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Fiji: Background and Issues for Congress

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Fiji is an archipelagic nation within the Melanesian sub-region of the Pacific Islands and a long-standing U.S. partner among the Pacific Island Countries (PIC). Fiji is the second most populated PIC with nearly one million people. Fijian society is ethnically and religiously heterogeneous, split between the indigenous iTaukei (57%) and Indo-Fijians (37.5%) whose ancestors were brought by the British from India to serve as laborers during British rule.

Fiji gained independence in 1970, and the United States established diplomatic relations that same year. U.S. policymakers have viewed Fiji as an important partner given its regional influence; relative economic power; and its military, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF, one of three in the region). Successive Administrations and Congresses have identified U.S. interests in Fiji and the Pacific including fostering economic growth, expanding infrastructure, and enhancing security cooperation, in part to offset the influence People's Republic of China (PRC or China). The second Trump Administration's approach to Fiji has focused on increasing commercial diplomacy and infrastructure initiatives.

Government and Politics

Since the 1980s, Fiji has had four coups, each of which included elements of ethnic tension and human rights abuses. The most recent coup in 2006 was led by Rear Admiral Voreqe 'Frank' Bainimarama. Bainimarama ruled Fiji as an autocrat until 2014 when elections were restored; Bainimarama was elected and continued as prime minister until elections in 2022 resulted in his government being replaced by a coalition led by Prime Minister (PM) Sitiveni Rabuka—another former coup leader. Under Rabuka, Fiji's government has undone some Bainimarama-era limits on freedoms and professed a platform of "economic resilience, people empowerment, and good governance." The Rabuka government has proposed to amend the 2013 junta-crafted constitution, but has drawn criticism from some civil society groups for not adopting key recommendations for democratic safeguards from a September 2026 independent Constitutional Review Commission report.

Fiji is expected to hold a national referendum on the constitutional changes in December 2026 and a national election by February 2027.

Economy and Trade with the United States

Fiji is the second largest PIC economy, with the World Bank reporting a national GDP of $6.2 billion in 2025 and a growth rate of 2.5%, largely driven by tourism. Constraints to economic growth in Fiji include labor shortages, limited land area, weak household purchasing power, and natural disasters. The government has managed fuel reserves in the face of rising costs due to the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran.

In 2020, Fiji signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the United States to promote economic engagement. The United States is Fiji's top export market and seventh largest import market. In 2025, U.S. goods trade with Fiji reached $329.1 million with a trade deficit of $84.7 million, a year-on-year reduction of $2.9 million. The U.S.-Fiji trade deficit has shrunk annually since 2022.

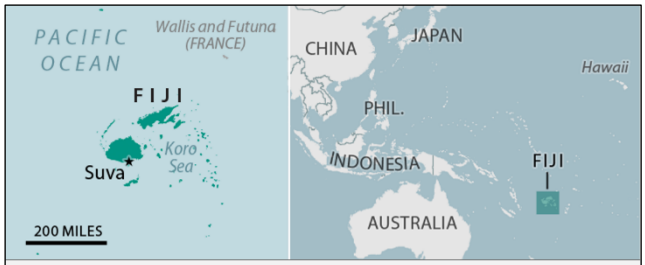
Foreign Policy

Fiji's foreign policy is articulated in a Rabuka-era 2024 White Paper that links its national security to Pacific regionalism and argues that Fiji's greatest threats come from an unstable and divided region. Rabuka has advanced an "Ocean of Peace" framework that seeks to center Pacific regional agency to address issues while affirming the Pacific as a "zone of peace, free from conflict and rivalry, where cooperation and respect guide our relationships." In 2025, leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the region's preeminent political organization, endorsed a Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration committing the region to "deliver collective peace and security initiatives."

Fiji's traditional development and security partners include Australia and New Zealand, both of which have deep relations with Fiji. In 2026, Fiji and Australia signed a comprehensive framework cooperation agreement and a mutual defense treaty.

Fiji's foreign policy also emphasizes addressing climate change; the 2024 White Paper notes that climate change is the most consequential transnational security threat Fiji faces. Fiji was the first country to sign the Paris Agreement ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31). In October 2026, Fiji announced it will contribute $10 million to a Pacific Resilience Facility to secure climate financing goals and coordinate climate action.

Figure 1. Fiji at a Glance



Land Area: 18,274 sq km
Population: 933,154 (2025 est.)
Ethnicities: iTaukei 56.8% (indigenous Fijians), Indo-Fijian 37.5% (2007 est.)
GDP Per Capita: $6,642 (2025 est.)

Source: Created by CRS using data from the U.S. Department of State, Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM), and ESRI.

Fiji and the United States

The United States is represented by an Embassy in Suva, and relations have historically been positive. Following the 2006 coup, the United States halted security assistance to Fiji under Section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-102). Since the return to elections in 2014 and the 2022 election of Rabuka, U.S.-Fiji relations have stabilized. The government of Fiji has raised concerns with the Trump Administration over the U.S. Visa Bond Program, which requires up to $20,000 for Fijians who are found otherwise eligible for a B1/B2 nonimmigrant visa to the United States.

Foreign Assistance

Under the second Trump Administration, the United States has provided foreign assistance to and sought to strengthen bilateral commercial relations with Fiji. In August 2025, the Millenium Challenge Corporation Board of Directors selected Fiji as eligible to develop a compact, later issuing a $12 million grant for initial planning. The United States is also providing global heath assistance to Fiji including through the Strengthening Infectious Disease Detection Systems initiative. Fiji became a U.S. Global Health Security partner in 2025.

Fijian representatives attended the first Honolulu Investment Summit in February 2026 that brought together government and private sectors leaders from the United States and the PICs to foster private-sector led economic growth. During the Summit, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency announced funding to scope infrastructure development projects, including the redevelopment of the Port of Levuka in Fiji. The United States, through its membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad; an Indo-Pacific diplomatic partnership with Australia, India, and Japan), announced in 2026 that it would work with Fiji to improve its port infrastructure.

Security Assistance and Cooperation

The United States provides the RFMF with training and equipment through programs such as Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (Section 333). In March 2026, the State Department stated that it intends to work with Congress to provide $500,000 in FMF funding to Fiji for securing the RFMF's communications capability to counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, building on a 2018 shiprider agreement. Fiji and the United States participate in joint military exercises. The RFMF has a partnership with the Nevada National Guard under the State Partnership Program to support security cooperation activities.

In November 2024, the two governments announced negotiations for a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and signed an Acquisition and Cross Service Agreement to ease U.S. logistical support to Fiji in case of emergencies. In 2026, the State Department announced that U.S. Pacific Command's Joint Interagency Task Force West will be providing $1.4 million for Fiji's maritime services and infrastructure to support counter drug efforts.

People's Republic of China (PRC, or China)

Fiji was the first PIC to establish official diplomatic relations with China in 1975. Following the 2006 coup, Fiji adopted a "Look North" foreign policy and courted PRC assistance to fill a perceived gap left when Australia, New Zealand, and the United States restricted bilateral assistance. In 2024, Rabuka reinstated a more limited version of a 2011 policing agreement between Fiji and Beijing; that deal had previously enabled PRC police officers to embed in Fiji's police force. Analysts also have expressed concern over PRC-linked corruption and influence in Fiji; in 2026, the U.S. Department of State designated a Fiji resident for visa restrictions due to his involvement in "significant corruption on behalf of China-based actors."

China is Fiji's second largest export market after Singapore. In 2024, Fiji and China signed a $300 million infrastructure and development project. The current PRC Ambassador-designate to Fiji has stated that China plans to align its Belt and Road Initiative with Fiji's development strategies.

Domestic Challenges

A 2024 UN Office on Drugs and Crimes report found that Fiji is becoming a hub for global drug trafficking operations and faces rising domestic drug abuse. In October 2026, Fiji's parliament passed the Counter Narcotics Act, which, among other things, establishes a dedicated Counter Narcotics Bureau and gives law enforcement updated tools to target drug trafficking operations. The bureau's functions will include developing strategies for drug use prevention and treatment. Fijian law enforcement has worked with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency in counter-drug operations.

Fiji declared HIV a national crisis in September 2026. Fiji has one of the world's fastest growing HIV rates and found that infection rates rose 12-fold between 2010 and 2025. Over 42% of known transmission cases were linked to injectable drug-use. In 2025, 39% of HIV-positive Fijians were aware of their status, with 22% accessing antiretroviral treatments. In October 2026, parliament passed the HIV/AIDS (Amendment) Bill that, among other things, permits the free distribution of needles, syringes, and other preventative treatments through harm reduction programs. Fiji's Health Ministry has asserted the law does not legalize illicit drugs.

Congressional Interest

Congress may exercise oversight of bilateral relations with Fiji and consider how to balance advancing relations with concerns about human rights and democracy, that would trigger foreign assistance restrictions (e.g., Section 7008 of P.L. 119-75). Congress may consider how such concerns might affect U.S. interests, including SOFA negotiations. Congress may also wish to consider whether and how to respond to growing PRC activity in the region and how relations with Fiji may facilitate such a response.

Other issues for congressional consideration may include U.S. support for drug interdiction efforts with Fiji, security cooperation, and global health support for the HIV crisis.

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