



Image from: [A modified version of the colonial flag.](#)  
[Fiji's... in Philip's World Factbook 2008-2009](#)

### Summary Article: **Fiji Islands**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Country comprising 844 islands and islets in the southwest Pacific Ocean, about 100 of which are inhabited.

**Government** From 2006–14 Fiji had a military government and its 1997 constitution was suspended. A new constitution came into force in 2014 and involved significant changes. Previously Fiji had had a two-chamber legislature comprising an elected House of Representatives and an appointed Senate. Its president, or head of state, was appointed by a hereditary Great Council of Chiefs, while the prime minister was appointed as head of government by the president, based on support in the House.

The ethnic composition of both chambers was preserved by guaranteeing indigenous Fijians, citizens of Indian descent, European, Chinese, and other minorities specified quotas of seats in the House. The complicated arrangement sought to ensure that all ethnic communities were properly represented.

Under the 2013 constitution, race-based electoral rolls and seat quotas have been ended, the upper house abolished, and the role of the Council of Chiefs ended. Fiji has a parliamentary executive with a single-chamber legislature, the 50-seat Fijian parliament. It is elected for four years using proportional representation in one multi-member national constituency. The prime minister is drawn from the party or group with majority support in the parliament and heads the government and cabinet. The president is formal head of state and is elected by the parliament for a three-year term.

**History** Originally inhabited by Melanesian and Polynesian peoples, Fiji's first European visitor was Abel Tasman in 1643. Fiji became a British possession in 1874 and achieved full independence within the Commonwealth in 1970.

**Ethnic divisions** Before independence there had been racial tension between Indians, descended from workers brought from India in the late 19th century, and Fijians, so the constitution incorporated an electoral system that would ensure racial balance in the House of Representatives. Traditionally the Fijians supported the Alliance Party, led by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The Indians supported the National Federation Party (NFP), led by Siddiq Koya. The main divisions between the two centred on land ownership, with the Fijians owning more than 80% of the land and defending their traditional rights, and the Indians demanding greater security of land tenure. The Indian-oriented Fijian Labour Party (FLP) was formed in 1985.

**Military coup establishes a republic in 1987** The April 1987 general election brought to power an Indian-dominated coalition, led by Dr Timoci Bavadra, which provoked unease among ethnic Fijians, who dominated the armed forces. In May 1987 Lt-Col Sitiveni Rabuka attempted to oust the government in a military coup, but pulled back after intervention by the governor general and the Great Council of Chiefs. But in September–October 1987, Rabuka led a second coup, which succeeded. Queen Elizabeth II of Britain accepted the resignation of the governor general, thereby giving up her role as head of state and making Fiji a republic. Fiji's membership of the Commonwealth was suspended.

A new constitution, adopted in 1990, replaced that of 1970 and institutionalized dominance of the political system by ethnic Fijians, through reserving them a majority of seats in the legislature. The general election of May 1992 was won by Rabuka, who had given up his army post, and he became prime minister. President Ganilau died in December 1993 and was succeeded by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who was re-elected in January 1999.

**1997 constitution and re-admission to Commonwealth** Rabuka and his Fijian Political Party (SVT) were re-elected in 1994. In 1995 he set up a Constitutional Review Commission which framed a new constitution able to win the support of both ethnic Fijians and the Indo-Fijian community. This constitution was approved in July 1997. It no longer guaranteed ethnic Fijians a majority in parliament and did not discriminate against the ethnic Indian majority. This enabled Fiji to be readmitted to the Commonwealth in September 1997.

The economy contracted by around 2% in both 1997 and 1998, mainly as a result of a slump in sugar production and gold mining.

In December 1998 a new governing coalition was formed by the ruling SVT, the Indian-dominated NFP, and the United General Party (UGP).

**Fiji's first Indo-Fijian prime minister: 1999** The May 1999 general election brought a landslide victory for the People's Coalition, with the largest party in the coalition, the FLP, securing an outright majority of seats. The FLP leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, became Fiji's first prime minister of Indian descent, heading a multi-ethnic governing coalition. In August 1999 there were bomb blasts in the capital, Suva.

**2000 coup** In April 2000 the government faced criticism from the revived extremist Melanesian nationalist group, Taukei, which claimed that the government was following policies and promoting land use which were detrimental to Fijians. Against this background, the businessman George Speight, supported by masked civilians, attempted a coup in May 2000, storming parliament and taking the prime minister and his cabinet hostage. There were also riots in Suva. The powerful Great Council of Chiefs responded to the rebels' demands by offering to dismiss Chaudhry's government and ban Indo-Fijians from power.

Under the leadership of Commodore Frank Bainimarama, the head of the armed forces, the military exploited the situation to seize power. They forced President Kamisese Mara to step down, declared martial law, and revoked the 1997 democratic constitution. There was international condemnation, with the Commonwealth threatening that it would suspend Fiji again and impose trade and aid sanctions if democracy was not restored.

In July 2000 the military reached agreement with Speight to release Chaudhry and his cabinet ministers, who were still being held hostage. The military also handed executive power over to a new president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, who had been vice-president since 1999, with Laisenia Qarase, a former banker, as prime minister. The rebels negotiated a total amnesty for themselves, and succeeded in having the 1997 constitution revoked, and thus to reduce the rights of the Indo-Fijian minority. The amnesty was revoked, however, because Speight refused to give up stolen weapons. In August 2000 Speight and 12 of his supporters were charged with conspiring to overthrow the lawfully elected government. Meanwhile, ex-premier Chaudhry visited New Zealand, India, and the United Kingdom as part of a campaign to restore democracy.

In November 2000 there was renewed unrest when troops who had supported the May 2000 coup attempted (unsuccessfully) to take over the country's main barracks and kidnap Bainimarama. Soon after, the high court ruled that Chaudhry's deposed government should be reinstated. The army appealed, but in March 2001, the appeal court reaffirmed the ruling, and the government resigned. President Iloilo was re-appointed president by the Great Council of Chiefs and he re-appointed the resigned government as an interim government pending fresh elections.

**New government** Speight contested the September 2001 general election from a prison cell, as he was facing trial on treason charges. He was a candidate of the indigenous Fijian's Matanitu Vanua (MV; Conservative Alliance) and was elected to parliament, as was Mahendra Chaudhry. The election was narrowly won by a coalition dominated by a newly formed centre-right party, the United Fiji Party (Soosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua: SDL), whose leader, Laisenia Qarase, remained in office as prime minister. Despite a series of Supreme Court rulings that he should include members of the FLP in his cabinet (to reflect their strength in parliament), he refused to do so and headed a government composed entirely of ethnic Fijians.

In February 2002 Speight was sentenced to death for treason, but President Iloilo later commuted the sentence to life imprisonment.

**Further military coup in 2006** The May 2006 general election brought a narrow victory for the SDL, which won 36 seats to 31 won by the FLP. The new Qarase government proposed setting up a Reconciliation and Unity Commission, which might grant an amnesty and award compensation to perpetrators of the 2000 attempted coup, many of whom were supporters of the government. The military strongly opposed this. In November 2006 Commodore Bainimarama gave the government a deadline of 4 December to meet his demands to abandon a bill to pardon participants in the 2000 attempted coup or to resign.

Qarase refused to back down. So on 5 December 2006 Commodore Bainimarama dissolved parliament and seized presidential and government power in a military coup. The justification given was that the Qarase government was allegedly corrupt and had been racially divisive, discriminating against ethnic Indians. On 6 December 2006 Bainimarama declared a state of emergency.

On 4 January 2007 international pressure persuaded Bainimarama to return presidential power to Iloilo, although a day later the president appointed Bainimarama as prime minister. Throughout 2007 the military government faced criticism at home for alleged human rights abuses and abroad from Australia and New Zealand.

**Resignation and reinstatement of Bainimarama** Bainimarama lost power for three days in April 2009 when the Court of Appeal ruled his December 2006 assumption of power to have been illegal. But President Iloilo sacked the Court of Appeal and judiciary, suspended the constitution, and restored Bainimarama. The 88-year-old Iloilo stepped down as president in July 2009, being replaced by Epeli Nailatikau, who had been army chief before 1987 before becoming a diplomat and former foreign minister.

Bainimarama's continued delays in holding elections led to Fiji being suspended as a member of the Pacific Islands Forum in July 2009 and fully from the Commonwealth in September 2009.

In January 2012 military ruler Bainimarama lifted martial law. A month later, a commission began consultations on a new constitution for elections in 2014, with the aim of ending race-based politics and

giving equal rights to all Fijians. In July 2012 Australia and New Zealand restored full democratic ties with Fiji.

**Bainimarama is confirmed as prime minister following multiparty elections** In September 2013 a new constitution was approved, paving the way for democratic multiparty parliamentary elections. These were held in September 2014 and were won by Bainimarama's FijiFirst party. It won 59% of the vote and 32 of parliament's 50 seats. Bainimarama was sworn in as a democratically elected prime minister in September 2014 and Fiji was re-admitted to the Commonwealth.

In October 2015 parliament elected George Konrote, a retired major-general from the FijiFirst party who was born on Rotuma Island, as Fiji's first non-indigenous president.

In February 2016 Cyclone Winston struck Fiji, killing 44, leaving tens of thousands homeless, and causing US\$1.4 billion in damage. It was the worst-ever recorded storm in the southern hemisphere.

### **APA**

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

---

Fiji Islands. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji\\_islands](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji_islands)

---



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.

## APA

Fiji Islands. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji\\_islands](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji_islands)

## Chicago

"Fiji Islands." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji\\_islands](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji_islands)

## Harvard

Fiji Islands. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji\\_islands](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji_islands) [Accessed 23 October 2019].

## MLA

"Fiji Islands." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji\\_islands](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/fiji_islands). Accessed 23 Oct. 2019.