

Limited preferential voting in Papua New Guinea: some early lessons

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In Western societies such as Australia almost everyone thinks democratic governance is the best, if not only way, for countries to run themselves. Yet we often hear people say of the South Pacific that democracy is incompatible with island cultures. Not many in Papua New Guinea would agree—they are enthusiastic democrats, even those who zestfully undermine the process. Some say there is too much political competition, but what kind of democracy is it?

The government of 1999–2002, led by Sir Mekere Morauta was acutely aware of problems in the operation of Papua New Guinea's political institutions and was strongly motivated to push through bold constitutional reforms. It developed legislation through the Constitutional Development Commission aimed at changing some of the ways in which the people of Papua New Guinea do their politics, and introduced a form of preferential (alternative) vote in the 2002 Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections (OLNLLGE), as well as an 'integrity law' designed to strengthen political parties and increase stability in the legislature and hence cabinet (the 2001 Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates, OLIPPAC).

The subsequent mid 2002 elections were widely regarded as chaotically organised and, in much of the Highlands region, violent (Gelu 2002; May 2003; Standish 2003). The government of Sir Michael Somare elected by the National Parliament in August 2002 has since implemented and benefited from these reforms driven personally by Morauta. That is the good news, before I plunge into detailed discussion of the recent changes, revive some doubts, and make some general points at the end.

This short paper examines Papua New Guinea's change in voting from the previous first-past-the-post (FPTP) method to limited preferential voting (LPV). Unless a candidate has an absolute majority of valid votes in a count, the candidate with the lowest tally is eliminated, and his/her second or third preferences are then distributed as marked, at full value, to remaining candidates. Once redistributed twice, votes are deemed exhausted and lapse, thereby reducing the size of the count. This process continues until one candidate receives 50 per cent plus one of the votes remaining, and is declared elected. The process is 'limited' because only the first three preferences marked by a voter are counted.

Here I report on the six by-elections since December 2003 which have used LPV, using my own observations and those of Fr Philip Gibbs of the Melanesian Institute and colleagues from the University of Papua New Guinea.¹ Early evaluations of LPV have focussed on election administration and the management of security issues. By contrast, I concentrate on the public's awareness of preferential voting and the political use of LPV by candidates and their supporters.

Here, the arguments used to promote the LPV reforms are briefly spelled out, and then tested against how the system has been used in the recent by-elections. Overall, observers agree that there have been significant improvements in the conduct of these elections, but not all these improvements are derived from the new voting system. We can also say that the system has been used in unanticipated ways, under the influence of local political cultures. It remains to be seen whether the system will have the intended effects on Papua New Guinea politics, and whether the state resources will be available to sustain the apparent improvements to date. The penultimate section widens the discussion to systemic problems associated with politics and elections in Papua New Guinea. The Appendix gives a summary sketch of my observations in the Chimbu Provincial seat by-election in May 2004.

An audit of the three mid 2004 by-elections was carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies at Victoria University in Wellington in October 2004. Led by Dr Andrew Ladley, the audit team reviewed the by-elections in three seats: Angalimp-South Wahgi in the Western Highlands, Chimbu Provincial and Yangoru-Saussia in the East Sepik. They thus emphasised the problem area of the Highlands, but several observers argue that Highlands-style politics has crept into the National Capital and some coastal provinces. The team found that the by-elections were generally peaceful, a great improvement

on 1997 and 2002, but that the excessively large enrolment facilitated multiple and mass block voting and so created huge unnecessary costs for the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission. The report says the heavy security presence in these by-elections (nearly half of the national police force), and especially the helicopters paid for by the Australian government, could not be replicated over several provinces at once in a General Election. Aside from preparatory costs in 2005–6, the 2007 general elections will cost over 100 million kina. The audit findings will feed into revisions of the electoral roll and point to the need for strong support from both national and provincial governments, and from officials and the public at large, if the electoral system is to remain viable.

Many of the continuing administrative problems associated with elections are beyond the control of the Electoral Commission, as when communities enter 'ghost' names into the electoral roll and when counting staff (even quite senior public servants) cleverly commit fraud. There cannot be a free and fair election where the community is determined to corrupt the election. Fortunately in the Chimbu, Moresby Northeast and Wabag by-elections the Electoral Commission staff and police were alert to these problems and blocked some attempts at cheating.

Reasons for preferential voting

The move to preferential voting was re-initiated by the late Sir Anthony Siaguru, largely because of the declining mandates held by the majority of Members of Parliament elected using first-past-the-post voting. As the numbers of candidates increased with every election, reaching an average of 21 candidates per seat in 1997 and 26 in 2002, so did the proportion of votes recorded by winning candidates decrease.

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| Policy dialogue |
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Only one received over 50 per cent of votes in 2002; all the rest were 'first past the post' with the highest tally. Half of the winners in 1997 scored less than 19 per cent of the vote and in 2002 half less than 16 per cent. Accordingly, it is argued, MPs think they only have to keep a small minority of voters happy in order to have a chance of re-election, and so most concentrate on looking after their own 'base voters'. The hope is that LPV will require candidates to widen their support base and that the need for a wider mandate should impel MPs to work for their entire electorate in order to have a hope of re-election. The ultimate aim is better governance and more stability when the system is properly bedded in.

In 2001 PNG media consumers (and the target MPs) experienced an innovative campaign for LPV by the Election Reform Project run by Transparency International (PNG), with daily cartoons in the press saying that MPs elected under LPV would be of better quality, because they would have a majority of votes.² That campaign raised hopes about LPV so high that many thought that, when combined with the OLIPPAC party electoral reform, the reforms would be something of a cure-all for the country's political ills.

The introduction of LPV is an attempt at 'political engineering' which has been subject of both enthusiastic endorsement and sceptical interrogation (Reilly 2001; Standish 2002b). This reform is intended to change people's electoral behaviour or political culture, and in particular to break down the intense localism found in most areas of Papua New Guinea. We can list the arguments used to promote LPV, which are based on the assumption that candidates and voters have a perfect understanding of how to use the system.

1. In order to win, candidates need minor preferences from others to gain a majority of votes, once having ensured

they have enough primary votes to avoid being eliminated early in the count. To gather the essential minor preferences all candidates need to be able to campaign beyond their own base vote areas.

2. If candidates can credibly claim to direct the preferences of their core supporters, it is most efficient for them to form preference-swapping alliances with (at least some of) their rivals in other base vote areas.
3. Hence campaigning will be more 'accommodative'. Elections under LPV will be less confrontational.
4. There will be less head-to-head conflict and hence less violence, whether in the form of intimidation before the vote, coercion during voting or payback reprisals after the election results (when it has become clear who voted for whom, who broke promises of support and who delivered on those promises).
5. The fact that voters will have a second and third choice will ease tensions in communities where individuals have conflicting obligations. If voters' first choices—usually their local candidate and often their kinsman—do not succeed and are eliminated in the count, then their next preference will go to another relative or perhaps to a worthy candidate from further away who is seen as likely to serve a wide area.
6. Second and third choices are seen as especially important for women, who in the past have been obliged to vote for their husband's choice of candidate. Having fulfilled their family obligations then women should have a free vote for their own choices, maybe their brother's candidates, or a really well-known good citizen from elsewhere. It is also hoped that under LPV women candidates may have a better chance for electoral success than previously.

7. The Electoral Reform Project stressed that LPV would produce 'a strong mandate' and better MPs, because winning candidates would need an 'absolute majority'. However it was not clarified that that is an absolute majority (50%+1) of *live votes at the final count*, after the eliminations, not of valid votes in the primary count.
8. Many people thought there would be fewer candidates under LPV, although election specialists saw no mathematical reason to make that more likely.
9. LPV was introduced alongside the Integrity Laws to strengthen political parties and was expected to increase stability in parliament and government. Parties would form alliances using LPV.

By 2001, preferential voting was something quite new for most of the Papua New Guinea public, including the electoral officials. Only a few old people remembered the Optional Preferential Voting used by the Australian colonial administration from 1964–74. In that era most people did not exercise their preferences, but their votes were valid because preferential voting was optional. The informal vote rate was fairly low, because most voters were assisted by officials. Even experienced politicians failed to understand the system at the time, although preferences (known as the *namba tu vot*) often changed the outcome, displacing the initial front-runner in 16 of 100 electorates. Although familiar to well-educated Australians, preferential voting is complex, even for people who are highly numerate, but it is used in very few cases internationally (Reilly 2004).

Clearly, the by-elections in which LPV has been used have been learning exercises for all concerned. It will take at least a full general election (or two) before the achievements of this reform can be fully assessed. Accordingly, this paper can only provide a

very preliminary assessment of the impacts of LPV against its proponents' good intentions, especially since by-elections, and the state resources deployed in them, pose fewer challenges than nationwide general elections.

Evaluating limited preferential voting

This section summarises the experience and observations of the six by-elections to date, using the anticipated benefits for LPV presented above as a checklist for a preliminary assessment of the impacts of the LPV reform. Although my comments about the use of preferences apply generally, polling in Abau and Yangoru-Saussia Open seats was much more orderly in most areas than in the other four electorates. The exception was Wanigela village near Abau where leading candidates brought thousands of voters from Port Moresby and gave them little tickets with names from the rolls to use in voting. There were disturbances when officials and police tried to stop under-age voters and multiple voting. I tend to use the masculine pronoun, because there were only four women candidates in these elections; of these, only one took a prominent role in local campaigning. Much of the data is summarised in Table 1.

1. Many candidates had limited understanding of the significance of preferences, and most only campaigned locally, just as they had under FPTP. Perhaps some stood merely to be seen as a leader within their local group. Being entrenched in their parochial communities, many candidates believed that their home base support, with that of relatives, would be sufficient to win. Probably some thought campaigning outside their local groups would be futile, or they lacked the confidence and personal contacts needed to campaign across the electorate. No doubt several

Policy dialogue

Table 1 Electorates using limited preferential voting, 2002 and 2003–04

| | Abau | A-SW | Chimbu | Yangoru-Sausia | Moresby-NE | Wabag |
|--|---------------------------|--|---|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 2002 FPTP | | | | | | |
| General election | Election null and void | | | Election null and void | Election null and void | Election null and void |
| Candidates | 18 | 26 | 41 | 32 | 33 | 25 |
| Women candidates (7) | - | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Allowable ballot papers | 20,902 | 129,455 | 441,713 | 24,287 | 29,617 | 50,383 |
| Informal vote (per cent) | 0.6 | 2.8 | 0.4 | 0.34 | 1.4 | 1.3 |
| Winning vote (per cent) | 29.6 | 9.3 | 14.6 | 15.4 | 15.6 | 24.7 |
| 2003–04 LPV by-elections | Court of disputed returns | Death of MP | Death of MP | MP dismissed | CDR | CDR |
| Candidates | 6 | 30 | 31 | 18 | 22 | 19 |
| Women candidates (4) | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | - |
| Allowable ballot papers | 18,195 | 105,948 | 341,060 | 29,265 | 23,802 | 53,418 |
| Informal vote (per cent) | 1.9 | 1.1 | 0.4 | 1.1 | 3.3 | 0.9 |
| Primary vote (per cent) | Puka Temu (49) | William Roim (9.3, 1st) | Peter Launa (13) | Peter Waranaka (19) | Casper Wollom (16.2) | Sam Abal (38) |
| | | Jamie Maxtone-Graham (8, 2nd) (8.6, 4th) | John Garia (8, 2nd) | | | |
| Winning percentage—all winners gained 50 per cent +1 in the final count | | | | | | |
| Winners' 'mandate' as a percentage of ballot papers in the primary count | Temu (50) | Graham (22) | Launa (21) Garia (21) (margin of 474 votes in 72,478) | Waranaka (29) | Wollom (29) | Abal (48) |
| Exhausted ballot papers (per cent) | Nil (0) | 63,930 (60) | 196,578 (57) | 12,904 (44) | 10,046 (42) | 5,003 (9) |

Note: Percentages are rounded.

Sources: Derived from PNG Electoral Commission data.

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| Policy dialogue |
|-----------------|

candidates in each seat stood only to split the votes of local men, and so did not want to campaign widely. But even experienced candidates did not campaign widely, one such was the runner-up in Abau. Widespread campaigning did work for candidates with strong appeal, as in Abau and Chimbu where two very well-known candidates received huge proportions of preferences from across the electorate—but not from their home village rivals.

2. Clearly not all candidates had the ability to direct preferences towards allies. In all electorates observed by teams from the University of Papua New Guinea, some candidates directed their supporters to give their preferences to minor candidates who could not be considered strong rivals. In other words, they asked people to throw away their votes on weak candidates, so as to deny any potential support to significant rivals who were thought likely to survive during the elimination stages of the count. In at least two electorates, an old tactic was used: compliant candidates were set up in order to split the vote bases of rivals. Their other role was to channel preferences towards their sponsor. (In Moresby-North East this was spotted, and backfired.)

Few candidates wanted to go around asking for second or third preferences. In both Abau and in Angalimp-South Wahgi the winning candidate received the bulk of preferences from several other candidates. In Angalimp, Jamie Graham came up from fourth place on the primary vote count to win eventually on the twenty-eighth count; he had publicly given thousands of kina to certain of his rivals at their rallies. Such cooperation was rare. No doubt the lesson of his success will be emulated in future by-elections and 2007.

3. Campaigning was much more relaxed and accommodative, with candidates able to campaign across the electorates in most instances. However some candidates refused to allow their nearest local rivals to speak at their rallies, no doubt fearing losing some of their base votes.
4. These polls were less violent than those in 2002, with much less tension and coercion in the campaigning, voting and counting phases. In Highlands booths people could not vote without being observed, but the levels of intimidation were greatly reduced compared with 2002. In some Highlands areas there were intimidating threats made before the vote, and minor instances of violence on voting day and after the count. Ballot papers were seized in two incidents in Chimbu and Angalimp, compared with frequent hijackings of papers throughout four Highlands provinces in 2002. By contrast with elections since 1977, only one serious election-related battle has been reported, a case in Chimbu where two candidates had split their tribe's vote, ultimately costing one of them the election.

This almost peaceful set of elections is a great improvement. Was this because of LPV? Maybe, but also note the strong police presence and that these were only mid-term by-elections, when the stakes are not as high and the competition (and election frenzy) is less intense.

5. Voters speak enthusiastically about having a 'free' second and third choice, and argue that having voted for their local man they may also support someone who might serve a wider area. After the audit inspection of ballot papers in Chimbu and close inspection of Wabag papers it is now clear that in certain areas the primary vote was filled

out by the presiding polling official. I personally observed this being done, and have field assistants' reports from other areas. Although primary votes were 'pre-marked' by the same person, minor preferences were often filled out by different people using different pens or pencils. In Chuave in Chimbu I observed dozens of people who were block voting all first preferences to their local candidate, but who then directed their minor preferences out of area, to strong candidates with a worthy history who could be considered likely to try to deliver services across the electorate.

6. Women were active in the poll, and in some Highlands booths women were seen voting early and often. For women, voting is more free under LPV, at least for second and third preferences. In Abau women told our team members that they had followed family decisions on how to allocate preferences. Under LPV there have been fewer women candidates (Angalimp being the exception, with three) but the primary vote for women candidates remains very low. In Angalimp-South Wahgi, one woman candidate took a leading role in awareness-raising about LPV, and is believed to have gained many second preferences, but was eliminated too early to benefit.
7. There was an increase—a near doubling—of the 'overall mandates' of the new MPs (in the sense of their final total of primary votes and preferences, as a proportion of total valid votes in the initial count). In four cases the mandates in this sense were in the range 22–29 per cent. In Abau and Wabag the winners' mandates were around 50 per cent. This can be explained by local factors, in that especially strong candidates had the explicit support of the Prime Minister and the Provincial Governor respectively.

Very few votes were exhausted before winners emerged. In the other four by-elections the count was drawn out till the third last candidate was eliminated, and the winning margin between the two remaining candidates was very narrow. As with first-past-the-post, close results like these weaken the legitimacy of the outcomes, and in three of the six cases the result was appealed (although in Chimbu the appeal was withdrawn). Widespread public confusion and irritation remain over 'absolute majorities'.³

8. There were fewer candidates in these by-elections (especially Abau, which dropped from 18 nominees in 2002 to six in 2004). This is normal; fewer stood in the six Supplementary Elections in the Southern Highlands in 2003, as well. Sometimes the candidates negotiated these withdrawals among themselves. People stood down because they were still tired and not financially well off after 2002. Besides, these were only by-elections for half a 5-year term. Nor had there been enough time for the usual bunch of newcomers to emerge, and so many conserved their resources till 2007. Having tested the water unsuccessfully in 2002, most of those who withdrew then transferred their support to stronger candidates. Nevertheless there were 18 candidates in Yangoru, 30 in Angalimp-South Wahgi and 31 in Chimbu, 19 in Wabag and 22 in Moresby-North East. In other words, the culture of most large groups wanting a candidate, and of ambitious men wanting to become candidates, has not changed, often defying rational calculation in terms of the chances of victory. Having large numbers of candidates still reduces the size of the vote needed to win. It also increases the workload and costs for the Electoral Commission. With only 3 preferences to count, most candidates

will be eliminated and a high proportion of votes deemed 'exhausted' (up to 60 per cent in a typical electorate), before someone collects an absolute majority of the live votes left in the count.

9. Some political parties were especially keen to elect new MPs, hoping to boost their numbers before an expected vote of no-confidence. But despite the strong National Alliance campaigns in Abau and Yangoru, and the involvement of Enga Governor Peter Ipatas in Wabag, there is little sign that OLIPPAC has changed people's voting behaviour towards political parties. Party endorsement was largely an afterthought in most of the Highlands seats, and meant little on the ground. The candidates were on their own. In Moresby-North East only four of nineteen candidates had party endorsement. Many party supporters deliberately hid their party preferences, preferring—as previously—to keep their options open in the event they were elected. At their rallies, parties did not direct supporters to preference other parties; inter-party cooperation was negligible.

Overall, we can say that on these criteria that LPV has had some real success, especially in the changed atmosphere of campaigning and less stressful voting and less violent aftermath. These changes may also be due to the massive presence of police and the use of helicopters, especially in the Highlands seats. The impacts of LPV in a number of coastal and Island region provinces may be more beneficial, but political competition in these regions has never been as intense as in the Highlands political hothouse.

Major problems remain with the administration of elections, especially the problems associated with the inadequacies of the electoral rolls. These can lead to the

doubling of the workload because the inflated numbers of ballot papers prolongs the poll and count, and hugely increase the overall costs of the exercise.

The improved performance in the by-elections resulted from lessons learnt in 2002, the use of the best staff from the electoral commission, and much higher levels of security and funding than for recent general elections. Increased resources were also available for the 2003 supplementary elections in the Southern Highlands, and led to improved but nevertheless still flawed performance using the old voting system.

Clearly LPV has not achieved the exaggerated hopes of its proponents, and many of the problems in the electoral system would never be touched by the preferential voting reforms. We should not expect revolutionary behavioural changes overnight.

Several general points can be made about LPV in the by-elections to date.

- The need to mark '1, 2, 3' for votes to be formal is readily known. Informal votes were relatively low (for example, when compared with 3–4 per cent in Australia): Abau 1.86 per cent; Angalimp-South Wahgi 1.11 per cent; Chimbu 0.41 per cent; Yangoru-Saussia 1.08; 0.86 per cent in Wabag and in Moresby Northeast 3.3 per cent. (In the last case police stopped 'helpers' from 'assisting' voters by writing the preferences.)
- What is not readily known is the overall rationale for introducing the system, how the count works, and its significance. Candidates told observers that this limited awareness affected how they and their teams campaigned, and what suggestions they had made as to how preferences should be used.
- In conducting community awareness, it is difficult for public servants (especially electoral officials) to give what is, in effect, political advice to members of the

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| Policy dialogue |
|-----------------|

public or candidates on how they could use their preferences. In a few cases non-government organisations have been able to raise awareness of political issues, and factors which might be relevant in allocating preferences.

- Many candidates were unaware of the need to create alliances with rivals, and did not use the system to full advantage. They have said that next time they will campaign differently.
- Preferences were used negatively in all by-elections, in order to block rivals, as much as to transfer support to allies. This tactic was unexpected, but is a legitimate use of the system (as demonstrated for decades by the Democratic Labour Party in Australia).
- A few candidates did build up their support by obtaining preferences, or used their own funds to help other candidates. (This could have implications under OLIPPAC—which bans supporting candidates from another party.)
- Many candidates are spoilers, still, and in Moresby Northeast and in Angalimp some were also dummies—fronts put up to channel preferences to a major candidate.
- Clever strategic and tactical use of LPV was seen to be successful in each by-election, and will surely spread more by 2007.
- Cheating, especially double-voting, was still rampant in Highlands polling booths in 2004. This was stopped by police on occasion, where they had the strength and will to do so. In other areas some police showed bias in favour of certain candidates, and in some locations (as in previous elections) there are strong allegations that police were bought off.
- In many booths, a 100 per cent vote for one candidate indicated coercion, official collusion or a ‘consensus’ decision to ‘turn the table’ and have a block vote. In many polling booths voters lacked privacy as they marked their votes. However in a number of areas the votes in whole ballot boxes were fairly evenly spread between two or three major candidates—which has been unusual in recent elections in the Highlands.
- Fraud was attempted in all three Highlands counting centres. Everyone—including public servants—appears to support one candidate or another in PNG politics. (Sometimes they support several. One ambitious senior official gleefully told me ‘I backed four horses—giving them money—and my horse came home!’) Partisanship by officials is an immensely difficult problem for the Electoral Commission and police to attempt to control.
- As well as affecting the quality of governance generally, the politicisation of the provincial public service undermines the integrity of the electoral process, and the outcome.
- Ultimately the politicisation of the bureaucracy under the current (and previous) provincial government system reduces the capacity of the state to deliver essential services. This undermines the authority of MPs, parliament, and of course it impacts negatively on good governance.
- In the Highlands, campaigning usually involved generous hospitality and where possible the distribution of money, and often sponsoring sporting teams. Towards the end, huge sums of cash were dished out in the hope of obtaining primary votes and preferences. Having preferences increases voters’ leverage over candidates, if the value of minor preferences is understood.

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| Policy dialogue |
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- The audit team says there is a necessity to try to change the culture around elections, to one of popular ownership. In particular, they seek to apply this ethic to the reform of the electoral roll over the next two years, so that only eligible persons get to vote (and only once).
- The job of reformers is never easy—there are no quick fixes.

Wider issues

Many discussions of PNG politics argue that reform will come through pressure from civil society organisations. Unfortunately, the executive and the legislature appear insensitive to public opinion, partly because there are so few levers with which to apply pressure. The media have limited reach beyond Port Moresby, and national civil society organisations which are based in the capital also appear to have limited capacity to reach out into the provinces. Some national organisations were discredited when their leaders were elected in 1997 and helped the late notorious MP, Sir William Skate, become Prime Minister.

Yet in the provinces there are many thriving non-government organisations focussed on environmental, human rights and women's concerns, and some are very acute in their analyses of politics and business. Across the country there are many church groups (especially women's groups) which might be expected to be socially conservative but which carry enormous weight in their communities. Some non-government organisations' leaders are focused on obtaining international funding, which can be a poisoned chalice, but most non-government organisations are simply getting on with their community development work, autonomously. This aspect of Papua New Guinea politics is probably best left to grow spontaneously, and

non-government organisation growth remains one of Papua New Guinea's heartening trends. (There are others, of course, such as economic stabilisation and the Bougainville peace process—with all its limitations.)

Overall, however, the PNG political system has not changed in two respects which have serious implications for politics, administration and the delivery of services. First, parliamentarians may be national legislators but most see their primary role as exercising power by manipulating government resources in their provinces and districts, and influencing the appointment of senior officials in their areas. Top public servants are still beholden to politicians and their allies for employment and promotion. Apart from the negative impact on government in the districts, this makes it difficult for officials to act impartially in running elections.

The excessive politicisation of government also makes it difficult to have continuity in development planning and the allocation of resources. With the few remaining exceptions in the New Guinea Islands, especially East New Britain, provincial governments in Papua New Guinea have been ineffective since the mid 1980s. Their capacities have deteriorated drastically since the 1995 'reforms' which removed the directly elected provincial governments and effectively handed power to MPs. The weaker these provincial governments become, ironically, the more central the role of the MPs becomes, and the more intense and ultimately destructive the political competition for their position. The insecurity of their tenure makes it more likely that many MPs seek to make hay while briefly enjoying the political sunshine.

Second, MPs, especially the Provincial Governors, effectively control the allocation of operating funds for government services within their electorates, as well as discretionary funds. The desire for such

Policy dialogue

funds increases the zest for winning elections. Since they were initiated in 1984, Electoral Development Funds (still known as 'slush funds') have increased dramatically in size, peaking at 1.5 million kina (US\$0.5 million) per MP per annum in 1999. Since 1995 MPs control District Support Grants. Meanwhile basic operating grants for provinces have declined in real terms. Although several dozen MPs have been expelled from Parliament for Leadership Code violations since 1978, the slush funds remain largely unaccountable, and their use is still not transparent.

The public knows about these discretionary funds, and expects MPs to provide endless payments. Civil servants and police lack essential resources, but it is the politicians who eventually suffer most because they cannot possibly meet the public's expectations for development. Only a few MPs transfer their funds to local-level and provincial governments, where they can best be utilised. So these funds turn MPs into lightning rods for discontent. This dysfunctional 'system' usually guarantees that there will be dozens of candidates in most electorates and that 55–80 per cent of MPs will lose their seats each election. The funds which sitting MPs try to use to try to sustain their careers are actually a real incentive to potential rivals, provoking more and more to stand against them, and further promote the monetisation of politics.

The nature of democracy in Papua New Guinea has been damaged by these two changes. PNG politics and policy is impacted by international resource industries such as the notoriously corrupt logging industry. For decades, the attention of PNG governments has been primarily focused on finding money to sustain the state and those who operate it, not on broad-based development. The failure of government ultimately increases political pressures on governance. Given the country's overall political

economy, the main game of PNG politics is unlikely to be changed by the recent focus of some PNG (and international) leaders on institutional changes from the top down.

Unless there are major reforms to the political system, and especially the reward system and provincial structures, then changes like LPV and OLIPPAC will not have a major impact. Papua New Guinea is likely to have chronic political instability undermining even the more effective and reformist governments. National politics remains essentially a struggle to change the guard (but not the policies), with alternating coalitions of similar political élites but little real choice or chance of improvement in developmental policies and performance, or the quality of governance.⁴ The current institutional reforms, while important, are mere tinkering compared with the deeper challenges involved in changing Papua New Guinea's power structures and politics of development, which can only be undertaken by people of that country.

Conclusion

The PNG Electoral Commission have managed these complex operations quite well. Lessons from these early by-elections will assist candidates, officials and police in preparing for the next general elections. In particular, creative work is needed to increase public knowledge of how to use preferences.

The questions remain, what kind of democracy does Papua New Guinea have, how do people use it, and who benefits? After 2007 it will be possible to start to see if the new voting system has changed the political culture. But not yet.

Notes

- ¹ I wish to acknowledge here the work of Drs Joe Ketan, Henry Okole and Orovu Sepoe, and Messrs Dorke de Gedare, Alphonse Gelu and Lawrence Sause.
- ² Much of the discussion of preferential voting in Papua New Guinea has been influenced by the work of Associate Professor Ben Reilly of the Australian National University (1996, 2001 and seminar presentations). The issue has been further popularised in the PNG press by Professor John Nonggorr, legal adviser to the Constitutional Development Commission, and the Election Reform Project conducted by Transparency International, with funding from the European Union.
- ³ The hypothetical counts in the 2001 LPV publicity campaign had used only five candidates and so did not require votes to be deemed exhausted after being used three times. The examples used did not show how the size of the mandate was likely to be less than a simple majority of votes.
- ⁴ The model I am using here resonates with Thomas Carothers's concept of 'feckless [ineffective] pluralism', with free political competition and frequent changes of government, but little difference between the actions of the political elites who can largely ignore the welfare of the general public. (Carothers 2002:10–11).

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Appendix 1

Notes on Chimbu Provincial seat by-election, May 2004

This case study from the volatile Highlands describes the contest for the provincial governorship. It raises the question now being asked by some political scientists in Papua New Guinea: can the PNG Electoral Commission, or legislation and the narrow institutionalism of political engineers, change vigorous and entrenched Highlands-type election cultures in the desired manner?

- Before the May 2004 by-election, there were problems with the security operation. Police in asserting their presence did not distinguish between shows of strength, and indiscriminate intimidation.
- There were 31 candidates—many of them incorrigible perennials.
- No women stood. Women and women's leaders said they were very happy about LPV. 'We have a free second vote' (n.b. second, not primary vote).
- Community 'Awareness' campaigns were conducted by PNG Electoral Commission using local officials. This was done late, in March 2004, around the time of nominations. They conducted Phase One only: 'Vote 1, 2, 3' so voters knew how to make their votes formal and able to be counted. There was little discussion about the meaning and use of preferences, indicating that this is the same vote with the same value, with three lives. Valuable work was done by the women's non-government organisation, *Meri I Kirap Sapotim*.
- There was little knowledge among the public of the counting process, and how that should affect their voting strategies. As noted in several other by-elections, people were inventing their own versions (first preference is worth 6 points, second 4 and third 2, was a common example). Some senior officials said they had no official information about LPV until February and admitted spreading misinformation about the counting system, including the idea that preferences carried different values.
- Only 10 of the 31 candidates were at the poorly advertised Electoral Commission briefing on LPV, held the day after nominations closed.
- No use was made of teachers, churches, or community groups for awareness activities. Although many of these rurally-based opinion leaders were keen to help, other churchmen were very concerned to be seen as neutral.
- The role of civil society was limited. There was, however, effective work in Chimbu (and Angalimp-South Wahgi) by the women's support non-government organisation *Meri I Kirap Sapotim* (led by Sarah Garap, the former councillor Diana Ulka and an unattached officer, Steven Gari Kaupa).
- Parties endorsed few candidates. In Chimbu there were a few party rallies—

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| Policy dialogue |
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the National Party, PAP and so on—but these were sideshows.

- Political parties had limited staff capacity. One prominent candidate (and the eventual winner), Peter Launa, approached several parties seeking nomination before he was endorsed by faction leader Tim Neville (United Resources Party) on the second-last day of nominations.
- Launa was the only candidate from Chuave District. He received 80 per cent of the Chuave vote.
- The National Alliance Party was divided over its choice of candidate, and there were signs of Prime Minister Somare providing some support for a nominal independent. National Alliance's national executive did not know about the Catholic Bishop's letter of December 2003 concerning Fr John Garia's candidacy, read out in parish churches at the end of 2003. Bishop Henk had instructed the faithful not vote for Fr Garia. Despite a ministerial visit by Treasurer Bart Philemon, there was no National Alliance rally in Kundiawa.

Campaigning

- At nomination time many candidates held peaceful rallies in Kundiawa town as shows of political strength. Most then went bush for the 7-week campaign.
- Except in Chuave District, outsiders were welcome to campaign for preferences in other candidates' base areas, and this was reciprocated. However, candidates from nearby groups were often unwelcome. Some villages without their own candidates set up small grandstands which they lent to visiting candidates to campaign, sometimes for a fee!
- People could usually campaign widely without harassment. The relaxed campaign atmosphere was a definite

improvement on previous elections, partly derived from LPV, but also the huge police presence from late in the campaign. There were few police in rural areas.

- There was also less tension in that this was only a by-election, and also a Provincial ('regional') seat—which involves fewer intense head-to-head local contests.
- Some candidates gave out considerable funds well away from their base areas. A few candidates gave out fortunes to get votes and preferences. (One two-time loser's campaign manager said he had spent 0.7 million kina, and another allegedly spent 0.6 million kina.) Some of these funds were given out as cash, others used to sponsor of football teams and whole sporting competitions, and much of it as food, a quasi-traditional approach.

Use of preferences

- Many of the 31 candidates sought to appeal only to the local vote. They did not trade preferences, and told people 'keep your preferences in the local area here; and don't help those people over there to get control of the provincial government'.
- Old rivalries and jealousies remained. Many candidates made negative use of preferences, in that they told their voters to only preference candidates thought likely to be eliminated early in the distribution of votes—who are sometimes called *rabis* candidates. While denying their stronger rivals support, this would have the effect of wasting the value of their supporters' preferences.
- Close examination of ballot box voting figures shows intense localism in voting. Most preferences went to local candidates, who may be related by marriage.

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| Policy dialogue |
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- The clever candidates sought preferences across a wide area, not just locally or in their own district.
- No how-to-vote cards were noticed, although these would be legal provided they are not left behind in polling booths.
- It is probable that in different areas, candidates gave different instructions to their supporters, or as they sought minor preferences among supporters of different candidates. Most decided not to broadcast these arrangements so as not to antagonise potential supporters in other areas.

Intimidation

- There was some intimidation before the election. Roadblocks were threatened at strategic points unless preferences were allocated to the candidates capable of blocking the road. There was also fear of such threats, arising from experience after previous elections. After the election, roads were blocked and people robbed in two areas (as had been predicted). Some people in different areas told me they would give their preferences to someone down the valley in order to ensure that their only access road was not blocked after the poll.
- Two prominent local candidates threatened to evict settlers from Kundiawa town if they did not receive the votes of peri-urban settlers.
- Generally, however, the campaign was very peaceful with limited intimidation, and no crude intimidation was obvious on voting day.

Voting

- Most voters were 'assisted' to ensure their votes were formal, the 'helpers' being designated family members, police, candidates' scrutineers, and local people

standing just outside the roped-off polling area. Presiding officers may also assist, but were too busy to do so. Most voters had no privacy in making their 'choice', and the helpers who stayed in polling places throughout the day could have been making sure people voted as pledged.

- Voting was orderly but rushed. This made it impossible to use the electoral rolls to identify the entitlement of individual voters. Frequently there was a charade of calling the rolls when whoever was in front of the queue, be they man or woman, would go forward to vote.
- In most polling places the 'indelible' finger dye was not used to prevent double-voting. In one area I saw a fresh layer of finger dye being applied on top of the old layer, as people used up all the available ballot papers!
- Voting was peaceful, with some police presence in most areas and mobile units moving around, in and out of booths, but usually only on the main roads which were more trafficable.
- Where the police came late, well after the start of voting, as happened in Chuave District, supporters of the dominant local candidate were able to gain control of papers and mass marked thousands of papers.
- Pre-marking of ballot papers by local officials was noted in several areas, especially Chuave.
- Block and forced voting was higher than in 2002. The dominant candidate in each count received 91–100 per cent of votes in 23 per cent of the 348 counts, and 99–100 per cent in 11 per cent of cases. In Chuave, these proportions were double that (48 per cent and 23 per cent respectively), a district anomaly which raises questions about the integrity of the polling process.

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| Policy dialogue |
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- Petty bribery was visible at polling booths. Cash was handed out for betel nuts and smokes, and these and other refreshments given to voters and police.
- There was widespread double-voting. The limited police action against multiple-voting undoubtedly contributed to the drop in the total vote of about 100,000 (compared with 2002), yet more than twice as many ballot papers were counted as there are adults eligible to vote. Some police who were receiving food, drink and smokes allowed double voting and the pre-marking of ballot papers. Where police had the numbers and motivation they prevented double-voting to use up all the ballot papers. In other areas they tolerated it. Unless mobile units were there, the general duties and auxiliary police could not stop such voting, even if they disapproved.
- Candidates whose base voters were prevented from double voting claimed discrimination—saying, in effect, ‘we were not allowed to cheat—but others were!’
- Clearly the culture is one of ‘win at almost any price’, ‘vote early and often’ and ‘cheat if you can, because everyone else is doing it’. That’s what elections are about in Chimbu. (Standish 2002; Dika 2003; Kaupa 2003).

The count

- The ‘distribution of votes’ (the count) was a long, slow, tiring, labour-consuming and very expensive process.
- Because this was a provincial seat, the count took over 3 weeks from the end of polling. One week was spent counting primary votes, tallied separately (but simultaneously) by six counting teams, one for each of the six Open electorates in Chimbu Province. Then an additional 2 weeks were spent on training two counting teams, conducting the eliminations and distributing preferences, 29 times.
- By the last eliminations, the great majority of voters had ceased to hold live preferences, and so were exhausted.
- LPV is much slower than FPTP, and legislative amendments are proposed to allow two more weeks before the writs must be returned.
- The informal vote in Chimbu was only 0.41 per cent, kept down by the high proportion of ‘assisted’ votes.
- There was no double-checking of primary votes before the eliminations commenced and preferences were distributed. Many minor mistakes (and a few major ones) were detected during the eliminations, leading to progressive retrospective adjustments to voting figures of over 400 votes.
- Major errors (probably deliberate) were detected as the totals of preferences were being entered. Polling officials were removed by police from the counting centre and beaten up on two occasions.

The outcome

- The eventual winner, businessman and former public servant, Peter Launa, collected 35,583 votes in his home district, Chuave. His first preference total (for all six districts) was 44,827 with 78 per cent of these concentrated in Chuave, where he had made sure he was the only candidate.
- Launa and his team told people to give minor preferences to minor candidates (likely losers), thereby effectively rendering these votes valueless should they ever be counted.
- He appealed successfully to what is known as the ‘Bomai’ (southern and eastern region) bloc for preferences. He won preferences from candidates based

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| Policy dialogue |
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in areas where he would be expected to get support—from his in-laws and his father's ancestors.

- In the final count he got just over 72,478 votes, including 27,650 preferences. Thus his 'mandate' was 21.25 per cent of the original vote, and he won by 474 votes.
- Launa's primary vote was never checked and his preferences are suspect, as raised in the Institute of Policy Studies' audit. The report suggests that 'a single false entry of the round figure of 1,500 votes at a late stage in the elimination process changed the result' (Institute of Policy Studies 2004:18).
- This win was based on his huge vote in Chauve. Launa gained first preferences all over that district. Our observer team witnessed polling officers pre-marking ballot papers with the first preference. Convincing evidence that that process was widespread was seen by the audit team, which inspected ballot papers from all over the district. People in Chuave district who had told us they would vote for outsiders would then have only been able to give second preferences to their preferred candidate. (Inspection of ballot papers indicates that some of these preferred candidates did indeed obtain second preferences in those areas where they had expected them.)
- The runner up, John Garia, got 27,000 votes in his primary count, spread fairly evenly over three adjoining districts, and then obtained 44,250 preferences from all around the electorate. Garia was constantly catching up on Launa's tally, at one stage leading, then lost by 0.33 per cent (474 votes in 72,478).
- The post-election atmosphere was calmer in Chimbu than in previous polls. Nevertheless, there were violent disturbances in Kundiawa town markets after the declaration of the poll, and clan

warfare in Fr Garia's home area in which several people were killed and 300 houses burnt (*The National*, 2 July 2004).

- Overall, despite the three week count, most Chimbu political figures stated that LPV is 'the fairest' voting system.

Post-declaration

- Supporters of one disappointed local candidate created havoc in the Kundiawa markets for a few days, as threatened before the poll. They chased and hit people who they said had not voted for their candidate, and one old man had his arm badly chopped.
- The only reported major fighting occurred in the week after the result was declared, and after the bulk of the police had left the province. Several people were reported killed and 300 houses burnt after the police had left the province. The fight occurred in the remote Neragaima area, where there were two candidates who belong to the same Bari (Bandi) tribe. The fight was between supporters of Garia and of the former police commissioner Joseph Kupo, who had his very expensive campaign run for him by Wingti ally and former MP, Peter Kuman.
- In October 2004 the audit team members inspected thousands of Chimbu ballot papers. As announced at a seminar in Port Moresby in November, they found strong evidence that polling officers had colluded in mass block voting, such as the pre-marking of papers by officials. They also found an additional apparent case of fraud, which involved the manipulation of a candidate's vote count by 1,500 votes. If discovered and prevented earlier, this false entry would have changed the outcome. This is not a great surprise, because of the two similar cases of attempted alteration of vote tallies were identified during the count—in one instance also involving 1,500 votes.