

COUP TIMELINE 1987–2001

1987

April 11: The Labour/National Federation Party coalition defeats Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's ruling Alliance Party in the general elections.

April 13: Coalition leader, Dr Timoci Bavadra, is sworn in as Prime Minister.

April 19: First signs of unrest emerge as Tavua villagers in the western side of Fiji set up roadblocks in protest against the new government.

April 21: About 3000 ethnic Fijians meet at Viseisei village, Lautoka, and sign a petition calling for Fijian political supremacy.

April 24: 5000 Fijian protesters march through Suva calling for the removal of the Bavadra government, saying it was Indian-dominated.

April 25: A similar march is held in Lautoka, in western Fiji.

May 14: At 10am, Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka stages the South Pacific's first military coup. He suspends the Constitution, appoints himself Commander in Chief and names a 15-member interim administration to run the country.

May 15: The Governor-General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, condemns the coup and assumes executive authority.

May 20: A group of Bavadra supporters who had gathered at Suva's Albert Park are attacked by coup supporters. Sporadic violence spreads to the greater Suva area and Nausori.

September 23: The Coalition and Alliance Party agree to form a caretaker government following the Deuba Accord initiated by Ganilau.

October 1: At 4pm, Rabuka stages his second coup, citing dissatisfaction with the Deuba Accord.

October 1: Rabuka issues two decrees formally abrogating the 1970 Constitution and sacks Ganilau.

October 6: At midnight, Rabuka formally declares Fiji a Republic, ending its ties with the Commonwealth.

December 5: Rabuka dismisses his Taukeist government and announces a 21-member mostly Alliance Cabinet. Ganilau is appointed President and Mara Prime Minister.

1988

December 5: Dr Bavadra, 55, passes away.

1990

July 24: Ganilau promulgates a new Constitution giving ethnic Fijians political supremacy.

1991

July 11: Rabuka resigns from the military to join the interim government as Deputy Prime Minister.

1992

June 28: Fiji goes to the polls. Rabuka becomes Prime Minister after the chiefs-sponsored Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei party captures most of the seats.

November 30: The government budget fails after eight SVT members, led by Josefata Kamikamica, vote against it. Fresh elections are called.

1994

January 18: Mara succeeds the late Ganilau as President.

February 28: The SVT is returned to power in the general election with 31 seats. The dissident group led by Kamikamica forms the Fijian Association Party and wins three seats. The National Federation Party wins 20 seats.

1996

September 6: The Constitutional Review Commission completes a review of the 1990 Constitution. Rabuka and NFP leader Reddy had led the way for the reviews to give the country a fairer constitution.

1997

April 4: The joint Parliamentary Select Committee looking into the Reeves report agree on a multi-party executive government with 71 seats — 31 for ethnic Fijians, 27 for ethnic Indians, two for generals and one for Rotumans.

1999

May: Elections are held under the new constitution. The Labour/Party of National Unity/Fijian Association Party coalition sweeps to power. Labour wins 31 of the 71 seats. The NFP, previously the major Indian party, fails to win any seat. Rabuka's SVT wins just eight seats.

May 19: Mahendra Chaudhry is sworn in as Fiji's first non-indigenous Prime Minister after President Mara persuades the Fijian parties to support him.

2000

April 21: About 500 ethnic Fijians march through Lautoka in protest against the government. They were led by ultra-nationalist politician Apisai Tora, who had earlier revived the Taukei Movement, a Fijian pressure group.

April 28: Over 4000 Fijians stage a second protest march in Suva.

May 19: A third march by protesting Fijians attracts 10,000 people. While it is taking place, a group of armed men led by failed businessman George Speight storms Parliament and captures Chaudhry and his MPs. The drama takes place on the first anniversary of the Chaudhry government.

May 29: Establishment of an interim military government and purported abrogation of the 1997 Constitution.

July 4: A Muaniweni farmer, Chandrika Prasad, commences a legal challenge to the takeover in the High Court.

August 23: High Court hearing before judge Justice Anthony Gates.

November 15: Justice Anthony Gates ruling in Lautoka High Court. Justice Gates's judgement declares the 1997 Constitution valid.

December 15: President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara resigns.

2001

February 19: Fiji Court of Appeal hearing commences to consider Justice Gates's November ruling contested by the interim administration.

March 1: Fiji Court of Appeal dismisses the interim administration's appeal making the following declarations in lieu of those made in the High Court:

1. The 1997 Constitution remains the supreme law of the Republic of the Fiji Islands and has not been abrogated.
2. Parliament has not been dissolved. It was prorogued on 27 May 2000 for six months.
3. The office of the President under the 1997 Constitution became vacant when the resignation of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara took effect on 15 December 2000. In accordance with Section 88 of that Constitution, the Vice-President may perform the functions of the President until 15 March 2001 unless a President is appointed under Section 90.