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‘The People Have Spoken ...’

Steven Ratuva and Stephanie Lawson

Fiji’s general elections of 17 September 2014, held eight years after Fiji’s fourth coup, saw some significant firsts, generated largely by new constitutional arrangements. These included a radically deracialised electoral system in which the entire country forms a single electorate and utilises open-list proportional representation. This system, brought in under the regime of coup leader Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, was designed first and foremost to encourage a shift away from previous patterns of electoral behaviour which, due in large measure to provisions for communal electorates and voting, were inevitably attuned to communal political identities and the perceived interests attached to them. Elections under such a system certainly allowed ‘the people’ to speak, but in a way which gave primacy to those particular identities and interests and, arguably, contributed to a political culture that saw democracy itself severely undermined in the process. This was illustrated only too clearly by the recurrence of *coups d’état* between 1987 and 2006 that all revolved, in one way or another, around issues of communal identity expressed through discourses of indigenous Fijian (Taukei) rights versus those of other ethnic or racial communities, especially of those of Indian descent. These discourses remain highly salient politically but, under the Constitution promulgated by the Bainimarama regime in 2013, they are no longer supported institutionally via electoral arrangements. As a result, political parties have generally been forced to at least

attempt to appeal to all ethnic communities. These institutional changes have brought Fiji's political system much closer to the standard model of liberal democracy in which 'one person, one vote, one value' is a basic norm.

The elections of September 2014 held under the new system delivered a resounding victory to Bainimarama's newly established political party, FijiFirst, founded on a modernist ideology repudiating the politics of race or ethnicity and emphasising equality and development for all communities in Fiji. However, the notion that election results indicate a clear and unambiguous statement of political intent on the part of the electorate—as reflected in the phrase 'the people have spoken'—is rather simplistic. Although this phrase does emphasise the most basic right of citizens in a democracy, or at least a majority of them, to choose their own government, the people rarely speak with one voice. After all, a key feature of liberal democracy is that it creates space for the expression of contested ideologies, strategies, visions and hopes. There is also the question of the conditions under which the people speak—a particular issue for Fiji's 2014 elections. Freedom of expression and political opposition had been tightly constrained during the period in which Bainimarama's military government had ruled by decree, and remained problematic during the election campaign. These circumstances favoured FijiFirst, which is, when all is said and done, the product of military power. These are among the issues we review below by way of introduction and which are analysed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Constitutionalism, democracy and elections in Fiji

Politics in Fiji has gone through turbulent and transformational periods since independence in 1970. These have been shaped in part by disagreements over what institutional and normative form democracy should take as well as the particular interests it should serve, for in Fiji it has rarely been simply a matter of serving 'the people' as a whole. This is a reflection of Fiji's 'plural society', in which the claims of the Taukei, who constitute some 57 per cent of the population, have very often been portrayed as trumping those of all other communities, especially citizens of Indian descent, who number

around 37 per cent. The remainder of the population is made up of Europeans, part-Europeans, other Pacific Islanders, Chinese, and other small minorities.

In a highly ethnicised political climate, adherence to democratic values for nationalist Taukei leaders was meaningful only if it served the apparent interests of their own ethnic community and, when it failed to do so, democracy as a form of government was considered inappropriate at best and illegitimate at worst. Reactions to the electoral success of those perceived as 'other' ranged from expressions of private displeasure around kava bowls to mass public demonstrations and the overthrow of elected governments. The latter, of course, is the antithesis of democratic constitutionalism, which requires that the rules of the game, once established, be respected by both winners and losers.

Elections in Fiji since independence have been held on an irregular basis, largely as a result of coups. Each coup has had its own peculiar characteristics, impacting on political processes, institutions, practices and discourses, and on people's everyday lives. Coups have unfortunately become the principal chronological and political landmarks from which Fijians take their historical bearing. Prior to the first coup in May 1987, many had seen riots in 1959 as the 'watershed' event in Fiji's history because of the way it united Taukei and Indo-Fijian workers against colonial and foreign corporate hegemony. However, the May 1987 coup, followed by a second intervention in September of the same year, completely eclipsed 1959 as a watershed event, this time appearing as the manifestation of an unbridgeable divide between the two major population groups.

This interpretation did not last long either, as Fiji's political, social and economic fortunes foundered on the rocks created by the system of political apartheid established under the 1990 Constitution. In the ensuing decade, politics took a very different turn with coup leader Rabuka reinventing himself as both a democrat and a multiculturalist and supporting a new, much more liberal constitution, which recognised all Fiji's citizens as 'Fiji Islanders', even though it retained a partly communal electoral system. The vision of a new, liberally oriented, multicultural Fiji seemed to become a reality in 1999 when Fiji's first (and so far only) Indo-Fijian prime minister came to power, thus creating another watershed event. But antagonistic race politics

appeared to become re-established as the status quo context for Fiji's politics with the 2000 coup and its aftermath washing away the apparent achievements of the previous decade. Although the civilian 2000 coup leader, George Speight, was prosecuted and subsequently incarcerated for treason, the government established in the wake of the coup, and subsequently legitimated through elections in 2001 and 2006, nonetheless followed an agenda attuned to discourses of race and Taukei privilege promoted by Speight and his supporters.

By the time of the 2006 coup, the term 'watershed' had all but lost its significance in a political environment where coups and elections alternated as defining moments, with new constitutions being promulgated along the way. In some ways, elections have come to play a role as pre-coup and post-coup historical signposts. Memories of an election may now be based on which coup was associated with it. The 1987 elections precipitated the 1987 coup and the 1990 Constitution, although the latter proved so unsatisfactory that it was replaced (without a coup) less than a decade later. This was followed by an election under a new electoral system that produced the unexpected election of an Indo-Fijian prime minister, which in turn precipitated the 2000 coup. The elections of 2001 that followed served partly to legitimate the essential aims of the 2000 coup, even while its prime perpetrators remained behind bars. But it established political stability on a tenuous basis only. The new government's leadership came increasingly into conflict with the military commander Bainimarama, who campaigned vigorously against it in the lead-up to the May 2006 elections. Since, according to Bainimarama, the people 'spoke incorrectly' on this occasion, there followed Fiji's fourth coup in December 2006.

Eight years later, electoral democracy returned to Fiji, albeit with a former military commander and coup leader as prime minister and under yet another new constitution. The 2014 elections were clearly a direct historical offshoot of the 2006 coup—an event claimed by Bainimarama as a 'coup to end all coups'. Certainly, it is unlikely to be the precursor to another in the foreseeable future, at least so long as Bainimarama retains the loyalty of those now in command of Fiji's military forces. It may also require that he retain the confidence of the majority of the electorate. Under the current Constitution, Bainimarama and FijiFirst will face the judgment of the electorate again in 2018, but of course there is no saying how the people will speak then.

In light of these events, democracy in Fiji appears as both a blessing and a curse—a blessing because it created space for multicultural participation in the political process and a curse because multiethnic participation too often revolved around communal interests, thereby sparking inter-communal antagonism. While liberal democracy is predicated on the idea of political plurality, in Fiji this took a different form, labelled elsewhere as 'communal democracy' (Ratuva 2005) or 'ethnic democracy' (Lawson 2012) which, paradoxically, became the nemesis of liberal democracy itself, undermining democratic constitutionalism and the stability it is meant to deliver.

Attempts to craft the 'right' type of democratic architecture through constitutional engineering based on national consensus has faced challenges due to both inter- and intra-communal interests, divided political loyalties and lack of faith in constitutional processes, among other reasons. It is as if exercises in constitutional engineering, which have followed coups, were designed as temporary post-conflict rehabilitation measures addressing immediate concerns rather than having a sustainable long-term trajectory. The latest Constitution, cannibalised from an earlier draft put together by the Constitution Commission under eminent international expert Professor Yash Ghai, but rejected by Bainimarama on the grounds that it pandered to indigenous nationalism, is yet another attempt at resetting the political compass.

Fiji's first three constitutions from the time of independence in 1970 had incorporated electoral systems conceived with communal considerations foremost in mind. The 1970 Constitution attempted to provide for ethnic balance while the 1990 Constitution imposed political hegemony by the Taukei. The 1997 Constitution adopted a halfway position between communalism and individual voting. In 1999 it delivered a multiethnic coalition government led by Fiji's first Indo-Fijian prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, subsequently overthrown in the civilian coup of May 2000 led by George Speight. In the 2001 and 2006 elections, however, the same constitution delivered the stridently nationalist government of Laisenia Qarase. This was the government overthrown by Bainimarama in December 2006, ostensibly on the grounds of its highly divisive and retrograde racist policies.

In contrast with all previous constitutions, the 2013 Constitution removed all traces of communalism in its formal provisions. Although this did not necessarily prevent appeals to communal interests and a certain degree of communal voting behaviour, it clearly represented the most profound institutional change in Fiji's post-independence political history. In opting for proportional representation in a single national constituency without any communally based reserved seats, the new Constitution forces political actors—political parties, individual politicians and voters—to think, behave and act 'nationally'. Although this did work to some extent in September 2014, the new electoral system has created another set of dynamics involving new alliances and contradictions. It requires political parties to become trans-ethnic in appeal if they are to have any chance of forming government. FijiFirst did so with ease because its leadership, which had effectively designed the new Constitution, had repudiated communal politics entirely. On the other hand, other parties that were successors to older communally attuned parties, such as the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), effectively the same party that Qarase had led to victory in 2006, and the National Federation Party (NFP), Fiji's oldest political party that had emerged in the colonial period mainly to serve Indo-Fijian political needs and interests, were shackled by their communal history.

Elections in established liberal democracies generally work to legitimise ruling elites and provide the fulcrum for delivering stable governance and social order. In Fiji, as in other post-colonial states, there are additional dimensions that give it a unique character. The prevalence of culture-based chiefly power structures and kinship alliances among indigenous Fijians, which are often intertwined with liberal democratic systems and norms either in a contradictory or complementary way, have produced additional dynamics. These have been at the heart of both intra- and inter-communal politicking, with battle lines drawn and redrawn, and alliances configured and reconfigured in different ways, in different places, at different times. They have interacted with social variables such as religion, kinship ties, tribal loyalty, ethnic consciousness, regional affiliations, professional agendas, socioeconomic interests, political ideologies, gender considerations and personal appeal, all of which play a part in shaping political alliances and voting behaviour. Politics in Fiji has therefore never been a simple contest between the two major population groups.

Indeed, an important but often underemphasised aspect of politics in Fiji has been *intra*-communal contestation. Although always a factor, this became most clearly evident, especially among Taukei, after the first coup of 1987 and continues to this day.

Another key factor in the analysis of Fiji's politics is the coup discourses that also emerged after 1987. Since that time, there has been a latent fear of coups and coup conspiracies before, during and after elections, as reflected in the normalisation of the word coup (or *ku* in Fijian) in everyday vocabulary. There is also the frequent use of coup-related dates and events by scholars, political analysts, journalists and the public at large as historical landmarks around which historical narratives are constructed. Thus coups loom large in people's historical memory and many historical events are understood relative to periods before, during, after or between coups. Bainimarama's coup of 2006, however, was portrayed as the 'coup to end all coups'. While this claim remains to be tested over the longer term, the prospect of another coup following the resounding victory of Bainimarama's FijiFirst party in September 2014 does seem unlikely under FijiFirst rule.

The Bainimarama regime

The results of the September 2014 polls served to confer legitimacy, both nationally and internationally, on a regime that had previously refused to accept the verdict of 'the people' in 2006. Eight years later the newly elected government, headed by former military commander and 2006 coup leader Bainimarama, was more than content to invoke the phrase. But for those on the losing side the rancorous utterance of Dick Turner, a US Democrat unsuccessful in the 1966 California State Senate election, may have had more resonance: 'The people have spoken—the bastards' (Synlick 2006, p. 1).

The 2014 elections followed a period in which Bainimarama's regime deployed coercion and intimidation to implement its own vision of an essential social transformation and to mobilise people's consent to his agenda for change. While these methods were highly undemocratic, the regime did introduce a number of important firsts, which may be seen as enhancing the longer-term prospects for democratic consolidation under FijiFirst rule. For instance, while the first past the post (FPTP) system under the 1970 and 1990 Constitutions and

the alternative voting (AV) system under the 1997 Constitution were technically different, they were both largely communally and multi-constituency based. The communal element was a carry-over from the pre-independence period, when electorates were first established on the basis of race. In contrast, the 2013 Constitution, in discarding the communal text, aimed very deliberately to eradicate the politics of race that had characterised all previous elections in Fiji. As any student of electoral engineering knows very well, electoral system design does have an impact on voter attitudes and political culture more generally. If the electoral system is communal, electioneering and voting behaviour will inevitably be oriented to communalism. Under a fully open system with no communal elements the dynamics are likely to change, as indeed they did in 2014, although not entirely.

For these reasons, among others, the 2014 elections may be seen as a turning point in Fiji's politics. The 2013 Constitution, with its radically different electoral system as well as a very significant rebranding of politics—itself very different from previous interventions in terms of its essential justification and subsequent outcomes—has defined a demarcation line between an 'old' Fiji and a 'new' Fiji, created largely by the Bainimarama regime. To many observers, the nation may appear to have reinvented itself, assuming a new identity at least with respect to issues of race or ethnicity. This new Fiji is meant to evince much greater political inclusiveness with the Taukei, Indo-Fijians and other minority groups being treated as equal partners as they move towards a more prosperous future, leaving behind the legacy of a colonial past in which particularistic interests, privileges, agendas and mindsets had become entrenched. Or so the narrative goes.

One point easily overlooked in all this is that the military, which may be seen to still hold ultimate power despite the return to electoral democracy, remains almost 100 per cent Taukei and there are no indications that this is set to change. Also, although the emphasis on equality and inclusiveness in FijiFirst's vision of the country's political future resonates strongly with democratic values, the fact remains that Bainimarama came to power initially through a military coup, ruled by decree, and used repressive measures to enforce his political will on the people of Fiji. This is readily interpreted as the very antithesis of democratic behaviour. So too, of course, are the three coups that occurred in 1987 and 2000 respectively. It is pertinent to note that many of those most vociferously opposed to the Bainimarama coup

had supported the previous coups. 'Democracy', at least for some in Fiji, therefore means accepting an electoral result only when one's favoured party wins at the polls. When it loses, 'democracy' may be either rejected because it is not an appropriate form of government for Fiji, redefined to reflect one's own particular interests, values and ideology, or put on hold until such time as the people are 're-educated'.

Bainimarama's regime had put democracy on hold for eight years, during which time it pursued a policy of both radically overhauling the electoral system to eliminate one key form of institutionalised race-based communalism and to re-educate the people to reject the discourses of race that had been so prominent in all previous elections. Even so, the politics of race, played out mainly in the assertion of the superior political rights of the Taukei as the indigenous people of the Fiji islands *vis-à-vis* non-indigenous Fijians (mainly of Indian descent), remained an issue throughout the 2014 elections. SODELPA's policies promoting a 'Christian state' became a proxy for race given that Christianity in Fiji is strongly associated with indigenousness while most Indo-Fijians are Hindu or Muslim. SODELPA also represented an ideology of traditionalism in which Taukei institutions, practices and values, such as those associated with chiefly authority and privileges, were vigorously defended. In contrast, Bainimarama's FijiFirst promoted an ideology of modernism in which real progress and development could be achieved only by the elimination of traditionalism as manifest in the communal electoral system itself, as well as in the political privileges of chiefly authority and all the vested interests associated with these. Having said that, we must be wary of endorsing a simplistic dichotomy between tradition and modernity, even though these are the general categories adopted, either explicitly or implicitly, by the major contestants themselves.

We now come, very briefly, to the Bainimarama regime's first year as a democratically elected government. With a resounding majority of 60 per cent in favour of FijiFirst, translating into 32 seats in a 50-seat parliament, the balance of power was overwhelmingly in its favour. Theoretically, the AV system is supposed to promote multiparty cooperation, but the strength of FijiFirst's victory means that it does not need to work cooperatively with other parties. The only other parties with seats in the parliament, SODELPA and the NFP, constitute an opposition virtually smothered by FijiFirst's parliamentary hegemony. With parliament so firmly under its control, the Bainimarama

government passed numerous items of legislation in its first year; altogether, a total of 413 decrees and statutes were enacted between 2006 and September 2014, one year after the elections.

Much of this legislative activity has supported the continuation of the modernist developmental agenda inaugurated under the previous Bainimarama regime. Interestingly, this approach is characteristic of many South East Asian countries, especially Singapore, where it has succeeded in enhancing the 'performance legitimacy' of semi-authoritarian governments. Here we may note that developmental state theory emphasises the centrality of the state in determining the country's economic direction and in imposing firm control over resources, the bureaucracy and general development policies. In Fiji, post-2006, various reform and development projects relating to the economy, land, infrastructure, social welfare, housing, education, communications and aviation have been implemented following new legislation. The latest measures have been passed with ease in the new parliament. Supporters of FijiFirst may point to Fiji's steady economic growth, which reached 5.3 per cent in 2014. Tourism reached a record high of 692,630 in that year and was expected to easily exceed 700,000 in 2015. Despite this growth, however, there has also been an increase in inequality. This is expected to worsen over time, as it has in other parts of the world where the fruits of development are unevenly distributed.

Parliamentary debates over the economy and development have been vigorous and the opposition has engaged in fierce verbal sparring. The new parliament has become a venue for venting political frustrations, expressing ethnic grievances, articulating ideological interests and publicising religious beliefs. This was to be expected in the new space provided for democratic discourse denied under the previous regime. Not surprisingly, it has caused intense animosity and fractures between and within parties as well as between parliamentarians. It has made the work of the speaker, Jiko Luveni, the first woman speaker in Fiji's political history, very difficult. The speaker herself was allegedly abused in a SODELPA public meeting by party president Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, leading to a furious debate in parliament and eventually to Lalabalavu's suspension from the house for two years.

Despite these developments, the committees of the house have worked reasonably well in creating at least some semblance of a bipartisan environment for serious deliberation. However, this has been undermined by the dominance of FijiFirst in the parliamentary votes on committee recommendations, which has killed off much enthusiasm on the part of the minority opposition. Even so, some opposition figures have done some valuable work. The revelations of the parliamentary finance committee, headed by economist Dr Biman Prasad, about previous unaccounted for spending since the 2006 coup has sparked much-needed debate about the financial accountability system of the regime. This illustrates the value of legitimate parliamentary opposition, which was missing throughout the eight years of Bainimarama's post-coup rule by decree.

One year on from the 2014 elections, political parties are already in campaign mode for the 2018 general elections. While FijiFirst is confident of another victory because of the apparent popularity of its intensive nationwide developmentist approach, SODELPA is struggling with internal leadership issues and fractures. The 2018 elections will test whether FijiFirst and its developmental policies can once again be translated into votes and, at the same time, whether the opposition parties have learnt anything from their previous mistakes and can refashion their agendas accordingly.

Analysing the 2014 elections

As the dust from the 2014 elections settles and as Fiji embarks on a fresh journey of democratic rule, questions are being asked from multiple viewpoints about the significance of the 2014 elections. This is what the book is about. It is a collection of chapters by contributors from both academia and outside academia who by no means speak with one voice. The varying positions taken by the authors are in no way an attempt to throw fuel on the fire of Fiji's ideological contestation but rather seek to elucidate some of the deep-felt sentiments on both sides of the political divide, sentiments that are often oversimplified at best, or obscured at worst, in the robust exchanges of politicians and their supporters in the public sphere. The chapters therefore attempt to engage in a serious dialogue about the elections, perhaps the most paradigm shifting of all of Fiji's elections since 1970. The chapters

focus primarily on the 2014 elections itself, with some providing relevant historical context to fill out the broader picture. They vary in style, political position and intellectual framings of Fiji politics and the 2014 elections. Unfortunately, despite attempts to solicit chapters from political parties about their experiences during the elections, only SODELPA responded. This is a major gap in the collection.

Chapter 2 by Steven Ratuva provides a broad discussion of electoral engineering, or the process of changing people's voting behaviour and political culture, through electoral system design. Fiji has gone through three different types of electoral systems: the first past the post (FPTP) system under the 1970 and 1990 Constitutions; the alternative vote system (AV) under the 1997 Constitution; and the open list proportional representation (OLPR) system under the 2013 Constitution. Different types of political systems generate different voting patterns and behaviour; the examples presented by the Fiji elections show different patterns of electoral outcomes. The electoral system itself does not determine voters' actual personal choice, but rather influences how people vote and how the results of voting are allocated and counted. There is a complex mix of factors which shape voter psychology and choice, including political and ideological preference, appeal through campaigns and manifestos by political parties, social group (ethnic, religious, cultural and political), individual loyalty, mode of mobilisation and influence of the media, among other things.

Chapter 3 by Stephanie Lawson examines the historical evolution of chiefly politics leading to the 2014 elections. Since independence, the chiefly system in Fiji has been part of the national system, primarily through the Great Council of Chiefs as well as through the role of individual chiefs in state leadership. This has changed over the years as a result of coups and other influences. The 2006 coup was a defining moment in the creation of the political conditions for the demise of chiefly authority in the state system, as exemplified by the abolition of the Great Council of Chiefs, more equal distribution of land lease money and reform of the Fijian administration, among other measures imposed by the pre-election regime. The victory of FijiFirst in the 2014 elections seems to have signalled the death knell for chiefly authority at the national level, although the chiefly system is still strongly embedded within the Fijian community.

Chapter 4 by Brij Lal provides a critical evaluation of some of the forces that shaped Indo-Fijian politics after the 2006 coup and factors that influenced Indo-Fijian votes during the 2014 elections. During the 2001 and 2006 elections, the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) won about 80 per cent of the Indo-Fijian votes, but during the 2003 elections the two predominantly Indo-Fijian parties—the FLP and the NFP—polled very poorly amongst the Indo-Fijian community as more than 70 per cent of them shifted their support to FijiFirst. Included in the numerous factors identified by Lal are issues ranging from an Indo-Fijian sense of insecurity to unrivalled propaganda by the incumbent FijiFirst. A lesson to be learnt from this is that, at least in Fiji where ethnic identification runs deep, group political loyalty can quickly shift when sociopolitical circumstances change.

Chapter 5 by David Robie, both a professional journalist and a scholar, provides an empirical assessment of the media environment and challenges in Fiji, especially after the 2006 coup and immediately before the 2014 elections. The media acts as the information nerve centre in any modern society and plays a vital role in shaping perceptions and values. Because of this, various forms of media often become effective tools for political propaganda, election campaigning and community mobilisation by state forces, political parties and other groups representing particular interests. In Fiji, the media has gone through some challenges posed by the post-2006 coup media decree that is still in force. The struggle to create a freer and better-informed society has been a central dilemma for Fijian journalists and Robie's chapter provides suggestions for positive change in the future.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of the Christian churches after the 2006 coup and during the elections. The author, Lynda Newland, who has carried out considerable fieldwork in Fiji, provides an analysis of the sometimes mutually supportive and sometimes antagonistic relationship between church and state in Fiji. Central to the chapter is the debate relating to the secular state, one of the most contentious issues during the election campaign. Throughout modern history, the relationship between the state and the church has been complex and has assumed different forms, sometimes mutually supportive and sometimes antagonistic. Fiji is no exception. The paper explores the often precarious interface between theology and political ideology,

especially how one is used to legitimise and operationalise the other. This interface was manifest in explicit and subtle ways during the 2014 elections and no doubt influenced the way some cast their votes.

Chapter 7 by Sefanaia Sakai focuses on land as a political issue during the 2014 campaign. Land is of the most volatile of all issues in post-colonial Fiji. Sakai's contribution looks at how land has been used by ethno-nationalists to instil fear of an 'Indian takeover' and Taukei marginalisation. He emphasises that land reform, including the equal distribution of lease money amongst all members of the landowning unit (as opposed to a 30 per cent share for chiefs as was the case previously), has empowered ordinary Taukeis. Sakai suggests that fearmongering used by political parties during the elections may have influenced some voters, but was insufficient to draw a significant number of votes away from FijiFirst.

The role of youth in Fijian politics and especially in the elections is discussed by Patrick Vakaoti in Chapter 8. Because of the change in voting age to 18, the number of voters below the age of 35 was in excess of 50 per cent of all voters and so youth naturally became a major target for political parties. But as Vakaoti argues, young voters were not a homogeneous voting bloc but were divided by diverse interests and expectations. The efforts of political parties to target youth voters met with mixed success.

Jone Baledrokadroka's Chapter 9 provides an analysis of the role of the military, as the most powerful coercive institution in Fiji, on political governance and change. His analysis problematises the Fiji military's interventionism, focusing on how it has transformed the political landscape through the use or threat of force since the 2006 coup. Baledrokadroka examines the extent to which support for FijiFirst among the military, and its incumbency, contributed to FijiFirst's victory. He suggests that the post-election period may well see the role of the military becoming more pronounced as an ally of the FijiFirst government and this may give the latter more enthusiasm for unrestrained reform.

The only politician among our contributors, Pio Tabaiwalu, discusses the fortunes and otherwise of SODELPA in Chapter 10. Because of SODELPA's narrow ethnic appeal and campaign to mobilise largely Taukei votes (who constitute about 60 per cent of the electorate),

it was virtually impossible for the party to win the elections outright and so it had to seek out coalition partners. But even with the NFP, traditionally an Indo-Fijian party, they could not make up the required 26 seats to control parliament. SODELPA campaigned largely in the shadow of the more resourceful and tactically astute FijiFirst and needs to re-strategise in the next election if it wants to increase its numbers in parliament.

Scott MacWilliam's Chapter 11 looks at SODELPA from the opposite vantage point to Tabaiwalu. While Tabaiwalu places blame on FijiFirst for SODELPA's electoral misfortunes, MacWilliam locates SODELPA's woes squarely within the party itself and its inability to adapt to the demands of a new multiethnic political climate. The chapter also argues a case for demarcating the Fijian political scene along a rural/urban divide, suggesting that this division was also reflected in the party votes.

The coup in 2006, and certainly the 2014 elections, impacted significantly on Fiji's relationship with its neighbours, an issue examined in Chapter 12 by Alexander Stewart. Fiji's suspension from the Commonwealth and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and sanctions by countries like Australia and New Zealand were meant to isolate Fiji as a 'pariah state', and force the Bainimarama regime to hold an election sooner rather than later. Instead, Fiji took advantage of the situation to mobilise support among fellow Melanesian Spearhead Group members as well as countries beyond the region, and to set up the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). Fiji's new government is now demanding the removal of Australia and New Zealand from the PIF as a precondition for rejoining the organisation.

Chapter 13 by Alisi Daurewa is a personal account of her work as a member of the Fiji Election Commission. The breadth and depth of the work of this organisation has not been fully appreciated, largely because the public's information about them has been based mainly on formal descriptions in the Constitution and electoral decree and media reports. Daurewa's contribution is a story of the more human dimension of the commissioners and electoral officials who expended great energy travelling to the far corners of the country under extremely challenging conditions. Yet, despite these sacrifices, she argues that they were still unfairly vilified by armchair critics.

In Chapter 14 Leonard Chan, who was a member of the international monitoring group (MOG), discusses his personal experience as a member of this group. MOG played a very significant role in ensuring the credibility of the elections in the eyes of the international community. As with the previous chapter, this is a personal story of a kind not usually captured in the media and public discourse.

A note on the use of terms

With ethnic-based contestations over political power and constant shifts in the discourse of race, ethnicity and the definition of cultural boundaries, the use of labels is both complex and sensitive. Until recently, indigenous Fijians were usually known simply as ‘Fijians’. The term ‘Taukei’ (literally ‘owners’) is now more commonly used, since ‘Fijian’ officially applies to anyone who is a citizen of Fiji (although this is contentious among more conservative indigenous Fijians). Some readers will be familiar with ‘iTaukei’. Here the ‘i’ stands as the definite article as in *the* Taukei. We use Taukei without the ‘i’ to avoid the error that often appears when people say ‘the iTaukei’ (which is the same as saying ‘the Taukei’). In the colonial and early post-colonial period, people of Indian descent were usually just called ‘Indians’. Then ‘Fiji Indians’ became more common, but over time the term ‘Indo-Fijians’ has become standard.

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