Since gaining independence on 10 October 1970, the people of Fiji have experienced four coups. While the leaders of the first three coups claimed to represent the interests of the iTaukei, the leader of the fourth coup (on 5 December 2006), Commodore Frank Bainimarama, stated that his aims were to address the underlying political problems to eradicate Fiji’s ‘coup culture’ forever.

The coups and ensuing political turmoil have seriously undermined Fiji’s economy and people’s sense of security. All coups have been fuelled by a combination of factors, including inter-ethnic competition over resources, traditional rivalries between the chiefly elite, low levels of education, an iTaukei-dominated military force, and traditional institutions of governance challenged by the systems of democracy and human rights. The experiences of Fijian citizens of ‘democracy’ and different models of governance are thus marked by discontent. If the root causes of this discontent are not addressed, the country may experience more political upheavals in the future.

Aspiring to carry out an extensive and impartial inquiry into governance issues, this report is based on a systematic exploration and analysis of views of Fijians from all sectors of society.

Given this background, this report presents the perceptions and visions of the people of Fiji for future democratic development, as well as their opinions as to the preconditions required for this development.

As will be seen when reading this report, the voices of the people carried varying and sometimes conflicting opinions about democracy in Fiji; while some may see this as problematic, we were reminded of the saying:

‘You don’t get harmony if everyone sings the same tune’.

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