some improvements for the country, but has failed to improve the economic situation for them personally.

**Church – State Relationship**

It was interesting to see that the issue of the church - state relationship, and the call for a Christian state, which has found much attention in public discussions over the years, seems not to be of concern to the vast majority of participants. Out of a total of 41 focus groups, participants in only two of these groups referred to this issue: ‘Christian beliefs are the foundation of democracy and certain traditions such as respecting Sunday as a day of rest need to be respected’ (iTM semi-urban 07.10.11; similarly iTF rural 22.08.11).

**Interviewees’ Responses**

Out of a total of 83 participants, 72 (86%) shared their views on different aspects of democracy in Fiji. Based on these responses, it is clear that the majority of interviewees agree that democracy is important and should be the future model for governance for Fiji. Nonetheless, some interviewees also pointed to several problems with the establishment of democracy and its functioning since independence, such as the introduction and adoption of the British Westminster model of democracy (e.g. Civil Servants 18.10.11, 17.01.12, and 18.01.12). Others elaborated further, emphasizing that, ‘Democracy in Fiji needs to be home-grown, tailor-made and adjusted to the special historical, social and cultural conditions’ (Academic 19.12.11). It was also stressed that, while democracy had taken hundreds of years to take root in the West (Academic 07.12.11), Fiji has only had about 40 years of experience with democracy (NGO Leader 20.09.11). One academic highlighted that democracy, as it is widely understood today, was developed in Western culture that is in many respects different from the communal Pacific culture (Academic 09.12.11). Other important lines of thinking are captured in the following quotes: ‘There might be a need to design a form of democracy that specifically applies to the Fijian context rather than taking foreign forms of democracy’ (Academic 09.12.11); and, ‘We had traditional forms of governance and we must find a way to be able to marry these to the Western form of democracy’ (Religious Leader 18.11.11).

Common expressions which are often used in speeches and in writing, such as ‘democracy is a foreign flower in Fiji’, were questioned by some participants, who argued that certain elements in the traditional model of governance are already very democratic (Politician 07.12.11, NGO Leader 08.02.12, and Academic 09.12.11). Similarly, other participants openly questioned whether democracy is the only and best option for Fiji (Civil Servant 18.01.12), by pointing out that ‘there is no real pure democracy anywhere in the world’ (Other 10.11.11). With regard to Western countries, one participant pointed out that ‘they have their own shortcomings and
are not in particular democratic but plutocratic like for example the USA' (Academic 07.12.11). This fundamental critique was complemented by statements such as, ‘there is an interconnection between democracy and economic growth models’ (NGO Leader 20.09.11), and ‘democracy is not a precondition for economic or personal growth’, pointing to Singapore as an example (NGO Leader 06.11.11). Concerns were also expressed along the lines that the practice of free market democracy is un-Christian (Religious Leader 03.10.11), and that there is today more colonialism in Fiji than ever before (Legal Professional 07.12.11).

Some interviewees expressed very principled reservations against Western-style democracy:

Political life in Fiji has always been there without the political parties. Fijians talked and had discussions about how to lead and get things done. If you miss this reality and try to bring in political ideas that are strange to the people, then it is a worrying thing. We do not need any outside political ideas to govern Fiji, and since independence, things have not really worked well for Fijians because of the strangeness of the political governance that was introduced (Religious Leader 14.10.11).

The ability to discuss and reflect on democracy was quite high amongst the generally better-educated interviewees, who expressed concern that the majority of the population is not well-informed or knowledgeable (as was confirmed by the focus group participants themselves). Therefore, it was recommended that ‘a precondition for democracy is education in communities about what kind of government we should have’ (Religious Leader 20.12.11), and ‘since independence in 1970 democracy has taken root slowly. There is not much understanding of democracy as such. We see the reluctance of accepting things that are strange or new to Fiji. I think there is little understanding and people need to be educated about it and other forms of governance’ (Religious Leader 12.12.11).

Elections and Electoral Systems
The majority of those interviewed agreed that elections are the best way to ensure everyone's participation in the political process of decision-making. In order to facilitate better and more meaningful participation, proposals were made for changes within political parties, and in the electoral system: 'Any political party that participates in elections must see that it has the collective interest of the entire people in the country [at heart]. It should not in any way favour a segment, a stratum, or an ethnic group' (Other 10.02.12). There was also general agreement that, before elections are held, substantial changes are needed to the electoral system,
especially with regard to the previous ethnicity-based system.\textsuperscript{35} However, a number of interviewees questioned the legitimacy of the current government to organize elections (Other 27.03.12, Politician 02.02.12, and Academic 07.12.11), saying that the 1997 Constitution must be reinstated before elections are held. Others proposed that a government of national unity should be established first, which should consist of the members of parliament who were ousted in the 2006 coup (Legal Professional 14.12.11, Traditional Leader 09.11.11, and Other 29.09.11). Some interviewees expressed doubts that elections really contribute to the practice of democracy (Legal Professional 06.12.11), or held that, since mechanisms are already in place in the traditional system of governance, there is no need 'to be forced into elections' (Religious Leader 14.10.11). It was also proposed that there should be a process of popular civic education on the meaning of elections, and the functioning and advantages and disadvantages of different electoral systems (Academic 16.01.12 and Religious Leader 20.12.11). Assuming that elections will take place in 2014, it was also recommended that the United Nations and other international observers should be involved in monitoring elections (Politicians 12.12.11 and 20.04.12).

**Political Parties**

The view that, in general, political parties are important and essential for a functioning democracy, and that they have an important role to play within Fijian society in future was underlined by representatives from the legal profession, civil servants, religious leaders, academics, business and NGOs.

However, there was also a broad consensus amongst interviewees - regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, religious or political affiliation - that there is a need for reform of, and changes to, political parties in Fiji. Topping the list of comments about political parties is criticism with regard to the racial policies that have dominated politics over the past 20 years. This was expressed in statements such as: 'Fiji needs to get rid of racial policies' (Academic 03.02.12); and 'Political parties have been divisive for Fiji, because they have been racially based' (NGO Leader 13.01.12). Others spoke of 'wasted opportunities' (Traditional Leader 23.12.11). The 'male style' of politics was also criticized by pointing to the fact that the majority of voters, namely women and youth, are grossly under-represented when it comes to decision-making, both within parties, and with regard to representation in parliament. This fundamental criticism was accompanied by recommendations such as a call for more transparency with regard to finances, the elections of office bearers, and the nomination procedures for candidates for election. 'Clear regulations for political parties are needed. They have to be forced to be transparent and accountable. Often political parties are very undemocratic. The

\textsuperscript{35} Academic 07.12.11, NGO Leaders 11.12.11 and 30.12.11, and Civil Servant 17.01.12. Some interviewees proposed the introduction of the 'one person-one vote' system (Civil Servant 18.10.11, NGO Leader 30.12.11, Other 04.12.11, and Business 12.10.11).
male style of politics needs to be changed and women should have more influence’ (Academic 09.12.11).

One interviewee thought that Fiji had done well without political parties since 2006 (NGO Leader 11.10.11), while two religious leaders pointed out that, in their opinion, there is no need for political parties at all (14.10.11 and 17.10.11). In comparison to the responses from the focus groups, not many interviewees were critical of political parties with regard to their broken promises, nor did many complain that political parties tend to neglect their constituencies; this issue was raised by just four interviewees – one from the business sector, two from NGOs, and one academic. A more analytical perspective on the problems related to the functioning and operation of political parties was offered by two interviewees, who pointed out that during British rule, Fiji did not have democracy, and, in the run-up to independence and democracy, certain undemocratic elements were maintained in order to guarantee the influence of Europeans in Fiji’s political affairs (Academic 07.12.11). As a result, they said, the parties that emerged in the 1960s were a direct reflection of how colonial society had been structured, with its divide-and-rule attitude, and ethnic-based policies (Academic 16.01.12).

The Role of the Military
Interviewees’ assessments of the role and function of the military in Fiji is often coloured by personal experiences, and the degree to which the respective person and/or his/her family benefitted or suffered as a result of the military coups. The following statements illustrate some of the very different opinions interviewees expressed about the military:

The takeover of a democratically elected government is not acceptable and is illegal (Religious Leader 03.10.11).

In future the military in Fiji should be downsized (Academic 16.01.12).

The degree to which the army has been able to create a stable environment has been positive (Business 06.10.11).

The view that, as a matter of principle, the military must be subservient to government was shared by interviewees from various backgrounds, including past and present politicians from different political parties, and former military commanders. This view is summarized by the following two statements:
The military should have absolutely no role to play in the political life of the country. They must accept civilian rule and work by the rules of a democratic society (Other 28.09.11).

I think we should return to the pre-1987 role of the military, when it was subject to the decisions of government, and was under the political control of the civilian government. It should never usurp political authority, not in any circumstances except possibly to restore the authority of a legitimate parliament where there has been an insurrection (Politician 12.12.11).

Given these views, the logical first step towards democracy would be a transition from the military regime to a civilian administration. Differing opinions were expressed as to whether such a transition should take place before or after the elections in 2014. While this might be politically correct according to classical textbooks on democracy, it is very unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. As one traditional leader stated: ‘I think it will take at least one generation to remove the influence of the military’ (23.12.11).

A substantial number of interviewees were positive about the current government; for example, one interviewee felt that, when compared to previous military governments, the current regime has created a stable environment (Business 10.02.12). Another representative from the business sector went much further, praising the military in no uncertain terms:

The military government has been very good to us business people. If you ask any Gujarati, we would rather have this government than any other government. Of course, globally that is not the kind of thing to do but for us business people, this government has been excellent. The policies are excellent. There’s law and order. A lot of corruption has been removed. New jobs have been created. There are signs that the economy is picking up. Every time there are elections the business community is afraid that another extremist government will come to power and trouble will rule. There’s trouble growing everywhere but the extremists seem to be quite suppressed under this military government. As far as our business is concerned, we are fine under this government but of course we understand that we cannot have these circumstances forever (Business 30.01.12).

There are others who even do not see the 2006 coup as a coup. One participant used the metaphor of a heart patient to make this point: ‘If you suffered three heart attacks you need to have surgery to get it right, otherwise you will be in trouble. The choice is often between evil and lesser evil’ (Academic 20.02.12). As one would expect
from a 'beneficiary' of the coup, this interviewee's assessment of the current
government's performance is very positive: 'The last four to five years have been
brilliant because of the processes and reforms that have come about. There is a new
job culture within the civil service as people tend to do their job within time limits
and with efficiency' (Civil Servant 17.01.11).

Critics as well as supporters of the current government agree to some extent about
the future role of the military. There is, for example, widespread agreement that the
military should return to their barracks; that the size of the military is
disproportionate to the size of the country and its population, and, therefore, that
'the military should gradually be reduced in number' (Academic 07.12.11). In
particular, interviewees broadly agree that a reduced-in-size military could be used
primarily for civil purposes, such as to assist with infrastructure development, or in
times of natural disasters. As one interviewee proposed: 'I think the military could
have a future role, whether it's civil defence or the coast guard, or being integrated
into the police force. This is another work in progress. We can't just demobilize them
in 2014' (Legal Professional 12.12.11). All these considerations depend to some
degree on whether an acceptable 'exit strategy' can be agreed with those who led
the 2006 coup, and/or hold leading positions in the non-elected military-civilian
government.36 This also raises the question of whether an amnesty should also be
extended to those who were part of the 2000 coup. Such a move might be a test case
for determining whether the country is ready for reconciliation with its recent past.

The Great Council of Chiefs
Out of the 83 people interviewed, 20 discussed the GCC, and expressed their views
on future options for this institution. Their opinions can be divided into three
categories: 1) those that want the GCC to be re-established; 2) those that do not see
any future role at all for the GCC; and 3) those that see a future role for the GCC,
with some changes.

Support for the continuation of the GCC came from a variety of interviewees from
various backgrounds: NGOs, the legal profession, academia, business, and - as one
would have expected - traditional leaders. However, all of those who expressed
strong support for the re-establishment of the GCC were iTaukei. The main line of
argument put forward for re-establishing the GCC was that it has a role to play as
long as there is a traditional system of governance in place (Academic
12.12.11(a)).37 The abolition of the GCC by the current government was not seen as
being appropriate: 'As for the GCC, it is not sure what form it will take in the future,

36 For a more detailed discussion, see the Rule of Law chapter, page 86
37 Two academics were interviewed (separately) on 12 December 2011; for the purposes of this
report, these interviews are referred to as 'Academic 12.12.11(a)' and 'Academic 12.12.11(b)'.

46
but the institution should remain. They have a role to play and it is not wise to do away with it; it is an essential part of this society' (Civil Servant 17.01.12); and, 'You cannot just abolish the GCC; it continues to exist in the culture and the minds of the people' (Politician 20.04.12). Other interviewees expressed concern that the abolition of the GCC by the military lacked respect for traditional leaders. Disappointment was expressed, because it was felt that ‘the Council had served the country well' (Traditional Leader 22.03.12), and ‘had played a stabilizing role' (Traditional Leader 30.04.12); on these grounds, therefore, the GCC should be re-established (Traditional Leader 09.11.11). These interviewees wanted the GCC to be re-instated, and thereafter, that a dialogue about reforms should begin.

Other interviewees disagreed strongly with this stance: 'I don’t see a future for the Great Council of Chiefs and the chiefly system in the long term' (Politician 27.02.12). Those that support the permanent abolition of the GCC commented that, 'the abolition of the GCC has been long overdue' (Traditional Leader 23.03.12), and that 'there is no real future role for it' (Politician 27.02.12). It was argued that the GCC was part of a system of patronage that is not acceptable in a democracy. In addition, it was reasoned that the GCC is a ‘remnant of colonialism’ and that Fiji should get rid of it ‘as it got rid of other elements of colonialism' (Academic 07.12.11). It was further recommended that ‘if traditional leaders want to have their own organization, members should be elected’ (Traditional Leader 23.03.12); and that ‘the chiefs should finance the organisation and not the state’ (Academic 07.12.11).

Some interviewees pleaded once more for an open debate about the future of the GGC: ‘Given that the GCC is an invention of British colonialism, one can question whether it is part of the traditional leadership system at all. The future of the GCC and also the Senate will have to be discussed in the process of constitution-making. It has to be decided whether there should be a unicameral system or a new way of selecting the members of the Upper House' (Religious Leader 05.12.11). Other participants took somewhat of an intermediary position, seeing a role for the GCC in future, but nevertheless agreeing that there is a need for some changes. Some suggestions were that the GCC could be an advisory body, dealing with mainly cultural issues (Traditional Leader 23.12.11), or that the Council could play a role in the protection of the environment (Legal Professional 06.12.11). Some concrete proposals were made, such as that the GCC should be de-politicized, and run as a cultural body independent from the government (Traditional Leader 06.12.11); here, the chiefs’ future role was envisaged as providing guidance and wisdom, but that they should not be granted veto rights. One interviewee felt that the GCC should not play any role in politics, and, as a practical example, suggested that the GCC should not have any responsibility for selecting the president of the country in the future (Other 14.12.11).
In summary, a clear majority of those interviewed did see a future role for the GCC, although they felt that this needed to be negotiated. Issues requiring negotiation included that the membership of the GCC could in future be based on merit rather than on heritage and tradition, and opening up the GCC to members of other ethnic groups. In a revised form, the GCC could play a role in advising the government and raising issues of concern regarding cultural issues.

**Conclusion**

The majority of focus group participants appeared to know little about the origins, history and development of democracy, although a few participants in each group demonstrated familiarity with some of the key elements of democracy, such as equality, human rights, the rule of law, and participation in decision-making through elections. Focus group participants clearly view the current system in Fiji as undemocratic by virtue of the lawfully elected government being ousted through a coup in 2006, the Constitution abolished, and Fiji ruled since then by a military government, through the issuance of decrees. In addition, human rights have been violated and there were (and still are) restrictions in place with regard to the freedom of expression. Given a choice of governance systems, the vast majority of participants prefer democracy for Fiji, and a substantial number of participants are for a variety of reasons - opposed to or critical of the current government. It should be noted, however, that a small majority of participants expressed their appreciation for certain programmes, projects and policies introduced by the military government. Nevertheless, there is agreement between supporters and opponents alike that there is a need for reform of the electoral system, and the introduction of regulations for political parties and aspiring politicians.

A comparison between responses of participants in focus group discussions and interviewees shows some striking similarities, but also some differences. The major differences between responses from participants and interviewees can mostly be ascribed to the different levels of formal education and status of the two groupings. Most focus group participants are representative of the majority of Fijians, who have low to moderate incomes, being in informal or formal employment, living in villages, towns and settlements. The vast majority of participants have had at least some sort of formal education: most have completed primary school, although very few have undergone secondary school or studies at tertiary level. In contrast, the interviewees represent a much smaller section of the social strata of Fiji, having medium to higher incomes, the majority having degrees from tertiary institutions, and being in leading positions at different levels of government, religious organizations, civil society, business, and political parties, or being traditional leaders. Because of these differences, interviewees naturally exercise a much greater influence on the public discourse on democracy, and provide more differentiated and reflective opinions on democracy and other related areas.
Similar to focus group participants, the vast majority of interviewees expressed their support for democracy as their preferred model of governance, rejected in principle the idea of bringing about change through coups, and also rejected any sort of racially-based politics. Similarly, the majority of interviewees support reforms of the electoral system. Because some interviewees are politicians, or have been involved in politics in the past, there was less criticism of the role and function of political parties and politicians. It also became clear that the interviewees’ responses were often based on their personal backgrounds, or personal experiences; this is especially true for those who either suffered or benefitted from the last coup. In broad terms, those interviewees who suffered as a result of the last coup are mainly traditional leaders and representatives of NGOs who have expressed criticism of the military, as well as trades union leaders and people who lost their jobs because they were dismissed by the current government. On the other hand, the majority of interviewees who are part of the government, such as civil servants and ministers, as well as many of the business representatives, expressed their support for the current government in different ways.

Turning to the broader picture, having a liberal democracy in a ‘sovereign’ country may be better than having no democracy at all, but it is still far from the ideal of democracy, which is, by definition, the government of the whole people by the people equally represented. Looking at the economic fundamentalism which underlies the globalized capitalist economy (as outlined in the introductory section above), one lesson that can be learnt is that relying purely on voting every four or five years is inadequate for controlling economic policy. Representation may be a necessary precondition for democracy, but it can only be genuinely democratic when reinforced by the enhanced participation of citizens at all levels of decision-making in all spheres of public life. This increased participation would need to be complemented by the insertion of democratic principles into economic life, which in turn would require the introduction of new clauses into the ground rules or basic laws of the free-market and trade system at global, regional and national levels. Eventually, this would require a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between democracy and the economy.

As has been outlined in the first part of this chapter, conventional democratic state-building aims at replicating the liberal representative model, by applying a standard recipe of support for elections and state institutions, with some additional assistance for civil society (Carothers 1999). Civil society in this context, however, is also understood along Western lines, with NGOs, community-based organizations, business associations, and trades unions etc. constituting elements of ‘civil society’; at the same time, the Western approach ignores actors and institutions which do not fit into its understanding of civil society, such as chiefs, elders, healers, charismatic religious leaders etc., thus missing the realities on the ground in the countries of the Global South.
This liberal representative model of democracy is challenged by approaches that aim at deepening democracy:

In this view, democracy is not only a set of rules, procedures and institutional design, and cannot be reduced to only a way of competition amongst parties ... Rather, it is a process through which citizens exercise ever deepening control over decisions which affect their lives, and as such it is also constantly under construction ... Full democratic citizenship is attained not only through the exercise of political and civic rights, but also through social rights, which in turn may be gained through participatory processes and struggles (Gaventa 2006: 11).

In other words, this ‘deepening democracy’ approach transcends conventional understandings of liberal representative democracy, through creating and expanding more participatory and socially inclusive forms of democracy.\(^{38}\) The focus of ‘deepening democracy’ is on new democratic arenas and spaces (Cornwall and Coelho 2004), and on participatory governance at the local level in particular. This approach is close to deliberative understandings of democracy (Habermas 1996; Dryzek 2000), which shifts the focus from a ‘voting-centric’ democracy to a ‘talk-centric’ democracy (Chambers 2003), and to concepts of empowered participatory governance (Fung and Wright 2003). In this context it can be argued, for example, that contestation among combative political parties is not the only possible democratic model; consensus-seeking in village or town meetings is another real option.

**REFERENCES**


\(^{38}\) Famous examples are the Porto Alegre experiment (Manor 2004), and what became known as ‘forum politics’, which preceded the new activist-based innovative movements of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. This approach is fully explained and further developed in the final chapter of this report with regard to its applicability in Fiji.


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