

“KNOWN, UNKNOWN, AND UNKNOWN UNKNOWN” IN THE 2014 FIJI ELECTION RESULTS

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ABSTRACT

With no data on voter ethnicity, no exit polls, and few post-election analyses, the 2014 Fiji election results remain something of a mystery. This study examines what the erstwhile US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, called the ‘known knowns’, in this case the voting results, and the ‘known unknowns’ of voter ethnicity and motivation. It concludes that any definitive analysis of Taukei electoral choices is currently impossible, not just because there is insufficient polling data but because of the ‘unknown unknowns’ of the dynamics within and between Fiji’s many customary communities.

Keywords: election results, voter motivation, urban vote, rural vote, Taukei vote

The Fiji general election of 2014 was novel in several ways. It was the first held under the recently introduced single constituency system. It was the first to be held with barriers to the establishment of regional and ethnic political parties in place. And it was the first to feature open list proportional representation.

Before the election, many in Fiji thought that, despite the Bainimarama regime's efforts to eliminate voting on the basis of ethnic affiliation, a large number of voters in the majority Taukei community would support the party rhetorically committed to advancing what they claimed to be the most important communal interests: the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA). SODELPA is the new name for the SDL party that had been ousted from power in 2006 by Bainimarama and is led by Ro Teimumu Kepa, who holds one of Fiji's three paramount chiefly titles. In the lead up to the elections, social media were suggesting that SODELPA's campaign was resonating strongly amongst Taukei, and when the few opinion polls published in the mainstream media showed a solid level of support for Bainimarama's party, FijiFirst, these were dismissed as being too urban in scope and therefore unrepresentative.

Fiji First had a solid victory in the election, taking over 59% of the vote, and it is a widely held assumption that this result was due to the appeal of its focus on rural development to Taukei voters and on nation-building for Fijians of Indo-Fijian descent and other voters. Other factors that are thought to have played a part include the advantages of incumbency, restrictions on the media, and the popularity of the highly visible FijiFirst leader's 'common touch'.

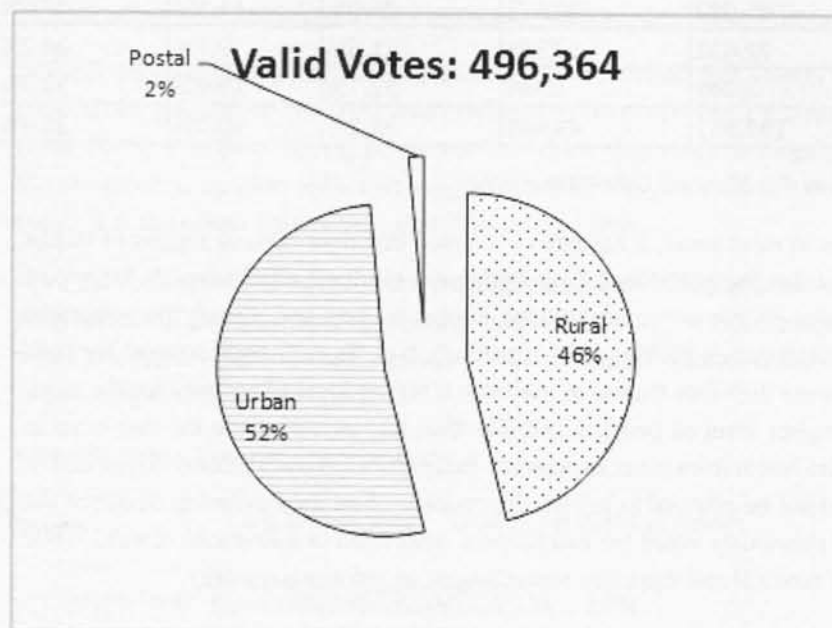
Thoughtful commentaries on various aspects of the 2014 electoral outcome have been produced by political and historical analysts, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi (2015), Steve Ratuva (2015), Brij Lal (2014), Robert Norton (2015) and Stewart Firth (2015), but only one in depth analysis of voting patterns. Jon Fraenkel's 'An analysis of Provincial, Urban and Ethnic Loyalties in Fiji's 2014 Election' concluded that FijiFirst had trumped SODELPA because its policies appealed to the majority of Taukei who were by then resident in the economically prosperous areas of Viti Levu. Support for SODELPA, he argued, was strongest in the poorer, less densely populated areas, where voter turnout was below average (Fraenkel, 2015).

Fraenkel's analysis is more nuanced than this conclusion would suggest. In the body of his argument he suggests that the outcome of the vote was also influenced by power relationships amongst the Taukei. For example he rightly notes that FijiFirst was able to capitalize on "dissent against the long ascendancy of the eastern chiefs, not only in western Viti Levu but also in parts of Tailevu and Naitasiri provinces" (Fraenkel, 2015). This study builds on Fraenkel's work, examining in more detail what the erstwhile US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, called the 'known knowns', in this case the voting results, and the 'known unknowns' of voter ethnicity and motivation. It argues that any conclusive analysis of Taukei electoral choices is currently impossible, not just because there is insufficient polling data but because of the 'unknown unknowns' of the dynamics within and between Fiji's more than two hundred vanua.¹

The aggregation of votes in this study shows the urban, rural, and postal vote proportions to be 52%, 46% and 2% respectively, a distribution that is in line with the findings of the 2007 Census that estimated 51% of Fiji's population to be resident in its urban areas (FBS, 2008). It

is the urban vote that we examine first, because, as was noted earlier, it was assumed before the election that Fiji First would win its greatest share of the vote in Fiji's towns and cities.

Chart 1: Valid Votes Demarcations by Rural, Urban & Postal



Source: Calculation based on Fiji Election Offices data (2014)

THE URBAN VOTE

It is in the urban areas that over half of Fiji's population now resides and although they are now home to more Taukei than Fijians of Indian descent, it was thought that urban Taukei voters would be more likely to vote for FijiFirst than their rural counterparts. This prediction proved to be accurate as Table 1 shows, with FijiFirst garnering 61.6% of the urban vote as against 56.5% of the rural vote.

Table 1 Votes for FijiFirst and its leader by rural/urban/postal demarcations

	Total	Fiji First	Vorege Bainimarama (VB)	Fiji First Share in Total	VB Share in Total	VB Share in Fiji First
Urban	260,204	160,324	120,127	61.6%	46.2%	74.9%
Rural	228,974	129,456	79,298	56.5%	34.6%	61.3%
Postal	7,186	3,934	3,034	54.7%	42.2%	77.1%
Total	496,364	293,714	202,459	59.2%	40.8%	68.9%

Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

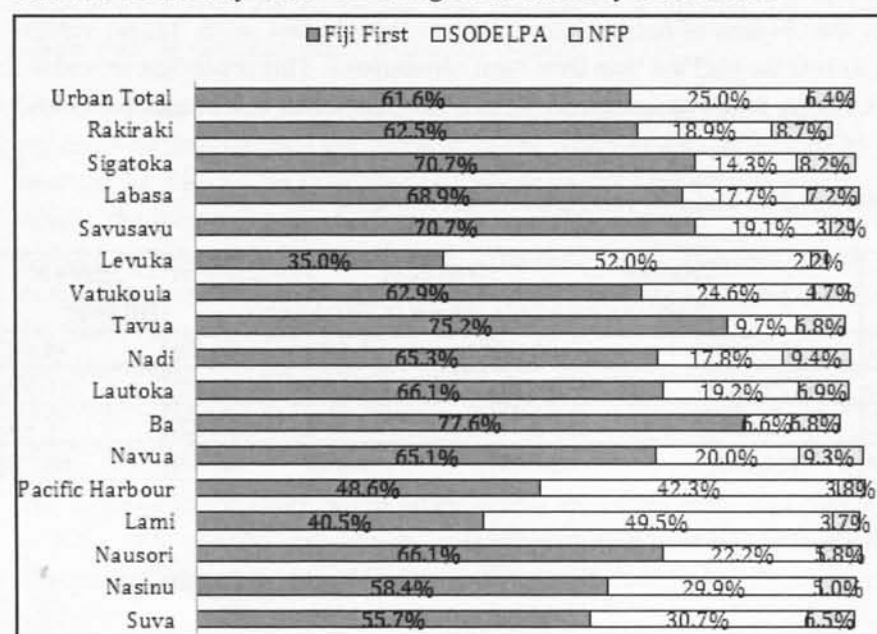
Table 2 Votes for SODELPA and its leader by rural/urban/postal demarcations

	Total	SODELPA	Ro Temumu Kepa (TK)	SODELPA Share in Total	TK Share in Total	TK Share in SODELPA
Urban	260,204	65,087	30,577	25.0%	11.8%	47.0%
Rural	228,974	72,421	17,542	31.6%	7.7%	24.2%
Postal	7,186	2,349	1,366	32.7%	19.0%	58.2%
Total	496,364	139,857	49,485	28.2%	10.0%	35.4%

Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

In the towns and cities, as in rural areas, it has been estimated that over 80% of Fijians of Indian descent voted for FijiFirst, having abandoned their traditional electoral affiliations. In large part this was due to the policies of this new party whose Taukei leaders had already demonstrated a commitment to multi-racial nation-building and apparently had the military's support for their continued efforts. They were therefore trusted to maintain a higher level of security for the Indo-Fijian population and a higher level of political stability than had existed since the first coup in 1987. Indo-Fijians had also learnt from bitter experience that parties led by or mainly comprised of their ethnic fellows would not be allowed to govern the country. And the leadership of one of the two parties that they had previously voted for had become embroiled in a financial scandal while the other was in a state of renewal and therefore something of an unknown quantity.²

The Fiji Labour Party barely attracted any votes while anecdotal evidence suggests that the newly revived National Federation Party (NFP) drew at least some of the support it did get from educated, middle-class Taukei, because of longstanding family connections to the party, familiarity with the qualities of its new leader, former USP professor, Biman Prasad, or distaste for the approaches being taken by the two major parties.

Chart 2: Urban Party Votes of Leading Three Parties by Urban Centre

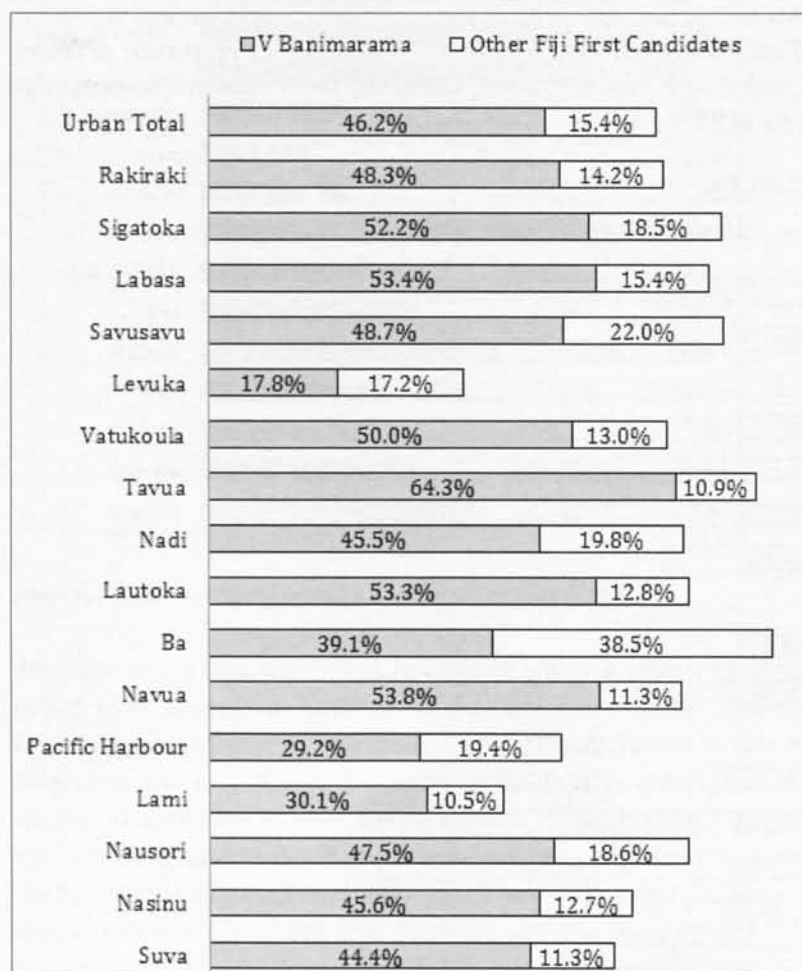
Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

Fraenkel's argument that the decrease in the number of Indo-Fijian voters relative to Taukei voters is unlikely to have matched the expected demographic shift between the 2007 census and the 2014 elections is based on the assumption that the shift would have been determined by the two communities' birth rates. It does not take into account the more significant effect on Fiji's demographics of continuing, even hastening, emigration of Indo-Fijians of all ages.

Because projections from the 2007 census results estimated that Taukei would constitute around 60% of the population by 2014 and predict that they will form a steadily increasing majority (FBS 2008) it is their voting behaviour on which this study is largely focused. And because the pre-election opinion polls that suggested a FijiFirst win were criticized as too urban in their focus, it is the urban Taukei vote that is examined first.

Fiji First does appear to have attracted a higher number of Taukei votes in urban areas than in the rural areas and this may have something to do with the rather different preoccupations of Taukei urban dwellers. But a disaggregation of the estimated Taukei urban vote suggests that other factors might have been at play.

Chart 3: Urban Votes of Fiji First Party



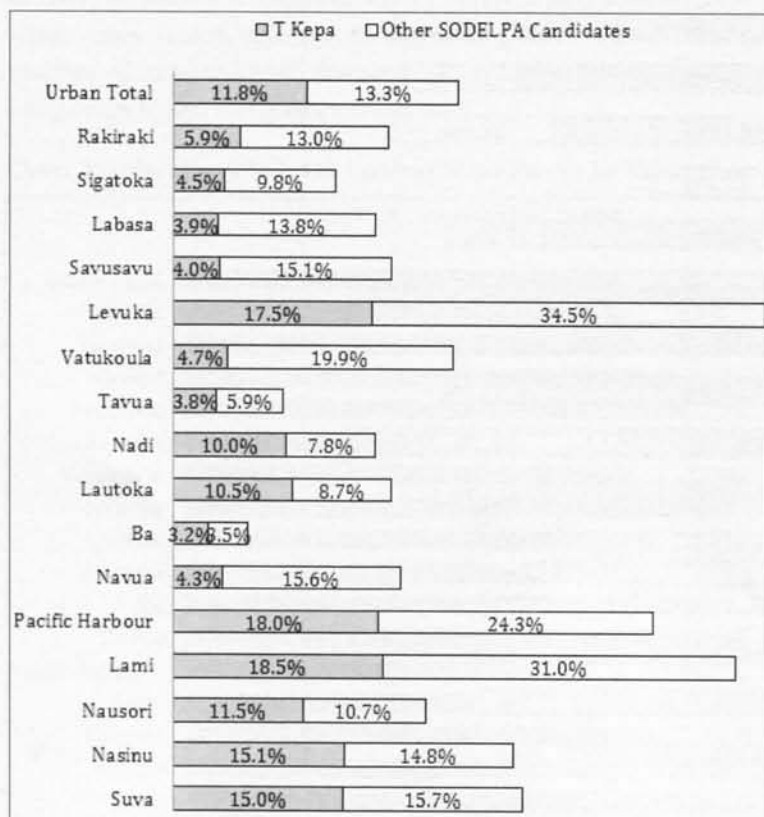
Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

Two of the five predominantly Taukei urban centres, Lami and Levuka voted strongly for SODELPA, while the others, Suva, Vatukoula and Pacific Harbour favoured FijiFirst. The difference in some can be explained by locale, with Lami forming a part of Ro Teimumu's Rewa province for example, and Vatukoula being on the Western side of Viti Levu, the region with the strongest electoral tradition of voting against the Eastern chiefly establishment now represented by SODELPA.

SODELPA candidates who attracted votes in the urban areas were most often those from the surrounding vanua, like Salote Radrodoro from Naitasiri who took votes in Nasinu, and Mosese Bilitavo from Macuata who polled well in Labasa. Mere Samisoni and Jone Kubuabola are not from Rewa, but Lami is now home to a number of migrants.

Only in Suva city, Navua and Pacific Harbour did the urban vote go in the opposite direction to that of its province. In Suva city, this may have something to do with the fact that it hosts a sizeable number of Taukei military personnel and civil servants living in government quarters. Almost every last one of the military stationed at Nabua voted for Bainimarama. And although, as Fraenkel observes (Fraenkel 2015), a number of Taukei civil servants had expressed concern about the Bainimarama regime's policies and actions since 2006 and/or sympathy with SODELPA's focus on the vulnerability of Taukei culture and insecurity of the community's political and economic rights, others supported FijiFirst. Moreover, Suva is home to a relatively high proportion of voters from minority communities, including Fijians of Chinese, European, and Melanesian descent, who were unlikely to have voted for SODELPA.

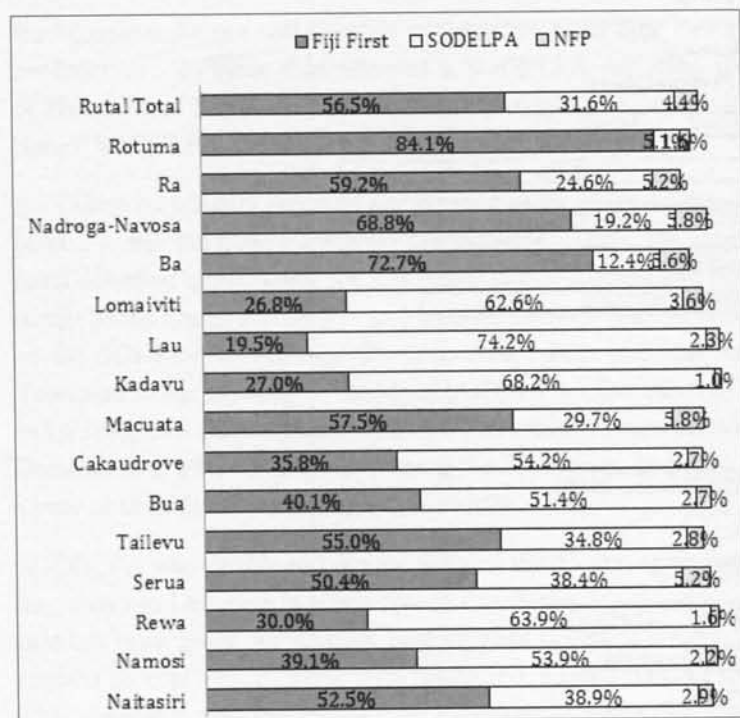
Chart 4: Urban Votes of SODELPA



Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

There were only two other cases where the urban voting pattern differed significantly from the rural. In one there was a major difference in the ethnic composition of town and country. This was in Namosi where Navua town's predominantly Indo-Fijian population delivered 65% of the vote to FijiFirst and the overwhelmingly Taukei rural population voting population only 39%. The vote in Pacific Harbour also went against the rural trend but there it was because of differences in the vanua composition of 'town' and country. Pacific Harbour voted for FijiFirst and Serua rural areas voted more in favour of SODELPA. This appears to be because FijiFirst happened to field a candidate from Pacific Harbour's local Dravuni yavusa while SODELPA had deliberately chosen one with widespread appeal in the rest of Serua, coming from the province's leading yavusa Korolevu.

Chart 5: Rural Party Votes by Province



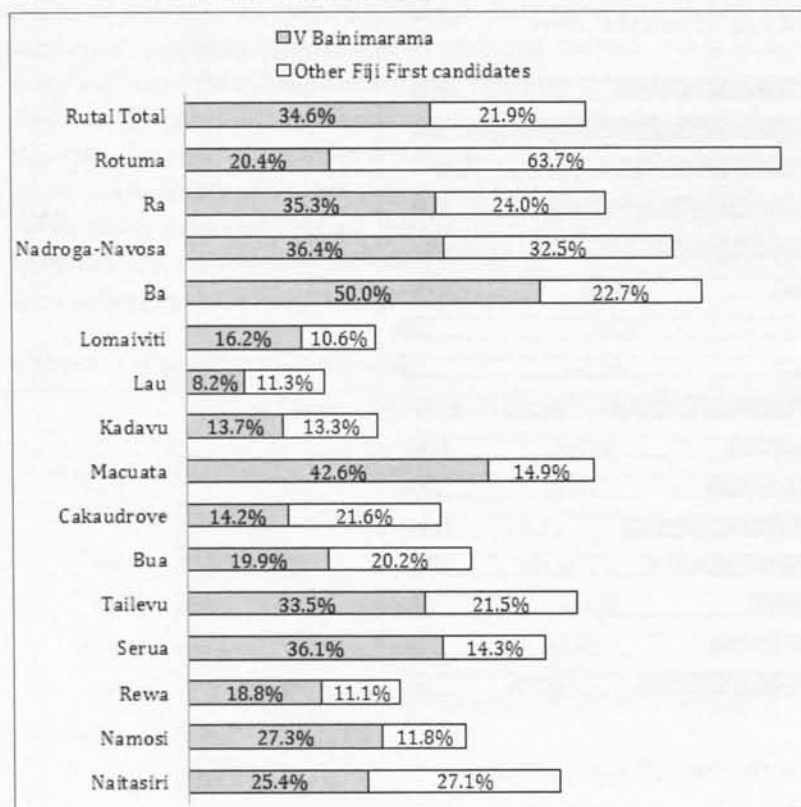
Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

The data shows that, apart from in Rotuma where it picked up over 84% of the vote, FijiFirst polled most strongly in both urban and rural areas on the Western side of Viti Levu. This is not surprising because, as Fraenkel notes, many Taukei in this area of Fiji have long been suspicious and resentful of the power of the Eastern chiefs, now embodied in SODELPA. A number of communities in the coastal areas of Ba and Nadroga-Navosa have also benefitted from the very development that Bainimarama was now promising to accelerate while the villages in the highlands had long been marginalized in developmental terms and may have welcomed the prospect of being provided with the basic services being promised by FijiFirst. The very low percentage of the vote that went to SODELPA in the rural areas of Ba might be attributed in part to the fact that it is one of the only two provinces in Fiji with a slight majority of Indo-Fijians.

But a sample survey of wholly Taukei village results suggests that Fiji First was twice as popular as SODELPA amongst Ba's rural Taukei voters. In Nadroga-Navosa where the rural population is roughly balanced between Taukei and Indo-Fijian, only 24% voted for SODELPA, that is less than half the Taukei population. And in Ra, where the rural population is predominantly Taukei, FijiFirst won over 59% of the vote.

It is interesting to note that the Taukei vote in the interior of Viti Levu leaned particularly strongly to FijiFirst, irrespective of province. The obvious explanation for this would be that development is particularly welcome in the highlands but other factors may have influenced voting choices there, including resentment of the neo-traditional political hierarchy and a consequently low level of interest in SODELPA's focus on the restoration of the Great Council of Chiefs.

Chart 6: Rural Votes for FijiFirst Party



Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

SODELPA polled very strongly in Rewa where its leader is also the highest ranked chief. Here the party took around 64% of the vote meaning that they had the support of a very high proportion, though by no means all, of the province's Taukei population. SODELPA also won a good majority of the vote in mainland Cakaudrove, the predominantly Taukei maritime provinces of Kadavu, Lomaiviti and Lau, and the small southern Viti Levu provinces of Namosi and Serua.

As with the vote in the FijiFirst majority areas, other factors than the economic may have come in to play. SODELPA had selected a higher number of chiefly candidates than had FijiFirst,

including Ro Teimumu, Roko Tui Dreketi, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, Tui Cakau, and Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, Tui Namosi. Other candidates had also been chosen for their vanua connections, examples being Anare Vadei from Lomaiviti and Sela Nanovo from Kadavu.

Paramountcy does not appear to have been a vote winner. Neither Ro Teimumu, head of the Burebasaga confederacy, nor Ratu Naiqama, head of the Tovata won many votes outside their own strongholds and in the latter case this did not even extend province-wide. Cakaudrove has a very different history and vanua organization to Rewa, with some vanua falling under the Tui Cakau's direct authority, and others not, and historical deviations in the distribution of power still resented by some. The former explains why SODELPA's Niko Nawaikula took almost as many votes as Ratu Naiqama in mainland Cakaudrove and the latter may explain why the Taukei vote split between SODELPA and FijiFirst on his island of residence, Taveuni.

Ro Teimumu did not poll strongly in the areas, other than Rewa, that fall within her Burebasaga confederacy. In those that returned a SODELPA majority, the southern Viti Levu provinces of Namosi and Serua, and the maritime provinces of Lomaiviti, and Kadavu, voters preferred 'local' SODELPA candidates.

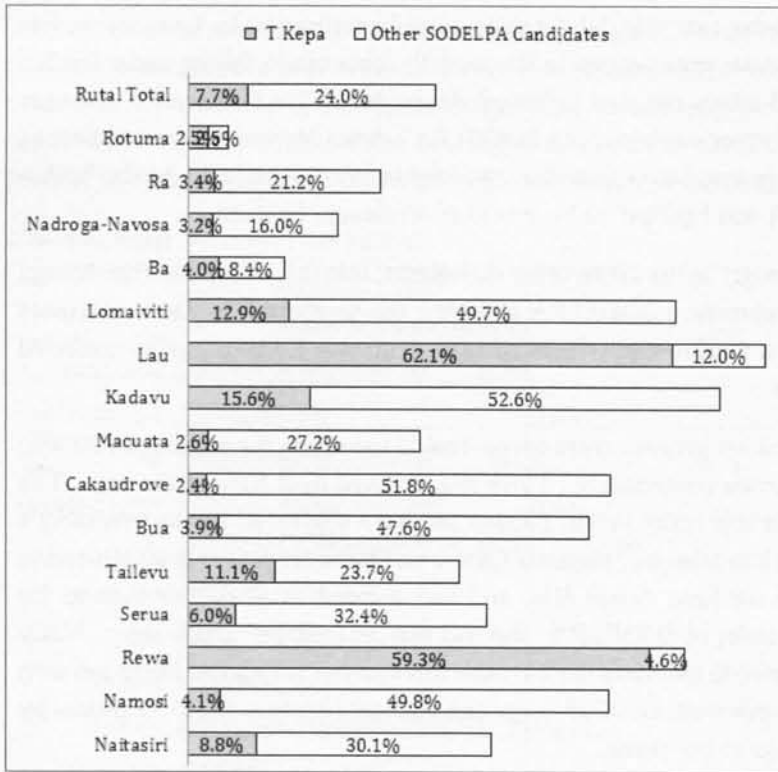
Ro Teimumu actually received her greatest share of the Taukei vote from the people of Lau who belong in the Tui Cakau's Tovata confederacy. There she received over 80% of the vote. The most common explanation for this result is that Lauans had been aggrieved by Bainimarama's ouster of the Lauan former Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase and the more recent disqualification of the SODELPA candidate for Lau, Anare Jale, and had decided to give their vote to Ro Teimumu in her capacity as leader of SODELPA. But this may be only part of the story. Many in Lau still owe vanua allegiance to the Mara family, most members of whom had fallen out with Bainimarama after initially supporting the 2006 coup, and who are vasulevu to Ro Teimumu by virtue of their father's marriage to her sister.

SODELPA was unable to take the 80% of the Taukei vote that it needed to win the election in any area but Lau, and in some places like Serua, its majority was very thin. One explanation that has been given for its poor performance is that 'a sizable portion of Taukei voters did not register to vote and, of those who registered, a good number did not vote' (Madraiwiwi 2015). This argument, also put forward by Fraenkel, assumes that the non-voters were all Taukei and that they all would have voted SODELPA. But a number of the unregistered (who included Indo-Fijians) were either indifferent to politics or sceptical about the likelihood of real political change. And those who did register but didn't vote were sometimes motivated not by the 'conviction that government, and potentially the Fiji military, would tolerate only a Bainimarama victory' (Fraenkel 2015) but by dissatisfaction with all of the party choices on offer.

Another explanation for SODELPA's poor showing is that FijiFirst benefited from a 'youth vote'. The voting age had been lowered from 21 to 18 in the lead-up to the election and it was thought that the expanded cohort of young voters would be attracted to the most rhetorically socially progressive and economically focused party. But caution is again warranted. The much-maligned pre-election opinion polls showed higher support for SODELPA amongst voters under the age of 34 than amongst their elders. Social media was also suggesting that where

Taukei youth voters made their electoral choices on the basis of party practice and policies they were just as, if not more, likely to opt for the one that promised to defend Taukei identity and promote communal rights.

Chart 7: Rural Votes for SODELPA



Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

Many rural SODELPA supporters chose to vote for their own chief, as in Namosi, for a candidate with an important local traditional role, as in Bua, or for a commoner with natal links to their vanua. This is very apparent in Table 4. But voter preference for candidates with vanua connections was not confined to those supporting SODELPA. It was also evident in the FijiFirst vote, with locally related Taukei FijiFirst candidates often winning more of the party's vote in their areas than Bainimarama.

Much has been made of the large share of the vote won by Bainimarama himself. As Charts 2 and 3 demonstrate, he received 41% of the overall vote and 69% of FijiFirst's votes. The most obvious explanation for this is that Bainimarama was himself very popular with a large proportion of the voting public, being seen as a 'man of the people' who acted on his rhetorical commitment to development and who could be approached directly by long-ignored communities. FijiFirst relied heavily on this personal appeal in its election campaign, using it as the focus for the party's advertising and campaigning, and making Bainimarama even more prominent and visible.

Table 4: Regional Concentration Of Votes for Top 18 SODELPA Candidates

Candidate #	Name	Regional Concentration
148	Aseri Radrodro	81% of votes from rural Naitasiri
150	Niko Nawaikula	78% of votes from rural Cakaudrove
158	Salote Radrodro	74% of votes from Nasinu town
164	Suliano Matanitobua	55% of votes from Namosi
171	Mikaele Leawere	70% of votes from rural Serua
188	Semesa Karavaki	59% of votes from Suva city and Nasinu town
197	Mere Samisoni	63% of votes from Lami town
219	Mosese Bulitavo	88% of votes from rural Macuata and Labasa town
254	Naigama Lalabalavu	77% of votes from rural Cakaudrove
292	Jiosefa Dulakiverata	79% of votes from rural Tailevu
295	Viliame Tagivetaua	85% of votes from Bua
317	Teimumu Kepa	Votes from many regions
335	Anare Vadei	63% of votes from rural Lomaiviti
344	Sela Nanovo	74% of votes from Kadavu
345	Bill Gavoka	67% of votes from rural Nadroga-Navosa
355	Kiniviliame Kiliraki	66% of votes from rural Naitasiri
359	Isoa Tikoca	64% of votes from rural Tailevu
382	Jone Kubuabola	64% of votes from Lami town

Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

Bainimarama's 'rock star' strategy, as Steve Ratuva (2014) describes it, may have contributed to his ability to attract votes from across the country, along with his policies of development for the Taukei and security for the Indo-Fijian community. But it should be noted that 31% of the FijiFirst vote did not go to its party leader but was spread amongst the other candidates. Some Indo-Fijians voted for local or national community leaders and others for Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Bainimarama's very active attorney general. And it appears that a substantial number of Taukei voted for FijiFirst candidates who were 'kai vata' or otherwise locally prominent.

In Naitasiri Timoci Natuva, who was born in Wainibokasi, and Alivereti Nabulivou, local president of the Ginger Farmers' Cooperative, polled better than Bainimarama between them and secured about 20% of the overall vote. In Rotuma, Jioji Konrote (Rotuman former RFMF major-general, diplomat and politician) secured 62% of the vote. And a number of FijiFirst candidates outpolled Bainimarama in their vanua areas, including Jiko Luveni in Ono-i-Lau and Ratu Ruveni Nadalo in the Taukei communities linked to the chiefly village of Cuvu in Nadroga.

Nadalo had explicitly said before the election that he would be relying on his traditional connections to mobilise support (Kunaluvea, 2014), and the geographically concentrated nature of the votes for other Taukei candidates from both parties suggest that such connections were a factor in Taukei voting choices. It may be that FijiFirst candidates from large, united and well-connected vanua were able to outpoll Bainimarama in their home areas, and that for a number of Taukei voters who had no local representatives; Bainimarama was the default, rather than the preferred option.

Table 5: Regional Concentration Of Votes for Successful Fiji First Candidates

Candidate #	Name	Regional Concentration
138	Inoke Kubuabola	46% votes from rural Cakaudrove
145	Sanjit Patel	66% votes from Nadi Town
162	Brij Lal	55% votes from rural areas of Northern Division
167	Vijay Nath	73% votes from Nausori Town
173	Balmindar Singh	49% votes from Nausori Town
184	Alivereti Nabulivou	81% votes from rural Naitasiri
185	Timoci Natuva	77% votes from rural Naitasiri
187	Semi Korolavesau	53% votes from rural Ba and Nadi Town
200	Osea Naiqamu	56% votes from rural Ba and Nadroga-Navosa
212	Mereseini Vuniwaqa	57% votes from rural Bua and Cakaudrove
216	Samuela Vunivalu	83% votes from rural Ba and Nadi Town
220	Ruveni Nadalo	92% of votes from rural Nadroga-Navosa
237	Pio Tikoduadua	70% of votes from rural Tailevu
245	Faiyaz Koya	66% of votes from rural and urban Ba
250	Rosy Akbar	86% of votes from rural Ba and Ba Town
255	Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum	Urban votes from all large population centres but rural votes are mostly from Ba
259	Lorna Eden	59% votes from rural Cakaudrove and Savusavu Town
263	Laisenia Tuitubou	31% votes from rural Tailevu
265	Jiko Luveni	53% votes from Suva city and Nasinu and Lami towns
279	Voreqe Bainimarama	59% votes from urban areas
286	Netani Rika	46% votes from rural and urban Lomaiviti (Levuka)
288	Neil Sharma	38% votes from Suva city and Nasinu town
294	Joeli Cawaki	43% votes from rural Ra
304	Mahendra Reddy	Supported in several urban centres as well as rural Nadroga-Navosa
306	Parveen Kumar	85% votes from rural Ba and Ba Town
315	Jioji Konrote	34% of votes from Rotuma; 62% of Rotuman votes
323	Alvick Maharaj	42% of votes from Macuata
352	Iliesa Delana	36% of votes from rural Nadroga-Navosa
356	Veena Bhatnagar	No specific regional strength
358	Jone Usamate	68% of votes from Suva-Nausori corridor
361	Viam Pillay	86% of votes from rural Ba
365	Inia Seruiratu	59% of votes from rural areas of Northern Division and Tailevu

Source: Calculation based on Fiji Elections Office data (2014)

The final aspect of the Taukei vote that merits further analysis is the motivation of those who voted for FijiFirst because of its performance and policies. All commentators on the elections have presumed that it was the party's promises of development and economic progress that won over such an electorally significant number. But this is not all that Bainimarama was pledging to do for Taukei. Another initiative that has been overlooked by election analysts but was popular in some quarters was his push to have Fiji's many vacant traditional titles filled. The process of doing so would provide an opportunity to restore rightful power-holders and restructure traditional relationships that had been corrupted by the colonial administration and the ambitions of chiefly title-holders, before and after independence. The prospect of clearing the customary pathways or *sala vakavanua* may have been more attractive than the building of physical roads to some voters in areas such as Cakaudrove, Macuata and Lau.

It is impossible to know whether candidates from either party won their votes because of whom they were or what practices they were criticizing and policies they were espousing. In some areas such as those in Vanua Levu affected by army reprisals after the 2000 coup, Taukei voters may have had strong political preferences and it seems likely that developmental or communal identity interests were the deciding factor for some right across the country and contributed to the almost universal splitting of the vote. But as the lack of definitive conclusions in this study suggests, much remains unknown about voting patterns in the 2014 Fiji elections. A great deal more research needs to be undertaken into why voters, particularly from the Taukei community, made the electoral choices that they did. It may well turn out to be that the obvious explanations were right and that SODELPA's interpretation of 'Fijian interests' was simply trumped for a significant minority of Taukei by Fiji First's more economically focused version. More localized vanua concerns and senses of identity may not have played a major influence on the electoral outcome. But it would be unwise for government and opposition parties to assume that this was the case. And it would be unwise for political analysts to predict the outcome of the next election before we have more data and more detailed analysis on this one.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *A vanua (as opposed to 'the vanua') may be defined as a Taukei socio-political group that has shared beliefs and practices and ideally has a shared allegiance to a recognised authority*
- 2 *The best analysis of the Indo-Fijian vote in 2014 is contained in Brij V. Lal, 'In Frank Bainimarama's Shadow: Fiji, Elections and the Future', Journal of Pacific History, 49:4, 2014*

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