THE 2014 FIJI GENERAL ELECTION: A FRESH START ON THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY?

Vijay Naidu

ABSTRACT

The 2014 general election in Fiji has been in many ways a completely novel experience for the people of the country, especially for candidates and for the voters. The newness of the event has to do with the electoral system adopted by the recently promulgated 2013 Constitution. The proportional electoral arrangement with a single national constituency is unprecedented. All previous electoral systems had multiple constituencies with representation based on communal or ‘racial’ allocation of seats together with a smaller proportion of open or national seats. The proportionate electoral and single national constituency system has been designed to firmly move the country away from race-based electorates, and seeks to ensure that each voter’s ballot has equal value. This paper describes Fiji’s new electoral system in the context of a changed national political landscape, and the political parties and candidates that contested the general election. It examines their key political messages and campaign issues and strategies. It then analyses the results of the general election seeking to explain voters’ preference of candidates and political parties. The paper concludes with a prognosis of national politics in the immediate aftermath of the general election and asks the somewhat rhetorical question – is it a fresh start on the road to Fijian democracy?

Key words: 2013 Constitution, proportional electoral system, national constituency, political parties, democracy and human rights.