

2018 Fiji Election Results: Patterns of Voting by Provinces, Rural-Urban Localities, and by Candidates

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Haruo Nakagawa¹

Abstract

Akin to the previous, 2014 event, with no data on voter ethnicity, no exit polls, and few post-election analyses, the 2018 Fiji election results remain something of a mystery despite the fact that there had been a significant swing in voting in favour of Opposition political parties. There have been several studies about the election results, but most of them have been done without much quantitative analyses. This study examines voting patterns of Fiji's 2018 election by provinces, and rural-urban localities, as well as by candidates, and also compares the 2018 and 2014 elections by spending a substantial time classifying officially released data by polling stations and individual candidates. Some of the data are then further aggregated according to the political parties to which those candidates belonged. The current electoral system in Fiji is a version of a proportional system, but its use is rare and this study will provide an interesting case study of the Open List Proportional System. At the end of the analyses, this study considers possible reasons for the swing in favour of the Opposition.

Keywords: 2018 Fiji Election Results; Ethnic Vote; Rural Vote; Urban Vote; Voting Patterns

¹ Fellow, School of Government, Development & International Affairs, The University of the South Pacific, email: haruo.nakagawa@usp.ac.fj

Introduction

The Fiji general election of 2018 was the second held under the Open List Proportional (OLPR) electoral system, with a single, nation-wide constituency introduced by the 2013 Republic of Fiji Constitution, which supposedly discourages race- or region-based political parties. According to the government rhetoric, all candidates are supposed to represent the entire country and people, and not a particular geographical region or ethnic group.¹ This new electoral system introduced for the first time in the general election of 2014 saw the Fiji First Party (FFP) win a landslide victory. FFP was a newly-formed party led by leaders and supporters of the 2006 coup, and the post-coup interim government that had promulgated the 2013 Constitution.

The government formed after the 2014 election continued the post-coup interim government's approach of promoting a common national identity, which meant deliberately pursuing "non-racial" or ethnically blind policies. In this regard, one of the most controversial decisions made by the interim government was the adoption of a single identity for all Fiji nationals as "Fijians," which was formalised by Section 5 of the 2013 Fiji Constitution. As a democratically elected government, the regime continued to implement policies in this direction, such as the elimination of ethnicity-based education schemes such as the Taukei Affairs, and Multiethnic Scholarships. The tertiary scholarship system was changed to the National Toppers Scheme, which selects recipients of scholarships according to the recipients' marks at the secondary level, and market conditions for particular professions (TSLB Fiji, 2019) without considering ethnicity of applicants. The government also prevented the release of the ethnic breakdown of the 2017 Population Census data, a critical set of figures for social science studies provided in all previous population censuses, as well as analytic papers of censuses published by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBS, 2008; 2013 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j).

Since exit polls were not taken in Fiji's 2014 and 2018 elections, it was very difficult to estimate ethnic voting patterns in the country. However, analysis of the 2014 election results by Baker & Nakagawa (2015) suggested that the FFP's sweeping victory was due to the appeal of its rural infrastructural development for Taukei voters, and on nation-building for Fijians of Indian descent (hereinafter Indian

¹ Just before releasing the final version of the current constitution, Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum stated, "So the idea is that we have a focus on elected members of parliament having a focus on all parts of Fiji, and to ensure that political parties focus on national policies" ("Fiji Government releases final version of constitution", 2013).

Fijians) and other ethnic minority voters, including Chinese, Europeans, Rotumans, non-Taukei Pacific islanders, and their descendants, including children of inter-marriages (Naidu et al., 2013). Indian Fijian and other minority voters preferred political stability and wanted to reduce ethnic tensions and the possibility of another coup. According to an estimate, in the 2014 general election FFP was overwhelmingly supported by Indian Fijian voters (71%), and about half of the Taukei voters (Ratuva, 2016, p. 34). Another study estimated the extent of Taukei support for FFP to be 40% (Fraenkel, 2019, p. 3). Other factors that were thought to have played a part in 2014 included the glaring pork barrel politics of the incumbent government, restrictions imposed on the media and civil society organisations, and the FFP leader's successful presentation of himself as an agent of change (Robertson, 2017).

Expectations and Outcomes

Before the 2018 election, an Australian diplomat stated in Munro (2018) that there would be no possibility of FFP losing the election because “any other outcome would be unacceptable to Bainimarama.” The GDP growth rate of the economy had slowed down to 2.5% in 2016, mainly because of Tropical Cyclone Winston, but it was a more robust 5.4%, and 3.5% in 2017, and 2018 respectively (World Bank, 2019). Good economic performance would be an electoral advantage for an incumbent government anywhere in the world. Opinion polls published in the mainstream media also indicated strong support for FFP (“Bainimarama tops Fiji pre-election poll”, 2018). It seemed that there had not been much change in the general conditions of the nation prior to the 2018 election from 2014, even though opposition parties, particularly Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) and National Federation Party (NFP), seemed to have adopted more strategic and pragmatic approaches to win votes in the OLPR system. For instance, these parties substantially increased media advertisements, including emphases on the candidate numbers assigned to their candidates compared to their campaigns in the 2014 election. One of the speculated reasons for FFP's popularity in 2014 was that it posed itself as an agent of development, and SODELPA and FFP announced in their 2018 campaign their versions of nation-building visions, including plans for social welfare and infrastructure development (Mudaliar, 2018).

Quite surprisingly for most people in Fiji, the 2018 general election result gave FFP a thin-ice majority. FFP obtained 50.02% of total valid votes cast, which was a full 9% less than the proportion of votes it secured in the previous election. Although the party retained its hold on the government, it lost its domination in parliament, having

had 32 seats in the 50-seat assembly since 2014. The difference between the FFP and its combined opposition in seat numbers was 14 in 2014. In the parliament following the 2018 general election, FFP only obtained 27 seats in the 51-seat assembly. The combined opposition secured 24 seats. The difference between FFP and the combined opposition in seat numbers was now only 3.

It is important to note that there was a relatively large drop in the voting rate in the 2018 election – 71.9% compared to 84.6% in 2014. One of the main reasons for the lower voter turnout was the highly adverse weather conditions. Voting at 22 flood-affected polling venues in Korovou, Rakiraki, Nausori, Levuka and some areas in the Central Division had to be adjourned to 17 November from the original polling date of 14 November 2018 (Fiji Electoral Commission & Supervisor of Election, 2018; Krishant, 2018). Bad weather in the form of torrential rain was generally observed in many other areas on the official voting day, which would have certainly affected voter turnout. The FFP leader Voreqe Bainimarama blamed the bad weather for the drop in support for him and his party (“Fiji’s election winner blames rain”, 2018).² Other possible reasons for the lower voting rate could be apathy towards the election due to a lack of convincing party choices (Fraenkel, 2019, p. 23), and concerns for safety among Indian Fijian voters, which had been pointed out in the 2001 election (Lal, 2006, p. 211). However, it is difficult to measure the effects of “lack of convincing party choices,” and “safety concerns” would be hardly applicable during the 2018 election.

This paper examines voting patterns in the 2018 general election using national, provincial, and urban-rural demarcations to seek the reasons behind the significant swing in voting in the 2018 Fiji election compared to the general election held four years earlier. The main data source for this paper is the official election results released by the Fijian Elections Office (FEO, 2018). Divisional and provincial demarcations were matched with the voting results by administrative divisions, which were announced after the initial data release based on FEO’s geographic divisions of polling venues/stations. Since the released FEO data did not provide aggregations by provinces, these were computed by the author using FEO’s data by polling venues/stations and by candidates. For identifying urban and rural demarcations, polling stations were further divided into urban and rural ones by the author using polling venue addresses on the bases of urban-rural divisions used in

² The comparison of the numbers of votes between the 2018 and 2014 elections show lower voting numbers in almost all provinces except for a small province of Namosi, but reduction is most pronounced in provinces of Naitasiri, Serua, and Nadroga-Navosa.

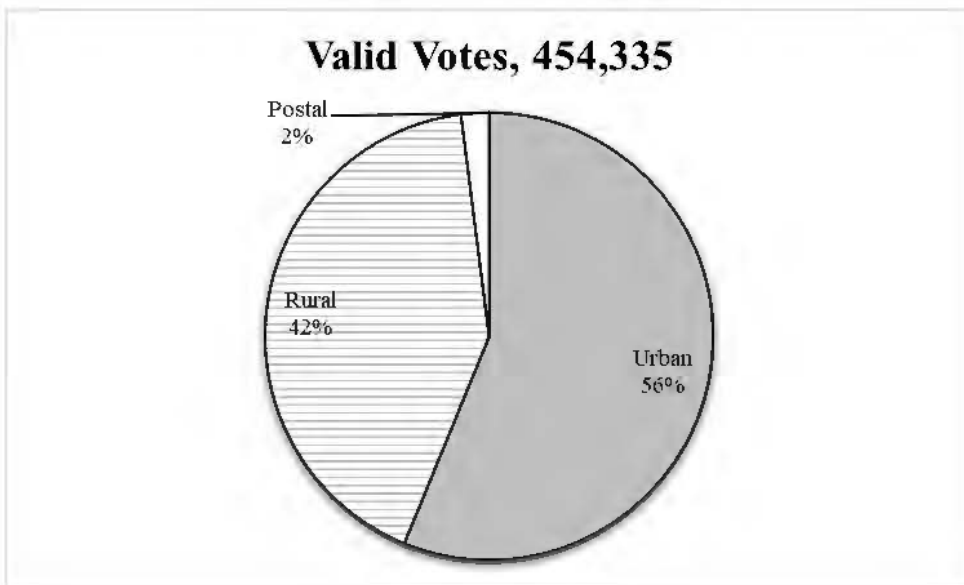
the 2017 Census.

The following sections begin by identifying national and urban-rural voting patterns, followed by comparison between 2018 and 2014 election results by province. Then, analyses of urban-rural voting patterns by province and votes for FFP and SODELPA leaders are provided. This is followed by an examination of voting patterns by urban centres and then voting pattern analyses by candidates. The penultimate section provides some analyses of the reasons for voting swing, and this is followed by concluding remarks.

National and Urban-Rural Voting Patterns

The aggregation of votes in this study shows the urban, rural, and postal voting proportions of valid votes in the 2018 election to be 56%, 42%, and 2% respectively (see Figure 1), a distribution that is in line with the findings of the 2017 Census that estimated 56% of Fiji's population to be residents of urban and peri-urban areas (FBS, 2018).

Figure 1. Pie Chart of Valid Votes by Rural, Urban & Postal Categories



Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

Urban areas constituting over 56% of Fiji's population favoured FFP in the 2018 election. The party collected 54.5% of urban votes relative to 43.1% of the combined votes for SODELPA (35.0%) and NFP (8.1%), as shown in Table 1. In rural areas, SODELPA and NFP were favoured with 52.5% (46.1% for SODELPA and 6.4% for

NFP) of votes to FFP's 44.3%.

Table 1. Percentages of Rural/Urban/Postal Votes by Political Parties

	Fiji First		SODELPA		NFP		Other		Total
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes
Urban	139,050	54.5%	89,475	35.0%	20,563	8.1%	6,200	2.4%	255,288
Rural	84,117	44.3%	87,525	46.1%	12,196	6.4%	6,081	3.2%	189,919
Postal	4,074	44.6%	4,072	44.6%	756	8.3%	226	2.5%	9,128
Total	227,241	50.0%	181,072	39.9%	33,515	7.4%	12,507	2.8%	454,335

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

Comparison between 2018 and 2014 Election Results by Province

Table 2. Provincial Votes for Parties in Percentages in 2018 and 2014 Elections

	2018				2014			
	FijiFirst	SODELPA	NFP	Rest	FijiFirst	SODELPA	NFP	Rest
Naitasiri	47.3%	43.0%	6.9%	2.8%	58.0%	30.6%	4.9%	6.4%
Namosi	34.3%	57.4%	6.3%	1.9%	39.1%	53.9%	2.2%	4.7%
Rewa	41.0%	48.5%	7.7%	2.7%	51.7%	36.1%	5.5%	6.7%
Serua	40.7%	50.0%	6.9%	2.4%	53.1%	35.1%	5.9%	5.9%
Tailevu	45.0%	43.6%	8.7%	2.7%	59.4%	29.9%	4.0%	6.8%
Bua	30.2%	63.6%	3.3%	2.9%	40.1%	51.4%	2.7%	5.7%
Cakaudrove	30.2%	64.8%	3.3%	1.6%	40.4%	49.7%	2.8%	7.2%
Macuata	58.7%	30.6%	8.9%	1.7%	62.6%	24.4%	6.4%	6.7%
Kadavu	12.6%	83.5%	2.9%	1.1%	27.0%	68.2%	1.0%	3.7%
Lau	17.6%	78.1%	1.8%	2.5%	19.5%	74.2%	2.3%	4.1%
Lomaiviti	21.5%	74.7%	2.1%	1.7%	29.4%	59.3%	3.1%	8.2%
Ba	63.6%	25.5%	8.3%	2.6%	69.8%	14.8%	6.8%	8.5%
Nadroga-Navosa	53.8%	35.0%	5.1%	6.1%	69.1%	18.5%	6.1%	6.3%
Ra	48.0%	37.4%	10.8%	3.8%	59.7%	23.7%	5.8%	10.8%
Rotuma	52.6%	14.2%	30.7%	2.6%	84.1%	5.1%	1.6%	9.2%
Postal	44.6%	44.6%	8.3%	2.5%	54.7%	32.7%	7.3%	5.3%
National Total	50.0%	39.9%	7.4%	2.8%	59.2%	28.2%	5.5%	7.2%

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018 and 2014

This section shows where the voting swing from FFP to SODELPA eventuated by province. Table 2 summarises the provincial-level, total votes in percentages for the leading three parties and the rest for 2018 and 2014 elections. In the 2014 election, FFP beat SODELPA in the more urban provinces with large populations, such as Naitasiri, Rewa, and Ba, and SODELPA obtained more votes than FFP in the more

rural provinces with small populations, such as Namosi, Kadavu, and Lomaiviti. In that year, in the 14 provinces and Rotuma, FFP had won in eight provinces and Rotuma, and SODELPA emerged victorious in six provinces. In the 2018 election, SODELPA received more votes in eight provinces, including Rewa, to FFP's six and Rotuma. However, when we compare the two elections, FFP lost and SODELPA gained support in all provinces and Rotuma as well as in postal votes in 2018, as shown in Table 3. SODELPA gained 11.7% in its share of the total national votes in 2018 compared to 2014. In contrast, FFP lost 9.2% of the total national votes. The gains for SODELPA and losses for FFP were more than 10% in a majority of provinces except for Namosi, Macuata, Lau, Lomaiviti, Ba, and Rotuma.

Table 3. Differences in Provincial Votes in Percentages for Political Parties in 2018 and 2014 General Elections

	FijiFirst	SODELPA	NFP	Rest	2018 weight
Naitasiri	-10.7%	12.3%	2.0%	-3.6%	17.8%
Namosi	-4.8%	3.5%	4.1%	-2.8%	0.6%
Rewa	-10.7%	12.4%	2.2%	-4.0%	9.9%
Serua	-12.4%	14.9%	1.0%	-3.4%	1.5%
Tailevu	-14.4%	13.7%	4.7%	-4.0%	6.2%
Bua	-9.9%	12.1%	0.6%	-2.8%	1.0%
Cakaudrove	-10.2%	15.2%	0.5%	-5.6%	3.0%
Macuata	-3.9%	6.3%	2.5%	-4.9%	9.6%
Kadavu	-14.4%	15.2%	1.9%	-2.6%	0.3%
Lau	-1.9%	3.9%	-0.5%	-1.6%	0.3%
Lomaiviti	-7.9%	15.4%	-1.0%	-6.5%	0.7%
Ba	-6.3%	10.7%	1.5%	-5.9%	37.2%
Nadroga-Navosa	-15.3%	16.5%	-1.1%	-0.2%	6.4%
Ra	-11.7%	13.7%	5.0%	-7.0%	3.4%
Rotuma	-31.5%	9.1%	29.1%	-6.7%	0.2%
Postal	-10.1%	11.9%	1.0%	-2.8%	1.8%
National Total	-9.2%	11.7%	1.9%	-4.4%	100.0%

Source: author's calculation based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018 and 2014

It should be noted that Ba and Macuata voters in all likelihood saved FFP from losing its hold on the government in the 2018 election. The extent of losses for FFP in the largest province of Ba (37.2% weight) and fourth largest of Macuata (9.6% weight) were not extensive at 6.3% and 3.9% respectively, relative to other provinces where

the FFP losses in the larger provinces exceeded 10% (15.3% in Nadroga-Navosa, 14.4% in Tailevu, and 10.7% in Naitasiri and Rewa). It is also noteworthy that the swing of votes to SODELPA was across almost all provinces and small changes were only observed in Namosi and Lau, where support for the party had been already quite high in 2014.

On the other hand, the National Federation Party (NFP) kept, and even strengthened its status as the third party and a potential alternative choice for the future. As shown in the bottom of Table 2, it drew a higher percentage of votes (7.4%) in 2018 relative to 2014 (5.5%). However, the D'Hondt method of seat allocation meant that NFP's seats in parliament remained at three. It would be important to point out that the traditionally Fijian Indian based party now has two Taukei MPs, which indicates that the party was supported by a good number of Taukei. This result reinforced the trend seen in the 2014 election when the NFP's Taukei candidate, Tupou Draunidalo received 2,966 votes.

As shown in the bottom of Table 2, the marginalisation of minor parties other than the three leading ones was another characteristic feature of the 2018 election; the three minor parties together received only 2.8% of the total valid votes in 2018. This proportion was much less than the 5% threshold required for eligibility to obtain a seat in parliament. By contrast, as shown under the "Rest" column in Table 2, in the 2014 election four minor parties and two independents received 7.2% of the total valid votes among them. Table 3 shows that in 2018 the "Rest" category lost 4.4% in total votes compared to the aggregate votes received by minor parties and independent candidates in 2014. This table also shows that the losses of the "Rest" group occurred in all provinces and Rotuma and even in postal votes.

It is interesting to note that the gains of SODELPA and NFP would not only be from the losses of FFP, but also from the losses of the "Rest" group, because those who voted for this group in the 2014 election would likely be critical of the FFP government. In other words, the marginalisation of minor parties in 2018 probably benefitted SODELPA and NFP mostly.

Further, the marginalisation of minor parties, particularly the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), can also be explained by the policy of FFP government and its unelected predecessor governments disempowering and de-politicising labour and farmers unions, the traditional main support bases of the NFP and FLP (Fraenkel, 2019). This included the banning of union officials from becoming political party officials. Also, a splinter party of FLP, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which had secured

3.2% of total votes in the 2014 election, had a coalition agreement with SODELPA in the end of 2017 to run their candidates on SODELPA's list. The PDP party leader at the agreement, Lynda Tabuya, eventually moved to SODELPA (Chanel, 2017) and this further weakened PDP's support base.³

Other two minor parties, the Unity Fiji Party (UFP) led by the former Governor of Reserve Bank of Fiji, Savenaca Narube, and the Humanity Opportunity Prosperity Equality (HOPE) Party led by ex-parliamentarian and ex-President of NFP, Tupou Draunidalo, received considerable media attention before the election. Narube was reasonably popular and received 2,811 votes and other candidates of his party received 4,085 votes in total but the sum of 6,896 votes was only 1.5% of the total national votes. Draunidalo, the daughter of the late Adi Kuini Speed, the former Deputy Prime Minister deposed in the 2000 coup, received only 650 votes in 2018, which was only a fraction of 2,966 votes she had obtained as a NFP candidate in 2014. Her party's total votes in 2018 were only 2,811 or 0.6% of the total national votes.

Urban-Rural Preferences and Votes for FFP and SODELPA Leaders

The votes for the two leading parties and their leaders are examined next, as these leaders secured more than half of the total valid votes between them (FFP leader 36.9% and SODELPA leader 17.0%), and there was a peculiar concentration of votes for these leaders within their political parties. As shown in Table 4, the FFP leader Vorege Bainimarama obtained 73.8% of the total votes received by the 51 FFP candidates. In other words, the rest of FFP's 50 candidates only received 26.2% combined, or slightly more than one quarter of the total votes for the party. In the 2014 election, a similar, but more moderate concentration of 69.9% of total votes had gone to the same leader of the party (Baker & Nakagawa, 2015). As shown in Table 4, this concentration of votes for the party leader of FFP was more accentuated in urban areas where Bainimarama received 41.2% of the total urban votes, which were more than three quarters of the total votes received by party candidates in urban areas.

³ Later the PDP was disqualified by the Fijian Elections Office in 2018 before the election for not submitting its statement of assets and liabilities to the registrar of political parties by the deadline (Mala, 2018).

Table 4. Votes for FFP and its Leader by Rural, Urban, and Postal Voters

	Total	Fiji First	Vorege Bainimarama (VB)	Fiji First Share in Total	VB Share in Total	VB Share in Fiji First
Urban	255,288	139,050	105,284	54.5%	41.2%	75.7%
Rural	189,919	84,117	59,513	44.3%	31.3%	70.8%
Postal	9,128	4,074	2,935	44.6%	32.2%	72.0%
Total	454,335	227,241	167,732	50.0%	36.9%	73.8%

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

Table 5. Votes for SODELPA and its Leader by Rural, Urban, and Postal Voters

	Total	SODELPA A	Sitiveni Rabuka (SR)	SODELPA Share in Total	SR Share in Total	SR Share in SODELPA
Urban	255,288	89,475	51,460	35.0%	20.2%	57.5%
Rural	189,919	87,525	24,042	46.1%	12.7%	27.5%
Postal	9,128	4,072	1,538	44.6%	16.8%	37.8%
Total	454,335	181,072	77,040	39.9%	17.0%	42.5%

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

Table 5 shows that the main opposition SODELPA's leader received 42.5% of the total votes obtained by the party's 51 candidates. These were not as high as his counterpart's in FFP. However, votes for Sitiveni Rabuka were much more pronounced than in the 2014 election, in which his predecessor received 35.4% of SODELPA's total votes (Baker & Nakagawa, 2015). This concentration of votes for the new SODELPA leader was also more extensive in urban areas (57.5%) relative to rural areas (27.5%). This concentration of votes for the party leaders of FFP and SODELPA could have been proxy votes or votes not specific to a candidate but for a party. This premise is supported by the fact that the previous party leader of SODELPA, Ro Teimumu Kepa, received 6,063 votes in the 2018 election, only a fraction of the 49,485 votes she had received in 2014. However, all the votes for the leaders of the two largest parties would not be proxy votes for their parties. In other words, if different leaders had led these parties, the choices of voters may have significantly altered because of factors such as the values and policies attached to party leaders, as well as implications for political stability they represented.

Most of the Indian Fijians who had voted for FFP in the 2014 election seemed to have kept their loyalty to the governing party in 2018, particularly in urban areas. They kept their faith in FFP's multi-racial nation-building, which had been supported by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). As described in Baker and

Nakagawa (2015), Indian Fijians also preferred political stability and the elimination of affirmative policies in favour of Taukei. These policies had been perceived by them as discriminatory. Some Indian Fijian voters may also have been suspicious of NFP, which had formed a multi-ethnic coalition with the Rabuka-led *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), a predecessor of SODELPA, in the 1999 election (Robertson, 2017).

Urban Votes by Population Centres⁴

In the 2014 election, FFP received 61.6% of urban votes to SODELPA and NFP's combined total votes of 31.4%, and the party secured more votes than SODELPA and NFP in most population centres. The only exception was Lami, where FFP received 40.5% of votes to SODELPA and NFP's 53.2% (Baker & Nakagawa, 2015).⁵ In the 2018 Election, FFP received 54.5% of urban votes to SODELPA and NFP's 43.8%, but in several major population centres FFP lost against SODELPA and NFP combined. These included Lami and Suva. FFP votes almost tied with the votes received by SODELPA and NFP combined in Nasinu (see Figure 2). It can also be seen that, in Lami, support for FFP ebbed significantly with the party securing only 23.9% of votes. Actually, in the urban areas of the Central Division in total, SODELPA and NFP combined secured slightly more votes (49.1%) than FFP (48.5%) (see Figure 2).

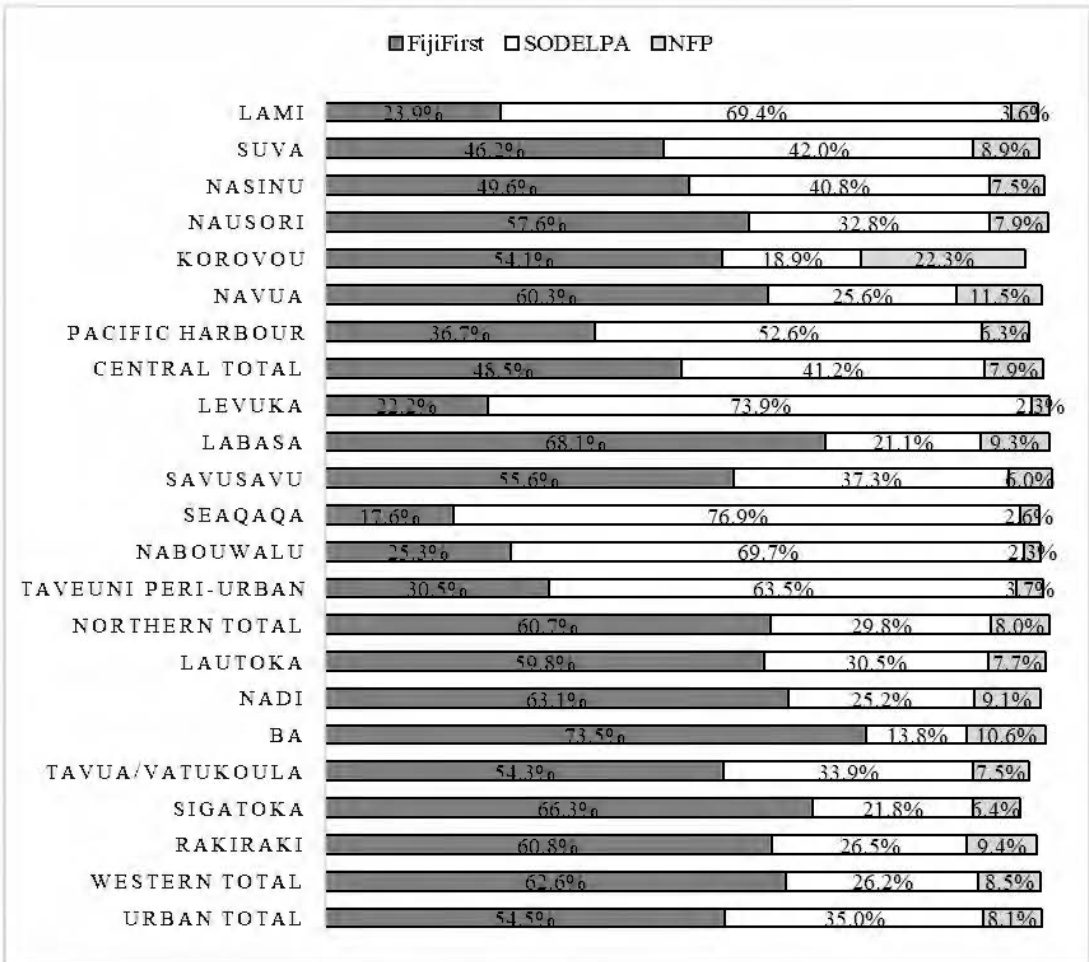
Although not as extensive as in the 2014 election, unwavering support for FFP in 2018 can be observed in urban centres in Ba, Lautoka, Nadi, and Sigatoka in the Western Division. In these urban areas, support for FFP was 62.6% in total to SODELPA and NFP's 34.7%. In the urban areas of the Northern Division, FFP also kept the lead by securing 60.7% to SODELPA and NFP's 37.8%.

These distributions may be partially explained by ethnic polarisation, with a significant majority of Taukei voters supporting SODELPA, and Indian Fijian and other minority voters overwhelmingly supporting FFP, but this explanation would be too simplistic to adequately explain voting patterns in some urban centres.

⁴ In this paper, urban areas include peri-urban areas adjacent to and beyond city/town boundaries.

⁵ The urban-rural demarcations of the 2014 election results used in Baker & Nakagawa (2015) were based on the 2007 census in which urban and rural populations were almost equal. Therefore, direct comparisons between the two data sets are not possible.

Figure 2. Urban Party Votes of Leading Three Parties by Urban Centre



Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

Table 6 is derived from a series of publications from FBS analysing 2007 census data (FBS, 2013 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j) show ethnic group numbers in some of the population centres measured by the "Usual Place of Residence" (UPOR). SODELPA's securing of nearly 70% of votes in Lami can be explained by Taukei predomination in the town (80% in 2007), but FFP edged over SODELPA in Suva and Nasinu in 2018, where Taukei population is greater than Indian Fijian and other minorities. A reason for this would be support for FFP by a substantial proportion of Taukei. They could have been public servants, military personnel, and workers in public enterprises. Support for FFP from them as a group would not be as extensive in 2018 compared to 2014 because of the introduction of an open, merit-based recruitment system by the Public Service Commission in October 2016, and contract-based employment for public servants seeking promotion in 2017. Probably, only

those who had been gaining from the new arrangements would have kept their allegiance to FFP.

Table 6. Ethnic Group Numbers in Urban Centres of Fiji in 2007

City/Town	UPOR	iTaukei	Indians	Others	% Taukei	% Indians	% Others
Ba	19,443	5,690	13,188	565	29.3%	67.8%	2.9%
Labasa	27,460	9,542	16,950	968	34.7%	61.7%	3.5%
Lami	19,930	15,904	1,396	2,630	79.8%	7.0%	13.2%
Lautoka	59,189	26,026	29,853	3,310	44.0%	50.4%	5.6%
Levuka	1,959	1,319	249	391	67.3%	12.7%	20.0%
Nadi	42,410	19,730	19,572	3,108	46.5%	46.1%	7.3%
Nasinu	89,638	47,000	36,617	6,021	52.4%	40.8%	6.7%
Nausori	40,710	16,793	22,230	1,687	41.3%	54.6%	4.1%
Navua	4,174	1,386	2,559	229	33.2%	61.3%	5.5%
Nabouwalu	544	496	44	4	91.2%	8.1%	0.7%
Rakiraki	4,805	2,098	2,639	68	43.7%	54.9%	1.4%
Savusavu	6,394	2,865	2,753	776	44.8%	43.1%	12.1%
Seaqaqa	765	271	476	18	35.4%	62.2%	2.4%
Sigatoka	9,332	4,363	4,521	448	46.8%	48.4%	4.8%
Suva	81,098	45,101	23,473	12,524	55.6%	28.9%	15.4%

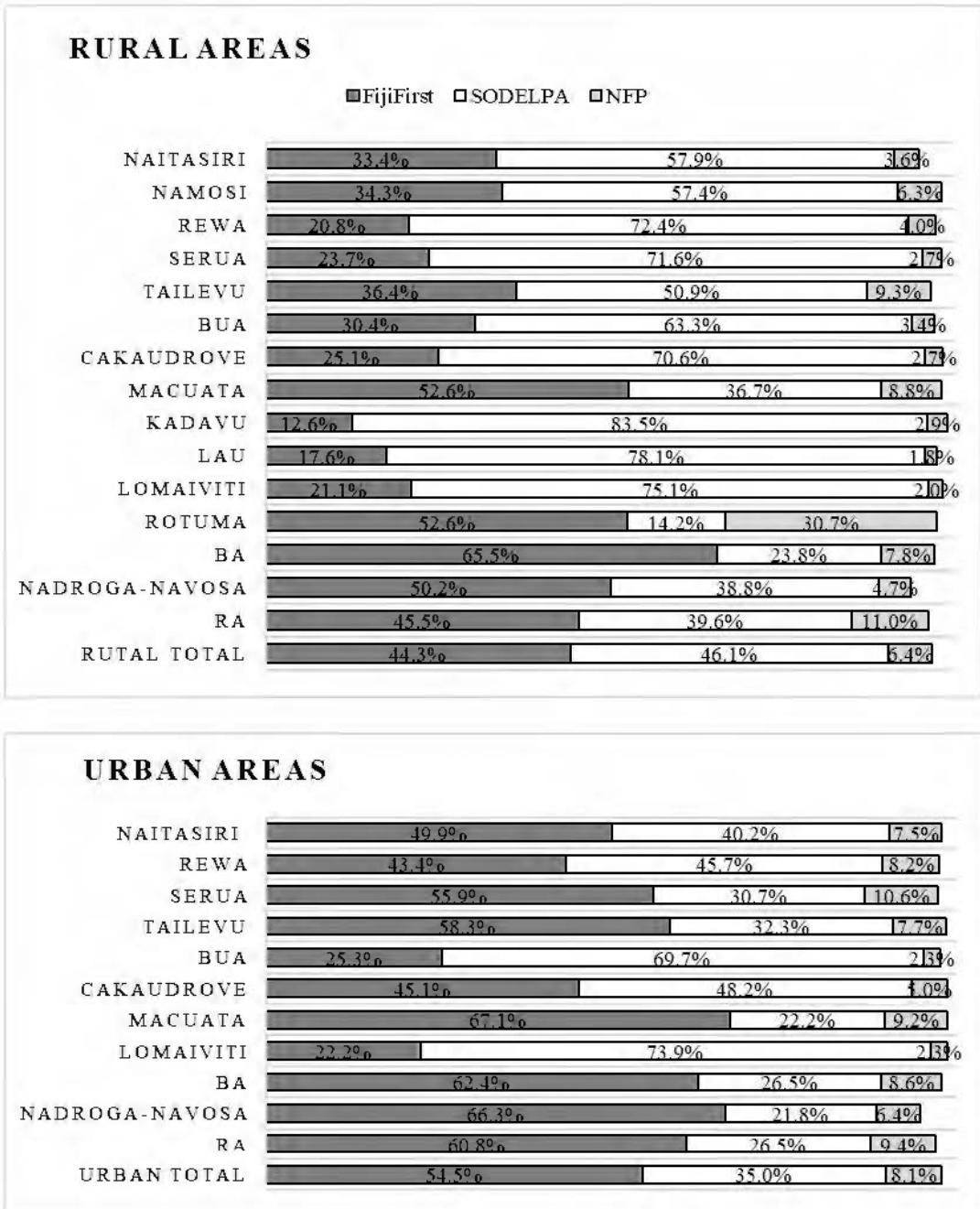
Source: FBS, 2013 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j

The success of FFP in urban centres of the Western and Northern Divisions can be explained by their substantial Indian Fijian and other minority populations. However, Taukei populations are also quite substantial in a few urban centres of the Western and Northern Divisions, as shown in Table 6, and in 2018, the Taukei proportion of the population of these municipalities would have increased substantially from the ones in 2007. This would indicate that some Taukei in these urban centres voted for FFP in both the 2014 and 2018 elections.

Rural-Urban Votes by Province

At the provincial level, in a majority of rural areas SODELPA secured more than 50% of votes, except for rural areas in the Western Division, and in Macuata and Rotuma, as shown in the upper rows of Figure 3. This can be explained by ethnic distributions of voters who are mainly Taukei. The domination of the party is particularly glaring in the rural areas of provinces of Rewa (72.4%), Serua (71.6%), Cakaudrove (70.6%), Kadavu (83.5%), Lau (78.1%), and Lomaiviti (75.1%).

Figure 3. Rural/Urban Votes of Leading Three Parties by Province



Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

On the other hand, FFP received more than 50% of the votes in rural areas of the provinces of Macuata (52.6%), Ba (65.5%), and Nadroga-Navosa (50.2%), where Indian Fijians and other minorities constitute substantial proportions of the population. Other than these three provinces, FFP secured more votes than

SODELPA in rural areas of Ra (45.5% vs. 39.6%). In aggregation of all valid votes in rural areas, SODELPA received 46.1% of the total votes to FFP's 44.3% and NFP's 6.4%. This distribution indicates that substantial numbers of Taukei who had voted for FFP in 2014 shifted to SODELPA in the 2018 election. However, sizable numbers of them still voted for FFP if we take into account the predominance of the Taukei population in rural areas in general.

FFP does appear to have attracted a higher number of votes in urban areas relative to rural areas in most provinces if we compare the upper and lower rows of Figure 3. Calling FFP an urban party might be premature, but this party's popularity is evident from its share of votes in the large provinces with the biggest urban centres. Besides ethnicity, FFP's popularity in these localities could be explained by its relative success in urban development compared to rural areas of the country.

Voting Patterns by Candidates

Baker & Nakagawa (2015) reported patterns of concentration of support in particular provinces and municipalities for most candidates in the 2014 election, and this tendency was repeated in the 2018 election. Despite the abolition of ethnic constituencies and the establishment of the single, nation-wide constituency that would not favour an ethnic party (Carnegie & Tarte, 2018), and the emphasis by government on nation-wide representation by all MPs, SODELPA had adopted a strategy of naming a majority of its candidates by particular provinces or municipalities. At the same time, some of their candidates were called national candidates, selected to represent the country as whole. Ratuva (2016) described a similar approach used by SODELPA in 2014.

The party opposed the nation-wide, single constituency to start with and many of its candidates had strong regional ties as high-ranking chiefs, or as "commercial buccaneers" based in a particular region (MacWilliam, 2016). MacWilliam (2016) considered this strategy to be an anachronism, with the 2014 election results being "the high-water mark for the party dominated by high chiefs, particular rural concerns and the Taukei buccaneers who were once prominent" (pp. 225-226). In contrast to this view, Ratuva maintained that this SODELPA strategy "was quite innovative and commendable because it won the party most of their seats" in the 2014 election (2016, p. 35).

The strategy may have also provided guidance to SODELPA supporters to spread their votes among the party's candidates. A clear example of this was the designation of Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, Tui Cakau (Paramount Chief of Cakaudrove and of the

Tovata Confederacy) as a national candidate for the party, and Dr Ratu Antonio Lalabalavu, his son, as a candidate for Cakaudrove East. The father who secured a parliamentary seat received 2,165 nation-wide votes (29% from Cakaudrove), while the son also secured a parliamentary seat with 5,016 votes, 96% of which were from Cakaudrove Province. In the 2014 election, the father received 6,668 votes, 77% of which was from Cakaudrove (Baker & Nakagawa, 2015).

The Brazilian elections strategy resonates with the SODELPA approach. Ames (2001) points out a typical election strategy of moderately popular candidates under the OLPS in Brazil as follows: they estimate roughly how many votes they need based on the previous election outcomes, given that more popular, star candidates of their parties would secure a substantial proportion of votes for their parties. Then they concentrate their efforts to secure enough votes from some identifiable groups that could be regional, religious, or ethnic. This suggests that a moderately popular candidate needs really strong and popular comrades in the same party to raise the total votes for the party. However, at the same time, other candidates from the same party can become the aforesaid moderately popular candidate's worst enemies as they may "steal" her/his votes from the targeted group, and end up higher ranked among party candidates, thereby becoming MPs in the OLPS. In this context, Mere Samisoni, a SODELPA candidate, was quite unhappy with the strategy adopted by the party headquarters that suggested to Lami voters in her urban stronghold "to vote for the party if they were not happy with the local SODELPA candidate." This would have shifted substantial Lami votes from her to other SODELPA candidates, particularly to the party leader who visited the town at the end of the campaign period (Delaibatiki, 2019).

Table 7 shows patterns of voting in the 2018 election in terms of regional voting concentrations for all winning candidates of SODELPA. Most of these candidates had more than 50% concentration of their votes from certain provinces and/or municipalities.

Some of the most concentrated voting patterns, equal to or more than 80% of all valid votes, can be observed for Dr Ratu Antonio Lalabalavu (96% from Cakaudrove Province), Jese Saukuru (96% of votes from Ba Province), Peceli Vosanibola (92% of votes from Lomaviti Province), Mitieli Bulanauca (93% of votes from rural areas of Bua Province), Ratu Tevita Navurelevu (91% of votes from Macuata Province), Mosese Bulitavu (91% of votes from Macuata Province), Simione Rasova (87% of votes from Kadavu), Mikaele Leawere (86% of votes from Serua Province), and Adi

Litia Qionibaravi (86% of votes from rural areas of Tailevu Province).⁶ It should be noted that the concentration of their votes was particularly strong in rural areas of a province where the dominant population are Taukei.

Table 7. Regional Voting Patterns for Winning SODELPA Candidates

# of Votes	Name	Voting Pattern
77,040	Sitiveni L. Rabuka	Dispersed in many areas of Fiji but 67% were from urban areas.
8,795	Lynda D. Tabuya	Dispersed in many areas of Fiji but 74% were from urban areas.
6,036	Ro Teimumu Kepa	54% of her votes were from Rewa Province where she is from and urban areas of Naitasiri Province. She also received some votes from Western District, particularly from Ba Province (17%).
5,342	Mosese Bulitavu	91% of his votes were from Macuata Province where he is from.
5,187	Niko Nawaikula	77% of his votes were from rural areas of Cakaudrove Province where he is from.
5,016	Dr Ratu Antonio Lalabalavu	96% of his votes were from Cakaudrove Province where he is from.
4,287	Anare Jale	60% of his votes were from Lau Province where he is from.
3,730	Peceli W. Vosanibola	92% of his votes were from Lomaiviti Province where he is from.
3,536	Viliame R. Gavoka	68% of his votes were from Rural areas of Nadroga Province where he is from.
3,299	Jese Saukuru	96% of his votes were from Ba Province where he is from.
3,286	Simione R. Rasova	87% of his votes were from Kadavu where he is from.
3,279	Ratu Suliano Matanitobua	56% of his votes were from rural areas of Namosi Province where he is from.
3,031	Mitieli Bulanauca	93% of his votes were from rural areas of Bua Province where he is from.
2,835	Ro Filipe Tuisawau	67% of his votes were from Rewa Province where he is from.
2,724	Inosi Kuridrani	91% of his votes were from Nadroga-Navosa Province where he is from.
2,354	Mikaele Leawere	86% of his votes were from Serua Province where he is from.
2,312	Aseri M. Radrodro	62% of his votes were from rural areas of Naitasiri Province where he is from.
2,235	Salote Radrodro	67% of her votes were from urban areas of Naitasiri Province which are parts of Nasinu and Suva.
2,195	Adi Litia Qionibaravi	86% of her votes were from rural areas of Tailevu where she is from.
2,165	Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu	29% of his votes were from Cakaudrove Province and about a half were from urban areas of Fiji such as Lami, Suva, Nasinu, Lautoka and Nadi.
2,010	Ratu Tevita	91% of his votes were from Macuata Province where he is from.

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

⁶ Among SODELPA candidates who received more than 1,000 votes but were not successful to get a parliamentary seat, the following candidates had high concentration of their supports from a certain province. They are Ratu Pacelli Rina Kama (80% votes from rural areas of Naitasiri Province), Esrom Y. Immanu'el (80% of votes from rural areas of Naitasiri Province), George Shiu Raj (87% of votes from Ba Province), and Ro Kiniviliame Kiliraki (89% of votes from Naitasiri Province).

Among successful SODELPA candidates, only three lacked one or two concentrated support bases where more than 50% of their votes were received. They were Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, the party leader Sitiveni Rabuka, and Lynda Tabuya. They received votes from diverse areas around the country and half or more of their votes were from urban areas. The former leader of SODELPA, Ro Teimumu Kepa, also had a wider support base, but 54% of her votes were from Rewa Province.

The geographical concentration of votes is a phenomenon not limited to SODELPA, and many FFP winning candidates also had significant support from particular localities. This is shown in Table 8. FFP candidates with more than 50% concentration of votes by locality were Joseph Nand (68% from Nadroga Province), Vijendra Prakash (59% from Naitasiri Province), Dr Salik Ram Govind (62% from Nadroga Province), George Vegnathan (77% from Macuata Province), Rohit Sharma (69% from Nausori, Nasinu and Suva), Viam Pillay (86% from Ba Province), Premila Devi Kumar (59% from Suva, Nasinu and Nausori), Parveen Bala (85% from Ba Province), Jale Sigarara (82% from Bua Province), Ashneel Sudhakar (68% from Ba Province), Rosy Akbar (55% from Ba Province), Selai Adimaitoga (95% from Ba Province), Sanjay Kirpal (74% from Ba Province), and Osea Naiqamu (86% from Ba Province and rural areas of Nadroga Province). Many other candidates had relatively concentrated voting patterns from more than two geographical areas, but they were less extensive.

The only FFP candidates with nation-wide support were the party leader Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, party General Secretary Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Alipate Nagata (candidate number 668, which might have been confused with party leader 688), Mereseini Vuniwaqa, and to lesser extent Dr Mahendra Reddy and Veena Bhatnagar.

As the two faces of government for more than 10 years, FFP's leaders, Bainimarama and Khaiyum, have had considerable media exposure and are well known to voters. They have held several important ministerial portfolios, especially in the period immediately before the 2018 general election. These factors would explain the preponderance of votes for the party leader, and the increased number of votes for Sayed-Khaiyum in 2018 relative to 2014. Many FFP candidates had electoral success because of the huge number of votes for their party leader, including proxy votes for the party. This meant that many successful FFP members of parliament received less than 1,000 votes, as shown in Table 8. It is noteworthy that, in 2014, only six out of the 32 of successful candidates of FFP had less than 1,000 votes, but in 2018, 13 out of 27 elected FFP candidates obtained less than 1,000 votes.

Table 8. Regional Voting Patterns for Winning FFP Candidates

# of Votes	Name	Voting Pattern
167,732	Josaia V. Bainimarama	His votes were dispersed in many areas of Fiji but 63% were from urban areas.
17,271	Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum	His votes were dispersed in many areas of Fiji but 59% were from various urban centres of Central and Western Districts as well as Labasa.
6,876	Alipate T. Nagata	His votes were from various areas around Fiji.
5,063	Parveen K. Bala	85% of his votes were from Ba Province. He is from the Province and was an elected mayor of Ba Town.
2,256	Vijay Nath	46% of his votes are from Nausori town where he is living. He also received 12% of votes from rural area of Tailevu where he is from.
2,081	Dr. Mahendra Reddy	37% of his votes were from Ba Province where he is from and 29% were from the urban areas of the Central District such as Suva, Nasinu and Nausori.
1,379	Premila Devi Kumar	59% of her votes were from Suva, Nasinu and Nausori. She is from Suva and also received supports from Lautoka and Nadi (14%).
1,349	Joseph F. Nand	68% of his votes were from Nadroga Province. He is living in Sigatoka and was a football coach for Nadroga.
1,280	Viam Pillay	86% of his votes were from Ba Province where he is from and residing.
1,251	Inia B. Seruiratu	59% of his votes were from rural areas of Tailevu Province where he is from and Cakaudrove Province.
1,167	Mereseini R.	Her votes were dispersed in many areas of Fiji.
1,147	Sanjay S. Kirpal	74% of his votes were from Ba Province where he is from.
1,129	Osea Naiqamu	86% of his votes were from Ba Province and rural areas of Nadroga Province. He is from Ba and was the CEO for Fiji Pine Trust.
1,019	Alvick A. Maharaj	49% of his votes were from Macuata Province where he is from and 13% were from urban areas of Naitasiri which can be related to his residence and business.
944	George Vegnathan	77% of his votes were from Macuata Province where he is from.
888	Semi T. Koroilavesau	53% of his votes were from Kadavu where he is from and Ba where his company is located.
849	Jone Usamate	43% of his votes were from Suva, Nasinu and Nausori. Another 18% were from Cakaudrove Province.
821	Rohit R. Sharma	69% of his votes are from Nausori, Nasinu and Suva.
755	Ashneel Sudhakar	68% of his votes were from Ba Province where he is from and currently residing.
743	Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete	52% of his votes were from Rewa and Naitasiri provinces. He is a medical doctor practicing in Suva.
718	Selai Adimaitoga	95% of her votes were from Ba Province where she is residing as a cane farmer.
705	Rosy S. Akbar	55% of her votes were from Ba Province where she is from.
697	Jale Sigarara	82% of his votes were from Bua Province where he is from and currently residing.
596	Vijendra Prakash	59% of his votes are from Naitasiri Province where he is from and currently living.
577	Veena K. Bhatnagar	61% of her votes were from Ba and Ra Provinces.
572	Alexander D. O'Connor	46% of his votes were from Cakaudrove Province. Another 22% were from Ba Province where he is living.
559	Dr. Salik Ram Govind	62% of his votes are from Nadroga Province where he is from.

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections Office data, 2018

As shown in Table 9, votes for all successful NFP candidates were dispersed widely and Biman Prasad and Lenora Qereqeretabua received more than 50% of their votes from urban areas, whereas Pio Tikoduadua received nearly 70% of his votes from various rural areas.⁷ Therefore, Tikoduadua is a more rural-based politician compared to the other two successful candidates of his party.

Table 9: Regional Voting Patterns of Winning NFP Candidates

# of Votes	Name	Description
12,137	Prof. Biman C. Prasad	His votes were dispersed in many areas of Fiji but 74% were from urban areas.
2,684	Pio Tikoduadua	42% of his votes were from rural areas of Tailevu where he is from. Another 26% of his votes were from various rural areas of other provinces.
1,811	Lenora Qereqeretabua	Her votes were dispersed in many areas of Fiji but 50% were from the urban areas of Central District, particularly Suva and Nasinu.

Source: author's calculations based on Fijian Elections data, 2018

Among the candidates of the three minor parties only Savenaca Narube, the party leader of UFP received more than 1,000 votes. His 2,811 votes were from widely dispersed areas, but 54% were from the urban areas of Central and Western Districts.

Reasons behind the Swing in Votes

As shown above, between the 2018 and 2014 elections there was a substantial swing of votes from FFP (-9.2%) to SODELPA (+11.7%) and NFP (+1.9%). Gains of these two opposition parties were also taken from the marginal, minor parties (-4.4%). The swing was almost universal and not limited to Cakaudrove, the well-known stronghold for the new SODELPA party leader, Rabuka. This shift of voter preference occurred in both urban and rural areas, but was more accentuated in the rural localities.

As indicated by a previous analysis of the election data, the swing in votes seemed to have occurred mainly among the Taukei population (McWilliam, 2019). A number of reasons can be discerned for the change in Taukei voter behaviour. Carnegie & Tarte (2018) note that the FFP government has been a “competitive authoritarian” regime, which had not collaborated with the opposition on policy making, but sternly

⁷ Another two NFP candidates who were unsuccessful in the election but managed to secure more than 1,000 votes were Charan J. Singh (1,102 votes) and Kiniviliame Salabogi (1,614 votes). Singh obtained 64% of his votes from his home province of Macuata whereas 50% of Salabogi's votes were from his home province of Ra.

rejected policy compromises and treated the parliamentary opposition with disdain. Among the Taukei voters, the swing in votes between 2014 and 2018 is likely to have been because of disillusion with policies implemented by the FFP government and the treatment of the predominantly ethnic Fijian opposition. The governing party largely retained the support of Indian Fijian and other minorities for reasons of security and stability.

As described by Fraenkel (2019), FFP also seemed to take advantage of ethnic insecurity among Indian Fijians by pointing out NFP's weak response to racist remarks made by SODELPA MPs in parliament (p. 3).⁸ He pointed to other factors to explain the swing in Taukei votes, such as the party leader Rabuka being a well-known potential "alternative leader," particularly in urban areas, as a former military strong man and prime minister. Another reason pointed out by Fraenkel (2019) was that SODELPA was able to choose locally prominent candidates whose personal votes at their provinces were stacked up (p. 24).

A further reason for the swing was the boosting of the image of Rabuka just before the election by the publicity relating to his prosecution. His candidacy was almost disqualified because of the charge of failure to declare his assets, income, and liabilities correctly at the end of December 2017, in violation of the Political Parties Act. The Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) brought the case against him and a guilty verdict would have disqualified him from contesting the 2018 election. However, a magistrate court found Rabuka not guilty on 26 October 2018 (Narayan & Turaga, 2018).

Then, at the hastily called High Court session, Chief Justice Anthony Gates dismissed the FICAC appeal on 12 November 2018, only two days before the election ("Appeal against Rabuka dismissed", 2018). If the Chief Justice had ruled against Rabuka, it would have been disastrous for SODELPA because it was already within the two-day election media blackout period, and the party would not have been able to announce the new party leader. The verdict of dismissing the FICAC appeal was greeted with euphoria among SODELPA supporters, boosting Rabuka's image among Taukei (Fraenkel, 2019).

⁸ Because of marginalisation of political parties such as Fiji Labour Party, the only viable alternative choice for most Fijian Indian voters for FFP was NFP in the 2018 election.

Conclusion

This study examined the 2018 general election results by provinces, rural, and urban localities, as well as by candidates. The patterns of voting in these geographical areas changed since the previous general election of 2014. However, patterns of vote concentration for political party leaders, and concentrations of votes for candidates based on their province of origin were similar in the two general elections. The study shows that support for FFP ebbed in all provinces with corresponding gains for SODELPA and NFP. SODELPA and NFP also gained at the expense of the three minor parties. The swing in votes characterised Taukei voters generally but especially in rural areas. FFP retained its support among Indian Fijian and other ethnic minorities. However, sizeable numbers of Taukei also continued to vote for the governing party in urban areas, and especially in Ba and Macuata provinces.

There is little doubt that the current FFP government will work hard to keep its Indian Fijian support and seek to regain support of Taukei voters for the 2022 general election. SODELPA strategy in the 2018 general election, which repeated its 2014 election approach of identifying provincial, urban, and national candidates, appeared to have produced positive results. It is likely that the party will continue this strategy in 2022. The NFP has significantly changed its image from being a party for Indian Fijians to one that is more broadly multi-ethnic. With two of its three MPs being Taukei, the party is likely to continue to gain more indigenous Fijian support.

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