



Fiji — Va-PoReg Country Report

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10/10/1874 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: The Kingdom of Fiji, with Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau as King, existed from 1871.¹ It became the largest British crown colony in the Pacific in 1874, after the Fijians ceded their country to Britain (McIntyre 1999). Because this phase is clearly marked by British annexation of the islands, this period is coded as colonial rule. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 1904, from 1905 onward, only multiparty legislative elections were held. Universal suffrage was absent until 1963.² Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as ambiguous until 1959 and as somewhat present from 1960 onward. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

04/17/1963 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: General elections took place in Fiji from 04/17 to 05/04/1963.³ A new constitution in 1963 provided for a majority-elected Legislative Council and extended the franchise for the first time to Chinese, Rotumans, other Pacific Islanders, women, and indigenous Fijians (Lal 2008). On 07/25/1965 the London conference at Marlborough House initiated steps towards greater autonomy in internal affairs, especially regarding the introduction of responsible government for Fiji. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to V-Dem's PCLI. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

08/10/1966 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: The first pre-independence general elections in Fiji were held on 09/26/1966 & 10/08/1966, in which two political parties (the Federation and the Alliance) contested. The elections resulted in a victory for the Alliance.⁴ On 09/01/1967, a ministerial style of government was established with Kamsese Mara as Chief Minister (Lal 2008). There were also strong monarchic elements in the regime form of Fiji. Mara was the hereditary Paramount Chief of the Lau Island.⁵ On 11/03/1969 all parties agreed that Fiji should become a fully sovereign independent state with the Queen as Head of State as a Dominion in the British Commonwealth (McIntyre 1999). Because the rather complicated electoral system applied in the elections of 1966 cannot be considered democratic because voters were mostly forced to vote along ethnic lines the regime is classified as an electoral hybrid regime. On 10/10/1970 Fiji attained independence as the Dominion of Fiji. The legislative council was replaced with a bicameral parliament, with a senate dominated by Fijian chiefs and a popularly elected house of representatives (Marshall 2018e).⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For this period, LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as free and fair while their CEI scores them as somewhat clean. However, political liberties were coded as absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI scores them as somewhat present. In 1970 and 1971, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or

subordination. While quantitative indicators from other datasets point more into the direction of a democracy, we classify it as an electoral hybrid regime. Until 1969, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 1970 to 1972, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

04/15[-29]/1972 End (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy: Between these dates general elections were held in Fiji. Different from the electoral system of the elections in 1966 the new rules can be considered democratic. Post-independence politics was initially dominated by the Alliance Party of Kamisese Mara. The 1977 election, however, saw the Indian-led opposition win a majority but fail to form a government, leading to the Fiji Constitutional Crisis of 1977. A significant change occurred in April 1987 when a coalition led by Timoci Bavadra, supported by the Indo-Fijian community, won the general election and formed the first majority Indian government, with Bavadra as Prime Minister.⁷ As per FH's classification for this regime period, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. Fiji's political framework facilitated the protection of minority rights, ensuring the preservation of civil and political liberties, and establishing an independent judiciary, further reinforced by the presence of an ombudsman (Gastil 1987). Nevertheless, LIED still considers that political liberties were not given. V-Dem's PCLI scores remained at a somewhat level for the entire time. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Besides, for this period, LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as free and fair while their CEI scores them as somewhat clean. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For almost the entire regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the year 1987, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Between 04/04/1987 and 04/11/1987, general elections in Fiji resulted in a victory for the coalition of the Labour Party and the National Federation Party, ending the Alliance Party's post-independence rule. Timoci Bavadra became Prime Minister.

05/14/1987 End (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka led a military coup against the Bavadra government, citing ethnic unrest and concerns of racial discrimination against indigenous Fijians. This coup initiated a military autocracy led by Rabuka. The regime suspended the constitution and civil liberties. The government Rabuka led after the coups can be described as a military junta, as it was controlled by military leaders without democratic legitimacy.

05/19/1987 End Military Autocracy/Start (Monarchical) Democratizing Regime: In the aftermath, Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau and Queen Elizabeth II attempted to restore order, granting Rabuka temporary amnesty and some authority and established a caretaker amid ongoing tensions.

09/25/1987 End (Monarchical) Democratizing Regime/Start Military Autocracy: Rabuka staged a second coup after the Supreme Court declared the first coup illegal and the Queen's new governor-general appointee attempted to assert executive power. He abolished the monarchy, declared Fiji a republic, and appointed himself president, establishing a military administration and severing ties with the British monarchy (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 77). This marked a further regime change to a military junta led by Rabuka. Despite this, pressures for democratic transition persisted, resulting in a new constitution in 1990 and subsequent elections in 1992 (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 27).⁸ According to LIED only legislative elections, which were not multiparty, were held during this period. Per FH, for 1987, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. For the remaining regime period a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free.

Moreover, political liberties are categorized as absent by LIED and as ambiguous by V-Dem's PCLI. From 1987 to 1989, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. In 1990 and 1991, based on Polity5's evaluation, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

05/30/1992 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), a party founded by Rabuka to represent indigenous Fijian interests, won the majority of seats reserved for ethnic Fijians. Sitiveni Rabuka transitioned from military leader to elected Prime Minister. While this signified a move toward civilian rule, the electoral system was heavily biased. The 1990 Constitution allocated a disproportionate number of parliamentary seats to indigenous Fijians and established a voting system that marginalized Indo-Fijians and other minorities. Despite the return to an elected government, the political environment remained strained. Civil liberties were generally safeguarded, but somehow restricted due to the constitutional framework that institutionalized ethnic divisions. Following the 1992 elections, the development was marked by ongoing efforts to address ethnic tensions and constitutional inequalities. The discriminatory aspects of the 1990 Constitution led to domestic and international pressure for reform. In 1997, a new, more inclusive constitution was adopted, aiming to provide equitable representation for all ethnic groups. The constitutional amendments in March 1999 lead to an end of the longstanding monopoly on power that had been guaranteed to indigenous Fijians for a decade (Karatnycky 2000). The 1999 general elections under the new constitution resulted in a significant political shift. Mahendra Chaudhry, an Indo-Fijian, became Fiji's first Prime Minister of Indian descent, leading the Fiji Labour Party to victory. This peaceful transition of power indicated progress toward a more inclusive democracy. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 for the assessed regime period until 1998 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. In 1999 the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. Political liberties were still absent in this period following LIED. However, V-Dem's PCLI still indicates that political liberties were somewhat present. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as free and fair while their CEI scores them as somewhat clean. Based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. In 1999, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. From 1993 to 1999, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the year 2000, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. The election on 05/08&15/1999 saw a peaceful transition of power. During that period civil liberties were safeguarded. While quantitative indicators indicate an electoral democracy our qualitative observations clearly point to an electoral hybrid regime. The Constitution disproportionately allocated seats to indigenous Fijians, thereby systematically marginalizing Indo-Fijians and violating the core democratic principle of equal representation.

05/19/2000 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military (Rebel) Autocracy: On this date, ethnic Fijian nationalist George Speight citing racial cleavages attacked the elected government with rebel soldiers from the Fiji's Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit. The Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry and a number of other members of parliament were taken hostage by Speight and his gunmen. Speight claimed to have seized power on behalf of ethnic Fijians, and purported to have revoked the 1997 constitution and appointed himself interim president and opposition member Timoci Silatolu as interim Prime Minister.⁹

05/29/2000 End Military (Rebel) Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, Military Forces Commander Commodore Frank Bainimarama manifested the removal of the elected government by an interim regime headed by Josefa Iloilo against the background of the ongoing hostage situation. De facto power lay in this time by the military. On 07/09, following prolonged negotiations, Speigh and the military signed the Muanikau Accord. All key demands of Speigh had been met. However, on 07/26 Speigh and others were arrested at a military checkpoint following threats to President Josefa Iloilo.¹⁰ In 2001, Iloilo persuaded the military to allow a return to democracy.¹¹ The Constitution of Fiji was restored by a High Court decision on 11/15/2000, following the failure of the political upheaval in which the government had been deposed and the constitution suspended in May that year.¹² According to our observations and LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. Political liberties were absent according to LIED, whereas according to V-Dem's PCLI they can be interpreted as somewhat present. V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

08/25/2001 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, an election to restore democracy, that can be considered as rather free and fair, was held.¹³ In 2001, Qarase, representing the United Fiji Party, assumed the role of prime minister. Despite the constitution's requirement for cabinet representation for parties holding more than 10 percent of seats, Qarase declined to include Labour Party members in his cabinet, persisting in this decision despite a supreme court ruling and negotiations. The government exercises significant control over the media and restricts freedom of speech. The Television Act grants authorities influence over programming content, while the Press Correction Act allows for the arrest of individuals publishing "malicious" material and mandates corrections for allegedly false or distorted articles. Political, economic, and social discussions often revolve around ethnic divisions, with entrenched racial discrimination prevailing. A prominent divide exists between indigenous Fijians, who hold significant influence in government and the armed forces, and Indo-Fijians, who wield considerable economic power. Indigenous Fijians receive preferential treatment in various areas, including education, housing, and land acquisition, while certain job opportunities remain exclusive to them. Throughout this period, Freedom House classifies Fiji as partly free (Piano/Puddington/Rosenberg 2006). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections mostly as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as free and fair, while their CEI scores them as somewhat clean. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. Additionally, according to LIED political liberties were still absent. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI categorizes them as somewhat present. Until 2005, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. From 2002 to 2005, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 2006, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

12/05/2006 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date Bainimarama spearheaded Fiji's fourth coup, deposed the civilian government, and assumed the role of acting president. President Iloilo, despite reservations, yielded to the persuasion of military leaders, leading to the dissolution of parliament. He appointed Bainimarama as acting prime minister and validated the establishment of an interim government comprising military officers and cooperative civilians. In return, Bainimarama reinstated Iloilo as president on 01/05/2007 (Lansford 2021: 552). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. For this period, LIED still considers political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI scores dropped back to not really present. In 2006, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. From 2007 to 2013, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate

Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the years 2007 and 2008, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For 2009, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 2010 to 2012, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. In 2013, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 2014, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

09/17/2014 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, elections under a new constitution, which were planned for 2009, took place.¹⁴ Of the seven parties contesting the election, three won seats (Lansford 2021: 553). International observers deemed the election to be credible, but they did note some issues such as the restrictive media environment which limited the ability of Fijian journalists to scrutinize the claims of candidates and parties, the short timeframe for the election, and a complex voting system. Despite this, leaders of several opposition parties disputed the result, alleging ballot tampering.¹⁵ The ruling party often intervenes in opposition activities, the judiciary is susceptible to political influence, and instances of military and police brutality pose a significant challenge.¹⁶ General elections took place on 12/14/2022, to elect 55 members of Parliament. Controversial electoral amendments were passed prior to the elections, including one restricting voter registration to birth names and another granting extensive powers to the election's supervisor, sparking criticism from opposition parties and legal organizations. Following the elections, FijiFirst secured a plurality with 26 seats, while the People's Alliance (PA) won 21 seats and the National Federation Party (NFP) secured five. Negotiations to form a government ensued, with FijiFirst and the PA-NFP coalition vying for the support of the kingmaker party, SODELPA. Eventually, on 12/20, SODELPA's management board voted to form a coalition government with the PA-NFP coalition, ending FijiFirst's eight-year rule and Prime Minister Bainimarama's 16-year tenure. Despite this decision, the first parliamentary session, scheduled for 12/21, was delayed, leading SODELPA's management board to reaffirm their decision to form a government with the PA-NFP coalition on 12/23.¹⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as somewhat free and fair while their CEI scores them as of ambiguous electoral cleanliness. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. In addition, LIED's outcomes concerning the political liberties did not change. V-Dem's PCLI outcomes switched to ambiguous until 2022. In 2023 political liberties are considered as somewhat present. Until 2017, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. In 2018, according to the Polity5 indicator, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 2015 to 2022, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For 2023, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Hartmann 2001)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Fiji

- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1963_Fijian_general_election
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1966_Fijian_general_election
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamisese_Mara
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Fiji
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_history_of_Fiji
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Fijian_coups_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Fijian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Speight
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Speight
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josefa_Iloilo; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Fijian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_Fijian_general_election
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_Fijian_general_election
- ¹⁴ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Fiji_2013?lang=en
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Fijian_general_election
- ¹⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/fiji>
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Fijian_general_election

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