Postcolonial Path Dependency and Democratic Instability in Fiji: Institutions, Identity, and the Military

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POLI31555

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2024/2025

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of BSc in Politics and International Relations.

I declare that the research contained herein was granted approval by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Mark Wickham-Jones, for his invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout this dissertation.

To my mum, dad, and sister - thank you for your unwavering support and belief in me every step of the way.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my Fijian family in Naivibuli, whose generosity in welcoming me into their home not only grounded this project in lived experience but also sparked the passion and purpose behind it, vinaka vakalevu.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the extent to which postcolonial path dependency has shaped democratic instability in Fiji, a state with democracy regularly obstructed by instability, coups, and constitutional crises. Academic literature on democratisation in the Pacific is relatively limited in comparison to other postcolonial states, and often analyses coups and crises as isolated events, without acknowledging the long-term structural and historical causes. There is a significant gap in literature combining elite interviews with analysis of postcolonial institutional legacies in Fiji. Drawing on eight elite interviews, newspaper archives, and constitutional documents, this dissertation employs process tracing to contribute to this gap. By incorporating both iTaukei and Indo-Fijian testimonies, this dissertation offers a nuanced, multi-ethnic account of institutional failure and democratic instability in Fiji. Unusually, Fiji has implemented three different electoral systems without success - First-Past-the-Post, Alternative Vote, and Proportional Representation, indicating that underlying factors continue to shape the political landscape and making it a valuable example for analysing electoral reform.

This dissertation analyses the enduring impact of colonialism in Fiji on two central institutions: the structure and the role of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), and electoral and constitutional reform. I argue that the military, originally designed for colonial-era internal control, remained institutionally path dependent post-independence and was further legitimised by its significant role in UN peacekeeping missions. Alongside this, electoral and constitutional engineering have failed to dismantle colonial-era ethnic divisions. I argue that the initial constitution, adopting FPTP and communal rolls, has had an enduring legacy in contemporary Fijian politics. I determine the adoption of the 1970 constitution and outcome of the 1987 coups as critical junctures which have had entrenched self-reinforcing trajectories and institutional legacies, resistant to reform.

This dissertation contributes to the literature on Fijian political instability, civil-military relations, and institutional reform, while my findings may be applicable in postcolonial state building in other contexts. Elite interviews revealed a relevant disconnect between the theoretical expectations of electoral reform and the real impact in Fiji, highlighting the cultural and historical factors which can be overlooked by political scientists and within theory.

Word count (following SPAIS guidelines): 9,902 words

Ethics Approval:

I declare that this research was approved by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group.

Title: Postcolonial Path Dependency and Democratic Instability in Fiji: Institutions, Identity, and the Military

Ethics approval code: 22729

Date: 11/02/2025

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

AV - Alternative Voting

AP - Alliance Party

CRW - Counter-Revolutionary Warfare

FPTP - First-Past-The-Post

FMF - Fiji Military Forces

FDF - Fijian Defence Force

FLP - Fiji Labour Party

NFP - National Federation Party

PA - People's Alliance

PCPD - Postcolonial Path Dependency

PM - Prime Minister

PR - Proportional Representation

RMFM - Royal Fiji Military Force

SDL - Social Democratic Liberal Party

GCC - Great Council of Chiefs

Chapter 1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Fiji is widely regarded as the most politically volatile country in the Pacific, with democracy frequently obstructed by instability, coups, and constitutional crises. Since gaining independence from Britian in 1970, Fiji experienced four coups in under 30 years, occurring twice in 1987, 2000 and 2006 (Hegarty and Tyron, 2013: 201). Despite multiple constitutional and electoral reforms, Fiji continues to possess a 'chaotic' political landscape, with the current government being characterized as a 'fragile coalition on the brink of collapse' with a disintegrating opposition (Herr, 2024). Yet, much of the literature on Fiji examines coups and political crises in isolation, offering little academic consensus on why limited democratic consolidation has occurred in the long-term.

This dissertation argues that persistent political instability in Fiji cannot be fully understood without analysing the long-term effects of colonial rule. Thus, I adopt postcolonial path-dependency theory (PCPD) as my central analytical framework. In a political science context, path dependency theory contends that once a particular institutional or political course is set in a country or region, these arrangements 'obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice.' As a result, a path can become entrenched and self-reinforcing (Lichbach and Zuckerman, 1997: 28-29). The concept of critical junctures, or bifurcation points, refer to key moments on historical trajectory where particular events or decisions play a pivotal role on future developments (Duit, 2007: 1100). Path dependency is rooted in historical institutionalism, which emphasises how rules, policy structures, and norms can become embedded in institutions over time (Pierson, 2000: 265).

There is no single, widely accepted definition of postcolonial theory, due to its use across disciplines and contexts. This dissertation employs Chandra's (2013: 480) definition of postcolonialism as a lens to critically explore the lasting effect of European colonialism on contemporary power relations, political systems, and ideas, highlighting the ways in which colonial dynamics persist in post-independence contexts. As Loomba (1998: 14-15) argues, the pre-colonial cannot be detached from its historical context, and 'is not available to us in any pristine form that can be neatly separated from the history of colonialism.' Alongside Appiah (1991: 353), she challenges romanticised accounts of indigenous institutions and identities, highlighting that these too were modified by colonial power. Accordingly, this

dissertation applies postcolonial theory critically, recognising both the enduring legacies of colonial rule and the agency of Fijians in navigating and shaping political trajectories.

PCPD integrates historical institutionalism and postcolonial theory, providing a framework that recognises both Fiji's complex history and contemporary coup culture. I use this approach to analyse Fiji's constitutions, electoral systems, and military, examining how colonial legacies continue to shape post-independence political instability. Thus, this dissertation seeks to answer the question 'To What Extent Has Postcolonial Path Dependency Shaped Political Instability in Fiji?'.

The relevance of this dissertation lies in the importance of a stable and functioning democracy. Political instability in Fiji has had a myriad of devastating consequences, some of which are immeasurable. Gong and Rao (2016: 383) projected that Fiji's GDP per capita would have been '44% higher in 1999 and 130% higher in 2011 in the absence of political instability.' Lal (2006: 8) condemns the 1987 and 2000 coups for limiting 'improvements to essential infrastructure, education and social and medical services' whilst causing 'a mass exodus' of some of Fiji's 'best and brightest citizens.' The economic and social consequences of instability have, in turn, deepened racial polarization. Rising unemployment due to coups has increased crime and violence, particularly in politically disenfranchised indigenous Fijian youth. Indo-Fijians are twice as likely to be a victim of crime due to racial polarization, and struggle to access resources. Political instability has not only been created by ethnic divisions but has actively deepened it, further hindering the development of democracy (Naidu, 2008: 164-166). The relative success of other Pacific Island nations demonstrates how democracy in Fiji had the potential to succeed. For example, Samoa's indigenous political structures, colonial history, and initial parliamentary system is distinctly similar to Fiji's, but has managed to successfully consolidate its democracy (Herr, 2014: 10).

In comparison to other postcolonial states, there is limited modern and comprehensive literature on why democratic consolidation in Fiji has failed. This analysis is essential to identify if reforms are necessary in Fiji's institutional framework to promote long-term development in the country. Furthermore, understanding the cause of political instability in Fiji may contribute to debates in other postcolonial, ethnically divided contexts.

This dissertation is structured as follows; the following chapter provides relevant context on colonial rule and ethnic conflict in Fiji. I then engage with the current literature on Fijian politics, civil-military relations, and electoral engineering. Chapter three consists of my methodology. The next two chapters make up the body of my research. Chapter four evaluates why electoral and constitutional reforms have consistently failed to stabilise democracy in Fiji, applying PCPD as a framework. In chapter five, I assess whether PCPD clarifies how the military has developed into a dominant political actor. Finally, chapter six presents the conclusion, summarising key findings and suggesting potential reforms that aim to enhance the durability of Fijian constitutional arrangements.

Chapter 2. Context and Literature Review

2.1 Context

British colonial rule fundamentally changed the demography of Fiji through the mass migration of Indian indentured labours to Fijian sugar plantations (Kaur and Prasad, 2017: 152). This resulted in the formation of two major ethnic groups, Indo-Fijians and Indigenous (iTaukei) Fijians, who are now 'almost equal in size' (de Vries, 2002: 313). Religion and language separate the communities, hindering integration and inter-community marriages (Hegarty and Tyron, 2013: 64). Social, spatial, and religious segregation was also enforced by British colonial rule, inhibiting the development of a common national identity. Official policy prohibited interracial marriages, religious conversions, and socialising between ethnic groups (Kelly, 1995: 71-72). This strategy aligned with the broader British colonial policy of "divide and rule", whereby authorities encouraged exclusion, spatial separation, and cultural differentiation within territories. This segregation maintained colonial hegemony, whilst protecting British settlers, colonial officials, and indigenous or immigrant communities who collaborated with imperial authorities (Christopher, 1998: 233-234).

Racial hierarchies were also deeply embedded in British imperial perspectives, shaping how authorities acted within territories (Mahmud, 1999: 1226). Recorded dialogue since colonial rule began in 1874 demonstrates how governors perceived Indigenous Fijians as a higher class than the Indian indentured labourers. For example, in 1879, Fiji's first governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, was quoted at the Royal Colonial Institute justifying preferential treatment for indigenous Fijians by saying they "exhibit capacities for a higher grade of civilization" than Indians (Kelly, 1995: 71-72). Within multiple territories, the British exhorted the mass migration of Indian populations, whilst using these populations as political scapegoats. The indigenous population were influenced to direct their 'resentment of colonial rule against the Indians rather than against the colonialists themselves.' Generally, the colonially encouraged 'anti-Indian prejudice' from local populations in postcolonial states which increased following independence (Morrock, 1973: 130). The subservience of Indo-Fijians was also promoted to facilitate cheap labour in sugar plantations, even in the post-independence period. Indo-Fijian Trade unions were actively discouraged as class-based political movements undermined the racial divide essential to maintain imperial rule and Fiji's plantation economy (Kelly, 1995: 78-79).

Following decolonisation, ethnic tensions have been exacerbated by contemporary socioeconomic differences. Indo-Fijians typically superintend the sugar industry and are prominent in business and the professional sphere. Conversely, the iTaukei population possess '84% of the nation's land and command the military establishment' (Lum, 2000: 1-2). The RFMF originally functioned to maintain colonial state security and remains ethnically imbalanced, demographically consisting of 'over 99% indigenous Fijian' (Naidu, 2021: 3)

2.2 Literature Review

Academic literature on democratic instability in the Pacific remains relatively limited in comparison to other postcolonial contexts. Much of the existing scholarship tends to analyse coups and political crises as isolated incidents, rather than examining their underlying structural, institutional, and historical causes. Fraenkel et al. (2009) provides a detailed analysis of the 2006 coup in Fiji. However, the volume's reliance on short-term causes of the coup by multiple authors results in a fragmented explanation without an overarching analytical framework. Within academic scholarship, Fiji is also frequently examined comparatively with other pacific nations, including with Samoa in Herr (2014) and Larmour's (2002) work. Although these sources provide constructive insights, using Fiji solely as a comparative case study can oversimplify the nation's unique and complex political context. The limited scope of these texts means, generally, only one variable is focused on.

Fraenkel and Grofman (2006) provide useful perspectives into Fiji's electoral systems, but their wider focus on the Pacific Islands constrains the depth of analysis. Moreover, the source negates the significant impact of military intervention in determining the success of electoral reform. The article also predates Fiji's 2013 constitution and adoption of PR as an electoral system, alongside much of the relevant literature on Fiji's electoral framework. However, Herr's (2014: 10) analysis highlights the long-term challenges for the 2014 government caused by the Westminster model, including the assumed supremacy of parliament and dependence on party accountability. This successfully acknowledges the impact of unresolved ethnic and historical legacies of colonialism on modern institutional functionality but is limited by its primary focus on the 2014 government.

Academic scholarship on the role of the Fijian military often focuses on how it has acted unlawfully, rather than why. For example, Cox (2003) critiques the seizures of power by the military, demonstrating how it was constitutionally unlawful, but did not focus on the determining factors of the 1987 and 2000 coups. A more nuanced explanation is offered by Goiran (2013), who interprets the RFMF's political role and demography through the lens of iTaukei warrior tradition. While her analysis acknowledges the impact of colonialism in reinforcing militarised authority in Fijian culture, her approach is centred in cultural continuity. This dissertation adopts an alternative interpretation, applying PCPD to the RFMF to analyse how colonial institutional design, rather than cultural legacies, has impacted civil-military relations.

Electoral systems

Electoral systems are 'powerful levers for shaping the content and practice of politics in divided societies,' and their 'design is highly sensitive to context.' Thus, unsuitable systems can politicise ethnicity and increase conflict (Reilly and Reynolds, 2000: 420). Foundational works by Lijphart (1977, 1999) and Horowitz (1991) provide relevant theory to assess the suitability and success of Fiji's electoral systems. Lijphart (1999: 33) contends that the only solution for deeply divided societies is a form of government that 'emphasizes consensus instead of opposition' and 'tries to maximize the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with a bare majority.' On the other hand, 'majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy.' Lijphart's argument critiques the use of majoritarian systems, including the initial FPTP and AV constitutions, in Fiji. Instead, Lijphart (1999: 143) advocates for the implementation of PR in divided societies as it 'represent[s] both majorities and minorities' through encouraging coalitions and preventing the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of parties. Horowitz (1991: 96-98) also critiques the suitability of FPTP in plural societies, arguing it encourages ethnic bloc voting and 'predictable and permanent entrenchment' of one group in power. However, Horowitz's (1999) theory of AV advocates for its ability to encourage cross-ethnic vote transfers. Although Horowitz's work does not draw on Fiji as a case study, he provided evidence to Fiji's 1995 Constitutional Review Commission, ultimately leading to the 1997 adoption of AV (Fraenkel, 2001: 8-9). This dissertation draws on both theorists to critically assess whether

electoral reform functioned as intended in Fiji, and whether their impact reflects deeper unresolved PCPD.

Civil-Military Relations

Military intervention is a defining feature of political instability in Fiji. Huntington's (1957) 'Civil-Military Relations Theory' provides useful insights into why the RFMF has recurrently intervened in domestic politics. Huntington (1957: 83) differentiates between 'objective control', whereby the 'military is removed from politics,' and 'subjective control', where military political power is increased in relation to civilian power. He contends that civilian control over the military is a prerequisite for political stability, but that this control should be balanced with 'military professionalism'. Huntington further argues that the 'military must remain loyal to the civilian government', and refrain from becoming an independent political actor (Huntington, 1957: 121). Huntington's theory contends that the RFMF must be controlled, depoliticised, and loyal to civilian governance for effective democracy, providing an applicable concept of the necessary institutional balance to avoid military intervention.

Adhikari (2020) adds a relevant dimension, warning that providing significant numbers of troops to UN peacekeeping missions can excessively grow the military, disrupting the 'civil-military equilibrium'. While Fiji is not an explicit case study in his work, it is a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping operations (UN, 2024). Existing literature recognizes the military's role in Fiji's coups but regularly fails to clarify the specific and determining factors behind its recurring interventions. Despite the characterisation by most scholars that the military as a dominant political actor, there is limited research in the institutional and ideological factors that have entrenched its involvement in governance. This dissertation applies Huntington's (1957) theory alongside PCPD to examine the determining factors that have entrenched its dominant role in domestic politics.

This dissertation responds to several gaps in the existing literature on Fijian political instability. PCPD (Pierson, 2000), (Chandra, 2013) provides a valuable lens for analysing the role of institutions which has not been applied to the Fijian military and electoral systems. This dissertation covers the full post-independence period, process tracing how institutions have endured and developed from colonial rule. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in

interview-based political research in Fiji. Naidu's (2013a) work is the sole study I identified which conducted interviews to provide a more nuanced and accurate 'picture of ethnic relations in Fiji'. Although this source acknowledges political instability, the central focus is on inter-ethnic relations. This dissertation uses primary interviews to provide a more comprehensive, holistic explanation of political instability in Fiji.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This dissertation employs qualitative analysis through process-tracing to 'identify the intervening causal process' between the independent variables I identify and the dependent variable, political instability and limited democratic consolidation in Fiji (George and Bennett, 2005: 206). The independent variables have been identified as the role of the military, and constitutional and electoral engineering. I employ postcolonial path dependency as my theoretical lens, applicable to Fiji because institutions and political norms were inherited from colonial rule upon independence and continue to shape contemporary political instability. An investigation of these two factors also facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between institutional design and political stability in Fiji. As a method, process tracing enables me to analyse and compare the causes of multiple key events (coups, constitutional changes, and shifts in the electoral system) with a diverse set of evidence and test competing explanations (Waldner, 2014: 16).

This dissertation draws upon primary interviews with eight elite political and military actors, newspaper reports, Fijian Constitutions, and supplementary secondary literature. Primary interviews have been specifically chosen to generate data and provide nuanced perspectives from key figures that may not be documented in formal sources. For an overview of interviewees and the anonymisation process, see Appendix A. This provides a distinct contribution to much of the existing literature on Fijian politics, as there is a gap in interview-based analysis on democratisation. This method enables a meticulous examination of the institutional forces shaping democratic instability, while testing whether PCPD is applicable in the Fijian context to answer my research question.

I have received approval from the SPAIS ethics committee for primary interviews. All interviewees' roles in politics or the military equip them with informed perspectives on democracy in Fiji. As mentioned in Appendix A, I have ensured even representation of Indo-Fijian, Indigenous Fijian, and foreign experts to minimise bias within my data.

Chapter 4. Constitutions and Electoral Systems

In this section, I argue that Fiji's 1970 Constitution represents a critical juncture in its democratic consolidation. In this context, a critical juncture refers to a 'particular course of action, once introduced, can be virtually impossible to reverse' (Pierson, 2000: 251). At this moment, Fiji had the opportunity to construct inclusive political institutions. However, instead, the design of the 1970 constitution and electoral system entrenched racial division and colonial-era political dynamics. I attest this path dependency to two aspects: the use of communal voting and the First-Past-the-Post electoral system. I demonstrate their unsuitability to Fiji's context using the 1977 constitutional crisis and 1987 coup as case studies. I then demonstrate how these decisions rendered future electoral and constitutional reforms unable to stabilise democracy in Fiji. I use PCPD to evaluate whether the initial constitution impacted the success of the AV and PR models.

This chapter employs Horowitz (1991, 2000) and Lijphart's (1999) theories of electoral design to assess the efficiency of institutional reform in Fiji. By applying these alongside PCPD, one can evaluate whether electoral and constitutional reforms were successful, and, if not, whether PCPD impacted their efficacy in Fiji. Horowitz and Lijphart were chosen as both acclaimed scholars' work contributed to electoral reform in Fiji. For example, both gave evidence to the 1995 Constitutional Review Commission, ultimately leading to Fiji's adoption of AV (Fraenkel, 2001: 8-9).

4.1 Communal Rolls

Under Section 32 of Chapter V, Part I of the 1970 Constitution (Fiji Government, 1970: 41), Fiji adopted an electoral system which used communal rolls. This divided voters by ethnicity and allocated the fifty-two elected members of the house accordingly. Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians both elected twenty-two members of the House, whilst 'neither Fijians nor Indians' elected eight (Fiji Government, 1970: 40). It is important to note that, at independence the population was 51% Indo-Fijian and 43% iTaukei Fijian (Ali, 1975: 355). Although the constitution ostensibly allocated equal seats to Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, the wider system provided disproportionate political influence to Indigenous Fijian interests. Interviewee one contested:

> "The British bequeathed system gave some degree of *over representation for the indigenous Fijians*, not much though, because the two communities were close to parity. But the general voters who are European, were given representation far in excess of their proportionate number because *of the idea that the indigenous Fijians and the general voters would club together to keep the Fiji-Indians down.*"

The *clubbing together* between indigenous Fijians and Europeans was not incidental but strategically enforced during colonial rule. Historical accounts highlight that when Indo-Fijian indentured labourers mobilised politically, colonial authorities used chiefs to discourage iTaukei Fijians from sympathising or aligning with the Indo-Fijians. Following the 1921 Viti Levu sugar strike, grateful colonial authorities emphasised 'the importance of Fijian political support and reaffirmed its commitment to the paramountcy of [indigenous] Fijian interests.' The chiefs, led by Ratu Sukuna, successfully lobbied for "special conditions" for iTaukei participation in governance (Macnaught, 2016: 114-115). Through the lens of PCPD, communal rolls within the independence constitution can be interpreted as the institutionalised continuation of colonial dynamics.

Newspaper excerpts from constitutional negotiations reported that indigenous Fijian elites lobbied for communal rolls, while Indo-Fijian leaders advocated for a common electoral roll (Forsyth, 1972: 2). Reuter reported that independence negotiations reflected hierarchical dynamics rather than genuine cooperation between groups, as 'if there was any disagreement on the composition of the legislature and its election methods the British Government's view would prevail' (1970: 7). Despite its implementation, the flaws of the communal system were acknowledged by senior British figures. Sir Hilton Poynton, the permanent undersecretary, wrote to Sir Kenneth Maddocks, Fiji's governor, in 1960 arguing that to maintain the communal system was "*purely a continuation of the present set-up*". However, authorities did not see the possibility of a non-racial state at independence, so decided to attempt to 'wither away' communal dynamics. Poynton wrote "'we should avoid any statement which commits us forever to communal representation" (Lal, 2008: 31). Ultimately, this commitment by colonial authorities, taken at a critical juncture, to appease iTaukei elites and impose communal seats entrenched Fiji into a definitive path of ethnically divided politics.

There was unanimous consensus among all eight interviewees that communal voting has had a longstanding legacy on voter behaviour Fiji. Interviewee two contended: "The whole electoral system was divided on the basis of race. That's only going to create racist discourses. If you've got communal seats, *you'll get race politics*." Establishing racially allocated seats into electoral design from the offset, entrenched and legitimised ethnic divisions. As a result, political actors were encouraged to engage in ethnically driven electoral strategies, furthering racial polarisation and discouraging cross-ethnic political identities. This reinforces Chandra's (2013: 480) assertion that structures inherited from colonial rule are not neutral as they reproduce colonial dynamics into post-independence institutions. The legacy of the 1970 constitution is evident when considering that a common roll in Fiji was not introduced until 2013 (interviewee one). Thus, communal rolls represent a critical institutional choice that entrenched Fiji into a path of ethnically divided political competition.

4.2 First-Past-The-Post

Alongside communal rolls, the adoption of FPTP as an electoral system further reinforced colonial hierarches by establishing winner-takes-all outcomes in an ethnically divided political environment. Lijphart argues that in deeply divided societies, 'majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy.' This is because plural societies, like Fiji, who are divided along religious, linguistic, cultural, or ethnic lines 'lack the flexibility necessary for majoritarian democracy' (1999: 32-33). Through its design and outcomes, FPTP in Fiji was unconducive to fair electoral representation and, instead, acted as a tool to sustain elite dominance. It became a path-dependent driver of continuity, rooted from postcolonial institutional design.

FPTP enables candidates to win with a plurality, not a majority. Thus, Horowitz (1991: 96-98) argues that cross-ethnic appeal is not necessary, and parties are more likely to win by appealing to their own ethnic group. Instead, an 'election is tantamount to a census,' leading to a 'predictable and permanent entrenchment' of one group in power. Consequently, in Fiji, "the [electoral] system encouraged the two communities to present themselves in homogenous parties" (interview one) and FPTP embedded "ethnic, racial compartmentalization" within politics (interview five). Interview data demonstrated that the FPTP electoral system functioned as Horowitz predicted, encouraging political polarisation

and disincentivising moderation or coalition-building. “One of the fundamental flaws of the Westminster system is that *it creates an antagonism of government versus opposition*” (Interview five). Due to the constitutional setup, Indo-Fijians were confined to opposition and consistently excluded from executive power. Throughout the 1960s, widespread concern from colonial officials about the suitability of FPTP in Fiji was reported, due to its inability to support multi-ethnic democracy. In the Governor of Fiji’s last despatch, two days before independence, he admitted his regret over the unresolved issue of the FPTP electoral system and communal voting, declaring: “in effect *a time bomb will lie buried in the new Constitution*” (Lal, 2008: 78-79). Despite awareness of its inadequacy, elites chose to implement FPTP, reinforcing colonial dynamics at a critical juncture.

The 1977 Constitutional Crisis and Elite Dominance

In 1977, the unsuitability of FPTP and communal rolls in the Fijian context became apparent, as the system failed to process democratic turnover. During the electoral campaign, the FNP emerged with an extreme ethno-nationalist standpoint, advocating for the ‘deportation of Indians’ (AAP, 1977: 5). This is otherwise called ‘ethnic outbidding’, where ethnic parties will ‘adopt extreme ideological positions so that they can distinguish themselves from rival parties’ (Stewart and McGauvran, 2020: 406). As a result, the FNP split the indigenous vote, siphoning votes from the AP and the NFP, a predominately Indo-Fijian party, gained a parliamentary majority (Vile, 1977: 8). The NFP won 46% of the vote, compared to the AP’s 43.5% (Ali, 1977: 192), but because FPTP establishes ‘winner-takes-all’ outcomes in each constituency, the electoral system inordinately rewords unified ethnic blocs and disadvantages those experiencing internal divisions. As Horowitz (1991: 97) highlights, under FPTP, even a small fragmentation in one ethnic group can produce an unexpected outcome in favour of the less popular but more unified group. Thus, it would’ve been too risky for the AP to appeal to Indo-Fijian voters as parties are more likely to face electoral success by securing their ethnic bloc. This minimises the possibility of cross-ethnic collaboration as winning does not require a majority or coalition, just a plurality. FPTP in Fiji incentivised polarisation and distorted representation, stoking ethnic resentment.

“1977 was the first time that it became clear that if the major indigenous Fijian party lost power, there would be trouble” (interview one). The Governor-General refused to let NFP

govern and dissolved parliament, legitimised by the narrow win of the NFP (Vile, 1977: 8). This outcome was not simply the consequence of a divided electorate, but the electoral system itself. The combination of communal rolls and FPTP were intended to manage ethnic difference through separation. Despite widespread concern about its suitability in the Fijian context, this system remained after independence, entrenching racial polarisation into the logic of democratic competition. In comparison, "a power-sharing arrangement ensures that one side isn't always in the opposition," and could have developed democratic norms in Fijian politics conducive to democratic turnover (Interview one). Whereas the established ethnic "government versus opposition" divide framed democratic turnover as a threat to iTaukei Fijian hegemony. No election reform occurred, deepening the fragility of constitutional arrangements and demonstrating an established path dependency within Fijian politics.

Aside from 1977, FPTP and communal rolls maintained colonial-era elite dominance in governance by chiefs for 17 years. Horowitz (2000: 643) contends that FPTP systems 'distort the electoral demography of ethnically divided societies' in two ways. The system inflates 'the share of seats obtained by an ethnic party with a majority of votes' and reduces 'ethnic minority representation below proportional levels.' As a result, "[FPTP] produced governments where the chiefly elite of eastern Fiji would rule and nobody would question it." (interview five). This is a PCPD outcome: the institutional design shielded elite power and FPTP created what interviewee five contended was a "semblance of democracy". Following a critical juncture, Pierson (2000: 252) argues that institutions tend to persist due to high reversal costs. Together, FPTP and communal voting institutionalised racial divide and elite dominance within Fiji, with increasing returns.

<u>The 1987 Electoral Defeat and Coups</u>

However, the 1987 election disrupted the established political dynamic and produced an unintended outcome. The electoral result exposed institutional fragility within the system and challenged entrenched colonial and political hierarchies from the last 17 years.

> "The 1987 government wanted to transcend all these compartmentalisations of society. Bavadra refused his identity as a chiefly aristocrat, he corroborated with many of the of the Indo-Fijian trade union leaders, and *he wanted to transition [Fiji]*

to a true and full democracy with a great kind of *multiethnic postcolonial identity*" (interviewee five).

The electoral mandate indicated a widespread public support for inclusive governance, and the 1997 election produced a FLP-NFP coalition government (AAP, 1987: 5). However, Fiji was not used to consensus, the prospect of this created elite backlash and, ultimately, a military coup. The institutional foundation could not absorb reform, demonstrating the dangers of colonially inherited systems in deeply divided states. Interviewee five stated that Fiji "could have avoided the [1987] coup, *they should have created a system from the beginning that was consensual.*" The FPTP system was superficially democratic and locked Fiji into a racialised and hierarchical political order. When the system ceased to produce an iTaukei majority, a coup occurred. FPTP initiated path dependency within Fijian politics through establishing entrenched ethnic dichotomy between government and opposition, obstructing the prospect of democratic turnover without elite consent. The FPTP system functioned in Fiji just as Lewis (1965: 71) had cautioned: '*the surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society is to adopt the Anglo-American electoral system of first past-the-post.'*

4.3 Alternative Vote: The 1997 Constitution

Following the 1987 coups, there was mounting international and domestic pressure to make Fiji's political institutions more inclusive. As a result, a constitutional review occurred, the Reeves Commission (Reeves et al. 1996), and the committee introduced the AV electoral system to encourage consensus and multiethnic cooperation. Both Horowitz and Lijphart gave evidence to the Commission. Horowitz's AV model was implemented, in the belief that this electoral engineering would alleviate ethnic divisions and foster cross-ethnic political cooperation (Fraenkel, 2001: 8-9). However, this reform was constrained by PCPD structures. As a result, "the *alternative vote system worked extremely badly*. It did exactly the opposite of what Horowitz thought it would do. He thought it would *incentivise moderation, but it didn't do that at all*" (interview one).

Horowitz's rationale was that the need for second and third preferences would encourage cross-ethnic coalitions as AV rewords moderate candidates via transferable votes and second preferences (Horowitz, 1991: 171). In practice, voting remained rooted in ethnic bloc

competition and, instead of moderation, AV "produced a rather unrepresentative parliament" (interviewee one). Newspaper reports from the 1999 election revealed that, despite the adoption of AV and formal commitments to stability, the system failed to change behaviour. The electorate "*still vote and think along ethnic lines*" while politicians publicly "preached stability and security in English during the elections" but "when they spoke in their regional languages their speeches were far more racially charged" (The Chaser, 1999: 5). This indicates that the problem wasn't solely electoral engineering, AV was incapable of reversing thirty years of ethnic voting, rooted in colonial divides, which was normalised and previously encouraged by FPTP. Despite almost thirty years of democracy, Fiji had failed to develop multiethnic political identities as colonial systems had never been dismantled.

In 1999, the AV system gave the FLP an absolute majority, despite minimal first-preference support from iTaukei voters. Fraenkel (2010: 21) highlighted that, 'in the two constituencies that were required to give the party an absolute majority', the FLP won despite being ranked third last. Interviewee one contended that this "artificially large majority" caused an institutional failure. By granting the FLP an absolute majority with minimal indigenous support, the 1999 election was widely seen as illegitimate among the indigenous community. The Chaser (1999: 5) reported that even the FLP's leader was shocked by the result, exacerbating fears among iTaukei Fijians that the new system was biased. A coup occurred in 2000, which interviewee one attested to the AV system: "*if he had needed coalition partners, the [2000] coup might not have happened.*"

4.4 Proportional Representation and Political Disillusionment

Following the 2000 coup, there was a consensus in Fiji that AV had failed to prevent political unrest and ethnic division. As a result, the 2013 constitution introduced a PR electoral system, intending to make democratic institutions more inclusive and stable (Lal, 2019: 5). Lijphart (1999: 37) recommends PR for stability in deeply divided societies as the system intends to provide an equitable share of power through granting seats proportionally to the amount of votes received. This aims to encourage coalition governments and ensure representation of minorities, replacing zero-sum outcomes to reduce ethnic outbidding. The 2022 election produced an unprecedented coalition between the SDL, NFP, and PA, indicating a significant shift towards cross-ethnic collaboration. However, the army was

deployed during coalition negotiations, indicating that the coalition may represent political expediency (Fraenkel, 2023).

Interview data demonstrated that Fijians remain sceptical and confused by political processes. Interviewee four said that "you used to vote based on your race… Now it's one person, one vote but *people don't understand the system*." He believes, despite seeing flaws in the first constitution, many people prefer it because it was "simpler" and "there first", indicating that Fiji's recurrent succession of electoral systems has fostered a sense of political disillusionment. Interviewee six, an Indo-Fijian, also highlighted the legacies of the communal system, recounting that "prior to the build-up of [the 2022] election, politicians instilled fear again, there's always rumours going around a coup will be done if you don't vote along this party line". This indicates that ethnic outbidding, encouraged by the FPTP system, continues to shape voting behaviour, despite the consociational PR system. Interviewee eight said: "I think Fiji has a number of problems, which *still stem from that [1970] constitution*, but were then *compounded by the convoluted way in which the current system is constructed*." This exemplifies institutional PCPD, demonstrating how Fiji's contemporary instability stems from colonially inherited systems, exacerbated by subsequent reforms which failed to reverse path dependency. This interview also highlighted that many rural and innumerate Fijian's struggle with the numbered PR system, limiting political engagement and trust in institutions.

4.5 Leadership and Expressions of Democracy

While electoral reform has improved since the 1970 constitution, interview data highlighted that the effectiveness of systems relies heavily on political leadership and norms to maintain democratic principles. As interviewee one contended: "electoral systems and the absence of power sharing are critical factors, but institutions don't determine everything, there's also an important role for leadership…" Interview data indicated that many iTaukei chiefs who became politicians struggled with democratic turnover as the role of a chief is hereditary, contrary to the nature of elections. Interviewee two said, "a paramount chief to have to face elections. It really rubs against the grain, doesn't it?" This has had a particularly notable effect in the case of PM Ratu Mara. Although his role in the 1987 coup has not been directly proven, the coup followed his election loss, and he subsequently accepted a reappointment as PM (Aglionby, 2004). Interviewee two contended that:

"Ratu Mara understood Democratic politics well, but *he was never really committed to democracy in Fiji*, ever. When he lost, *he was a paramount chief*, a major figure both in Fijian culture and in regional politics. His loss of face in losing the 1987 election was considerable… The chiefs won, it was fine as soon as they lost no."

Interview data further demonstrated a clear disconnect between an Indo-Fijian desire for political autonomy and iTaukei scepticism for democratic turnover and values. Interviewee four said "a lot of conservative indigenous Fijians still say Western democracy is not in accordance with our traditions." This is exemplified by rhetoric from the current Prime Minister, Rabuka, who characterised democracy as "a foreign flower unsuited to Fijian soil" (O'Sullivan, 2018). This view is not uncommon among senior officials as interviewee eight, who works closely with an incumbent senior government official, said:

"He told me *he would prefer if Fiji was still a realm of the United Kingdom* and King Charles was still the monarch because they feel as if a *connection to an outside kind of higher power best fits their own cultural style*"

This highlights a postcolonial legacy where the traditional iTaukei chiefly hierarchies were co-opted by colonial frameworks, embedding a political culture among alites that remains influential today. This elite colonial nostalgia hinders the formation of a national identity, due to the contrasting colonial experience of Indian indentured labourers. Interview four contended political elites have "sugar-coated colonialism" and "sidelined people who were actually heroes of anti-colonial resistance." As a result, interviewee two said "there's no real postcolonial intellectual reckoning in Fiji." Aside from chiefly elites, interview data indicated that colonial rule and multiple undemocratically imposed constitutions altered many indigenous Fijians perception of democracy to an external imposition, rather than a domestic choice. This obstructs the development of democratic norms. Interviewee one contended: "If you have constitutions imposed on the people without any elected representative or any referendum. That's not a democracy. *People have to establish their own constitution, and that hasn't yet been done in Fiji."* This demonstrates how PCPD can also institutionalise elite dominance and alter the post-independence political culture.

Chapter 5. The Military

This chapter expands on my previous analysis of the impact of PCPD on constitutional engineering in Fiji, by process tracing how the role of the military developed into a dominant political actor. I demonstrate how, upon independence, the Fijian military was unable to act as a neutral institution due to its colonial roots and iTaukei ethnic dominance. I present 1970 as a critical juncture, whereby colonial authorities failed to regulate the military's inordinate institutional influence, initiating PCPD. Since independence, the role of the RFMF in domestic politics has intensified, while being economically empowered and legitimised as a state actor through UN peacekeeping missions. This formed what interviewee seven contended is "democracy by military permission" in Fiji.

5.1 Army Structure and Colonial Roots

Originating in the colonial period, the RFMF exemplifies the institutional legacies of British rule. The Fijian army was initially formed to protect Western settlers, and for the ''pacification' of tribes resisting the British presence.' It then functioned as an internal police force, and to manage Indo-Fijian trade union uprisings (Goiran, 2013: 59). Press coverage during the First World War, including The Daily Telegraph (1914: 8), reported that the Fijian Defence Force was significantly upscaled during the war, with recruitment schemes and compulsory conscription if quotas of indigenous Fijians were not met. Although, the FDF remained predominantly focused on domestic protection, as advocated for by European settlers. Indo-Fijians remained excluded from military service, due to their contracts as indentured labourers (The Muswellbrook Chronicle, 1916: 1). During the Second World War, Fiji gained strategic importance due to Japan's entry in the war, and 'supplied contingents of men for the imperial forces' (J.P., 1943: 3). Prospective Indo-Fijian soldiers protested for equal pay with Europeans, whilst iTaukei Fijians did not. Colonial authorities viewed Indo-Fijian dissatisfaction as a potential disturbance to the rest of the army, excluding Indo-Fijians from meaningful combat participation and punishing leaders who advocated for equal pay. The European settlers and iTaukei Fijians later resented the Indo-Fijians "lack of contribution to the war" (Gillion, 1977: 178-179).

Interviewee six contended that many Indo-Fijians wanted to fight, but with a "protest in political culture movement already from India", they were strongly opposed to their lives being viewed as implicitly less valuable. This "legacy had an impact, discouraging

generations" of Indo-Fijians to join the military. Alongside this, she asserted that Indo-Fijians still have a "fearful" perception of the military because "the whole point of military setup was to suppress the locals." This quote underscores the legacy of the original purpose of the RFMF, to enforce racial and colonial hierarches, rather than national defence. Through a PCPD lens, the failure to restructure the RFMF at independence ingrained a post-independence trajectory still shaped by the colonial exclusionary policies towards Indo-Fijians. Wartime press coverage, alongside interviewee six's account, affirms how this legacy deterred Indo-Fijian participation and entrenched iTaukei dominance within the military. As a result, inclusive structural reform became increasingly institutionally resistant and politically sensitive, reflecting the concept of increasing returns in path dependency theory (Pierson, 2000: 251). During the National Defence Review, interviewee six strongly recommended the military implement an ethnic quota system. However, officials continually contended that the military "never advertise that it's only for Fijians", reflecting a broader unwillingness to recognise or rectify the enduring impacts of colonial policies and historical exclusion of Indo-Fijians from the RFMF.

5.2 The Development of Norms

By 1970, the RFMF was an entrenched part of the state, while democracy was in its infancy. Upon independence, the size of the Fijian military was not scaled down, despite Fiji's limited geopolitical threats (Naidu, 2021: 4). This institutional choice marks a critical juncture, whereby the military's asymmetrical power in relation to democratic institutions could have been regulated. The RFMF preserved most of its colonial structure as interviewee two, a Fijian army personnel, declared "99% of the Fijian Army still is based on the British Army - the structure, the ranking, everything". This continuity is emblematic of PCPD, where institutional frameworks, such as military structure and dynamics, were accrued from colonial era and left largely intact upon independence. Although this strong military framework was inherited, the accompanying norms of civil-military separation within the British army were not. Consequently, the military emerged as a powerful and politically dominant institution, fostering a culture of intervention. Interviewee two, a RFMF official, said:

> "During the early stages, when the British were there, *it was never broken down in a way where they said this is where the army stops, and this is where government takes over*…

Because *the army had so much influence in pockets of the government* in other departments and all. Their belief system was you have the right to overpower or to overrule the law of the land."

This quote demonstrates how British colonial authorities failed to impose the institutional boundary between civilian and military authority and dismantle colonial norms surrounding the role of the military. Huntington (1957: 83-84) defines the correct institutional boundary as 'objective civilian control', whereby the army is an 'independent military sphere' which is professionalized, 'politically sterile, and neutral.' Conversely, upon independence, Fiji retained an oversized, politicised military with inordinate influence in government departments. This cultivated praetorian tendencies, where the military had an inflated sense of political legitimacy, viewing itself as a guardian of the state. Path dependency theory explains how, once institutions become political actors, their role is hard to remove.

5.3 UN Peacekeeping

Although colonialism influenced the establishment, structure, and initial norms within the Fijian army, UN Peacekeeping missions have reinforced and legitimised the military's political dominance. While peacekeeping had the potential to reform the RFMF's colonial role, it has instead consolidated its domestic paramountcy. Fiji has consistently contributed troops to the UN since the 1978 Lebanon mission and, for the last four decades, has exceeded all other nations in sending 'more troops and police per capita to serve UN peacekeeping operations' (UN, 2024). This has significantly inflated the size of the RFMF, reinforcing domestic militarisation. In 1978, the RFMF expanded from 800 to 1,300 to provide 500 troops for the Lebanon mission. By 1986, due to subsequent UN requests, troop numbers expanded to 2,200. In 30 years, Fiji has provided approximately 25,000 soldiers to international peacekeeping missions, generating an estimated US$300 million in domestic income (Fraenkel and Firth, 2009: 119). Interview data demonstrated that this impacts the military's engagement with domestic politics in three ways.

Firstly, it contributes to the militarisation of Fiji through increasing RFMF's size, power, and prestige. This corresponds with Pierson's (2000: 263) principle of 'positive feedback' within path dependency, whereby 'external factors', such as UN funding and legitimacy, can act as 'mechanisms of reproduction' that 'amplify the effects of a critical juncture through time.'

Especially in a small developing state, there are significant financial incentives to overlook the negative impact UN peacekeeping has had on democratisation as it serves as a significant income revenue and "job creation device for the indigenous communities" (interviewee one). "UN peacekeeping gave *the military prestige, money, and a sense of entitlement*" (interviewee two), contributing to the RFMF's perceived role as a guardian of the state. The disproportionate size of the force means "about 6,000 of them, at any time, can overthrow the government", particularly as the "the army are the only ones with guns" (interviewee five). Newspaper archives from the 1987 coup corroborate this claim, reporting that '*the military are in control because they have the guns* and the support of most of the chiefs' (Freney, 1987: 6). Thus, paradoxically, UN peacekeeping sustains domestic instability behind the façade of international service, a dynamic that was unanimously agreed across all interviewees.

Secondly, beyond domestic PCPD, peacekeeping introduces new socialisation of military norms as 'protecting democracy' in vulnerable states abroad is conflated with the authorisation of domestic interventionism and guardianship. This builds on the military's colonial role. Military service through UN peacekeeping further gains cultural legitimisation from iTaukei Fijian culture. While PCPD interprets the institutional entrenchment of the Fijian military, it overlooks key dimensions of cultural pre-colonial history. Military service provides a modern alternative to the traditional iTaukei Fijian warrior, the "Bati". This history contributes to the indigenous community receiving military authority and power within society with a greater cultural tolerance (interviewee six). Participating in UN missions has amplified this social legitimacy, as interviewee two contended that peacekeeping has developed into "a status source - you became a little chief". Thus, the entrenchment of the RFMF in post-independence politics cannot be solely attributed to the jobs and revenue the UN provides Fiji as the indigenous reverence for modern warrior roles also provides cultural legitimacy, amplified by peacekeeping roles. Political rhetoric surrounding peacekeeping further reinforces this perception. PM Bainimarama delineated the RFMF's international service as "the pride of every Fijian" as Fijian soldiers "protect the innocent, shield the vulnerable and uphold the basic human rights of all people" at the 73rd Peacekeeping Summit (Bainimarama, 2018). This national narrative helps normalise and legitimise the militaries political guardianship role as the RFMF is presented as an

international protector of “human rights”, which contrasts with the institution’s aversion to multiethnic domestic democracy. Thus, iTaukei cultural history provides the military with political legitimisation which is furthered by participation in UN peacekeeping. This limits the extent to which PCPD can be considered the sole determinant of military intervention in politics.

Finally, peacekeeping roles became an available tool for coup leaders to silence dissent of domestic political intervention by exporting their critics into esteemed international roles. Interviewee one contended “when you had a coup, like in 2006, all the critical voices that might have opposed the coup maker got UN jobs, so they didn't come home and attack the coup maker.” Thus, peacekeeping vacances effectively enabled military leaders to provide significant incentives to refrain from opposing coups. This pattern demonstrates how engagement with prestigious international organisations can inadvertently be used to weaken accountability of military and political leadership.

5.4 Military Coups as PCPD Political Interventions

In this section, I analyse the extent to which military coups are PCPD interventions. I argue that Fiji’s recurrent coups are not individual anomalies but follow a trajectory entrenched by its colonial origins and historical role. Colonial military roles evolved into entrenched political ‘guardianship’, exemplified through 1987, 2000, and 2006 coups. These repeated coups are path dependent interventions, reflective of Pierson’s (2000: 251) concept of ‘increasing returns’ whereby successful coups reinforce democratic norms and political actors, normalising the next coup.

The 1987 Coups: Critical Junctures

In 1987, the election of a NFP-FLP Coalition government superseded the rule of the AP, who had governed since independence. The FLP’s electoral success was controversial, largely due to its Indo-Fijian support base. (Ratuva, 2011: 105). The RFMF intervened, initiating the first coup ‘with the aim of returning state control to indigenous Fijian elites.’ Further negotiation efforts by the coalition leaders to attempt to share power and reunify the government fostered the military to stage a second coup to reassert control. This second 1987 coup was more extensive, dismantling the entire state apparatus. Rabuka, an army commander,

became leader, declared Fiji a republic, and formulated a new constitution (Ratuva, 2011: 105).

The 1987 coups marked the RFMF's first unilateral rejection of democratic turnover, revoking Fiji's 'objective civilian control' and initiating a trajectory of a politically interventionist military role (Huntington, 1957: 84). The Canberra Times (1987: 2) reported Rabuka claimed Fiji would require a military-backed regime for at least 15 years to maintain 'internal security' and planned to increase the size of the army by 2000 men and establish a surveillance division. Thus, in the guise of security, Rabuka pursued structural changes to institutionalise military involvement in politics and civic life. Furthermore, the second coup in the same year further demonstrated how the military would prohibit democratic turnover if Indo-Fijian's gained power, even in a coalition. Through a PCPD lens, the 1987 coups normalised military intervention in politics and set a precedent for future interference, while also reviving the military's colonial function: to maintain indigenous hierarchy and control. Newspaper articles at the time contended that the coup was "not really much of a surprise" due to pre-independence ethnic divisions (Scarr, 1987: 2). This reflects a PCPD inevitability due to unresolved colonial polarisation. Interviewee seven contended that 1987 marked the moment "the military emerged as the guardian of the indigenous elite rather than of the of the state itself."

Both international and domestic ramifications of the intervention were weak, which had the potential to play a pivotal role in on future developments. The 1987 coup unfolded against the backdrop of Cold War dynamics, where the 'Pacific Ocean became heavily militarised' and strategically important (Weber, 2017: 7). Interviewee five contended that Rabuka was "very aware of the geopolitical Cold War politics, drawing into that coup", and the international response was muted by the deposed "leftist" government's "non-aligned" stance that challenged the "Western imperial agenda." Furthermore, interviewee seven highlighted the weaknesses of domestic repercussions, contending:

> "There was *complicity right from the word go*. *If in 1987 there had been a strong stand* made by the former Prime Minister, who had been our founding Prime Minister, or some of his allies, *if those elites had defended democracy at that moment*, we could have seen the military returned to barracks, and some kind of political solution."

This corroborates that 1987 represented critical institutional juncture, where alternative trajectories were possible. Had domestic elites and political figures opposed the coup and "defended democracy", the pattern of military intervention in politics may have been avoided. This reinforces the relevance of path dependency theory in explaining Fiji's contemporary civil-military relations. Pierson's (2000: 253) concept of increasing returns contends that 'earlier events matter much more than later ones,' as the further down a path institutions are, the harder it is to shift that trajectory. Based on this logic, following 1987 the military's influence in governance had grown inordinately, and was too powerful to be regulated. The coups served as path dependent events and self-reinforcing junctures due to the limited domestic and international ramifications, justifying future interventions. 1987 also marked the first instance of military personnel in senior political roles, as Rabuka became PM. Interviewee six argued that 1987 initiated an excessive overlap in military and political roles: "you can't keep using military personnel in politics, *you can't unleash a dog and expect them to back into chains again*" (interview 6). This quote is evidenced by the fact Rabuka is the current Prime Minister of Fiji, despite his fundamental role in the 1987 coups. Thus, the 1987 coup represented a normalisation of military intervention and personnel in domestic politics.

<u>The 2000 Coup</u>

The 2000 coup marked another consequence of Fiji's inordinate civil-military relations. Following the election of the first Indo-Fijian prime minister in 1999, iTaukei Fijian businessman George Speight led a coup to overthrow the government. Employing elements within the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare unit, he held the new government hostage (Ratuva, 2011: 106). While the coup was not orchestrated by the military, the RFMF nonetheless played a momentous role in shaping its aftermath. It reasserted control by overthrowing Spleit's group, imposing martial law, revoked the 1997 constitution, and formed a caretaker government to maintain authority until the 2001 elections. Notably, it did not restore the democratically elected administration (Ratuva, 2011: 106).

This juncture reinforced the military's perceived role as a democratic guardian. Through a path dependency lens, the military's response to the coup is emblematic of Pierson's (2000: 263) concept of 'inertia', whereby 'an increasing returns process is established' through the

limited repercussions of prior military democratic intervention. Despite pressure from the international community to adopt a consociational electoral system, Fiji's coup faced little global consequences. Zinn (2000) reported, 'the top men from the United Nations and Commonwealth came and went, achieving little but shaking hands with the man [Speight] even the President called a terrorist'. This response demonstrated the military's capability to intervene in politics and override constitutional norms with minimal accountability. The military used the civilian coup to regain authoritative control, rather than to restore a democratically elected government.

The 2006 Coup

In 2006, the RFMF, led by Commodore Bainimarama, overthrew Qarase and seized power labelled as a corruption "clean-up" campaign. This included dissolving parliament, reforming indigenous institutions, and imposing media censorship. Bainimarama justified the coup by claiming that the military's ideological perspective on ethno-nationalism had evolved towards 'multi-culturalism and de-indigenization (Ratuva, 2011: 112). Interview data frequently asserted that the "clean-up" campaign was used to legitimise the coup and provide a guise for Bainimarama's power consolidation. Interviewee one contended the coup was "more of a power struggle" and that "*Bainimarama discovered these great anti-racist credentials because it suited him*." Interviewee three highlighted that Bainimarama could not justify a coup in the "defence of indigenous Fijian rights" as the SDL represented iTaukei Fijian nationalists. Thus, Bainimarama strategically employed reformist anti-racist rhetoric. The coup's reformist justification was further undermined by the fact the disproportionately indigenous military undertook a coup in the defence of multi-ethnic democracy "and then stayed in power for 16 years" (interviewee six).

Furthermore, during the 2000 coup, 'Bainimarama narrowly escaped an assassination attempt' (Reuters, 2007). In 2005, a bill was proposed by Qarase's government to pardon the coup perpetrators, heightening social tensions (Singh, 2023). Interviewee three argued that Bainimarama's motives to turn against Qarase's government were partially due to the "personal element" of Qarase attempting to grant pardons to the people that Bainimarama were "implicated in the attempt to assassinate him." This highlights both the fragility of democratic accountability for individuals inciting coups and the inordinate authority the

military commander has over democratic institutions in Fiji. Again, this pattern reflects what Pierson (2000: 263) describes as 'increasing returns', a trajectory in path dependency theory, where the lack of consequences for perpetrators of the 1987 and 2000 coups encouraged future leaders to initiate coups.

5.5 Section 131 (2) of the 2013 Constitution

In 2013, Bainimarama's unelected regime implemented the current constitution, effectively legitimising military coups as legally defensible. Section 131 (2) of this Constitution (Fiji Government, 2013: 83) states that: '*It shall be the overall responsibility of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to ensure at all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and all Fijians.*' Interviewee eight, a senior political figure, highlighted two dangers of the ambiguous wording of this section. Firsly, the RFMF "would therefore interpret the word Fijians as indigenous" giving the RFMF "the ability to act as a defender of iTaukei rights" within domestic politics. Secondly, the "vagueness" of the definition surrounding what constitutes protecting the 'safety of Fijians' has an "ethnical or religious undercurrent to enable violence". Interviewee four also stated that Section 131 provides the military with "legitimate action" in any scenario as "if they see anything happening that they feel is a threat, they can overthrow the government in the name of security." Thus, immunity provisions for the perpetrators of coups are now enshrined in the Fijian constitution. This determines the likelihood of a coup on individual leaders' choice. Interviewee four stated "I would say if it wasn't the current commander, if there was another person, we might have had a coup already…"

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to determine the extent to which PCPD has shaped political instability in Fiji. By integrating elite interviews, constitutional documents, newspaper archives, and secondary literature, my research has explored how colonial institutional legacies have shaped both the Fijian military and success of electoral and constitutional engineering. My findings indicate that PCPD has been a central influence on the development of Fiji's core political institutions and democratisation, playing a significant role in Fiji's political instability. One key concept within PCPD that is particularly evident in my findings is the role of critical junctures. The decisions made at independence (1970) and during the first coup (1987) were pivotal in entrenching colonial institutional dynamics into postcolonial Fijian politics. The persistence of democratic fragility despite repeated reforms demonstrates how PCPD continues to obstruct Fiji's democratic development.

Beginning with my first independent variable, electoral and constitutional engineering, my findings show that colonial authorities implemented FPTP and communal rolls, knowing these systems would produce a continuation of colonial dynamics within Fiji. My analysis critiques the use of communal rolls and corroborates Horowitz (1991) and Lijphart's (1999) contentions that FPTP is unsuitable for plural societies, as zero-sum outcomes foster ethnic bloc voting and racial division. I identified 1970 as a critical juncture in institutional design due to the destabilising legacy of the initial constitutional framework. This research concludes that successive electoral reforms have largely failed to alleviate ethnic divisions and political instability due to PCPD. Horowitz's (1991) electoral theory contends that AV encourages moderation and multiethnic consensus in divided societies. My findings demonstrate that this theoretical ideal did not materialise in Fiji, as the AV system reinforced ethnic divisions. Data demonstrated that the 1999 election results played a key role in the 2000 coup, offering a case study that challenges Horowitz's theory. Conversely, analysis indicated that the introduction of PR has begun to foster a more inclusive political environment. However, interview data revealed widespread distrust and disillusionment among the electorate. This dissertation found that electoral reform is unable to ensure democratic stability without deeper political reconciliation. My findings also raise questions about the suitability of PR for a largely rural population, although more research is necessary on this subject. My final section highlighted the impact of colonial rule on

perceptions of democracy and leadership, emphasising the need for inclusive nation-building in Fiji.

The military was identified as the second independent variable. This dissertation found that colonial decisions to centralise and ethnically homogenise the RFMF acted as a prerequisite for its post-independence political role. The failure to scale down and depoliticise the military in 1970 represented a critical juncture. Additionally, the role of the RFMF in UN peacekeeping has reinforced and legitimised the military's political dominance, creating 'increasing returns' and amplifying Fiji's PCPD (Pierson, 2000). The 1987 coup embodied another critical juncture, normalising military intervention in politics and setting a precedent for future interference. International and domestic ramifications for the 1987, 2000, and 2006 coups also failed to balance civil-military relations. This dissertation found that Section 131 (2) of the 2013 Constitution codifies military intervention, drawing parallels to the RFMF's colonial role.

While PCPD offers an insightful explanatory framework, its structural focus risks minimising other intersecting factors, such as religion, economic growth, and international relations in shaping political instability. This dissertation did not engage directly with the GCC. However, the institution adds important dimensions to Fiji's democratisation. Despite elite interviews providing valuable insight, a wider sample size would ensure that data is more representative of the whole Fijian population. The interview sample only included one interview with military personnel. However, it would be valuable to interview more members of the RFMF to gain a deeper understanding of how PCPD and UN peacekeeping impacts military norms and intervention in politics.

This dissertation demonstrates the limits of institutional reform in the absence of deeper postcolonial social reconciliation. Constitutional and electoral engineering in Fiji has often overlooked unresolved colonial legacies underpinning ethnic division and political instability. My findings indicate that reform has regularly failed to dismantle the racialised hierarchies inherited in 1970. Similarly, the absence of meaningful endeavours to confront or rectify historical exclusion of Indo-Fijians from the RFMF remains a key institutional flaw. Interview-based research was particularly insightful in indicating how political actors interpret and perpetuate these colonial norms, revealing the impact of PCPD.

My work builds on existing electoral systems literature, complimenting Horowitz (1991) and Lijphart's (1999) critiques of FPTP in deeply divided societies. It also provides a case study analysis, testing Horowitz (1991) AV theory and Lijphart's (1999) PR theory. Huntington's (1957) civil-military relations theory was also supportive in assessing the RFMF's politicised role.

Future research could apply this methodology in other Pacific Island nations to assess how PCPD shapes contemporary political stability. An important avenue for future research also lies in examining the impact of UN peacekeeping on domestic democracy in Fiji and other contributing states. Data showed that research should also address on current political disillusionment in Fiji and the suitability of PR to rural, innumerate populations.

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Appendix

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Over the course of this dissertation, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with individuals offering a diverse range of perspectives on Fijian politics, military engagement, and constitutional reform. In line with SPAIS ethical guidelines, anonymity of interviewees has been maintained, while professions and affiliations have been generalised. All interviews took place between March and April 2025 on Microsoft Teams. Throughout the dissertation, interview quotes are cited by number (e.g. interviewee one) to maintain anonymity.

Interview one: Regional political journalist and analyst, March 10th 2025.

Interview two: Fijian military personnel, March 12th 2025.

Interview three: Policy advisor and former journalist with experience covering Fijian elections, March 20th 2025.

Interview four: Fijian NGO worker involved in political advocacy, March 20th 2025.

Interview five: Political historian specialising in Pacific regionalism and governance, 26th March 2025.

Interview six: Fijian governance and human rights expert with research specialising in coups, transitional justice, and Pacific legal systems, 15th April 2025.

Interview seven: Local Fijian political commentator with ties to Fijian media and civil society, 20th April 2025.

Interview eight: Foreign diplomat with extensive regional experience, 22nd April 2025.

Interviewees were identified and contacted through LinkedIn and targeted email correspondence. While I had initially planned to interview Fijian politicians, recent developments in Fijian politics increased parliamentary workloads and made this unfeasible. I had aimed to conduct additional interviews but the time-intensive nature of arranging, conducting, and transcribing interviews, some of which lasted up to two and a half hours,

also limited the final number. With a longer timeframe and greater word count allowance, I would have expanded the number of interviews to deepen the empirical base of the study.

Nevertheless, the interviews reflect a balanced range of perspectives across ethnicity, institutional background, and professional roles. I interviewed equal number of iTaukei Fijian and Indo-Fijian participants, as well as one Fijian of European settler descent, one foreign diplomat, and two individuals from the wider Pacific region. This diversity was key to ensure a balanced representation of perspectives, particularly given Fiji's complex ethnopolitical context.

Appendix B: Table of Fijian Political Parties and Notable Political Figures

This table provides a general overview of key Fijian Political Parties, compiled with information from the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (2025), International IDEA's Global State of Democracy 2023 Report on Fiji (Runey, 2023), Britannica (2025), and Nandan (1991).

Party Name	Founded	Key Base	Governing Period
Alliance Party (AP)	1966	iTaukei Fijians	Ruling political party from 1966 to 1987
National Federation Party (NFP)	1963	Indo-Fijians	Won 1977 election, denied power Current governing party within coalition
Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP)	1974	iTaukei Fijian Nationalists	Split the indigenous vote in the 1977 election
Fiji Labour Party (FLP)	1985	Multiracial	Won 1987 and 1999 elections, each overthrew by coups
Social Democratic Liberal Party (SDL)	2001	iTaukei Fijian Nationalists	Overthrown in 2006 coup
FijiFirst	2014	Multiracial	Current governing party within coalition
People's Alliance (PA)	2021	Multiracial	Current governing party within coalition

Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was Fiji's Prime Minister from 1970 to 1992 and 1993 to 2000. Ratu Mara lost the 1987 election but was reinstated following the coup.

Timoci Bavadra was the founder of the Fiji Labour Party, elected as Prime Minister in 1987. Although he was an iTaukei Fijian, he won a considerable number of votes from the Indo-Fijian community.

Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka is the current Prime Minister of Fiji and leader of the People's Alliance Party. He is a former Army Commander who carried out the 1987 coup d'etat. Following the coup, he was made a life member of the Great Council of Chiefs, while pursuing a career in politics.

Mahendra Chaudhry is an Indo-Fijian politician and the leader of the Fiji Labour Party. In the 1999 election, he became the first Fijian Prime Minister of Indian descent, beating Rabuka. However, within a year, his cabinet were taken hostage in the 2000 coup. His government was subsequently deposed by Qarase and Bainimarama.

George Speight is a Fijian businessman who undertook the 2000 coup. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but was pardoned and released in 2024 by Fiji's Mercy Commission.

Laisenia Qarase was the Prime Minister from 2000 to 2006 and the leader of the Social Democratic Liberal Party, overthrown in the 2006 coup. Prior to the coup, Qarase's government introduced three controversial pro-indigenous bills to parliament.

Josaia Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama is a formal naval officer and commander of the RFMF. He undertook the 2006 "clean up" coup and subsequently served as the prime minister of Fiji from 2007 to 2022. He founded the FijiFirst party in 2014. He has stepped back from politics after being convicted of attempting to pervert the course of justice in 2024.

Appendix C: A Timeline of Fijian Constitutions, Electoral Systems, and Coups

This timeline provides a general overview of Fijian Constitutions, Electoral Systems, and Coups compiled with information from Lal (2019), Hegarty and Darrell (2013), Ratuva (2016), Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (2025), International IDEA's Global State of Democracy 2023 Report on Fiji (Runey, 2023), Britannica (2025), and Nandan (1991).

1970 Constitution

Independence Constitution

Electoral System: First-Past-the-Post

Features: Communal rolls; House of Representatives comprised of 22 seats reserved for Indigenous Fijians, 22 seats reserved for Indo-Fijians, 8 seats reserved for general voters

1987 Coups:

First coup: 14 May 1987, led by Rabuka. Second coup: 23 September 1987, led by Rabuka

Both coups intended to overthrow Bavadra's multiracial coalition government

1990 Constitution:

Imposed Constitution by military interim government

Electoral system: First-Past-the-Post

Features: Communal rolls; 37 seats reserved for iTaukei Fijians, 27 for Indo-Fijians, 5 for general voters, 1 for Rotumans. Only iTaukei Fijians eligible to become Prime Minister

International and domestic pressure led to review.

1997 Constitution:

Electoral System: Alternative Vote

Features: House of Representatives comprised of 46 communal and 25 open seats, Cabinet representation for any party with more than 10% of seats

2000 Coup:

Followed 1999 Election with a FLP majority, Chaudry elected as first Indo-Fijian PM

Civilian Coup, led by George Speight with support from the military's CRW unit

Followed by military intervention and interim military-backed government.

Chaudhry is not reinstated as PM

<u>2006 Coup:</u>

Military coup led by Bainimarama to overthrow Qarase's government

Framed as a multiracial, corruption "clean up" coup

<u>2013 Constitution:</u>

Implemented without a referendum, created by interim military government

Electoral System: Open-List Proportional Representation

Features: uses the D'Hondt system of apportioning seats, a single national roll, a single multi-member constituency comprised of 55 members of Parliament, a 5% election threshold

Appendix D: The Traditional Role of iTaukei Chiefs

In traditional iTaukei Fijian society, there is a 'well defined social system' where hereditary chiefs hold a sacred leadership role within villages and regions (Ford, 1938: 541). The role of a chief developed during colonialism to maintain structure and control through commanding the wider indigenous population, particularly among the 'eastern chiefly oligarchy' (Howard, 1991: 6-8). The Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and the Fijian Administration were established by colonial rule as institutional frameworks, whilst the council acted as an 'advisory body for the British colonial rulers' (Movono, 2024). During Fiji's independence procedures, these colonial institutions and the same Eastern indigenous Fijian chiefs from the colonial period were given power to 'ensure relative stability' (Howard, 1991: 6-8). The GCC remained involved in politics until the 2006 military coup, where Commodore Bainimarama dissolved the GCC after the chiefs refused to ratify his presidency (Narsey, 2024). In 2024, Fiji's prime minister restated the GCC with hopes for it to resolve regional issues among the indigenous population (Movono, 2024). It is important to note that Fijian ethno-nationalists typically contend that because iTaukei Fijian chiefs ceded Fiji to Queen Victoria in 1874, power ought to be restored to indigenous chiefs upon independence (Hegarty and Tyron, 2013: 38).