



STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Consolidated Review Report on the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Electoral Commission Annual Reports



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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ACRONYMS

1.	FEO	Fijian Elections Office
2.	MOG	Multi-National Observer Group
3.	NRV	National Register of Voters
4.	ICT	Information and Communication Technology
5.	KPI	Key Performance Indicator
6.	BDM	Births Deaths and Marriages Office
7.	GE	General Elections

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD	4
COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS	6
COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT	7
1.0 INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Procedure and Programme	8
1.2 Electoral Commission	8
1.3 Electoral Commission Appropriation	9
2.0 DELIBERATION AND FINDINGS BY THE COMMITTEE	9
2.1 Deliberation by the Committee	9
2.2 Clarification provided by the Electoral Commission and Fijian Elections Office	10
2.3 Sustainable Development Goals impact analysis	13
2.4 Key Findings	13
3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS	15
4.0 CONCLUSION	16

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the *Electoral Commission Annual Reports of 2020, 2021 and 2022* and the Committee was mandated to review these Annual Reports and table its findings back to Parliament.

The Electoral Commission is the constitutionally mandated independent electoral management body in Fiji that oversees the running and conducting of free and fair elections in accordance with written laws governing elections and any other relevant law.

The Committee identified pertinent issues from the Annual Reports and sent correspondences regarding these to the Electoral Commission and its representatives, for clarification.

As a result of the review, the Committee identified a few key findings, which are provided as follows:

- Concerns on the voter turnout and the number of invalid votes cast during the 2014, 2018, and 2022 General Elections (GE).
- Concerns regarding registered voters who were unable to cast their votes due to restrictions imposed by the existing electoral laws.
- The effectiveness of the voter perception survey report conducted by the Fijian Elections Office (FEO) in identifying issues faced by voters in the 2018 (GE) and the lesson learned that may have addressed the 2022 GE.
- The absence of the financial statements noted in all the three annual reports.
- The notion of political interference in appointing national observers in the GE.
- The consultation process of FEO in engaging its stakeholders on the MOG report.
- The notion of digitization of data in the National Register of Voters (NRV).

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee resolved that it would be appropriate to put forth a few recommendations for consideration by the Electoral Commission. A summary of these is as follows, in which the Committee recommends;

- The incorporation of ethnicity data into the FEO system to better understand voter demographics.
- The continuations and strengthening of voter education initiatives to improve public awareness and voter turnout.
- That targeted voter registration initiatives be developed to support tertiary students residing outside their home constituencies.
- That future Annual Reports of the Electoral Commission include audited financial statements to enable Standing Committee(s) to provide independent oversight.
- That the Electoral laws be amended to strengthen voter education on proper ballot marking, with the aim of reducing the number of invalid votes.

- that a system be developed to facilitate collaboration between the Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) office and the FEO, enabling automatic updates to the NVR; and
- That the FEO strengthens its internal mechanisms to ensure accuracy of voter registration database.

I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee, for their deliberations and input. The alternate member(s) who made themselves available when the substantive members could not attend. Appreciation is also extended to the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office who accepted the Committee's invitation and made themselves available to make a submission, which assisted the Committee in its work.



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HON. RATU RAKUITA VAKALALABURE
Chairperson

COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights ('Committee') is established under Section 70 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* and Standing Order 109 of the *Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji*. The Committee consists of the following Members:



Hon. Ratu Rakuira Vakalalabure
(Chairperson)



Hon. Faiyaz Koya
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Jone Usamate
(Member)



**Hon. Ratu Isikeli
Tuiwailevu**
(Member)



Hon. Sachida Nand
(Member)



Hon. Josaia Niudamu
(Member)

COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In accordance to Standing Order 38(2), the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the *Electoral Commission Annual Reports for 2020 and 2021* on 29 July 2022 and the *Electoral Commission Annual Report for 2022* on 11 November 2023.

The Committee was mandated to review the Annual Reports in the parameters provided under Standing Order 110(c) and table its finding(s) back to Parliament as pursuant to Standing Order 39 and 34(1)(g).

1.1 Procedure and Programme

The Committee began its review of the Annual Reports on 25 August 2025. The review process adopted by the Committee was agreed upon through consensus by the Members and a summary of this is as follows;

- The Committee read through the Annual Reports and had discussions on matters that were noted by individual Members. The Committee identified issues that needed clarification and further discussions.
- These issues were brought to the attention of the Electoral Commission on 9 September 2025 through a formal letter that included questions on the three (3) Annual Reports. Clarifications were received from the Electoral Commission on 15 September 2025, and these were then deliberated on by the Committee.
- Following the review of the written clarifications, the Committee then invited the Electoral Commission for face-to-face meeting on 18 September 2025 and further discussed on the matters that were related to the annual reports, particularly with the response received.

At the conclusion of the review, certain issues were identified that formed the Committee's findings and recommendations for Parliament to consider.

1.2 Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission ("**Commission**") is established by Section 75 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (2013)* (hereinafter also referred to as the "**Constitution**") and its responsibilities are stated in Section 75(2), (3) and (4).

The Commission is mandated to formulate policy and to oversee the conduct of elections in accordance with the Electoral Act and any other related law, including responsibility and authority with respect to the following matters—

“

- (a) registration of voters;
- (b) registration of political parties;

- (c) *determination of the number of members of Parliament in accordance with section 54(2) of the Constitution;*
- (d) *receipt and return of the writ for an election;*
- (e) *declaration of the election results and allocation of seats in Parliament;*
- (f) *adjudication of electoral disputes, including disputes relating to or arising from the right to be nominated as a candidate, but excluding petitions and disputes subsequent to the declaration of election results;*
- (g) *monitoring and enforcing compliance with this Decree and any law governing political parties, on its own initiative or in response to a formal complaint; and*
- (h) *adopting Rules and instructions consistent with this Decree and the Constitution that are necessary for the transparent and orderly conduct of free and fair elections.¹*

The *Electoral Commission Annual Reports* 2020 to 2022 provide an overview of the Commission's work across the three reported years, specifically in relation to pre-election work leading up to the 2022 GE.

1.3 Electoral Commission Appropriation

The Committee noted that the Commission has received a budget for each reported years through the appropriation of fund under Head 13 of the National Budget². However, there were no audited financial statements for the reported years included in the referred annual reports.

2.0 DELIBERATION AND FINDINGS BY THE COMMITTEE

2.1 Deliberation by the Committee

The Committee identified pertinent matters that needed further clarification from the Commission and sought clarification on the following;

- The status of the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) recommendation on the 2018 post GE.
- The status of the of the strategic plan of the FEO.
- The effectiveness of the nationwide survey conducted by the FEO in 2020 following the 2018 GE.
- The effectiveness of the e-Training platform developed in 2020 and whether the platform remained operational.
- The status of the ICT projects that were planned to commence in 2021 and 2022. This included the upgrading of the server infrastructure, redesigning network architecture, implementing disaster recovery solutions, and enhancing computer network security.

¹ *Constitution*

² parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-2026-Budget-Estimates.pdf

- The Committee queried how often the FEO conducted data cleaning exercise of the National Register of Voters (NRV).
- The Committee queried the operational status of the industrial elections carried out by FEO.
- The milestones achieved by the Commission in 2020.
- Voter turnout during the GE declined from 84% in 2014 to 68% in 2022. The Committee queried the measures undertaken by the FEO to address this downward trend.
- The strategic plan and KPI for the Commission were not included and clarification was sought on the status of these matters.
- Whether the Commission had adequate human resources to carry out its constitutional role.
- There was no financial statement provided for the three reported years and clarification was sought on the reasons for this.
- How the Commission measures its effectiveness for voter education and communication campaign in terms of reach, engagement of voters and trust levels with the voters.

2.2 Clarification provided by the Electoral Commission and Fijian Elections Office

The issues identified were addressed by the Commission and the FEO, and a summary of the clarification received is provided below.

Electoral Reform

The Committee noted that following the 2018 GE, the MOG report was published with 22 recommendations. The Commission after careful consideration had accepted 14 out of the 22 recommendations and 7 were not considered. (*Details of the MOG recommendations is appended*).

Internal Audit

The Committee was advised that the status of the strategic plan for the respective directorates within the FEO are outlined in the FEO strategic plan 2020-2023 (*appended strategic plan pp 42 and 43*) whereby **100%** of the targets were achieved in 2020, **90%** in 2021, **86%** in 2022 and **100%** in 2023.

Communications and Public Relations

A nationwide survey was conducted in 2020 to provide feedback on voter experience in the 2018 GE. The information gathered from the survey assisted the FEO in developing a more comprehensive strategy leading up to the 2022 GE.

EMIS

The *Election Management System (EMIS)* developed by Nadra technologies was utilised by FEO in the 2018 and 2022 GE. The software has been used to manage elections

including polling venue management, nominations and party registration, logistics, voter list and postal voting.

e-Training platform

The Committee noted that the e-Training platform which was developed in 2021 is still operational. The platform has proven to be effective particularly in conducting training for election officials engaged during the 2022 GE. It was further noted that to date, a total of 3,527 participants have utilized the platform. Of this, 2,638 were presiding officers in the 2022 GE.

ICT project

The Committee noted that the ICT projects year marked for 2021 were not completed on time. The ‘*Disaster Recovery Solutions*’ was subsequently completed in the year 2022. The ‘*Computer network security*’ was upgraded and completed in 2023. The upgrade to the ‘*Core Server Infrastructure*’ was completed in 2024.

FEO has re-designed the network architecture of the ‘*Voter Service Centers*’ and these are now successfully linked to the core server located at the FEO headquarters.

Data Cleaning Exercise for the National Register of Voters (NRV)

The data cleaning process allows the removal of voters that are no longer eligible to be registered in the NRV, and it ensures that the NRV is consistently maintained within the updated and accurate listing of voters biannually. The Committee noted that the exercise is conducted twice a year (January and July) which is once every six months.

The Committee noted that the FEO currently has a MOU with various statutory authorities to assist FEO in exchange of data. One such agreement is with the Fiji Corrections Service, which provides the FEO with notifications regarding individuals who have been sentenced to imprisonment of 12 months or more. These individuals are flagged by the FEO as ineligible to vote while serving their sentence. Upon release, the individual must present a discharge letter to the FEO in order to have their voting rights reinstated and their re-entry into the NRV.

Industrial Elections

Apart from facilitating the national elections, the FEO also administers two types of elections as stipulated under section 154 of the Electoral Act 2014.

The first category is for the elections office holders in trade unions registered with the Registrar of Trade Unions. The second is for elections authorized by the Minister responsible for Elections. These includes entities such as the Fijian Holdings Limited, Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited, Fiji National University Students Association, Fiji National University, and the Fiji Medical Association.

Reported Milestones for 2020

The Committee noted that the following three (3) milestones planned for completion in 2020 were deferred to 2021.

- *Inventory Management System*
The system was completed and is currently operational.
- *Communication Strategy*
The Communication strategy was developed and used for the 2022 GE.
- *Industrial Election Management Platform*
This platform was developed in 2021 and allows trade unions to efficiently access and submit essential information required by FEO for the conduct of industrial elections.

Decline in Voter Turnout from 84% in 2014 to 68% in 2022

The 2024 Voter Perception Survey Report¹ provided the following challenges encountered by voters and stakeholders in the 2022 GE that affected voter turnout.

- Lack of public trust in the institution
- Accessibility of FEO services.
- Materials used for awareness were not suitable for the targeted audiences.
- A number of young voters attending tertiary institution were unable to vote due to the non-update of their residential address.
- Concerns were raised that there was lack of clear understanding by stakeholders while observing the electoral process.
- Voters were turned away at polling stations due to discrepancies in the FEO registration database. For example, people registered to vote in Narewa, Nadi turned up to Vote in Narewa, Rakiraki.

The Committee was informed that the FEO has identified key strategies to improve electoral participation. These include improving voter education and strengthening outreach programs.

Absence of the financial statements in the Annual Reports

Committee noted the absence of the financial statements in the Commission's Annual reports for 2020, 2021 and 2022. Whilst the accounts of the Commission were audited by the Auditor-General, these was not included in the annual report as per the usual practice.

Written copy of the issues and clarification documents are uploaded along with this Report onto the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj.

¹ [Voter Perception Survey Report | Fijian Elections Office](#)

2.3 Sustainable Development Goals impact analysis

As part of its review, the Committee is also mindful of the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament whereby all matters before the Committee are to be reviewed through a gender lens. This is supplemented by the Committee's appreciation of the Parliament's role in contributing towards the Global Agenda, which Fiji is also committed to. The Committee noted that voter participation for women in the GE elections improved from 2018 to 2022.

“Women's participation, in 2022, there were 345,566 (49.8 percent) women registered to vote, compared to 316,431 (49.63 percent) in 2018. Accordingly, 2022 was the largest number of women voters registered to date”¹.

In the 2022 General Election, 56 of the 343 candidates were women, matching the number of female candidates in the 2018 election. However, due to an overall increase in candidate numbers, the proportion of women decreased to 16.3% in 2022, compared to 24% in 2018 and 17.7% in 2014².

2.4 Key Findings

Following a thorough review of the evidence collated, the Committee has the following key findings.

Low voter turnout

1. The Committee observed a notable trend in the rate of voter turnout³ across recent electoral cycles. The voter turnout per election year is as follows;

Year	Registered Voters	Votes cast	Percentage
2014	595, 101	496, 524	(84%) ⁴
2018	637, 527	458, 532	(72%)
2022	693, 915	473, 910	(68%)

The FEO has acknowledged the factors contributing to low voter turnout, particularly among youth and overseas voters. These insights were drawn from the 2024 Voter Perception Survey, which highlighted the following;

- Lack of public trust in the FEO
- Accessibility of FEO services.
- Materials used for awareness were not suitable for the targeted audiences.
- A number of tertiary students from the north attending tertiary institution in the Viti Levu were unable to vote due to the non-update of their residential address.

¹ [Multinational-Observer-Group-2022-Fiji-Election-Final-Report-.pdf](#) (pg 84)

² [Multinational-Observer-Group-2022-Fiji-Election-Final-Report-.pdf](#) (pg 14)

³ [Multinational-Observer-Group-2022-Fiji-Election-Final-Report-.pdf](#) (pg 84)

⁴ [Multinational-Observer-Group-2022-Fiji-Election-Final-Report-.pdf](#) (pg 16)

- Voters were turned away at polling stations due to discrepancies in the FEO registration database. For example, people registered to vote in Narewa, Nadi turned up to Vote in Narewa, Rakiraki.
2. The Committee observed a fluctuation of *invalid votes* across the recent electoral cycles. The invalid votes cast per election year are as follows;

Year	Registered Voters	Votes cast	Invalid Votes	Percentage
2014	595, 101	496, 524	3, 674	(0.75 %) ¹
2018	637, 527	458, 532	4, 197	(0.92 %) ²
2022	693, 915	473, 910	3,326	(0.70 %) ³

3. There was a significant number of tertiary students unable to vote during the general election due to logistical and registration constraints. Specifically, many students were registered to vote in their home constituencies but were residing in major urban centres while attending tertiary institutions.

Ineffective Strategies

4. The voter perception survey was conducted in areas that recorded low voter turnout. Whilst the survey identified reasons of decline, it did not make a comparison of voter turnout between the different polling stations/regions.
5. The 2018 Voter Perception Survey was utilized by the FEO to develop strategies for the 2022 GE. However, the Committee observed that voter turnout declined in the 2022 election and this shows that the strategies derived from the 2018 survey were ineffective in addressing the low voter turnout.
6. FEO does not collect or maintain data on voters ethnicity, but does maintain demographic information including gender, age group, and residential address, which are used to guide its operational planning and outreach strategies.
7. The 68% voter turnout recorded in the most recent general election is noted to be comparable to voter participation rates across the Pacific.

Compulsory Voting

8. Compulsory voting was utilised in 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2006. For these years, the voter turnout stood at 84%, 89.41%, 80.1% and 68% respectively. There seems to be no strong link to suggest that compulsory voting will improve voter turnout.

¹ [2014_Joint-Report-by-EC-SoE.pdf](#) (pg 18)

² [Joint-Report-EC-SOE-ecopy-compressed.pdf](#) (pg 14)

³ [Multinational-Observer-Group-2022-Fiji-Election-Final-Report-.pdf](#) (pg 58)

Appointment of National Observer

9. Under the existing legal framework¹, the Minister responsible for elections holds the authority to appoint domestic observers. This may be perceived as allowing political interference in the appointment process of domestic observers.

Audit

10. The Committee noted that the Commission's Annual Reports for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 did not include financial statements.
11. The Committee noted that there was no external audit conducted on the NRV, despite recommendation by the MOG in 2022.

Consultation on Electoral Process

12. There was no formal consultation conducted with the public or civil society organizations (CSOs) after the MOG report was received by the SOE.

Digitization of data

13. FEO has decided not to pursue full digitization with government agencies, particularly the BDM Registry. This decision stems from concerns regarding data reliability and in particular the removal of eligible voters from the NRV.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

After extensive deliberation, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The need for FEO to incorporate ethnicity data into the system in order to better target its strategies to address low voter turnout.
2. That the FEO develop and implement targeted voter registration initiatives for tertiary students residing outside their home constituencies, such as special registration drives, temporary transfer options, or mobile polling stations near campuses to ensure their inclusion and participation in future elections.
3. That the Commission includes its financial statement in their next Annual Report to provide Parliament with a comprehensive overview of the EC's annual performance. The Committee noted that the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) is required by law to include its audited accounts with its annual reports as per section 25(3)(d) of the *Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission Act 2010*². The Committee commends the FCCC for setting a positive precedent by mandating audited reports to Parliament, and further recommends that

¹ [Annotated-Version-Electoral-Act-2014-1.pdf](#) (section 119)

² [FIJIAN COMPETITION AND CONSUMER COMMISSION ACT 2010 - Laws of Fiji](#)

this practice is necessary for all independent commissions to adopt, including the EC.

4. That the Commission continues with its voter education initiatives and identifies strategies to boost voter turnout by addressing misconceptions and strengthening public awareness of the voting process. Additionally, the Committee recommended amending the Electoral laws to clarify and improve understanding of voting procedures, particularly the perception around ballot marking to reduce invalid votes cast by voters.
5. That a system be developed to enable the BDM office and FEO to collaborate to update the NVR so that deceased citizens are automatically removed from the NVR, and those who have reached 18 years be flagged to the FEO for registration and update in the NVR.
6. That the FEO strengthens its internal mechanisms to ensure accuracy of voter registration database. *(For example, individuals registered to vote in Narewa, Nadi, should be permitted to cast their ballots at that designated location and not be redirected to vote in Narewa, Rakiraki).*

4.0 CONCLUSION

After reviewing the *Electoral Commission Annual Reports 2020, 2021 and 2022*, the Committee recommends that Parliament takes note of the contents of this report and endorse the Committee's recommendations.

MEMBER'S SIGNATURES



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Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure
(Chairperson)



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Hon. Faiyaz Koya
(Deputy Chairperson)



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Hon. Jone Usamate
(Member)



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Hon. Ratu Isikeli
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Hon. Sachida Nand
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Hon. Josaia Niudamu
(Member)

DATE: 26/09/2025