REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY, THE CONSTITUTION AND ELECTORAL ENGINEERING IN FIJI: 2014 AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to ensure all citizens are equally represented and their interests accommodated in a multicultural setting, Fiji changed its electoral system four times since flag independence. The first three electoral systems used in 1970, 1990 and 1999 were First Past the Post (FPTP), a system of ethnic based rolls and seats using FPTP, and Alternative Voting (AV) respectively. These were systems with communally assigned seats because of the country’s ethnic configuration. Leaders then justified their adoption as a way to facilitate fair representation of all citizens. The 2014 election was contested under a new electoral system of proportional representation and eliminated reserved ethnic seats. This paper critically examines the results of the 2014 elections under the new open list proportional representation system. It analyses the intentions of the electoral system under the 2013 constitution and the extent to which its targets were achieved in the 2014 election results. The paper also highlights lessons from constitutional and electoral engineered systems in other Pacific island countries and compares these with Fiji’s new electoral and political party system. It concludes with possible future scenarios for the country under the current constitution and electoral system.

Keywords: electoral system; proportional representation; electoral engineering; political stability; ethnic politics; political parties