

CASE STUDIES

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From marginalization to mainstream? Rotuma and the 2006 election

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The Rotuma Communal seat is one of the ‘special’ privileges conferred on the Rotuman people by the Fiji constitution. Elections in 1999 and 2001 saw the seat contested by two candidates in each election. Marieta Rigamoto won on both occasions and was made a Minister in the Fiji government; however, in 2006, she chose not to stand for the seat, which was contested by five candidates (all male). The increase in candidate numbers as well as the recent attention given to Rotuma and the community in general by prominent political parties in the campaign have links to broader political issues in Fiji. This chapter assesses the position of the Rotuman community in current Fiji politics and raises questions about effective representation for the Rotuman community in a Fiji parliament.

Politics in Fiji usually revolves around the ‘major’ players. Major political party manifestos tend to focus on the two majority communities, and media attention is ultimately focused on the major issues affecting the dominant populations of the country, often centralized in the capital or, at the least, the main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. For this reason, issues affecting outer islands and minority communities are often under-reported or pushed aside.

Fiji’s population can be divided into a number of minority groups, although the defining of who actually constitutes a political minority in Fiji is problematic,

with differing usages of the term minority and no international consensus.² It is from this context that the position of minority communities within the political arena of Fiji can begin to be understood. Within the framework of the Fiji electoral system – in which the majority of seats in the House of Representatives are decided by a communal roll system based on ethnic groupings – a minority community must, in electoral terms, be defined in terms of numbers and not power. As discussed elsewhere in this book, all eligible citizens in Fiji register on two electoral rolls – an open roll and a communal one. The four communal rolls are based on ethnic identification: 42 of the seats are allocated to ‘Fijian’ (23) and ‘Indian’ (19) citizens, and the remaining four to voters identifying as either ‘Rotuman’ or ‘General’ (those Fiji citizens who are ‘registered otherwise than as Fijians, Indians or Rotumans’³). The very existence of communal seats, and the number of seats representing between 5 and 8 per cent of the population⁴, has raised a number of questions about effective representation of minority communities in Fiji politics.

For the Rotuman community, questions relating to the representation of the community in the parliament of Fiji can, arguably, be linked to broader questions about the status of Rotuman people within the state. While much of the discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to recognize that the debate exists. As a minority group, the Rotuman community is one of the more readily identifiable and recognized. With a population of approximately 10,000 throughout the Fiji Islands (a minority of approximately 2,000 living on the island of Rotuma itself) the Rotuman language, culture and traditions (which are distinct from others in Fiji) continue to be relatively strong, and deliberate attempts have been made by many members of the community to safeguard them.⁵

Arguments have been made previously about the status of Rotumans as a ‘marginalized’ minority within the Fiji population. While a number of notable Rotumans have been high achievers academically and professionally, the community is sometimes overlooked in broader political decision-making. Indeed, this political marginalization can be seen in a number of key government policy documents (including the ‘50/50 by 2020’ affirmative action blueprint in which Rotumans are referred to as ‘indigenous Fijians’); in generalizations about the economic and other status of the community (ensuring that social and

economic reality for many members is not addressed); in the dismissal of the legitimate political concerns voiced by some members of the community; and in the way in which the island is treated as akin to other outer islands despite its 'special status' (the difficulty in delivering goods and services, the lack of development, the expense and difficulty in travel all indicative of the latter). It is these issues of the status of Rotuma within the Fiji Islands and effective representation (for the community as a whole and as individuals), which are arguably at the crux of many Rotuman political arguments.⁶ Such arguments, however, are usually not aired by the media. Accordingly, contemporary Rotuman electoral politics tends to be characterized by an image of consensus.⁷ The electoral contest may not be plagued by the dramatic tensions evident in mainland Fiji, but the changes in the status quo of election candidacy and campaigning in Rotuma for the 2006 election indicate that there is a need for further analysis of contemporary electoral politics in the community.

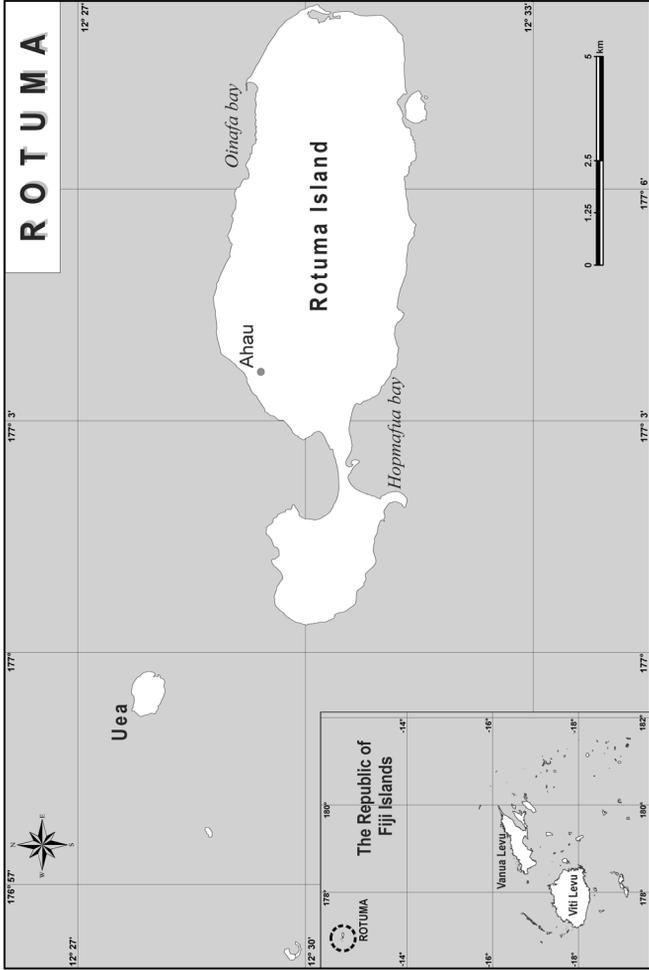
While past elections have seen few candidates and the absence of major political parties campaigning in the community, the 2006 election was different. What has changed? The characteristics of Fiji elections and the political arena in general have been altered somewhat by the events of the past decade. Increasing attempts to have democracy settled through the legal process is one example; the attempts of major parties to broaden their appeal beyond ethnic stratification is another. It is this second change which could be construed as contributing to the increasing political mainstreaming of the Rotuman community.

This chapter assesses the 2006 election results vis-à-vis past elections in 1999 and 2001. It reviews some of the key election issues for the Rotuman community and addresses some of the continued 'sticking points' relating to the status of Rotuma within Fiji.

Rotuma in the Fiji Constitution and electoral provisions

Annexed seven years after the colony of Fiji was created, Rotuma has occupied an uncertain position within the state, and moves towards independence have been mooted at various times (in the late 1970s, 1988 and 2000).⁸ The 1988 and 2000 moves both led to arrests and court cases, with slightly varying outcomes.⁹ The Rotumans are recognised simultaneously as indigenous, but different from, Fijians, and their 'uniqueness'¹⁰ has been given emphasis at

Map 14.1 Rotuma



Source: Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance (PIAS-DG) Mapping Database, University of the South Pacific, Suva.

multiple legal and policy echelons. Such recognition is exemplified by provisions within the constitution of Fiji, including the presence of a designated seat for the Rotuman community in the Senate, and the continued existence of the 'Rotuma Communal Roll', which not only serves as recognition of the community, but also entitles the Rotumans to one designated seat in the House of Representatives.¹¹ The inclusion of three Rotuman representatives in the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, the body responsible for appointing the Head of State, also indicates the importance of Rotuma as part of the broader political landscape in Fiji.

The population of Rotuman voters currently stands at 5,373. Of these, more than 4,000 live in parts of Fiji other than Rotuma.¹² Technically, Rotuman voters have more than one representative in parliament (as do all citizens in Fiji) by virtue of the dual roll system. Individual voters are required to vote in both the communal and open constituencies. Rotumans in Rotuma are, accordingly, represented at one level by the communal member and at another by the member for the Lau/Taveuni/Rotuma Open seat. Rotumans living in the rest of Fiji are also represented by their respective open roll members. The viability of the open seat as a source of representation for Rotumans has been challenged in the past. In 1999, president of the Rotuma Independent Movement Aleki Kafoa urged Rotuman voters to boycott the elections, arguing, 'We are now treated as sub-class citizens, we are told that we have two seats to contest but in reality we have only one that is the Rotuman Communal Constituency seat'.¹³

The question of representation in the open constituencies is valid when one realizes that, in most instances, the Rotuman voters make up less than 1 per cent of each constituency. Notable exceptions to this are in the Laucala Open and Suva City Open electorates – where Rotuman voters constitute 3.18 per cent and 4.61 per cent respectively – and in the Lau/Taveuni/Rotuma Open electorate, where Rotuman voters make up 7.65 per cent of voters (see Table 14.1).

The Rotuma Communal roll and seat in the House of Representatives has arguably been something of a mixed blessing for the community. While the communal seat secures some representation in the parliament, requests have been made that the number of seats reserved for Rotumans be increased:

...to better represent the two communities [Rotumans living on Rotuma and Rotumans living elsewhere in Fiji] because of the difficulties of travel between Rotuma and Fiji and the wide distribution of Rotumans living outside the island of Rotuma.¹⁴

Table 14.1 Rotuman voters as a percentage of the open electorates in the 2006 election

Electorate	Total number of voters	Total number of Rotuman voters	Rotumans as a percentage of the electorate
Tailevu North/ Ovalau	17,893	58	0.32
Tailevu South/ Lomaiviti	21,620	35	0.16
Nausori/Naitasiri	19,977	253	1.27
Nasinu/Rewa	21,273	162	0.76
Cunningham	24,087	380	1.58
Laucala	19,774	629	3.18
Samabula/Tamavua	17,137	384	2.24
Suva City	15,206	701	4.61
Lami	17,815	253	1.42
Lomaivuna/Namosi/Kaduva	19,819	87	0.44
Ra	19,670	15	0.08
Tavua	15,996	198	1.24
Ba	20,759	38	0.18
Magadro	19,911	6	0.30
Lautoka City	19,084	249	1.30
Vuda	20,275	143	0.71
Nadi	23,658	248	1.05
Yasawa/Nawaka	20,002	15	0.07
Nadroga	18,590	47	0.25
Serua/Navosa	22,642	107	0.47
Bua/Macuata	17,925	7	0.04
Labasa	15,651	22	0.14
Macuata East	16,306	7	0.04
Cakaudrove West	17,717	36	0.20
Lau/Taveuni/ Rotuma	16,906	1,293	7.65

Source: Elections Office (2006), unpublished roll analysis.

Despite the specific definition in the Fiji Constitution of who can be classified as a 'Rotuman'¹⁵ and, in the *Rotuma Act*, a specific definition of who is a member of the Rotuman Community,¹⁶ there are differences in identification between those who live on the island and those who have 'migrated' or were born and raised outside of Rotuma.¹⁷ This distinction in itself is complicated by the fact that the majority of constituents on the Rotuma Communal roll do not actually live on Rotuma. As already noted, more than 75 per cent of the constituency lives off the island. Of these, more than 2000, more than 43 per cent of the entire Rotuman constituency, live in electorates that could be considered part of the greater Suva area (Laucala, Cunningham, Suva City, Lami, Samabula/Tamavua). Adding the voting populations of Fiji's next two major urban centres – Lautoka and Nadi – to the equation shows that more than 50 per cent (2,844) of the Rotuma Communal constituency can be considered city- or urban-based. As a result, Rotumans living on the island of Rotuma are effectively minorities in both of their constituencies – making up only 7.65 per cent of the Lau/Taveuni/Rotuma Open constituency registered voters (combined with Rotumans living in Lau and Taveuni), and less than one-quarter of those in the Rotuma Communal constituency.

This urban–rural dichotomy is not only problematic in terms of effective representation of all Rotuman people included in this constituency. As this chapter demonstrates, election campaigning has also proven to be difficult, as many candidates seem to try to campaign 'to the island', rather than taking into account the wider Rotuman diaspora across the Fiji group. In terms of national government, there also seems to be some misunderstanding about the role of the elected Rotuma Communal member, with some politicians assuming that the member is the representative of the island alone and not of the broader Rotuman community.

Overview of past elections

In past elections, only two candidates have contested the Rotuma Communal constituency, although in 1999 Aleki Kafoa was also announced as an early candidate for the Party of National Unity (PANU)¹⁸, but withdrew before the election.¹⁹ The results of the 1999 and 2001 elections were close, and a relatively high number of invalid votes were cast. In 1999, independent candidate Marieta

Rigamoto won the Rotuma Communal seat by a margin of 30 votes, securing 50.38 per cent of the vote.²⁰ Of the 4,682 ballot papers counted, 688 (more than 14 per cent) were deemed to be invalid. Rigamoto entered the interim government in 2000, and was re-elected as Rotuma's Communal representative in the 2001 election (again as an independent). This was the second election in which Rigamoto was (ultimately) the sole candidate opposing a Lio 'On Famor Rotuma party candidate, Riamkau Tiu Livino, and once again winning by a slight majority. Again, invalid votes were quite substantial. Of the 4,255 counted, 493 (more than 11 per cent) were deemed to be invalid.

The 1999 election also gave rise to the beginnings of 'party politics' on Rotuma. The Lio 'On Famor Rotuma party was created that year to more effectively campaign for development on Rotuma and to represent the collective Rotuman people.²¹ Candidate Kafoa Pene was reported as saying 'For too long Rotuma has been represented in Parliament by an independent candidate, which has denied us our democratic rights.'²² The establishment of the party was intended to improve the representation of Rotuman interests, and a number of areas addressed in the Party's manifesto continue to be issues today.²³

The 2006 election

2006 saw a record number of candidates contest the Rotuma Communal seat. Of the five, two stood as independents while the other three represented major parties within Fiji. Lio 'On Famor Rotuma did not field a candidate. Marieta Rigamoto decided not to stand, her time in office not having been without its difficulties,²⁴ including concern that her role as a government member prevented her from being a true representative of Rotuma. Her contribution to the 2006 Budget addressed Rotuman issues in passing, commenting that Rotuma was a province the public relations unit had not been able to visit.²⁵ An August 2005 response to the President's address in parliament mentioned the constituency as item 10 of 11 items, and thanked the government for its work on the island, without mention of the challenges it faces.²⁶ In contrast to 1999, all candidates fielded by major parties ran for the duration of the election. Sosefo Kafoa stood on behalf of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL), Mua Ieli Taukave for the United Peoples Party (UPP), Sosefo Sikuri Inoke for the National Alliance Party of Fiji (NAPF), while Victor Fatiaki and former Fiji High Commissioner

to Australia, Jioji Konousi Konrote, ran as independents. A record number of voters – 5,373 – registered and early predictions were that Konrote would win the seat.²⁷ In an interview with the *Fiji Daily Post* before the election, Konrote attributed the high number of candidates to a number of factors, including increased political awareness, and a sign ‘...that democracy is working well on the island’.²⁸ He also noted the dissatisfaction felt by many, acknowledging:

...there are a lot of dissatisfied people on the island in terms of what the government could have done for the island. People feel let down in the areas of shipping and in terms of the little that has been done to create more income-generating activities on the island. Freight, for instance, is out of the question so people cannot export their crops and because of all this the rural to urban drift is now a major problem. The majority of the Rotuman people live off of the island.²⁹

Campaigning for the election was conducted on multiple levels. Candidates used ‘traditional’ methods (party manifestos, interviews with the media, attendance at rallies, constituency visits) as well as more contemporary avenues, such as the Internet. The Noa’ia Mauri Rotuma website (www.rotuma.net), a long-standing virtual community for Rotumans around the world, invited all candidates to post their CVs and manifestos on the website. Only the two independent candidates (Fatiaki and Konrote) and the NAPF candidate (Inoke) chose to do so. While the manifestos of Konrote and Fatiaki were succinct (and included their CVs), Inoke chose not to post the official manifesto of the NAPF, but created his own manifesto of election promises tailored for the Rotuman electorate.

Inoke’s choice of manifesto is an interesting one that can be seen to reflect the overlooking of Rotuma in the manifestos of the major parties. Of the three major parties fielding candidates for the Rotuma Communal constituency (NAPF, SDL and UPP), only the SDL party’s manifesto included specific mention of the Rotuman community. The party’s mission statement included the statement, ‘Special assistance or affirmative action to reduce the economic gap between Fijians and Rotumans and other communities’.³⁰ In regards to ‘values’, the manifesto promised the party would continue to demonstrate ‘Respect for the *Vanua* and the cultures and traditions of the indigenous Fijians and Rotumans’, and ‘Recognition of the paramountcy of indigenous Fijian and Rotuman interests, as proclaimed in the Constitution’.³¹ It also referred to the affirmative action programs, but there were no specific promises

made to the island or the community outside of those offered to the rest of the Fiji population. In contrast, the official manifesto for the NAPF (as opposed to the Inoke Rotuma version) made no specific mention of Rotuma or Rotumans.³²

The overlooking of Rotuma by major parties, despite their fielding of candidates, reflects the ongoing marginalization of Rotuma within the political arena of Fiji. It could be argued that the key election issues for at least the past decade have remained the same. As with past elections, the predominant issues in the 2006 election for the Rotuma Communal constituency were linked to effective representation of the community collectively and development of the island itself. In relation to representation, both on and off the island, key concerns for some included the potentially conflicting role of the Rotuma Communal member as a representative of the community while also being a member of the government. Rotuma's legal and constitutional position in Fiji, infrastructure, education, the environment and health continued to be at the forefront of political discussion on (and off) the island. These issues were reflected in the manifestos tailored for the Rotuma Communal constituency and in all candidates' election campaigning.

Of the three 'Rotuma specific' manifestos, all raised the issue of Rotuma's constitutional and legal position within Fiji, although with varying emphasis. Fatiaki noted that the review of the Rotuman Lands Act needed to be 'pursued', while Konrote argued:

As Rotumans, our sovereign rights as members of the Indigenous community are guaranteed in the Compact of our Constitution. In this regard we should appreciate and cherish with pride the old adage of 'Viti Kei Rotuma'.³³

Later in the document, however, he stated:

I am committed to engaging the Government of the day to ensure that the interests of our community and our special and unique status as an Indigenous ethnic group are protected at all times. In this regard I am equally committed to ensure that all amendments to existing statutes (Rotuma Act, Rotuma Lands Act etc) are done following wide consultations, but more importantly changes are effected with the full endorsement of the Chiefs and the people.³⁴

The latter statement can be read as indicating that there has not been consensus in all of the discussions regarding these two Acts and proposed amendments. It was the manifesto of Inoke, however, which further highlighted

the challenges faced by the community. Inoke's manifesto argued strongly in favour of change. In relation to the Rotuma Act he noted that:

[T]he law worked well when we were a colony and the central government decided what was good for us. We have grown up as a people and as a nation and we don't need to be spoon-fed anymore.³⁵

Inoke raised the issue of autonomy for the island, suggesting in an interview broadcast on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Asia Pacific program that Rotuma could be governed in a similar way to Australia's Torres Strait Islands.³⁶ He also challenged the Rotuman Lands Act, arguing that the Act 'discriminates against women and children'³⁷ and 'goes against Rotuman traditional land rights'.³⁸

The status of women within the community, and in general, was addressed by all three candidates who posted manifestos on the website (perhaps something of an irony given that, in contrast to in the past two elections, there was no female candidate contesting the seat). Inoke's observations relating to discrimination against women were specifically related to the Rotuman Lands Act, and Fatiaki's concerns about women were also linked to the review of the Act, the latter asking for 'the assurance that registration of all Rotuman land will be under both maternal and paternal lineages, and that women will not be disenfranchised from their traditional heritage'.³⁹ In contrast, Konrote did not link discrimination of women with any specific legislation, but concentrated on the employment sector, saying '...I believe that women are often discriminated against and are significantly under-represented at senior and middle-management levels in both the public and private sector'.⁴⁰

Issues such as transport, infrastructure and development on Rotuma were key issues noted by all candidates in their manifestos and in other campaign aspects. Fatiaki's manifesto primarily concentrated on issues of sea transport, as well as infrastructure, such as roads, the Oinafa wharf, Rotuma's airport, electricity and water. Inoke wrote of the environment, investment and employment. Konrote addressed these issues as well as the need to improve the efficiency of shipping and air service. At a rally held in Suva before the election, Kafoa pledged to improve the shipping services to Rotuma (a long-standing issue) as well as deal with infrastructural issues such as roads and electricity.⁴¹

On the social welfare front, Fatiaki and Konrote both addressed the issues of health services and education. Fatiaki was more specific about these issues,

outlining problems facing the Rotuma hospital and secondary school. Inoke wrote of youth and the reintroduction of sports and traditional activities. Interestingly, given the emphasis on religion and politics in Fiji, only Fatiaki emphasized religion as an issue for Rotuma (although Konrote's campaign symbol was the image of the island imposed over a Christian cross). His 'vision' (as stipulated in his manifesto) declared Rotumans to be 'a God fearing people with respect for tradition and culture, and for one another'.⁴² Fatiaki later noted that he believed '... that Rotuma can only prosper and progress if all communities work together in Fear of God...', and advocated religious tolerance.⁴³ The other candidate's non-emphasis of religion may be due to the fact that, unlike mainland Fiji, where the population split between major faiths has been used as a source of political tension, the vast majority of Rotumans identify with the Christian faith. In the 1996 census, slightly more than 95 per cent identified as being of the Christian faith (various denominations, although the majority belong to either the Methodist or Catholic denominations), and less than 1 per cent identified with Fiji's other major faith, Hinduism.⁴⁴ While there have been difficulties in the past between congregations of the major Christian denominations, sectarianism has not caused overt or public political disputes in contemporary times.⁴⁵

The decision of major parties to campaign in Rotuma was also a source of intrigue, and became a political issue in itself. Inoke traveled to Rotuma, launching the NAPF manifesto there and discussing the need to change two key laws – the Rotuma Act and the Rotuma Lands Act – to assist with the development of the island.⁴⁶ Neither Inoke's visit nor the campaigns of the other candidates caused as much controversy as the visit by UPP party leader, Mick Beddoes, with UPP candidate Taukave.

Beddoes was more vocal than the leaders of other major parties, and his statements and promises were reported more often than those of his party candidate, Taukave. Beddoes was critical of the SDL government's treatment of Rotuma during their five years of government, as was FLP's Mahendra Chaudhry, who accused the SDL of vote-buying.⁴⁷ Beddoes was scathing in his attacks; reportedly 'shocked' by his visit to the island, he apologized for not having visited in the past five years (while he was the representative of minority communities in parliament), saying:

...it is because I have always assumed that with the Rotuma Member of Parliament in Cabinet, all of the problems of Rotuma get resolved and acted upon on a continuous basis.⁴⁸

He was reported as saying that it was time that the people of Rotuma:

Wake up to the lies and stop being used. What good have you realized from having a Cabinet Minister in the SDL Government over the past five years? It has been nothing more than a showpiece and after five years, they have nothing to show for it and certainly it has not benefited the people in any real and tangible way.⁴⁹

While Qarase dismissed Chaudhry's comments, saying he should 'stop misleading the people and concentrate on the elections',⁵⁰ Beddoes' statements were taken more seriously and a press release was issued by the government. Branding Beddoes' comments as 'irresponsible politicking',⁵¹ outgoing representative and Minister for Information, Communications and Media Relations Marieta Rigamoto's press release emphasized the contribution of the SDL government to the island and was contemptuous of Beddoes, stating:

In his fly-by-night visit for the first time in five years to the island, Mr Beddoes makes hollow promises of "immediate" developments for the island as a vote-catching gimmick for his candidate. And what's worse he has acted irresponsibly by closing his eyes to the visible contribution of the SDL towards the welfare of the people.⁵²

Table 14.2 Outcomes in the Rotuma Communal constituency

		1st count	2nd count	3rd count
Sosefo Kafoa	SDL	526	531	
Mua Ieli Taukave	UPP	532	548	566
Sosefo Sikuri Inoke	NAPF	245		
Victor Fatiaki	Independent	1,149	1,348	1,361
Jioji Konousi Konrote	Independent	1,983	2,008	2,508
Informal		302		
Total votes		4,737		
Total registered		5,373		

Source: Fiji elections website, www.elections.gov.fj

2006 election results

Despite there being 5,373 registered voters, only 4,737 cast their ballots (an 88 per cent voter turnout).⁵³ There were fewer invalid ballots in this election (6 per cent) than in previous elections, perhaps a result of it being the third time that the system had been used or, alternatively, a sign that the election education campaign (conducted throughout the country prior to the elections) had been effective. The three major party representatives were excluded in successive rounds of voting. The NAPF's Inoke, securing 245 of the first preference votes, was the first to be eliminated from the contest (see Table 14.2). Most of his votes were transferred to Victor Fatiaki. The SDL's candidate, Kafoa, was the second to be eliminated, but the difference in votes between Kafoa and the UPP's candidate, Taukave, was minor. Kafoa secured 526 first preferences, Taukave 532. Distribution of Inoke's preferences saw Kafoa collect an additional five votes, ultimately gaining 531, while Taukave secured an additional sixteen. After the distribution of Kafoa's preferences, Taukave had won 566 votes, less than half of the votes given to either of the independent candidates.⁵⁴

Konrote, the early favourite, led at every stage of the counting process. He secured 1,983 (41.86 per cent) of the first preference votes, his only real opposition being Fatiaki with 1,149 first preference votes (24.25 per cent). Distribution of preferences saw Konrote with 2,008 at the second round of counting and Fatiaki with 1,348. Ultimately, Konrote won the seat having secured 2,508 votes (52.94 per cent), although it is interesting to note that 500 of these were preferences from votes originally given to the SDL. Fatiaki was the runner up, gaining a total of 1,361 votes (28.73 per cent).⁵⁵

Konrote's win could be attributed to a number of key differences between his campaign style and that of the other candidates. While all three of the Rotuma-specific manifestos made special note of tradition and culture, only Konrote's used the Rotuman language to any great extent (although two other candidates produced flyers using the Rotuman language).⁵⁶ Konrote's manifesto also addressed the issues of human rights, good governance, access and equity. His manifesto was less overtly political than those of the others, and his campaign style of 'not campaigning' stood in stark contrast to the style of UPP's Taukave. While Fatiaki and Inoke emphasized key issues on the island of

Rotuma and for the community as a whole, Konrote's recognized some of the broader and contemporary issues facing Rotumans living in the urban centres (the majority of the constituency).

Konrote decided to work with the government of the day and, with the SDL winning the majority of votes, was made Minister of State in the multiparty government. It remains to be seen what achievements he will make during his time in office, but his decisive win indicates that he has substantial support from the Rotuman people in general. With secret voting, it is virtually impossible to ascertain if Konrote's support is both on and off island. Many of the key issues facing the Rotuman community, in both Rotuma and in Fiji, need to be addressed and brought to the fore of politics in Fiji to prevent marginalization. The inclusion of Rotuma in the political campaigning of major parties indicates a change for the community, and the highlighting of a number of issues by re-elected Leader of the Opposition Mick Beddoes may be conducive to future positive developments.

Future pathways

Many of the political difficulties facing Rotuma have been related to a lack of development, the status of Rotuma in the Viti kei Rotuma (Fiji and Rotuma) relationship, challenges to effective leadership, and representation at the parliamentary level. On the matter of leadership, Howard and Rensel, who are amongst the leading authorities on political developments (and other aspects) of Rotuma, wrote in 1997:

Leadership on Rotuma today is...in a state of crisis. The chiefs are at a great disadvantage. As members of the Rotuman Council they are supposed to formulate policies and guide the development of the island, but they are not well-equipped to do so. They lack the education and experience required to manage an expanding economy and to make informed choices concerning development opportunities. They are uncomfortable with bureaucratic procedures and with bureaucrats who control resources. Internally, they are perceived by most Rotumans as self-interested and ineffective, lacking in moral authority.⁵⁷

And yet effective leadership cannot be considered a matter only for the chiefs, or the Council of Rotuma. In terms of national government and politics, leadership must be viewed at multiple levels. The chiefs have their role, as do all of the members of the Council of Rotuma. The Senator appointed by the

President of Fiji on the advice of the Council of Rotuma, Dr John Fatiaki, has his role to play, as indeed do the three members of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga. While it cannot be said that effective leadership or representation should be demonstrated by one person alone, in a democracy it is essential that the elected members of parliament also demonstrate their skills in this area. There is currently only one elected Rotuman member of parliament, Jioji Konrote, and the responsibility for effective representation of the Rotuman community in general in the House of Representatives is his. Konrote may be the member needed to lead the community and oversee some of the much-needed developments. His manifesto indicated an acute awareness of the constituency and his time in office (both military and diplomatic) has provided him with expertise that may be conducive to many of the changes needed and apparently desired by the community.

In response to a seemingly overt politicization of Rotuma and the community, the introduction of this chapter raised the question 'what has changed?'. In many regards, it is clear that little has changed in the past decade. The relationship between Rotuma and Fiji retains both benefits and disadvantages. The presence of the single communal seat remains unsatisfactory for some, transport to the island is still difficult and expensive, delivery of services and infrastructure to the island still problematic, and the generalizations made about the economic, professional and academic success of the community as a whole encourage a tendency to overlook those members of the community who are at a disadvantage. While it is true that individuals and communities must bear some responsibility, until the issues and concerns of all members of the Rotuman community, both urban and rural, island and other, are addressed and taken seriously by the government of Fiji, then it is likely that many of the political arguments related to the position of Rotuma in the Viti kei Rotuma relationship and the existence of one communal seat will continue.

In some regards, these issues are related to the broader political agenda of the current Fiji administration in the area of reconciliation and national unity. Rhetoric and brushing aside key issues will not serve anyone well in the long run. The concerns of all minority communities in Fiji must be addressed in the interest of national cohesiveness and stability. In terms of broader political arenas, democracies are now being judged not only on their

successful representation of the majority of the population, but also on their ability to consider the concerns of minorities. Increasing concentration on the members of the minority communities in Fiji may augur well for the state's image internationally while also being conducive to more political harmony domestically.

Notes

- ¹ The author is grateful for the Noa'ia Rotuma website, at <www.rotuma.net>, for its ongoing documentation of political issues and other concerns/events relating to Rotuma. Without this valuable resource, this chapter could not have been written. Thank you to Professor Stewart Firth and Dr Bruce Yeates for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. Also appreciation and gratitude to those who read the draft, made comments and provided feedback but wish to remain anonymous. A final thank you to Liti Vasuturaga at the Fiji Election Office for supplying the 2006 roll analysis information.
- ² Anderson, K. (nd) 'The politics of identity and recognition: the status of protection and promotion of 'global minority' culture and language in Fiji, unpublished working paper.
- ³ *Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands*, Part 2: 51(a) (iv).
- ⁴ Based on Fiji census statistics. The last census was conducted in 1996 and indicated that 42,000 belonged to neither the Fijian or Indian groups. Estimates made in 2005 by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics indicate that the number is closer to 66,560 (<<http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/>>, accessed 15 June 2006).
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- ⁶ The Noa'ia website noticeboard will provide the reader with an overview of some of the more critical issues and arguments. See also, Howard, A. and Rensel, J. 1997. 'Rotuma', in B. V. Lal and T. Vakatora (eds), *Fiji in Transition*, Vol. 1, Fiji Constitution Review Commission Research Papers. School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, Suva (available online) <<http://www.rotuma.net/os/howsel/28FijiConRpt.html>>.
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