

Unit 44. Republic of Fiji The struggle for self-determination

Tokasa Gray



Figure 44.1. Map of Fiji Islands

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Define a Constitution
- Describe the differences between Traditional, Constitutional and Republican Government
- Describe the structure and importance of self-government in Fiji
- Argue about the significance of October 10, 1970

This unit on “My nation: my government looks at Fiji and the changes that have occurred since the British departed in 1960 and Fiji became independent.

Background

Fiji consists of a group of 850 islands, of which 332 islands are inhabited. The major islands and island group are Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Kadavu, Taveuni, Yasawas, Lomaiviti and Lau Group. It is located in the South West Pacific midway between the Kingdom of Tonga and Vanuatu. Rotuma was added to Fiji in 1885. It is located 400 km north. In 1875, Fiji became a British Crown Colony. Fiji gained independence in 1970.

THE PEOPLE OF FIJI ISLANDS

Fiji is a multi ethnic and multi cultural society – made up of people of different races, unique traditions, cultures, values, religions, languages and social economic backgrounds.

The population of Fiji in 1992 was 758,275 and it grew to 772,665 in 1996. The two major races are Fijians and Indians while the minority groups include other Pacific Islanders, Asians and Europeans. There is a small mixed -race community of European-Fijians, known as *kailoma*. The majority of people live in rural areas, but the urban areas of Suva and Nadi are expanding.

Before the coups in 1987, people of Indian descent slightly outnumbered the Fijian indigenous population. By 1992, due to Indian emigration, Fijians were in the majority. The Indian population also had a lower birth rate.

Fiji Population Figures for 1992 and 1996

	1992	%	1996	%
Total population	758,275		772,665	
Fijians	377,234	49.7	394,999	51.1
Indians	343,168	45.3	336,579	43.6
Others	37,873	5.0	41,077	5.3
Total no. of persons in urban areas			358,131	
Total no. of persons in rural areas			414,524	

Figure 44.2. Fiji Population Figures

Questions and Activities

1. What was the total population of Fiji in 1996?
2. How many Indians were living in Fiji in 1992?
3. Suggest one reason why might the Indian population was decreasing?
4. Draw a bar graph (or pie graph) to show the percentage distribution of the 3 groups – Fijian, Indian and Others - in 1996.
5. Can you find some more recent population statistics? Compare these to the 1996 figures. Explain some possible reasons for the changes.

ADMINISTRATION of ROTUMA

Rotuma is a dependency of Fiji. It is part of Fiji for administration purposes but has no other links with Fijian culture or history. Rotumans are of Polynesian descent. The Administration is provided for by the Rotuma Ordinance which makes Rotuma subject to all Fiji law. It has a District Officer and a court called the District Officer's Court, and a Council of Rotuma. The Council of Rotuma consists of the District Officer, the Chiefs of the seven Rotuma Districts, one elected representative from each of the same Districts and a Medical Officer resident on the island. The Council makes local regulations which must be approved by the government in Suva.

ADMINISTRATION of RABI

The people of Rabi Island are Banabans, originally from Banaba or Ocean Island – the British used funds from phosphate mining on Banaba to purchase Rabi so phosphate mining could proceed without disturbance. The Banabans were forced or tricked into resettling on Rabi after World War II. Rabi is a part of Fiji, subject to the same general law as Fiji. After independence, the Banaban Adviser was the equivalent of a District Commissioner in the Fijian administration.. There was also a Rabi Island Council, which had the same general functions as a Provincial Council.

The Banabans on Rabi still receive royalties on the phosphate mined on Ocean Island. Banaba was included in the new nation of Kiribati in 1979 as it had been part of the former British Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. There has been great deal of discontent amongst leaders of the Rabi community. Banabans continue to negotiate with Kiribati, the Fiji government, and in the British courts of law over mining royalties and resettlement issues. Banabans once took their case to the British Courts and although they technically lost the case, the United Kingdom made an *ex-gratia* lump sum payment of about £100,000. In 1968, the Banabans unsuccessfully presented a case to the United Nations for rehabilitation of Banaba, an idea that continues to gain support among some Banabans on Rabi Island.

Fiji also has several other large ethnic and cultural communities some going back to Solomon Islanders and iKiribati people who came as labourers in the 19th century. AQs Suva is a hub for the region and attracts Pacific Islanders from other nations as well as expatriates who work for regional and international agencies, and non-government organizations. This mixture makes Suva a very cosmopolitan city. The government of Fiji has always included a Ministry for Multiracial, Multicultural or Multi-Ethnic Affairs.

Culture and Heritage

The indigenous Fijian's most valuable asset is native land and it is well protected by the constitution. This means that it is difficult for parliament to change certain laws relating to land sales. Fijian customary laws, practices, and values are also an important part of the nation's political structure. After Independence when Parliament made laws it was required to embrace the principles protecting the rights of indigenous people.

For example, the *1997 Constitution* recognised the special needs, rights and interests of other cultural and ethnic groups now making Fiji their home. These groups are the Indians, Europeans, part Europeans, Chinese and other Pacific Islanders. The government itself and responsible citizens are required to show respect and tolerance towards cultural and ethnic groups in all aspects of life.

Questions and Activities

6. Form a group of three students. Identify your group as one of Fiji's cultural and ethnic minority communities. Write a short speech that:-
- announces your loyalty to the nation of Fiji
 - announces your respect for other ethnic groups
 - announces why you are proud of your own ethnic group and identity.

Traditional Government

Before the arrival of any outsiders or Europeans, the Fiji Islanders had their own system of government. It was very simple in structure; not complex like today's governments. It was a local system that made decisions and judgements about the communities. The

Chiefs ruled according to their own standards of “fairness” - that is, what they thought was just and equal.

People who were against their ruler were punished severely. These Chiefs derived their “power to rule” from a combination of traditions and customs, victory in war, or calculated alliances. Most Chiefs ruled by right of their leadership talents and high rank in society.

For example, in Fiji traditional leaders were normally the Chiefs of the clans. They were the highest ranking chief in their traditional social system. A chief’s son becomes a leader when his father, the late leader dies. This system could not be disturbed in favour of a commoner becoming a leader.

“Democracy and freedom is a Government of the People for the People”.

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The statement used for this sub-heading was made by USA President, Abraham Lincoln in 1863. A government is the main law making body of a nation. There are many types of government in the world today based on various beliefs and ideals. One common aim of “good governance” and popular governments is to provide a good life for citizens, meaning peace, unity and security.

The Constitution

The powers of a government are limited by a constitution. Government use the constitution as their guide. The constitution defines the roles and policies of a government and protects the individual right of its citizens. It also sets up institutions, other than a parliament, to check the government does not abuse their powers. A constitution is the supreme or highest law of the land. It must be followed by the government and indeed by all the people.

The Constitution provides guidelines on how we want to be governed. A government which rules under a constitution is a democratic government. This means that everyone in the nation has been allowed to make a contribution to its laws and to have a say in the affairs of the government through elected representatives (the members of Parliament).

Because the Constitution has laid down rules we have a check-list on the Government’s activities and can make sure that governments follow the rules and do not abuse their power or privilege. A Constitution also ensures that fundamental rights and freedom both as individuals and as members of a group are securely protected.

The constitution also promotes values. For example, Fiji is a multi-ethnic society. After Independence, ideas such as *Living in Harmony*, *Promoting Social Justice*, and *Respect for Human Dignity* were considered important. The importance of the family and land are outlined in the Constitution.

Constitutions are changed when the needs of the people in a particular country change. Constitutional change is a continuing process. Nations have their own reasons for wanting to change a Constitution.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT SYSTEM SINCE EUROPEAN'S ARRIVAL

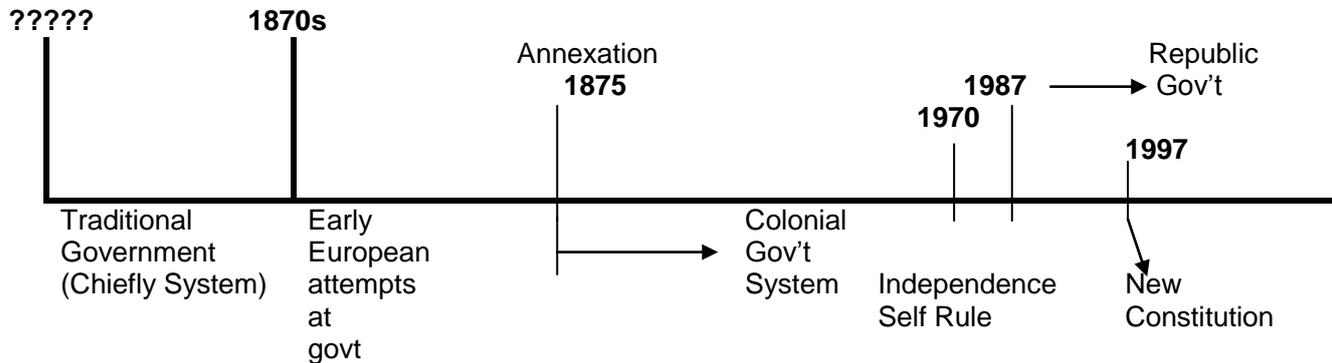


Figure 44.3. Timeline

Some Important Features of Change

Before 1800, Fiji had a competitive chiefly system. In the mid-19th century, with the arrival and settlement of Europeans in Fiji, the chiefly system began to change. In 1874, Fiji became known as the British Crown Colony. The annexation followed a Deed of Cession signed between Fiji Chiefs and Great Britain. In 1970, Fiji gained independence from the British, with a Democratic Representative type government. In 1987, following two military coups, Fiji changed to a Republic government. As a Republic the first President was Ratu Penaia Ganilau and the Prime Minister was the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

For much of this time Fiji was governed democratically by the political party that won the national elections. There have also been multi-party or coalition governments. Under the two-party system one of the political parties acted as the government (the majority of votes) and the losing party as the opposition.

Since 1987 there have been two more coups and a military administration now governs Fiji. The constitution was suspended and it was announced that elections will not be held until 2014 or later.

Colonial Government

After it was colonised in 1874, the imperial power of Great Britain established a colonial government in Fiji. The head of government was a Governor (appointed from England) who represented the British government. The Governor set up a colonial government which adopted the British levels of rank, importance and roles in administration.

The traditional system of local authority of the chief was used by the British for the administration of "native affairs" at the local level. This was called Indirect Rule.

Questions and Activities

7. Who appointed and instructs the Governor?
8. Who appointed the Executive Council?
9. Who appointed District Magistrates?
10. Who were the Chiefs responsible to (who were their masters?)

The Role of the Governor

The role of the Governor increased and he became Commander in Chief (1904), President of the Legislative Council (1904), Speaker of the House (1854-1954) while still retaining full powers in matters of appointments and nominations of members.

The Governor was responsible only to the British Government. Fijians had little if any direct say in the governing of the Colony. They could only make suggestions through the Governor's advisers. Until self-government in the 1960s they had no members of parliament elected from among them to act in their interest.

Features of a Crown Colony Government

The government structure

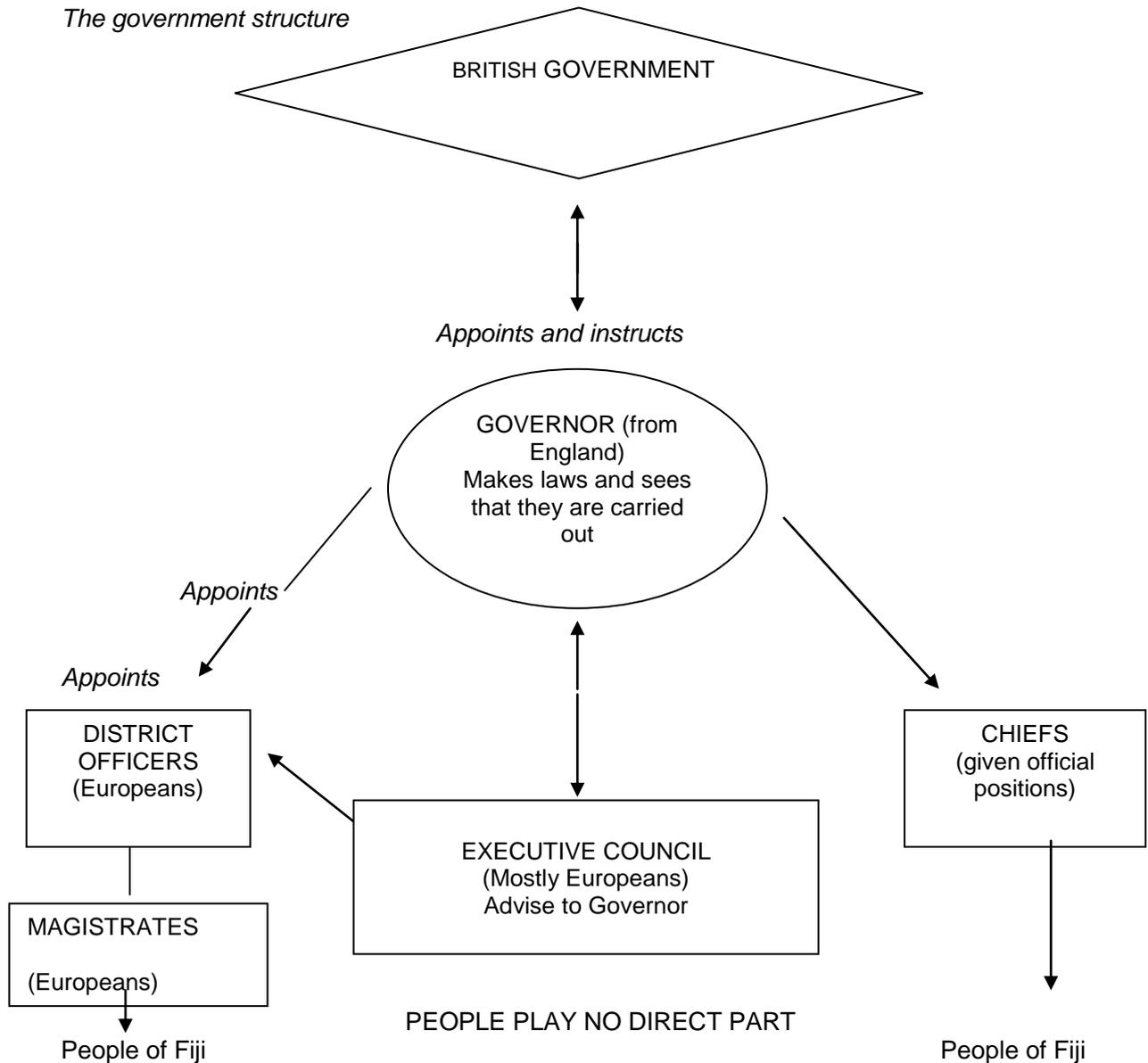


Figure 44.4. Chart of Crown Colony Government. Arrows indicate relationships between different parties in the political system.

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

When the British judged the colony has grown sufficiently and the colony could take some part in managing its own affairs, a form of *Representative Government* was introduced. The European colonists elected an assembly from amongst themselves to discuss the government of the country and offer advice on laws which were then handed to the Governor for his approval.

But the Governor was not obliged to accept advice from the assembly. In many cases the assembly remained purely a debating body, while the real power lay with the Governor and his personal advisers and friends, and particularly CSR, the giant sugar company which dominated Fiji's economy.

The next big change was from *Representative* to *Responsible* government. This change meant members of the Assembly moved from being nominated or elected as advisers to the Governor, to actually being responsible for matters of government, including local laws, public works, education, and "native affairs". The change from representative to responsible government was part of the change to "self rule" or self-government, and much later, independence.

Questions and Activities

11. Write a description (in one sentence) of:

- (a) the role of the Governor
- (b) "Indirect rule"
- (c) the link between the Governor and Great Britain
- (d) the link between the Chief and the Governor
- (e) the best feature of a colonial government
- (f) the worst feature of a colonial government.

Changes Between 1904 – 1965

The Governor retained full powers in matters of defence, external affairs, internal security and the public service, but the number members of the Legislative Council (as advisers to the Governor) was increased. In 1919, three Europeans from each Division were nominated into the Legislative Council.

By 1929, membership of the Legislative Council was made more equal with even representation of the three main cultural and ethnic groups of Fijians, Indians and Europeans. In 1937 the total of ethnic representation increased, including Fijians from the Council of Chiefs. In 1956, a new Legislative Speaker was created and Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna was appointed. In 1963-1965 a voting system was put in place where Communal rolls were set up and electors voted in their racial groups; women were given right to vote.

The change to Responsible Government began in 1963-1965. Because the Communal roll was not agreed to by all racial groups, a cross voting system was introduced. In 1966, a general election was held The Alliance Party won majority votes, so they formed the Government. The Minority Party formed the Opposition in Parliament.

In the change to Responsible Government, the Governor no longer selected his Ministers. They were selected from the Legislative Assembly and were responsible for their actions only to the Assembly. The Governor's power had been greatly reduced.

British Colonial Rule; the system of Indirect Rule

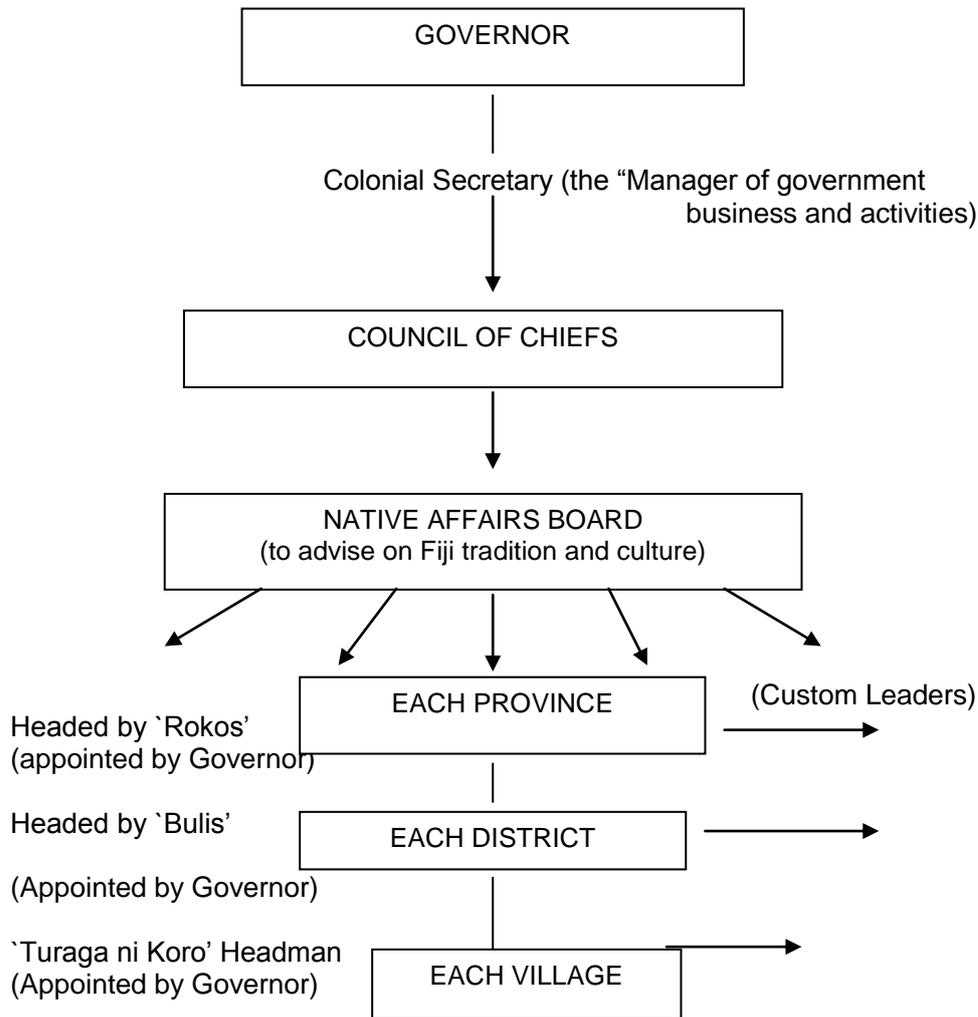


Figure 44.5. Diagram of Indirect rule in Fiji

Each Minister was placed in charge of a government department (such as Transport, Health or Education) and was called on to give an account to Parliament of the work of the department. If the department is inefficient or carried out policies which did not meet with the approval of the parliament, the Minister's resignation or the passing of a vote of no confidence in the Minister occurred.

In this system the Governor's main task was to represent Britain, and in a purely nominal way, to give assent to laws passed by the Legislative Assembly, or parliament.

Towards Full Self-Government

The first real change towards responsible government was taken in July 1964. Three members of the Legislative Council were placed in charge of government departments. Mr J N Falvey became member for Communications and Works, Ratu Kamisese Mara was appointed Member for Natural Resources, and Mr A D Patel took the post of Member of Social Services. For the first time, elected members of the Legislative Council controlled important government departments but they were, still responsible to the Governor for the running of their departments, not to parliament (the representatives of the people).

By 1965, the British, keen to withdraw as soon as possible from Fiji, declared that Fiji was ready to take a further step towards full self-government, and a conference was held in London to discuss changes to be made in the Constitution. In a despatch to the Governor of Fiji, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, said:

The purpose of the conference will be to work out a constitutional framework which will preserve a continuing link with Britain, and within which further progress can be made in the direction of internal self-government for Fiji.

The most important change made was in the membership of the Legislative Council. This was enlarged to thirty-six members, of whom twelve were Indian members; fourteen were Fijian members and ten were European and "Other Races", called General Members.

The Fijians, Indians and General members were selected on separate communal roles. In addition, two Fijian members were elected by the Council of Chiefs. The members were elected on a system of cross-voting. Under this system the colony was divided into three large constituencies, in each of which electors voted for one Fijian, one Indian and one General Representative. In this way all races voted for candidates of other races.

Questions and Activities

1. Complete this table; What type of government operated?

PERIOD	TYPE OF GOVERNMENT
1910-1963	
1963-1965	
1966-1970	
1970-1990	
1987-1999	

Question 2

Composition of the Legislative Council.

Fill in the appropriate number of representatives for each group as in 1968.

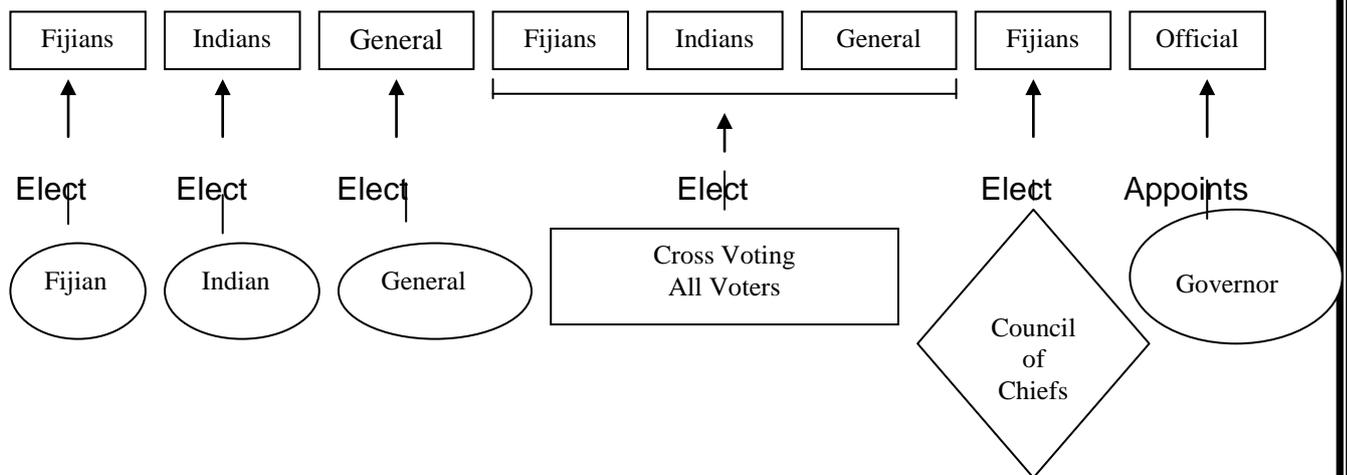


Figure 44.6. The composition of the Legislative Council

FULL SELF-GOVERNMENT: 1970

A Conference in London decided that Fiji would be granted independence with full responsible government on 10 October 1970. New constitutional changes were agreed to with two Houses of Parliament be established – a House of Representatives (Lower House) with 52 Members and a Senate (Upper House) with 22 members). The House of Representatives was the main legislative or law-making body. It was comprised of:

Fijians	12 (communal roll)
	10 (national roll)
Indians	12 (communal roll)
	10 (national roll)
General Electors	3 (communal roll)
	5 (national roll)

The function of the Senate was to review and to look closely at legislation passed by the House of Representatives and suggest amendments where necessary. It was decided that the Senate would consist of 22 members:

- 8 nominated by the Council of Chiefs
- 7 nominated by the Prime Minister
- 6 nominated by the Leader of the Opposition
- 1 nominated by the Council of Rotuma

The Executive, or top decision-making body was the Cabinet. It was to consist of Ministers for each government department, appointed from either the upper or the lower House .

The leader of the majority party became the Prime Minister while the leader of the minority party became the Leader of the Opposition. The Head of the State was the Queen of England who was represented by Governor-General.

The structure of the 1970 Independent Government can be shown as:

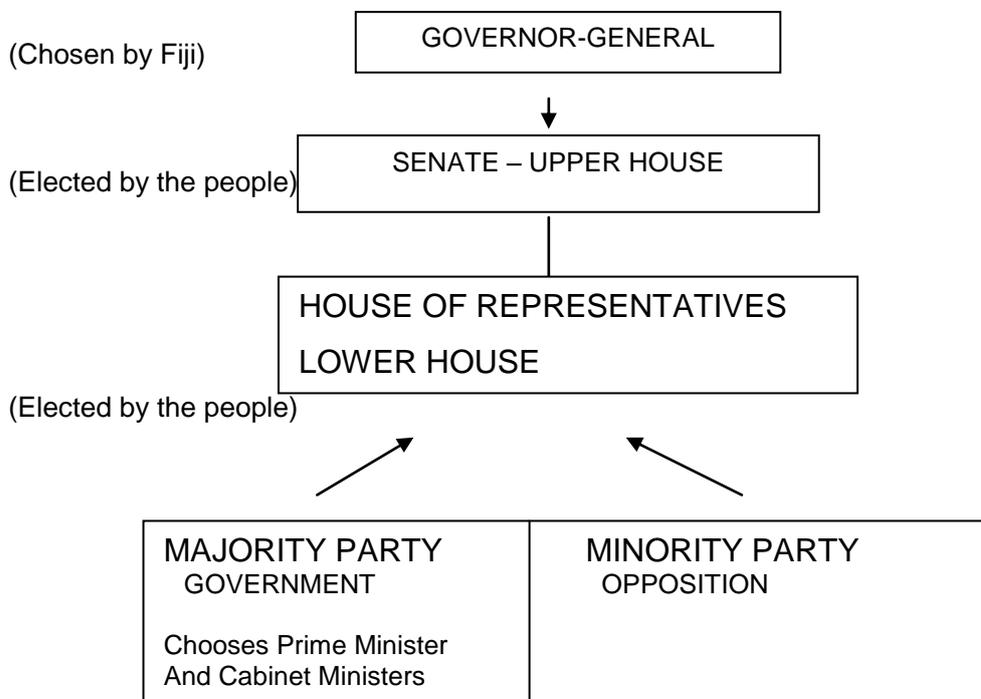
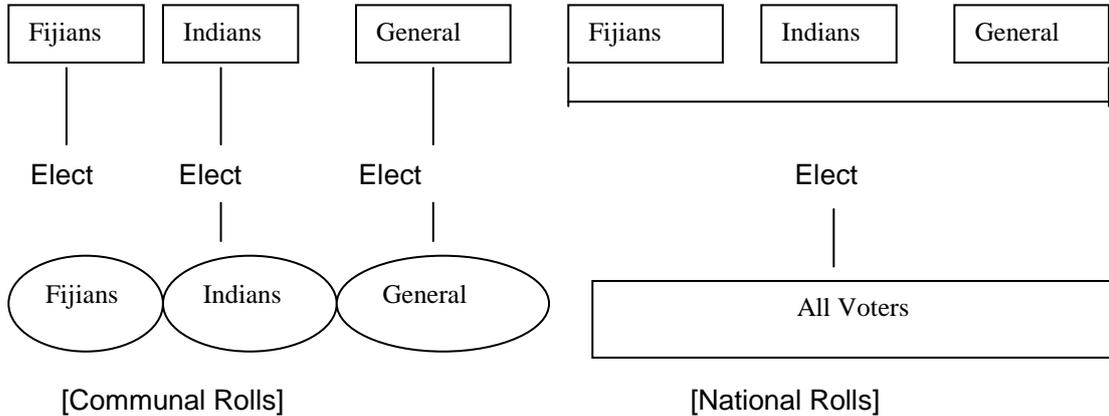


Figure 44.7. Independent government 1970.

Questions and Activities

13. Study the chart and table of the two houses of parliament below. After drawing them in your notebook, fill in the appropriate number of members

The House of Representatives: according to the 1970 Constitution



The Numbers in the Senate, according to the 1970 Constitution

Fill in the appropriate numbers

Nominated by

Council of Chiefs	Prime Minister	Leader of Opposition	Council of Rotuma	TOTAL

A GREAT DAY IN FIJI HISTORY: 10TH OCTOBER, 1970

On October 10th, 1970, at Albert Park in Suva, the capital of Fiji, celebrations marked the historic occasion of the nation’s independence. This was the official day when the British Government withdrew from Fiji. Britain had the ‘power to rule’ since the Deed of Cession in 1874.

Independence was made possible as a result of successful negotiations, bargaining and compromises by the leaders of the major cultural and ethnic groups who lived in Fiji. The leaders had written a constitution relevant to the needs and interests of the people of Fiji, ensuring peace and unity in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

To mark this important ceremony, Prince Charles, the eldest son of the British reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, was the Queen’s representative for the announcement of Fiji’s independence. The day also marked the acceptance of the 1970 Constitution by the new Prime Minister of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and the swearing in of the first Governor-General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau. A message from the Queen was read by Prince Charles at the flag-raising ceremony at Albert Park, Suva, on Saturday, October 10, 1970. It said:

“My chiefs and people of Fiji, on this historic occasion I send to you all my congratulations. On the 10th October, 1874 a document was signed at

Levuka whereby your ancestors, and in particular that great chief Cakobau, the Vunivalu of Bau, ceded to my great-great-grandmother the rule and government of your islands in return for protection which the Crown could afford you. Since that day there have been many changes in the world. But there has always been mutual faith and confidence between Fiji and Britain in peace and war. Confident, this relationship has stood the test of time and will, I believe endure in the future. With independence your leaders assume new burdens and will have greater responsibilities to discharge. I am confident that with a spirit of good will, and with trust and tolerance, they will be successful in bringing to Fiji the progress which we all desire and expect As head of the British Commonwealth I also take pride in welcoming Fiji to membership of our unique international fellowship

Questions and Activities

14. What happened in Levuka in 1874?
15. Queen Elizabeth II refers to Fiji being “Ceded” – what did she mean?
16. Why did Prince Charles visit Suva in 1970?
17. Who was the first Prime Minister?
18. Who was the first Governor-General?
19. Who was the “Leader of the Opposition” in a two-party electoral system?
20. In 50 words (say 4-5 sentences) describe the major difference in the government of Fiji before 1970, and after 1970