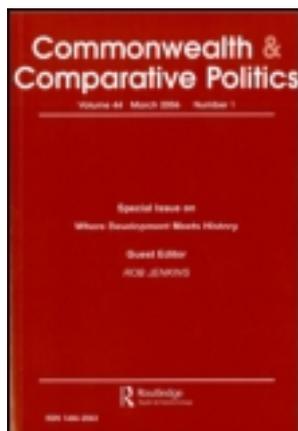


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### The ethno-demographic structure of democratic consolidation in Mauritius and Fiji

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## The ethno-demographic structure of democratic consolidation in Mauritius and Fiji

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This article investigates political demography as a predictor of the onset and prevalence of inter-communal conflict and different political outcomes in cases with conditions that are otherwise quite similar. Applying a most similar systems design, the article compares the Mauritius and Fiji to assess the currency of independent variables to which the article posits political demography as a complementary explanation. The article posits demographic equilibrium between groups in ethnopolitical conflict as favourable towards democratic consolidation; a demographic imbalance, by contrast, appears to have the opposite effect. Political demography distinguishes itself from commonplace *ex post facto* explanations since demographic trends can be projected into the future. The findings thus have implications for conflict prevention, especially in Small Island Developing States which are among the world's most conflict-prone societies.

**Keywords:** coups; democracy; demography; ethnic conflict; Fiji; Mauritius; Small Island Developing States

Ethnic conflict is a curious social phenomenon: Social scientists are quite confident about who and where but have great difficulty explaining when and why. Objective cultural differences are neither sufficient nor necessary for the salience of political and social divisions. Poverty, class, regional or cultural cleavages, institutional and constitutional design, colonialism, and electoral systems are just some of the more common ills thought to be ailing ethnically conflicted societies. Yet, in every case where a confluence of factors appears to be fanning conflict, there is a comparable case where the

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same attributes give rise to different outcomes. This article assesses the extent to which demographic structure, difference and change condition differences in political outcomes in Mauritius and Fiji.

Fiji has seen four military coups over the past 25 years (two in 1987, and one each in 2000 and 2006) and multiple constitutional crises dating back to 1977 with the most recent as late as 2009. It now has the dubious distinction of ranking among the world's most coup-prone countries; observers speak of Fiji's 'coup culture' and 'coup syndrome' (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2009: chapters 27, 31). By contrast, Mauritius has had not a single coup in over 40 years of independence, notwithstanding riots in 1999 the roots of which cannot readily be reduced to ethnicity (Eriksen, 2004). Accounting for this difference presents a puzzle: historically, economically, politically and institutionally Fiji and Mauritius are quite similar. Methodologically, this is a major advantage as it allows us to control for variables more comprehensively than is possible for most ethnic conflicts. Yet, Fiji and Mauritius have rarely been the subject of systematic comparison. In fact, the 38 UN-member Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – which include Mauritius and Fiji – lend themselves particularly well to comparative inquiry. By virtue of being (fairly) closed systems, they are as close to controlled laboratories of experimentation as social scientists are likely to find in the real world. They also happen to be among the most conflict-prone countries in the world. A comparison of different trajectories of democratic consolidation and institutional reproduction in Mauritius and Fiji in light of demographic drivers thus promises to yield interesting payoffs. The innovation of this article is to assess the viability of demography as a diachronic enabler of episodic instability. Nonetheless, the demographic account should not be interpreted as either over-deterministic or materially reductionist. Rather, the demographic explanation in this article is meant to complement rather than displace other synchronic explanations, but enjoys a comparative advantage. In other words, the argument is premised neither on causality nor on agency (including the ability of ethnic entrepreneurs to exploit actual demographic trends); nor does the article make a case for demography as either a necessary or a sufficient condition for political volatility.

Instead, the article posits a demographic equilibrium among groups in ethnopolitical conflict to favour democratic consolidation whereas a structural imbalance is likely to have the opposite effect. It seeks to validate the plausibility of this claim by comparing demographic evidence gleaned from a natural experiment. The first section of the article explains the objective and approach that frames the subsequent comparison. The second section makes the case for Mauritius and Fiji as a natural experiment by outlining commonalities and differences. The third section lays the foundations for comparing demographic change and difference between Mauritius and Fiji. The fourth section lays out the demographic trends in Mauritius, the fifth section the

demographic trends in Fiji. The sixth section offers a diachronic and synchronic comparative analysis of demographic trends. The conclusion discusses the broader implications of the findings.

### Objective and approach

Insofar as it is not out to weigh the merits of competing explanations *per se*, the approach in this article differs from the most-similar-systems design that frames some other well-known comparative case studies of ethnic conflict (e.g. Horowitz, 1989; Posner, 2004). These studies confine themselves to synchronic explanations. Demography, however, is dynamic; consequently, demographic change and difference have the intrinsic potential to explain punctuated equilibria, such as coup episodes in Fiji. In other words, demography, in conjunction with other variables, has the potential to explain not only differences in outcome but also differences in trajectories, such as the likelihood and onset of political instability.

By way of example, those familiar with Mauritius and Fiji are quick to point to different land-tenure systems as the source of Fiji's troubles. Carroll (1994), for instance, framed a comparative puzzle similar to the one in this article in which he largely attributes differential outcomes in ethnic relations in these two countries to native Fijians' nurtured entitlements to special rights and claims to their rightful ownership of the state, by virtue of being a sizeable indigenous community; no ethnic community defends similar claims in Mauritius which had no native population prior to its colonisation. Yet, a hallmark of Fiji's system of land tenure is its continuity. A variable that has remained so constant cannot explain the onset of coups. I suppose one could contend that land tenure and various other forms of affirmative action have been tilting in native Fijians' favour which control most of the land, largely on a customary basis (although 8 per cent of land is freehold). Nonetheless, the two essentially competing and often incompatible notions of land as commodity and land as cultural inheritance in Fiji are fraught with difficulty:

Most Indo-Fijians routinely assert that Fijians have over 80 per cent of all the land in Fiji. That is statistically true, but only a small percentage of it is economically useful. Moreover, land is not owned by one monolithic entity but by thousands of social units scattered throughout the islands. Thus, some Fijians have ample land, while others are effectively landless. (Lal, 2003: 343)

But the impact of mystical attachments to land and overlapping claims on political allegiances are hardly unique to Fiji: Although they are widespread throughout ethnically conflicted societies, they may often be a necessary but not a sufficient cause for violence (Duffy Toft, 2003).

And there is no consensus on land as the overriding driver of the conflict. It is merely symptomatic of ethnic political mobilisation as a product of the

strategic behaviour of rational politicians (Kasfir, 1979; Bates, 1983; Brass, 1991; Chandra, 2004). Aside from land, the literature on Fiji identifies a host of grievances and dynamics that have acted as enablers for Fiji's political entrepreneurs: Class and regional cleavages, the party systems, communal electoral procedures, democratic processes and political institutions that are seen as exacerbating social cleavages and biased towards an oligarchic elite of provincial chiefs, colonial policies that fostered ethnic compartmentalisation, and a fragmenting Fijian electorate along class, provincial and urban-rural lines (Scarr, 1984; Lal, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1998, 2000, 2006; Robertson & Tamani-sau, 1988; Howard, 1991; Lawson, 1991; Dakuvula, 1992; Sutherland, 1992; Norton, 2000, 2002; Robertson & Sutherland, 2001; Durutalo, 2006; Firth, 2006: chapter 16; Fraenkel & Firth, 2007: chapters 6, 21; Fraenkel *et al.*, 2009: chapters 6, 8). Yet, in Mauritius many analogous historical, economic, social, political and institutional dynamics seem to have precipitated quite different outcomes. Although the social importance of ethnicity in Mauritius has been shown to depend as much on political and economic circumstances as on kinship organisation (Carroll & Carroll, 2000a), a distinguishing feature of Mauritius is the presence nowadays of ethnic as well as non-ethnic logics of belonging and identity that make it possible for social pluralism to make a positive contribution to effective and democratic governance (Eriksen, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1998; Carroll & Carroll, 1997, 2000b). To explain this outcome, Carroll and Carroll (1999) posit good luck, a favourable colonial inheritance and good leadership as an explanation. Social scientifically, however, 'good luck' is hard to control for and Fiji and Mauritius share a similar colonial inheritance. And 'good leadership' could be circumstantial. Mauritius faced many serious difficulties upon gaining independence in 1968: ethnic conflicts, economic stagnation, rapid population growth and high unemployment. Mauritius was and still is among the most densely populated and diverse countries on the planet. Might there be more to demographics than initially meets the eye?

Structural conditions of demographic approach in Fiji contrast with relative demographic stability among groups in Mauritius. On the one hand, Mill (1910: 365), Nordlinger (1972) and Milne (1981) identify demographic parity as the pivotal ethnic-conflict threshold. On the other hand, relative differences in population size are thought to stoke ethnic tensions and democratic instability (Nordlinger, 1972; Milne, 1981; Olugbemi, 1983; Wright, 1983; Duffy Toft, 2002) as well as ethno-nationalist violence (Baaklini, 1983; Courbage & Fargues, 1997; Judah, 1997: 155). In keeping with the logic of power-transition theory, Duffy Toft (2007) singles out what she terms 'demographic approach' as prone to instability: a minority closes in on or surpasses a group that had hitherto been in the plurality or majority.

The article's hypothesis posits institutional and demographic reproduction as inter-related: 'The simple phenomenon of differential population growth rates is translated into changing political potentials' (Wriggins & Guyot, 1973: 16). In contrast to politics, economics, history and even institutions (path-dependency notwithstanding), demographic trends distinguish themselves as fairly unique social-science variables insofar as fertility, mortality and even migration can be projected into the future with a fairly high degree of accuracy. As a result of their predictive potential, demographic accounts thus hold out the promise of transcending the *ex post facto* explanatory mode. Given its preoccupation with the polis, it is puzzling that much of political science has failed to grasp the extent to which democracy is inextricably linked to demography:

Political society is a set of nested and connected social groups and institutions – state administration, elites, and popular groups, all drawing from the natural environment and interacting with other societies – that is sustained by a continuous, ongoing set of processes involving flows and exchanges of resources and actions. Those flows and exchanges support states and elites, maintain varied popular groups in diverse economic and political roles, and allow administration and coordination and security for the whole. . . . Because political systems are constantly in the act of distributing and redistributing resources across levels and segments of society, any significant changes in population – not only in the overall size of the population relative to environmental resources, but in the size and resources of any subgroups, including the state and elites – will likely affect the distribution of resources, and hence have political impacts. . . . Problems can quickly arise if the numbers of people in various segments does not grow in proportion, but causes shifts in the resources available to circulate within the system, and creates disruptions or changes in their flow. . . . Throughout history, the ebb and flow of population – through natural growth, epidemic diseases, and migration – has been linked to the rise and fall of empires, to conquests and revolutions. Periods during which populations were stable in size also tended to be politically quiet. By contrast, periods in which societies showed sustained growth, such as the century from 1550 to 1650, or from 1730 to 1850, were marked by severe political disruptions. (Goldstone, 2011: chapter 2)

Table 1. Types of demographic relationships in a binary conflict.

Majority group	Minority group			
	Increase	Increase	Decrease	Static
Increase	1	2	3	
decrease	4	5	6	
Static	7	8	9	

Source: Duffy Toft (2007: 250).

Dyads between groups as political actors and their possible demographic trajectories generate nine possible outcomes which are summarised in Table 1.

Intuitively, one might expect ethnic tensions to wane in the wake of a demographic consolidation of an ethnic group's majoritarian position. Quite the opposite actually obtains. That counter-intuitive finding, however, is entirely in keeping with the predictions offered by power-transition theory. Political demography thus improves political science's ability to project onset and outcome. Although the demographic histories of Mauritius and Fiji have received attention in their own right, this article presents the first systematic controlled comparison in light of the ethnic politics in the two island states. The story here is the way migration affects the demographic dis/equilibrium between groups.

### **Comparative design: Mauritius and Fiji as a natural experiment**

Since it is not possible to mount a controlled laboratory experiment to study the effects of demographic change and difference on democratic consolidation and institutional reproduction, the next best solution is an observational study with a definitive and large change in the treatment to a population. This sort of research design is known as a natural experiment. Natural experiments differ from controlled experiments insofar as the assignment of treatments to subjects is haphazard. Mauritius and Fiji lend themselves particularly well to controlling for differential effects of demographic treatments as they already share many other attributes. Erstwhile British colonies, they gained independence around the same time, in 1968 and 1970, respectively. Their independence was actually managed by the same individual in London's Colonial Office. At the time of independence, the same governor general served, in succession, first in Mauritius, then in Fiji. Indian migrants, mostly descendants of indentured labourers, comprise a substantial proportion of the population in both countries, shipped in to provide cheap labour on the sugar plantations. Both countries' economies remain closely tied to sugar.

About 850,000 people live in Fiji; Mauritius is home to about 1.2 million people. But at 720 square miles, Mauritius has less than one-tenth of Fiji's land-mass. At 631 people per km<sup>2</sup>, Mauritius ranks among the most densely populated countries on the planet, about 14 times the global average. By contrast, at 46 people per km<sup>2</sup>, Fiji comes in right around the global average. Mauritius is also orders of magnitude more heterogeneous than Fiji. Fifteen linguistic groups are represented on Mauritius, as are four major world religions. By contrast, linguistic diversity in Fiji includes Bau Fijian, Fiji Hindi, including Hindustani – an umbrella term designating Hindi and Urdu, English, Tamil and Telugu, Gujarati, Chinese, Rotuman, as well as several distinct native Fijian dialects and three major world religions: Christian (largely Methodists), Hinduism and Islam.

The 1960s had been a time of considerable labour and subsequently inter-communal unrest on Mauritius. On the advent of Mauritius' independence, Nobel laureate James Meade, a British commission, and an independent analysis arrived at ominous conclusions about the prospects for ethnic harmony, economic development and political stability on Mauritius (Meade, 1961; Titmuss & Abel-Smith, 1968; Naipaul, 1973): deep ethnic diversity, rapid population growth, lack of economic growth and growing population density on a small island with no natural resources of its own was cause for concern. The Franco-Mauritian and Creole communities saw independence as a ploy by the Indian majority to gain control of the state apparatus. Of course, Fijian Indians' motivation for independence was no different and cause for indigenous Fijian concerns and outright antagonism towards Indians and Indo-Fijians in their bid to protect and maintain traditional privileges (Ravuvu, 1992). The racial communalism nurtured by colonialism thus reified ethnic compartmentalisation (Gillion, 1962, 1977; Lal, 1992; Norton, 1981, 1990, 2002).

The combination of risk factors did not bode well for the period post-independence. Still, in its aftermath the major antagonists in the run-up to independence – the Indian-backed Mauritian Labour Party and the Franco- and Creole-backed Parti Mauricien Social-Démocrate – banded together under Prime Minister Seewoosagur Ramgoolam in a grand coalition and implemented many of the pre-independence commission's recommendations: job creation, economic growth, education, social welfare, etc. As the first non-European associate member of the European Economic Community, in 1975 Mauritius signed a long-term agreement to provide the EEC with 500,000 tons of sugar annually at a price that would turn out to be very favourable for Mauritius and which subsequently became a major catalyst of national prosperity. This agreement was a key in securing funds to sustain the aforementioned programmes. Instead of heeding austerity calls by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mauritius built 'the welfare society'. (Ironically, today the IMF holds Mauritius up as Africa's poster-child for economic and social development.)

Although Mauritius' main ethnic cleavage is between the Creole minority and the Indian majority, the high degree of diversity within Mauritian society in general and these categories in particular problematises the reification of ethnic categories.<sup>1</sup> In Mauritius, 68 per cent of the population is of Indian descent – the highest concentration of the Indians diaspora anywhere in the world – while 27 per cent is Creole. Creole remains the Mauritian vernacular. The principal ethnic cleavage in Fiji is similar. About half the population is of Indian descent while the other half is native Melanesian with a Polynesian admixture. Under British administration, however, native Fijians enjoyed explicit autonomy and protections so as not to attenuate traditional social and cultural links and attachment of a native culture confronted with mass-immigration by indentured Indian labourers.

### Demographic change and difference

By the end of the seventeenth century, about 200 Dutch colonists and 500–1000 slaves are estimated to have lived on Mauritius. Although control over Mauritius switched to the French, the population remained stable until the years 1735–1746 when another 2000 slaves were ‘imported’ from Madagascar and East Africa Coast (primarily Mozambique). Between 1767 and 1807, the total population rose from 18,777 to 77,768 (Kuczynski, 1949: 758). The French abolished slavery at the end of the eighteenth century. Still, trade continued unabated with 1000–3000 slaves being imported to Mauritius annually from 1767 through 1810. The exponential demographic growth precipitated by this forcible population movement is shown in Figure 1.

By 1817, the population had reached 100,000, more than 80 per cent of whom are thought to have been slaves – notably some 6000 Indian slaves among them (Tinker, 1974: 44) – 11 per cent free coloured inhabitants, 8 per cent Europeans or their descendants.

France ceded the island to Britain in 1810. The latter abolished slavery a quarter of a century hence. Prior to emancipation, only 34,000 slaves were still working on the plantations (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1984), although the total number of slaves at the time was reportedly 66,000 (Bowman, 1991: 18). A labour crisis ensued. Demand for labour outstripped supply for, by 1860, Mauritius had become the leading sugar cane exporter in the British Empire (Alladin, 1986). Instead of slaves, landowners had the British recruit indentured Indian labourers (Bissoondoyal & Servansing, 1986).

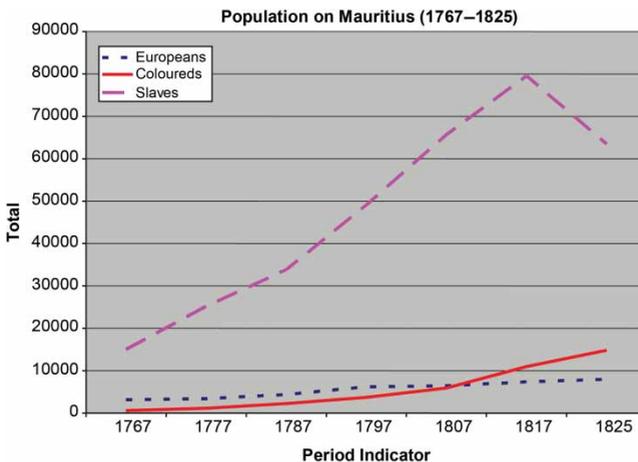


Figure 1. Population on Mauritius (1767–1825).

Source: Census of Mauritius and its Dependencies (1921: 3).

Ample labour supply would depress wages. Indentured labourers started to arrive in 1834. Almost 200,000 Indian migrants would end up arriving on Mauritius between 1851 and 1881, 94% of them in the 1850s and 1860s (Titmuss & Abel-Smith, 1968: 45). By 1866, a total of 339,706 labourers had entered Mauritius. Between 1834 and 1861, the population effectively tripled to 310,000.

Significantly, Indians have formed a majority on the island ever since the 1860s (Lutz & Wils, 1994: 76–78). By 1839 they made up 18 per cent of the population, 43 per cent in 1851 and 67 in 1871. Interestingly, the proportion of Indians on Mauritius has since remained fairly stable. Trade in humans was halted in 1910. Over the entire 1834–1940 period, 451,796 Indians (346,036 males and 105,760 females) arrived on Mauritius. By the end of the nineteenth century, 370,000 South Asian labourers are believed to have resided on Mauritius.

Until the end of the nineteenth century population growth on the island was attributable almost exclusively to immigration. Although Indian migration began to peter out in the 1860s, the total population remained stable until about 1875 because many more males than females were brought to the island. That hampered natural growth. The unequal sex ratio was particularly noticeable among Indians. By the time immigration ceased, Indian males exceeded the number of women by a two to one margin (Lutz & Wils, 1994, 87).

In contrast to Mauritius, Fiji became a colony long after the UK abolished slave labour. Still, some 60,000 *girmitiyas* (indentured labourers) were brought to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 (Lal, 2004). The demographic impact of this population movement was compounded by a subsequent wave of Indian immigration to Fiji during the inter-war period. In absolute terms, and relative to the population already established, migration to Fiji was smaller than to Mauritius. As a result, the numerical gap between Indians and natives Melanesians in Fiji has always been much closer than the gap between Indians and the ‘General Population’ in Mauritius. The first comparative conclusion to draw, then, is that colonial migration policy generated different outcomes with respect to the differentials between the two main population groups on each territory. That is, colonial migration policy had the unintended consequence of producing a clear Indian majority in Mauritius. In Fiji, by contrast, it only produced a very sizeable Indian minority.

Yet a further unintended consequence of colonial migration policy was that the Indian minority in Fiji would inadvertently end up challenging the native predominance. Indian migration to Fiji preceded migration to Mauritius by several decades. As a result, the age structure of Indians in Fiji was comparatively younger than that of Indians in Mauritius. The age-structure differential was partially responsible for the rapid population growth among Indians in Fiji during the first half of the twentieth century. With the exception of a few

thousand free settlers from India between 1920 and 1950, immigration had largely ceased by 1921. Yet, Fiji's Indian population quadrupled between 1921 and 1966. Indo-Fijians were able to sustain disproportionately high rates of natural increase in the order of 4–5 per cent over four decades only because of their comparatively youthful population structure.

If population growth remains constant, the total fertility rate (TFR) – roughly defined as the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime – must be declining. Were it not, the population would increase accordingly. A declining TFR notwithstanding, the number of women of child-bearing age in the population continues to grow. As a result, the crude birth rate (CBR) – the number of births over a given period divided by the person-years lived by that population over that period – actually rises, thus cancelling out the drop in the TFR. The result of such rapid growth is a sizeable youth cohort. Such dynamics necessarily precipitate changes in relative group size, with Indians outnumbering native Melanesians by the end of the Second World War. By the late 1950s, Indian plurality was verging on an absolute majority (Meller & Anthony, 1968: 28–29; Milne, 1981: 61).

The second comparative conclusion to draw from colonial migration policy in Mauritius and Fiji, then, is that migrating populations tend to be fairly young. As a result, they are likely to reproduce at above-average rates. Nativists are thus faced with a manifest and a latent development ensuing from migration. Manifestly, there is a fear of being 'swamped' by migration. Latently, the native population may gradually end up being outnumbered due to differentials in natural increase. Neither development was problematic for political stability in Mauritius. On the one hand, there was no native population that felt its territory was being 'swamped'. On the other hand, colonial migration policy unintentionally preordained an incontrovertible Indian majority. In Fiji, by contrast, the feeling of being 'swamped' was compounded by an unintended challenge to native political incumbency. Although in both cases the demographic outcome of colonial migration policy was unintended, this outcome was predictable. Ergo, the impact migration may have on the demographic (im)balance between groups is anything but fortuitous. Similarly foreseeable is the second-order effect migration has on natural increase and thus changes in relative group size; this is the subject of the next two sections.

### **Demographic developments in Mauritius**

Until 1834, Mauritius had been colonised by Europeans, coloureds and slaves. Mauritius was rapidly becoming a leading exporter of sugarcane in the British Empire (Alladin, 1986). Since labour was in short supply, landowners had the British import indentured Indian labourers (Bissoondoyal & Servansing, 1986). As a result, the island's population effectively tripled to 310,000 by 1860.

Indians have been in the majority ever since (Lutz & Wils, 1994: 76–78). By 1871, they made up 67 per cent of the island's population.

The proportion of Indians to the general population has remained stable over time. This is not what one might have expected given Indian migrants' rapid population growth in Fiji. Two factors, however, attenuated exponential population growth of the sort seen in Fiji. In the years following their arrival, unsanitary living conditions hampered population growth among Indian migrants in Mauritius by driving up morbidity (Ly-tio-Fane Pineo, 1984; Parahoo, 1986). In addition, men vastly outnumbered women which limited fertility (Lutz & Wils, 1994: 87): Of the 451,796 Indians who arrived on Mauritius between 1834 and 1940, 346,036 were males. The extent of the gender imbalance is depicted in Figure 2.

Natural increase among the Indian population was further hampered by the return of 157,539 Indians (128,761 males and 22,778 females) to their country of origin prior to 1910 (Kuczynski, 1949: 797). The Indian multitudes and their youthfulness notwithstanding, unsanitary conditions, an unbalanced ratio in the distribution of gender and emigration ensured that the Indians' rate of natural increase approximated that of the general population. Nonetheless, Figure 2 shows unambiguously that due to the large base of their population Indians have been able to sustain the absolute demographic majority they have enjoyed since the late nineteenth century.

Until 1921, the rate of natural increase for both ethnic groups had been about the same. Henceforth, demographic trends started to diverge due to both improvements in public health (such as the chlorination of potable water as well as campaigns against malaria and hookworm) and the onset of the demographic transition among the Creole population.

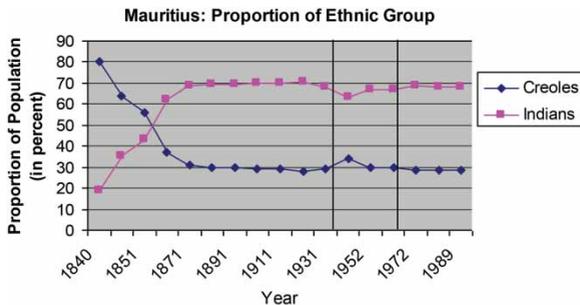


Figure 2. Mauritius, population proportion of ethnic group 1840–1989.

Note: Data after 1973 are based on estimates because collection of data by ethnic group was halted beginning with the census in 1983.

Source: Census of Mauritius and its Dependencies, 1851–1973; estimates 1982–2001.

Their sheer numbers made Indians a force with which to reckon. As depicted in Figure 5, however, by the 1930s Indians' relative advantage in group size over Creoles started to wane. Were these demographic trends to persist, the best option open to Indians would be to buttress their political influence; so, Indians pressed for the franchise from whose expansion they stood to benefit disproportionately. Indeed, a decade after the first major incident of internecine unrest in 1937, the number of enfranchised Mauritians had grown from 11,437 to 71,230 (or about 40 per cent of the adult population) (Tinker, 1976: 335). Only after Indians were able to bolster their political influence they, too, benefitted from improved health care. At that point, the rate of natural increase among Indians rose sharply – and the political unrest of the late 1930s and early 1940s subsided.

Overall, rates of natural increase on the Island remained comparatively low throughout the late nineteenth century. Population growth was kept in check by recurring epidemics and natural disasters. In the wake of the Second World War, the elimination of malaria led to population growth among all populations on Mauritius. Yet, the elimination of malaria bolstered the rate of natural increase at a time when the Indian population had just entered the demographic transition and was thus still growing more rapidly than other population groups. A lower fertility rate among women but a greater number of woman overall can cause the CBR to rise. Indeed, a rise in the rate of natural increase among Indians indicates that Indians were only starting to enter the demographic transition (Xenos, 1977). Since Indian immigration was more recent and substantial than Creole immigration, it ensured that even decades after Indian immigration had ceased, the Indian population structure remained younger than the Creole population. Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the census conducted in 1944 to illustrate the point.

By virtue of being younger and more numerous, Indians were able to produce a greater number of children than Creoles. Since Indians comprised two-thirds of the population as a whole, the young structure of the Indian population precipitated large cohorts of youth throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the extent of which are confirmed by Figure 4.

The graph shows that the immigration of Indians coincides with a rise in the proportion of youth. Since the number of Creoles remained largely unchanged until the end of the nineteenth century, this trend explains the disproportionately younger population among Indians.

During the 1960s, Mauritius witnessed an unprecedented decline in fertility. This had two consequences. Presently, natural increase among all ethnic groups will slow to the point where Mauritius' population may actually start to shrink. Second, slow natural increase among a population that has almost passed through the demographic transition translates into rapid ageing. As a result, youth make up a diminishing proportion of the population. The

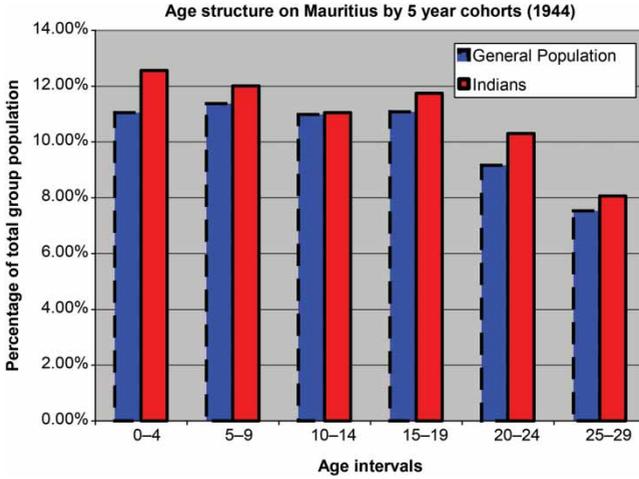


Figure 3. Age structure in Mauritius by 5-year cohorts, 1944.  
 Source: Census of Mauritius and its Dependencies (1944).

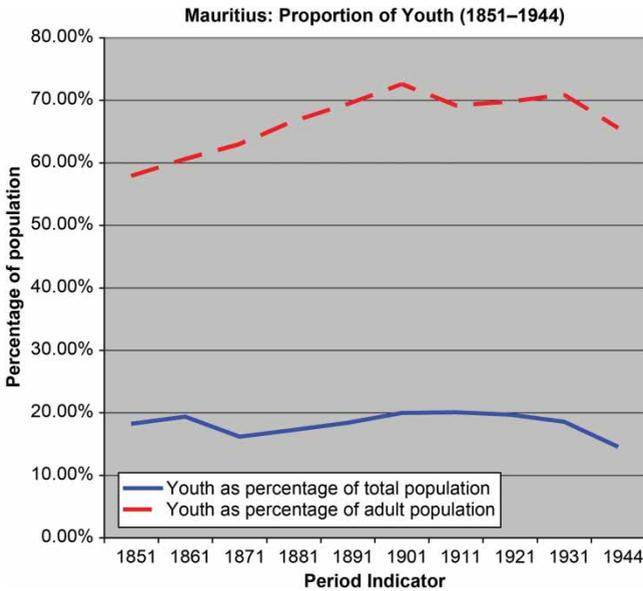


Figure 4. Mauritius, proportion of youth, 1851-1944.  
 Source: Census of Mauritius and its Dependencies (1944).

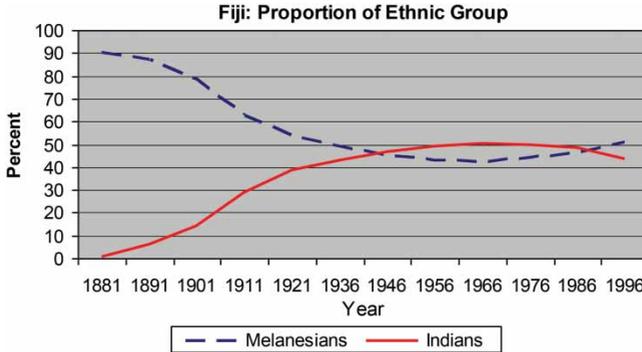


Figure 5. Fiji, proportion of ethnic group, 1881–1996.  
Source: Fiji Islands Statistics Bureau (2002).

balance of Creoles to Indians has remained unchanged since independence and the steep decline in fertility from the 1960s onwards has almost halted natural increase. Their age structures, however, differed considerably prior to independence, with Indians having a younger population. One would expect political instability to wane over time.

### Demographic developments in Fiji

The immigration of about 60,000 indentured Indian labourers to Fiji occurred later than in Mauritius, between 1879 and 1916. The date of the onset of Indian immigration is significant: A devastating measles epidemic had wiped out at least a quarter of the native Fijian population in the late 1870s. That put native Fijians at a certain demographic disadvantage, slowed their natural increase, and accelerated the demographic approach among native Fijians and the newly arrived Indian migrants. The impact of Indian immigration was compounded, and demographic approach hastened further, the aforementioned free settlers from India during the inter-bellum period. The number of migrants to Fiji was smaller than to Mauritius, both in absolute terms and relative to the population already established there. As a result, the demographic gap between Indians and Melanesians (see Figure 5) has always been much closer than the gap between Indians and Creoles in Mauritius (compare Figure 2).

Since the migration of Indians to Fiji postdates their migration to Mauritius by several decades, it follows that the Indian population on Fiji remained young longer into the twentieth century than the Indian population on Mauritius. That largely explains the rise in the rate of natural increase among Indians on Fiji during the first half of the twentieth century (Figure 6).

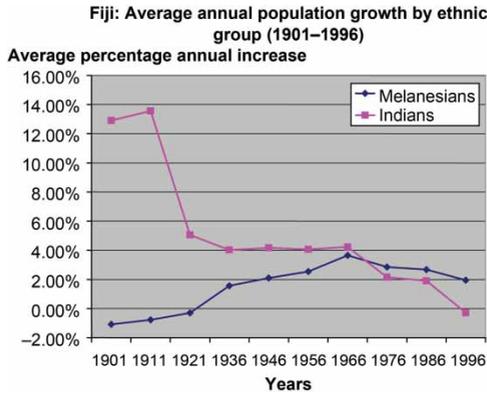


Figure 6. Fiji: average annual population growth by ethnic group, 1901–1996. Source: Fiji Islands Statistics Bureau (2002).

Owing to the compound effect of natural increase and immigration, Fiji's Indian population quadrupled between 1921 and 1966. By the 1950s, not only were Indians an absolute majority, they also had a fairly young age structure. Indians passed through the demographic transition more rapidly than native Melanesians; consequently, the Indian fertility rate and natural increase dropped below the Melanesians' rates. The decline in Melanesian fertility has been more gradual. In the early 1980s, Indians and Melanesians traded 'fecund advantage'. For the first time in decades, Melanesians now had the edge in terms of the TFR. As a result, natural increase among Melanesians now exceeded that among Indians. Melanesians were poised to challenge Indian plurality, a phenomenon known as 'demographic approach'.

The 1987 coup came at a time when Indians had lost their majority and the compound effect of a decline in fertility and emigration was about to cost them their plurality. The subsequent coup attempt in 2000 coincides with Melanesians regaining the demographic majority they had relinquished during the 1930s. Although both Indo- and native Fijians, especially skilled ones, have been emigrating, the numbers clearly show that the demographic impact on the Indo-Fijian has been considerably more deleterious, in part because the impact of native Fijian emigration is mitigated by above-replacement fertility (Bedford, 1989; Gani, 2000; Reddy *et al.*, 2004; Firth, 2006: chapters 6, 10; Mohanty *et al.*, 2006). Since the late 1980s, Fiji's Indian population has been shrinking at the rate of half a per cent a year. The Indian population has contracted by a quarter since the 1990s. It now stands at 37 per cent relative to 57 per cent native Fijian (down from 44 versus 52 per cent in 1997) which is indicative of a precipitous demographic decline among Indo-Fijians since

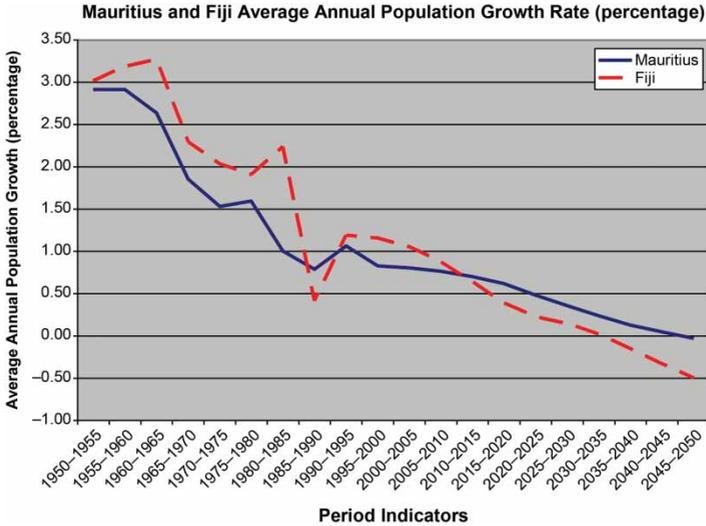


Figure 7. Mauritius and Fiji, average annual population growth rate, 1950–2050. Source: UN Population Projection (2000 revision).

parity in the 1980s. The rate of emigration has been having a marked impact on the average annual rate of population growth in Fiji (as compared to Mauritius in Figure 7), especially considering that Fiji maintains a higher fertility rate than Mauritius (as shown in Figure 8). Providing that these trends persist, the number of Indians in Fiji will keep diminishing.

A lower rate of fertility coupled with out-migration has caused an absolute decline in Fiji’s Indian population, the reason being that the population that is most likely to emigrate includes women of childbearing age and those who already have children (cf. Voigt-Graf, 2003). Emigration further decelerates natural increase. First, the part of the population that could reproduce is the one most prone to leave. Second, the potential for future increase is undermined by children who are leaving with the parents. Natural increase among Melanesians, by contrast, held steady. With no emigration and a slower decline in fertility, the Melanesian CBR has been exceeding the Indian CBR since the 1980s.

The situation on Mauritius in the late 1930s and early 1940s was reversed. Creoles were gaining on Indo-Mauritians. In absolute terms, however, Indo-Mauritians still enjoyed a significant edge due to a higher CBR. Indo-Mauritians may have lagged in terms of relative increase but, unlike Fiji, their majority and relative advantage in group size was never in doubt.

## Discussion

Fiji's population is still in the process of passing through the demographic transition. Unlike Mauritius, behavioural change in Fiji has been gradual and fertility remains higher than in Mauritius. Fiji's population continues to grow at 1.41 per cent – as opposed to 0.88 per cent per annum on Mauritius – it is ageing less rapidly (33 per cent of its population is under the age of 15 as opposed to 25 per cent in Mauritius) and on average women still give birth to almost three children, which is well above the level of replacement. As Figure 8 shows, on Mauritius, the TFR is 2.01 children, which is below the level of replacement of about 2.1. In light of the literature on population structure and political instability, we would thus expect Fiji to be at greater risk of political instability than Mauritius since Fiji's population structure remains younger.

This trend is partially a function of the average age at which women get married. Women on Fiji marry earlier (22.5 years of age) than women in Mauritius (23.8). Figure 9 shows that, as a result, the proportion of youth among Fiji's population has been diminishing noticeably more gradually than in Mauritius.

In 1996, one-third of the population in Fiji was between the ages of 10 and 24. That is, the base of the Melanesian population is young and broad; consequently, as is evident in Figure 10, any decline in the rate of natural increase

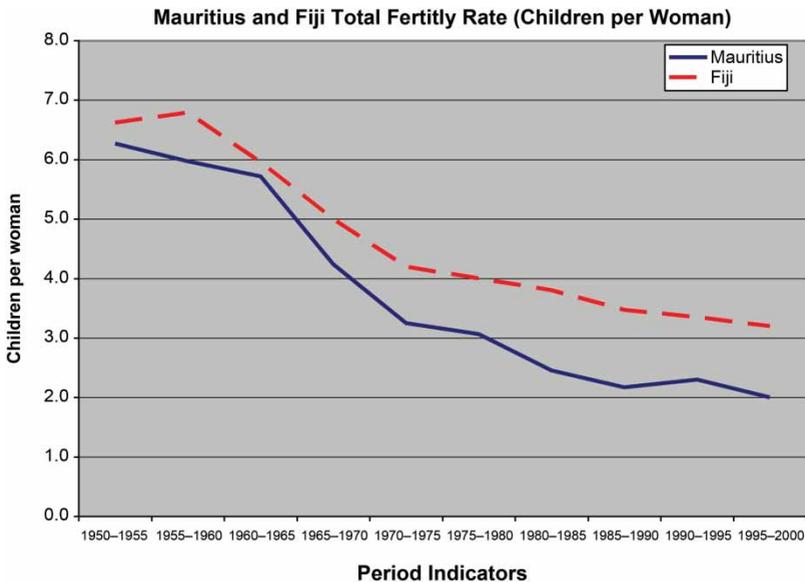


Figure 8. Mauritius and Fiji: total fertility rate, 1950–2050.

Source: UN Population Projection (2000 revision).

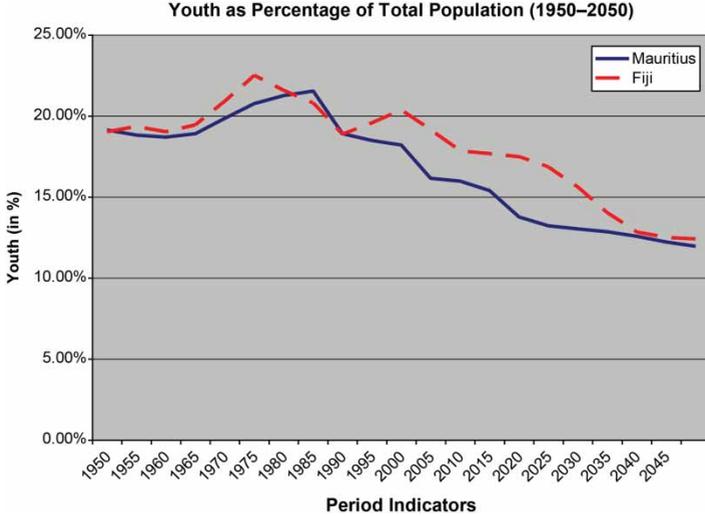


Figure 9. Mauritius and Fiji, youth as percentage of total population, 1950–2050. Source: UN Population Projection (2000 revision).

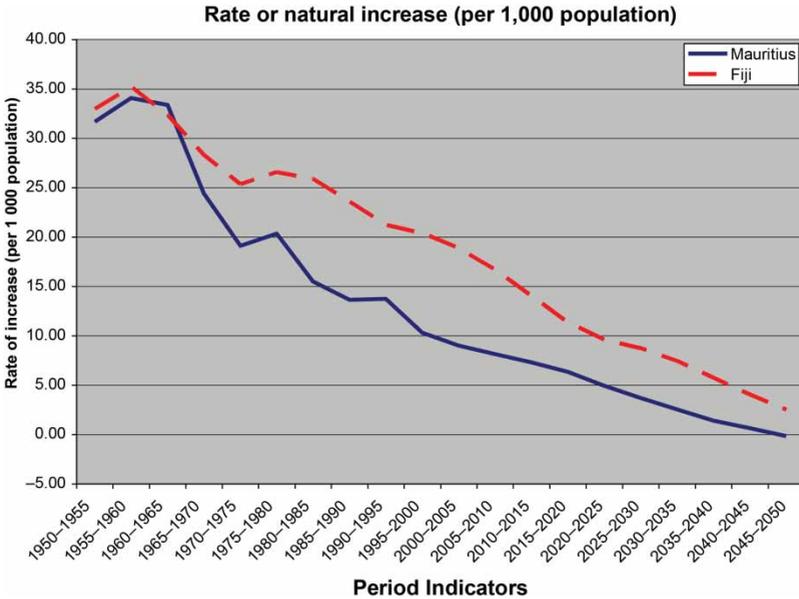


Figure 10. Mauritius and Fiji, rate of natural increase (per 1000 population), 1950–2050. Source: UN Population Projection (2000 revision).

among Melanesians is bound to have a more gradual impact on natural increase in Fiji overall as compared to Mauritius. This explains why Fiji's rate of natural increase will continue to be positive for some time yet. Although Figure 10 shows that the heightened risk emanating from Fiji's demographic structure is on the decline, albeit gradual.

The gap between the two ethnic groups on Fiji has always been narrower (Figure 7) than that between Creoles and Indo-Mauritians. An Indian plurality, therefore, had never been a foregone conclusion in Fiji. On a territory claimed by Melanesians as their ancestral lands, that is sanguine: Just as in-migration jettisoned Melanesian plurality, as a result of the relative proximity of the total size of the two population groups, Indian out-migration could readily re-establish Melanesian demographic dominance. As Figure 11 shows, that is, indeed, what has been happening in Fiji – but not in Mauritius.

Owing to 30 years of persistent emigration, Indians on Fiji now find themselves in the minority. As a result, the question is no longer one of a just political deal for Melanesians as a national minority. Now the concern is the protection of Indians as a political minority (Prasad & Kumar, 2004). Issues of this sort tend to be difficult enough to resolve in countries that have already passed through the demographic transition. A satisfactory solution is

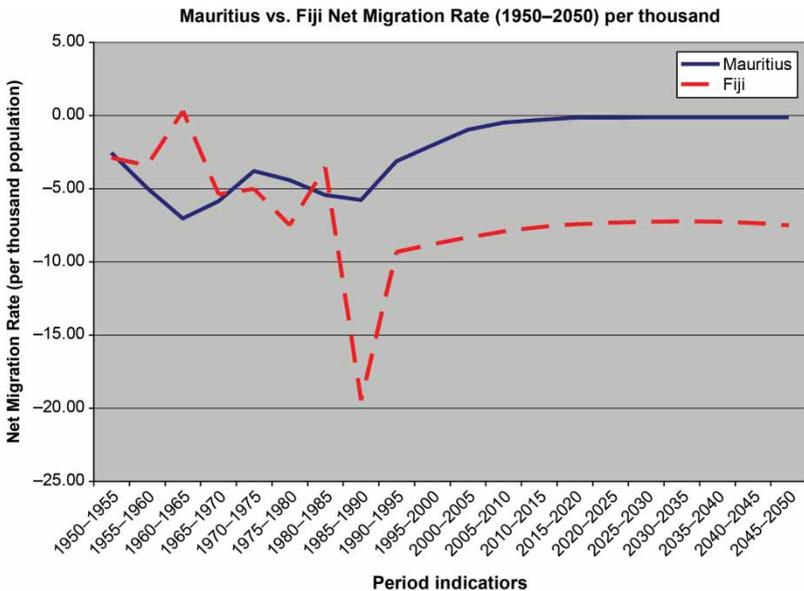


Figure 11. Mauritius versus Fiji, net migration rate, 1950–2050.  
Source: UN Population Projection (2000 revision).

likely to be complicated by demographic trends that favour the new majority whose numerical advantage is sustained for the foreseeable future by a cohort of youth that is disproportionately larger than the minority's.

Still, the patterns that emerge substantiate the explanatory and predictive potential of a demographic dimension of inter-communal relations. The Mauritian population entered the demographic transition earlier than the Fijian population; therefore, it is older. Yet, both cases show evidence of significant differentials in age structure. Nowadays, the ethnic populations on Mauritius are structured similar to one another. In Fiji, by contrast, the former minority's population is younger than the formerly dominant majority's population, whose demographic position has been undermined further by emigration. The result has been a relative shift in group size. Demographic structure thus appears to matter to the different outcomes of inter-communal relations in Mauritius and Fiji.

### **Conclusion**

Just how likely ethnically divided societies are to consolidate democratically has proven an elusive quest. Their undisputed significance notwithstanding, historical, economic, political and institutional variables are difficult to disentangle and have trouble accounting for the sort of onset and dispersion of instability seen in Fiji as compared to Mauritius. Against this backdrop, demography holds out considerable promise, both in explaining and in projecting the prospects for democratic consolidation. First, a demographic equilibrium thus does seem to be more favourable for democratic consolidation than a demographic imbalance. Second, the comparison of demographic trends vis-à-vis outcomes in Mauritius and Fiji confirms a counter-intuitive inference about 'demographic approach' drawn from power-transition theory: inter-communal tensions are likely to wax rather than wane when an ethnic group consolidates its demographic majority. Third, the precipitous rate of change between Indo-Fijian and native Fijian demography may further aggravate inter-communal tensions.

Having accounted for differences in the trajectory democratic consolidation has taken in Mauritius and Fiji, demographic change and difference also offer a viable account for a rise in political rivalries among native Fijians – in the absence of a concomitant development in Mauritius. Youth have long been identified as a source of political instability (Fuller & Pitts, 1990; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Goldstone, 2002; Cincotta *et al.*, 2003 Kahl, 2006; Cincotta & Leahy, 2007; Leahy, E. with R. Engleman *et al.*, 2007). Youth bulges have been found to have a positive effect on civil war (Urdal, 2006, 2007; Cincotta & Doces, 2011), ethnic conflict (Esty *et al.*, 1998) and ethno-nationalist violence (Braungart, 1984; Fuller, 1984; Pfaffenberger, 1990; Huntington, 1993:

259–260). Ergo, the probability of ethnopolitical infighting correlates with a group's demographic structure: the younger a group's population structure, the greater the chances of internal strife.

Demographic change never had much of an impact on the conflict in Mauritius precisely because there was so little change: Indians had cemented their majority early on. All population groups in the island state have been ageing rapidly since the 1960s, and at roughly the same pace. As a result, no one group has the sort of young age-structure dynamics that are associated with a high probability of political instability or which might challenge Indian demographic hegemony. Since the 1960s, all groups on Mauritius have been moving through the demographic transition quite expeditiously. Rapid population ageing is the result. In the process, the proportion of youth diminishes, both in absolute and relative terms. Since the onset of the demographic transition is largely synchronic among the different ethnic groups on Mauritius, they age in tandem which means the equilibrium of groups' size relative to one another remains stable.

In Fiji, by contrast, migration temporarily spawned a rapid influx of a very young Indian population which reproduced rapidly and, in the process, called the indigenous demographic majority into question. However, the younger population structure of Fiji's native population made it impossible for Indians to consolidate their demographic plurality. Demographic imbalance thus had a deleterious effect on democratic consolidation. In Fiji, both the onset and the pace at of the demographic transition among Indians and Melanesians differ. Since the Indian population has been ageing more rapidly than the Melanesian population structure, the latter's relative youth bulge has been more pronounced and is able to sustain population growth exceeding that found among the Indian population. As a result, demographic dynamics in Fiji make political volatility more likely.

These dynamics are exacerbated and the demographic imbalance upsets further as people exercise the exit option (by means of emigration). In the short term, emigration compromises relative group size. Over the longer term, however, emigration depletes natural increase: Not only are emigrés not producing children, but emigration also tends to be concentrated disproportionately among people of childbearing age. Emigration thus has a multiplier effect on an already unsteady demographic state.

Ergo, demography is germane to institutional reproduction in the two island states in at least two distinct ways. First, relative differences in natural increase and migration translate into differentials in age structure among groups in conflict. Differences in fertility dynamics in terms of onset of and progress through the demographic transition hamper the emergence of a demographic equilibrium. A demographic equilibrium in terms of both youth and relative group

size, by contrast, bodes well for democratic consolidation; in the absence of equilibrium, the risk of democratic instability is heightened.

Second, migration emerges as an intervening variable insofar as it affects demographic equilibrium. Migration has two manifestations. The first one is the presence and absence of migration altogether. From the comparison of Mauritius and Fiji, it would appear that the simple presence of migration has the potential to have destabilising political effects, provided the migratory flows have differential effects on population structure and group size between two groups. The second variance is in-migration versus out-migration. While both appear to have an effect, the impact of immigration is more difficult to gauge from the evidence marshalled in this study because of the colonial conditions under which it occurred. By contrast, the evidence seems to suggest that emigration has the potential to exacerbate age-structure differentiation among groups in conflict, thereby aggravating potentially destabilising demographic trends.

Demography may be neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for inter-communal conflict. Conflicts are complex and variables notoriously difficult to disentangle. The ethno-demographic approach to democratic consolidation posited in this article is not meant to diminish the significance of historical, political, economic or institutional variables, or intervening variable such as the societal representativeness of the security sector. Still, the comparative findings suggest that demography may be under-appreciated as an explanation for the onset and prevalence of inter-communal conflict and different political outcomes in cases that are quite similar in many other respects. Differences in inter-communal population structure seem to affect democratic consolidation. Indeed, inter-communal conflict is ubiquitous on Mauritius. Yet, it has not precipitated the systemic political instability witnessed in Fiji. The case of Fiji suggests that situations of demographic approach, when relative group size shifts, may prove particularly volatile, a situation that is exacerbated by heightened prospects of volatility within the majority ethnic group due to its youthful population structure. By the same token, a demographic equilibrium among groups, all of which share a rapidly ageing population structure, has bolstered democratic consolidation in Mauritius.

These observations transcend Mauritius and Fiji. In 1994, the United Nations Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS was ratified in Barbados. Mauritius and Fiji are among 38 UN-member SIDS – with 14 more that are either not members of the UN or associate members of the regional commissions. The UN protocol sought to draw attention to the particular economic and environmental challenges faced by SIDS. In January 2005, Mauritius hosted the protocol's 10-year review. Among the emerging themes was the extent to which economic and environmental issues are tied to political stability. Since most SIDS exhibit a high degree of ethno-cultural

diversity, there is now a growing realisation that managing inter-communal relations is a prerequisite for achieving economic and environmental goals. Since democracies tend to have more vibrant economies and tend to have more effective environmental policies, an improved understanding of the conditions that affect the nature of inter-communal relations and democratic consolidation goes a long way towards attaining these goals.

To this end, demographic structure, change and difference and associated independent variables of fertility, mortality and migration are especially useful insofar as they transcend the *ex post facto* explanatory mode. They hold out potential to account for diachronic differences in outcome across cases, and synchronic variation in onset and intensity of political instability. Without independent variables that have greater predictive power, early intervention and preventative diplomacy are difficult to time and focus for maximum strategic effect. A comparative approach to the ethno-demographic structure of democratic consolidation is not only able to account for variation across time and space but also appears to have at least some predictive power.

### Acknowledgements

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### Note

1. By definition, Creole refers to a mixture. In the context of Mauritius, Creoles are coloured people who trace their origins to Madagascar and East Africa, especially Mozambique; therefore, their ethnic background is diverse. While that fragmentation is manifest among the Indian community, religious divisions appear to trump linguistic ones. Although 65 per cent of the population in Mauritius is of Indian ancestry, for instance, its Muslim contingent (17 per cent), its Dravidian contingent (6 per cent Tamil and 3 per cent Telugus) and its Marathi contingent (2 per cent) have rarely aligned themselves politically with the north Indian Biharis (42 per cent). When communal cohesion is concerned, however, that categorization is somewhat misleading. Hindus are commonly understood as a religious group, whereas Tamils and Telugus are commonly understood as a cultural and, to a lesser degree, linguistic group. But on Mauritius, Hindu has more of a cultural than a religious connotation. That has the effect of reinforcing ethnic cohesion among Indians (Alber, 1994). Many older rural Indo-Mauritians still communicate in Bhojpuri (a Hindi dialect) although Hindi and Urdu are also common. Similarly, one might expect Hindus to be divided along caste lines. For Indo-Mauritians, however, castes do not represent strict endogamous units. Marriage and kinship cut across caste lines. The ethnic division of labour on the island further reinforces group cohesion: Hindus and Muslims tend to work in rural agriculture, especially the sugar industry (Eriksen, 1998). Inter-ethnic marriages are rare and in the fewer than 1 in 10 cases where they do occur, the evidence suggests

they have consolidated, not undermined, ethnic consciousness (1989: 148–154; 1997; 1998: 121–130; Oodiah, 1992: 59; Nave, 2000). On closer examination, then, Indo-Mauritians constitute more cohesive a community than an initial glance might suggest.

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