

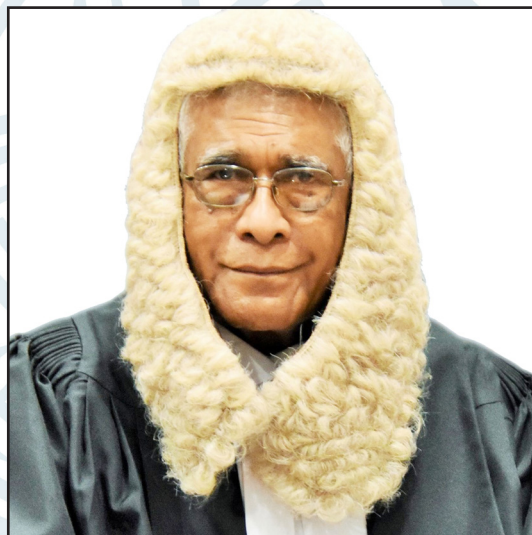


AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIJI PARLIAMENT 2018–2022

FOREWORD BY THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER

I am honoured as Speaker of Parliament to present the overview of the Fiji Parliament 2018–2022 term.

This is the second such publication that is essentially a statistical summary of Parliament's core work over a four-year Parliamentary term. The overview serves the purpose of informing citizens, Parliamentary stakeholders and interested groups about the work of Parliament. This is important as Parliament is dutybound to be accessible and open to citizens, and also ensure it promotes the public's understanding of Parliamentary work and processes.



Whilst the overview is a brief statistical account of how the Parliament had performed during the 2018–2022 term, it is by no means an exhaustive narrative of what has been achieved. There are other reports and documents produced by Parliament, its Committees and the Secretariat that are part of the body of information that documents the progress and achievements over the second Parliamentary term.

The overview is also an important guide to Parliament and the Secretariat on how it can do better in the next term and identify which areas it needs to focus on in terms of service improvements and institutional strengthening.

The overview does not dwell into the specific details of discussions, debates and processes achieved during the term, but is intended to provide a statistical synopsis of the key functions of Parliament.

Parliament was able to innovate and adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic, by leveraging new information communication technologies (ICTs) and the internet to undertake some of its key functions. This ensured minimal disruptions to its work and allowed the continuance of citizen and stakeholder engagement with its legislative process at the height of the pandemic.

The 2018–2022 Parliament had a total of 141 sitting or plenary days until dissolution on 30th October, 2022. During this second term, a total of 170 laws were passed by the Fiji Parliament. The most number of Bills – 49 in total – were passed in 2022 accounting for nearly a third of all Bills passed during this term.

A total of 1,495 questions were posed to Government Ministers during the period, 612 of which were questions with notice and 883 supplementary questions asked during debates. The raising of questions to Government Ministers by Members of Parliament is an important part of the oversight and scrutiny functions of Parliament.

There were 1,837 Standing Committee meetings conducted during this period, an increase from the previous 2014–2018 term. The Standing Committees also produced 203 reports and more reports of work done during this period were scheduled to be tabled in the next term. The Standing Committee inquiries and hearings are an important point of access for Fiji citizens with over 1,800 individuals participating, the majority submitting written and oral evidences and other information to the Committees. It is encouraging to note that despite the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, many individual citizens and representatives of various interest groups were able to participate through the Committee hybrid and virtual hearings.

I would like to thank all Honourable Members who served during this term, including those that have left Parliament and those that have successfully made it back into the 2022–2026 term. Their dedication and sacrifices particularly during the challenging times of the pandemic is highly appreciated.

I also take this opportunity to thank our development partners, especially the UNDP Pacific Office and the Fiji Parliament Support Project for the tremendous support during the 2018–2022 term. On behalf of Parliament, I also sincerely acknowledge with much gratitude the generous contribution of the Governments of Australia, Japan and New Zealand towards the UNDP FPSP Project that had supported Parliament's progress during the 2014–2018 term.



Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu
SPEAKER

Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

INTRODUCTION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

This overview is an important document compiled by the Secretariat that provides a statistical synopsis of Parliament's operations during the 2018–2022 term.

The statistics are collected annually and presented after each term of Parliament by the Tables and Committees Unit of the Secretariat with the collaboration of other units.

The Secretariat, has the important task of providing the required legislative, administrative and corporate support to Parliament, the Office of the Speaker and Honourable Members of Parliament. The statistics compiled in the 2018–2022 overview and other data maintained by the team are part of the collection of evidence-based information upon which we rely on to review our services and the required level of support for Parliament. These kinds of information are crucial to the Secretariat as they assist us in our efforts to continuously improve on the effectiveness and efficiency of our services to Honourable Members of Parliament, Parliamentary committees and other aspects of Parliamentary work.



The overview is also intended to inform Fiji citizens and Parliament's stakeholders of some of the Fijian Parliament's work output over the 2018–2022 term.

The statistics presented here cover the various core functions of Parliament that include the number of sitting or plenary days, number of Bills passed by Parliament, questions, motions, petitions and debates and the legislative reviews and oversight work of Standing Committees. It also covers citizens' interactions with Parliament through public inquiries or hearing of submissions by the Standing Committees.

The Parliament Secretariat has worked ahead against many challenges to ensure that the Parliament played its constitutional functions over the 2018–2022 term. As a team, the Secretariat has done exceptionally well considering the major disruptions and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in the first quarter of 2020 and towards the end of 2021. The staff had given their best despite the risks of a public health emergency to ensure that there were minimal disruptions to the core Parliamentary processes, particularly the passing of important Bills, Standing Committee work and so forth. A huge achievement was the Secretariat's ability to harness information and communications technologies (ICTs) to allow the first-ever hybrid sitting of the Fijian Parliament and virtual Standing Committee inquiries and meetings.

The institutional strengthening work undertaken by the Secretariat towards the end of the 2018–2022 term has allowed the team to be in a strong position to address the challenges of the future. The COVID-19 pandemic and the broader social, political and economic impacts had compelled us to re-look at our work processes and our approach towards serving the needs of Parliament. As the Secretariat prepares to embrace the next term of Parliament (2022–2026), I am confident that the Secretariat is well-positioned to take on the challenge of effectively and efficiently serving the new Parliament in the next four years.



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Jeanette Emberson (Mrs)
Secretary-General to Parliament

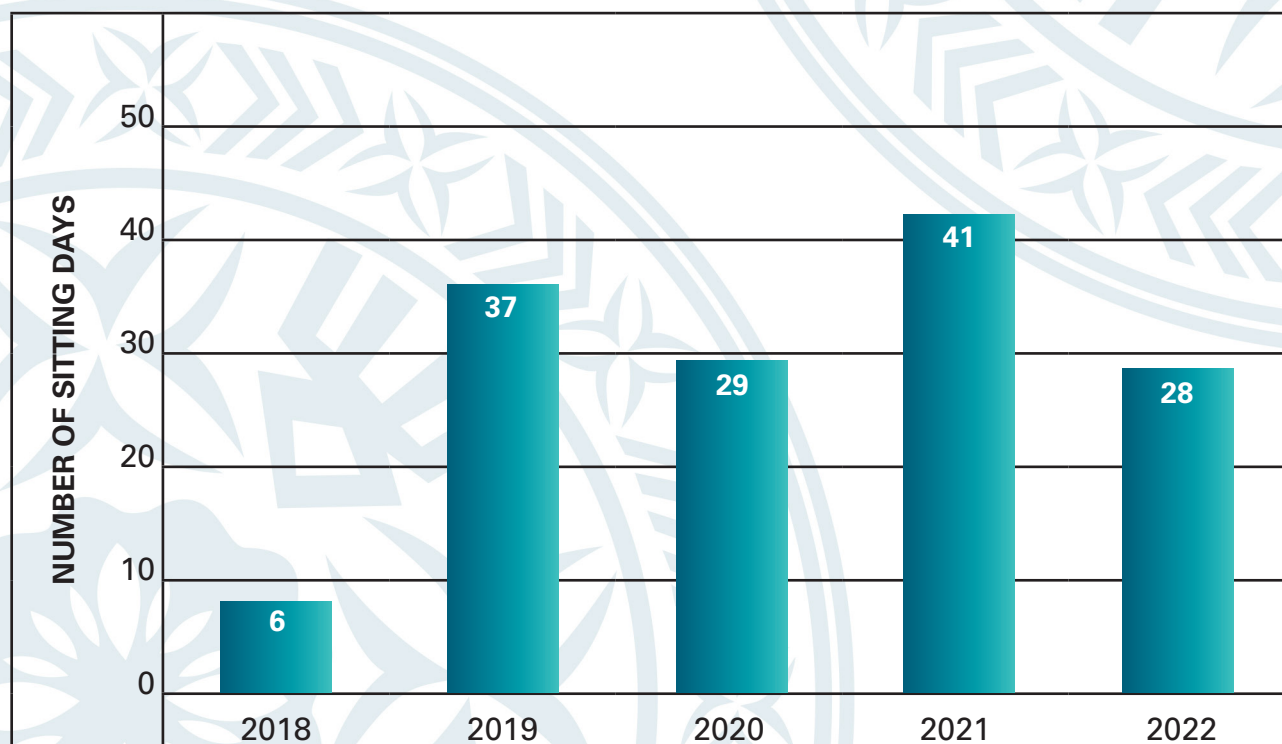
PARLIAMENT SITTINGS

During this Parliament term, from the first sitting of Parliament on 26th November, 2018 until the dissolution of Parliament on 30th October, 2022, there were a total of 141 Parliament sitting days.

Sitting days in Parliament according to the Standing Orders are from 9.30am to 12.30pm and from 2.30pm until 4.30pm for Monday to Thursday and 9.30am – 12.30pm on Fridays. However, on occasion the Parliament adjourned before the end of the full sitting day, and on numerous occasions the Parliament agreed to procedural motions to extend the sitting hours of the Parliament beyond 4.30pm.

Prolonged sitting days were a common feature during budget scrutiny at the Committee of Supply stage.

It should also be noted that in the Fiji Parliament, when the Parliament is sitting, the vast majority of Honourable Members are present and remain present throughout the sitting day. During the Parliament term 2018–2022, there was not a single occasion when there was no quorum in the Chambers, with quorum being one-third of all Members during debates or a majority of Members if a vote is required.

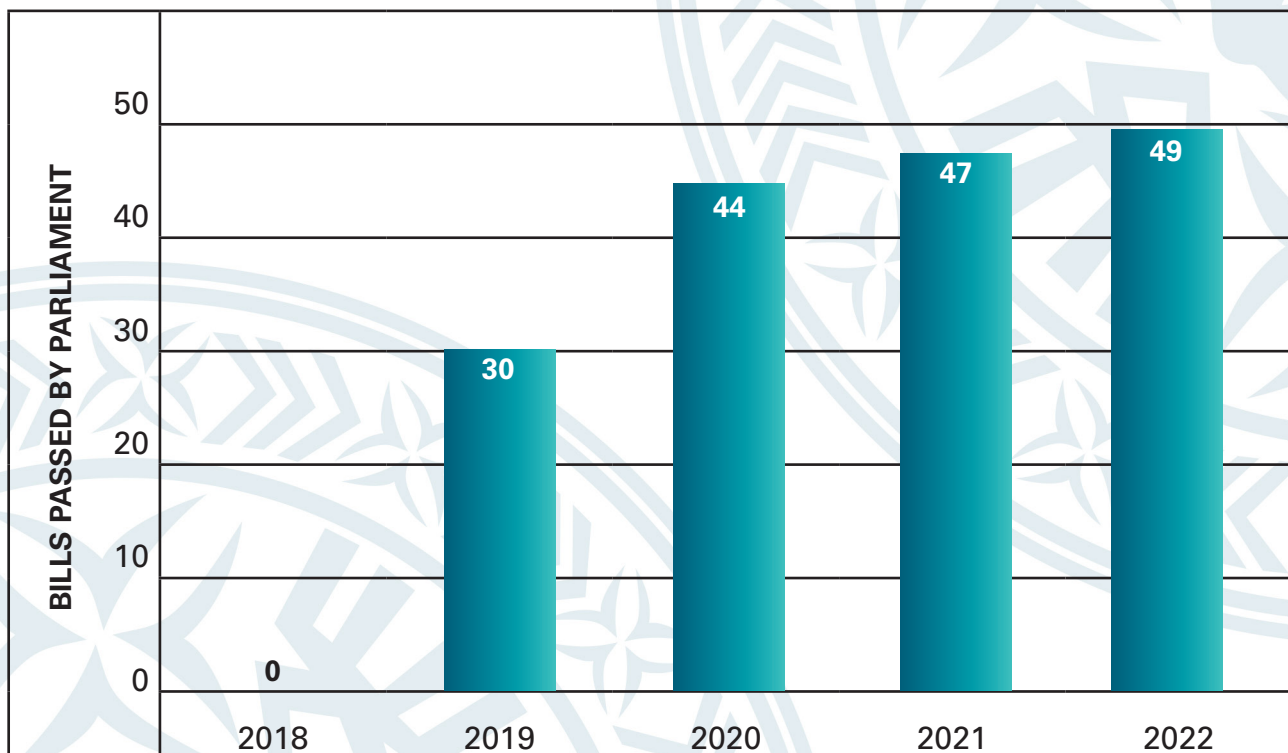


APPROVAL OF LEGISLATION

One of the key functions of any Parliament is scrutiny of proposed laws and final approval. Section 46(1) of the Fijian Constitution stipulates that the authority and power to make laws for the State is vested in Parliament consisting of the Members of Parliament and the President, and is exercised through the enactment of Bills passed by Parliament and assented to by the President.

In total, 170 laws were passed by the Fijian Parliament during the term 2018–2022.

Details of the laws passed by calendar year are provided below, with the 2022 calendar year being the busiest legislative period with 49 Bills approved by the Parliament.



INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

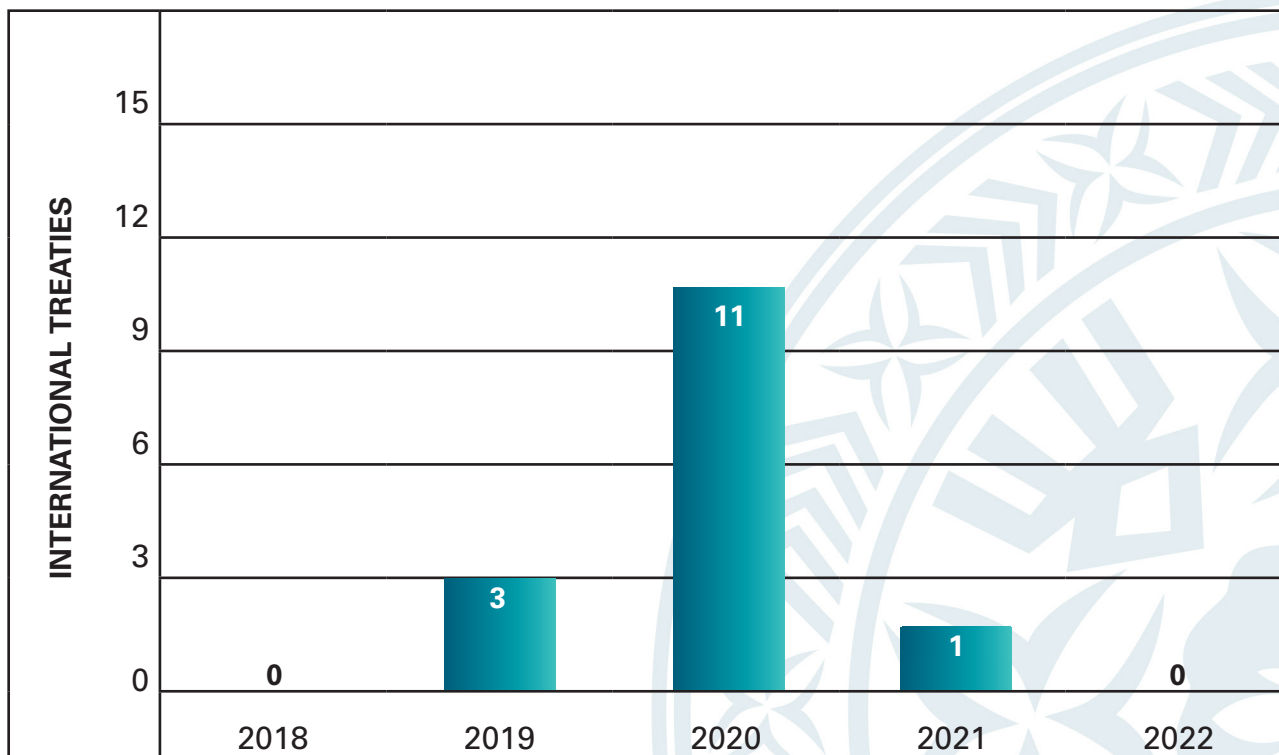
According to the Fiji Parliament's Standing Orders, "treaty" means a treaty, convention, or other bilateral or multi-lateral agreement signed by the Government of Fiji that binds the Government of Fiji to meet certain standards or to implement a particular legal or policy framework and includes any schedules, appendices, or other attachments to the agreement.

Section 51 of the Constitution further states that an international treaty or convention binds the State only after it has been approved by Parliament. Standing Order 130 outlines the process by which Parliament approves an international treaty.

All international treaties are referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Standing Committee will then be given no later than thirty (30) days to provide a report to Parliament. During such time, the Standing Committee will undertake due process of calling and sending invitations for public submissions to and from interested and relevant stakeholders or individuals.

During the Parliament term 2018–2022, a total of 15 international treaties were considered and approved by Parliament.





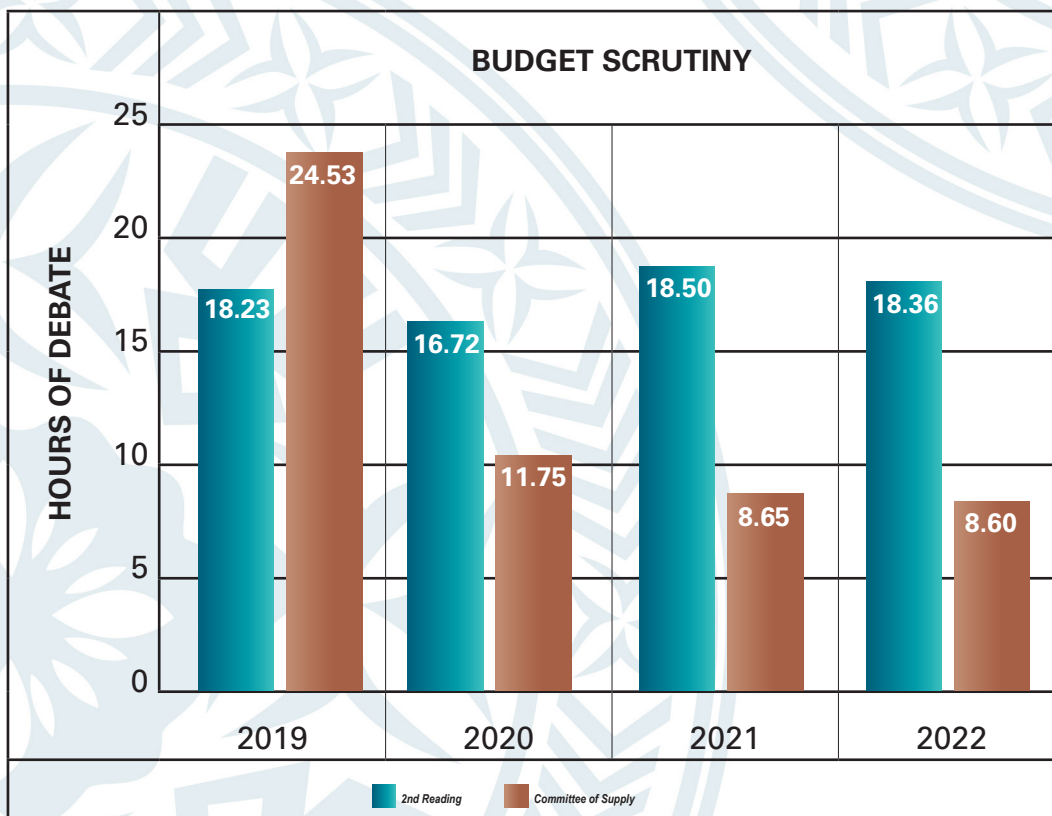
BUDGET SCRUTINY

One of the major roles of the Fiji Parliament is to review, scrutinise and approve the national budget. In the 2018–2022 Parliamentary term, the budget was scrutinised and approved on 6 occasions. This included 4 national budgets and 2 supplementary budgets. The supplementary budgets were passed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The budget process in the Fiji Parliament includes the tabling of the national budget by the Minister responsible for Finance. The Minister will table the Appropriation Bill, accompanied by the Estimates, which outlines the details of the appropriation amounts contained in the Bill. In tabling the Bill and Estimates, the Minister will deliver a budget speech which constitutes the first reading of the Appropriation Bill. The Minister is given leave to speak at length on the Bill, then Parliament adjourns for at least six days before the second reading of the Bill.

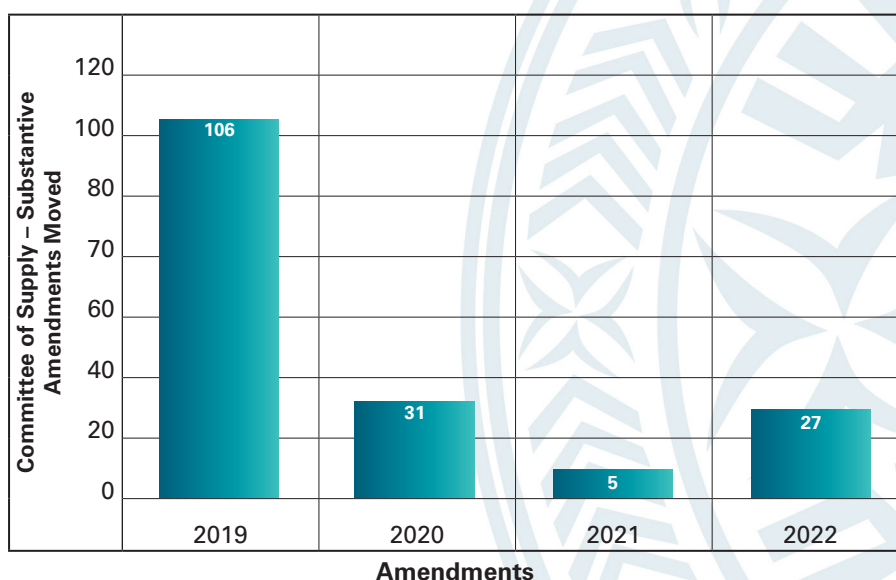
During the second reading of the Appropriation Bill, all MPs have the right to speak on the Bill at this stage. MPs are allowed 20 minutes each to speak on the Bill with the exception of the Shadow Minister responsible for Finance. The Shadow Minister is given the same amount of time that was taken by the Minister responsible for Finance when tabling the Bill, to speak at this stage.

Parliament has been tracking the time spent on the second reading of the Appropriation Bill. In total, during the 2018–2022 Parliamentary term, approximately 71 hours of debate was held on the second reading stage of the budget.



After the second reading, the Bill is passed without a vote. It is then referred to the Committee of Supply which consists of all MPs. The intent of the Committee is to review the details of the Bill and Estimates. In total over the 2018–2022 Parliamentary term, the Fiji Parliament considered the national budgets for almost 53 hours during the Committee of Supply. The longest Committee of Supply was in 2019 which lasted for about 24 hours and the shortest Committee of Supply was in 2022 which took only 8.6 hours.

During the Committee of Supply, amendments are allowed and can be proposed by any MP. A total of 169 amendments were tabled and voted upon in the Committee of Supply during the 2018–2022 Parliamentary Term.



OVERSIGHT OF THE EXECUTIVE

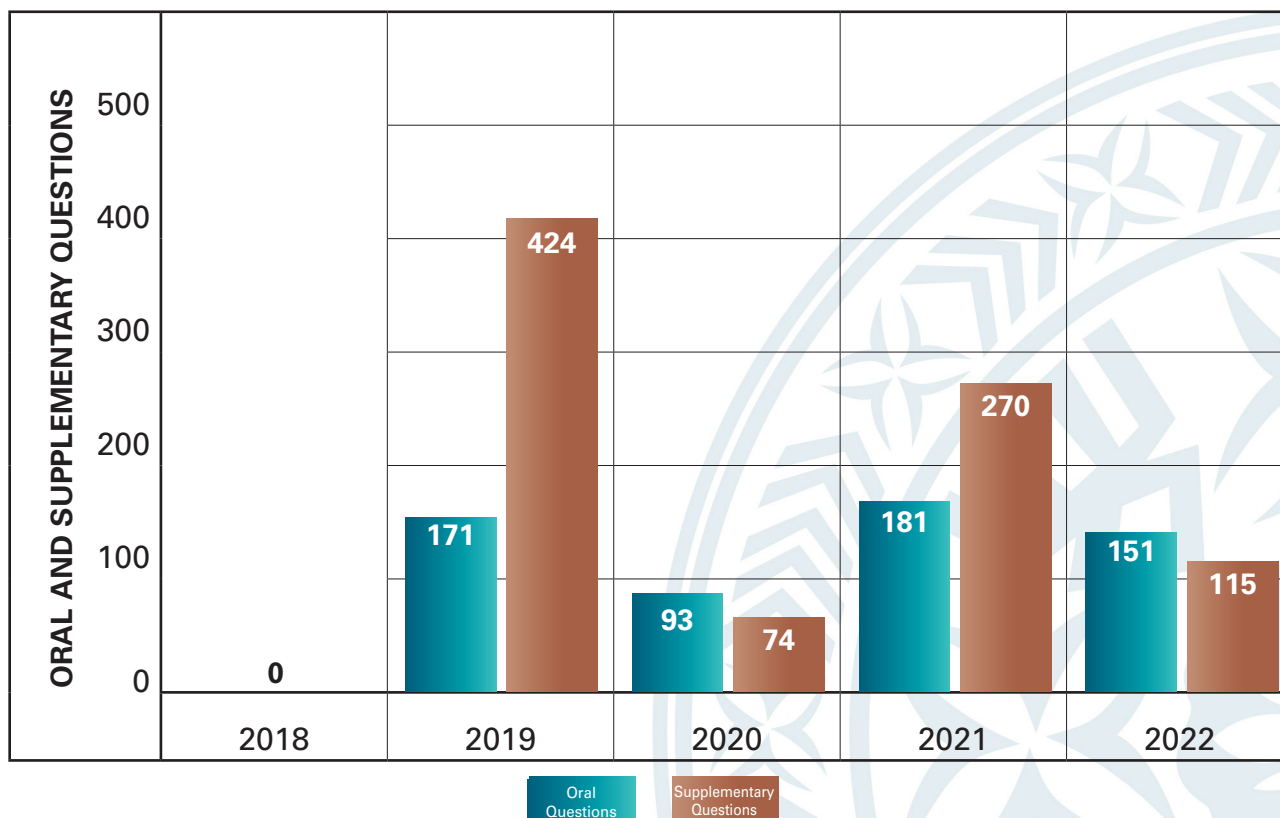
QUESTIONS

Members of Parliament are responsible for holding the Government of the day to account, and the Standing Orders of the Fiji Parliament provides Honourable Members with a number of mechanisms to undertake their oversight duties. This section of the report will focus on the work undertaken in the Fiji Parliament Chambers with regards to oversight during the 2018–2022 Parliamentary term with a separate report section dedicated to oversight through Parliament Committees.

Standing Order 41 outlines that Members who are not Ministers may address questions to the Government that relate to public matters for which the Government is officially responsible.

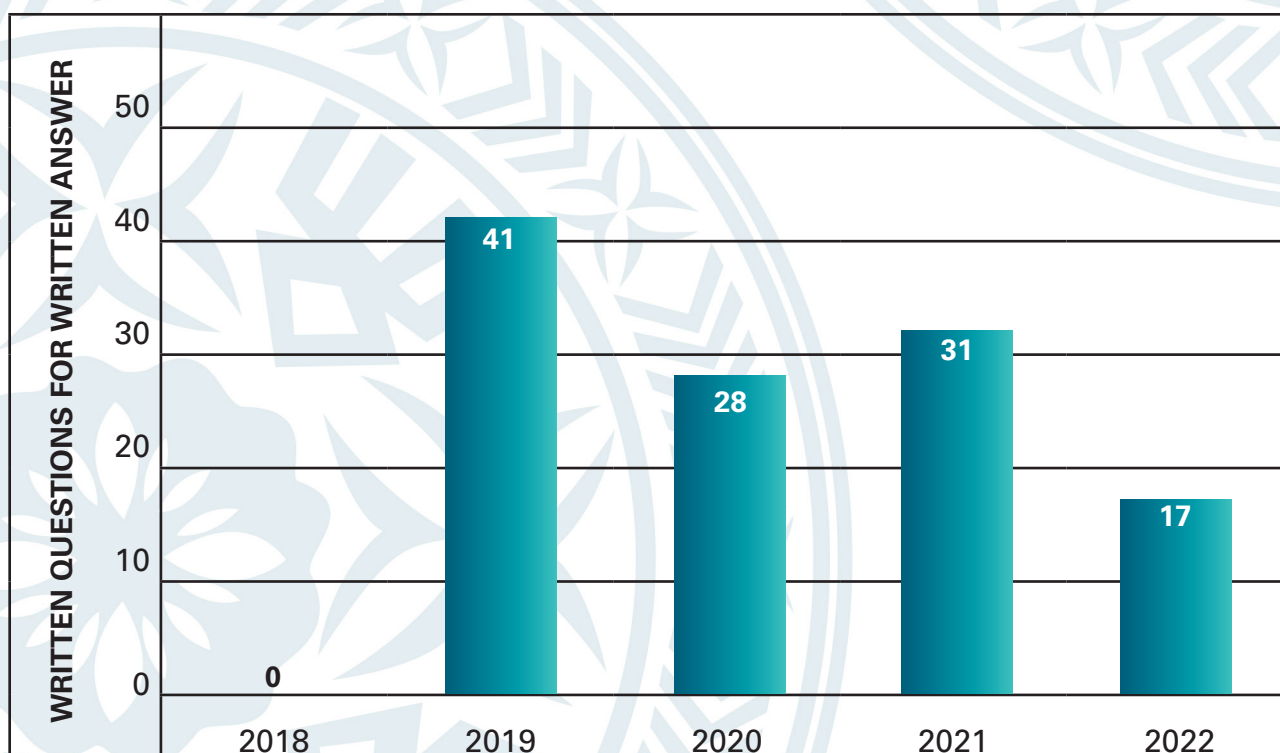
Question time is held every time the Parliament sits unless the Parliament's Business Committee has decided otherwise. Honourable Members must submit their question four days before the question is to be asked in order to allow the Minister time to collect the information required to provide a response to the question. At the beginning of the Parliamentary term 2018–2022, the Standing Orders allowed for six questions with notice every sitting day but this was amended to eight per sitting day following a review of the Standing Orders in 2019.

Over the Parliamentary term, a total of 596 questions with notice were asked by Honourable Members.



Following a Minister's response, the Standing Orders allow Honourable Members to ask supplementary questions to the Minister on the same subject as the original question. The number of supplementary questions asked is at the discretion of the Speaker. During the Parliamentary term 2018–2022, a total of 883 supplementary questions were asked to Ministers.

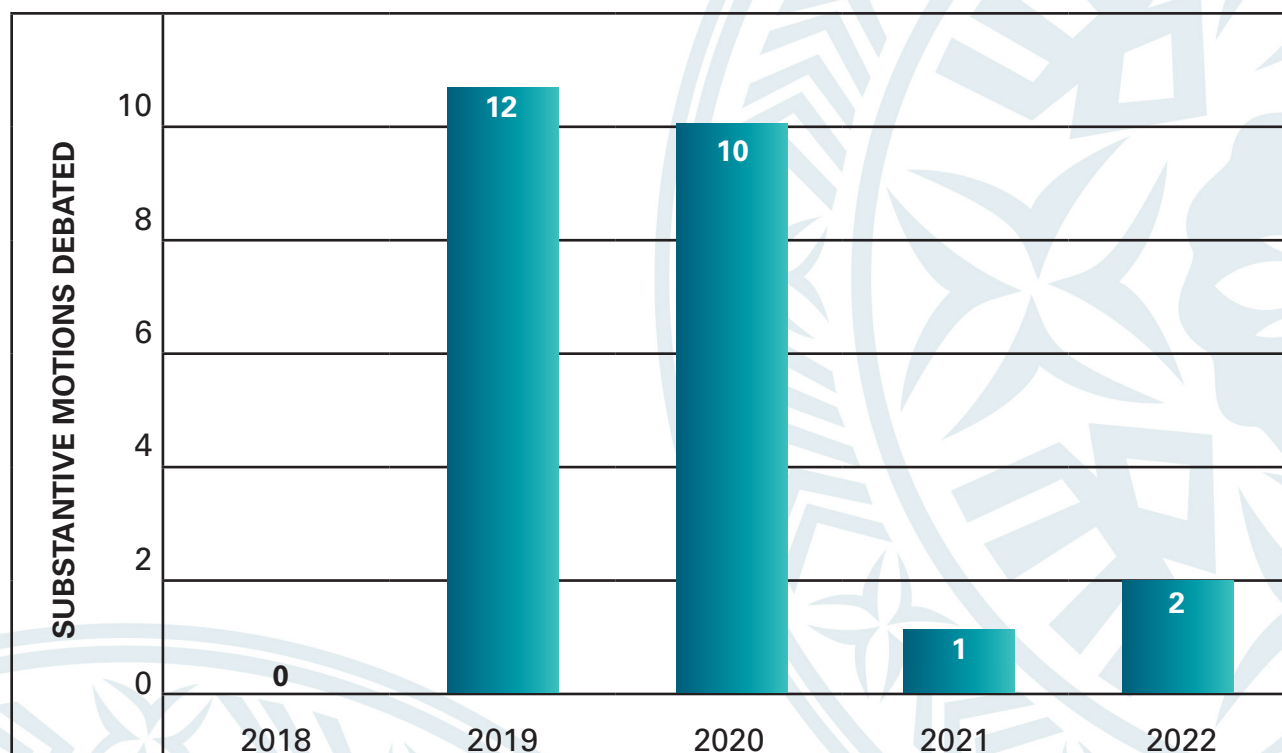
Honourable Members also have the right to submit written questions for written answer. Usually, written questions are statistical in nature and Ministers should provide a written response within 7 sitting days of the written question being asked. In total, 117 written questions were submitted during the term 2018–2022.



MOTIONS

Honourable Members have the right to submit motions that can then be discussed, debated and voted upon. Substantive motions are usually on issues of public interest and allow for discussion on national issues which allow Parliament to provide oversight of the Executive.

In total, 25 substantive motions (as opposed to procedural motions) were debated during the 2018–2022 Parliamentary term. All of these were submitted by Opposition MPs except for 2 motions by the Government Members in 2019. Motions are a mechanism that allow for debates to be held on topics of interest to the Honourable Members submitting the motion. Ministers usually respond on behalf of the Government on the issue being debated.



PETITIONS

Any member of Parliament may present a petition to Parliament that has endorsed upon it a certificate signed by the member stating that, in the member's opinion, the petition is respectful, does not promote disharmony, and is deserving of presentation.

If 40% of the total number of members of Parliament approve that the petition be referred to a standing committee, the Speaker must refer the petition to the standing committee and the standing committee must investigate its contents and provide a report to Parliament on the petition and the action sought by the petitioners.

During the 2018–2022 Parliamentary term, only one petition was tabled and referred to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

PARLIAMENT STANDING COMMITTEES

MEETINGS AND REPORTS

The Fiji Parliament continues its active role in both the legislative process and oversight of the Government through the work undertaken by the Standing Committees of Parliament. In this second term, the Standing Committees were established in early December 2018. Oversight roles is carried out through annual reports referred to Committees by Parliament. For a summary of the data shown below there have been a total of 1,837 committee meetings (Figure 1) with 203 reports tabled (Figure 2) by Committees in Parliament relating to legislation or scrutiny of international treaties, petitions or annual reports.

Figure 1

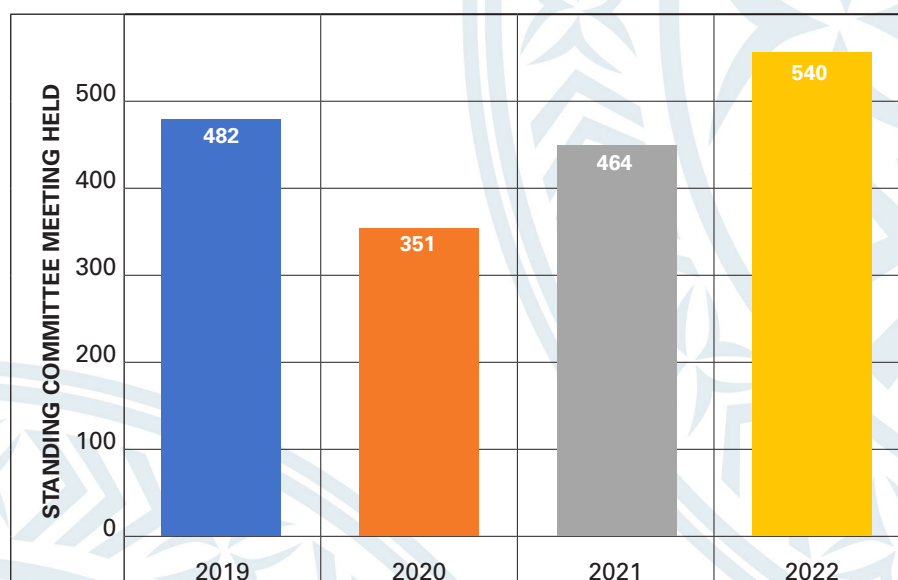
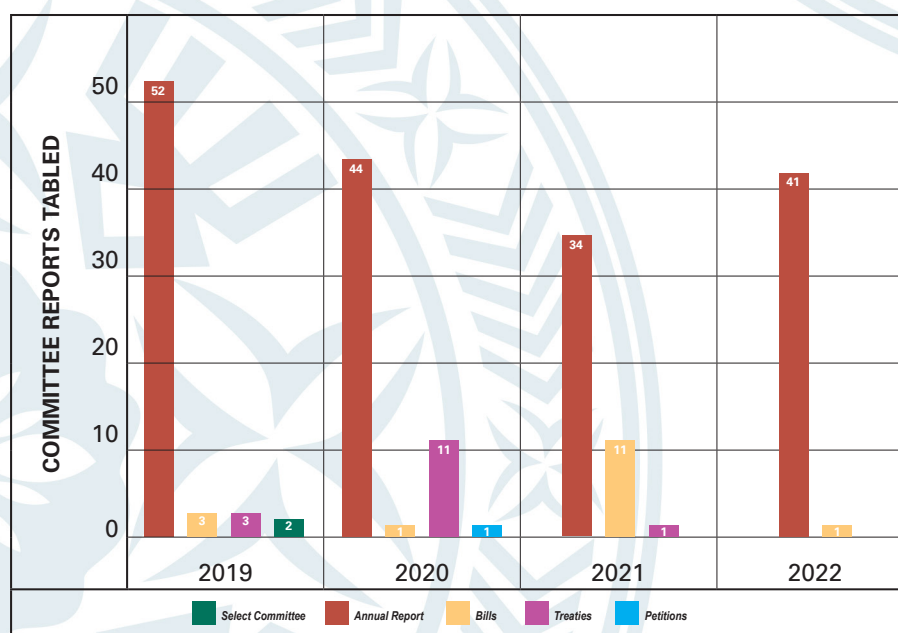
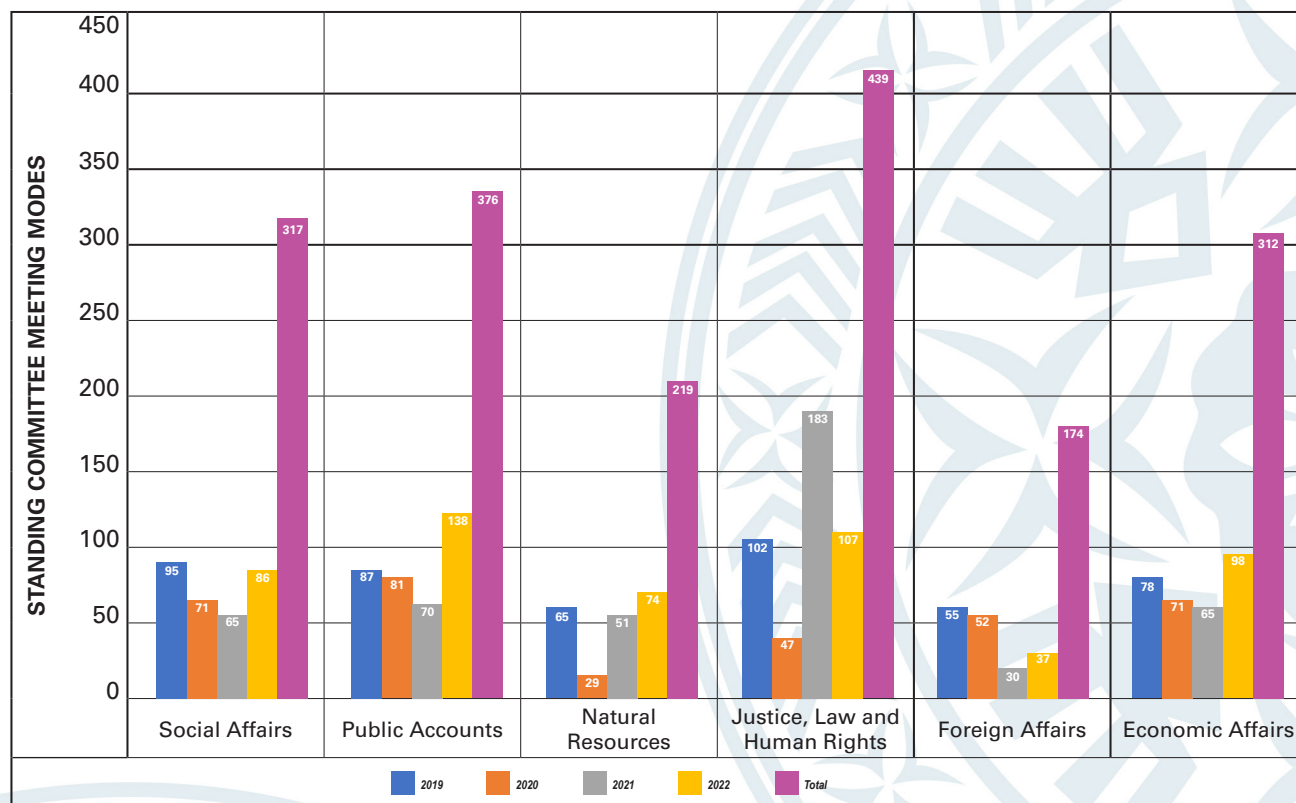


Figure 2



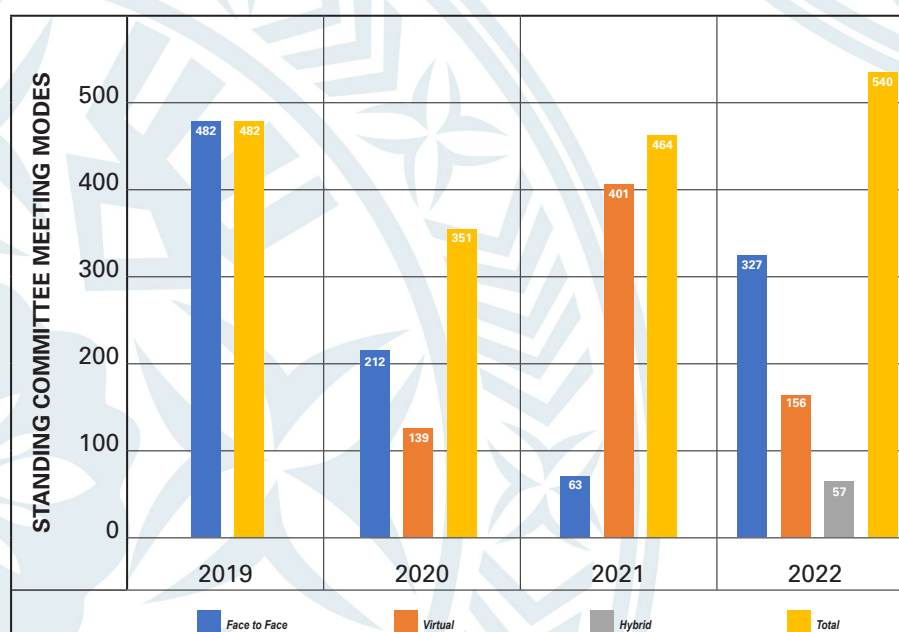
The activity rate of Committees is linked to the number of Bills, annual reports, petitions or treaties referred to Committees. The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights has been the most active Committee by holding 439 meetings, followed by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that held a total of 376 meetings (Figure 3) during this Parliamentary term.

Figure 3



Furthermore, with COVID-19 restrictions the Standing Committee meeting modes varied. The modes shifted from face-to-face to virtual and with hybrid meetings conducted as well. Figure 4 shows the different modes of committee meetings held from 2019 to 2022.

Figure 4



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Another key feature of the Fiji Parliament committee system is the transparent and participatory nature of the way in which Committees operate. Standing Order 111 outlines that all Standing Committee meetings must be open to the public and the media except for the limited occasions outlined in SO111(2).

In addition, the Standing Orders further provide that Standing Committees must, unless otherwise directed by Parliament, provide sufficient time, notification and an adequate opportunity for public representations and input into its activities prior to finalising their reports and making recommendations. In practice, this has meant that the main forum for Parliament interaction with citizens, groups, NGOs, the private sector and academia has been through the work of the Parliament Standing Committees.

During this second Parliamentary term 2018–2022, over 1,832 individuals appeared before the Standing Committees to provide their views on Bills, annual reports, petitions and international treaties under consideration by Committees. This has included Government Officials, academics, and representatives from NGOs, private sector and faith based organisations, political parties, as well as private citizens. Notably, only 29.47% of those who appeared before the Standing Committees were women with further work being required to ensure that public participation in the work of Parliament is gender balanced.

In addition, the Standing Committees continue to provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to engage with the work of Committees by providing written submissions to Standing Committees on issues under their consideration. These have been in the form of submissions sent to the committee by post, hand-delivered to Parliament or sent to the Committee secretariat by email. Over this second Parliamentary term 2018–2022, a total of 1,833 written and oral evidences were submitted to the Parliament Standing Committees.



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