

INSTITUTIONS WITHOUT ARCHITECTS: REASSESSING FIJI'S MAY 1999 ELECTIONS IN THE WAKE OF GEORGE SPEIGHT'S COUP

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The impact of alternative electoral reforms aimed at mitigating ethnic tensions are often difficult to judge. Political leaders responsible for such innovations usually retain office after their introduction, rendering complex any straightforward appraisal of their political consequences. Fiji provides a reverse case. In 1997, the small Pacific island state embarked on a bold experiment in electoral reform and ethnic compromise. But the political leaders who steered those reforms through parliament were emphatically defeated at elections held in 1999. The historic compromise they had brought into being quickly unravelled, and a coup in May 2000 left the country once again sharply polarised.

Très souvent pour les politologues les réformes électorales tendant à apaiser les tensions raciales sont difficiles à apprécier dans la mesure où les responsables politiques qui en sont à l'origine, sont aussi souvent ceux qui restent au pouvoir une fois ces réformes mises en place. Dans un tel contexte, l'évaluation de l'impact politique réel de ces réformes s'avère un exercice délicat et aléatoire.

Le cas de Fidji fournit cependant un exemple inverse. En 1997, cet Etat devait opter pour une réforme radicale de son système électoral, conséquence d'un compromis historique intervenu entre les différentes communautés ethniques de ce territoire. Mais les politiques, artisans de ces réformes, devaient être battus aux élections de 1999, annulant progressivement tous les bénéfices des réformes antérieures. De surcroît, le coup d'état de 2000 devait raviver les tensions en bipolarisant la vie politique de Fidji.

The People's Coalition's landslide victory in Fiji's May 1999 election gave it only a year in office. On the anniversary of that victory, a group of armed men led by George Speight stormed parliament, taking Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and most of his cabinet hostage. Three days later, President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara announced that, even were the hostages to be released, Chaudhry's government would not be reinstated – a position quickly

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accepted by the Australian government. Within ten days, Mara had been forced to resign, the 1997 constitution had been abrogated by Fiji's military and Speight himself promised immunity from prosecution. Speight was eventually arrested and imprisoned, but Fiji's military did not restore the elected government to office. Instead, they installed a largely ethnic Fijian 'interim' administration, led by former banker Laisenia Qarase.

There were several reasons for the May 2000 putsch, and the subsequent reluctance to restore the People's Coalition administration.¹ The 1997 constitution had been a compact between the country's ethnic Fijian and Indian leaders. Its principal architects were former PM Sitiveni Rabuka and opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy. Yet Rabuka's *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) and Reddy's National Federation Party (NFP) were annihilated at the polls in May 1999. Instead, the Fiji Labour Party won an outright majority and Mahendra Chaudhry became the country's first Indian Prime Minister. But the coalition the Labour Party forged with ethnic Fijian political parties was not robust, and the new government's policies during its year in office galvanized grass roots Fijian opposition.

This study argues that Fiji's new electoral system, coupled with the results of the May 1999 polls, left parliament ill-equipped to contain the pressures that led up to the May 2000 rebellion. Voters from the urban areas, who figured strongly among the rebels, were poorly represented in parliament, party officials were granted too much power by the provision for 'above-the-line' tickets on ballot papers and transfers of preference votes gave Labour an artificially strong mandate. Conversely, Fiji was left with an emasculated, largely indigenous Fijian, opposition, and playing the 'ethnic card' quickly became the stock and trade of opposition politics. Fiji would have been better served by a more straightforward, transparent, electoral system – proportional representation.

I THE NEW ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND THE 1997 CONSTITUTION

The 1997 constitution was the outcome of an historic compromise between the country's Indo-Fijian and ethnic Fijian leaders. This was Fiji's third constitution since independence. The British-bequeathed 1970 constitution had been abrogated in a coup back in 1987, also aimed at removing from office a government elected mainly on the basis of Indo-Fijian votes. After the 1987 coup, a new 1990 constitution stacked seats inside parliament in favour of the country's 52% indigenous Fijian population, and reserved the positions of President and Prime Minister for Fijians. By the mid-1990s, however, international pressures coupled with domestic difficulties led Rabuka and SVT leaders to initiate a review of the 'interim' 1990 constitution aimed at improving political rights for Fiji's 44% population of Indian descent. Rabuka himself eventually steered the agreed upon 1997 constitution through parliament.

The electoral system introduced as part of the 1997 constitution differed in several important respects from that employed under the country's previous constitutions. First,

1 On these, see Fraenkel, J, 'The Clash of Dynasties and the Rise of Demagogues; Fiji's *Tauri Vakaukauwa* of May 2000', *Journal of Pacific History*, December 2000.

compulsory registration and voting was introduced, backed by threats of fines for failure to register (F\$50) or vote (F\$20).²

Second, the new electoral system was the first in Fiji's history to include 'open' constituencies. All citizens for the first time could vote together for candidates of any ethnic group – a longstanding demand of the country's Indo-Fijian population.³ Numbers of reserved 'Indian' and 'Fijian' seats were brought closer to respective ethnic weights in the population. While 46 MPs were to be elected from communal or ethnically reserved franchise constituencies,⁴ there were also 25 'open' seats. Each voter had two votes, one in a reserved or communal constituency and another in one of the open constituencies.

Third, the British-style first-past-the-post system was abandoned in favour of the 'alternative' or 'preferential' voting system (AV). This system ensures that no candidate is elected without an overall majority of votes cast. Voters list candidates (or parties) in order of preference. If no candidate or party gets a majority on the first count, the lowest polling candidate is eliminated and his or her voters' second preferences are re-distributed amongst the remaining candidates. The process of elimination and re-counting of lower order preferences continues until one candidate or party emerges with an overall majority of all votes cast (50%+1).

Most controversially, a split format ballot paper was introduced, enabling voters to choose to follow party 'tickets' rather than specify preferences directly. Voters could either list candidates in order of preference (voting 'below-the-line').⁵ To cast a valid ballot in this way, it was necessary to number at least 75% of those standing⁶ – no easy task in some of the urban seats where ten or so stood, including relatively unknown independents. The simpler option was to cast a single vote by ticking 'above-the-line' next to a party symbol. Where necessary, such votes were then redistributed in accordance with preferences specified by the party or candidate, rather than directly by the voter. Parties and candidates lodged preference lists for each constituency with the Elections Office. The vast majority of voters (around 92%)⁷ opted for this second 'ticket' approach. Indeed, they were often explicitly encouraged to do so by the parties themselves, whose T-shirts, banners and placards called for 'above-the-line' support. Party officials thereby acquired considerable leverage over the final election result.

2 Electoral Act, 1998, sections 11 (3) and 88 (4 and 5).

3 Gillion, KL, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920-46*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1977, p. 130. Common roll voting is, however, well-established for local council elections

4 23 for Fijians, 19 for Indians, 3 for 'general' voters and one for voters from the island of Rotuma, to the Northwest of the Fiji group. 'General' voters are those of Chinese, other Pacific Island, part-European or European descent. There were 71 seats in total.

5 *Electoral Act*, 1988, sections 57 & 61 and appended schedule.

6 *Electoral Act*, 1988, section 116.

7 Elections Office, personal communication.

Fourthly, Fiji's leading politicians added a provision for mandatory power sharing. After an election, all parties securing more than 10% of seats were to be offered positions inside the cabinet.

Finally, the 1997 constitution included powerful safeguards and veto rights to be exercised by the indigenous Fijian elite. Although the premiership was no longer 'reserved' for an ethnic Fijian, Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs retained considerable powers over the choice of Fiji's Head of State, the President exercised powers to nominate members to the Senate and the Senate had the right of veto over changes to the Fijian Affairs Act, to legislation affecting land ownership or leasing and over changes to the constitution itself.⁸ The constitution endorsed the principle of 'indigenous Fijian paramoutcy', but as a 'protective principle', rather than as a guarantee of political dominance.⁹

The electoral system remained heavily weighted in favour of race-based voting, and was marked by significant demographic imbalances. The voting age was restricted to those over the age of 21, while regulations against citizens holding dual nationality deprived Fiji's sizeable number of overseas passport holders of the vote. The 'common roll' element in the voting system was smaller than that under the 1970 constitution – 35% of constituencies were common roll under the 1997 constitution, as compared to 48% under the 1970 constitution.¹⁰ The distribution of reserved franchise constituencies left significant disparities between the number of voters required to elect an MP in the urban and rural constituencies (table 1). The retention of a number of tiny rural constituencies was partly explained by the Constituency Boundaries Commission referring to factors other than equality in overall numbers of voters-per-constituency, such as ease of communications and traditional ties.¹¹ Nevertheless, the number of seats allotted to urban voters was not in proportion to the percentage of the population living in urban areas. That share has increased sizeably since independence – 47.6% Fiji citizens now live in the towns, whereas only around 28% of the seats were allotted to urban areas.¹²

II FIRST PREFERENCE RESULTS AT THE MAY 1999 POLLS

The 1999 elections resulted in a landslide victory for the People's Coalition. Mahendra Chaudhry's Labour Party secured 37-seats – just over the absolute majority threshold.

8 The 1997 Constitution requires support from nine of the 14 members of the Senate nominated by the President for amendments to the Constitution, the Fijian Affairs Act, Native Land Trust Act, Native Lands Act, Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act or acts relating to Rotuma or the Banabans on Rabi Island (Fiji Constitution 1997, §192 [4], p. 144; §185, p. 139; §64[1a], p. 91). The Great Council of Chiefs appoints Fiji's President, after consultation with the Prime Minister (*ibid*, §90, p. 58).

9 Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, 27th July 1998, 6j, p. 11.

10 Under the post-independence electoral system, 25 of Fiji's 52 constituencies were 'national' or 'common roll'. However, these were so-called cross voting constituencies, for which the ethnicity of the candidate was specified, while the electoral rolls were national. Each voter had four votes; one in a reserved franchise constituency, and another three for candidates specified as 'Fijian', 'Indian' and 'General'.

11 Constituency Boundaries Commission, Final Report, September 1998.

12 Fiji Statistics Office, Statistical News, 10 June 1998.

Table 1: *Fiji's Electoral Constituencies*

Type of Seat	Number of Seats	Average Number of Registered Voters
<u>Fijian Reserved Seats</u>		
Rural	17	8,464
Urban	6	12,967
Total	23	9,577
<u>Indian Reserved Seats</u>		
Rural	13	9,534
Urban	6	12,279
Total	19	10,401
<u>General Reserved Seats</u>		
	4	4,676
<u>Open Seats</u>		
	25	17,488

Source : Elections Office, *Elections '99; Results by the Count* (1999)

Together with its pre-election People's Coalition allies, the new government could command 52 seats in the 71-member parliament. Rabuka's SVT obtained only 8 seats, while the NFP was left without a single MP – a crushing defeat for the former main opposition party. Chaudhry took up the position of Prime Minister. Defeated PM Rabuka addressed the nation that night, swearing 'loyalty to the spirit of democracy and to the principles of the constitution', but warning of defiant opposition should the new government seek to undermine constitutional safeguards for Fijian interests.

If the new government were to use its majority to bulldoze through measures which we see as being detrimental to the best interests of indigenous Fijians, we would oppose these vigorously, both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, and we will not hesitate to call on the support of the Great Council of Chiefs' appointees in the upper House.¹³

The elections witnessed an extraordinary increase in voter registration and turnout. There was a 32% increase in voters on the electoral rolls, while the turnout rose from 73% in 1994 to 90% in 1999, features at least partly explained by the threat of fines for failing to register or vote. Voting lasted a week, with long queues witnessed outside many polling booths. The count lasted a further three days, in part owing to the laborious process of re-counting preference votes. Nearly half of the seats were decided by reference to party preference lists lodged with the Elections Office. In nearly a quarter of all cases, first count leaders were defeated by candidates able to secure larger numbers of preference votes and leap-frog to victory. Owing to the complexity of the new style ballot paper, 8.7% of ballot papers were declared 'informal' or 'invalid' – a figure considerably higher than the 2-3% witnessed in

13 Fiji TV, Address to the Nation, 18th May 1999, *Fiji Times*, 19th May 1999.

elections during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴ The cost of the election, not including extensive assistance-in-kind from the Australian government, was over twice that for the previous elections in 1994.

As in most elections before the 1987 coup, first preference voting was strongly along ethnic lines. All 19 of the Indian reserved seats fell to the Fiji Labour Party, but not a single one of the Fijian communal seats. Five major Fijian parties divided among themselves 22 out of the 23¹⁵ of the reserved indigenous Fijian seats, but not one of these parties was able to obtain an Indian seat. Largely Indian-backed parties together secured 1.9% of the Fijian vote, while largely Fijian-backed parties secured only 0.7% of the Indian vote.

In the 19 Indo-Fijian communal constituencies, the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) crushed its main rival, the National Federation Party (NFP). Labour's victory was based on strong support not only in the sugar cane belt constituencies of Western Viti Levu and Northern Vanua Levu, but also in urban areas where the NFP had secured strong majorities in previous elections in 1992 and 1994. Constituencies with relatively large numbers of Muslim voters,

Table 2: *First Preference Votes by Type of Constituency at the May 1999 Polls*

	Open Constituencies	Percentages			Overall Vote	Seats won
		Communal Constituencies				
		Fijian	Indian	General		
Fiji Labour Party (FLP)	33.3	1.9	65.5	-	32.2	52.1
National Federation Party (NFP)	14.4	-	32.0	-	14.5	0.0
Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT)	20.2	38.0	-	-	19.6	11.3
Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisisito (VLV)	9.8	19.4	-	-	9.7	4.2
Fijian Association Party (FAP)	10.8	17.9	0.6	7.0	10.1	15.5
Party of National Unity (PANU)	3.9	9.6	0.1	-	4.4	5.6
Nationalist Party (NVTLP)	4.2	9.1	-	-	4.4	1.4
Others	3.4	4.2	1.8	93.0	4.7	9.8

Notes: - indicates that no candidate stood. * Including Rotuma communal.

Source: Elections Office, Elections '99.

14 For figures on 'invalid' or 'informal' voting at elections under the 1970 constitution, see Fraenkel, J, 'Electoral Engineering and the Politicisation of Ethnic Frictions in Fiji', in Luckham, R & Bastian, S (eds), *Strengthening Democratic Governance in Conflict-Torn Societies*, IDS, Sussex, forthcoming.

15 The remaining seat, Lomaiviti, was won by an independent candidate, Simone Kaitani.

such as Nadroga and Nasinu, also deserted the NFP. Since the 1987 coup, some 75,000 Indo-Fijians had migrated. High levels of migration among middle class Indo-Fijians also helped erode the NFP's support base. The FLP's focus on 'bread and butter' issues struck a popular chord amongst Indo-Fijians, while the NFP's association with prominent Gujarati businessmen damaged the party's reputation. Most importantly, NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy's alliance with 1987-coup leader Rabuka lost the party considerable support among Indo-Fijians, who had been hit by the economic collapse after the 1987 coup and deprived of political rights under the 1990 constitution. The NFP's share of the Indian vote shrank from 54% in 1994 to 32% in 1999, enabling Labour to obtain victory in all 19 reserved Indian constituencies on the first count.

In the Fijian communal seats, the defeat of Rabuka's *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* was less emphatic, and the reasons more complex. The party's 1999 share of the Fijian vote (38%) was well down on its 1992 and 1994 levels (66.5% and 65.3% respectively). In all the Fijian constituencies (except Cakaudrove East and West and Kadavu), the SVT received less than 50% of the Fijian communal vote, ensuring that most contests went beyond the first count and were decided by second- or lower- preference votes. Pursuit of the politics of patronage, the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji with at least F\$220 million in bad loans and two years of slump in the Fiji economy took their toll. Yet a comparison of the 1999 election results with those of 1992 and 1994 suggests that it was not solely economic factors that served to undermine SVT support amongst the Fijian electorate.

The SVT was originally established in June 1991, sponsored by Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs to unify the country's Fijian political leadership in the wake of the 1987 coup. Even by the time of the 1992 elections, the SVT faced opposition from two rival Fijian parties. Apisai Tora - who had earlier been a founder of the Nationalist *Taukei* movement against the 1987 coalition government - led the All-National Congress (ANC), a party which appealed to hostility in Western Viti Levu to the longstanding dominance of Fiji's eastern chiefly elite.¹⁶ The extremist Nationalist Party also opposed the SVT, on a platform calling for repatriation of Indo-Fijians, defence of Fijian landowners' interests and declaration of Fiji as

Table 3: *Election Results in the Fijian Reserved Constituencies, 1992-1999*

	SVT	ANC [*] /PANU ^{**}	FAP	VLV	Nationalists
1992	66.5%	13.5% [*]	-	-	12.7%
1994	65.3	5.9% [*]	16.1	-	6.7
1999	38.0	9.6% ^{**}	17.9	19.4%	9.1

Notes: - indicates that the party did not stand in the elections.

^{*} All-National-Congress. ^{**} Party of National Unity. For other party initials, see table 1.

Sources: Fiji Elections Office *Elections '99*; '1994 Election Scoreboard', *Fiji Times* 28th February 1994, '1992 Election Scoreboard', *Fiji Times* 1st June 1992.

16 On the history of Western opposition to eastern chiefly dominance and the various Western-based regional parties, see Thomas, N, 'Regional Politics, Ethnicity and Custom in Fiji', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2, (1), 1990.

a Christian state.¹⁷ By the 1994 election, the Fijian vote had further splintered – with the emergence of the Fijian Association Party. Yet despite this fragmentation of the Fijian vote, the SVT managed to maintain a reasonably stable two-thirds of the Fijian vote at the elections of 1992 and 1994.

In 1999, this situation changed owing to a further splintering of Fijian voter loyalties. Comparing the 1999 results in the Fijian reserved constituencies with those in 1992 and 1994 (see Table 2), only a very slight increase is identifiable in support for the political predecessors of those parties who in 1999 forged an alliance with the FLP – the Party of National Unity (PANU) and the Fijian Association Party (FAP). PANU, like the earlier ANC, was sponsored by the Ba Provincial Council and led by Apisai Tora. It secured a slightly higher share of the Fijian vote than the ANC had obtained in 1994 (9.6%) – but still well below the latter's 1992 levels. The FAP's share of the vote was only very slightly above its 1994 levels. The extremist Fijian Nationalist Party's 9.1% of the Fijian vote was well below the 25% it had secured back in April 1977 and slightly down even on the 12.7% it had obtained in the first post-coup elections in 1992.

The key change in Fijian loyalties at the May 1999 polls was the swing in support to the Christian Democratic Party (*Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisito* – VLV). This newly formed party was backed by disgruntled ex-SVT members, as well as several leading Methodist ministers and trades unionists. Party campaign literature accused Rabuka of exploiting 'indigenous Fijian institutions for his own glorification, even to the extent of selling out on the rights and interests of Fijians'.¹⁸ The VLV secured just short of 20% of the Fijian vote, closely matching the decline in SVT support. Transfers of VLV preference votes provided the margin of victory for many non-SVT candidates, particularly in the area around the capital, Suva.

The SVT always played an ambivalent role as the executive upholder of chiefly authority and the 1990 constitution, particularly owing to the 'commoner' Rabuka's successful bid for the party leadership over Ro Lady Lala Mara – Ratu Mara's wife and in her own right, *Rokotui Dreketi*, the high chief of the confederacy of Burebasaga.¹⁹ Even in the 1994 election, the party was defeated in Ratu Mara's Lau constituency following a public rupture between Rabuka and the Lau chief. The VLV included several political figures who were close to Ratu Mara (including his daughter, Adi Koila Mara and his son-in-law, Ratu Epeli Ganilau, as well as party leader, Poseci Bune).²⁰

In the 1999 elections, Rabuka's SVT lost the support of chiefs, provincial councils and voters in Western and Northern Vanua Levu (Bua and Macuata), in Western Viti Levu (Ra,

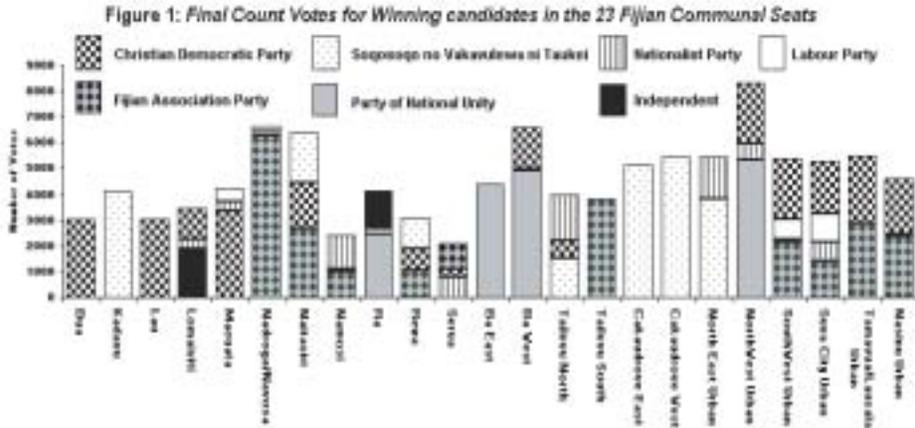
17 Norton, R, *Race and Politics in Fiji* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1977, Revised edition, 1990), pp. 111-120; Premdas, R, 'Constitutional Challenge: The Rise of Fijian Nationalism' *Pacific Perspective*, 9, (2), 1980, pp. 30-44.

18 VLV Campaign literature, cited in B V Lal, 'A Time to Change – The Fiji General Elections of 1999.' Canberra: Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific, Discussion Paper no 23, 1999, p. 14.

19 Fiji's traditional hierarchy is organised around three confederacies: Burebasaga, Kubuna and Tovata.

20 *Fiji Times*, editorial, 3 April 1999.

Ba East and West and Nadroga/Navosa) as well as in central and eastern Viti Levu (Naitasiri, Namosi and Rewa). In the 1992 and 1994 elections, the SVT had made a clean sweep of the country’s under-represented urban constituencies. In 1999, it was defeated in five out of the six urban seats. Rabuka’s earlier electoral appeal among Fijians as 1987 coup leader and standard bearer of indigenous Fijian interests was not matched by his new packaging as moderate ally of Jai Ram Reddy and architect of the 1997 constitution.²¹



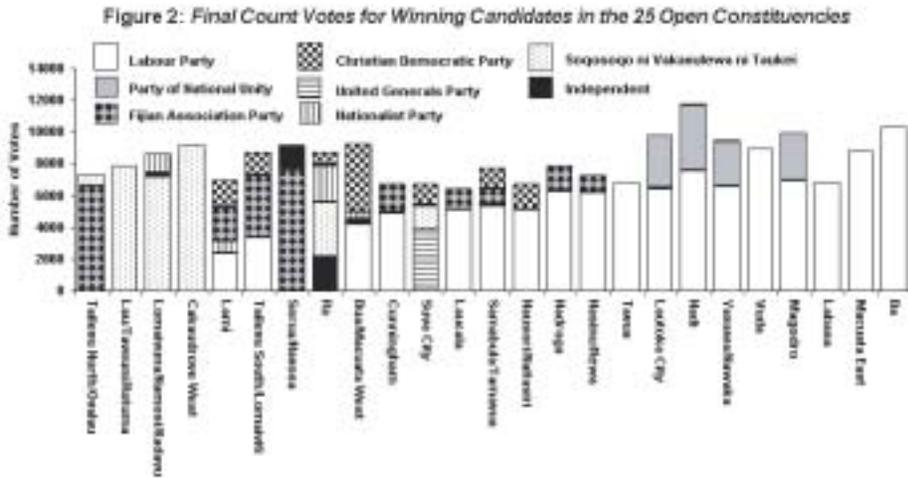
Source: Fiji Elections Office, Elections '99; Results by the Count, Suva, 1999.
Notes: first series at base of each column shows the winning party or candidate in each constituency. Above, transfers of preference votes are shown where these were required to push winning candidates over the 50%+1 threshold.

Nevertheless the SVT still obtained 38% of the first preference ethnic Fijian vote, leaving it as easily the largest of the Fijian parties. Under the first-past-the-post system the party might plausibly have gained 18 seats, rather than the eight it actually received. It was the new preferential voting system that worked strongly against the SVT, resulting in net loss ten seats (see Table 4). In both the Fijian communal and open constituencies, the opposition parties stacked their preference votes against the SVT. In most marginal contests, such preferences secured victories for opposition parties.

The columns in Figure 1 show the combination of first count and transferred preference votes for winning candidates in each of the 23 Fijian communal constituencies. The eventually victorious party is shown at the base of each column. Upper sections of columns show where additional preference votes were necessary for winning parties to obtain 50%+1 of the vote. The FAP was the greatest recipient of preference transfers in the Fijian communal constituencies, and the Christian Democrats were the largest donor. FAP victories relied strongly on preference transfers in Naitasiri, Namosi and in four of the urban constituencies, including the three constituencies around Suva (Suva City, Tamavua/Laucala and Nasinu).

21 Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei literally means ‘Party of the Native Constitution’ and so was defined by its relationship to the 1990 constitution.

With its 20% of the overall first count vote, the SVT secured only 11% of seats in parliament. Conversely, the FAP's 10% of the first preference vote gave it 16% of the seats.



Notes & sources: as for Figure 1.

Given the division of the Indian and Fijian seats among different parties, it was inevitable that the final result of the election would be decided in the 25 open constituencies. Under the former 1970 constitution this was also the case. The open-franchise cross-voting constituencies decided every election from 1970 to 1987.²² Results here were broadly consistent with a transfer of party loyalties in communal constituencies over to the open constituencies, but were complicated by the greater number of political parties.²³ Figure 2 shows the 25 open constituencies ranked from left to right in accordance with the ratio of Fijians to Indo-Fijians in each constituency's electorate – with constituencies on the right side possessing predominantly Indo-Fijian electorates, and those on the left largely ethnic Fijian electorates. The Fiji Labour Party (shown in white) was able to win, on the first count, five sugar cane belt constituencies with largely Indo-Fijian electorates shown towards the right of figure 2 (Ba, Macuata East, Labasa, Vuda and Tavua). Another thirteen constituencies secured by the FLP relied upon transfers of preference votes from ethnic Fijian political parties. In Western Viti Levu, PANU votes provided the margin of victory (Magrodo, Yasawa/Nawaka, Nadi and Lautoka – also all cane districts. Lautoka – the so-called 'sugar city' is where Viti Levu's largest sugar mill is located).

Eastern Viti Levu was a bigger challenge, owing to larger Fijian electorates and strong performances by the NFP in this part of the country in 1992 and 1994. In these constituencies,

22 In favour of either the Alliance or National Federation Party (or NFP/FLP coalition in 1987). Even in the September 1977 election, when the NFP was at its lowest ebb, the Alliance did not win any Indian reserved constituency. Similarly, no Fijian seat has ever been won by either the NFP or the FLP.

23 For a discussion on this issue, see Fraenkel, 'The Triumph', pp. 96-102.

the FLP was dependent on the transfer of preference votes mainly from the Fijian Association Party and the Christian Democrats (Nasinu/Rewa, Nausori/ Naitasiri, Samabula/Tamavua, Laucala, Cunningham, Tailevu South/Lomaiviti and Lami).²⁴ Given the division of the Fijian vote amongst five parties all able to secure 9%+ of the vote, the FLP's 66% of the Indian vote tended to give the party sizeable first count leads, even in a number of majority ethnic Fijian constituencies. Had Fijian parties formed a united front, or exchanged preferences with each other, the FLP would not have been able to win any of those contests shown towards the left hand side of figure 2. However, the FAP and PANU consistently put the FLP in second position in their preference lists submitted to the Elections Office, while the Christian Democrats, in many crucial cases, put the FLP in penultimate position, just above the SVT and its coalition allies, giving the FLP victory in any two-horse race at the final count.

The FLP, with advice from the Australian Labor Party, proved easily the most tactically adept organisation at exploiting this feature of the new electoral system. It received over half of the total open constituency transfer votes (53%). The final election result was the most disproportionate in Fiji's post-independence history, with wide discrepancies between the proportion of votes cast for each party and the number of seats each obtained. The FLP secured 32% of the overall first count vote (or 38% of the final count vote), but 52% of the seats in the *Bose Lawa* (Lower House).

III THE OPERATION OF THE PREFERENTIAL VOTING SYSTEM

The architects of the 1997 constitution expected the SVT-NFP-UGP coalition to fare considerably better at the polls. Rabuka's historic compromise over the constitution was widely upheld as having paved the way to an era of compromise and conciliation between leaders of the country's Indo-Fijian and ethnic Fijian political parties.²⁵ The two leaders were determined together to take the 'race card' out of Fiji's politics, in a new government with Rabuka figuring as PM with Reddy as Deputy PM. In the run up to the polls, Reddy appealed to Indian voters to forgive Rabuka for having led the coup back in 1987. Rabuka invited Jai Ram Reddy to address the Great Council of Chiefs – the first time an Indo-Fijian had ever appeared before the pre-eminent institution in the indigenous Fijian hierarchy.

Fiji's mid-1990's Constitutional Review Commission had devised a voting system intended to deliver significant rewards to just this type of inter-ethnic co-operation. The new AV system had been deliberately adopted, and indeed fine-tuned, to give political parties incentives to arrive at cross-ethnic deals. The need to engage in pre-election coalition-building by exchange of preferences was anticipated to provide 'electoral incentives to moderation

24 In addition, Nadroga, in Western Viti Levu was won by the FLP drawing on FAP preferences, while Bua/Macuata, in northeastern Vanua Levu, was also a majority Fijian constituency where Labour's margin of victory was provided by transfer of VLV preferences.

25 See, in particular, Lal, B V, *Another Way; The Politics of Constitutional Reform in Post-Coup Fiji* (Canberra: NCDS, ANU, 1998). Lal's post-election pamphlet describes the FLP's victory as 'hugely improbable' (Lal, B V, 'A Time to Change – The Fijian General Election of 1999', *Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific*, Discussion paper No 23, ANU, Canberra, p. 4).

and compromise'.²⁶ 'Only moderate parties with conciliatory politics will agree to trade preferences and be able to persuade their supporters to honour the agreement. The system therefore encourages the emergence of such parties', the commissioners argued, emphasising that 'for this reason alone ... we favour the adoption of AV'.²⁷ Indeed, the preferential voting system was intended not only to advantage the more moderate parties, but also to encourage such parties to adopt more conciliatory stances on ethnically divisive issues during the process of swapping preferences.²⁸ The resulting coalitions, it was claimed, would be likely to be more politically robust than those types of coalitions negotiated between parties aiming to form a government after an election.²⁹

Before the 1999 election, several commentators criticised, in principle, this intention to devise electoral rules aimed at favouring moderate parties, and penalising extremists. Shadow Finance Minister Wadan Narsey argued that 'the CRC unfortunately comes perilously close to arguing that minority groups should not have parliamentary representation if they are not 'moderate' towards other ethnic communities'.³⁰ The Citizen's Constitutional Forum's David Arms warned that this was a 'dangerous choice' because 'it tends to force such [extremist] groups to seek redress outside the democratic system', arguing that 'ethnically-based parties have a right to exist'.³¹ In the wake of the election, there were further criticisms of the voting system, particularly of the above-the-line party ticket option and the requirement that voters complete 75% of the ballot paper to record a valid vote.³² Prasad observed that 'the AV system did not work as it was thought it would', noting that where the system had 'fostered cross-community cooperation, this has been amongst elites; it has not occurred amongst people'.³³ Leading expert in Australia's use of AV in federal

26 Fiji CRC, 'The Fiji Islands; Towards a United Future' (Suva: Report of the Fiji Constitutional Review Commission, (eds) Reeves, P, Vakatora, T R & Lal, B V, Parliamentary Paper No 34, 1996), pp. 11-12, p. 312, p. 317.

27 Fiji CRC, 'The Fiji Islands', pp. 316-317; see also B V Lal, 'Fiji Constitutional Review Commission; Recommendations for a New Electoral System', in B V Lal & P Larmour (eds), *Electoral Systems in Divided Societies; The Fiji Constitutional Review* (Canberra: N.C.D.S., Australian National University, 1997), pp. 71-72; Lal, *Another Way*, p. 76.

28 CRC, *The Fiji Islands*, p. 316.

29 CRC, *The Fiji Islands*, p. 325.

30 Narsey, W, 'Sound Principles, but Weak Advice on Electoral System', *Fiji Times*, 1 November 1996.

31 Arms, D G, 'Fiji's New Voting System; A Critique with Counter-proposals', in B V Lal & P Larmour (eds), *Electoral Systems in Divided Societies; The Fiji Constitutional Review* (Canberra: NCDS, ANU, 1997), p. 99 and p. 111.

32 Williams, E and Saksena, K, *Labour's Victory; Electoral Behaviour and Opinion in Fiji*, USP, Suva, 1999, p. 20, pp. 144-145; Narsey, W, 'When Mistakes are Repeated', *Fiji Times*, 14 September, 2000; Narsey, W, 'The 1997 Constitution: The Baby and the Bathwater', *Daily Post*, 13 March 2001; see also the critical comments of former Constitutional Review Commissioner, Tomasi Vakatora regarding 'above the line' voting (*Fiji Sun*, 12 September 2000).

33 Prasad, S, 'Fiji's 1999 general elections: Outcomes and Prospects', in A Haroon Akram-Lodhi (ed), *Confronting Fiji Futures*, 2000, p. 69.

elections, Professor Joan Rydon, argued that the export of the system to Fiji had produced 'farcical results'.³⁴

Even if one accepts the structuring of electoral rules to disadvantage ethnic extremist parties, it is highly questionable whether the AV system effectively accomplished this task. It was not only 'moderate parties with conciliatory policies' that submitted lists of preferences. All parties and candidates did so, including even the extremist Fijian Nationalist Party. Indeed, they were forced to do so by the electoral rules regarding above-the-line voting. Any party that refused to submit such lists to the Elections Office was denied an above-the-line party symbol on the ballot paper, effectively depriving it of perhaps 90% of likely votes.³⁵ Instead of advantaging ethnic moderates or encouraging the formulation of conciliatory policies, the most marked characteristic of inter party preference-swapping was a coordinated effort to topple the former governing party, along with its new coalition allies.

The adoption of *compulsory*, rather than *optional*, preferential voting was deemed necessary to oblige voters to support candidates of a different ethnicity. Voters were compelled to rank 75% of candidates on the ballot paper to avoid recording an invalid vote. Yet this obligatory ranking requirement in fact diminished the likelihood that lower-order candidates reflected any genuine ideological affinity, or that the obligation to cast votes for such candidates would underpin the hoped-for process of inter-communal conciliation. In any case, 9 out of 10 voters opted for the simpler 'party ticket' option by recording 'above-the-line' votes and effectively delegated the decision about the ranking of candidates to party officials. For parties submitting lists of preferences, the same logic of compulsion applied. Parties were obliged to rank 100% of candidates. In some cases, parties made deals with each other over such rankings. But, even in these cases, there was no evidence of the anticipated corollary of such accords – compromises over ethnically fractious issues, such as land leasing legislation or the racial composition of the cabinet. Both types of compulsion - one effecting voters and the other effecting parties - encouraged the submission of relatively arbitrary preference rankings.

In their lists of preferences, parties typically listed themselves and close allies first, followed by all the independents, mavericks and no-hope politicians and, finally, in the lowest positions, they placed those parties thought to pose the greatest electoral threat.³⁶ The tactic boosted the potential for highly erratic results. Independent Indo-Fijian moneylender, George Shui Raj, for example, was in 4th position in the Ra open constituency on the first count with only 14.7% of the vote (see Table 4). But most other parties listed him as second preference, precisely because he was thought to have little chance of victory and,

34 Rydon, J, 'Fiji and the Export of Electoral Systems', *Fiji Times*, 9 November 2000, reprinted in *Australian Parliamentary Review*, (1), Autumn 2001.

35 The extremist Nationalist Party did request that it be allowed not to submit preferences, but was told by Elections Supervisor, Walter Rigamoto, that if it chose not to do so then no Nationalist Party symbol would be printed on the 'above-the-line' section on ballot papers (personal communication from Mr Rigamoto).

36 For a detailed study, see Fraenkel, J, 'The Alternative Vote System in Fiji; Electoral Engineering or Ballot-Rigging?', *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol 39, No 2, 2001.

Table 4: *Constituencies where First-Count Leaders were displaced at the Final Count*

	First Count leader		Eventual Winner		Number of	
	Party	% 1st Count Vote	Party	% Vote at 1st count	Initial Position	Counts
<u>Open Seats</u>						
Ra	FLP	26.3%	IND	14.7%	4th	5
Nadroga	SVT	44.5	FLP	43.6	2nd	3
Bua/Macuata West	SVT	38.4	FLP	27.6	3rd	5
Tailevu South/ Lomaiviti	SVT	39.3	FLP	21.4	2nd	6
Lami	SVT	34.4	FLP	19.0	2nd	9
<u>Fijian Reserved Seats</u>						
Macuata Fijian Provincial	SVT	46.0	VLV	42.3	2nd	3
Namosi Fijian Provincial	SVT	42.8	FAP	41.9	2nd	3
Rewa Fijian Provincial	NVTLP	39.1	FAP	20.5	3rd	3
Serua Fijian Provincial	SVT	35.0	NVTLP	23.0	2nd	5
Tailevu North Fijian Provincial	FAP	45.6	SVT	20.0	3rd	3
SouthWest Fijian Urban	SVT	41.9	FAP	22.6	2nd	5
Suva City Fijian Urban	SVT	40.3	FAP	15.3	3rd	4
Tamavua/ Laucala Fijian Urban	SVT	43.6	FAP	28.7	2nd	2
Nasinu Fijian Urban	SVT	33.3	FAP	25.9	2nd	5
<u>General Reserved Seats</u>						
Suva City General	UGP	45.1	IND	30.4	2nd	3
Northeast General	UGP	46.5	IND	37.1	2nd	4

Source : Election '99; Results by the Count, Elections Office, Suva, Fiji.

Notes : for party initials, see table 1.

as an independent, would pose little threat inside parliament. At the fifth and final count, Raj took the seat. This was scarcely an example of the preferential voting system favouring the genuinely 'most preferred' candidate. In Ra, it was rather the candidate to whom other parties were *most indifferent* who leapfrogged to victory at the final count.

The compulsory preferential voting system, argued Enid Lakeman, 'may involve party combinations that are quite incongruous and dictated by nothing more than political opportunism'.³⁷ Like many other countries, Fiji has a history of bizarre electoral alliances forged between odd bedfellows. In April 1977, the largely Indo-Fijian-backed National Federation Party, in its eagerness to split the vote for the mainstream Fijian Alliance Party, went so far as to pay the deposits for a number of candidates for the extremist Fijian Nationalist Party, despite the latter's support for repatriation of Indo-Fijians.³⁸ In the early 1990s, Rabuka forged a temporary alliance with his Labour-leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, who had been a minister in the government Rabuka had deposed in the 1987 coup.³⁹

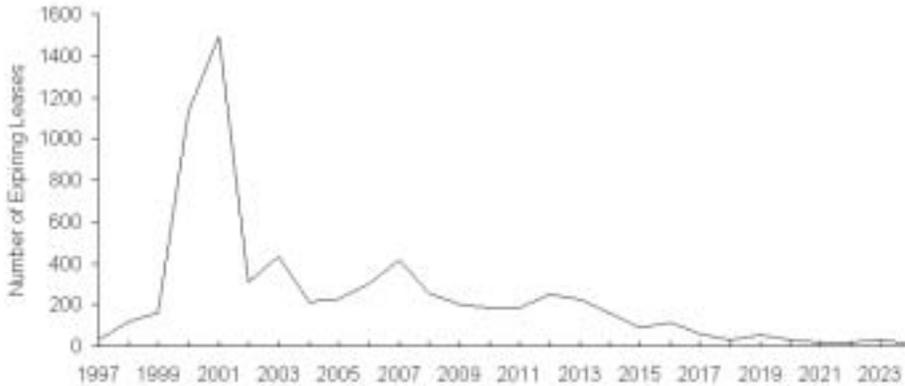
37 Lakeman, E, *How Democracies Vote: A Study of Electoral Systems*, Faber & Faber, 1955, (1970), p. 70.

38 The NFP paid the deposits of a number of Fijian Nationalist Party candidates in the April 1977 elections: see Premdas, R, 'Elections in Fiji: The Restoration of Balance in September 1977', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1980, p. 195, p. 196n.

39 See Lal, *Another Way*, pp. 32-34.

Compulsory preferential voting strengthens the potential for such bizarre accords simply because parties are stuck with *de facto* alliances unless they deliberately forge them. Any party that positions party X last ensures that party Y will win any two-horse race with X because Y must, necessarily, be placed in a higher position. The system eases the way to the

Figure 3: Expiry of Indo-Fijian Cane Farm Leases under the 1976 Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act



Source: Native Land Trust Board

formation of loose groupings of otherwise fractious opposition parties who, under a first-past-the-post system, would be unable to arrive at the required common policies that are often a pre-requisite for seat-sharing deals.

The opposition People's Coalition was able to take advantage of these anti-incumbent pressures in the new voting system. The three pre-election allies (the FLP, FAP and PANU) made deals to exchange second preferences, but without any explicit accompanying deals on party policies. The collective goal of dislodging Rabuka's government proved sufficient. PANU was the party of the Western Viti Levu Ba province's landowning indigenous Fijian chiefs – those who secured sizeable rents from the lease of lands to Indian farmers in the sugar cane districts.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most controversial issue in Fiji's late 1990s politics was the expiry of leases under the 1976 Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (ALTA). Thousands of Indian farmers faced eviction upon expiry of their leases during 1999-2000 (figure 3). The FLP favoured renewal of ALTA, whereas Ba landowners had been at the forefront of demands for non-renewal – followed either by indigenous farmers moving onto their ancestral lands or passage of legislation permitting shorter leases at higher rents.⁴¹ Yet no explicit agreement was struck between these coalition allies on this contentious issue. Once in office, government policies on land legislation, as well as steps to assist beleaguered Indian cane farmers, stirred up opposition from the re-born *Taukei* (indigenous people's) movement. Land issues proved a rallying cry during George Speight's putsch of May-July 2000.

40 Its President, Ratu Sairusi Nagagavoka, is the largest landowner in Ba province.

41 Report of the NLTB Task Force on ALTA, cited in *Fiji Times*, 24 February 1997.

Most controversially, the transfer of preferences from the ethno-nationalist Christian Democratic Party (VLV) provided the margin of victory for the FLP in five open seats – giving the party its overall majority (figure 2). VLV President Ratu Josaia Rayawa explained that his party ‘from the word ‘go’ did not accept the 1997 liberal constitution. We deplored it from the day it was promulgated’.⁴² His party favoured turning Fiji into a ‘Christian state’ and a ban on Sunday trading – policies which were scarcely acceptable to the Indo-Fijian community, 95% of whom are Hindu or Muslim. In some constituencies, the VLV nevertheless came to a deal with Labour, and the two parties agreed to exchange second preference votes. In others, the FLP secured victory relying on VLV transfers simply because the Christian Democrats listed Rabuka’s SVT last. In Lami and Tailevu South/ Lomaiviti – both of which ended up as two horse races between the FLP and SVT at the final count – the FLP emerged victorious, at the final count, drawing on transfers of 5th and 7th preferences from the VLV. What mattered was that the FLP was positioned somewhere, indeed anywhere, above the SVT on VLV preference lists.

Pre-election accords regarding transfer of preference votes did not make the People’s Coalition robust and durable. It had begun to unravel within days of the election. As leader of the party that had secured an outright majority on its own account, Mahendra Chaudhry announced his decision to assume the premiership, while indigenous Fijian FLP member, Dr Tupeni Baba became Deputy PM.⁴³ Under the 1990 constitution, the position of PM had been reserved for an ethnic Fijian. Chaudhry’s unexpected decision led immediately to Nationalist protests against an ‘Indian take-over’ and a revolt amongst the FLP’s coalition allies led by the FAP leader, Adi Kuini Speed. Only the personal intervention of Fiji’s President, Ratu Mara, halted the dispute.⁴⁴ The ethnicity of the Prime Minister, predictably a controversial issue, had apparently not been settled at the time when People’s Coalition allies agreed to exchange preference votes.

The People’s Coalition quickly fragmented during its year in office. While leaders of parties allied to the Labour Party took up ministerial portfolios, backbenchers and grass roots supporters veered towards opposition. After the election, PANU’s General Secretary, Apisai Tora – who had been defeated by Labour’s candidate in Nadi – became the leader of the militant *Taukei* movement. Speight’s take-over of parliament was timed to coincide with a *Taukei* march, led by Apisai Tora, through the streets of Suva on May 19th. Many of those

42 Featured in Mesake Koroi’s column in *Fiji Sunday Post*, 25 March 2001.

43 The issue was predictably controversial. In the SVT’s original submission to the mid-1990s Constitutional Review Commission it had stated that ‘even if Fijians were to concede tomorrow to have a complete common roll election system, that will not change the average person’s belief that as *taukei*, they should control the governance of this country. Secular political ideologies and principles do not because of their admirable qualities of purity or moral purpose necessarily dissolve or obliterate cultural, religious and behavioural differences, that compel people to identify together as one people and to emphasise these distinctive characteristics as against other people’ (cited in Lal, pp. 143-154). The SVT’s eventual agreement to introduce the new constitution had clearly been based on the conviction that they would be re-elected.

44 Sharpham, J, *Rabuka of Fiji*, Central Queensland University Press, 2000, pp. 292-293; Keith Reid, R, ‘Chaudhry: Man in the Hot Seat’, *Fiji Business magazine*, June 1999.

marchers subsequently joined the insurgents inside parliament. FAP leader, Adi Kuini Speed, took up the post of Deputy Prime Minister. But prominent Fijian chiefs from the province of Tailevu challenged her leadership of their party in the law courts and kept up a year-long barrage of opposition to the Chaudhry government. Eight out of the eleven FAP MPs crossed the floor on the afternoon of Speight's take-over.⁴⁵ One of these – Ratu Timoci Silatolu – became Speight's right hand man. The final ethnic Fijian party allied to Labour was the Christian Democrats (VLV). Two of its three members of parliament joined Chaudhry's cabinet (including Mara's daughter). The third, at first, joined Speight's camp and later entered Qarase's 'interim' administration. Rank-and-file VLV activists were strongly represented among dissident opponents of Chaudhry's regime.

Many of the more marginal constituencies which fell to the 'People's Coalition' in 1999 were in the same areas where people subsequently rallied behind Speight's take-over of parliament. Lami, Tailevu South/Lomaiviti and Bua/ Macuata West were all majority-Fijian open constituencies, secured by the Fiji Labour Party in 1999 drawing on preference transfers from Fijian parties (see Figure 2). Fijians from these same areas were, a year later, strongly represented amidst the crowds that flocked to support the putsch instigators inside Fiji's parliamentary complex and areas where, during the later stages of the crisis, roadblocks were established and police stations seized.⁴⁶ In the eastern constituencies of Naitasiri, Lomaiviti, Rewa and Tailevu North/Ovalau, strong protest votes in May 1999 led to the defeat of candidates representing Rabuka's SVT by parties allied to the FLP or independents (see Figure 1). These areas were also focal points of rebel activity. Speight's home province of Tailevu, alongside the neighbouring provinces of Naitasiri and Rewa, provided the hard core of coup supporters – as can be seen from police records covering those arrested in the eventual clampdown on the rebel encampment at the Kalabu Fijian School on the outskirts of Suva.⁴⁷ On the island of Ovalau, villagers launched an assault on the Pacific Fishing Company factory in early July and burnt the local Masonic Lodge Polynesia to the ground.⁴⁸

45 These MPs tried to strike a deal with Speight, but were rebuffed by the would-be coup leader (*Fiji Sun*, 15 August 2000).

46 Several of the early opposition rallies against the Chaudhry government were held in Lami, an urban settlement next to Suva, and, during the spate of incidents around the country in early July, a pro-Speight roadblock was established at nearby Wailekutu. At the same time, many of Macuata's chiefs were rallying to support a mutiny at the army's Sukunaivalu Barracks, outside Labasa. The local police station and telephone exchange were also seized by rebels. Provincial chiefs from both Bua and Macuata sent delegations to parliament in the early days of the crisis, but, during the later stages, Bua's provincial chiefs opposed the rebels operating out of Labasa, even setting up roadblocks at Nabouwalu in defiance of rebel activity (on Bua's shifting allegiances, compare *Daily Post*, 9 June 2000 and *Daily Post*, Letters, 5 July 2000). Macuata East and Labasa had majority Indo-Fijian electorates, but the existence of a strong protest vote by Fijian voters in these areas can be seen in the VLV's victory in both the Macuata and Bua Fijian communal seats..

47 Speight's supporters arrested at Kalabu, list kindly provided by Ricardo Morris, *Fiji Sun*. Of the 415 listed, all but seven listed their occupation as 'unemployed', 187 were from Tailevu (mainly the northern parts, such as Speight's home area of Wainibuka and Dawasamu), 60 were from neighbouring Naitasiri. 356 were men and 58 were women.

48 Lomaiviti returned an independent MP, Simone Kaitani, while in Naitasiri, the FAP's Peceli Rinakama and in Rewa, the FAP's Ratu Timoci Silatolu, secured seats. All three became close allies

The same protest vote which had earlier defeated the former Rabuka-led government was quickly turned against the Labour-led People's Coalition administration.

Fiji's new electoral system was poorly equipped to contain these pressures. Constituency design discriminated against urban voters, party officials were granted too much power over the disposition of 'above-the-line' preference votes and the provisions for vote transfers in the new electoral system gave the FLP an artificially strong mandate.

IV THE 1999 ELECTION UNDER ALTERNATIVE VOTING SYSTEMS

It is worth exploring what Fiji's election outcome would have been under an alternative system – well known for strengthening the political influence of smaller parties and often requiring the post-election formation of multi-party coalitions in order to form governments – proportional representation.

Speculation concerning the likely results of the May 1999 election under an alternative electoral system is fraught with difficulties. Had Fiji's 1999 election been organised under a first-past-the-post system, for example, different political constellations may have arisen. There would have been stronger incentives for smaller parties with little chance of winning seats to stand aside in favour of larger parties with similar political platforms, but with a greater chance of victory. There would have been a greater disincentive to splitting the vote amongst like-minded parties. Under list system proportional representation, parties would pick up minority votes in areas where they would not otherwise stand candidates. Using first preference votes under the preferential voting system as an indication of likely voting patterns under other electoral systems may, therefore, be misleading. Despite such difficulties, however, it is worth examining the plausible election result had voting, party organisation and campaign strategy remained the same, while the electoral system changed.

Table 5 shows the number of seats actually obtained by each party in 1999 under the alternative or preferential voting system (row 1), as well as the plausible number each might have obtained had the election been conducted on a first-past-the-post basis (row 2). The final row uses the percentage distribution of the votes only in the open seats to calculate the possible 1999 election result under list system proportional representation. There are several interesting features of the possible outcome of the 1999 elections under these two electoral systems.

Under both alternative systems, the Fiji Labour Party would still have emerged as the largest party and, in all probability, have formed a government. However, the FLP would not have had an absolute majority under either the first-past-the-post system or under proportional representation systems.⁴⁹ Proportional representation, unlike the opportunistic liaisons forged through official controlled preference-swapping before the polls, would have rendered the government's majority heavily dependent upon its coalition allies.

of Speight. The SVT did manage to retain Tailevu north, but only because of preference transfers from the Nationalist Party candidate Iliesa Duvuloco, again one of the key instigators of the putsch.

49 It should be noted that, under FPP, there would have been a considerably stronger disincentive to the splintering of the Fijian vote among numerous parties, or greater incentives for smaller parties

Table 5: *Hypothetical Number of Members of Parliament under Alternative Electoral Systems*

	FLP	NFP	FAP	SVT	VLV	PANU	Others
1. Alternative Vote	37	0	11	8	3	4	8
2. First Past the Post	34	0	6	18	2	4	7
3. Proportional Representation	24	11	8	14	7	3	4

Source: Elections Office, *Elections '99*.

Notes: for full party titles, see text. First-past-the-post results calculated with reference to first count leaders. Proportional representation results calculated using the percentage distribution of votes for parties in the open constituencies, with no threshold.

The counterpart of the electoral system's promotion of FLP and FAP victories owing to preference transfers was the demolition of the post-May 1999 opposition parties. The SVT gained only eight seats, while the NFP secured none at all. Those not on the government benches were almost all ethnic Fijian members.⁵⁰ Opposition politics quickly became characterised by a concerted effort to bring together dissident Fijians, including some nominally allied to the FLP, in an all-Fijian united front against an Indian-led government.⁵¹ Straight after the election, former PM Rabuka responded by resigning his seat and taking up the position of chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs, rather than leading the emasculated opposition inside parliament. Within a month of the May 1999 polls, the SVT's new leader, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola had formed a shadowy committee aimed at destabilising the People's Coalition government.⁵² Annihilation of the opposition made the resort to extra-parliamentary action more likely. Under a proportional representation system, Fiji would have had a stronger opposition, and one composed of a mixture of Indian and ethnic Fijian members.

There are no neat 'electoral engineering' solutions to ethnic rivalry in Fiji. Two coups, first in 1987 and then again in 2000, have been mounted against governments with little

to stand aside in favour of larger parties. Hence, Fijian parties would probably have secured a larger number of the open constituencies.

50 Independent member, George Shui Raj, was the single Indian member on the opposition benches.

51 See, in particular, one of Fiji's monthly magazines, *The Review*, which throughout the Peoples Coalition's year in office, documented efforts by the opposition to unite Fijian parties in opposition to Mahendra Chaudhry's leadership – a strategy which, of necessity, would mean the splitting away of some ethnic Fijian members of the Fiji Labour Party. According to Australian High Commissioner, Susan Boyd, this strategy was on the verge of success just before the putsch, with Deputy Prime Minister and ethnic Fijian FLP member Dr Tupeni Baba about to mount a leadership challenge against Chaudhry (see G Dobell, 'The Strange Saga of Speight's Seige in Suva', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 15, (2), 2000, p. 176).

52 See the comments of Jone Dakuvula, in *Fiji Times*, 25 May 2000, *The Review*, June 2000.

direct electoral support from indigenous Fijian voters.⁵³ In such a context, the preferable option is to put in place an electoral system that is as transparent and straightforward as possible – one in which the distribution of seats inside parliament is closely related to the fraction of votes secured by each party. Instead, the mid-1990's Constitutional Review Commission tried to artificially promote moderation, and penalise ethnic extremist parties. This only drove the Fijian extremists underground, and weakened the parliamentary will to tackle underlying inflammatory issues. Fiji would be better served by eliminating reserved franchise constituencies, jettisoning the preferential voting system and opting instead for an electoral system that leaves no room for claims that either Indo-Fijians or ethnic Fijians are under-represented in parliament – proportional representation.

53 The 1987 election victory of the FLP-NFP coalition, relied on a clean sweep of Indian reserved constituencies as well as all the majority Indian national constituencies and the highly marginal Suva City constituency – on the basis of an unusually low 60% turnout. Nevertheless, the coalition did secure 9.6% of the Fijian vote in 1987, considerably more than the 1.9% it obtained in 1999.