble their constituents. Following the coups of 1987 two new constitutions were adopted in 1990 and 1997 respectively. The 1990 constitution provided for an electoral system that allocated specific numbers of seats to four separate rolls. Thirty-seven MPs were voted in by those registered under the Fijian roll; twenty-seven from the Indian roll; one MP from the Rotuman roll; and five MPs chosen by a roll of voters that were neither Fijian, Indian nor Rotuman (GOF 1990, p.62). The electoral system under the 1990 Constitution was FPTP. Under the 1997 Constitution a system of Alternative Vote (AV) was adopted. AV is a voting system in which electors vote preferentially and lower placed candidates drop out in succession with their vote being redistributed until one candidate gains 50 per cent (Section 54, Fiji 1997 Constitution; see also Heywood, 2007, p.259). Representation under the 1997 constitution could be seen through the delegation model where a delegate acts as a conduit conveying the views of their constituents but may not exercise judgement or preferences because of the strength of the groups that they represent. The constitution and electoral system were again partly ethnically constituted. The 2013 Constitution and the 2014 Elections and Political Parties decree engineered a new electoral and political party system. What follows is an assessment of these electoral provisions and an initial assessment of the 2014 democratic election results. It should be stressed that the full implications of this engineered system will become more apparent after the 2018 election results.

THE ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM IN FIJI SINCE 2013

As suggested earlier, the political history and experiences of Fiji since the colonial period produced a divided society that had been and continues to be the core of political discussions in the country. The reasonably stable political climate in the first 17 years of independence encountered a reality check in 1987 when the first coups opened the way for a succession of coups, the latest of which was conducted by Commodore Frank Bainimarama in 2006.

Those who took power in the latest military takeover claimed it was “a coup that would end all coups” (see Fraenkel, Firth & Lal, 2009). The then interim regime that ruled for a further 8 years took upon itself the arduous task of moving Fiji citizens towards the path of peaceful coexistence and constitutional equality. It also engineered an electoral and political party system to move away from ‘business as usual’. The 2013 constitution and electoral system aimed at producing a stable political environment that would then facilitate nation building and move away from the ethnic divisions that had dominated party formation and election campaigning since independence.

THE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM

Fiji’s current electoral system is a multi-member open list system of proportional representation. In a move to discourage ethnic, regional and class voting, the Fiji 2013 Constitution attempted to ensure that voters choose representatives that are mandated and trusted to make laws for them. Under this electoral system, Fiji is a single constituency, meaning that the country is not divided into electoral constituencies or districts¹. Each voter has one vote and the slogan

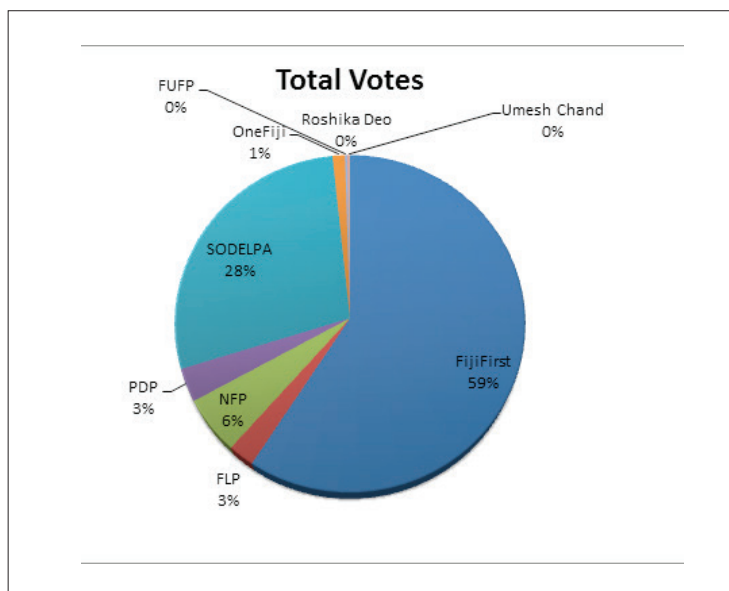
is 'equal citizenry - one vote, equal value' (see www.electionsfiji.gov.fj). What this entails is that each MP is representing the whole country and its citizens rather than certain electoral constituencies. There is also a provision in the 2013 constitution for a 5% threshold. A total of 496,363 people voted in the 2014 elections. This is multiplied by 0.05, giving a total of 24,818 as the 5% threshold required by each political party or independent candidate to secure a seat.

Table 1: Summary of votes polled and seats secured by the seven political parties

Total Valid Votes	%	496,363	Seats
FijiFirst	59.20%	293,714	32
FLP	2.40%	11,670	0
NFP	5.50%	27,066	3
PDP	3.20%	15,864	0
SODELPA	28.20%	139,857	15
OneFiji	1.20%	5,839	0
FUFP	0.20%	1,072	0
Roshika Deo	0.20%	1,055	0
Umesh Chand	0.00%	226	0

Source: Fijian Elections Office, 2014

Figure 1: Percentages of votes polled by political parties



As can be seen in Table 1, ‘the threshold is determined by votes across the board for political parties. For instance, if a party has two candidates: one receives three percent of the vote and the other receives two per cent of the vote. Combined, this is five percent and the party will be allocated one party seat’ (“Pacific Scoop”, 2014). The threshold of 5% in this case is very high and a lot of votes, 35,725 (7.2%) were wasted. If a party or independent candidate gets 4% of the votes, which is around 15496 votes, none of these will be taken into consideration. This brings into question the idea of equal representation under the current system. From Table 1 above, the votes secured by FLP and PDP were not considered as representing a seat or two. Representation would have been different had the threshold been reduced to say 2% as is the case under the Israeli system (see Yishai, 2010, p.151). Nevertheless, as Walsh pointed out, this is not peculiar to Fiji as other countries in the Pacific such as New Zealand also have a 5% threshold (see <http://pacific.scoop.co.nz/>). New Caledonia also has a 5% threshold but under a slightly different system (Fraenkel, 2006, p.71).

POLITICAL PARTIES

Like the engineered electoral and political party systems in PNG and Samoa briefly outlined above, there are provisions under the 2013 constitution and the 2013 Political Parties Registration Decree and the 2014 Electoral Decree for political party strengthening and a stable parliament. Although candidates can still run as independents, the 5% threshold is so high that chances of securing a seat are higher under the collective votes of political parties. For instance Roshika Deo, one of the two independent candidates who contested in 2014, secured a total of 1,055 (0.2%) votes. As an independent candidate, she was a long way from the threshold. However, if she had contested say under the Fiji First banner, she would have secured a seat. Indeed, she polled more votes than 9 of the MPs duly elected under the collective votes of the FijiFirst Party. The point is that electoral and political party systems are politically engineered to compel candidates to run under political parties rather than as independents. Such a move will avoid the likelihood of parliamentary instability by the formation of independent factions (see Nanau 2010).

Under the *Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Decree 2013*, political parties are required to register with an indication of national support in the registration process. A group of people cannot be regarded as a political party and may be heavily penalised (a fine of \$50,000 or five years imprisonment or both) unless they are registered in the *Register of Political Parties*. An application to register a political party must be made in writing from at least five applicants who are members of the proposed party. The names of the political party must be in English, a move to discourage ethnic based political parties, and applications must include the names of the office bearers and their voter identification numbers. In addition, the application to register a political party must be accompanied by the names, signatures, voter identification card numbers and addresses of 5000 members of the party making the application accompanied by a fee of \$5005.00. These 5000 signatures should come from the 4 regions of Fiji as follows: (i) 2,000 members from the Central Division; (ii) 1,750 from the Western Division; (iii) 1,000 members from the Northern Division; and (iv) 250 members from the Eastern Division (see GOF, 2013: 44). It is important to note here that this is basically a registration process and does not bind those affixing their signatures to that particular political party nor an indication of actual

support. The results in Table 1 and Figure 1 above clearly support this point. Despite the 5000 signatures obtained by One Fiji and Fiji United Freedom Party (FUIFP), they each got less than 5000 votes in the General Election.

In the 2014 elections, after going through the requirements of registering a party, a total of 7 political parties and 2 independents contested the national General Election. These were: Fiji First, Fiji Labour Party (FLP), National Federation Party (NFP), People's Democratic Party (PDP), Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), One Fiji and Fiji United Freedom Party (FUIFP). Two independent candidates Roshika Deo and Umesh Chand also contested. These political parties fielded a total of 248 candidates vying for the 50 seats in parliament. Voters cast their votes in a designated polling station from more than 2000 polling stations throughout the country. Fourteen thousand (14,000) polling officials were engaged to manage the polling stations in the 2014 elections (*Fiji One News*, September, 2014). Since the whole country constituted a single constituency the Constitution Boundaries Commission was disestablished. All those elected are representative of every citizen in Fiji. The principle of delegation and resemblance on the part of MPs therefore may not apply in the current system in Fiji.

PARTIES AND REGISTERED VOTERS

The actual final list of registered voters was not publically available prior to the Election Day but was later released after the elections. From the list, it is difficult to identify the registered voters disaggregated according ethnicity, age group, gender or other categories. Part of the reason for this lack of disaggregated data is the move away from ethnic based communal constituencies to a single constituency system. As Steve Ratuva explained, the use of a single constituency system is to “constitutionally and socially engineer people’s political behaviour away from ethnic mobilisation” (Ratuva, 2014).

In the 2014 elections, a total of 524,712 voters were registered. From the total, 5,508 were registered as overseas voters. Moreover, out of that total number of registered voters, 100,960 were youths in the age bracket of 18 to 25 years (“Fiji times Online”, 2014). On the eve of the Election Day, an estimated picture of the total number of registered voters based on gender was revealed as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2 : Total number of registered voters by gender

		Males	Females	Itaukei	Indo-Fijians	Others
Population (census 2007)	837,271 (2007)	427,176	475,739	475,739	313,798 (37.6%)	47,734
Registered Voters (2014)	524,712 (2014)	300,353	224,358	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Fiji Times Online & Fiji Broadcasting Corporation and Fiji Election office, 2014.

Reflecting on a single constituency and the desire of the regime to constitutionally engineer change away from ethnicity and region, voter statistics are only disaggregated in terms of gender. It is therefore quite difficult to assess how the voters from each region and ethnic group in Fiji voted in the 2014 general elections. We can only assess the old issue of ethnicity in terms of candidates and the winners in the elections to get some general insights into ethnic relations and representation.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2014 ELECTION RESULTS

The various processes that Fiji went through before undertaking the first democratic elections after an eight year lapse were welcome. With so much at stake, the election was a positive turn towards representative democracy in Fiji. The credibility of the election results was established by the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) led by Australia, India, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea which oversaw voting in polling stations and the counting of ballot papers. The leader of the MOG made a public statement on the 20th and 21st September and assured the global community that all went well and that the results of the elections were credible (Fiji Times, 2014; Fiji Sun, 2014; FEO, 2014). This is not to obscure the fact that there were some protests by members of some political parties during the draw of candidates' numbers and immediately after the announcement of the official results. The results of the Fiji 2014 General Election were outlined in Table 1. Figure 2 below shows the same election results shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 above but disaggregated into gender and ethnicity. Figure 3 compares results based on ethnicity and gender.

Figure 2: Total number of candidates by gender and ethnicity

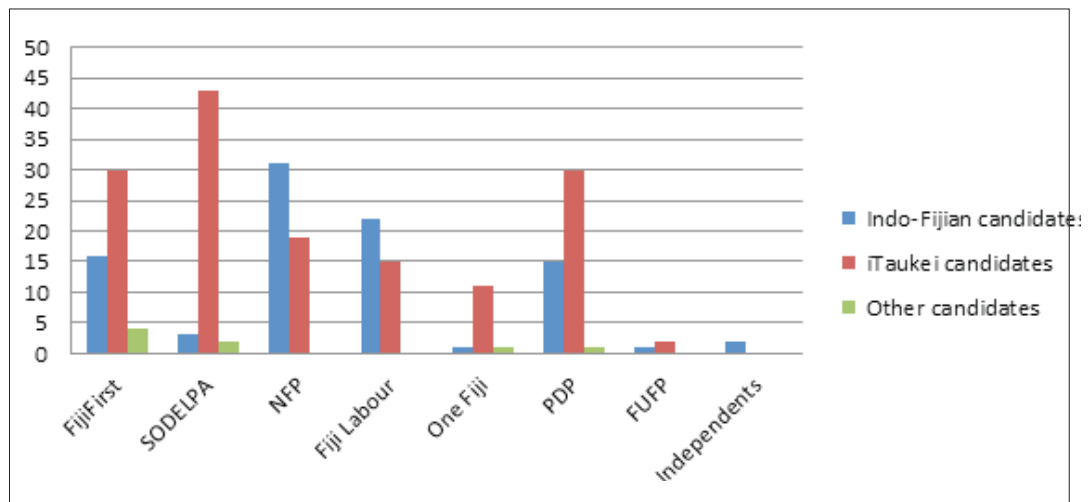
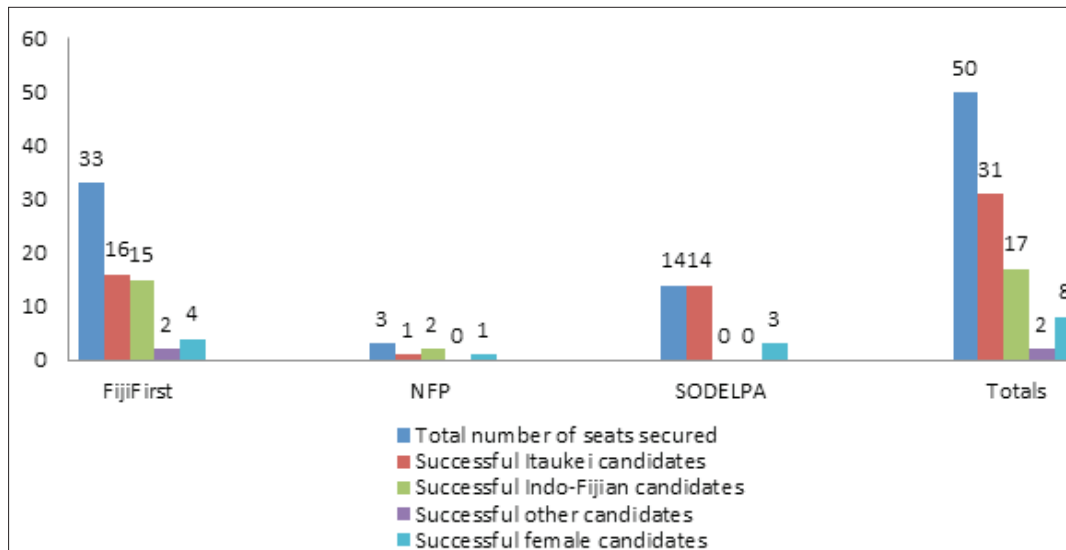


Figure 3: 2014 disaggregated election results as per ethnicity and gender

One key observation from the election results is the triumph of female candidates, partly as a consequence of the new electoral system. The 2014 elections have yielded more female MPs into the National Parliament of Fiji than in any other time in its independent history. Females comprised 17.7% of the registered candidates who contested the elections and they ultimately secured 16% of the seats. Forty three of the women candidates ran under political party banners while one contested as an independent. The female MPs elected into parliament in 2014 include Ro Teimumu Kepa, Vane Seruvakula, Mere Samisoni, Tupou Draunidalo, Rosie Sofia Akbar, Veena Bhatnagar, Mereseini Vuniwaqa and Lorna Eden. It should be pointed out that Jiko Luveni was also elected but resigned to take up the Speakers' position, the first female speaker in the history of Fiji. In comparison only 6% of the 338 candidates in 2006 elections were women. In that election 8 seats (11%) were secured by women candidates in the 71 seat parliament (see Chattier, 2014). For Fiji and the Pacific, this is an indication of the slow progress towards gender equality in political leadership.

Secondly, it is important to note the extraordinary support by voters especially for the leaders of the two prominent political parties; FijiFirst's Frank Bainimarama and SODELPA's Ro Teimumu Kepa. These two party leaders secured 69.9% and 34.9% respectively for their political parties. Bainimarama in particular was so popular among Fijian voters that the other 31 FijiFirst MPs only contributed 30.1% of the votes for FijiFirst. Ro Teimumu also had very strong support as she captured 34.9% of the SODELPA votes by herself while her other 13 MPs collected 65.1% of the party votes. This support for party leaders could be attributed to many factors, including position and status in society and the party's campaign strategy.

Ro Teimumu's support could be explained by her position as a respected traditional Fijian leader who obviously had the support of the *Itaukei* voters nationwide. Her popularity could also be attributed to her bold and vocal stance against the Bainimarama regime prior to the 2014 general elections. Frank Bainimarama's support was due in part to the campaign strategy used

by FijiFirst which focussed mainly on the party leader. Moreover, since he seized power from the Laisenia Qarase led government, his interim government focussed on financing tangible infrastructure developments that benefitted a larger cross section of the community. Most crucial was his government’s focus in the election on bread and butter issues plus security concerns that cut across ethnicity, gender and generational lines. Such developments were projected positively by the media, some of which were controlled by the interim government.

Third, Figure 2 suggests that FijiFirst encouraged the representation of different ethnicities in its candidate composition. As a very new political party formed by a government that preached equality and equal representation of all ethnicities in Fiji, this was an important outcome. Significant inroads were made by the party to ensure that the system catered for the representation of *Itaukei*, Indo-Fijian and other interest groups in society. There was an indication of a more balanced representation of different ethnic groups by the FijiFirst candidates and MPs that actually secured seats. On the other hand, SODELPA maintained a strong emphasis on *iTaukei* candidates. To an extent NFP and FLP also held on to ethnic politics, a hangover from their past. Even newly established parties like PDP, One Fiji and FUIP were heavily weighted towards ethnic affiliations. The pie charts below compare the distribution of candidates running under the six political parties that contested the 2014 elections together with FijiFirst.

Figure 4: Ethnic composition of SODELPA and NFP candidates

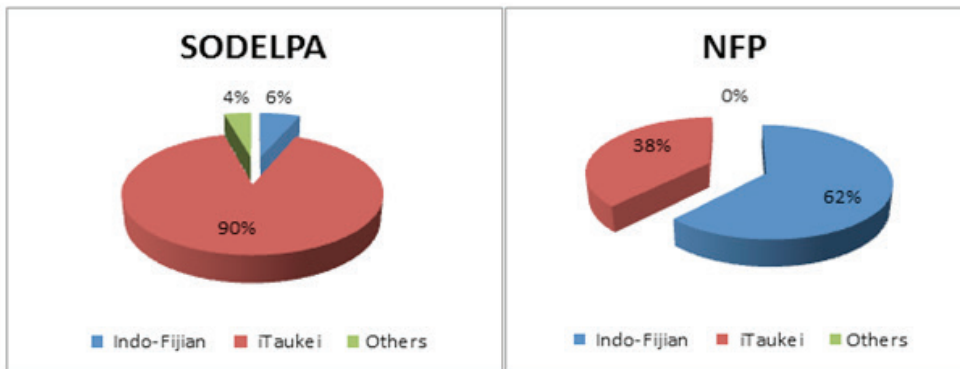


Figure 5: Ethnic composition of Fiji Labour and PDP candidates

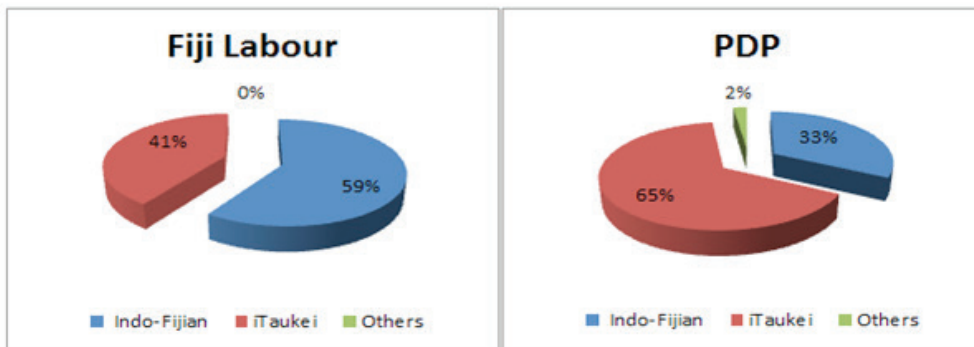
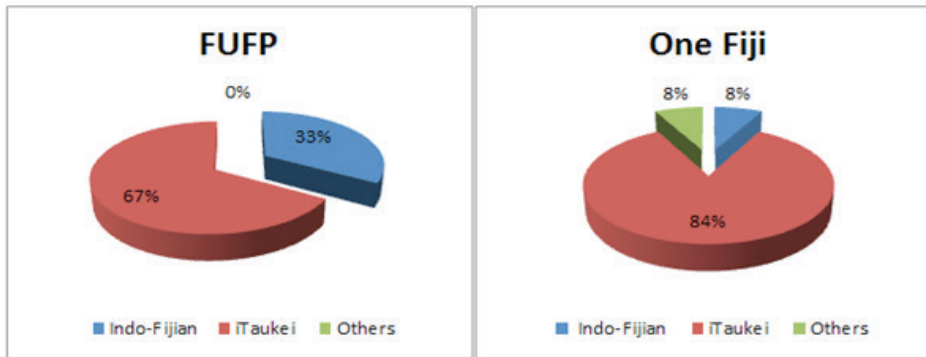
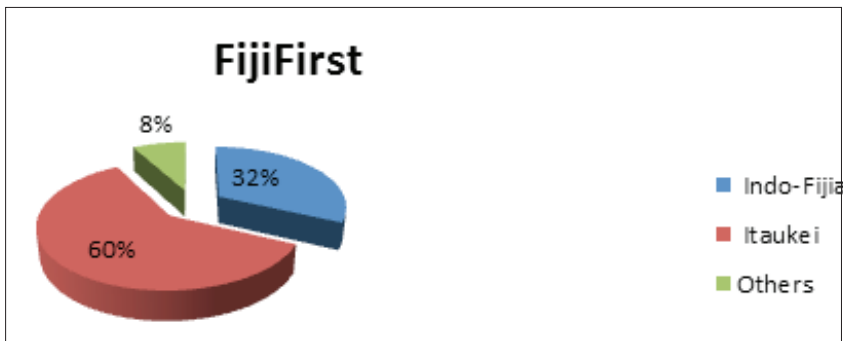


Figure 6: Ethnic composition of FUFP and One Fiji candidates**Figure 7:** Ethnic composition of FijiFirst Candidates

For FijiFirst, SODELPA and NFP, there was greater recognition of gender equality in political party leadership, candidate line up and the number of elected candidates. As indicated earlier, these are positive developments under the 2013 constitution and a clearer evaluation of this progress will become apparent after the 2018 general election. A concern may emerge if in the future, the current ‘two-party system’ further polarises the society representing the two dominant ethnicities. If that happens, the smaller parties would become king makers and a new set of political issues for the country would emerge.

Fourth and closely related to the observation above is the question of whether or not the election results actually give us a good indication of the noble intentions of this constitutionally engineered political party and electoral system. As mentioned earlier, the Bainimarama regime since 2006 had been preaching the need to move away from ethnic and class based political parties and politicking towards a more multi-ethnic and peaceful coexistence. They have progressed into this area by promoting and addressing: (i) bread and butter issues; (ii) tangible products/infrastructure coupled with further promises under a democratic setting (be with the devil you know approach); and, (iii) physical security from harm. This was especially critical for Indo-Fijian voters and minority groups (see Narsey, 19 April 2014). Narsey later re-iterated that the fear by Indo-Fijians about who has more control over the military (‘fear factor’) may explain their vote for the Fiji First Party (Narsey, 21 September, 2014). Again, such a position will only be verified after a second election under the current constitution in 2018. This is because Fijian voters would have

time to assess the performance of the FijiFirst government that was elected and compare that with the same unelected government that ran the country between 2006 and 2014.

Finally, the landslide victory of the FijiFirst party and its subsequent control of 66% of the seats may signal four years of parliamentary stability. The ruling government can easily pass laws because of the majority support in Parliament. However, with the new democratic arrangement and associated processes and the need to debate with the opposition, development decisions may be slower than when the current PM was ruling with an unelected government. Sections 63 and 65 of the 2013 Constitution provide further safeguards for political stability. In the event that an MP misses out on two meetings without the Speaker's consent, that MP automatically loses his/her seat in parliament. Similar to the OLIPPAC law in PNG and those adopted in Samoa, the constitution also provides for an early dissolution of Parliament. The important provisions that would ensure stability are those prohibiting the introduction of votes of no confidence against the government. The leader of opposition is not allowed to move a motion of no confidence against the Prime Minister until 18 months after the formation of government and within 6 months before the end of the parliamentary term of four years. A sitting MP is also not allowed to switch allegiance to another political party under the current system as s/he automatically loses the seat when switching allegiance. This would suggest that parliamentary stability is assured for the next four years.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Without being too presumptuous about the future, it is still possible to anticipate possible scenarios. The fundamental question that will continue to be of interest to Fiji's political observers is whether ethnic politics suppressed through electoral engineering will re-emerge in future elections. Constitutional and political party engineering in the country to an extent had produced an election outcome that drastically shifted ethnic and regional politics. At least on the surface and based on the 2014 election results, the system promoted inclusive politics where ethnicity, regional and gender equality were advanced. Having said that, it is important to note some perturbing features of the 2014 election campaigns such as distinct positions taken by political parties on sensitive national issues along ethnic and identity lines. The polarization of Fiji along ethnic and identity lines was obvious in the lead up to the 2014 elections especially in the social media. Nevertheless, if the current political trends continue uninterrupted into the future, the benefits for the country are abundant. Given the background of the political system now in place in Fiji, the type of constitutional engineering that took place and general discussions on the experiences with political parties and electoral systems in the Pacific more generally, two scenarios are possible. One possibility is the further strengthening of a two party system generated by the 2014 election results. Second is the possible loss of support for one or two parties as a consequence of the dwindling of support for political party leaders and manifestos. I discuss these two prospects separately.

The first possibility is for the current trend of a two party system produced by the recent election to be sustained into the future. However, two party systems do not normally emerge from

proportional representation systems (such as Fiji's) in which minority groups and interests are usually represented. In a normal representative democracy, two party systems usually emerge in majoritarian systems such as the First Past the Post (FPTP) which often discourage voters from wasting their votes on third and smaller parties. When voters do switch allegiance, they are usually inclined to switch to one of the more successful parties. This is what Duverger (1966) called the 'mechanical effect' of plurality systems where bigger parties have disproportionate shares of seats than votes and that subsequently places small political parties at a disadvantage. In PICs like PNG, Solomon Islands and others that have plurality electoral systems, this so called 'mechanical effect' never materialized because of the fluidity of political party systems explained earlier. Surprisingly, Fiji's proportional representation system, at least in the 2014 elections, produced a two-party system that if nurtured with sufficient time and right information may actually lead to voters assessing the relative strength of political parties. If that continues, the 'psychological effect' as Duverger (1966) calls it, would influence voters to avoid wasting their votes on smaller parties and candidates. If that happens, after several elections under the current electoral system, the possibility of a two party system evolving – one conservative (indigenous rights) and the other moderately liberal (change/human rights) – is conceivable.

The second scenario would be the dissipation of the emerging two-party system and a reduction in the approval levels accorded to the two political parties and their leaders, giving way to a multiparty system. If the party leaders are not popular enough the likelihood of voters going back to regional and ethnic voting is possible. They would gravitate towards smaller parties or even independent candidates that resemble their peculiar needs and aspirations. Many more small parties would emerge with no dominant ones, in contrast to the 2014 elections. If that happens coalitions of sorts comprising smaller political parties may become critical king makers. This would be a messy scenario that would give way to parliamentary instability. Anthony Downs (1957) explained that in such situations rational voters will cast ballots for parties or candidates who are not their first preferences in order to maximize the impact of their votes. It may be important to point out that the restriction of Members of Parliament switching allegiance mentioned above is only for individual MPs. A situation may arise if an entire political party decided to shift allegiance in a government coalition setting. Like any other constitutionally engineered political and electoral party system in the Pacific, there may be loopholes that MPs could exploit when the need arises or when poor leadership cannot be changed through the normal established and legitimate processes.

CONCLUSION

Fiji and Fiji citizens have gone through a lot of change since the 1970 flag independence from Britain. The political structures, laws and institutions adopted then were colonial hangovers. In its first seventeen years of independence, stability was experienced under such structures. However in 1987, the first coups rocked the nation followed by subsequent coups in 2000 and 2006. Ordinary Fiji citizens have observed and lived through these events and the changes and destruction they brought with them. Many left because of frustration and uncertainty of the future but many more remained because Fiji is home and cannot be replaced by another. Still others

have limited ability to move. The 2006 coup and the various decrees introduced by the military regime that followed were a beacon of hope for many citizens. The democratic world, though, including some neighbouring countries of the Pacific turned their backs on Fiji. The regime persisted under an unfriendly regional and international environment promising to build a 'Fiji for all Fijians' and to 'end all coups'. The 2013 constitution is a culmination of the efforts by the regime and constitutional committees tasked to determine the political future of Fiji. The Yash Ghai Commission earlier tasked to draft the constitution consulted widely and compiled a draft that was rejected by the regime although most of its suggestions found their way into the 2013 constitution. The constitution and decrees configured certain aspects of politics in the country, including the electoral system.

One such aspect of politics is the notion of representative democracy. The 2013 constitution engineered democracy to mean that MPs are elected through a proportional representation system where all MPs represent all citizens since the whole country is a single constituency. Representation under the current system is such that MPs do not directly connect to people from a specific geographic locality or section of society. Once elected, these MPs and their political parties are entrusted and mandated by the whole country to represent them. Whether people from one region, ethnic group or gender dominate parliament is a non-issue as political parties and the elected MPs have a mandate from the higher number of voters that voted them in. For example in the first house under the 2013 constitution, two relatives from the same village who contested under SODELPA and FijiFirst respectively each secured seats and one is now serving as a minister and the other an opposition MP. Who represents who in such a situation? Other matters regulated in the current system are political party registration and membership, and the electoral process. Once an MP is in parliament, s/he is bound to the political party and is expected to attend all parliamentary sittings. At the same time, MPs who switch political party allegiance automatically lose their seats, similar to what happens in Samoa and PNG under their respective electoral systems. In the said countries, what followed were tendencies for dictatorial leadership where political parties and leaders remain in office for extended periods of time. In the case of Samoa, it produced what some people call a one party state because of the rule by a single political party for more than 30 years. With the restraints in place, Fiji may also go down that route where the current government remains in power for a long time.

Fiji's experience under the current constitution and engineered electoral system appears to discourage and side-line independent candidates. It actually forces would-be independent candidates to join political parties because of the very high threshold. It also shows that the popularity of political parties is determined by the popularity of a party leader as an individual and not necessarily on the policies of the political party. An effective strategy used in the 2014 elections was of focussing on the positive qualities and popularity of the party leaders. The more votes the party leader got, the more members of the party had the chance to secure seats in parliament. More importantly parties that focus on basic needs and bread and butter issues attract voters from a broad cross section of society. Basic needs became the primary consideration while other concerns like human rights and other higher needs were of secondary importance, at least to the ordinary voters.

Fiji has reverted once more to a parliamentary democracy following the 2014 General Elections. FijiFirst was chosen by a majority of eligible voters as the most favoured political party and with the most popular leader. With infrastructure development and in the vision of 'Fiji for all Fijians', there is optimism for strengthening the goal of multi ethnic and peaceful co-existence. It would be interesting to see the outcomes of four years of parliamentary democracy and debates under the 2013 constitution. The second election under the 2013 constitution in 2018 may give us a clearer indication of whether people have really moved away from ethnic politics, in line with the focus and intent of the 2013 constitution.

ENDNOTES:

1 This single constituency arrangement is similar to the Israeli system (see Yishai, 2010)

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