

Part II: The military's electoral reform: do they really want it?
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The Military Government keeps stating there will be no elections until a fair, non-racial, one person-one vote system is in place.

Their NCBBF came up with a proportional system with a List element in it.

But this Military Government (including NCBBF, David Arms, CCF etc) are no longer expending any energy on public education for electoral reform.

Indeed, the military censors have stopped the local publication of this article, which tries to explain how their proposed electoral reform could be made to work.

And what the likely results would be- which possibly is what bugs this Military Government.

Going by the 2006 election results, under the Military Government's proposed proportional List system, SDL and FLP will still be the largest parties but reduced in strength.

A major improvement will be that the smaller parties like the National Federation Party (NFP), the National Alliance Party (NAP) and PANU will see some representation in Parliament, in contrast to their complete elimination by the Alternative Vote system in 2006.

And the "List" element promises several other advantages for Fiji people.

The NCBBF's proposed electoral reform

We have had 3 elections under the Alternative Vote system, with undesirable results.

Two of the members of the Reeves Commission (Sir Paul Reeves and the late Mr Vakatora) long acknowledged that the electoral system needed to be changed.

We can all agree that the existing electoral system has many weaknesses: it has an unacceptably high rate of invalid votes, and it produces very disproportionate results leading to smaller parties being marginalised and the larger ones unfairly strengthened.

Let us agree that a "proportional" system with a "List" element, with one person one vote, and no communal seats, may be much better for Fiji. How can it work? And what would be the likely results?

The NCBBF Draft Report's recommendation for four or five large constituencies will be a totally messy affair, with two weaknesses.

Each voter may well face a hundred names to choose from, on the ballot paper. Second, there will be no locally accountable parliamentarians to serve purely local needs for roads, water, sewerage, health, education etc.

It would be much better to have a larger number of “local” constituencies to ensure that all our people will have some specific local parliamentary representative to go to, for their purely local needs. The remaining parliamentarians can come from the party “Lists” to make up the required number in Parliament by the proportionality element.

How will this work?

The Party Lists

Before the elections, all political parties will publish a “List” of all their candidates, ranked in order of importance, hopefully those with expertise to be Ministers, at the top.

Successful List candidates will be chosen from the top, going down to the required number.

It will be clear from the List order, how much the Party values ethnic balance; gender balance; regional balance; age balance, etc.

The voting

Each voter will be given two ballot papers- one ballot paper to vote for the national political parties only; and one ballot paper to vote for the local constituency representative.

Start with Ballot Paper 1 which will have only political party names and their symbols.

Mark just one box- with a tick, or a cross, or a slash. All the votes in the country are added up.

This will give you each party’s national percentage share of all the seats in Parliament (minus the Independents). It will also give the total number of seats that Party will get in Parliament, regardless of the local constituency results.

Likely results?

A very good idea may be obtained from the 2006 votes in the 25 Open Constituencies: effectively 25 Common Rolls: one person one vote, voting for the candidates of any race.

Ignore for the moment the 17,717 votes for Independents all around the country. In 2006, the party votes, and the total required seats in Parliament would have been as follows:

Party	Open Votes	Percent.	Total Seats	Local Result	From List
SDL	170186	46.8	33		
FLP	153494	42.2	30		
NFP	23594	6.5	5		
NAP	12971	3.6	3		
PANU	2191	0.6			
NVTLP	1454	0.4			
	363890	100.0	71		

SDL would have been very fairly entitled to 33 seats in Parliament, FLP 30 seats, NFP to just 5 seats and NAP to 3 seats. The others just did not get enough votes nationally, to justify having a seat, although PANU was close.

If we only had one national constituency, then the SDL would just select the top 33 from their SDL List, FLP would select the top 30 from the FLP List, NFP the top 5 from their List, and likewise the NAP would select the top 3 from their List.

Very simple, fair and democratic: one person one vote, the number of seats in Parliament will be exactly proportional to the number of votes received throughout the country. Every vote counts.

Result from Local Constituencies

To ensure that all voters have a specific parliamentarian to go to for their purely local interests in roads, water, sewerage, health or education, you need local constituencies.

Simply divide Fiji into geographically convenient constituencies that voters can easily identify with. Not too large that one parliamentarian cannot serve the area well. Not too small either.

There will be no need to have constituencies of equal size, or same racial composition. Any candidate of any race can stand in any constituency. Again, one person one vote.

Each voter therefore will get a second ballot paper for their local constituency- only with the local candidates and their Party symbols (or Independents).

Just tick one. Don't bother with preferences. The person with the highest number of votes can be declared the winner ("First Past The Post" system). The FPP system has faults but it is simple.

What local results?

Again let us use the 25 Open Constituency results for 2006, and use the "First Past the Post" criterion to decide the winner.

SDL wins 14 seats, FLP 11 seats, and the other parties, none.

But these local results won't matter at all for the total party representation in Parliament.

Party	Votes	Percent.	Total Seats	Local Const.	From List
SDL	170186	46.8	33	14	(19)
FLP	153494	42.2	30	11	(19)
NFP	23594	6.5	5		(5)
NAP	12971	3.6	3		(3)
PANU	2191	0.6			
NVTLP	1454	0.4			
	363890	100.0	71	25	(46)

We already know that SDL is entitled to have a total of 33 seats given their national votes; they have won 14 seats in the local constituencies; so they now select the top 19 persons from their SDL Party List (leaving out those who may have already been elected in the local constituencies)

FLP was entitled to 30 seats nationally, they won 11 seats locally, so they now select an additional top 19 persons from their List.

AND while NFP won none in the local constituencies, they now get the top 5 from their List, to go into Parliament.

NAP who also did not win in any local constituency, will also send the top 3 from their List, to go into Parliament.

Other advantages

The great advantage of the proportional List system is that smaller parties do not have to win anywhere, but their national votes will still be aggregated, and if they have enough votes nationally, they will get the appropriate number of seats in Parliament.

You can move the boundaries anywhere you like. Fiddling or “gerrymandering” boundaries will have very little effect.

It does not matter what the local results are: If by some accident, SDL had won all the 25 local seats (and FLP none), then SDL would only select 8 additional persons from their List to make the same national total of 33 in Parliament.

If FLP won none locally, they would select all 30 persons from their List to make the same total of 30 in Parliament.

What of Independents and the “Generals”?

If Independents win locally (say 3 seats) then the national total for sharing between the political parties is reduced by 3 seats i.e. the political parties will share 68 seats to get their overall totals.

For parties representing “General” voters, you need to obtain roughly 6,700 votes to get one MP into Parliament. In 2006, there were some 13,800 General voters. If they all voted for the same person, they would get at least 2 seats in Parliament. But Rotumans may struggle to elect anyone using their own votes alone.

But who forms government?

Who forms Government?

In the normal Westminster system followed by most countries (US, Australia, UK, NZ...) any Party getting the support of more than a half of Parliament- here 36- forms government and the others become the Opposition? (yawn, yawn, been there, done that).

With the above results, both SDL and FLP could form government, depending on who the smaller parties support- smaller parties will indeed have great power in such situations.

Of course, SDL and FLP could also form a Coalition and form Government! (dream on).

Or Fiji could still retain the Multi-Party Government provision (which all our recent political leaders have miserably failed to use and thereby helped to ruin this country).

Readers can read my previous published articles on all these questions, at this link.

<http://www.econ.fbe.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=8216>

But having seen a decade of failures by our selfish political leaders to co-operate for the common good, most Fiji people are tired of all these questions.

Our devastated ordinary citizens just want jobs and improving standards of living. That requires strong economic growth which requires investments in excess of 25% of GDP, which requires the confidence of the business sector.

That will only return if there is a lawful parliamentary democracy supported by an independent judiciary.

But the real crux of the matter is not electoral reform for a non-racial electoral system, but that this Military Government, whatever its rhetoric, wants neither a genuine non-racial parliamentary democracy, nor does it want an independent judiciary.

And their guns will tell the people of Fiji what we can and cannot have.