Abstract

This paper explores the merits of Fiji’s adoption of alternative voting (AV) in 1997. It reviews the context for its adoption, the 1999 elections, the Speight coup, and its aftermath. It examines criticisms advanced against AV by Jon Fraenkel (2001, 2000) and arguments for AV advanced by Brij Lal (2002) and the Constitutional Review Commission (1996). The paper argues the weight of evidence does not support a blanket condemnation of AV. Changes in the way AV has been implemented may be in order, but it would be unwise to replace AV before it has a chance to operate over a number of election cycles. Electoral rules should not be changed lightly (Taagepera 2002). Over time and with modifications, political learning on the part of voters and politicians may enable AV to produce more proportionate outcomes and may lead to greater inter-ethnic cooperation. Although the disproportionate outcome of the 1999 elections may have been a destabilizing factor in the Speight coup of 2000, this action and the Rabuka coups before it are a reflection of deeper problems in Fijian politics. No set of electoral rules will work in Fiji unless efforts are made to address the real obstacles to democracy – a lack of commitment to the rule of law and constitutionalism (Lawson 1996, 1991), conflicts over land, and the imbalance of power between communities (Premdas 1993).

Introduction

Politics in Fiji is organized around the divide between indigenous Fijians (51%) (hereafter referred to as Fijians) and Indo-Fijians (43%) (Lal 2002, 267), which dates back to when the colonial power, Great Britain, imported large numbers of Indian indentured laborers to work on plantations. Fiji gained independence in 1970, and enjoyed stability from 1970-1987 under the continued governance of the main Fijian political party, the Alliance Party (AP). Trouble erupted, however, when the AP lost the 1987 election to the Indo-Fijian opposition, a coalition consisting of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) and National Federation Party (NFP). Displacement of Fijians from the pinnacles of political power prompted calls for return to Fijian control. The calls were answered by Sitiveni Rabuka, a colonel in the military, who overthrew the elected government and went on to oversee the establishment of a new, less democratic constitution in 1990, framed so as to ensure perpetual indigenous control over government.

1 There are other important divisions (intra-Fijian tensions between chiefs and commoners, chief and chiefs, eastern and western provinces, rural and urban, and class), but the focus here is on the Fijian/Indo-Fijian divide. For detailed studies of Fijian politics, see: Duratolo 1985; Howard 1991; Lal 1992, 1986, 1983a; Lawson 1996, 1991; Mara 1997; Milne 1981; Norton 1977; Ravuvu 1988; Scarr 1988; and Sutherland 1992.
Rabuka’s actions and the resultant constitution revealed to the world the deep divisions between Fijians and Indo-Fijians. The international community and Indo-Fijians heavily criticized Fiji for the restrictive constitution, and pressures were brought to bear on Fiji to re-establish a more open political system. It did so through an extensive constitutional review process in the 1990s. The result of this process was the creation of a new, more democratic constitution. One of the many unique features of this constitution was the replacement of plurality voting (sometimes referred to as first-past-the-post, FPTP) with alternative voting (AV). Based on the recognition that electoral systems can be a powerful tool to influence and engineer politics, constitutional engineers hoped AV would promote moderation and inter-ethnic accommodation between the Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities.

Unfortunately, the use of AV in 1999 did not provide a quick fix for Fiji’s political problems. The elections of 1999 brought an Indo-Fijian led coalition to power, and once again it provoked widespread fear and resentment among Fijians. In May 2000, George Speight and a group of Fijian nationalist extremists took the Indo-Fijian government hostage and demanded the return of Fijians to power. Fiji’s police and military stood by as the siege dragged on for two months. While perhaps not consenting to the use of violence, large parts of the Fijian community supported the motives behind the coup. In the end, the Indo-Fijian-led government was dissolved and an interim government installed.

Fiji’s adoption of AV as part of the constitutional engineering enterprise has raised a lot of debate, both within Fiji and internationally. The controversy over AV in Fiji is part of a much larger debate over the most appropriate electoral forms for deeply divided societies (Reynolds and Reilly 1999). Simplifying matters a bit, there are basically two main camps of theorists. The first argues the best way to achieve accommodation and democratic stability in divided societies is to pursue consociational power sharing arrangements. Arend Lijphart (2002, 1991, 1977) is by far the best-known consociational theorist. When it comes to electoral systems, Lijphart and others advocate proportional representation (PR).2 One of the great advantages of PR is there is close approximation between votes and seat shares, and groups (assuming parties are organized along ethnic lines as they typically are in divided societies) gain adequate and fair representation in parliament, which mitigates tensions and makes anti-democratic behavior less likely. The second camp, which has emerged more recently, is critical of consociation on a number of grounds, and advocates the adoption of integrative institutional forms. Perhaps the best-known critic of consociation is Donald Horowitz (2002, 1993, 1991, 1985), who has advocated alternative voting (AV). Horowitz and others contend that preferential voting systems are uniquely suited to promoting inter-ethnic accommodation and political moderation in deeply divided societies.

Not coincidentally, both Lijphart and Horowitz were interviewed by the constitutional review commission that recommended Fiji switch from plurality voting to AV in 1997, and therefore Fiji became a battle-ground for opposing visions of electoral engineering. Naturally, Fiji’s instability in 2000 could be interpreted as an indictment of the moderating potential of AV, but I will argue the weight of evidence does not support

2 Other key features of consociation include: grand coalition (power sharing) cabinets, group autonomy, and mutual veto. Proportionality extends beyond the electoral system to resource allocations and civil service appointments.
a blanket condemnation of AV. In a sense, AV has been handicapped from the beginning by structural factors (a small proportion of open seats in parliament and relatively homogeneous single-member districts) and the way it was implemented. As a result, condemnation of AV based on its operation in Fiji to date would not be appropriate. Changes in the way AV has been implemented are probably in order, but it would be unwise to replace AV before it has a chance to operate over a number of election cycles. Although the disproportional outcome of the 1999 elections may have been a product of AV and may have been a destabilizing factor in the Speight coup of 2000, this action and the Rabuka coups before it are a reflection of deeper problems at work in Fijian politics that will probably never be addressed through electoral engineering. While it may make sense to reform the operation of AV in Fiji, there are strong arguments for not changing electoral systems lightly (Taagepera 2002). Over time and with modifications, political learning on the part of voters and politicians may enable AV to produce more proportionate outcomes, and may very well lead to greater inter-ethnic cooperation. Up to this point, the way AV has operated in Fiji has not provided a proper test of its potential benefits. In the end, no set of electoral rules, PR, AV, or anything else, will “work” in Fiji unless efforts are made to address the real obstacles to democracy in Fiji – a lack of commitment to the rule of law and constitutionalism (Lawson 1996, 1991), conflicts over land, and the imbalance of power between communities (Premdas 1993). Only when these issues are addressed will Fiji remain stable and democratic under governments not dominated by indigenous Fijians.

Politics in Fiji, 1970-1990

British rule laid down a pattern of ethnic representation in Fiji that persisted after independence. Leading up to independence, debate turned on the issue of elections and safeguarding Fijian rights in land and custom. Fijians called for the retention of ethnic rolls; Indo-Fijians advocated open rolls. Given their cultural and political clout, Fijians won the day. Communalism became the basis of group representation, and indigenous rights were constitutionally entrenched. The 1970 Independence Constitution established a parliamentary system with an elected 52-member House and an appointed Senate. All House seats were ethnically reserved and contested on a plurality basis (first-past-the-post, FPTP) in single-member districts. The 22-member Senate consisted of 8 members nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs, 7 by the prime minister, 6 by the opposition leader, and 1 by the Council of Rotuma. The Senate was empowered with review privileges and the Great Council of Chiefs’ appointees were given veto power over matters affecting Fijian rights and traditions (Norton 1977, 9). Change in matters related to Fijian affairs required supermajorities (3/4 vote) in both the House and Senate.

\[^{3}\text{House seats were communal seats returned by ethnic constituencies and national (ethnically reserved) seats returned by national constituencies. The “cross-voting” scheme gave voters four votes – one communal and three (one for each ethnic group) national – based on the formula: Fijian (12 communal, 10 national); Indo-Fijian (12 communal, 10 national); General Elector (3 communal, 5 national) (Lal 1992, 212; Lal 1999, 7).}\]

\[^{4}\text{Rotuma is an island to the north of Fiji incorporated in the late nineteenth century.}\]

\[^{5}\text{Lal (1992a, 212) writes: “Fijian rights and interests were given such watertight protection that none other than the Fijian chiefs themselves could alter or amend legislation pertaining to them. A firmer guarantee of protection could not be devised.”}\]
From independence to 1987, Fiji enjoyed relative stability with political control residing in the hands of the Alliance Party (AP), a Fijian-dominated alliance between the main Fijian party, a minor Indo-Fijian party, and General Electors (non-Fijians, non-Indo-Fijians). (See Appendix A, Election Results in Fiji, 1972-2001.) Fiji’s communal institutions eased the transition to independence, but hampered nation building. Voters and candidates had little incentive to be concerned with the problems and interests of other ethnic groups; government by one party came to be seen as ethnic government; and defeat of the governing party as defeat of one ethnic group by the other (Lal 1999, 5-9). When the mainly Indo-Fijian Fiji Labour Party (FLP) and National Federation Party (NFP) coalition defeated the AP in 1987, it created a backlash. A group of Fijian nationalists formed the Taukei movement bent on destabilizing the FLP-NFP government and returning control over government to indigenous Fijians. Shortly thereafter, Sitiveni Rabuka led a successful coup against the coalition government. Months later he carried out a second coup making Fiji a Republic.6

The 1987 coups culminated with the adoption of the 1990 Constitution, widely condemned as undemocratic, which established a purely communal electoral system and disproportionate indigenous representation (Premdas and Steeves 1993). All 70 House seats were ethnically reserved and returned by communal rolls. The ethnic balance of seats (37 indigenous Fijian, 27 Indo-Fijian, 5 General Elector, and 1 Rotuman) guaranteed Fijians an absolute majority and made non-Fijians a permanent minority.

**Constitutional Reform and the Switch to AV**

The 1990 Constitution provoked intense criticism. In response to domestic and international pressure, the government agreed to review it. Founded in 1994, the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) consisted of Tomasi Rayalu Vakatora, a government nominee and former senior Fijian public servant, Brij Lal, an opposition nominee and Indo-Fijian academic, and Sir Paul Reeves, a consensus nominee and former Anglican Archbishop and Governor General of New Zealand. The CRC’s mandate was ambitious. According to Brij Lal (2002), it was charged with recommending constitutional arrangements which would meet the present and future needs of the people of Fiji, and promote racial harmony, national unity, and the economic and social advancement of all communities. These arrangements had to guarantee the full protection and promotion of the rights, interests, and concerns of all ethnic groups in Fiji, and take into account internationally recognized principles and standards of individual and group rights…the Commission was expected to have scrutinized the Constitution, facilitated the widest possible debate on the terms of the Constitution, and, after ascertaining the views of the people, suggest how the provisions of the 1990 Constitution could be improved upon to meet the needs of Fiji as a multi-ethnic and multicultural society (269).

The CRC held public hearings throughout the country and received more than 800 oral and written submissions from individuals, groups, and parties; it commissioned papers from local and oversees researchers on international conventions, power sharing,

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6 For background on the 1987 coups, see: Dean and Ritova 1988; Lal 1988; MacDonald 1990; and Robertson and Tamanisau 1988.
and electoral systems; and its members visited Malaysia, Mauritius, and South Africa to see how they had dealt with the problem of political representation (Lal 1999, 2-9; Lal 2002, 270). The CRC concluded the primary goal of the new constitution should be to promote multi-ethnic governments that would protect the rights and interests of all citizens, especially the indigenous community, and provide incentives for political parties to pursue multi-ethnic cooperation (Lal 2002, 276).

In its report, *The Fiji Islands: Towards a United Future* (1996), the CRC recommended Fiji move “gradually but decisively” away from communalism towards a free, open, and multi-ethnic political system. Its stated objective was to “find ways of encouraging all, or a sufficient number, of …[political parties]…to come together for the purpose of governing the country in a way that gives all communities opportunity to take part” (CRC 1996, 308). It recommended a 70-seat lower House with 45 seats elected from open constituencies and 25 from reserved seats (Fijians, 12; Indo-Fijians, 10; General Electors, 2; Rotumans, 1). The 45 open seats were to be elected from 15 three-member constituencies, with boundaries drawn to ensure the greatest possible degree of heterogeneity (Lal 2002, 279-80). The remaining 25 seats would be elected on an ethnic basis from single-member constituencies, with 12 seats for Fijians, 10 seats for Indo-Fijians, 2 for General Voters, and 1 for Rotumans. To promote regional identity, the Senate would consist of 35 members, 2 returned from each of the 14 provinces on a common roll basis, 1 from Rotuma, and 6 appointed by the president (who would be elected at a joint sitting of both houses of parliament) on the advice of the Electoral Commission to represent underrepresented groups (religious and cultural groups, women, and youth) (CRC 1996, 329; Lal 2002, 278-9; Reilly 2001).

Cognizant electoral systems can be a powerful tool to influence and engineer politics (Reilly 2001, 100), the CRC identified and ranked a number of criteria to evaluate options, including, in order of importance: the encouragement of multi-ethnic government; recognition of the role of political parties; incentives for moderation and cooperation across ethnic lines; effective representation of constituents; effective voter participation; effective representation of minority and special interest groups; fairness between political parties; effective government; effective opposition; proven workability; and legitimacy (Lal 2002, 281).

Retention of plurality voting (FPTP) was considered unacceptable. It had not encouraged multi-ethnic government and it had provided few incentives for multi-ethnic cooperation and moderation. The CRC concluded single transferable voting (STV) required an extremely low threshold to get elected—in a three-member constituency, a successful candidate would need no more than 25 percent—and privileged the representation of community interests (Lal 2002, 281). List system proportional

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For full accounts of the CRC, see: CRC 1996; Lal 2002, 1999, 1997; Scarr 1997; Tarte 1997, 1996. Significant recommendations not discussed included: preserving the Great Council of Chiefs veto power over legislation affecting Fijian land or customary rights; changing Fiji’s name to “The Republic of the Fiji Islands,” giving all citizens the opportunity to call themselves Fiji Islanders; according Fijian, Hindi, and English equal official status; adopting a Preamble outlining the history of Fiji’s multi-ethnic society and its shared beliefs and values; drafting a Compact stating the values and principles that should be taken into account in forming governments; creating a Human Rights Commission charged with educating Fijians about their constitutional rights; and supporting traditional rights to land ownership, a separate Fijian administration, Fijian paramountcy, proportionality in civil service employment, and affirmative action for disadvantaged groups (Lal 1999, 10-14; Lal 2002, 276-7, 282-7).
representation (PR) would give too much power to party bosses, constrain voter choice, and fail to provide the necessary links between a voter and his or her member of parliament (CRC 1996, 307). Moreover, PR provoked fears of small parties exercising disproportionate influence in governance (Lal 2002, 281-2).

The CRC concluded alternative voting (AV) was the best available option. AV requires voters to rank candidates in their order of preference, and candidates need a majority of votes to get elected. If no candidate reaches the threshold when first preferences are counted, the lowest polling candidate is eliminated and the outcome made dependent on the redistribution of his/her voters’ second preferences. Each successive count redistributes preferences until a candidate achieves a majority (Fraenkel 2001, 5). The CRC believed AV in heterogeneous multi-member districts stood the best chance of promoting multi-ethnic government because it increases the need for multi-ethnic support, allows parties to trade preferences, promotes moderate parties with conciliatory policies, provides effective representation of constituents, and encourages strong party or pre-election government (Lal 1999, 14-5; Lal 2002, 282). AV would promote “coalitions of commitment” rather than “coalitions of convenience” because securing preference transfers depends on policy concessions or moderation on ethnic issues (Fraenkel 2001, 5-7). The CRC assumed politicians and parties would respond rationally to the incentives and restraints imposed by preference voting by seeking second and third preference votes from other groups. Moderate parties and candidates who attempted to appeal to the “ethnic middle ground” would be more successful than extremists. AV would move Fijian politics away from the extremes towards a more moderate, centrist, and multiracial competition for power (Reilly 2001, 101).

The Best Laid Plans…What Parliament Established

The CRC submitted its report to parliament in 1996, and it altered crucial provisions (Lal 1999, 19-20; Lal 2002; 288-9; Tarte 1997). Rather than accept the recommendation of a majority of open seats, the 1997 Constitution established a 71-member elected House with 46 members elected from ethnic constituencies (23 Fijian; 19 Indo-Fijian; 3 General Electors; 1 Rotuma) and 25 from open, non-racial seats, thereby reversing the recommended proportion of open to ethnic seats. Parliament accepted AV, but insisted it be carried out in less heterogeneous single-member districts (Lal 2002, 289-90). Rejecting the notion of an elected Senate, the new 34-member Senate would be appointed (14 selected by the Great Council of Chiefs, 9 by the prime minister, 8 by the leader of the opposition, and 1 by the Council of Rotuma). Finally, parliament added an element of consociationalism, providing that all parties achieving at least 10 per cent of the seats should be invited to join the cabinet in proportion to their overall seat share (Lal 1999, 21-2).

According to Reilly (2001, 102), the CRC felt “under… [PR]…ethnic parties could be expected to be represented in the legislature in proportion to their numbers in the community, irrespective of whether they were inclined towards moderation or not. Hence PR, when combined with communal seats, offered ‘few incentives to parties to become multi-ethnic in their composition and more willing to take account of the interests of all communities.’”

As Reilly (2001, 104) points out, “[t]aken together, these amendments greatly changed the centripetal nature of the CRC’s report and undermined future prospects for cross-ethnic behaviour…[Fiji’s 1997 Constitution]…included a combination of centripetal electoral institutions…[AV with open seats]…with consociational power sharing…the option for all significant parties to take part in a grand coalition
Although an improvement over 1990, the 1997 Constitution was full of compromises and contradictions, well summarized by Lal (2002).

Its broad thrust is the encouragement of moderate multi-ethnic politics through the adoption of a new system of alternative voting and a number of open, non-racial constituencies, the principle of proportionality in the pursuance of public policies, and through the values enshrined in the Compact. At the same time, two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives are contested on communal rolls... The electoral system intended to provide the space for pre-election political cooperation, yet the Constitution stipulates mandatory, post-election power-sharing. The Constitution enshrines values of equity and fairness, yet the way constituency boundaries are drawn negates the fundamental principle of one vote one value. Fijians participate in national politics by utilizing the mechanism of traditional political institutions, causing conflict between traditional and modern patterns of behaviour (290).


The first test of the new constitution came with the elections of 1999. When two multi-ethnic coalitions emerged, the new electoral system appeared to be working. Reminiscent of the old AP, and considered by most to be a “coalition of commitment” due to its agreements on a series of contentious ethnic issues, the first coalition consisted of the governing Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa (SVT, led by Rabuka), the NFP (formerly an Indo-Fijian opposition party), and the United Generals Party. The opposition coalition, considered by most to be a “coalition of convenience” because it did not reach explicit agreements on ethnically divisive issues in trading preferences, consisted of the FLP, the Fijian Association Party, and the Party of National Unity. Although heavily favored, the SVT coalition was severely punished at the polls for its conciliatory stance toward Indo-Fijians. The FLP won 37 of 71 House seats; and the coalition, 58. The NFP gained 14.8% of the votes and 32% of the Indo-Fijian vote, yet failed to win a single House seat. The SVT obtained the largest share of the Fijian vote (38%), but gained only 8 House seats. The FLP’s landslide victory propelled its leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, into the prime minister’s chair, the first Indo-Fijian to hold this post.

Victory by the FLP-led coalition gave rise to increasing ethnic tensions. Even though the government consisted of the multi-ethnic FLP and the Fijian FAP, PAN, and VLV (the SVT declined to accept cabinet positions), many Fijians perceived the new government as Indian-dominated. Chaudhry’s outspoken advocacy of Indo-Fijian rights deepened mistrust over controversial issues such as land ownership (Reilly 2001, 107). Following the election, a movement of Fijian nationalists emerged that sought to regain control over government. Tapping into the anger and resentment that fueled the Rabuka coups of 1987, the movement came to a head when George Speight and a well-armed band of Fijian nationalists stormed parliament and took the government hostage in May 2000. The Speight crisis resulted in the dissolution of the FLP-led government and the installation of an interim civilian government that sought to revise the constitution so as to entrench Fijian control.
In 2000 the Fijian High Court weighed in. In an historic and wide-ranging finding, the Court ruled the Speight coup was unsuccessful, the declaration of emergency unconstitutional, the elected government illegitimate, and the 1997 Constitution still in effect. It rejected the claim that AV was extraordinarily complex, the results remarkably ambiguous, and its merit as a tool for promoting ethnic cooperation highly questionable; it also contradicted the claim the 1997 Constitution diluted protections for Fijian interests. No effort was made to return the FLP-led coalition to power, but the interim administration, the military, and the Great Council of Chiefs accepted the decision (Lal 2002, 291-2). The ruling paved the way for new elections in August 2001.

The 2001 elections gave victory to the mainstream Fijian nationalist party, led by the interim prime minister, Qarase. His party, the \textit{Soqosoqo ni Duavata Lewinivanua} (SDL), dedicated to maintaining indigenous control over government and entrenching Fijian paramountcy, won 32 seats, while the FLP won 27. The SDL refused to offer cabinet posts to the FLP opposition as mandated by the 1997 Constitution. Instead, it formed a coalition of convenience with the more extremist Conservative Alliance \textit{Matanitu Vanua} (CAMV) (Lal 2004).

**AV or Not AV? Weighing the Evidence…**

The 1999 elections and the subsequent Speight coup raise serious questions about the merits of AV in Fiji. The most vocal critic of constitutional engineering and AV has been Jon Fraenkel (2000, 2001). Fraenkel argued Fijians supported Speight’s coup because they felt marginalized under the Chaudhry government. An important reason for this was the way AV “manufactured” an overly large majority for the FLP-led coalition, which meant it was able to ignore the needs of indigenous Fijian allies, thus making anti-democratic action more likely. Fraenkel (2001) charged that the assumption only moderate parties with conciliatory policies would agree to trade preferences under AV was wrong. The inter-ethnically moderate SVT-led coalition struck seat-sharing deals instead of trading second preferences, while the FLP-led coalition traded second preferences without arriving at conciliatory positions on divisive ethnic issues. The FLP was the largest recipient of the total open constituency vote transfers (53.4%) and did not transfer a single preference vote to any other party in the open seats (Fraenkel 2001, 33-9). The VLV put the SVT coalition last in most open constituencies, which meant the bulk of its vote transfers went to opposition parties, and the FLP, FAP, and PANU put the SVT coalition last in every constituency where they submitted preferences. Moreover, a large number of second and third preferences were deliberately squandered on no-hope independents or smaller parties; and the FLP and VLV arranged to put each other second in some constituencies. Fraenkel contended AV produced a 19.25% index of proportionality between seats and votes, well above the average for AV in Australia, and considerably higher than averages for plurality and PR systems. In phrasing quoted by the High Court, Fraenkel (2001) claimed AV “proved extraordinarily complex, the results remarkably ambiguous and its merits as a tool for promoting ethnic cooperation highly questionable.”

Fraenkel is correct to point out that AV is subject to manipulation by parties. It is clear many of the preference-swapping arrangements struck between parties on the FLP side were motivated by political expediency and rational calculations rather than shared visions or aligned interests. In 22 seats the FLP directed its preferences to the traditional and ultra-nationalist VLV, while the NFP placed the VLV last on its preference ordering.
The FLP put last parties that posed the greatest threat, which breached the spirit and intention of the preferential voting system, where like-minded parties trade preferences among themselves and distance those with which they disagree (Reilly 2001, 106). Even so, it is one thing to say AV is subject to abuse; it is quite another to say despite its potential for promoting moderation, it should be replaced because it gives rise to disproportionate outcomes.

The way AV was implemented contributed to the disproportionate outcome in 1999 (Reilly 2001, 111-12). First, registration and voting were made compulsory, which had a significant partisan impact (e.g., the FLP doubled its 1994 vote). Second, the expression of preferences was made compulsory and voters had to number at least three-quarters of all names on their ballot or have their vote declared invalid. Third, a “ticket voting” option was included, which allowed voters to forgo ranking candidates and accept their party’s ordering of preferences (95% of voters did), which exacerbated the effect of strategic manipulation of preferences. Ticket voting also shifted cross-cultural communication to party strategists, thus giving candidates little incentive to interact with other parties or address other groups once preference-swapping deals had been struck. Fourth, very few of the districts were ethnically mixed, which meant the majority of contests provided no opportunity for cross-ethnic campaigns, appeals, or outcomes (Reilly 2001, 109-10).

That the 1999 elections produced an extremely high degree of disproportionality is clear. But it is equally clear disproportionality was not the primary cause of the Speight coup. The Speight coup was an expression of problems in Fijian politics that pre-dated AV. Reilly’s (2001) interpretation of the Speight coup is instructive.

As in 1987, the election of an Indo-Fijian led government, combined with the waning influence of some traditional power-holders within indigenous ranks, provided fertile ground for extremist elements within the Fijian community to arouse popular discord and fear…Once these fears had crystallized into direct attack on the country’s democratic institutions, the traditional defenders of public order such as the police and the army – both indigenous Fijian dominated institutions – were nowhere to be seen. Indeed it is clear that significant elements of both institutions actively supported the 2000 coup and the overthrow of the elected government, just as they did in the 1987 coups…The familiar circumstances of the May 2000 coup and the apparently recurring phenomenon in Fiji of extra-constitutional attacks upon democratic institutions which deliver the wrong result in ethnic terms suggests the latest breakdown of democracy was not just a failure of constitutional engineering but a broader failure of political leadership, capacity, and commitment within Fiji to the idea of multi-ethnic democracy (emphasis added) (108).

Reilly (2001) submits that despite the shortcomings of the reforms instituted in 1998, AV did play a modest but important role in breaking old habits of mono-ethnic politics by facilitating cross-ethnic bargaining and helping build routines of inter-ethnic bargaining and cooperation. Moreover, the new rules changed the tone of the campaign. Reilly argues “…one of the most striking aspects of the election was how, in marked contrast to previous election campaigns which concentrated on racial issues, the 1999
A campaign was strongly focused on ‘bread and butter’ issues such as the economy rather than ethnic ones” (112).

Questions remain, however. Should Fiji alter its electoral system once again? Has AV failed to live up to the hopes of its proponents? Fraenkel (2000) argues that it has and that it should be replaced.

There are no quick-fix solutions, or elaborate types of ‘electoral engineering’ that will solve the deep-seated racial antagonisms in Fiji. Key political questions in the country obstinately continue to revolve around ethnically divisive questions. In such a context, the best response is to put in place an electoral system that is as fair as possible; one in which the distribution of seats bears a closer relationship to the voting pattern. The worst response is to try to artificially promote moderation, and penalize ethnic extremist political parties. This only drives them underground, and weakens the political will to tackle underlying inflammatory issues.

Although he does not state it explicitly, Fraenkel suggest Fiji should adopt PR or return to plurality voting. Reilly (2001, 112), on the other hand, believes Fiji should not give up on preferential voting, but should consider a more proportional preferential system, for example, STV in heterogeneous multi-member electorates. Such a system would produce more proportionate outcomes, and thereby remove one rationale for anti-democratic coups, while at the same time promote inter-ethnic bargaining and cooperation characteristic of preferential voting systems.

Although both Fraenkel and Reilly agree deeper forces were at work in the Speight coup of 2000, Fraenkel seems to imply that the disproportionality inherent in AV contributed to the coup and that AV will not promote greater inter-ethnic accommodation. His view rests on the assumption that if the extremes were given representation in parliament, they would be less likely to engage in anti-democratic behavior. Reilly argues AV did demonstrate some ability to promote moderation, but that Fiji might consider switching to STV because it might produce greater proportionality. What is less clear is whether he believes AV as it stands now or with modifications (regarding compulsory voting, ticket voting, and heterogeneous multi-member districts) might achieve lower disproportionality and accommodation.

Both perspectives fail to fully grasp the reality that anti-democratic activity in Fiji does not come from the extremes. While the leaders of anti-democratic pushes have been extremists (Rabuka, Speight, et al.), they had widespread support for their actions, both in the general population and in the institutions of government (police, military, civil service, and judiciary). Although some Fijians did not approve of their methods, there was widespread support for their objectives. I would argue that the debate over electoral reform in Fiji must address two sets of questions. For those who advocate retention of AV, the questions become: How can the issue of disproportionality be addressed? Assuming disproportionality is a concern, to what extent are structural issues, such as the number of ethnic to open seats, heterogeneous single-member districts, compulsory voting, and ticket voting, responsible for disproportionate outcomes? Assuming these factors do contribute to disproportionality and can be remedied to make AV more proportional, is AV superior to other electoral forms at promoting accommodation? Is AV more likely than any other electoral form to enable Fiji to address what Fraenkel...
refers to as “deep-seated racial antagonisms”? For those who advocate change, if AV could be reformed to produce more proportionate outcomes, would this be enough? Will PR, STV, or plurality voting, do any better than AV at advancing the cause of democracy in Fiji? Will these electoral forms necessarily be any better than AV at dealing with Fiji’s “deep-seated racial antagonisms”?

All things considered, I would argue AV should be retained. It is as yet uncertain whether AV might contribute to accommodation and efforts to address the deeper issues troubling Fiji. AV is still not a system in the strong sense of the term: the rules have not been fully incorporated into all the main players’ strategic thinking. Once it has, the manipulation of preferences will be more difficult. At the same time, because proportionality is an issue, reforms are in order. Studies should be conducted to see what the effects might be of voluntary voting, the removal of ticket voting, and the creation of multimember districts. Efforts should be made to draw more heterogeneous districts so as to promote inter-ethnic accommodation among politicians and parties. Of course, most efforts in this regard will be met with resistance. In the final analysis, it is not obvious other electoral rules will better enable Fiji to address its fundamental problems.

While the high degree of disproportionality under AV in 1999 and 2001 is disconcerting, it is too early to tell what the nature of the electoral system will be over time. As Rein Taagepera (2002, 248) points out, “An electoral system emerges when the electoral rules have become embedded in a political culture where the actors have acquired reasonable skills in handling the electoral rules for their enlightened self-interest...Such skills are based on experience. Hence electoral rules can become the containing carapace of an electoral system only when they have been used a fair number of times. If meanwhile the rules are altered, the evolution of a system is delayed.”

In Fiji, political actors have only experienced two elections under AV. When politicians and voters become more aware of how the rules operate, they will be better able to make informed decisions. As awareness increases, the ability of parties like the FLP to strategically manipulate preferences will decline. This was evidenced in the difference in political behavior between 1999 and 2001. AV should not be replaced quickly with some other electoral form, either PR or STV. While it might be wise to fine-tune AV, it would be a mistake to replace it with an entirely different electoral form. Electoral systems should not be altered until their true impact can be measured. Change to another electoral form may or may not help to solve Fiji’s problems and may cause more instability and confusion. Unless electoral forms are left in place for a sufficient period, actors on the ground cannot learn how the rules operate and cannot adjust their behavior accordingly. Taagepera’s (2002, 259) advice to constitutional engineers on altering electoral rules is instructive and worth quoting at length.

Don’t think the first election outcomes are characteristic of the properties of the given electoral rules under your socio-political conditions. It takes several elections with the same electoral rules before their systematic effects stabilize. Parties and voters need time to learn how to use them to their best advantage. An electoral system consists of rules and skills in using these rules. If the rules are continuously altered, no stable electoral system can emerge. Of course, no advice

10 Interestingly enough, the index of disproportionality for the 2001 elections (20.35) was even higher than in 1999. And, yet, the outcome did not produce instability because government control remained in the hands of indigenous Fijians.
is absolute. There may be disastrous sets of rules to be given up in a hurry. But in nine cases out of ten, when electoral rules are altered it is done too early in two respects. First, the existing rules may not be so dysfunctional after all, once people learn to use them. Second, if you messed it up the first time, what guarantees that you now can do a better job rather than flipping from flaws discovered to flaws as yet unknown?

**Conclusion: The Politics and Limits of Electoral Engineering**

The root cause of democratic instability in Fiji, both in 1987 and 1999, was the displacement of Fijians from control over government. No truly democratic electoral system, in which electoral outcomes are uncertain, can ensure that Fijians will always remain in power. Regardless of whether Fiji retains AV, switches to STV, returns to plurality voting, or switches to PR, it is important to keep in mind there are clear limits to electoral engineering for managing conflict in divided societies. Similarly, electoral systems alone, no matter how perfectly conceived, will not insure stable democratic outcomes. They can be crafted to promote certain tendencies through incentives and rules, but they operate within a much larger political universe. In Fiji, the electoral system alone will not overcome the deep divisions between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians over commitment to the democratic process and the rule of law, land use, and the unequal balance of power between communities. All parties to the debate on AV in Fiji agree on this point. The question is: What electoral system is most likely to promote movement towards resolution of these fundamental problems? A strong case can be made that AV has unique advantages in the promotion of accommodation. And yet, it is too early to tell what the ultimate impact of AV will be for democracy in Fiji.
**Appendix A. Elections in Fiji, 1972-2001**

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AP = Alliance Party (Fijian-dominated coalition)
NFP = National Federation Party (Indo-Fijian opposition)
FNP = Fijian Nationalist Party (extreme Fijian nationalist)
WUF = Western United Front (multi-ethnic, western regional)
FLP = Fiji Labour Party (Indo-Fijian)
SVT = Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (mainstream Fijian nationalist; grew out of Rabuka coup)
FNUF = Fijian National United Front (formerly FNP)
FAP = Fijian Association Party (SVT splinter)
GVP = General Voters Party (General Elector)
PNU = Party of National Unity (formerly WUF)
VLV = Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakaristo (Christian Democratic Party)
UGP = United General Party (formerly GVP)
NVTLP = Nationalist Vanua Takolavo Party (formerly FNUF)
SDL = Soqosoqo ni Duavata Lewenivanuaatanitu Vanua (mainstream Fijian Nationalist; grew out of Speight coup)
CAMV = Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (extreme Fijian nationalist)
NLUP = New Labour Unity Party (FLP splinter)
IND = Independents

1 WUF-NFP coalition
2 FLP-NFP coalition
3 SVT-NFP-UGP, FLP-FAP-PANU coalitions
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