INSECURITY OF TAUKEI LAND AS AN ISSUE IN THE 2014 GENERAL ELECTION: REAL THREAT OR POLITICAL GIMMICK?

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ABSTRACT

The 2014 General Election returned Fiji to democratic government after almost eight years of military-backed government rule. As in other Pacific Island countries, issues of customary or native land generate critical debate before and during national elections because of the cultural, social and economic significance of land. Interwoven with these important factors is ethnicity and in this case the Taukei (indigenous people) and non-Taukei that have had different land rights in terms of accessibility, use and ownership as regulated by the Native Land Act. The 2014 General Election campaign was significant because for the first time political parties, especially the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) and FijiFirst Party (FFP) campaigned vigorously on the decrees pertaining to land that had been introduced by the interim government to win the approval of voters, especially Taukei. After a brief discussion of the cultural importance of land to the Taukei, this article evaluates whether the SODELPA or FFP party manifestoes relating to land issues appealed more to Taukei voters during the general election.

Keywords: Native land, Taukei, Native Land Act, SODELPA, FijiFirst Party