

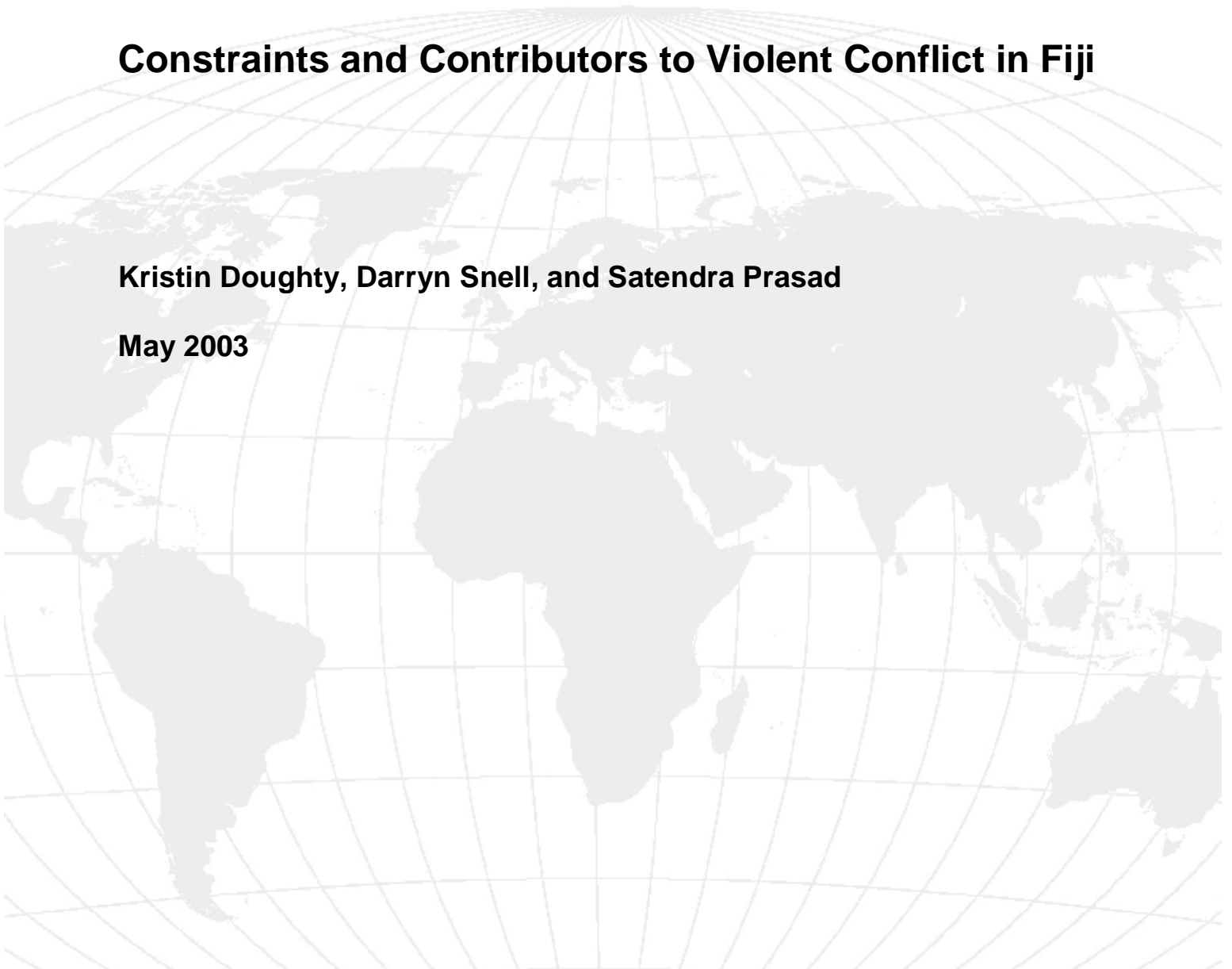
STEPS TOWARD CONFLICT PREVENTION PROJECT

Case Study

Constraints and Contributors to Violent Conflict in Fiji

Kristin Doughty, Darryn Snell, and Satendra Prasad

May 2003



This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.

Table of Contents

Introduction and Methodology

Background and History

Colonial Period

1987 Coup

1990 Constitution and 1997 Constitution

1999 Election and 2000 Coup

Analyses of the 2000 Coup

Analyzing Violence in Fiji's Society

Factors that Increase the Likelihood of Violent Conflict

Potential Triggers to Violence

Moderating Factors / Constraints to Violence

Concluding Thoughts

Balancing Apparent Contradictions between Constraints and Contributors

What Does the Future Hold?

Appendix 1: Timeline of Events

Appendix 2: Additional Information on the Chandrika Prasad Case

Appendix 3: Map of Fiji

Bibliography

Team Composition

This case study was developed by Kristin Doughty, Project Associate at the Collaborative for Development Action in the United States; Darryn Snell, currently Professor of Sociology at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, formerly a lecturer at the University of South Pacific in Suva, Fiji (1998-1999); and Satendra Prasad, USP lecturer and member of the Citizen's Constitutional Forum. During our visit to Fiji, we worked closely with the Citizen's Constitutional Forum (CCF), and are grateful for their assistance.

Introduction and Methodology

This case study explores the reasons that Fiji has remained relatively peaceful, rather than escalating into full-scale violence, civil war, or genocide despite deep socio-political tensions, two coups in 13 years, and episodes of riots and disorder. It was developed as part of the Steps Toward Conflict Prevention Project, directed by the Collaborative for Development Action, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. The Steps Toward Conflict Prevention project seeks to understand more about, and draw lessons from, a series of communities around the world that have been able to disengage from the violent conflict that surrounds them.

The case writing team included one person with expertise in the STEPS project, and two people with extensive expertise looking at similar questions in Fiji—one Fijian national and one American who lived in Fiji for two years. The team worked together during a 10-day visit to Fiji in March/April 2003. We interviewed several dozen people in Fiji about the factors that are likely to act as a trigger to increased violence and conflict, and factors that have worked to reduce conflict. We held formal and informal interviews and discussions with a range of people, including: members of NGOs and United Nations organizations, government ministries including Reconciliation and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, representatives of the military, members of the police, members of Parliament from a variety of parties, union leaders, members of religious organizations, farmers, landowners, community leaders, and chiefs. We spoke with women and men, including Indo-Fijians, Indigenous Fijians, members of Fiji's minority population, and ex-patriots. Our interviews were conducted primarily in Suva, the capital of Fiji on the east coast of the island of Viti Levu, as well as in Nadi, on the west coast of the same island. Several of these respondents were close to the upheavals and destabilization in 2000. Several represent Fiji's civil society, which is often divided along ethnic lines. Within the case, we do not attribute quotes to individual people because unless otherwise noted, the ideas below reflect themes we heard repeated across many people and interviews.

Many people expressed a fear that tensions and conflict in Fiji are likely to continue to escalate. A few even commented, "Fiji is always 5 hours away from a Rwanda-scale genocide." Others told us, "Fiji will never go the way of violence or civil war. It just won't happen in Fiji." This report explores the factors that contribute to these very different perspectives within and about Fiji's society. We begin with a brief discussion of Fiji's background and history. The discussion of our respondents' views is divided into two main parts—identifying those elements that contribute to an increase in tension and violence, and identifying those elements that constrain tension and violence. We then conclude with our perspective and analysis as authors.

Background and History

Fiji's population is split between Indigenous Fijians (51%) and Indo-Fijians (45%). There is also a minority community (5%) made up of people of Chinese, Rotuman, European and other Pacific Islander origin.

Indigenous Fijians are the largest ethnic group in Fiji, and make up just over 50% of the population. Indigenous Fijians own 90% of Fiji's land through a complex system of communal ownership, make up 99% of Fiji's military, 80% of Fiji's police force, 90% of Permanent Secretaries, 75% of Fiji's nurses, and hold the most senior positions in the justice system, military, and police force. Most Indigenous Fijians speak Fijian and English. Most are Christian and mainly Methodist. Fijian social structure is organized along provincial lines. At its apex are hereditary chiefs who play a powerful role in politics and society. Inter-provincial rivalry and differences create tension and conflict within the Indigenous Fijian community.

Indo-Fijians, Fijians of Indian origin, constitute the second largest ethnic community in Fiji, making up approximately 45% of the population. The first wave of people to come to Fiji from India came between 1889 and 1916, when over 40,000 indentured laborers were recruited from colonial India (including modern-day Bangladesh and Pakistan) to work on sugar plantations in Fiji. Most remained at the end of their terms. A second wave of immigration from India occurred in the mid-20th century when "free" Indians, including a substantial number of businessmen, came in search of economic opportunity. By the 1970s, the Indians associated with the second-wave of migration, most of whom came from the state of Gujarat, had come to rival Europeans for dominance in the small/medium scale enterprise sectors of the Fijian economy. The current Indo-Fijian community self-identifies as part of one of these two groups: descendents of farmers, or descendents of businessmen. But distinctions between Indians from South India, Northern India, and Gujarat provinces remain, and are sometimes a source of tension within the community. Most Indo-Fijians speak Hindi and English. Most are Hindu. A smaller proportion are Muslims or Christians.

Many pointed out to us that Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians get along well on a day-to-day basis. Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians work side-by-side in many workplaces. Middle class Fijians of both groups live together in mixed urban communities, with a sizeable amount of neighborly interaction. In rural areas, families have been living close to each other, though not in the same villages, for generations.

Nonetheless, there is still a great deal of separation. By and large, the two groups do not speak each others' language. There is very little intermarriage. People in both groups express a fair amount of suspicion and distrust about the other. Even within families with inter-ethnic marriages, acceptance and understanding has limits. As one Indigenous Fijian described, "My son-in-law is Indian, but I am still embarrassed if he shows up to cultural events." The two communities have racialized understandings of each other—we heard Indigenous Fijians describe Indo-Fijians with a clear set of group descriptors, and vice versa. In many cases, these are the same descriptions the communities use to describe themselves. Many Indigenous Fijians see themselves, and are seen by Indo-Fijians, as loyal to tradition, and emphasize duty to family, community and their chiefs over individual achievement. Many Indo-Fijians see themselves, and are described by Indigenous Fijians, as individualistic, success-oriented, hard-working, and placing a high premium on education. At various times, these divisions become more pronounced.

The minority “Other” community in Fiji is largely unnoticed. They have minimal voice, and are not recipients of affirmative action policies, which many claim is *de facto* discrimination. Some of these communities, such as those of Solomon Islander and Tuvalu origin, are among the poorest communities in the country.

Colonial Period

People mentioned several aspects of Colonial history that influence current tensions in Fiji, as follows (See Appendix 1 for a brief timeline of events in Fiji’s history):

- Definition of Racial / Ethnic Groups: Beginning in the 1920s, the British colonial administration defined groups along racial and ethnic lines for administrative purposes. The groups included Indo-Fijians, Indigenous Fijians, European (all “white people”) and Other (everyone else). These categories stuck and continue to shape the racialized thinking of Fijian society. These categories still serve as the basis for government policies today.
- Economy: British Colonial leaders had a “protective labor policy” aimed at ensuring the communities remained separate. They imported labor from India to work in sugar, cotton and other agricultural sectors. They allowed Indigenous Fijians to work in coconut, mining, the military and public services. While the purpose was ostensibly to protect Indigenous Fijians from commercial employment, this resulted in an ethnically-stratified labor force, with Indigenous Fijians concentrated in some of the lowest income and low-skilled occupations. The economic split remains today, though there is increasing integration. There was also a geographic stratification. The sugar industry for example was concentrated in Western and Northern regions. The coconut industry was concentrated in the Southern regions of the two main islands. This geographic separateness was part of a policy of divide and rule.
- Land: In 1874, the British divided the land in Fiji, as follows: 7% was owned by Europeans and other foreigners; 10% was crown land, which included land not yet claimed by Fijian landowners and land used for public purposes, and 83% was native land, claimed by Indigenous Fijian chiefs, which was communally owned. Native land was protected and could not be sold except to the Crown for public purposes. The concept of leasing native lands emerged with the increasing demand for colonial agricultural production, especially sugar cane. In 1880, Fijian landowners began granting leases. By the 1940s, the Native Land Trust Board was established to improve administration of the native lands for economic development. Indo-Fijians were barred from owning land (except a small proportion of freehold land). Land could, however, be leased under terms determined by the government.

The land issue remains contentious. Indo-Fijians are still rarely permitted to own land. A small number of more successful Indo-Fijians do own freehold lands in a few of the urban centers. Many Indigenous Fijians have begun not renewing the leases that Indo-Fijian families have held for generations. Since 1997, almost a 3rd of all sugar cane farming leases have not been renewed by indigenous land owners.

- Sugar Industry: As the sugar industry developed, Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) maintained monopoly control. CSR owned and operated sugar plantations on Fijian land, and relied upon sugar cane production by Indo-Fijian laborers and tenant farmers. The sugar industry continues to be the backbone of Fiji's economy, with minimal Indigenous Fijian involvement. It is managed by Europeans and farmed by Indo-Fijians. The current government has efforts underway to restructure the sugar industry, which are creating a great deal of controversy and tension.
- Constitution at Independence. Fiji gained Independence from Britain in 1970. The 1970 Constitution established communal representation defined along racial lines. It granted an equal number of seats in Parliament to Fijians and Indo-Fijians and a disproportionately large number of seats to the then economically and politically powerful "Other" grouping. The effect of this Constitution was near complete political separation of the communities.

1987 Coup

The April 1987 general elections were won by the Labor/ National Federation Party coalition, which defeated the Alliance Party, the established Indigenous Fijian party, in general elections. The Fiji Labor Party, which led the winning coalition, was the first truly multi-ethnic political party, and actively challenged the economic and political status quo. The Coalition's appointed Prime Minister, while Indigenous Fijian, was the first "commoner" rather than chief to rule Fiji. Over the next month, signs of unrest emerged: protestors organized roadblocks, submitted petitions in support of Fijian political supremacy, and organized protest marches. Many claimed that the Fiji Labor Party-led coalition government was "Indian dominated." Fijian nationalists expressed concern about threats to Fijian identity, and the fear of erosion of the land tenure system that grants native Fijians title over 80% of Fiji.

In May and October of 1987, 3rd ranking Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka staged a military coup, the first in the South Pacific, in the name of indigenous rights. (This actually took two separate military interventions, but it is often described as one overarching coup.) He abrogated the 1970 Constitution, then ceded control to civilian authorities, giving leadership to members of the Alliance Party who had been defeated in the general elections earlier that year. During the period around the coups, the situation remained very volatile and insecure.

Sporadic violence spread around Suva. Some protests between coup supporters and detractors turned violent, and there were repeated incidents of arson, looting, and riots, primarily targeted at Indo-Fijians. While there was some violence—and certainly a perception of insecurity on behalf of Indo-Fijians at the time—in retrospect, people now describe the period following the coup as comparatively "smooth" and "calm" compared to the upheavals that were to follow in 2000. But, some people pointed out that at the time, an illegal arms shipment was found, which some saw "as a sign of imminent Indian revolt." However, nothing ever materialized, and few appeared to take it seriously.

1990 Constitution and 1997 Constitution

A new Constitution was imposed in 1990 through presidential decree by the unelected government that took office following the 1987 coup. The 1990 Constitution aimed to ensure Indigenous Fijian dominance of Parliament. It introduced an entirely communal voting structure that guaranteed Indigenous Fijians a disproportionate number of seats. The offices of President, Prime Minister, Chief Justice, and the heads of the military, police, and public service were reserved explicitly for Indigenous Fijians. Among other affirmative-action policies, Indigenous Fijians were guaranteed at least 50% of all civil service positions. The 1990 Constitution also provided a mechanism for suspending the Bill of Rights with a simple majority act of Parliament. The international community responded to this Constitution with harsh criticism. Some compared it to South Africa's apartheid system. Some remarked that the Constitution not only discriminated against Indo-Fijians and other non-Indigenous Fijians, but also denied political rights to lower income and commoner Indigenous Fijians—anyone who might challenge the traditional authority of the chiefly hierarchy.

International pressure continued until, immediately following the 1994 elections, a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Constitution was established. This group appointed a Constitutional Review Commission to review the 1990 Constitution. A new Constitution was approved and promulgated in July 1997. It included a provision for power sharing in the formation of a multiethnic Cabinet from among parties winning seats in the Lower House. Forty-six MPs would continue to represent ethnic constituencies while 25 MPS would be elected in the open (non-ethnic) role. The purpose of this was to compel politicians to campaign on non-ethnic platforms. The Constitution went some distance in reducing the overbearing racialist emphasis of the 1990 Constitution. It provided for a new and strong bill of rights guaranteeing individual human rights. It provided for a new human rights commission. It removed constitutional restrictions on non-indigenous communities' holding high offices. But it also ensured that Indigenous Fijians, who were now a majority in population, were guaranteed a majority in Parliament and that their group rights and interests were firmly protected through veto powers of the nominated representatives of the Council of Chiefs in an unelected upper house (Senate).

1999 Election and 2000 Coup

Elections were held in May 1999 under the new 1997 constitution. The Labor/Party of National Unity / Fijian Association Party coalition won. Mahendra Chaudhry was sworn in as Fiji's first non-Indigenous Prime Minister. Chaudhry and his government moved quickly, and tackled some of the more contentious issues. For example, he tried to resolve issues of land tenancy, and took on government corruption, especially tax evasion. He also reversed a number of unpopular economic reform measures including a general sales tax and privatization. His actions and the pace of the changes he was spearheading upset a wide range of people and entrenched interests, including many in his own party who were frustrated at his style, which many said to be "arrogant."

Within months, Indigenous Fijian nationalists commenced a destabilization campaign in indigenous rural communities. They distributed photocopied leaflets throughout the country providing misinformation. Some, for example, spoke of a “confidential masterplan” detailing the Chaudhry government’s plot to make Fiji a colony of India. Many recall that chiefs and community leaders (especially church leaders) encouraged people to protest the government’s policies. Protest marches were organized in several cities and grew increasingly large as time went by. Then on May 19th, 10,000 people marched in Suva. Some suggest that this march was planned as a front for the coup.

While the march was taking place, armed men stormed Parliament and took the government hostage in an attempted coup. The armed takeover was led by George Speight, an Indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalist who had been dismissed by the new government as chairman of a government commission to oversee the commercial harvesting of large scale mahogany (hard wood timber) resources. Speight is usually described as a failed businessman, and a commoner (not a chief) who emerged during the coup from relative obscurity. He and his supporters took hostage almost the entire People’s Coalition government, and demanded the 1997 Constitution be abrogated and a new Indigenous Fijian government be installed.

The hostages were held for 56 days. During that time, the Fiji Military Forces attempted to regain control, with considerable difficulty. The military itself became deeply divided into those who supported the coup and those who supported the rule of law. The military negotiated for the release of the government, “abrogated” the constitution, imposed a state of emergency and direct military rule, and dismissed the current President. People noted that at the time, it was unclear who was in control. For a while, power appeared to oscillate between the military top brass and the President, until he was “dismissed”.

During the hostage period, there were episodes of violence in Suva and surrounding communities. The day of the hostage taking, widespread rioting and looting broke out in Suva. This was brought under control in a few days, though people continued to stream into the city and enter the Parliament compound where the hostages were being held. Many contend that some powerful chiefs were encouraging villagers to participate in the continued violence. This violence included the systematic looting and burning of Indo-Fijian homes, temples, and businesses in Suva and in neighboring provinces. In one hard-hit community on the outskirts of Suva, called Muaniweni, 30 Indo-Fijian families were evacuated for their safety by a humanitarian agency after a series of beatings, theft and killing of farm animals, and destruction of their homes. (Ninety percent of these families returned within a year.) People in and around Suva all describe this period as insecure and sometimes dangerous. Indo-Fijians report feeling scared, unsure if the violence would escalate. Indigenous Fijians also describe having been scared because they did not know who was in control, or “just how deep the unrest went.” Reports were mixed from the other side of the main island. Some Indo-Fijian farmers faced similar targeting, especially in Dreketi. Most said they had felt scared that what was happening could also happen to them, while few others said that they were not concerned by “what was going on over there in Suva.” Anxiety worsened when all the police stations on Vanua Levu

and the military barracks were taken over by the “rebels” who held the island under their control until reinforcements arrived from Viti Levu and regained control a month later.

The hostages were released on July 14 with the installation of an almost exclusively Indigenous Fijian Interim Administration. Many said that with the release of the hostages, they no longer felt insecure. George Speight was arrested two weeks later, and subsequently charged with treason.

Many Indigenous Fijians describe a second event that was even more troubling than the coup, the November 2000 Mutiny within the Army. Shortly after the government decided to charge Speight with treason for the coup, troops in the elite Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (which had been actively involved in the coup) seized the armoury and other buildings at the army’s headquarter’s in Suva, then attempted to arrest army chief Commander Frank Bainimarama, who evaded capture. In the ensuing counter-offensive, four soldiers were killed, and four mutineers were beaten to death after being captured. A subsequent investigation suggested that the mutiny was not a spontaneous protest over the government’s decision to charge Speight with treason, but the start of an attempted coup. The aim, allegedly, was to replace military chief Bainimarama and oust the interim government. This episode shocked many Indigenous Fijians, as it was the first incidence of violence within the Fijian community. As well, it revealed an ongoing insecurity that still troubles many Indigenous Fijians. This incident exploded a sense of calm that had prevailed within the indigenous community. Deep provincial rivalries emerged, dividing the whole indigenous community and its institutions, like the Council of Chiefs.

In the coming year, the constitution was restored through the courts. A citizen named Chandrika Prasad filed a human rights challenge in the Fiji High Court contesting the takeover. (See Appendix 2 for additional information on this case.) Many citizen’s groups became involved in fighting this case, filing affidavits that showed popular rejection of the attempted coup and demonstrating their support for the Constitution and contending that the government did not represent their interests as it claimed. Both the High Court and the Fiji Court of Appeal ruled that the coup was illegal, and reinstated the 1997 Constitution and thus paved the way for a return to constitutionality. In another court case, the Citizen’s Constitutional Forum asked the High Court to direct the President to reconvene the 1999 Parliament rather than order fresh elections. The High Court controversially rejected this challenge, and instead supported a return to constitutionality via a fresh general election under the 1997 Constitution, under the scrutiny of the UN and the Commonwealth. Fresh elections were held in September 2001, and signaled the transition to the new government led by the SDL and supported by the Conservatives who had backed Speight and the takeover.

Charges continued to be leveled against many of the participants in the coup. Thirteen perpetrators were charged with treason. In February 2002, George Speight pleaded guilty to treason. Two other participants were found guilty in March 2003, and are awaiting sentencing. Investigations into the involvement of a number of others including the present Vice President and the deputy speaker of the Parliament are continuing.

Since the May 2000 events, there has been a downturn in the economy. Tourism decreased because of the unrest, the garment industry slowed because of perceived insecurity, the sugar industry is slowing because of disputes over land, and even the mahogany trade cannot take off because of divisions among Indigenous Fijians about land holding. Most point out that even though Indigenous Fijians were supposed to be the beneficiaries of both coups, many rural Indigenous Fijians have been the hardest hit.

Analyses of the 2000 Coup

There has been a great deal written analyzing the causes of the 2000 coup. The perspectives include the following:

- Some scholars argue it was a result of ethnic tensions erupting, and that Indigenous Fijians could not accept a prominent role for Indo-Fijians in government.
- Others argue that race/ethnicity was a smokescreen and that the coup reflected divisions within the Fijian community. The underlying motivations were really about personal power and wealth, and commoners versus chiefs within the Indigenous Fijian community. People involved in the coup felt that the Kubuna confederacy, involving the provinces of Tailevu, Naitasiri and Navosa had remained politically and economically marginal since independence. It was time that power was transferred to them and their chiefs.
- Others argue it was a consequence of segments of Fiji's society seeking to destabilize a center-left leaning government (e.g. employers and politicians who lost out in the 1999 election). Some large businesses felt threatened by investigations into corruption and tax evasion, and feared a government comprised of Fiji's most prominent trade unionists and activists. In the destabilisation, these factors overlapped and fed into each other – creating a powerful anti-government momentum. Such pressures were used to win loyalties in the public services and the military – institutions that were central to making an overthrow possible.

Analyzing Violence in Fiji's Society

Before discussing the factors that people identified as contributing to or constraining violence, it is important to point out that people all talked about these factors in relation to four different categories of conflict:

Conflict between Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians.

Many Indo-Fijians mentioned this as a possibility; even though they went on to say it was unlikely. Very few Indigenous Fijians suggested they are concerned about this.

Conflict within the Indigenous Fijian community.

Nearly all Indigenous Fijians noted that the only place they see potential violence is within the Indigenous Fijian community, primarily within institutions such as the Council of Chiefs. For example chiefs who supported the coup recently tried unsuccessfully to get the Council of Chiefs to pardon those involved in the 2000 upheavals. The Council of Chiefs thus remains very divided over events associated with the 2000 upheavals.

Some Indo-Fijians also mentioned the divisions within the indigenous community and feared they would be scape-goated in any intra-ethnic conflict.

Conflict between institutions of the state.

People cited a growing differences between some of the civilian wings of government such as the President's and the Prime Minister's office and the judicial system that could erupt into a more open conflict. Differences of political opinion on the Constitution, especially with regards to the provisions for Multi-Party Government, could, they say, erupt into a more open conflict.

Conflict within the military.

People noted that a potential location of conflict is within the military, which has suffered from the events of May 2000. The most violent chapter in Fiji's recent history was the uprising against the military leadership by military supporters of the 2000 overthrow of government. The tensions and scars associated with this episode have not gone away. Views are mixed as to whether the ongoing court cases of accused military members will help reduce the tensions or fuel more divisions. Many noted that military's difficulties are exacerbated by the different outside groups (e.g. chiefs, political leaders, nationalists, etc.) who compete for control and influence within the military as a way of furthering their agendas.

Factors that Increase the Likelihood of Violent Conflict

This section explores where things in Fiji could have gone "more wrong", or escalated into violence. People with whom we spoke identified the following factors as things that contribute to escalating tension, or "risk factors." Some of these factors increase the likelihood of interethnic conflict and violence, while others impact conflict within the Indigenous Fijian community (where Indo-Fijians are still vulnerable as scapegoats). Our own analysis appears in the Analysis/Conclusions section.

Both communities feel vulnerable with regard to the other.

Respondents all described that Indigenous Fijians have a real and perceived sense of exclusion from the mainstream commercial economy in both urban and rural areas. Many attribute this to Indigenous Fijians' poor educational status. As well, many Indigenous Fijian politicians report feeling that Indigenous Fijian exclusion and under-representation is a product of deliberate and often unfair practices on the part of Indo-Fijians and others in the commercial sectors. They feel that minority communities have conspired to deliberately keep them away from the commercial spheres. There is a perception among Indigenous Fijians that Indo-Fijians are all wealthy, and that their commercial success has come at the expense of indigenous community. To overcome this perception of inequality and unfairness in the commercial spheres, many Indigenous Fijians feel that it is necessary to retain control of the government in Indigenous Fijian hands.

Among many Indigenous Fijians, there is also a perception that their ownership and control over land and other resources is precarious. They are acutely aware that large tracts of their land were lost to foreigners during the colonial period, and they do not want to see a repeat of this. Thus, there is a perception that political control is important to ensure that “greedy foreigners” are unable to alienate Fijian land and natural resources through political manipulations. The perception about vulnerability of indigenous rights is what matters. All of Fiji’s constitutions since its independence (1970, 1990 and 1999) have included explicit and far-reaching provisions to ensure that indigenous rights are well protected (CCF, 1990).

As well, many say that with the transition from the traditional way of life towards globalization, their identity as indigenous peoples is being threatened.

Indo-Fijians perceive themselves to be vulnerable because of their diluted political rights and marginal role in governance; the belief that they have been denied a fair share of state resources for education and employment; their precarious access to land that is leased from indigenous landowners; the displacement of large numbers of Indo-Fijian tenants (when Indigenous Fijians do not renew land leases) who have no other means of sustenance and who already feel a real sense of political marginalization; and the scars of two military coups and subsequent ethnic violence. Indo-Fijians received little or no government assistance for rebuilding their businesses and communities after the coup-related violence, but had to find resources themselves. As one described, “It was a bad dream. We put back the pieces and moved on.” Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians both report that many Indo-Fijians still feel their identity is not respected. Indo-Fijian farmers in particular are in a vulnerable position. The majority are poor and not well educated. They are largely a landless community, yet reliant on the land for survival. With the removal of land and/or government support, they have little.

“People have been conditioned to think in terms of us and them.”

Everyone identified the “us”/“them” mentality as a risk factor. The communities are still quite separate. This separation has several factors.

- “Us” and “them” acceptable as basis for policy

Public policies often reaffirm the “us” and “them” dichotomy, enforcing ethnic labeling. For example, when Fiji citizens depart or arrive in the country, they are required to state their ethnic group on documentation. As well, the Government supports community development for Indigenous Fijians through a department referred to as the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, and development for Indo-Fijian and other minority communities through the Ministry for Multi-Ethnic Affairs. Many feel such policies undermine fragile efforts to create a national identity.

- Limited social and cultural interactions

In many regions, separation is physical—in the countryside, Indigenous Fijians live in villages, while the Indo-Fijians who farm live on their individual leased farmlands.

The physical separation of communities in rural areas continues to ensure that many schools remain segregated as well. Several elite schools maintained by the government are almost exclusively Indigenous Fijian. Schools are referred to as Fijian or Indian Schools.

Cross-ethnic cultural and social interactions are minimal. Inter-marriage is rare enough to warrant news stories, and often associated with social sanctions. During periods of heightened conflict, cross-ethnic marriages and other social interactions decrease. Even when interactions across ethnic groups do take place, such as those at higher educational institutions or ethnically-mixed workplaces, many explained that these interactions often remain comparatively formal and detached.

People pointed out that this overall separation contributes to stereotyping and allows for easier exploitation of those stereotypes. Even where people from different groups live side-by-side, most people still talk about “those Indo-Fijians” as compared to “we Fijians,” and vice versa.

Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians feel that the other community does not respect their customs, traditions, and religious beliefs. Vigorous moves by some groups to convert Indo-Fijians to Christianity and the continuing push by some nationalist political leaders to declare Fiji a Christian state are often cited as evidence for the disrespect that the indigenous community has for non-Christian Indo-Fijian culture. Indigenous Fijians, on the other hand, feel that Indo-Fijians do not respect the traditional and communal order of indigenous society in some of their statements, actions, and dealings with their community.

- Lack of national identity

Many people note the absence of a national identity. There is no common name for citizens—the term “Fijians” refers only to Indigenous Fijians. The 1997 Constitution makes an effort to classify all citizens as Fiji Islanders, but this is a term that has still not taken off in popular or practical usage.

Indo-Fijians and other minorities also report a sense of alienation from the symbols of the state. These communities play a marginal role during national ceremonies and functions, and since 1987, most do not identify with such functions as Fiji’s Independence Day celebrations. Within the Indigenous Fijian community, an absence of a national identity also presents itself in a more complex manner. For traditional Fijian institutions, allegiance to the “Vanua”, which refers broadly to the local village and province, is more important than allegiance to the country. Traditional practices further amplify separation between communal groups and provinces.

Some suggest that the lack of a national language perhaps contributes most to the absence of a national identity. Only a small proportion of Fijians and Indo-Fijians can speak each other’s language. While English serves as a national language by default,

it cannot be used by the greater proportion of the adult population as a means for cross-ethnic communication.

People express concern that with external triggers, such as the economic downturn or natural disasters (like the devastating cyclone in 2003), people are prone to become more racialized in their thinking and Indigenous Fijians are more likely to blame Indo-Fijians for their predicament, whether it be economic exclusion or other disadvantages. As Fiji's economic woes worsen, many feel this cycle of blaming Indo-Fijians will become more acute.

Communal electoral system encourages ethnic division.

People noted that Fiji's political system encourages politicians to cater to separate ethnic groups. Elections in Fiji are conducted almost exclusively under an ethnic voting system. Indigenous Fijians are required to vote for Indigenous Fijian members, and the same is true for Indo-Fijians and Others. Voters are able to vote for candidates from other ethnic communities for a small number of seats in Parliament ("open seats" versus "communal seats"). Electoral rules emphasize and reward ethnic exclusivity rather than cross-ethnic cooperation. While the 1997 system changed the electoral system (by adding open seats) in order to encourage parties to widen their platforms, the small number of such seats means that it has not had much effect.

Typically parties and politicians feed on group insecurities and present themselves as custodians and protectors of ethnic group rights. The two main parties, the SDL and the Fiji Labor Parties (FLP) are comprised almost exclusively of either Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian elected members (SDL: 36 out of 37 members are Indigenous Fijians; FLP: 25 out of 27 members are Indo-Fijians). There is little incentive or political reward for moderating behavior such as making appeals on cross-ethnic group issues. Maintaining ethnic group hostilities and playing on ethnic group anxieties is thus a useful strategy to mobilize support both to win power and to stay in power. Even with a more class-based political party like the FLP, the electoral system and an ethnically organized labor market ensures that ethnicity is the predominant organizing principle for electoral competition and rewards. Each time opportunities have opened for electoral reform, Fiji's political leaders have balked at moving the system decisively away from its emphasis on race.

Some have argued that this ethnically-based electoral and political system prevents the emergence of a shared national identity (See Prasad, S., in Lodhi eds, 2000).

Divisions within the Indigenous Fijian community are increasing

Many pointed out the increasing divisions within the Indigenous Fijian community that have begun to create tension. They cite class differences (commoner vs. chief, where the chiefs benefit from the landholding rules more than poorer people), generational differences, provincialism/ regional affiliations, and nepotism and favoritism of areas that have had chiefs in national government.

There are several significant divisions on provincial lines. (See Appendix 3 for a map of Fiji.) First is the perceived domination of Fiji's politics by the eastern Lauan Maritime

Provinces since Fiji's independence under the leadership of the Lauan Prime Minister and later President Ratu Mara. Under Ratu Mara's leadership, development in Lau and the Lauan influence in industry, public service, and the military increased considerably, leading to resentment elsewhere. The central Viti Levu provinces of Naitasiri and Namosi are among the poorest of all provinces, despite being rich in resources. A large number of supporters of the 2000 upheavals came from this region. They blamed chiefly Fijian governments for their region's marginalization and their revolt was as much against the Presidency of Ratu Mara as it was against an Indian-dominated government. Many Lauans now blame Naitasiri for the removal of Ratu Mara as the President of the country.

Fijians in the western Viti Levu provinces also resent their politically marginal role. The 1987 and the 1999 elections brought parties to power that were supported heavily by Indigenous Fijians in Western Fiji – the country's economic powerhouse and the location of sugar, tourism, gold and pine industries. Many western Fijians saw the overthrow of these governments in 1987 and 2000 as designed to continue eastern hegemony over Fiji's politics. Following both these coups, some voices in the Western regions called for greater regional autonomy and in fact complete independence.

Real economic and political inequalities underlie the growing divisions between Fijian provinces. Such inequalities, people note, fan the flames of provincialism. Many suggest these differences could escalate into violence within the indigenous community, and/or that the Indo-Fijian community could be targeted as a "common enemy" in an effort to smooth over these divisions.

Several people pointed out that tensions within the Indigenous Fijian community increase as chiefs struggle to regain and retain power. Many Indigenous Fijians noted that the Fijian social structure stands at an interface of the modern and the traditional. Chiefs as traditional leaders may also engage in competitive commerce or electoral politics, and may manipulate traditional loyalties for personal political ends in the modern world. Many pointed out that these are worrisome and at times divisive developments for a community torn by the competing demands of tradition and the needs of the modern market-based economy.

Several Indigenous Fijians commented that these divisions are threatening because "People don't know how deep the divisions go." Others point out that "Grassroots Fijians are angry. Their boys are in prison, while the people who gave the orders for their participation in the 2000 destabilization and upheavals are free."

The Indigenous Fijian population is seen as highly susceptible to manipulation. Many describe Indigenous Fijian culture as compliant and attached to tradition, claiming that Indigenous Fijians "don't challenge authority," and are "loyal to their chiefs." The indigenous social structure is complex and multi-layered. A continuous socialization process reinforces chiefly authority and obedience to chiefs and the "vanua". Traditional leadership is important in organizing social life, the division of labor, and the management of group resources such as land and forestry. The fact that land and natural resources are owned collectively (tribe or province) reinforces the need for obedience to

chiefs and unity within the social group. Many say the Indigenous Fijian obedience to authority is problematic, as it leaves people prone to manipulation.

In 2000, chiefs enflamed people for their own ends. Many people have come forward to say that they were directed by chiefs and politicians to become involved in the violence and unrest. Many suggested that politicians manipulate the general populations, “only using their constituencies to further their own ambitions for power.”

Increasing levels of poverty increase racial unrest and violence.

Growing poverty has contributed, and continues to be seen to contribute, to both increased inter and intra-ethnic group conflict.

Many cite growing poverty as a contributor to intensified racial violence, primarily through youth. The scale of poverty has increased dramatically over the last decade, and one in three families is now estimated to live under conditions of poverty. In the capital Suva, youth unemployment is as high as 60 percent (UNDP, 2000). The majority are Indigenous Fijians. This reflects both demographic features of the capital as well as differential educational levels between the ethnic communities. The increasing poverty leads to a reduction in state resources to deal with exclusion issues, while those feeling excluded are predominantly from one community. The disenchanted urban unemployed youth become voter pools to be manipulated, fertile ground for communal and extremist political leaders. They also become potential militias; these are the youth who participated in the violence and looting in Suva in 2000. As one NGO activist said, “So far these youth have been brought back on the leash by their leaders. I can’t say that will necessarily keep happening.”

When the “other side” is blamed for the economic woes of the indigenous community, unemployment supports increasing day-to-day ethnic crime as well. The vast majority of robberies and violent crimes in Suva are committed by young Indigenous Fijians and the victims are Indo-Fijians. Indigenous Fijians comprise approximately 90 percent of the prison population.

Poverty between regions is also significant. For example the Naitasiri and Serua provinces, where few cash income-generating and wage employment opportunities have been created, neighbor the capital, Suva, where wage and salaried employment are concentrated. Excluded groups in these regions see that they are missing out on resources and development that remain concentrated in urban regions and the capital. They are more willing, therefore, to support extremist nationalist political leaders who claim to support their cause and redress the political and economic imbalances. Some suggest that these people are more willing to provide their support even in ways that involve violence.

Indigenous Fijian Nationalism is becoming increasingly extremist.

People mentioned several elements that contribute to a strengthening of indigenous nationalism and, consequently, ethnic tensions.

- Fijian nationalists still play a prominent role in government.
Everyone notes the fact that Fijian nationalists are still in control of government as a critical factor contributing to tensions. Several ministers, the Vice President, and the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament were directly associated with the coup of 2000. The new Prime Minister subsequently appointed several high-powered supporters of the coup to important positions in the public service. As many respondents explained, “Those same individuals who were involved in the last coup are powerfully placed today, and could cause the same problems.” These nationalists base their platform on concern about threats to Fijian identity; fear of erosion of land rights; fear that they will be reduced to the status of other indigenous minorities in the region. They feel Fijian dominance of government is necessary to ensure that state resources are allocated preferentially to enable Indigenous Fijians to escape their disadvantaged position.

Many described, “This party understands its mandate as serving the people, but they define “people” only as rural Fijian poor, whereas only 50% of the country is Fijian, and only 40% of them are rural, let alone the Indo-Fijians.”

Many contend that these politicians are motivated by personal aggrandizement rather than community welfare. People say that the language of indigenous rights has been used to cover up more basic motivations of political power and self-enrichment. That is, everyone cites that there are many people in power who want more power, and who will manipulate the population to get there.

- Churches are increasingly being used as justification of Fijian paramountcy.
Many express concern that churches are increasing the strength of these nationalist claims and Fijian paramountcy. The dominant Methodist Church is seen to be closely allied with aspirations for Indigenous Fijian paramountcy. Christianity has been used by many churches to justify the chiefly tradition and Fijian customs. Previous rulers, including Rabuka (who carried out the 1987 coup) linked Christianity to politics, and put in place overtly Christian policies, including a ban on activity on Sundays. These policies are deeply offensive to many Indo-Fijians. Many Christian groups are again advocating for Fiji to become a Christian state. Some critics have suggested that the push for Christianizing the state “has nothing to do with Christianity, just with Fijian paramountcy.” Some argue that converting non-Christians is way of ensuring that Fiji becomes a Christian state.

Some of the churches and their leaders were directly involved in the May 2000 upheavals, asserting their presence inside the Parliament when the government was under siege, and legitimizing those who held the government hostage for 56 days. This signaled a new phase of church activism with several religious leaders taking part in direct political action, rather than supporting political actions from the pulpit only. Some of these leaders continue to make strong representations to release those convicted of treason and related crimes.

Many also mentioned that a new wave of fundamentalist churches, described as “the most destructive export from the United States,” are contributing to an escalation in tension, as they are also increasingly being used to justify Fijian paramountcy. Some churches preach “a kind of Fiji Israelism,” referring to Indigenous Fijians as the “chosen people” in Fiji. These churches are increasingly political, working closely with allies in government. Many reported that there was strong evidence that leaders of the Methodist church and a coalition of these fundamentalist churches were directing their followers to vote for SDL and the Conservative Alliance during the last elections.

Many current or former members of the church complain that there is little room for dissension within the church community, saying, “The church has only one official voice.” Some of these alternative voices have left the church. They complain that the increase of fundamentalist churches is increasing the level of potentially destructive, nationalist rhetoric.

- There is a history of “indigenous rights” being used as justification for coups. The previous coups were based on the language of “indigenous rights” and the claim that political rights of “Indians” represented a threat to these rights. Coups became a way of securing Fijian leadership and dominance, and through that, protecting indigenous rights. Many voice a concern this platform could be used again to justify a coup, or at least the need for ongoing Indigenous Fijian political dominance. Nationalist leaders take over indigenous causes like compensation for past injustices, or securing better claims for some public good (like providing land for building a hydroelectricity dam) as a means to mobilize public opinion. During the 2000 upheavals, the issue of native timber resources was used to mobilize popular support.
- “Affirmative action” has become racial discrimination. Many point out that the affirmative action policies that began in order to protect the indigenous community now support discrimination based on race. These policies commit significant resources for improving education, reducing poverty, and improving participation in commerce and industry exclusively for Indigenous Fijians. Nationalist politicians resist moderating or adapting these policies, though they have resulted in systematic and institutionalized discrimination. There is increasing Indo-Fijian anger and frustration about this. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) stated in March 2003 that Indo-Fijians suffer from racial discrimination, and call upon the government to make changes.
- “Hate speech” is increasingly present in Parliament. Members of Parliament frequently make racial comments, and the general tone of discussion is hostile and accusatory. While racial outbursts have been a characteristic of Fiji society for some time, the frequency and intensity of some of

the hate speech now being expressed concerns most observers. To many, this development signals a deterioration in race relations. It may also indicate that a larger proportion of Fiji's elected leaders are less committed to promoting inter-ethnic group understanding and reconciliation than was previously the case. Many say that this is the most important thing that needs to be controlled, in order to slow further deterioration in race relations.

Political leaders are still trying to create instability.

Many mention that there are political leaders "who benefit from the current situation" and thus are still trying to create instability. Others say, "The powers in charge want to keep a general level of unrest. There's no intention on the part of the leaders to debunk anything." There have been periodic comments from members of Parliament that "We cannot rule out the possibility of another coup." There is consistent mention of potential coups in the media. More recently, there is renewed talk about snap elections in early 2004. Some see the renewal of tensions between the military and branches of the Government in April and May 2003 as deliberate destabilization.

Deterioration in community leadership increases space for extremists.

Many in both communities described, "We have a leadership problem as a country."

Within the Indigenous Fijian community, it appears that most people do not see their political leaders as "real leaders." For the majority in rural areas, leadership is decided by the village and vanua through traditional means. Party political leaders tend to be subservient to this traditional leadership structure. We were told that in polls conducted in communities asking people to whom they turn for leadership. MPs were not even on the list, and government officials were at the bottom. High on the list were people outside formal power hierarchies, such as heads of family and community leaders such as ministers. However, many say that community leadership is not as cohesive as it used to be. Some claim that the shift to a democratic system at Independence (versus traditional Fijian systems) undermined the communal chiefly system on which Indigenous Fijian culture is based. Some feel that traditional leaders have been disempowered from effectively helping people cope with the rapid changes caused by modernization and globalization. This is seen as a problem, in a community that traditionally had strong hierarchical leadership. People feel that it causes the disempowered leaders to take extreme actions to try to get more power, or it can mean that once the situation begins to escalate, there are not leaders in place to bring it back under control.

Talented leaders with cross-ethnic appeal become disheartened with the political process and thus do not present themselves as candidates. This leaves space for more radical leaders who mix electoral politics with direct political action involving unlawful means. This new approach to politics is gaining a stronghold across Indigenous Fijian society. For example, elected leaders may support the takeover of public property by landowning groups in order to make the case for compensation. In this process, they directly confront police and authorities and also undermine the role of the courts or other processes for settling compensation claims. Leaders who are willing to support such direct action in local constituencies are in the ascendancy at present.

Indo-Fijians also cite that there is a vacuum of leadership within their community. The emigration of educated Indo-Fijians is leading to a decrease in quality leadership. As well, many point out that leaders who have been fighting the struggle for a long time are weary, and therefore stepping aside. This could lead to an increasingly volatile situation, if the situation for poor Indo-Fijian farmers continues to deteriorate, leading to additional anger and frustration, and there is an absence of seasoned moderate leaders.

Unresolved issues from earlier coups contribute to instability.

Nearly everyone mentioned that many issues remain unresolved from the earlier coups. Three years later, the news every day still has stories about fall-out from the coup, including court cases, sentencing, and political reactions. The continuing prosecution of those associated with the 2000 coup is creating tensions and instability generally. There is considerable pressure on authorities to stop prosecutions and investigations.

Some feel the current government is not doing enough to address the real issues. As one person noted, “The current government is trying to band-aid things. Work was done on building bridges, but it didn’t get down to the grassroots. Real grievances are not being addressed.” The government has reconciliation processes in place, but many say these are proceeding in “the wrong direction” in a way that risks alienating Indo-Fijians. The Ministry of Reconciliation is pursuing reconciliation among Indigenous Fijians (rather than including Indo-Fijians), and according to the language of Christianity.

The media is used to exacerbate tensions.

Fiji has national English language media, as well as a number of vernacular radio stations and weekly newspapers. Some mentioned a concern that the media, particularly radio, are not always smartly used, but instead can contribute to tension—for example, by broadcasting the hate speech in Parliament; by presenting frequent inexpert reporting; and by being increasingly “corporatized” and therefore “unidimensional and under suspect agendas.

Many pointed out that during the 2000 coup, extremist and nationalist fringes of leadership used the media with few controls or checks to promote the cause of indigenous nationalism. Those who did attempt to control media were targeted and marginalized. Many NGO staff and members of civil society mentioned that the content and influence of ethnic media will remain an important issue for Fiji in trying to overcome the cycles of ethnic conflict.

Ethnic media, especially radio programs in the Fijian language, are often highly nationalistic and their reporting is at odds with official policy. Radio is the main means of communication for rural communities.

Some people in the military are extreme.

Many mentioned ongoing concern about the role of the military. Some people in the military supported the extreme nationalists and perpetrated violence in the past. The mutiny in the barracks in September 2000, carried out by soldiers loyal to the coup

perpetrators, was one of the most violent episodes in Fiji's recent history. The mutinous troops evidently had widespread support within the military at the time. Although the mutiny was unsuccessful, it demonstrated that the military was divided, with extremist fringes. Such divisions continue, compounded by strong provincial rivalry within the ranks.

Since 1987 it has become clear that the control of the military is necessary for Indigenous Fijian leaders making a claim for national leadership. As political competition becomes more intense between groups within Fijian society, many fear it is likely that such competition will spread within the military forces. Leadership struggles within the military exacerbate fragmentation within the ranks. This occurred in 2000 in the Northern Island of Vanua Levu when the majority of soldiers broke rank and formed an autonomous force for a period.

The situations among Indo-Fijian farmers is increasingly tenuous.

Some pointed out that fear is high among many Indo-Fijians, who depend on leased land for their livelihood. Many have not had their leases renewed, and either have been forced to leave, or are living day-by-day on land without a lease, knowing they could be evicted at any point. Approximately 3000 families have already been evicted, and others fear that they will soon be evicted. Many Indo-Fijians express fear that they will be robbed, or that their children attacked, by Indigenous Fijians nearby.

Displaced tenants and their families face problems on a number of fronts. They do not have adequate assistance from the state, given its preferential policies. Many move and set up homes in equally precarious circumstances, which often strains social relationships in the areas where they settle next. Compounding this problem is their political helplessness. Their political representatives are confined to opposition benches and therefore unable to influence government policy. As the numbers within this evicted group increase, these resulting tensions are likely to escalate.

Potential Triggers to Violence

We asked people to identify potential "triggers" to further violence. There were four common responses.

Supreme Court ruling on multi-party government.

Multiparty government is a legal requirement in Fiji, where the party that loses the election but gains a significant portion of the votes must be included in the Prime Minister's Cabinet. After the 1999 election, the ruling SDL-party did not include the Fiji Labor Party within the Prime Minister's cabinet. The Labor Party filed a lawsuit against this. In June 2003, there will be a ruling on whether the current government is required to include Fiji Labor Party within the Prime Minister's cabinet.

Some people are concerned the court decision could trigger violence. Many current cabinet ministers will lose their positions if multiparty government is mandated. Thus,

people predict some politicians and parties will provoke trouble. In Fiji's recent past, agitators have triggered communal violence to score political points. It is likely that communal passions can be whipped up to lead to violence to "show" that when Indians do come into Cabinet then there will be a repeat of ethnic conflict and violence.

Many prominent figures have stated that they do not think multiparty government is possible. For example, the Director of the Ministry of Reconciliation echoed a pervasive view in noting "I can't believe legal arrangements will make a difficult marriage work. Politicians by definition won't give an inch. They are a species who can't do this. We have to recognize a failure of the system. We're not happily married. It will be difficult for a legal option to work." The government, thus, may choose to go to election rather than introduce a multiparty government. People say a snap election could result in an extreme escalation in violence and threats.

Nationalist leaders gain control of military.

Shortly after the field visit, it was announced that the current government will not renew the contract of the current commander of the military (who served during the hostage crisis). There is concern that the nationalist government may be gaining additional control of the army by removing him. Many believe that if the government succeeds in removing the present commander, it might be able to pursue a general amnesty for soldiers involved in the 2000 coups, based on traditional Indigenous Fijian reconciliation and forgiveness processes. Many people stand to gain from such a process. The Conservative party may withdraw support for the SDL government if this does not occur, as their platform for the 2001 elections was based upon the release of those convicted for 2000-related.

Court cases are currently underway prosecuting people who allegedly participated in the mutiny in the barracks. Fiji's Vice President, and a high Chief from the Kabuna confederacy, have recently been charged. Some fear these charges could provoke violence within the indigenous community, if foot soldiers and "front" people are convicted while the organizers of the mutiny (and the coup) remain free. The current message from the military and the police is that they will support the rule of law

Collapse of the sugar industry.

Fiji's economy remains vulnerable because it is small and dependent upon a few sectors such as sugar and tourism. The sugar industry is the main economic activity of a large part of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The mass unemployment that would inevitably follow a collapse of the sugar industry would lay the ground for extremist politicians promoting simple solutions to deep problems.

Non-indigenous person in leadership.

Previous coups have occurred when Indo-Fijians gained political leadership. Many suggest that if this occurs again—while unlikely in the current political climate—it would again spark trouble. It is certainly possible that Indo-Fijians will be included in future governments significant numbers, but as a minority in future cabinets.

Moderating Factors / Constraints to Violence

Given the number of elements people cite as likely to increase tensions in Fiji, why has the situation not yet escalated into more and sustained violence? What keeps Fiji's inter- and intra-ethnic tensions from developing into something more disastrous?

The following can be identified as contributing to the prevention and de-escalation of tensions in Fiji. These elements are seen to constrain violence or moderate tension. Some explicitly de-escalate tension. Some more neutrally help prevent an escalation.

There are "abundant goodwill" and interdependencies among the people.

Nearly everyone suggested that the main reason tensions in Fiji have not escalated is because "There is a lot of goodwill among the people." Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians have traditionally lived side by side, and "have mostly gotten along without problems," people say.

Despite the separation noted earlier, the country is small enough that groups cannot exist in complete isolation from each other. There is substantial interaction between the communities in daily lives, through education, commerce, and agriculture. At the community level, there are networks of dependencies. Indo-Fijians may be dependent on the local indigenous community for access to land under informal arrangements. Fijians may be dependent upon Indo-Fijian families for transportation. So even though their politics and group interests force them into communal compartments, these interactions and mutual dependencies are more important in their daily lives. Many suggest that the expansive nature of integration curbs and repels nationalist and violent impulses. A clear example of this followed a tropical cyclone in January 2003 that wreaked havoc and widespread destruction in the Northern Island of Vanua Levu. Fijian and Indo-Fijian families rescued each other, and assisted each other with food, water, and in other ways. Paradoxically, after an initial period of cross-community cooperation, the government intervened with its rehabilitation program. When this happened, widespread accusations were made that government rehabilitation programs largely benefited the indigenous community (see *Fiji Times*, January, 2003 issues at *Fijivillage.com*).

The importance of daily contact is also proved by the fact that violence during the coup was greatest in those areas and regions where the communities were less integrated. Indo-Fijians are sparsely dispersed in the Naitasiri province where much of the violence was concentrated. Similarly, there is little interaction between groups who live within largely "ethnic ghettos" or slums in urban areas like Suva.

People know each other.

Many mentioned that Fiji is a small country with a population of only 800,000, so people know each other, which they say makes people less inclined to violence. As several explained, "You know the person at the other end of the gun." A military spokesman indicated that one of the reasons the military did not intervene earlier in the 2000 hostage situation and storm Parliament to free the hostages was because "We knew them."

People say that during the coup, they were able to moderate others' behavior through informal networks, which were strong because of the small size of the country and community. For example, one woman told a story that during the hostage crisis, people were stealing from her backyard as part of the overall lawlessness. She talked to her neighbor about it, who happened to be the nephew of one of the people closely linked to the coup perpetrators. The neighbor called his uncle and told him to get it to stop, and it did. At the political level, the relatively small number of players makes for informal networks as well. Even though political leaders may be publicly opposed to each other, they interact extensively through the parliamentary process (there are only 71 elected members in all), through parliamentary committees and informally.

We have seen that in other small countries—Rwanda for example—people have killed their neighbors, so small size and knowing people is not a universal prevention or sufficient deterrent. But everyone mentioned it, so clearly most feel strongly that it is a contributing factor.

Fijian people are seen to be more moderate than their leaders.

Everyone we spoke with emphasized that the extremist ideology and behavior propagated by politicians is not an accurate barometer for community sentiment. Many explained that the extreme nationalists at the political level are a minority, although they are very assertive. As one described, "Fijians have a culture of silence. People are encouraged not to speak out. But that means that what we're hearing is a few hard-line views, not the main perspective." Others added, "The moderate sides don't have a clear voice. They are the silent majority. The moderates just want to get on with life; they don't take part in politics. They want normalcy."

A great deal of evidence suggests that Fijian people are more moderate than their leaders. Polls show that a solid block of the Indigenous Fijian population would support a multi-party government (despite the public party line). As well, a newspaper poll in March 2003 showed that Mick Beddoes, the opposition leader who supports a multiracial, moderate platform, had the highest public approval rating (compared to the current nationalist Prime Minister or Chaudhary, the ousted Prime Minister, currently head of the Labor Party). NGOs working with communities say that they see evidence that people in rural areas appreciate and support their work. As well, those working with chiefs see evidence that many chiefs want help, want to change, and want to learn more about conflict prevention. As discussed earlier, the majority of Indigenous Fijians do not see political leaders as their real leaders.

People emphasized that both the 1987 and 2000 coups were led by elites, not by disenfranchised people with arms. That is, the coups are top-down, by coalitions of businesspeople and corrupt politicians, not bottom-up grassroots people's movements. As many described, "A section of the population engaged in the violence and conflict, and then they only looked for support afterwards. The majority of Fijians were not involved. People who got involved just got swept up in what was happening." Many civil society leaders and even the police indicated that very few of the people who were involved in the violence and looting surrounding the 2000 coup took part because of on strong

ideological underpinnings. We heard again and again that “People who got involved only did so because others had done it.” Many people mentioned that several surveys have been done asking people why they participated in the violence, and that people say “they do not know why they got involved, they just did it because others did, or because their chiefs told them to.” Overall, the consensus we heard was that “There is no general disenchantment at the grassroots level. In the countryside, things seem to be fine. It’s only at the political level that there is a problem.”

Of those who claim they support “the ideas” of the coup (i.e. that Indigenous Fijians needed once more to be in control of their government), most say that they “do not support the means” of an illegal, and potentially violent, coup. They would be willing instead to promote unity among Indigenous Fijian political parties to achieve this objective.

Interestingly, though, more moderate parties like the Fijian Association Party and the New Labor Party performed very poorly during the last elections. One explanation for this is that the more nationalistic parties are seen as more capable of protecting “ethnic rights.” Fiji’s population and especially Indigenous Fijians have been led to believe that their rights and interests are vulnerable and that moderate parties will “do political deals” around them.

Fiji is a very religious country.

Many people told us that Fiji is a very religious country, and that faith/spiritualism plays a significant role in people’s lives, whether Christian, Hindu, or Muslim. They claim that the principles of tolerance, love, and non-violence preached by these religions help people live together peacefully and help and support one another. Although during the 1987 coups and the May 2000 political unrest there were attacks on temples and mosques, there have not been overt religious conflicts in Fiji.

As well, people pointed out that religious organizations, particularly churches, are very influential in communities. Some people cited specific examples of ways that religious organizations have contributed to what they call a “culture of peace.” During the 2000 coup and the ensuing violence, some church leaders preached moderation, maintaining a spirit of care and forgiveness, in a pro-active way to constrain the events. People also described Hindu religious leaders in the Indo-Fijian community who counseled calm during the period following the coup and helped “maintain calm and self-security.” Many suggest that people’s religiousness is a strong base that could be built on for positive change in the future. The more moderate leadership of the Catholic, fundamentalist, and Fiji Council of Churches have especially played a very significant role in bringing wayward churches into line during political upheavals.

Active civil society and media moderate the situation and keep pressure on extremists.

Many mentioned the active role of civil society in constraining violence and having a moderating influence on extremism. Fiji has active NGOs, trade unions, employers’ organizations, media, academics, etc. As one activist suggested, “There are a lot of men

and women of goodwill, who are already there with NGOs, willing to put their lives on the line.”

Many people began doing visible work in communities during the hostage crisis and kept it up immediately after. As well, individuals and organizations spoke out against the coup. For example:

- Women’s groups collaborated to hold a non-stop peace vigil throughout and after the hostage crisis.
- NGOs started working in communities, for example holding workshops with communities to address the roots of what caused the violence, and to prevent it from happening again.
- The Citizen’s Constitutional Forum worked to help convince the military to condemn the abrogation of the constitution, and encourage them to let the case go to court, rather than prevent it. During our visit, a CCF member was writing a letter to Commander Bainamarama to encourage him to stand firm against amnesty for coup perpetrators.
- The Human Rights Commission was speaking out, setting the record straight against Speight’s propaganda and sending people out to villages to accurately evaluate the security situation.
- Individuals (described as “brave”) spoke out against the coup, and took risks to make their voices and positions heard.
- With the exception of the Methodists, the leaders of other mainstream churches condemned the violence and called for peace and reconciliation from the early days of the crisis.

The media and civil society worked in partnership during the 2000 coup to keep pressure on extremists and prevent a spread of violence. While some say that the vernacular media contributed to an escalation in tension by printing extremist ideology during the 2000 coup, many suggested that the national English language media balanced those reports by broadcasting and publishing alternative views. The major violence and looting were well covered and some of the people involved were identified in the media. Civil society, like the CCF, church groups, and the Human Rights Commission, actively documented cases of violence in rural areas and brought them to public attention from early on. The media did not succumb to violence or threats. Many mentioned an incident where a member of CCF made a comment condemning the perpetrators of the coup on Fiji TV. The station was ransacked within hours, but it was back on the air within a few days. This was all in sharp contrast to the 1987 coups, when the media was brought under more direct control of the post-coup government. In 2000, though, the coup perpetrators did not succeed in taking over government, so the private media maintained space to operate.

People suggested that this is important insofar as it implies there is space for alternative discourse and resistance. Active minority opinions exist and can be voiced. People who choose to publicly oppose the dominant ‘racialised’ ideology and confront nationalist political leaders are not targeted for the most part.

There are people using their positions to prevent the conflict from escalating.

Many people described the role of specific individuals who use their positions of power and influence to prevent violence. As one person explained, “We have many individuals in Fiji who are balanced in their thinking. This balance can help prevent extreme swings. These people emerge in times of crisis.” It is hard to know how widespread or representative the examples below are, but we include them here because it is clear that a) there are people working in these ways, b) there are systems in place—networks, communication systems, etc.—that allow them to do so, and c) they have an impact on people who know about them.

- Chiefs in two villages in Taveuni prevented inciters from coming in, spreading the word that “We will fight you if you do try to come in and start trouble.” They proactively initiated conversations with their Indo-Fijian neighbors and made it clear that they did not agree with what was occurring.
- A priest in Napuka reportedly found out that people were being influenced by their chiefs to go to Parliament and participate in the unrest. He wrote a letter to them explaining his disgust that they were using their power to mobilize people in this way, explaining the repercussions of this behavior, and saying that if they authorized further unrest, he would leave. The chiefs came to see him and apologized. Within two days, the people who had participated were arrested and held accountable. People came and thanked the priest for his role (though others criticized him as well).
- Some former nationalists are now actively working to educate people and criticize the government. They have leverage because of their former political alliances.
- Reverend Yabaki, a former minister in the Methodist church who now works with CCF, spoke out against the Methodist church giving its support to George Speight and his group. He is quite active and vocal, regularly appearing on television and radio talkback shows.

There are some moderate politicians.

While most people talk about how inflammatory and negative most members of Parliament can be, many mentioned that there are some moderate politicians. They see these politicians as providing hope for Fiji. The leader of the opposition, Mick Beddoes, was mentioned most frequently. In an interview, he laid out a very clear non-racial agenda that is about creating a unified Fiji and addressing issues that impact on all Fijians. Many said that he is the “only politician who travels to villages to speak with his constituencies.” Many see him as “an inspiring voice of reason.” There is a small core of such leaders across political parties who act as restraints within their political parties. Thus even when there may be no dialogue at the national level, such leaders can continue informal dialogue and engagement.

The Labor Party is a generally moderate political party, although by force of circumstances it is required to act as a custodian of rights of the Indo-Fijian population. Similarly, the SDL has many moderate politicians. Its foreign, commerce, education, and finance ministers are perceived as strongly moderate politicians.

State institutions are strong enough to function during times of crisis.

Some pointed out the importance of the fact that state institutions were able to function during the coup and hostage crisis, albeit with difficulty. This maintained a degree of normalcy and enabled Fiji to withstand and absorb the crisis in a number of ways. Fiji's health, education, aviation and other services remained functional even when an apparent power vacuum existed. Maintaining the normal business of government and keeping the treasury functioning prevented a collapse of the banking system and thus the economy. This prevented the situation from deteriorating further.

Rule of law is taken seriously.

Rule of law was not fully dismantled, despite the abrogation of the Constitution. Institutions kept the courts and legal processes functioning reasonably independently. This secured an early return to legality and constitutionality after the 2000 crisis. This had several elements.

- The courts were used by NGOs and civil society to restore the constitution. A Fiji court of appeal made up largely of expatriate judges negated the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution by the head of military forces. (See Appendix 2 for additional information on the Chandrika Prasad case.) This began the return to constitutionality and a properly elected government in a short period of time. As one member of CCF who worked closely with the case described, "The government could not prove to the court that they had public support. We could prove that there was significant opposition. So the revolution was unsuccessful and the Constitution came back."
- People are held accountable through the courts for their involvement. Organizations such as CCF are still using the courts to convict people associated with the 2000 upheavals. As one activist explained, "We need to convict as many people as possible to deter this happening in the future." Unlike 1987 when a new constitutional and legal order evolved, the return to constitutionality paved the way for successful prosecution. Already some of the top leaders of the coup and most of the mutinous troops have been sentenced. Prosecutions of others involved in the 2000 upheavals, including the Vice President of the country, have commenced. These are important steps and have increased the confidence of individuals and groups in the legal process. NGOs like CCF are continuing to use the courts to push for change, including using the courts to ensure multiparty government. As one CCF member explained, "We still continue the constitutional cases. Our leaders accept constitutionalism. We keep working to keep them accountable, push them towards acceptance of multi-party government and resolution of the criminal aspect of the crisis."
- Coup perpetrators seek legitimacy through the law. Many point out that part of the reason violence is averted is that those who cause the instability seek legitimacy through the rule of law. Politicians and Parliamentarians are the ones who were involved in the coup, and their goal is to restore order and get back to Parliament

as quickly as possible under a new constitution. In both coups, people were saying they wanted a “new constitution”. Thus a new constitution is not what a dissatisfied people want, but what the nationalist leaders want to protect and safeguard them when they do gain power.

Some told us that this emphasis on the rule of law is because “Fiji is still a very law-abiding culture.” They suggest this was the influence of the British colonial experience. From the beginning, changes that have happened have been through the law. There has not been a colonial period of violence that would set a precedent.

This commitment to the courts and the rule of law highlights two important issues: people felt they had options for how to proceed when the coup occurred. “There was another way.” Also, adherence to rule of law shows that there are consequences for actions, and holds people accountable. This can provide disincentive for future negative actions.

International interventions have been positive.

Everyone we spoke with said that international involvement in Fiji has been successful in helping reroute the nationalist pressures, rather than contributing to and strengthening them. This was described in several ways.

- Sanctions: There was consensus among respondents that the international community reacted appropriately and promptly to events in Fiji. They described the “powerful and engaged role” played by the European Union, the UK, New Zealand and Australia, including their “smart sanctions” which took immediate effect. These smart sanctions penalized those directly associated with the coups rather than a swathe of the population. They denied leaders making the political push any international legitimacy.
- United Nations. Some described that Fiji’s role in the United Nations is important in drawing international attention. Fiji routinely sends soldiers to participate in UN Peacekeeping missions in the Middle East, in parts of Africa and most recently in East Timor, and perhaps soon to Iraq. This is an important source of revenue for thousands of Fijian families, and it is a source of great pride that Fijian troops are so valued internationally. Should the military have gone with the coup makers, its international engagement was threatened. Senior officers and ordinary Fijians appeared to understand this threat well: Fiji’s troops could not provoke strife in Fiji and then expect to participate in peacekeeping in other conflict areas. UN and governmental agencies applied considerable indirect pressure upon Fiji’s military to resist supporting the actions of those who held the government hostage.
- International human rights groups. Many mentioned that during the 2000 coup and in the period since, international human rights groups and conflict resolution organizations have helped draw attention to Fiji, and have provided support for organizations working in Fiji. For example, many discussed that the UN

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is publicizing discrimination in Fiji and pushing for adherence to international conventions on human rights. Amnesty International monitored and responded to developments in Fiji and drew international attention rapidly.

- Trade Unions: Many point to the important role of trade unions in drawing international attention. Fiji has a very strong trade union movement with approximately 40 percent of all workers belonging to trade unions. The unions are generally among the most ethnically integrated organizations in the country. Trade unions play an important social role in the country through their credit systems and other support mechanisms. These influential unions are well connected internationally through their counterparts in Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere. Through these networks, they were able to impose shipping bans on Fiji. This had a very positive effect in Fiji as employers and manufacturers pushed for an early resolution of the political crisis so that these bans could be lifted. Moreover, in countries like the UK and New Zealand, trade unions were able to use their close connections with their governments to draw attention to the political crisis in Fiji.
- Commonwealth Secretariat and the European Union: Both developed a clear and coherent road map to ensure that Fiji returned to constitutionality, backed by threats of additional sanctions, the consequences of which were well understood by the interim government. Given Fiji's obvious trade limitations and economic vulnerability, the interim government made clear and firm commitments to return to constitutionality within a short space of one year. NGOs in Fiji assisted the Commonwealth and EU in analyzing and understanding the crisis, and helped them formulate reasonable responses that could be enforced.

Fiji in general does not attract international attention. The South Pacific has few strategic or natural resources to command international attention. Through the above mechanisms, these obstacles were overcome reasonably well, and the international community did manage to develop a coherent and strategic engagement to resolve the crisis.

There is a lack of access to arms.

Guns have thus far been kept out of Fiji and are restricted largely to the Military. The police force does not carry guns. The import of guns privately remains difficult and risky to those who may attempt it. This has ensured that political assassinations, and other killings have not occurred thus far. This has been helpful in avoiding cycles and counter cycles of political assassinations and revenge.

As one person described, to get arms, "it would have to be deliberate, and well funded, with international knowledge on how to smuggle and how to train people to use guns. The people instigating the violence aren't that committed or savvy." Some suggested it would be difficult to start an arms trade because it's a small country and everyone knows each other. On the other hand, Fiji is a series of islands without easily patrolled borders,

so it could be easy to get them in on various islands. Some suggested that it would be difficult to find the funds to finance arms. On the other hand, there is an increasingly large Diaspora Indian community who could presumably do so, but no one mentioned that as a concern.

Many explained that during the 1987 coup, people were surprised to see weapons: “We saw truckloads of soldiers and guns for the first time!” Now arms appear to be becoming more of a concern; there are periodic news stories about it. In both 1987 and the 2000 upheavals a small number of arms were imported privately. On both occasions, these weapons were quickly confiscated and removed by the military.

Fijians are well-educated.

Many people cited the fact that Fijians are “well-educated” as an element that separated Fiji from other countries where there has been violence. Fiji has extremely high literacy rates, typically cited between 80% and 90%, with the rates for people between ages 15 and 24 as high as 98%. Many people emphasize that most Fijians listen to the radio (with news and call-in debate shows), and read the newspapers. In one person’s words, “Everyone debates, everyone has a point of view.” People suggest that these factors make people less likely to be manipulated. More and more organizations are building on this—doing targeted education on human rights issues, or working with the media to ensure more accurate information is reported to communities. Civil society is also involved in public education on political, constitutional, and rights issues. (That said, it is important to note that many of those involved in both the 1987 and 2000 upheavals were overseas-educated individuals and belonged to an upwardly mobile class in Fijian society.)

On the other hand, people cite education as an issue that needs a lot of work, and one that could be a powerful tool for change. Though education (in schools) was not cited as having been used as a tool for divisive propaganda, many said more work should have been done in the schools to increase tolerance between the different communities, as a space for people to learn about each other’s communities and customs. As one explained, “There is a great potential to bring racial togetherness through the schools, but it is not happening.”

Some suggest that literacy statistics are a bit misleading, since being able to read does not necessarily make one a discerning reader. As well, there are disparities between communities, with the Indigenous Fijian community less well educated (and with leadership more likely to engage in manipulation). Many individuals and NGOs suggest that more work needs to be done to educate people to think freely, as inoculation against manipulation, to challenge rhetoric, and to increase individual understanding of complex issues. For example, during the 2000 destabilization, leaders were suggesting that Prime Minister Chaudhry was about to cede Fiji to India. Many were taken by this rhetoric, but most educated Fijians knew that the days of ceding countries were long over. Many feel that if a large segment of the population could make independent assessments, they would be able to assess what their leaders are asking them to do and respond responsibly, rather than emotionally. Many NGOs feel that education about key issues such as land and protection of land, protection of group rights, human rights, and constitutional

protections is critical in the short term, as it is around these issues that “political manipulators” play with local communities.

The military has largely remained professional.

Many mentioned that the military played a positive role in ending the 2000 coup, and has helped keep the situation since then under control, as well. While deeply fragmented, its core remained intact. The commander and key officers maintained a professional attitude and tried as best as possible to keep extreme nationalists at bay. The military accepted that they should not prevent the case from going to the courts. Others describe that during the coup the military helpfully “put up road blocks to diffuse the gathering of their own people. They gradually brought things to a quiet, restrained normalcy.”

Many mentioned the importance of the fact that the military has a great deal of experience with overseas UN peacekeeping operations. For the past thirty years, the military has been “exporting” soldiers for international peacekeeping, so most people active in the military at any given time have spent time in peacekeeping operations abroad. Many feel that since “the military have been trained to handle people in ways other than through violence,” this is critical to the military’s capacity to prevent escalation. Many described stories where they had seen soldiers handle crowd situations in a way that was calm and positive, rather than in a way that provoked tension and escalated “spark points”. For example, one person talked about seeing a group of students demonstrating in front of Parliament in 1987, where as the situation heated up, the military fired into the air and otherwise maintained control of the situation and ultimately dispersed the crowd without hurting anyone. The military has managed some extremely tense situations quite well without resorting to the use of weapons.

The participation in international peace building is seen as just one factor, though. One human rights activist suggested that soldiers in a UN mission would have learned that maintaining unity among the ranks is critical, but this did not prevent the splintering within the military wherein certain factions supported the coup. But, overall, the military has pulled through and regained a high degree of internal cohesion.

Most importantly, the military does have a strong cadre of leaders who have had international exposure to understand the costs of military’s political actions. While segments of the leadership did splinter, overall the military was able to come out of the crisis quite well. Many feel that the military is the last line of defense against anarchy. The military understands itself as providing a basis for unity among indigenous people. The 2000 upheavals and particularly the mutiny at the barracks were a wakeup call. Many feel that if the current leadership remains in place, lessons have been learned and it is likely that a leaner and more professional military will result from this period of great instability.

The police force has played a stabilizing role.

Some pointed out that the police force has played a stabilizing role. While it is largely Indigenous Fijian, it has approximately 30% from other communities, which people suggest moderates the culture of the police force, and prevents it from acting in the

interests of only one community. It was also significant that such a force could not undermine the inquiries into the coup, even though sympathetic officers allegedly initially tried to hamper the investigations. Individuals within the force, including its Commissioner, are tainted by the upheavals of 2000, but the force as a whole has, on balance, come out of the crisis stable and strong. People said that significant donor investment in capacity building within the forces has had a positive impact.

There has been active investigation into what occurred, and admissions of guilt.

Many emphasize the importance of the active investigation on the part of NGOs, the police, and some elements of the government to try to understand the roots of the coup, and to identify who got involved, and why. Civil society is actively talking about what happened, what it was really about, and why. People suggest this will help prevent further coups in the future.

A police spokesman explain that even before the hostages were released, police went into villages to learn about what was going on, and try to understand why people got involved. They then worked with chiefs to identify people who had been involved, and charge and arrest them. One described, “Even chiefs came freely to be charged, as a result of those meetings. We explained to them the political, socio-cultural, and economic consequences of their actions. They admitted their guilt.”

Many suggest the investigations are prompting people to realize the consequences of their actions. NGO members who do extensive work in communities explained, “People who got involved acted without thinking, at the time. Now they regret what happened, and realize it was wrong and they should not have followed along.” NGOs report that increasingly, parts of the population realize that they were manipulated for other people’s gain, and feel they have been used. People suggest that it would therefore be harder to build momentum the next time.

There is government support for reconciliation.

Since 1987, there has been a great deal of investment in reconciliation, and, as some describe, “Many former extremists have been pulled into the political mainstream already.” Despite the problems of reconciliation noted earlier, many feel it is having some positive impacts. Most feel that a well thought-through reconciliation program that has the support of the main communities is still capable of being developed and implemented.

There is increasing interaction between communities.

Despite the demographic separations noted earlier, many emphasize that at this point, the communities are increasingly interacting. Forty-six percent of the population now lives in cities. This has led to more and more children attending multi-ethnic schools. There is an increasingly multiracial workforce in urban areas. The previously separate labor force is becoming increasingly integrated and with this comes increased interaction and better understanding between the groups. Though still few, there are more and more inter-communal marriages.

Fiji is a resource-rich country.

Some pointed out that Fiji is not a crowded country, so there is minimal pressure for resources the way there is in some other countries where tensions have escalated. There is a perception that there is “enough to go around.” This can temper extremism and desperation. Competition for basic resources like food and water is therefore not intense (though this situation is changing, especially in urban areas).

There are few regional pressures

Many pointed out that Fiji is the strongest country in the region. It has the best economy, is the most developed, has the regional headquarters of international organizations and UN offices, and has the University of the South Pacific and the South Pacific Forum. People pointed out that because Fiji is an island nation that is relatively distant from its neighbors, there are not the same pressures of movement across borders that are found, for example, in the Great Lakes region in Africa. Fiji is also the political hub for the whole of the South Pacific region and is expected to provide leadership to other small island states like Solomons and Tuvalu. For Fiji to maintain that prominent role, it needs political stability. This acts to keep the more radical and extremist tendencies in check.

Even Fijian nationalists are not so extreme that they advocate extermination.

As one Indigenous Fijian described, “Even the nationalists are not so extreme that they’d be willing to have bloodbaths.” Some of the reasons for this (which prevent Indigenous Fijian-initiated violence against Indo-Fijians) include:

- Indo-Fijians are not sufficiently threatening. The perception among Indigenous Fijians is that Indo-Fijians will never take up arms, and they therefore do not see Indo-Fijians as enough of a threat to try to exterminate them. Also, there is a perception that with so many Indo-Fijians leaving already, they do not need to increase the pressure to get people to leave. As one Indo-Fijian explained, “In the future there will be only 150,000 Indians left; they won’t be perceived as a threat.” With the declining numbers, their political stake could be reduced further. Their influence in the commercial sectors will also decline and the pressure on land in prime urban and peri-urban regions will be reduced.
- Fiji would be worse off without Indo-Fijians. Indigenous Fijians themselves say that if the Indo-Fijian population left, things would be worse off, not better. Even the most extreme nationalists recognize that Indo-Fijians are contributing significantly, and disproportionately, to the economy, and therefore they would be hurting themselves to try to push them out. No one describes a need to rid the island of the Indo-Fijians—either by pushing them off or by killing them; rather, Indigenous Fijian politicians want to maintain the upper hand.
- Violence is only needed to obtain power, not maintain it. Indigenous Fijians do not need to use violence except as a tool for taking over the government, to obtain power rather than maintain it. Once Indigenous Fijians are in control of government, violence becomes unnecessary except to keep other competing

groups out of power. The violence that does occur (for example, the armed takeover) remains in check because it meets virtually no opposition. Indigenous Fijians are in control of the government, military, police, etc. These institutions would support any government led by Indigenous Fijians.

The Indo-Fijian community is unlikely to resort to violence.

Everyone mentioned that it is significant that Indo-Fijians have not “risen up” or resorted to violence, given their situation. We were told the following factors that prevent Indo-Fijian initiated violence against Indigenous Fijians:

- They have a self-described “non-violent culture.” We were told repeatedly that the Indo-Fijian community is peaceful, patient, and non-violent, with strong religious sentiment. This was described by Indo-Fijians as well as Indigenous Fijians. As many Indo-Fijians described, “I don’t ever see Indo-Fijians inciting violence. They would rather give up more rights, as long as they could live in peace, and mind their own business. There have not been violence-inciting politicians.” Some suggest this passivity is weakness: “Indians are weak. We would never pick up arms and fight back. We have grown up thinking that Indigenous Fijians are strong, while Indians are a weak race.” In any case, they feel that institutions like the police and the military are already biased against them, rather than neutral arbiters.
- There is an absence of Indo-Fijian nationalism. Many Indo-Fijians have accepted how they have been described over centuries: as visitors or an “invading alien force.” Indo-Fijians have never made claims to own the land. As one Indo-Fijian explained, “There is not a commitment among the Indo-Fijian to stay and fight. Skilled people who are unhappy can leave.” Because they cannot own land, they feel that Fiji is a temporary station in their lives and that when opportunities do open up, they would settle in countries where they feel permanent.
- Emigration is a good and realistic option for many. Many mentioned that large numbers of Indo-Fijians are migrating to Australia and New Zealand. Members of the Indo-Fijian business community are well educated, and have opportunities abroad. As one explained, “There is an outlet—emigration. The Indian population is leaving. Five hundred people are departing the country every month and some 70,000 have left since 1987 coups.” People suggest that those departing are the educated people most likely to take up active resistance: “The intellectuals who could lead protests years ago decided to leave. It’s not worth fighting, we might as well escape.” The perception is that the majority of young intellectuals have already left the country and that those who remain have options to leave when things become difficult. Many of their political leaders already hold permanent residencies in Australia and elsewhere. Emigration is actively promoted as a communal strategy by Indo-Fijian leadership.

- There are alternatives to violence. Many explained that Indo-Fijians have ways of resisting, putting pressure on the government, other than violence. They have a history of forms of non-violent resistance, such as boycotting Parliament, that have been deployed effectively at different times in Fiji's recent history. For example, after the 2000 coup, Indo-Fijians boycotted products from many companies that had supported the overthrow of the government. Many Indo-Fijians are organized in the labor movement, which has been quite active, both in pulling in international attention, and in organizing strikes that have the power to strategically shut down the country.
- Indo-Fijians are unarmed. Many told us that Indo-Fijians, while equal in numbers are not armed, and would be foolish to fight against the better-armed Fijian military. As one Indo-Fijian leader described, "You have one community that is armed, and another that has only rocks. The days of David versus Goliath are over because of guns."
- Indo-Fijians feel they have a lot to lose. Many suggest that part of the reason Indo-Fijians do not participate in rioting and looting is that they are the ones who own the businesses and nice homes. One said, "I have everything to lose—my house, my property, my car." There is a perception that if they were to initiate looting and rioting, they would be the losers, and would need to rebuild everything afterwards without assistance, once again. "Propertied classes don't resort to violence against property." "We would be burning our own buses." Similarly in rural areas, farmers are frightened that their sugar crops would be burned very easily should they take part in any violence. This would set them back by years.
- Leadership encourages non-violence. Many pointed out that community-level leaders are advocating non-violence, finding solutions, encouraging people to keep going to school as a "way out", etc.

Concluding Thoughts

In the constraining factors that people report above, there are several cross-cutting themes that emerge to explain why the situation has not escalated more.

- People report feeling that they have alternatives other than violence: for example, NGOs used the courts to restore the Constitution, and Indo-Fijians have leverage through non-violent action such as strikes and boycotts. The recovery after the 2000 crisis is testimony to the effectiveness of these and other non-violent actions.
- There is space for alternative opinions. People are not targeted and killed for voicing alternative and unpopular views; rather, they are put on talk radio shows.

A public media and active civil society has worked to broaden the space for dialogue. There is plurality of political parties available to members of the same ethnic group. This encourages some political debate.

- There are “escape valves” for tension, which release pressure before it builds to a violent crescendo. For example, many Indo-Fijians who are frustrated emigrate. Indigenous Fijians are also migrating in increasing numbers. People move internally from one region to another if they feel threatened.
- Work is being done on many fronts to hold people accountable for their actions. Investigation continues into the coup and perpetrators of violence are being brought to justice. Even if the courts were to free them, being charged and prosecuted is often sufficient embarrassment to deter further action. Restriction on travel abroad is also a powerful disincentive for would-be leaders. These consequences increase accountability, and decrease impunity. At the community level, increasing people’s awareness that they were manipulated decreases the likelihood that it will happen again. All this suggests that there is a price to be paid for individual actions, and therefore it would be harder to build momentum next time. This accountability extends to actions separate from the coup fallout. For example, localized actions such as forced takeover of property do take place, but aggrieved groups are allowed to express their grievances and make their case heard.
- Many individuals and groups, including NGOs, Ministries, churches, media, are working proactively on conflict prevention, knowing that tensions and active conflict could escalate again. This pre-emptive and broad based action, which often includes education, provides Fiji citizens with opportunities for becoming less dependent upon their political leaders for their ideas.
- The government machinery, and formal and informal institutions and social networks function despite episodic crises. As well, informal communication networks remain strong, so, for example, during the hostage crisis, people could influence others through word of mouth, and through the “coconut wireless.”
- People repeatedly identify the problem as the extremists who are in power, not the ideology of a people who put them there. There appears to be a strong potential for positive change, if better leadership were available. We heard often, “If the leadership said good things, then people would listen to reason. When the leadership is corrupt, there’s no hope for people.” Good leaders are starting to win elections, and voters are punishing bad and corrupt leaders. For example, supporters of Speight only 7 out of 71 seats in Parliament. This is changing the scene of electoral politics.
- People are increasingly cognizant of their rights. They more readily identify leaders who are manipulating their feelings and communal loyalties. They have an

increasing choice of political parties to support. Discussion about leadership is more common. Voters are starting to make calculations about leaders who will best serve their interests. Politicians are also required to account for their actions and so cannot take their voters for granted. Moderate leaders are starting to have better chances of securing seats within ethnically based parties. The top category of cabinet ministers in the SDL government is more moderate in its orientation and the more extremist have marginal responsibilities. Over time, moderation is likely to succeed, although extremists presently hold sway.

- There are numerous examples of individuals and communities reaching out to each other, in civil society, in trade unions, and slowly but certainly in the political process as well. These developments are derailed by communal pressures but there is increasing cross-ethnic political interaction. There is greater social interaction through more integrated schools and workplaces across the country. This is a positive and conflict reducing trend that appears likely to continue.
- As an additional observation, the fact that the two communities are nearly balanced in number differentiates Fiji from, for example, Rwanda. One community is not totally overwhelmed by the other. Both communities seek political partnership with the much smaller European, Pacific Islander, and other minority communities in Fiji, and this creates moderation.

Balancing Apparent Contradictions between Constraints and Contributors

“Goodwill” versus Hate Speech

Many people we spoke to mentioned “goodwill” as a constraining element. But that is an ambiguous concept. Only rarely do Indigenous Fijians invite Indo-Fijians into their homes, and vice versa. Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians sometimes, but not always, help each other in times of crises. The communities do not appear to view each other’s cultural and religious traditions as legitimate and acceptable aspects of the diverse Fijian society. As well, there is the issue of “hate speech” and how this relates to “goodwill.” While manifested in Parliament most bluntly, hate speech and the beliefs that lead to it appear to be more prevalent. Some would argue that growing up as Indo-Fijians do, and internalizing that you are “inferior” and a “weaker race” and a “visitor” does damage to one’s self-image, confidence, pride, etc. This could be one reason that Indo-Fijians do not challenge their “oppression” through violent measures.

The Role of the Church

Some church leaders are linked with extremism and political manipulation. Others are promoting moderation. While there is tension between fundamentalists and nationalists and moderates among and within the churches, so far the mainstream church leadership has been able to keep radical fringes in check.

Military and Police

The institutions that some blame for creating the problems of the 2000 coup, including the military and the police, are also the institutions that brought the situation into check.

Some people inside these institutions have been able to maintain institutional integrity. The police commissioner in 2000 and senior military officers are now under investigation. These institutions have proved resilient in the wake of nationalist challenges from within.

What Does the Future Hold?

Some say the fact that Fiji has not escalated into violence or civil war on a scale seen elsewhere is just a function of timing. Colonialism ended only recently. Institutions are still working, but they are certainly being weakened by forces of communalism and the difficulties associated with modernization and globalization. People say, “Things could snap at any time,” and threatening actions may trigger extreme violence. Others, even people closely involved in monitoring and working on the situation, say optimistically, “I know Fiji. I just do not see the ingredients for things getting out of hand.”

Our perspective is somewhere in between. There is still strong uncertainty. There are many reasons for concern; however, there is much to build on. There is a need for constant vigilance.

Of the four trigger events that people mention, the concern about an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister seems unnecessary. Most feel that it is extremely unlikely that an Indo-Fijian will ever be Prime Minister again, and thus this “trigger” has been defused and cannot be used by nationalists to fuel racial violence as in the past. The 1999 elections that led to an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister were unique. The rise of Labor as the dominant group in 1999 was largely due to fragmentation within the Indigenous Fijian community. Some of this fragmentation has been reversed, and even the competition that exists among the Indigenous Fijian community will cooperate sufficiently to prevent an Indo-Fijian from taking power. As well, the electoral system will ensure that Indigenous Fijians will continue to be a majority in Parliament. The likelihood of a repeat of 1999 type of election results is thus remote. Within a rapidly reducing Indo-Fijian population, indigenous representation in Parliament is likely to further increase, not decrease.

The three other triggers people identified—resistance to multiparty government, extremist control of the military, and collapse of the sugar industry—still remain serious issues. The government has made it clear that it is unwilling to involve the Fiji Labor Party in government. In the likely chance that the Supreme Court rules in favor of multi-party government in June 2003, the SDL government is unlikely to agree to such an arrangement. Their resistance to multi-party government could escalate tensions and fuel the fires of communalism. It could also increase the tensions that exist between the government and the judicial system. The government’s commitment to upholding the Constitution and the rule of law will certainly be tested. Most expect the government to call for a snap election rather than ignore the Constitution and the Supreme Court ruling. A snap election, however, has the potential to be quite explosive.

The military situation remains the great unknown. There are many unresolved issues surrounding the split within the military ranks during the May 2000 events. It is unclear how deep the resentment is over the treatment of the military members involved in the

coup. Since the restoration of the 1997 Constitution and the return to government rule, the government and military have cooperated with one another, but it is well known that their relations are strained. The government's decision to not renew the current commander of the military's contract is part of the government's effort to assert its control over the military. It is feared that the nationalist elements within the government may be gaining the upper hand of the military through this process.

Groups within the Fijian population are divided over political leadership more than ever before. Some see that these divisions are sufficiently deep-seated that competing groups may begin to use violence as a means for political ends. A professional, balanced military prevents the military force from being used to political advantage. There is awareness among many in the military about international accountability. Many Indigenous Fijian soldiers do not want to risk their UN peacekeeping tours of duty by participating in unlawful action.

The economic crisis confronting Fiji from the downturn in tourism and the difficulties facing the garment and sugar industries is unlikely to go away any time soon. In many ways, poverty rather than race is the source of Fiji's problems. Race has been used to achieve political ends and growing poverty and exclusion make this more possible. The collapse of the sugar industry would further exacerbate this. It has been known for some time now that the sugar industry must be restructured if it is to survive in Fiji. Slow progress is being made to redress this problem and as one person stated, "The path they are on now is going to lead to disaster." The industry is unlikely to achieve much without a much more concerted national effort. It is possible that the pressure to deal with this problem might in itself induce inter and intra-ethnic violence (as Indo-Fijian farmers are displaced, and indigenous land owners lose revenue, etc.) due to the highly communalized political environment that exists presently.

A multi-party government with moderates in power would be better positioned to handle most of the challenges facing Fiji. This requires dialogue between the SDL and the Labor Parties. That is why work is being done by NGOs like CCF in the months leading up to the court case resolution. Multi-party government seems critical to the rescue of the sugar industry, Fiji's economic mainstay. Moderate politicians in a multi-party government could more effectively explain to farmers why they may lose their land. People suggest that a multi-party government could do a better job in developing adjustment policies to deal with the negative impact (i.e. the displacement of Indo-Fijian farmers, the loss of revenue for indigenous land owners, etc) of these badly needed changes so that all communities' needs are addressed.

Regardless of multi-party government, if that should ever happen, there is much to build on to prevent the slide into a cycle of open conflict. People we interviewed identified many options for building bridges between the communities, and further consolidating a fragile peace that exists presently. These include working through the schools, working with religious leaders, encouraging the growth of civil society initiatives and using the media more responsibly. People are thinking about these issues and their potential without waiting for government action. They are aware of the risks that Fiji faces and are

developing strategies and taking action. The older generation, those who have dealt with both coups, are more likely to say, “We won’t go that route again” and it is hoped that message is being heard by the younger generation who may not have necessarily learned those lessons. These are all positive developments.

Civil society understands the early-warning conflict indicators. All stakeholders now understand the urgency and need to resolve issues surrounding land and the sugar industry – two greatly communalized problems. Fiji’s well-developed civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and church groups, remain committed to working together to ensure the rule of law is upheld, justice prevails and ethnic divisions are held in check. These efforts are strengthened by civil society’s capacity to effectively network internationally. Initiatives are taking shape and the development of processes to deal with Fiji’s difficult issues might in themselves be tension reducing. This is a great step forward in itself.

Institutions and civil society are capable of responding to the challenge of developing a society that is less prone to conflict. The main political leaders have remained measured in their actions. The international community has an understanding of the difficult problems and remains engaged – although Fiji is identified as being less strategically important.

On all these fronts a lot more needs to be done, and a lot more can be done. With all the forces in play, it is admirable that tensions in Fiji have not escalated further. Yet many point out the need for constant vigilance, given the dual forces at work. People remain concerned, and there is minimal room for relaxation.

Appendix 1 : Timeline of Events

- 1870 Fiji colonized by Great Britain
- 1884 Indentured laborers begin to be imported from India
- 1916 End of the indentured labor system and 40,000 Indians remain in the country
- 1970 Fiji becomes independent and the Alliance Party under leadership of Ratu Mara assumes leadership
- 1987 Alliance loses power to a coalition of National Federation Party and Fiji Labor Party
- 1987 New government removed from power through a military coup and Sitiveni Rabuka, a senior military officer, assumes leadership
- 1990 A new racially discriminatory constitution imposed by the military backed regime
- 1997 A new democratic and multiracial constitution introduced
- 1999 Fiji Labor Party forms government in coalition with smaller Fijian parties and Chaudhry becomes first Indo-Fijian prime minister
- 2000 Nationalist extremists take government hostage and government is subsequently dismissed by President Ratu Mara. Military removes Ratu Mara and imposes martial law and abrogates the 1997 Constitution.
- 2000 Fiji Court of Appeal upholds the 1997 Constitution
- 2001 Fiji holds fresh and internationally supervised elections and the SDL and Conservatives form coalition government. Labor excluded from cabinet government and launches legal challenge to its exclusion.

Appendix 2: Additional Information on Chandrika Prasad Case:

Chandrika Prasad, a farmer from Mounaweni, commenced a legal challenge to the takeover in the High Court on July 4, 2000. This case was filed with the assistance of the Fiji Human Rights Commission. It sought the following orders:

1. That the May 19 attempted coup was not successful.
2. That the state of emergency proclaimed by the President on May 19 was unconstitutional and of no legal effect.
3. That the attempted abrogation of the 1997 Constitution was unconstitutional.
4. That the 1997 was still in force.
5. That the Parliament of Fiji still exists.

6. That the elected government is still the legitimate government,
7. Any other relief the court thinks fits.

The ruling on the case was delivered on November 15, 2000 by Justice Anthony Gates. His ruling was as follows (excerpted):

1. The attempted coup of May 19th was unsuccessful.
 - 2 The revocation of the 1997 Constitution was not made within the doctrine of necessity and such revocation was unconstitutional and of no effect. The 1997 Constitution is the supreme and extant law of Fiji today.
 3. The Parliament of Fiji is still in being.
 4. The President should appoint a Prime Minister from the House of Representatives.
- The judge ruled that the interim regime was illegally holding office.

The government appealed. The Court of Appeal judgment of March 1, 2001 upheld the original ruling, stated that the Constitution of 1997 was “a reliable expression of the hopes and aspirations of the whole population” (contrary to what government had contended), and said that the abrogation of the Constitution was illegal. It stated that the 1997 Constitution remains the supreme law of Fiji.

(Adapted from <http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/WO0011/S00126.htm>, May 2003.)

Appendix 3: Map of Fiji



Map courtesy of Lonely Planet:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/pacific/fiji/fiji.htm> 23 May 2003.

Bibliography:

Books

Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon, editor. *Confronting Fiji Futures*. Asia Pacific Press. Australia. 2000.

Citizens Constitutional Forum, 1996. *Protecting Indigenous Rights and Interests in Fiji*. Suva, CCF.

Lal, Brij V. and Michael Pretes, editors. *Coup: Reflections on the Political Crisis in Fiji*. Pandanus Books. Australia. 2001.

Robertson, Robbie and William Sutherland. *Government by the Gun: The Unfinished Business of Fiji's 2000 Coup*. Zed Books. New York. 2001.

Articles

MacLellan, Nic. "Indigenous Rights and the Crisis in Fiji." *Arena journal* no.16, 2000/1. p31- 38.

Prasad, Satendra and Jone Dakuvula and Darryn Snell. "Economic Development, Democracy, and Ethnic Conflict in the Fiji Islands." *Minority Rights and Development Macro Study*. Minority Rights Group and Citizens Constitutional Forum: November, 2001.

Snell, Darryn and Satendra Prasad. "Behind the Fiji Crisis: Politics of Labor in an Ethnically Divided Society." *Arena journal*. No 15, 2000. p39-56.

Rory Ewins, *Colour, Class and Custom: The Literature of the 1987 Fiji Coup*, 2nd ed., 1998, http://speedysnail.com/pacific/fiji_coup/.

United Nations Development Programme. *Fiji Poverty Report: 1994*. www.undp.org.