

AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN ETHNIC POLITICS IN FIJI 1987-2006

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Political parties are imbued with special functions making them an essential component of democracy. A country's measure of democracy also depends on the system of its party politics. While the developed democratic countries of the West have institutionalised party systems, other developing countries, some of which are catergorised as deeply-divided societies are still struggling with their party systems.

In most of these countries party systems are weak and characterised by ethnic-based political parties. These parties only appeal to their community without appealing to voters from other communties. Mostly these communities are the ethnic communities of these particular parties. The usage of what might be referred as 'ethnic attractors' in the form of traditional allegiance and clientilism is common not only to instill fear of withdrawal of special priviledges from the electorate but also to sustain the bourgeiosie class within these societies.

Fiji is not a stranger to such types of ethnic-based party politicking. Over the years since Independence, political parties in Fiji have continued to use ethnicity as a means of attracting votes. Fiji has had an extensive review of its electoral system, however, moderate party politics still seems to be an illusion.

This study evaluates the extent to which political parties and the electoral system contribute to ethnic politics by evaluating their roles over the years since 1987 until 2006. The study also includes the period from Independence until 1997 to show how ethnic politics popularised by political parties began.

Keyword: Politic;Parties;Ethnic