

# Fiji

## *Ethnicity in Fiji*

### *Group selection*

Fiji was colonized by the British in 1874. Under colonial rule the British “imported” Indian labor to work on the various plantations. After 1945, the **Indian** community surpassed the **Fijis** for the first time. When introducing electoral institutions the British also introduced ethnically separated electorates.

While there are still some European descendants and a growing number of Chinese traders, the politically relevant ethnic categories were shaped by British colonial rule and expressed in the Island’s party system.

### *Fijians*

Fijians were mostly converted to Christianity (Methodist Church) by American and British missionaries. Due to earlier beliefs they still feel an almost spiritual connection to the land they inhabit. Finally their language is Fijian. The main political organization was through “Chiefs.” After independence the party that stood for Fijian political concerns was the Alliance party under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Fijians, although being the original inhabitants of the island archipelago, were in the minority when Fiji became independent. Responsible for that was the high immigration of Indian plantation workers as well as a devastating measles epidemic in 1875 that killed a third of all Fijians. However, Fijians gained the numerical upper hand after the political developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s which led to mass emigration of Indians.

### *Indians*

Indians are the descendants of the plantation workers who were brought to Fiji by the British. The Indians speak Hindi and mainly adhere to Hinduism although there is also a sizable minority of Muslims. Indians owned most of the small and medium businesses in Fiji but have to lease most of the land from Fijians. Since the political changes in the late 1980s more and more Indians have left the country, which is reflected in the group sizes.

### *Power relations*

Fiji became independent from the United Kingdom in 1970. It then had a population of 520,000 which has grown to more than 800,000 today (<sup>1721</sup>).

After independence Fijians governed despite being a minority due to various safeguards given to them in the new constitution. The Fijian leader Mara consulted closely with his counterpart from the Indian National Federation and while this was not a coalition government, Indian interests found their expression in decision making (<sup>1722</sup>). In 1977, Indians won the parliamentary election but could not form a government amid Fijian fears of being dominated by the Indians. In new elections in the same year, the Alliance party won a landslide victory and formed a government under Mara, and the balancing act continued until 1987 (<sup>1723</sup>).

In that fateful year, the multi-racial (but Indian-dominated) Fiji Labour Party under the Fijian Dr. Timoci Bavadra won the election. Despite the fact that several Fijians were included in important cabinet positions, and the prime minister was to be Fijian, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka overthrew the government in May and created a caretaker government. Rabuka handed power over to long time Fijian prime minister Mara but oversaw the drafting of a new constitution that created “in effect a two-tier society where non-Fijians were in effect relegated to the status of second-class citizens” (<sup>1724</sup>). Indians were not to attain the office of Prime Minister or President but were still included in parliamentary process and could possibly achieve cabinet positions.

Under international pressure, a new more liberal institution was drawn up in 1997, leading to elections in 1999 that were won by the Fiji Labour Party and their Fijian Allies. Mahendra Choudry became the first Prime Minister of Indian descent. However, already in May 2000 George Speight overthrew the government in a military coup. While there were new elections and an ostensible return to the 1997 constitution, Indians were not included in the government and effectively powerless.

After the successful coup d’etat in 2006, Frank Bainimarama - previously the RAF commodore, took over power. As the primary figure who initiated the coup against the Qarase government, he saw this government as illegitimate considering its reconciliation efforts towards figures that initiated and facilitated the Speight coup of 2000 (<sup>1725</sup>). Publicly, there are indications that the justification for the coup was to prevent policies of overt racism against Indo-Fijians, yet this seems more an instrumental tool rather than the primary consideration for committing the coup (<sup>1726</sup>). The subsequently formed government was largely made up of native Fijians but included Fijians of Indian decent in the government in leading positions. Foregrounding unity Fiji under Brainimarama has been far from becoming a post-racial society, as indicated by the strength of informal/formal native Fijian institutions and attacks against the interim government as facilitating a pro-Indian agenda. Yet for this

<sup>1721</sup> [Gleditsch, 2010]

<sup>1722</sup> [Us Department of State, 2011]

<sup>1723</sup> [Premdas, 1993]

<sup>1724</sup> [Eriksen, 2001]

<sup>1725</sup> [McCarthy, 2011]

<sup>1726</sup> [Fraenkel et al., 2009]

very reason the current government has produced a partnership with Indo-Fijians such as Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum and former interim Prime Minister Chaudhry (of the majority Indian Fijian Labor Party) in order to legitimize its rule as anti-racist and multi-cultural. The partnership is by no means equal by virtue of representation and inclusion of former pro-Fijian political figures within the cabinet and parliament (an instrumental policy sustained by corruption and meant to legitimize interim rule in the eyes of the native Fijians), yet internal executive policy dictates that there shall be no racially motivated discrimination or disenfranchisement in the area of politics (<sup>1727</sup>).

<sup>1727</sup> [Fraenkel et al., 2009]

Intended to undermine native Fijian institutions perceived as racially motivated, several policies have been based. Especially the dismantlement of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) - which is understood to be the foundation for all governmental legitimacy in the eyes of the native Fijians is a prime example. The GCC opposed the 2006 coup, and Bainimarama mandated the depoliticization of the GCC, bereaving it of its political power and indicating that it was a bastion of racism and Fijian nationalism. The government also undercut the legitimacy of the Methodist church which had opposed the coup.

The dismantling of the traditional Fiji institutions described above exemplified Bainimarama's little respect for the traditional political order. The constitution of 2013 abolished the ethnically separate electorates and created for the first time a unified electorate. This electorate was in 2014 tasked with the election of a new parliament to officially end the military rule. Before the election the old traditional parties had to undergo a number of procedures, among them the collection of a certain number of signatures, to be permitted to participate in the election. This procedure plus the introduction of a 5% hurdle lead to the representation of only three parties in the parliament. 32 of the 50 seats in the parliament and therefore an absolute majority have been won by the Fiji First Party. This new party was set up by the head of the 2006 military coup Brainimarama and explicitly presented itself as non-ethnic. It tried to appeal to a cross-ethnic electorate. The second biggest party the Social Democratic Liberal Party won 15 seats mainly targeting native Fiji voters (<sup>1728</sup>). The last three seats were won by National Federation Party, which is dominated by Indo-Fijians. The winning party formed a government that gave the majority of ministries to native Fiji politicians but also included politicians of Indian descent in the government (<sup>1729</sup>). This landslide for a non-ethnicity centered party can also be seen in relation to the lowered voting age as the younger generation is more willing to accept political discourses not based on ethnicity (<sup>1730</sup>).

<sup>1728</sup> [Firth, 2015]

<sup>1729</sup> [?]

<sup>1730</sup> [Ramesh, 2016]

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## *Political status of ethnic groups in Fiji*

*From 1970 until 1987*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Indians	0.51	JUNIOR PARTNER
Fijians	0.43	SENIOR PARTNER

*From 1988 until 1999*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Fijians	0.51	DOMINANT
Indians	0.436	POWERLESS

*From 2000 until 2000*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Fijians	0.53	JUNIOR PARTNER
Indians	0.4	SENIOR PARTNER

*From 2001 until 2006*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Fijians	0.548	DOMINANT
Indians	0.374	POWERLESS

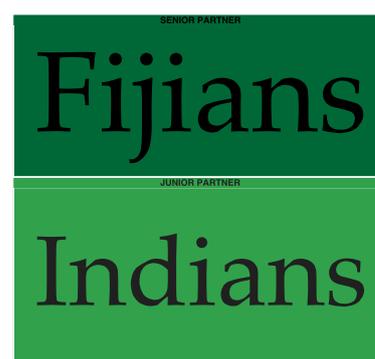


Figure 309: Political status of ethnic groups in Fiji during 1970-1987.



Figure 310: Political status of ethnic groups in Fiji during 1988-1999.



Figure 311: Political status of ethnic groups in Fiji during 2000-2000.



*From 2007 until 2009*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Fijians	0.573	SENIOR PARTNER
Indians	0.376	JUNIOR PARTNER

*From 2010 until 2017*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Fijians	0.591	SENIOR PARTNER
Indians	0.344	JUNIOR PARTNER



Figure 313: Political status of ethnic groups in Fiji during 2007-2009.

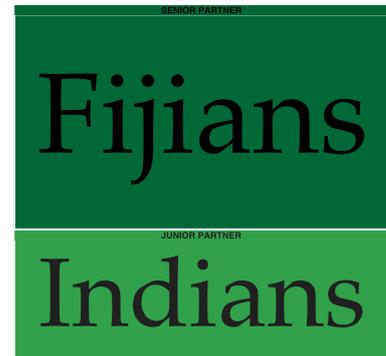


Figure 314: Political status of ethnic groups in Fiji during 2010-2017.

## *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Fiji*

*From 1970 until 2017*



Figure 315: Map of ethnic groups in Fiji during 1970-2017.

	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■	Indians	18 031	Statewide
■	Fijians	18 031	Statewide

Table 104: List of ethnic groups in Fiji during 1970-2017.