



# 2018 Fijian Elections

Insights on the Electoral System, Institutions, Laws and Processes





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Laws and Processes.

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Nilesh Lal

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# Foreword

Elections, particularly in divided societies can be a tricky exercise, often including suspicions by the losing candidates and parties. While understandable, such suspicions often arise because candidates and party officials are misguided or oblivious about the laws relating to the electoral processes. To avoid suspicions and minimize post-election wrangling, it is important that contestants and the voters alike are adequately informed about the electoral process of the country.

Fiji's 2013 Constitution and related electoral legal framework introduced substantial changes to Fiji's electoral system and processes, marking departure from Fiji's previous constitutions since gaining independence in 1970. These changes brought about also new expectations, anxieties and at times, also suspicions.

Nilesh Lal's series of articles published in the Saturday edition of 'The Fiji Times' in the lead-up to the 2018 elections were an attempt by an active representative of the Fijian civil society to provide up to dated information about key issues affecting Fiji's elections to the contestants as well as to the general public. The articles discussed issues such as the electoral system, the election threshold, ballot design, voter turnout, gender parity, caretaker conventions, election monitoring, and media monitoring. Overall, Nilesh Lal should be commended for providing analyses of those issues, explaining number of crucial concepts of Fijian elections to the readers. As such, it was considered beneficial to compile and publish these articles in a book format, available also electronically, for wider use and dissemination amongst policy makers, researches and the general public.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is grateful to the European Union for the support to the "Upholding Citizens' Constitutional Rights for

Democratic Consolidation in Fiji” (C3-Fiji Project) making it possible for us to publish this book in collaboration with Dialogue Fiji. We are also appreciative of the Fijian Elections Office for their commitment throughout the project. Publications like this are important for developing democracies like Fiji as it may help ironing out misunderstandings and misgivings about electoral institutions and processes that persist amongst electorates. Indeed, ‘2018 Fiji Elections: Insights on Electoral System, Institutions, Laws and Processes’ is a useful read and a valuable resource for those advocating for free, fair and credible elections in Fiji.

*Leena Rikkilä Tamang  
Regional Director  
International IDEA, Asia & the Pacific*

# Preface

Fiji made wholesale changes to its constitutional and legislative framework with the promulgation of the 2013 constitution. The new constitution and subsequent legislation established a new electoral system. Some of the key changes included the adoption of an Open List Proportional Representation system, the D'Hondt system of apportioning seats, a single multi-member constituency and a single national roll, single day voting, and a 5% election threshold.

These changes were a significant departure from the previous electoral arrangements which were based on majoritarian/plurality systems, with multiple constituencies, ethnically-based voter rolls, and multiple voting days. Since electoral systems are one of the easiest political institutions to manipulate, any radical changes to electoral frameworks are often viewed with suspicion, especially in divided-societies with yet to be consolidated democracies, like Fiji.

In the Fijian context, it was also observed that electoral contestants, social media commentators, and electoral officials, on occasion, displayed lack of knowledge of various aspects of the new electoral arrangements and this contributed to a high degree of misinformation and misunderstanding about different elements of the electoral framework, such as ballot design, allocation of seats, election threshold, etc. amongst the electorate.

In order to address this problem, Dialogue Fiji, in collaboration with its international and local partners, developed and conducted a series of voter education workshops in the central, western and northern divisions of Fiji. These workshops were aimed at educating Fijian voters on the new electoral system and processes, the rationale behind their adoption, and on the international best practices, norms and standards for the conduct of credible elections.

The lack of trust and confidence in electoral systems, processes and institutions is a major source of political instability, which is exacerbated in divided societies. It also directly impinges on the legitimacy of elected governments, and consequently on peace prospects in a country. Civil society organisations have a crucial role to play in rebuilding public trust and confidence in democratic institutions and processes, and in the consolidation of democracy in post-conflict contexts. To achieve this, CSOs need to become independent and credible voices on key elements of democracy, including electoral matters.

The voter education workshops that Dialogue Fiji conducted, therefore, also sought to build the electorate's trust and confidence in election processes and institutions which we found was alarmingly low. This was done by increasing people's understanding of election standards and norms, providing comparative analysis, and providing independent and evidence based responses to people's concerns relating to various aspects of electoral laws and processes, including the contentious elements.

In order to increase our coverage of the electorate, we decided to use mass media channels to further our voter education work and provide independent commentaries and analyses on different aspects of our national election. We are grateful to The Fiji Times for providing space in their popular Saturday editions during the months of September and October 2018 to publish a series of articles that sought to achieve this objective.

These articles were very well received, and we continued to receive requests for copies of the articles following the election. The fact that Fiji will hold its next elections in two short years, the need for continuous education, discussion and debate on our electoral systems and processes, the need for electoral reforms to strengthen



elections and achieve our electoral objectives and the continued currency of most of the issues raised in The Fiji Times articles, we are publishing this booklet for the benefit of stakeholders and the general public.

*Nilesh Lal*  
*Executive Director*  
*Dialogue Fiji*

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| FEO     | Fijian Elections Office                 |
| AV      | Alternative Voting                      |
| PR      | Proportional Representation             |
| FPTP    | First-Past-The-Post                     |
| EMB     | Electoral Management Body               |
| NFP     | National Federation Party               |
| SODELPA | Social Democratic Liberal Party         |
| MOG     | Multinational Observer Group            |
| CSO     | Civil Society Organisation              |
| IEOM    | International Election Observer Mission |
| DEOM    | Domestic Election Observer Mission      |
| NDI     | National Democratic Institute           |

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# CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1

# Our Electoral System

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Electoral Systems are one of the most important political institutions. The choice of electoral system is a critical institutional decision for any democracy and has profound implications on future politics, quality of democracy, and broader governance issues for the country.

Fiji's choice of electoral system is entrenched in its constitution which some commentators have described as problematic. However, there is a strong rationale for entrenching electoral systems in the constitution. Arguably, the electoral system is the easiest political institution to manipulate and it is important there are safeguards against an unscrupulous majority changing it to ensure an electoral advantage.

Since independence, Fiji has experimented with four different electoral systems, under each of our constitutional orders. For most of our post-independence history, we have used plurality or majoritarian systems; First-past-the-post (FPTP) under the 1970 and 1990 constitutions and Alternative Voting (AV) systems under the 1997 constitution. The 2013 constitution ensured a departure towards the Proportional Representation (PR) family with the adoption of the Open List PR system.

List PR is the most popular electoral system in the world today. According to International IDEA, 37.3% of 217 countries use List PR. As the name suggests, PR is based on the premise that the allocation of seats in the legislature is proportionate to the votes received by a party. The strongest arguments for PR derive from the way the system avoids the anomalous results of plurality/majority system and is able to better produce a representative legislature. In unconsolidated democracies like ours where deep societal divisions exist, PR systems can lead to the inclusion of all significant groups in the legislature which can be critical for democratic consolidation, building social cohesion and increasing legitimacy of parliament and the government.

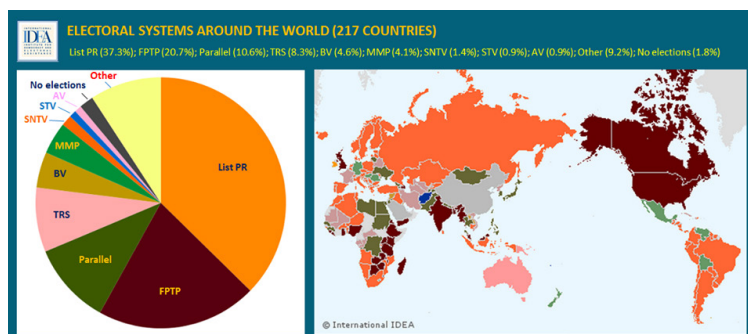


Figure 1: Electoral Systems Around the World. Source: International IDEA.

An electoral system that does not accommodate both minority and majority interest will foster divisions in society. Therefore, power-sharing and inclusivity has been an important objective of electoral system design in Fiji's case since the 1997 constitution. However, despite the best intentions of the architects of the 1997 constitution, the experience under the AV system was not very positive, although the blame cannot be entirely attributed to the electoral system. By 2006, we essentially had a two-party system, polarised along ethnic lines, with a growing trend of smaller parties merging into one of the two larger (ethnic-based) parties. We are yet to see power-sharing and inclusive political governance under the new PR system.

## Advantages of PR systems

The following are the key strengths of the PR system:

- Translates votes proportionally into seats won. Seat bonuses for larger parties are minimised and smaller parties are likely to get representation in the legislature.
- Gives rise to very few wasted votes (especially when the thresholds are low) and almost all votes go towards electing a candidate. This impacts positively on voter turnout.
- Increases minority parties' prospects of gaining access to representation. PR systems make it possible for parties with even a small percentage of the vote to gain representation in the legislature. For example, the NFP polled 5.5% of the total vote in 2014 and gained three seats in parliament. Under the previous majoritarian system and its arrangements, they would not have won a single seat for the same number of total votes.
- Encourages parties to campaign beyond the areas where they have a stronghold. For example, under previous systems, certain parties had "safe" constituencies where they were certain to win. The other parties did not often consider it worthwhile to attempt to build electoral support in these areas. Under the PR system, even the votes from areas where a party is electorally weak matter, because they all contribute towards the party's aggregate and its eventual share of seats.
- Leads to greater continuity and stability of policy. There is evidence from west European jurisdictions that PR systems correlate positively to government longevity, voter participation and economic performance. As opposed to a two-party system and the consequent zero sum equation, an inclusive coalition government will have greater longevity.
- Makes power-sharing between parties and interest groups more visible. In the event that no party wins an absolute majority, they are forced to form alliances with different parties which brings about political negotiation and consensus decisions that are taken for the common good, and by a more inclusive cross section of the society.

## Disadvantages of PR systems

PR systems are criticised for the following:

- Can provide platforms for extremist parties. With lower thresholds, parties with extreme ideologies and policies can get elected into the legislature, and even become part of coalition governments.
- Can lead to governing coalitions which have insufficient common ground in terms of either their policies or their support base. For instance, a governing coalition of either SODELPA and Fiji First, or SODELPA and NFP, will find it extremely difficult to reconcile their diametrically opposed policies, political stances, or demands of their support bases.
- Can result in small parties wielding a disproportionate amount of power. If a large party needs to rely on a small party to form government, the smaller party that has the support of only a small proportion of voters, can effectively veto any proposal or political decision that comes from the larger party.
- Can lead to legislative gridlocks and inhibit ability of a governing coalition to implement coherent policies.

## Conclusion

Given Fiji's history of ethnic division and voting on ethnic lines, the choice of PR is a reasonable one. There are strong imperatives for encouraging more inclusivity and consensus building in the legislature in the Fijian context. A particularly interesting outcome for Fiji would be if no party is able to win an absolute majority in the next elections. That will be the ultimate litmus test in Fiji's experiment with PR systems.

*This article was first published in the Fiji Times on 29 September, 2018.*





# CHAPTER 2

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CHAPTER 2

# Election Threshold

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Election Threshold is the minimum share of the total vote that a political party or independent candidate needs to achieve to become entitled to representation in the legislature. Fiji's 2013 constitution requires that a contesting party needs to achieve 5% of the total votes cast, to be considered eligible for a share of parliamentary seats. In 2014, four political parties and two independents were unable to achieve this threshold which effectively meant that their 35,727 cumulative votes were “wasted” and did not contribute to any representation in parliament. As this equated to 7% of total votes cast, there were calls made that the threshold was excessive and should be reviewed for future elections.

The former Electoral Commission in their 2014 Annual Report recommended that section 53(3) of the constitution which provides for the threshold be deleted arguing that votes of all citizens must be respected. The commission argued that the 5% threshold, by discarding the choices of a significant proportion of voters, was essentially violating the all important “one person, one vote, one value” principle. Being considerate of the fact that it was tremendously difficult to amend the constitution, the commission further suggested that if it was objectionable to the political actors to totally abolish the threshold, a compromise would be to consider lowering the threshold to 3.5%.

The practice of having a prescribed threshold under Proportional Representation systems is not rare. Many countries that use the PR prescribe a threshold with some as high as 10%, as in the case of Turkey. Israel and Holland, which use a single national constituency like us, have thresholds of 5% and 0.67% respectively. Commentators have argued that the impact of a threshold is compounded in single national constituencies due to the large numbers of voters.

The argument for having a threshold emanates from the consideration that the inclusion of too many parties will lead to legislative gridlock in parliament or a weak, unstable government. This can effectively thwart coherent and visionary policy making as preservation of the government becomes an overriding concern of the ruling party. Take the following hypothetical scenario if we were to abolish the threshold completely. In the upcoming elections, no party wins by an outright majority, and a party with 24 seats is forced to form government with 2 parties which have 1 seat each (having received 2% of the votes each). The two smaller parties in the coalition would be able to exert a disproportionate amount of influence on policy and decision making. This would compromise the principle of majority rule that is fundamental to democracy, since a party with only 2% of the total vote would effectively dictate policy and political governance of the country.

On the other hand, a key reason for choosing the PR system for Fiji was to bring about power sharing and inclusion of a greater number of parties in the legislature. This followed the negative experience Fiji had with AV system, that had led to the creation of a two-party system, with the two major parties based on ethnic support bases. The electoral objective of power sharing and inclusiveness places value on the importance of a pluralism of ideologies and representation, which are desired outcomes in a divided society like Fiji which also exhibits the tendency to quickly slide into ethnic politics. The rationale is that having a multiplicity of parties with different ideologies and support bases in the parliament will divert politics away from the preoccupation with race. The inclusion of

smaller, moderate parties will mitigate the polarisation that results from having two major parties.

International experience has shown that having a high threshold can also lead to a cycle of exclusion that smaller parties find themselves trapped in. Voters do not want to waste their votes so refrain from voting for smaller parties that are not expected to meet the threshold. Gradually, the vote shares of the smaller parties diminish and they fade into political oblivion. This is observable in Fiji as we hold our second elections under the PR systems. A number of parties have virtually winded up and their membership have joined other larger parties. No independents are expected to contest the 2018 elections. Over time, this can lead to the ascendancy of two major parties- an outcome that we tried to avoid by adopting PR.

## Concluding Remarks

In 2014, the threshold for gaining representation was approximately 25,000 votes, with 500,078 votes cast. In 2018, assuming that there is a voter turnout of at least 80%, this threshold will increase to 25,500. It is a fairly difficult demand on a new or small party to gain that number of votes, as experience from 2014 has shown. If we wish to have a truly pluralistic democracy, power sharing and give equal value to all votes, we need to reconsider our election threshold. Given our dynamics, a parliament with a large number of political parties represented would be a better outcome for our society.

*This article was first published in the Fiji Times on 13 October, 2018.*

# CHAPTER 3

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CHAPTER 3

# Ballot Design

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The 235 candidates contesting the 2018 elections were each accorded a number through a public draw. This random allocation of numbers is necessary because of the structure of our ballot paper. Ballot design is of great importance to the electoral process because it can aid or inhibit clarity in an election. It also has a direct impact on the incidence of invalid (or unintended) votes.

Several contesting parties and candidates have expressed reservations on the design of the Fijian ballot paper, which essentially is a grid of numbers, as mandated by the Electoral Decree of 2014. Concerns have been raised that this design, which does not provide any details of party affiliation is making it difficult for voters to accurately express their political choices. Calls have been made to include elements such as party symbols, candidate's names and even photographs on the ballot paper.

Ballot design is a highly technical process. An overriding principle of ballot design is that it should not confer any a priori advantage to one candidate (or party) over another. Moreover, the ballot needs to contain all elements that achieve the objectives, intents and principles of the electoral system. In Fiji's Open List PR system, votes are cast for individual candidates. In contrast, in a Closed List PR system, votes are cast for the party and it is the party leader's prerogative to determine which candidates from his party will enter parliament if the party wins a share of seats.

Therefore, to facilitate this key requirement of our electoral system, we need a ballot structure that provides for voting for individual candidates.

The sudoku styled ballot paper that we use has drawn a lot of criticism. Let us consider the different proposals that have been made to change our ballot design:

### **Inclusion of Party Symbol**

There are two ways the inclusion of party symbols can be facilitated. The first way is to have a party symbol next to each candidate number or name in the same box. The drawback of this is that it will inevitably increase the size of the ballot paper. Moreover, the presence of multiple boxes with recurring party symbols on the paper can confuse the voter, and they can possibly end up voting for an unintended candidate from the party of their choice.

The second option is to place all contesting candidates under different columns (or rows) by party (with a single party symbol on top of the column or beginning of the row). However, the order of the candidates in that list will also matter (as a number of voters will tend to tick the candidate next to the party symbol, therefore, a draw of candidates within each party will have to be done to determine their order of appearance in the ballot paper to ensure complete randomness. Despite this, the candidate that will be drawn to appear next to the party symbol will still have an undue advantage as a number of voters will still place their ticks in the boxes adjacent to or right below the party symbol. The second problem that would arise would be the order of parties on the ballot paper. Any party that will appear on the left most columns or top rows will be seen to have an undue advantage. To circumvent this, another draw (between contesting parties) will have to be done to determine their order of appearance. This would essentially mean that two levels of draws would be necessary to ensure complete randomness. The extent to which this will complicate the processes and lead to further confusion amongst voters is a pertinent issue as well.



## Inclusion of Names

Before considering how this can be implemented, it is important to consider the merits of this proposal. Propositions to include names on ballot papers are emanating from the view that unintended votes are being cast because voters are unable to remember numbers or even make sense of (or read) numbers. However, it is important to point out that voters that are able to read but have forget the numbers of their preferred candidates at the time of voting can simply refer to the voter instruction booklet (provided at every voting screen) to ascertain what their candidate's number is. However, it is important to note that a significant proportion of our elderly voters are not literate and would find this challenging to do. For these voters, the question is whether it is easier for them to remember a three-digit number or the spellings of names? Are they more likely to be able to discern three-digit numbers on the ballot paper, or names of candidates?

Assuming that if it really were useful to include names, draws would need to be done to ensure that the candidates names appear randomly on the ballot paper. Any ordering of names by alphabetical order would also provide undue advantage. Interesting case from Australian Elections was how some candidates changed their surnames to start with "A" so that the so-called "donkey voters" voting below the line would give them their first preferences!

## Recommendations

The legitimate concerns that a "minimalist" ballot paper does not have adequate information to identify candidates can be easily addressed by providing adequate supplementary materials inside the voting screen. This is also the most cost-effective way as printing "table cloth" ballot papers and providing proportionally sized voting screens can be burdensome. Also, there is no evidence that a voter would find a table cloth sized ballot paper any less daunting!

Following the last general elections, the MOG recommended that the national candidates list should include party identification. I believe that it is necessary that the candidate instruction booklet provided at every voting screen should include details of party affiliation such as party symbols. This is important to ensure that if a voter is unable to remember either the name or number of their preferred candidates in the voting booth, they can still vote for another candidate from the party of their choice. There is a strong case for this because voters are not allowed to carry any material into the polling booth which can help them remember details of their preferred candidates. In the PR system, any vote for a party will still benefit the party, regardless of the candidate who receives it. Whilst the probability of a voter failing to remember both the name and number of their preferred candidates seems highly unlikely, the possibility of such cases happening can not be entirely ruled in Fijian elections given the magnitude of unintended votes that we have seen in past elections.

The Supervisor of Elections has confirmed that there would not be any details of party affiliation in the voter instruction booklet in 2018 elections because the electoral law does not permit it. It is, however, important to point out that it is incumbent upon the EMBs to suggest legislative changes that will clarify or simplify information for the voter and it is unfortunate that it has not happened in our case despite the MOG having expressly highlighted this issue in the last elections.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In Fiji, voters and political contestants have exhibited a tendency to question well-established international electoral norms and practices, therefore, it is important that processes are kept as simple as possible to maintain confidence in the credibility of elections. The easiest and most cost-effective way to compensate for the minimalist ballot paper would be to contain essential information such as party affiliation (which is central to voters when making their choices) in the voter instruction booklet. It defies reason

to remove all trace of party affiliation from the supplementary information materials in a PR system where party aggregates are fundamental. In fact, the importance of party aggregate increases in PR systems with thresholds, as in the case of Fiji.

Overall, our ballot design is generally good however, since it contains minimal information it needs to be accompanied by supplementary information materials at the voting screen. The voter instruction booklet needs to contain party information which is central to our electoral system, and is critical information that voters need to express their choices.

*This article was first published in the Fiji Times on 20 October, 2018.*

# CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 4

# Voter Turnout

Voter Turnout during national elections is considered an important indicator of political participation in a country. A high voter turnout is a good sign of the vitality of a democracy and is usually indicative of people's confidence in the electoral process and political governance structures. A low voter turnout, on the other hand, indicates voter apathy and is usually associated with mistrust of the political processes.

Factors affecting voter turnout has been of great scholarly interest. Various empirical studies have been conducted to understand reasons which influence voter participation. International IDEA's Voter Turnout Database, which is available online, lists the following factors as influencing turnout:

- Population Size- The smaller the population of a country, the greater the value of a vote, hence greater voter turnout.
- Population stability- People who reside in an area for a longer period have a greater awareness of politics, local issues, election candidates, and are therefore more likely to vote.
- Economic development- Voters in developed countries are more likely to turn out to vote than in countries with lower levels of economic development and prosperity.
- Closeness of election- The closer the competition between political parties, the higher the voter turnout. Voters are more likely to decide to vote if there is a tight race between contesting parties.

- Perception of the political issues at stake- The extent to which the electoral outcome can lead to a different policy direction on issues important to voters also has a bearing on voter turnout.
- Campaign expenditures- There is evidence that the degree of spending by candidates/parties during election campaign can effectively “market” the elections and lead to higher voter turnout.
- Political fragmentation- The number of parties contesting in an election also impacts on voter turnout however there is no clear evidence whether fragmentation (due to higher number of parties) increases or decreases turnout.
- Electoral system- There is a higher voter turnout during elections that use proportional representation systems than those that use plurality/majority systems.
- Compulsory Voting- In countries where voting is compulsory, voter turnout is higher.
- Registration Requirements- The easier/more accessible the voter registration process, the higher the voter turnout (because more from the voting age population register)
- Voting Arrangements- Accessibility of polling stations, number of voting days, advance voting provisions and other arrangements all have a bearing on voter turnout.
- Age- Studies by the World Value Survey show that older voters (above the age of 25) are more likely to vote.
- Higher education- There is some evidence that higher education levels result in higher tendencies to vote.
- Political interest- The degree of political interest that citizens have can impact on voter turnout.
- Civic duty- The level of perception of civic duty amongst citizens also affects voter turnout levels. In countries where citizens consider it their civic duty to participate in political processes, the turnout is higher.
- Confidence in electoral institutions- The higher the confidence/trust in electoral processes and institutions, the higher the voter turnout. In view of this, political parties need to refrain from unduly casting doubts on the integrity of the electoral process as this can lead to voter apathy. Naturally,

the party that is making the allegations will lose the most, as their own voters are most likely to believe their statements, and refrain from voting. (This is not to suggest that legitimate concerns should not be raised.)

- Voter Education- Voter awareness and education programmes carried out by the election management bodies, NGOs, women's groups, etc also has a positive impact on voter turnout.

### Voter Turnout in Fijian Elections

| Year | VAP     | Registration | Voter Turnout |
|------|---------|--------------|---------------|
| 2014 | 602,405 | 591,101      | 84.60 %       |
| 2006 | 552,797 | 479,674      | 64.00 %       |
| 2001 | 493,217 | 468,772      | 81.05 %       |
| 1999 | 522,310 | 437,195      | 89.41 %       |
| 1994 | 407,680 | 303,529      | 74.80 %       |
| 1992 | 373,000 | 303,172      | 78.77 %       |

Table 1: Voting Age Population, Registration and Voter Turnout 1992-2014. Source: International IDEA

The table above shows that average voter turnout in Fijian elections is relatively high and is, in fact, higher than the global average of 66%. From available data, the highest voter turnout (89.41%) was achieved in 1999, which was evidently due to the compulsory voting requirements imposed by the new electoral laws. By 2006, however, voter turnout had dwindled to as low as 64% under the same regulatory framework. This was partly because sanctions for failure to vote in the earlier elections were not imposed effectively so they ceased to remain a deterrent for non-participation.

In 2014, under the new proportional representation system, the voter turnout of 84% was especially impressive because voting was not compulsory. The high turnout in 2014 could be attributed

to several factors. Firstly, there was a high degree of enthusiasm amongst the people towards a return to democratic rule, given that the country had been under an unelected government since 2007. A second factor was the lowering of the voting age to 18, and many young Fijians who were eligible now to vote for their first time in their lives, were eager to exercise their political rights. In addition, the idea to designate the election day as a public holiday also increased turnout. In previous elections, some voters had difficulties taking leave from work or finding time to visit polling stations to vote on a working day. Another factor which impacted positively on turnout was the large number of polling stations operating on elections day. The degree of accessibility to polling stations, and the fact that the people did not need to wait in long queues to vote also encouraged people to cast their votes.

## **Concluding Remarks**

November 14<sup>th</sup> will again be a public holiday and 846 polling stations will be operating throughout the country which will provide ample opportunities for Fijians to cast their votes. In addition, advance polling (or pre-polling as it is called in Fiji) and postal ballots facilities will be available for voters who cannot vote on election day. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders (EMBs, political parties, NGOs, etc.) to urge people to cast their votes and exercise their political right as a Fijian citizen.

*This article was first published in the Fiji Times on 6 October, 2018.*





# CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 5

# Gender Parity In Political Representation

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Achieving gender parity in political representation has become an important objective of electoral design in recent times. Due to its relative efficiency, quotas have become a popular mechanism for achieving this. There are three approaches to gender quotas being employed in different systems and jurisdictions. These are:

1. Reserved seats (mandated by constitution or legislation)
2. Legal candidate quotas (mandated by constitution or legislation)
3. Political party quotas (voluntary or mandated by contesting parties internal constitution)

The drawback of reserved seats is that it fails to provide safeguard against tokenistic representation of women. For instance, allocating 2-3 seats representing a vague and all-embracing category of “women” can do little to address the issue of women still being a tiny minority in parliaments. Moreover, it is also considered important to have several women together in the legislature to feel confident in raising women’s issues in an establishment with a history of patriarchy, and to also prevent the stress often experienced by the token women elected under reserve systems.

Quota regimes, therefore, have emerged as an effective mechanism for ensuring that women constitute at least a “critical minority” of 30%-40%. To this end, a number of countries have legal

gender quotas mandated either by their constitution (e.g. Nepal, Philippines, Uganda, etc) or assigned by the electoral law (e.g. France, Belgium, Bosnia, Slovenia, etc.) In Fiji's case, there is no legal gender quota, that is, our constitution or our electoral laws do not require political parties to have a certain gender balance in their candidate list. In an Open List Proportional Representation system such as the one Fiji uses, it is even more difficult to ensure women are elected into parliament because a candidate's election is determined by the voters, and not his/her party.

Given these facts in our context, the only available mechanism is the institution of voluntary quotas by the political parties themselves. This is common practice in many countries- e.g. political parties have set their own gender quotas in Germany and Sweden. Such a commitment has been glaringly absent in Fiji's case despite gender parity being a real issue.

With candidates lists gradually being released by various contesting parties for 2018 elections, it is interesting to consider how they have treated the issue of gender balance in their candidate selections so far. Fiji First has been the only party, at this juncture, to have announced all their candidates. They have a total of 11 women in their lineup- this constitutes roughly 21% of their list. It is positive to note that there is diversity within their women complement in terms of age, ethnicity, geographical distribution, professional, socio-economic and other orientations. SODELPA has, so far, announced 8 female candidates, NFP has publicised 7 female candidates, FLP has 5 whilst Unity Party has announced 2 candidates. This brings the total number of provisional women candidates, so far, to 33. The 8 contesting political parties would be allowed to nominate a total of 408 candidates in total, and it looks certain that the number of women candidates contesting the 2018 elections will fall way short of the critical minority threshold.

It is important to point out, however, that the blame for this should not fall entirely on the political parties. In Third World contexts like ours with a relatively conservative and patriarchal culture, it is

difficult for political parties to find female aspirants who are popular, credible and have the ability to bring in significant votes to the political party-which is the overriding objective in an electoral contest. In a PR system, each candidate matters because all votes contribute towards the party's aggregate, which determines its share of seats. Therefore, political parties need to strike a delicate balance between gender balance and electoral power of candidates-which can be tricky. In Fiji, the attitudes of voters towards women also do not encourage aspirants from the female folk. Recently, we have witnessed cases of female candidates getting maligned on social media with matters such as their alleged sexual promiscuity being discussed. Needless to say, these can be relatively more embarrassing for women candidates. Politics, essentially, being a dirty game can be rather unnerving for women in conservative societies. Users with fake accounts on social media like Facebook are able to defame candidates and make all kinds of unsubstantiated allegations with total impunity. There is, therefore, a need to educate our electorate to exercise greater responsibility. Social media trolls belonging to different political parties need to be advised to refrain from malicious posts targeting women candidates and discouraging other aspirants.

## Conclusion

Without discussing the implications of gender quotas on principles of liberal democracy such as equal opportunity, it is being advocated that Fiji needs a quota system that can ensure a more acceptable representation of women in our legislature. The easiest way to achieve this would be through voluntary quotas mandated by political parties, however, there are a number of key challenges which need to be addressed to expand the pool of credible and popular female aspirants that parties can select from.

*This article was first published in the Fiji Times on 22 September, 2018.*

# CHAPTER 6

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CHAPTER 6

# Caretaker Conventions

Following any dissolution or expiry of parliament, the government goes into caretaker mode. This means that the government operates through executive decision making and without any parliamentary oversight during the electoral period, and until the appointment of the new government. Unlike neighbouring jurisdictions such as Australia and New Zealand, Fiji does not have codified “caretaker conventions” - or a set of guidelines which guide the operations of the government and its political actors in the caretaker mode.

## What are caretaker conventions?

Caretaker conventions have evolved as a check on the power of the executive when there is no parliamentary in existence for it to be accountable to. Caretaker conventions necessitate because of the need for the business of the government to continue during the electoral and transition period. They aim to ensure that the actions of the government in caretaker mode do not inappropriately bind an incoming government and limit its freedom of action. Caretaker conventions require that no policy decisions are made, no major contracts entered into, and no significant appointments made during the caretaker period. A caretaker administration needs to strictly limit itself to ordinary matters of public administration. Caretaker conventions also seek to moderate the advantages of incumbency and reduce the potential for the ruling party to make partisan use of public resources to gain unfair advantage

in national elections. In addition, during the caretaker period, opposition parties can get access to public servants and get briefings on matters that can inform their electioneering activities, to ensure that they have the same access to official data and information as the ruling party.

## **Power of Incumbency**

The power of incumbency is very much pronounced in the Fijian context. In analysing the last general elections in 2014, researchers have described as “remorseless” or “ruthless”, the use of the power of incumbency to secure electoral success. Consecutive Fijian governments have never hesitated abusing incumbency. An analysis of electoral outcomes in Fiji’s post-independence history will make clear the disconcerting impact of incumbency on election results. In fact, only three times in the last 5 decades have the incumbent parties lost elections- Alliance party in 1977 and 1987 and SVT in 1999. All other changing of parties in power have been through coups!

Given this fact, it is important that the abuse of incumbency is regulated by constitutional, regulatory or institutional mechanisms and the new parliament may need to consider such controls in future. This is critical to ensure that the national election is, in reality, a competition among political parties, rather than a contest between the state (acting on behalf of the ruling party) and the opposition parties.

There is a need for specific guidelines that can address the grey areas emanating from the lack of treatment of the issue in the Fijian constitution and relevant electoral legislations and regulations, and the absence of guidelines similar to caretaker conventions existing in our neighbouring democracies. Whether these conventions would need to be legally binding, given our contextual peculiarities, is another matter.

An interesting case during the last elections was that billboards containing images of the prime minister were allowed to remain visible during the 48 hour blackout period, with the MIDA



chairperson explaining that it was exempted because of the “quotidian” nature of the billboard’s purpose. Contrast this with an Appeals Court’s decision in Senegal recently that parliamentary election campaigns cannot use the effigy of the country’s president.

Moreover, tackling the state bias of state owned media is also an important issue, one that is extremely difficult to achieve in unconsolidated democracies. One of the international benchmarks for state owned media reporting during an electoral period is the equal allocation of air time or print space to all political contestants, and the requirement to ensure that the tone of the reporting is neutral, and not illicitly advancing certain political interests. There are several measures that can be taken to moderate the advantages of incumbency, and it is clear that given Fiji’s context, it is a political problem which requires political will and solutions.

## Way Forward

Caretaker conventions can be a critical safeguard against dysfunctional partisanship during national elections. Given Fiji’s history of incumbents being accused of using state resources to derive unfair advantages, there is a need to seriously consider developing guidelines for the operations of governments in caretaker modes. With the electoral period impending, the government needs to act swiftly to institute caretaker conventions which would guide the operations of the caretaker government from the dissolution of parliament to the inception of the new government. At the very least, the government can commit itself to limiting its use of authority and decision making in line with caretaker conventions used internationally. In the long term, legally binding caretaker conventions could be legislated by a future parliament. It is evident that legal, regulatory or institutional restraints are necessary to prevent a government in caretaker mode from governing without limits and abusing power of incumbency.

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# CHAPTER 7

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CHAPTER 7

# Election Monitoring

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Election Monitoring is an integral process during national elections and can be an invaluable tool for improving quality of elections, deterring fraud, and building public confidence in the electoral processes and outcomes. It has become an international best practice to invite observers to monitor elections and deliver a verdict on the credibility of elections and encourage acceptance of the results.

When Fiji held elections in 2014 under a new constitution and electoral system, a Multi-national Observer Group (MOG) comprising 92 observers from 13 countries lead by Australia, India and Indonesia, was able to endorse the election results as broadly reflective of the will of the people. This verdict was very significant in restoring Fiji's status internationally as an upstanding, democratic nation and ensuring the legitimacy of the elected government both globally and domestically. Some discontent, however, was prevalent with allegations by unsuccessful political parties that electoral outcomes were manipulated, and shortfalls in the capacities of international observer missions to observe elections were highlighted, perceptibly in a bid to undermine their credibility and question their endorsement of the elections.

## **Election Monitoring in Divided Societies**

Fiji has deep cleavages along ethnic lines and these manifest the strongest during times of intense political activities like elections - and coups! In such a context, different groups may harbour strong suspicions of the political system and electoral processes. This is a highly problematic scenario. From a peacebuilding perspective, increasing confidence in the political system and processes is integral to bringing about national reconciliation, improving democratic outcomes, and preventing any post-election violence or lawlessness. Moreover, for a developing country, a smooth transition to a legitimate government is critical for avoiding any shocks to the economy and disrupting development. Therefore, there is a stronger imperative to garner public confidence in the electoral system and processes in a divided society. In part, election observation that is based on nonpartisan rigor and standards and executed by international and national groups can play a significant role in achieving this.

## **Acceptance of Electoral Outcomes**

In a recent forum organised by the IGO International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in Suva, the Supervisor of Elections Mohammed Saneem raised the issue of the tendency, in Fiji, of unsuccessful candidates and parties to not accept electoral outcomes and allege electoral fraud. He highlighted how allegations of vote rigging have been made following every national election in recent times. He further stated that he is waiting for the day when electoral contestants will achieve political maturity and graciously accept results of elections and congratulate the winners rather than crying foul. It is important to point out that the onus for making this a reality does not fall entirely on the political parties, candidates and voters but rather the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) have a bigger role to play in bringing about this transformation. Acceptance of results will only happen if decisive steps are taken to build public trust and confidence in the systems, processes and institutions running the election. Although this is particularly

difficult to achieve in a divided society like Fiji where trust and social capital are scarce, and misinformation and rumour mongering is rampant, it is important we aspire to realize this.

EMBs need to make earnest efforts to acquire the confidence of respective political parties, party or independent candidates and their supporters. Given the context, there is a need for a clear separation between the governmental arm and the independent election management bodies to ensure that there is no scope for a reasonable person to perceive that the ruling party might be favoured.

In addition, EMBs need to increase and strengthen communications with their stakeholders to ensure great transparency and understanding of their work. This will include increasing the number and frequency of meetings, workshops and trainings involving all contesting parties, and publicising the issues discussed where appropriate. This will potentially ensure that the concerns of the electoral contestants are allayed and/or adequately addressed to bolster confidence in the electoral process.

Public right to verifiable information on electoral governance and electoral dispute management are considered paramount in building public trust by national EMBs. In addition, it is not unusual for electoral complaints to be made throughout the electoral cycle, hence the need for the presence of a robust electoral justice system.

The EMBs also need to make use of platforms created by CSOs to inform people about elections, generate public discussion on elections and democracy, and engage freely with participants to foster understanding and build trust relationships. The FEO's engagement in some of the EU-funded C 3 -Fiji Project's activities is much appreciated and is a welcome improvement in FEO- CSO relations, but more could be done.

## International and Domestic Observer Missions

As stated previously, election monitoring by independent, credible bodies is critical to ensuring acceptance of electoral outcomes. An internationally benchmarked national election will have both international and domestic observers. One of the reasons is because both International Election Observer Missions (IEOMs) and Domestic Election Observer Missions (DEOMs) have limitations, and therefore are seen as complimentary when they are allowed to operate alongside each other. IEOMs are generally more likely to be accepted as impartial witnesses, often have superior technical expertise and operate using internationally benchmarked and tested methodologies. IEOMs are also more likely to command greater international media interest, and if they are able to endorse the elections, enhance the international legitimacy of the incoming government. However, IEOMs usually do not know the country well, or understand the culture and history, and thus may fail to detect some fraudulent practices or instances of intimidation. Moreover, they may not be able to adequately cover the entire country especially one with scattered islands that are expensive and difficult to reach.

DEOMs, on the other hand, understand the culture, history and nuances of the political environment and would be able to detect fraudulent practices that IEOMs would not notice. Moreover, DEOMs would be comprised of individuals passionate about democratic freedoms in their country and would want to bring about reforms that would guarantee these. DEOMs also have networks all over the country and are able to get information and data from these sources relatively inexpensively.

The major issue with DEOMs can be that of credibility and impartiality. Civil society activists are usually perceived (unwarrantedly) as anti-ruling party and thus are construed to be lacking impartiality. Moreover, DEOMs may lack resources, technical expertise, training and a tested methodology with valid instruments for data collection which can seriously jeopardise

their ability to make accurate and objective assessments of the credibility of elections.

## CSO Capacity and Credibility

Given the need to bolster public confidence in the Fijian national elections, and arguably the important role that DEOMs can play in ensuring this and bringing about reforms that will strengthen the integrity of elections, it is important to consider the issue of CSO capacity in Fiji to form credible DEOMs. The key to achieving this lies in appropriate upskilling of CSO actors, which needs to start during the pre-electoral cycle. CSOs can move with a lot of certainty in doing so and investing scarce resources into such upskilling if they are given assurance in time that they would have a role in DEOMs.

During 2014 elections, the Minister Responsible for Elections gave the undertaking that DEOMs would be allowed during the next general elections. Since 2017, the Citizens' Constitutional Forum, which led previous DEOMs during national elections, has been writing to the Minister to get confirmation on whether DEOMs would be allowed to monitor the 2018 elections. There has not been any response from the minister thus far and the EMBs have stated that it is not within their jurisdiction in accordance with the Electoral Act to respond to the issue.

Perceptibly the reluctance to have DEOMs stems from the concern that local CSOs may be politically aligned, and therefore would not do an objective assessment and consequently end up undermining the credibility of elections unduly. To ensure that DEOMs do not become biased towards their own political ideologies or parties they support, they need to be strictly neutral and follow the "Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations (DoGP) and the accompanying "Code of Conduct for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observers and Monitors", developed by the NDI.

Moreover, the unhealthy suspicion that exists between CSOs, government and EMBs needs to be addressed, through open dialogue and interaction – something the C3 – Fiji Project is actively working on. In addition, there needs to be greater support from international donors to upskill local CSOs on knowledge of electoral processes and standards for them to become effective and impartial DEOMs.

On another note, it is interesting to note that Fijian civil society activists are getting international prominence in elections observations and recently have been invited to observe elections in countries such as Pakistan and Papua New Guinea. It is, therefore, ironic that the local CSO sector is cited as lacking capacity when their expertise is being recognised internationally.

## **Conclusion**

With elections impending, and the need to build public trust and confidence in electoral processes, prompt action is required on the part of the Minister Responsible for Elections, who is the designated authority under the current legal framework. The involvement of a highly professional, non-partisan and competent DEOM needs to be swiftly facilitated to this end. Given the time constraints and the concerns over capacities, the Minister should allow one DEOM comprising of a mix of CSOs, locally resident academics, etc thereby limiting the influence of any particular political proclivity. CSOs need to self- evaluate themselves on their political leanings (if any) and commitment/capacity to adhere to the DoGP. CSOs with political proclivities should not be actively involved in electoral processes.



For future elections, domestic capacity needs to be built throughout the entire electoral cycle, and not commenced in or just before the electoral period. An inclusive approach to strengthening our electoral processes and institutions involving the EMBs, political parties, CSOs and other domestic stakeholders is key to improving public confidence and trust, and ensuring political legitimacy, stability and democratic consolidation.

*This article was first published in the Fiji Times on 1 September, 2018.*

# CHAPTER 8

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CHAPTER 8

# Media Reporting

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A free and non-partisan media is essential to free and fair elections. An election cannot be deemed to be democratic unless the voters have had access to a balanced media coverage of all electoral contestants and issues and have been able to make well informed choices. The media provides an invaluable platform for the dissemination of and discussion of competing ideas and views and must create a pluralistic marketplace of ideas where these are deliberated, debated and contested, accepted or rejected. When the media, however, has a subservice agenda or political proclivities, it would effectively distort this marketplace of ideas by selectively promoting or suppressing views and ideas that provide an undue advantage to the electoral contestants it is aligned to.

Publicly owned/funded media have a far greater obligation to provide equitable and balanced coverage of all electoral contestants and issues than privately owned media. In most countries globally, there are laws and guidelines which set rules for equitable access, balance and non-partisanship of public owned media in relation to election time reporting. These are necessary to ensure that the ruling party does not derive an illicit advantage by using its incumbency power. In cases of non-compliance, there are clear provisions for aggrieved electoral contestants to make complaints to independent election media regulatory bodies which make determinations that are binding on the state-owned media (and even private media entities in some jurisdictions).

Unfortunately, no such safeguards against partisan election media reporting exist in Fiji despite our discontent with balance and fairness in local media reporting for a long time now. This is allowing partisan media entities to continue to create an uneven electoral playing field with total impunity.

There was a huge public uproar some weeks ago with the conduct of the interview featuring the NFP leader by the state broadcaster on their popular current affairs TV programme. The now, infamous “pressed for time” episode caused huge public outrage over its display of blatant partisanship. Earlier this week, a vernacular radio and TV talkback show run by the state broadcaster again subjected the same political party leader (incidentally) to an even more hostile treatment. The bias was so extreme this time, that it made the previous instance look more palatable.

The state broadcaster does a great injustice to its owners, the tax payers of the country, when it does not provide them with a fair and balanced coverage to empower them to make well informed choices during elections. It does not help matters at all that aggrieved candidates do not have any mechanisms for redress, and there is no credible and independent body that can consider their complaints and ensure a just outcome.

It is very evident, given the extreme situation that we are in, that binding guidelines that govern the rules and practices relating to media coverage of election campaigns need to be instituted. This should be based on international standards and best comparative practices and should be policed by an independently constituted election coverage regulating body. They could also form part of an all-encompassing electoral justice system.

The guidelines should be broadly based on the following key imperatives- the duty to inform, establish rules regarding election coverage, provide protection of freedom of expression during elections, and provide clear provisions for implementation of these guidelines. Each of these are considered below.

## The Duty to Inform

During a campaign period, public media have the general duty to inform the public on matters relevant to elections such as political parties and candidates, campaign issues and voting processes. State owned media are obliged to provide special programmes on election issues, and all parties and candidates are entitled to direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis. A way of equitably allocating access could be providing air time on the basis of the number of candidates a party is fielding in the election.

## Rules Regarding Election Coverage

Public owned/funded media have the obligation to be balanced and fair on their election reporting and to not display bias against or discriminate against any political party or candidate. The guidelines can extend to include privately owned media. All news, current affairs, talkbacks and other election coverage segments should not exhibit bias for or against any electoral contestant.

## Laws restricting freedom of expression

Laws which do not conform to international standards and laws should be abolished to ensure that they do not inhibit political debate or the ability of media to report freely and fairly on election issues. Such restrictive laws can have a drastic impact on the fairness of elections and must be repealed way ahead of elections to create an enabling and conducive environment for political debate.

## Protection of media outlets and journalists

There needs to be adequate protection of journalists from threats of violence and intimidation, and limits on media liability for broadcasts of unlawful statements made by candidates or parties during campaigns, provided retractions or corrections are made by the media organisation within reasonable time frames. Media organisations should not be penalised for publishing statements

critical of government or ruling party candidates, and mechanisms for redress from an independent body needs to be available should there be illicit interference or intimidation, especially by those in power.

## **News Coverage**

Balance and Impartiality in news and current affairs reporting should be strictly demanded. Moreover, publicly owned media should not be allowed to broadcast editorial opinions at all during the campaign period, lest this is perceived as news. For other broadcasters, there should be clear demarcations made between editorial and news programmes. The right of reply also should be mandatory to ensure balance in news stories.

## **Direct Access Programmes**

It is necessary that publicly owned media provides all political parties and candidates air time (or print space) for direct access programmes on a fair and equitable basis. In Fiji's case, it is important that independent and unbiased moderators host these programmes so that they do not end up unfairly attacking or discrediting the invited party representatives. An independent body should also set rates for paid programmes so that all parties are able to purchase advertisements on equitable terms.

## **Special Information Programmes**

The media should also provide avenues for voters to pose questions directly to the political contestants. Experts, and other interviewers should also be engaged to ensure impartiality, validate claims made by electoral contestants and allow critical scrutiny of election issues such as promises and manifestos.

## Voter Education

Publicly funded media should also allocate air time or print space to broadcast or publish voter education information to ensure people have adequate knowledge of electoral systems and processes to effectively make political choices.

## Opinions polls and election projections

Opinion polls and election projections can profoundly affect voter decisions. Media organisations that run opinions polls need to conduct and report these fairly. They need to provide key information about the methodologies used, who conducted, commissioned or paid for the polls, the sample size, margin of error, and fieldwork dates. Any biases that the media or poll conductors hold must be declared.

## Way Forward

These guidelines are critical to create an equal playing field in the media for all contesting parties. The nature of media reporting thus far, has made it evident that Fiji critically needs such binding guidelines /regulations to ensure that our media coverage of elections does not undermine the fairness of our elections. Moreover, the overarching powers provided by the MIDA Decree to the Minister to direct/regulate content in the media need to be suspended in the period following the issuance of the writ of elections. The responsibility for this needs to pass to an independent body that regulates election media coverage. It is clear that the incoming parliament needs to duly consider legislative reforms and to institute guidelines for media reporting for future elections, since the current electoral and media laws do not accord it full treatment.

# About Dialogue Fiji

Dialogue Fiji is a civil society organisation based in Suva, Fiji. The organisation has the mission to engage with others to create inclusive spaces for dialogue and peace building, and develop capacities in Fiji's society for a culture of dialogue, resulting in dialogue processes being applied to increase understanding, respect and collaboration across divides. The vision of the organisation is "a Fiji where people respect each others' differences and share a common will to build a free, just, peaceful, and inclusive nation".

Dialogue Fiji's current projects are in a range of areas such as inclusive and sustainable democracy, democratic institution building, human rights, conflict transformation and climate change, which constitute key areas for peacebuilding work in the Fijian context. Our work involves convening dialogues, engaging in advocacy, providing community education, facilitating community engagement with statutory actors, undertaking research, social and political commentaries, policy analysis, media analysis, etc.

Dialogue Fiji promotes the use of dialogue and other deliberative processes to encourage and facilitate civic engagement in Fiji to strengthen a democratic culture, build social cohesion and advocate for the use of peaceful ways of dealing with conflict.



### **What is International IDEA?**

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

### **What do we do?**

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work.

International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on good international democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on democratic reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

### **Where do we work?**

Our headquarters is located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

# About the C<sup>3</sup> - Fiji Project

The “Upholding Citizen’s Constitutional Rights for Democratic Consolidation in Fiji” or the C<sup>3</sup>- Fiji Project relates directly to the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) global objective of consolidating democracy in Fiji. Specifically, it responds to the emphasis in EIDHR 2014-2020 on cooperation between CSOs, local authorities, relevant state institutions, and vulnerable groups. It aims to increase voters’ and citizens’ knowledge of their constitutional rights and of elections in the lead up to the 2018 elections and provide guidance about ways in which those rights can be exercised both before and after the election. The Project provides opportunities for CSOs to strengthen networks and institutional capacity, develop collaborative networks and relations across the sector, and improve collaboration with state entities.

A special role for International IDEA is to facilitate mutual working relationships amongst these stakeholders and provide knowledge resources on elections and democracy. In the pre-election period, the Project provided assistance to the FEC and FEO in producing and disseminating information about the electoral process and in engaging the public through meetings in various parts of the country and in universities and disparate communities, including vulnerable groups.

The Project also ensures that gender equality and women’s participation is mainstreamed, through engagement with women as candidates and as voters. This is achieved with a deliberate focus/approach on women’s’ participation in various project activities, MP’s and government officials; inclusion of community groups representing women; and gathering gender based disaggregated data.

The lead implementing organisation for the C3-Fiji project is International IDEA and the co-implementing organisations are Citizens' Constitutional Forum, Dialogue Fiji, Media Watch Group and the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding.

# 2018 Fijian Elections

## Insights on the Electoral System, Institutions, Laws and Processes

The Fijian General Election of 2018 was a significant one- it was only the second election held under a new electoral system and legal framework. In a divided society like Fiji where a high degree of mistrust and lack of confidence in electoral arrangements and institutions exist driven in part by a lack of knowledge and misinformation, it was critical for independent actors like civil society organisations that work across ethnic, religious, political and ideological divides to provide balanced analyses and commentary on different elements of the elections, including the contentious aspects. As an implementing partner in the International IDEA led “Upholding Citizens’ Constitutional Rights for Democratic Consolidation in Fiji (C3 project), Dialogue Fiji published a series of articles on different elements of the 2018 elections.

The Fiji C3 project had a key objective to increase citizens’ and voters’ knowledge of their constitutional rights relating to elections, including increasing their knowledge and understanding of various aspects of elections. This book contains a collection of articles that provide insights on a number of key elements of the 2018 General Elections and provides recommendations for strengthening laws and processes, and improving electoral outcomes and legitimacy in Fiji.



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