

## Discussion and activities

### 1. Quick Quiz

Work in pairs or small groups to answer these questions. All the answers can be found in the information you have just read.

1. What is Fiji's Head of State called?
2. How is the Government formed?
3. Why is our system of government sometimes known as the "Westminster" system?
4. What is the Chamber of Parliament?
5. What are the key functions of Parliament?
6. Why isn't the President allowed into Parliament?
7. Who puts forward the plan for how taxes should be spent?

### 2. Building Understanding of Vocabulary and Concepts

Copy the grid below and add more rows. (If you are working in pairs or a group, you could copy it onto big sheets of paper.)

Identify words that were new to you or that you didn't understand. Write what you think each word means, find the definition, and then explain how the word relates to your own life.

Use the example given below.

New Word	What we think it means?	Definition	Our explanation
Legislative	It is something to do with laws.	Having the power to make laws.	Parliament makes the laws. The laws it makes are final. Many of these laws affect our lives and parents' lives.

Here are some words to get you started: **Government, representative, Bill, supreme, accountable, taxes.**

### Try This

Write a job description for a Member of Parliament, the Prime Minister, or the Leader of the Opposition. What sort of qualities or experiences would be needed for these roles?

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Card 1



# DISCOVER Parliament

## What is Parliament?

If you've watched the news on television, you may have heard reporters say, "Today in Parliament ..." or "Parliament has passed a new law ...". You've probably seen photographs of Parliament Buildings in Suva, or you may have even visited them. But do you know what happens there? What is Parliament and what does it do?

Our Parliament consists of the President and the members of Parliament. The President does not participate in ordinary Parliament debates and meetings except during the opening of Parliament where he delivers a speech. The Fiji Parliament is made up of Members of Parliament as determined by the Electoral Commission one year before each general election. There were 50 members from 2014, 51 from 2019 and this number can change in the future. The members of Parliament represent the views and concerns of the people of Fiji, which means we are a representative democracy.

As well as representing the people, some members of Parliament form the Government (or Executive) and are responsible for running the country. Parliament also has the responsibility to make new laws, update old laws, and approve decisions about how tax money will be spent for the benefit of all people of Fiji. In addition, Parliament has opportunities to question the Government's actions to keep it "accountable" for the decisions it makes.

The President of the Republic of Fiji is the Head of State. The President's role in the work of Parliament is to approve new laws. He does this by signing the law, this is called **Assent**. The President opens Parliament at the beginning of a new session. He also closes the Parliament at the end of a term. This final act of closing Parliament is called **Dissolution**.



Parliament Chamber



Parliament of Republic of Fiji, Government Buildings, Suva



# How is Parliament organised?

Our Parliament is modelled on the British Parliament, so our system of government is sometimes called the "Westminster" system. (Westminster is the part of London where the British Parliament is located). Under this system, some members of Parliament form the Government. The Government must have the support of over half the members of Parliament (the majority).

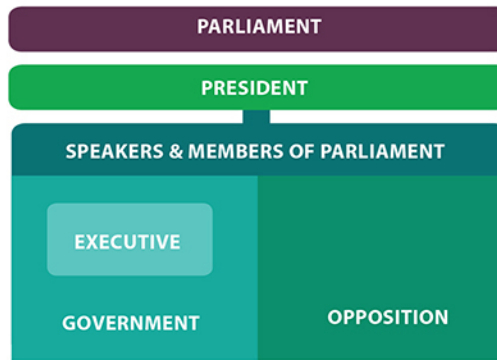
The Government is led by the Prime Minister, who appoints other members as Ministers. The members of Parliament who are not in the Government form the Opposition. Both the Government and the Opposition can consist of one or more parties.



Government House, Nasova, Levuka in the 1870s  
Photograph by Courtesy of Fiji Museum

## SOME HISTORICAL FACTS

Fiji's Parliament used to be a bicameral system, and consisted of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Fijian Parliament dates back to 10 October 1970, when Fiji became independent from the United Kingdom. The Parliament replaced the former colonial legislative body, the Legislative Council, which had existed in various forms throughout the entire colonial period. Since independence, Parliamentary rule has been interrupted four times. The first two interruptions were in 1987, the third in 2000 and another in 2006. The 2013 Constitution prescribes a unicameral parliament.



## THAT'S INTERESTING

The first attempt to set up a Government based on the principles of the Westminster System for Fiji was tried at Nasova, Levuka in 1871. It was then called Kingdom of Fiji and Ratu Cakobau unilaterally tried setting up his Government backed by European settlers in Levuka. In 1874 Fiji was ceded to Great Britain.

Source: The Sydney Morning Herald, 14 Nov. 1871, p.3.



Photograph of Suva, Fiji, showing Government Buildings, taken between 1888 and 1892 by an unknown photographer.  
Photograph by Courtesy of National Library of New Zealand

## DID YOU KNOW ?

The old Government Buildings was located at the junction of Macarthur Street and Gordon Street; the present site where Suva Anglican Church is located. Much of the building materials were re-used from the Government Building in Levuka while constructing these buildings. The capital was relocated to Suva in 1882 and the Legislative Council met here until 1939.

# What does Parliament do?

## It passes new laws.

Laws are necessary for a fair and safe society. Parliament carefully considers new laws and laws that need changing. Some laws are repealed because they are no longer needed.

## It represents the people.

Fiji's system of government is representative. This means that the members of Parliament are elected by the people, and Parliament needs to represent the views and concerns of all Fijians.

## It keeps the Government accountable.

Parliament has ways of checking that the Government makes wise and responsible decisions for the people of Fiji. The Government must show it is acting responsibly by answering questions about what it does.

## It approves how tax money is spent.

Parliament must approve the Government's plans for how taxes are to be spent. Every year, the Government sets out a Budget. This is a detailed plan of how it intends to use tax money for such things as education, health, and social welfare. Parliament must approve the Government's plans before any money is spent.

## THAT'S INTERESTING

In the Republic of Fiji, power is shared between the Legislature (Parliament), the Executive (Government), and the Judiciary (Courts). Each of these three arms of the State is independent and has separate roles to play. Their roles are clearly set out in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

## DID YOU KNOW ?

When Parliament resumed in 1972, under the 1970 Constitution, Fiji's Parliament adopted a bi-cameral system. It had two houses, the Upper House and the Lower House. The Lower House was also called the House of Representatives (elected members). The Upper House had nominated members called Senators. The 1990 Constitution and the 1997 constitution also prescribed a bi-cameral Parliament.



Opening of Parliament by Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, 1987