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Options for the election of people's representatives in Tonga

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Tonga's 2006 National Committee on Political Reform (NCPR) recommended an increase in the number of people's representatives in the Legislative Assembly from nine to 17, a proposal that would, for the first time, entail a majority popularly elected parliament in Tonga. The 2007 Tripartite Committee on Political Reform (2007), which brought together representatives of the government, the people's representatives and nobles, endorsed the NCPR's proposals—likewise recommending increasing the number of people's representatives from nine to 17, while retaining the nine representatives of the nobles alongside four parliamentarians nominated by the King (instead of the 15 cabinet members directly nominated by the King at present). Amid these deliberations, there have been important questions raised about the choice of electoral system. The three options considered were

- retaining the present mixed block-voting and first-past-the-post system
- shifting to a first-past-the-post system with single-member districts
- shifting to a single-transferable vote system.

Several other possibilities exist but these three represent sensible and feasible options. Many of the other widely used electoral systems would be worthy of consideration only in the context of a well-developed political party-based system, which Tonga does not have at present. All three of the systems under consideration operate fairly well without political parties; however, all three can also operate effectively with political parties, should these emerge. Building in this kind of flexibility seems sensible in contemporary Tonga, since some observers anticipate the development of a political party-based system in the future while others do not.

The purpose of this article is to examine these three options and to consider which might best suit the country during a period of radical reform in the composition of parliament.

Retaining the present mixed block-voting and first-past-the-post system

Tonga's current voting system for the nine people's representatives is a mixture of two systems. In the international electoral systems literature, it would be categorised as a combination of the 'first-past-the-post' and the 'block-vote' systems. First-

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past-the-post systems use single-member constituencies, in which the candidate with the largest number of votes wins. Where there is more than one member per constituency, this is called the 'block vote'. At present, Tonga has three multi-member block-voting constituencies and two single-member first-past-the-post constituencies. Tongatapu elects three people's representatives, while Ha'apai and Vava'u elect two people's representatives, using a block-voting system. 'Eua and, to the far north, the Niuas (Niuafo'ou and Niuatoputapu) each has a single member in the Legislative Assembly.

First-past-the-post and block-voting systems are reasonably simple to count and straightforward for the voter to understand. Eligible voters mark a tick on the ballot paper next to their favoured candidate or candidates. Candidates with the largest number of votes win.

The block-vote system is used in several other small islands worldwide (for example, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Jersey, Kuwait, Saint Helena, Tuvalu, Mauritius and the Maldives). It is rarer in larger countries or countries with established political party systems.

Block-voting systems are sometimes criticised for advantaging parties, groups or factions that have only a slight electoral advantage and heavily penalising those groups that have substantial minority support. For example, in a three-member constituency such as present-day Tongatapu, if one group manages to have 52 per cent of electors vote for three candidates, it is likely to win all three seats. Another group, even if it receives 48 per cent of the vote, might gain no seats at all. As a result, there might be no opposition in parliament. This is also a potential danger with first-past-the-post systems, and is known as 'disproportionality'—meaning that the share of seats won is very different from the share of the vote secured by a party or political grouping. The risks of severe disproportionality tend to be higher with larger constituencies (Taagepera and Shugart 1989:23). Concerns about disproportionality, however, make sense only when candidates group together in support of positions or form political parties, rather than operating as separate independents, without any common affiliations.[1] In circumstances where such party or group coherence exists, the block-vote system tends to reward disciplined parties or groups and penalises those with looser control over their supporters.

If the first group were to put up *more* than three candidates in Tongatapu, it would be less likely to win all three seats. Supporters might spread their votes too broadly across the candidates, thereby allowing the 48 per cent group to take some or all of the seats. In practice, however, the block vote often has the reverse reputation because political parties are unable to keep their supporters disciplined. In Thailand, for example, it was seen as encouraging greater rivalry *within* groups, triggering a proliferation of political parties and generating short-lived and unstable coalition governments. As a result, the system was abandoned in Thailand in 1997, in a move sometimes credited with diminishing the number of political parties and encouraging the emergence of issue-based national politics (Hicken 2005:383–5; 2006:105–7).

The block-vote system is also sometimes seen as generating incentives for increased rivalry among candidates competing for the same seat, and so potentially diminishing the potential for post-election coalitions. As one observer of the 2005 polls on Tongatapu indicated: 'in an electoral system where each voter has three votes a candidate will improve his chances if he can bleed votes from more than one rival; attracting votes to a running mate is therefore sound tactics' (Campbell 2006:56).

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In other words, the system generates incentives for rivalry and, if sufficient discipline can be established, alliances.

In the existing non-party circumstances in Tonga, there are several good reasons for retaining the block-vote system but expanding the number of members per constituency. The difficulties of subdividing islands, simplicity, the preference for counting at polling stations rather than centrally and the absence of a party-based system are factors that favour the block vote. If Tonga were to retain a block-voting system and increase the number of people's representatives in some constituencies, consideration should be given to the consequences of using the block vote in the much larger constituencies.[2] The largest constituency, Tongatapu, might best be subdivided into three or four smaller multi-member constituencies. If a party system develops and if problems of vote/seat disproportionality ensue, the issue of which electoral system is best for Tonga might be revisited and other options entertained. There seems little to be achieved by making such changes *before* the advent of political parties.

Shifting to a first-past-the-post system with single-member districts

Another option considered by the Tripartite Committee was to shift to a fully fledged first-past-the-post system. This would entail a move to single-member constituencies, requiring a Constituency Boundaries Commission to subdivide the current multi-member constituencies, at least on the three larger islands: Tongatapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai.

For example, Tongatapu currently has three of the nine people's representatives (33.3 per cent), while the island is home to 70.5 per cent of Tonga's population, according to the 2006 Census. Together with an increase in the number of people's representatives, it would be sensible to allocate a larger proportion of seats to Tongatapu. Under a first-past-the-post system, the island would probably have to include separate constituencies for urban Nuku'alofa and the rural areas would be criss-crossed with boundaries, perhaps covering eastern, western and central Tongatapu. The precise formula would depend on the number of seats to be allocated to Tongatapu.

The Cook Islands made such a change from multi-member block-voting constituencies to first-past-the-post single-member electorates in 1981. There it was credited with encouraging a more parochial style of politics, with members becoming more responsive to local concerns and pressures and neglecting nation-wide issues. According to Ron Crocombe and Jon Tikivanotau Jonassen (2004):

> In 1981, 'large' electorates with multiple members were replaced by the same number of MPs in single-member electorates. This attracted more parochial politicians, and small electorates encouraged all politicians to be more parochial...As no one is elected at even the level of one island on the larger islands, or nationally, there are no incentives to take a national perspective.

Other countries with first-past-the-post systems, such as the United Kingdom, are not noticeably more parochial or locally focused than those countries with multi-member constituencies. Where members represent island-wide constituencies, as in Tuvalu, it has not avoided claims of a narrowly focused 'islandism'.[3] Whether or not politicians assume a national perspective may therefore be unrelated to the electoral

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system. It may be due to other political factors.

In Tonga, other features of the emerging political system encourage at least those members who join the government to take a national perspective. With the entry of some people's representatives into cabinet, by-elections have been held in their former constituencies. As they become ministers, they have been deemed to join the ranks of members appointed by the King. In so doing, by convention, they are expected to take a more national perspective, with those selected in the resulting by-elections assuming their former constituency representation roles. This feature of the political system, however, may be altered as Tonga shifts the balance towards a cabinet comprising a larger proportion of elected members. Elsewhere in the Pacific and in countries with Westminster-influenced political systems, ministers more usually remain representatives of specific constituencies and do not lose their seats in parliament.

In some circumstances, having an electoral system that strengthens local ties between a member of parliament and his or her constituents is considered one of the merits of the first-past-the-post system, whereas multi-member, constituency-based electoral systems are criticised for loosening that connection and leaving constituents uncertain about who 'their' representative is. Under Tonga's existing system, the problems often associated with multi-member constituencies are not widely raised, perhaps because even the largest constituency, Tongatapu, has only three members.

There is often room for healthy debate about the 'effects' of electoral systems since other factors—such as the presence or absence of strong political parties, the resilience of island-wide solidarity or the existence of cross-cutting allegiances or church pressures—also influence the way politics is conducted.

Under the existing system, voters sometimes adopt 'tamate fika' (or 'killing numbers') tactics—that is, they cast a vote for their favoured candidate and then deliberately squander other votes on 'no-hope' candidates to avoid supporting contenders who might oust their favourite. Even where careful strategic voting of this kind is not used, 'impulse voting' often characterises the second or third vote lodged (that is, these votes are given to linked kinsfolk or friends as gestures, whether or not they are likely to win). If widespread, such tactics would be best dealt with by a shift to a first-past-the-post-system. There are, however, some systems that enable voters to indicate preferences on the ballot paper and to make it unlikely that their most favoured candidate will be disadvantaged by their also indicating support for other candidates.

Shifting to a single-transferable vote system

Another option considered by the Tripartite Committee on Political Reform was the 'single-transferable vote system' (STV), sometimes known in Australia as the Hare-Clark system. This is a preferential voting system used in multi-member constituencies. It is a complex system and is used in Ireland, Malta and, for upper house elections, in Australia (Bowler and Grofman 2000). This system requires voters to rank candidates '1, 2, 3, 4', and so on.

STV can be used with optional marking of preferences (as in Ireland and Malta) or it can be used with compulsory marking of preferences (as for the Australian Senate). In the latter case, if a voter does not indicate preferences, his or her vote is considered invalid (or informal) and is not counted.

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How does the STV system work? Initially, the number of first-preference votes is tallied and a quota is established that indicates the number of votes required for a candidate to cross the threshold of victory. The so-called 'droop' quota is determined by the formula

$$\text{Votes}/(\text{seats} + 1) + 1. \tag{1}$$

The first-preference votes for each candidate are then counted. Any candidate that reaches the threshold at the first count is elected. If none reaches that threshold or if seats remain to be filled, at the second count the lowest polling candidate is eliminated and his or her votes are redistributed in accordance with the second preferences shown on the ballot paper. In addition, if one candidate exceeds the threshold and is elected, his or her 'surplus' votes above the threshold are redistributed in accordance with the second preferences marked on the ballot paper.[4]

If no candidate reaches the threshold or if seats remain to be filled at the second count, the process of eliminating the lowest polling candidates and redistributing preferences, and recycling any surpluses, continues until all seats are filled (or until all the preferences are exhausted, in which case the candidate with the largest number of votes wins). This often entails a large number of successive recounts.

Some debate exists about whether STV, which is a candidate-centred system, stimulates rivalry *within* political parties or affiliated groups, and whether it encourages incumbent politicians to focus too much on their constituencies rather than focusing on scrutinising and enacting legislation at the national level. The Republic of Ireland is the most frequently cited example of 'localism' and 'short-termism' associated with STV. Some commentators have,

however, contested these claims, pointing out that Irish parties are reasonably cohesive and that factors other than the electoral system could be responsible for 'localism' in Irish politics (Gallagher 2005:73–4). There is little sign that STV has triggered excessive intra-party competition in Ireland or Malta, where STV coexists with reasonably robust party-based systems (Hirczy de Miňo and Lane 2000:178–204). Some commentators have criticised STV for giving first, second and subsequent preferences an equal value, on the grounds that lower-order preferences should be worth less than a first preference. This is the case with the Nauruan system, where a first preference is worth 'one', a second preference 'half', a third preference 'one-third', and so on. Instead of progressively eliminating the lowest-polling candidates, Nauru simply tallies all the preferences to establish the winners.

A hypothetical example of STV in Tonga

It is impossible to show exactly how STV might work in practice in Tonga because, at present, ballots cast do not indicate voter preferences. For illustrative purposes, however, let us consider how the STV system might work for Tonga's largest constituency, the three-member Tongatapu constituency. To make this possible, let us imagine that all voters marked their ballot papers in 2005 with the real top-three candidates as, respectively, first, second and third preferences.

On Tongatapu, there were 51,780 votes cast at the 2005 election. The 'droop quota' would therefore be established as follows

$$51{,}780/(3 + 1) = 12{,}945 + 1 = 12{,}946. \tag{2}$$

To win, a candidate would have to receive 12,946 votes. On Tongatapu in 2005,

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there were 29 candidates who contested the election (Table 1). The candidate with the largest number of votes was 'Akilisi Pohiva, who received 11,225 votes. This was 1,721 votes short of the 12,946 threshold. The lowest-polling candidate was Lolo Mataele, with 89 votes. At the second count, Mataele would be eliminated, and his votes would be redistributed according to the second preferences shown on his ballot papers. Even if all of those 89 ballot papers showed 'Akilisi Pohiva as second preference, Pohiva would still not reach the required threshold of 12,946. Thus, further rounds of counting, and elimination of the lowest-polling candidates, would be required to determine the first victor. The hypothetical sequence of eliminations and the manner of redistributions is calculated (Table 1), with those tallies that change at each count shown in bold font.

Ten candidates would need to be eliminated before 'Akilisa Pohiva would be declared the first victor at the eleventh count. The number two people's representative would be established after 19 candidates had been eliminated, and the number three people's representative would be established after the elimination of 22 candidates. In total, 23 counts would be necessary. At the final count, four unsuccessful candidates would remain in the contest. This is because, even if gathered together, their 12,681 combined votes would not be sufficient to overturn the 13,207 votes secured by the number three people's representative. Their votes would therefore be 'wasted' in the sense that they did not serve to elect any candidate. If there were a shift from the current three-member constituency to a larger constituency, more than 29 candidates may stand. If so, a larger number of counts might be necessary.

It is important to re-emphasise that this exercise is for illustrative purposes only. In real-world situations, eliminated candidates'

preferences would be spread more widely, and would not be concentrated on the top candidates at the first count. One of the key features of STV and other such preferential voting systems is that a candidate who polls the largest number of first-preference votes can end up losing the election. If he or she receives few high preferences, other candidates can come from behind and leap-frog over a first-count leader to win the election. Indeed, if STV persistently produced the same result as Tonga's current system (as in our hypothetical example), there would be little to be achieved by an electoral system change. In practice, one would expect a significant number of first-count leaders to be dislodged after the counting of preferences.

The pros and cons of STV in Tonga

The STV system has been recommended as 'the most appropriate voting system for Tonga' on the grounds that other options entail the presence of political parties, because they could yield disproportionate outcomes if parties develop or because they entail a difficult subdivision of existing constituencies (Salmond 2002:171–92). On the larger Tongan islands, voters are familiar with indicating more than just one favoured candidate on the ballot paper, even if they do not mark these in order of preference. So, in this sense, the system might be well received. Other Pacific island countries use preferential voting systems, including Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Nauru, but none uses the STV system. The crucial question of whether the marking of preferences should be compulsory or optional has not been widely considered.

In response to the objection that the STV system would be a rather complicated method of electing members to the Legislative Assembly, it has been said that

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[t]he new system only needs to be fully understood by a small number of returning officers. Voters need only be aware that their vote is almost never wasted, regardless of who they vote for, and that the results of the process are a fair reflection of the electorate's overall support for each candidate. Most people do not know all the inner workings of their car's engine, but they are happy to drive the car anyway. So it is with electoral systems. (Salmond 2002:185)

To pursue the analogy, even when they are imported fully assembled, cars need regular servicing by mechanics just as electoral offices need to run general elections every three or more years. Electoral officials need to know how to count the votes. The complexity of the count can make the STV system difficult to operate for electoral officials, particularly if, as at present in parts of Tonga, votes are still recorded and tallied by hand rather than using computer programs. Counting could no longer be conducted at the polling stations, but would need to be centralised (Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis, 2005:77), potentially reducing the transparency associated with village-level monitoring of electoral administration. In neighbouring Fiji, where a single-member version of STV called the 'alternative vote' is used, problems have arisen due to frequent errors by electoral officers in the distribution of preferences.[5] To manage such a system would require substantial capacity strengthening at the Tongan Elections Office and considerable overseas technical assistance. Those recommending electoral system changes who neglect the institutional context in which the system will operate could unintentionally open the path to major on-the-ground difficulties.

Second, just as some customers prefer manual cars, which they learn how to operate themselves, wise administrators might prefer a transparent and easily comprehensible system. Understanding how the count worked—and why winners won and losers lost—could be important, particularly in circumstances where there were uncertainties about the legitimacy of electoral processes. In the aftermath of political convulsions, or where major controversies exist about the composition of governments, such issues are particularly significant. Systems in which everyone understands and, even if they are on the losing side, accepts the rules tend to produce more legitimate outcomes than those that work in mysterious and impenetrable ways. In other words, electoral systems are not really like cars at all. They are facilitative frameworks for translating votes cast into seats won that need to be carefully woven into the social and institutional fabric of societies.

Where first count leaders have been overtaken by those coming from behind, who may have obtained only a small number of votes at the first count, this often leads to political controversies and complaints that preferential voting systems are 'unfair'. Other commentators respond that such systems are 'fairer' because they minimise the number of 'wasted votes' and ensure that those elected have broad support.

If Tonga were to adopt STV, it would be likely that some constituencies would still have single members and would therefore find themselves with the single-member equivalent of STV, the so-called alternative vote (AV) system, as in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. 'Eua and the Niuas would probably retain single-member districts even if the overall number of seats for people's representatives substantially increased. Other electorates, such as Vava'u and Ha'apai, although using STV, would probably have fewer than the minimum

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Table 1 **Hypothetical illustration of the operation of STV in the three-member Tongatapu 2005 constituency**

29 candidates:	First Count									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
07. Samuela 'Akilisi Pohiva	**11,225**	**11,314**	**11,444**	**11,577**	**11,735**	**11,904**	**12,084**	**12,279**	**12,484**	**12,718**
18. 'Isileli Pulu, Ma'ufanga, incumbent	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110	8,110
22. Feleti Vaka'uta Sevele, Ma'ufanga	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585
28. William Clive Edwards, Kolofo'ou	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619
02. Fuiva Ruby Adeline Kavaliku, Ha'ateiho	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219
14. Mateitalo F. Mahu'inga, Pea	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960
30. Lopeti Senituli, Fahefa	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883
11. Semisi Kailahi, Holonga	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013
01. Semisi P. I. Tapueluelu, Talafo'ou	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586
27. Simione Kau Silapelu, Ma'ufanga	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569
31. Mateaki Heimuli, Kolomotu'a	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431
04. 'Alisi Pone Fotu, Kolofo'ou	998	998	998	998	998	998	998	998	998	998
03. Mumui Tatola, Kolomotu'a	725	725	725	725	725	725	725	725	725	725
24. Sela Lopa Kaisinga, Kolofo'ou	522	522	522	522	522	522	522	522	522	522
17. Kamipeli Tofa'imala'e'aloa, Haveluloto	393	393	393	393	393	393	393	393	393	393
16. 'Alani Fisher Taione, Vaini	372	372	372	372	372	372	372	372	372	372
06. Tupou Malohi, Kolonga	325	325	325	325	325	325	325	325	325	325
19. Siosifa Filini Sikuea, Tofoa	259	259	259	259	259	259	259	259	259	259
10. Siale Christopher Kava, Haveluloto	255	255	255	255	255	255	255	255	255	255
09. 'Aisake Fa'alongo Filimone, Nukunuku	238	238	238	238	238	238	238	238	238	238
12. Salesi Kauvaka, Ha'utu	234	234	234	234	234	234	234	234	234	elim
26. Sione Tu'i'onetoa, Makaunga	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	elim	
08. Hoatatau Tenisi, Tokomololo	195	195	195	195	195	195	195	elim		
05. Penisila Save, Ha'akame	180	180	180	180	180	180	elim			
21. Lesinali Tovo Faleafa, Kolomotu'a	169	169	169	169	169	elim				
13. Kelepi V. Lamipeti, Makaunga	158	158	158	158	elim					
25. Semisi Nauto Tu'apasi 'Ata'ata, Kolofo'ou	133	133	133	elim						
20. Taholo Lelea Kolovai	130	130	elim							
15. Sione Lolo Mataele, Te'ekiu	89	elim								
Totals	51,780									

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11	Surplus transfer	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Surplus transfer	21	22	23
12,956	victor 1													
8,110	8,120	8,375	8,634	8,959	9,331	9,724	10,246	10,971	11,969	13,400	victor 2			
7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	7,585	8,039	9,608	11,194	13207 victor3
3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3,619	3619
3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3,219	3219
2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2,960	2960
2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2,883	2883
2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	2,013	elim
1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	1,586	elim	
1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	1,569	elim		
1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	1,431	elim				
998	998	998	998	998	998	998	998	998	elim					
725	725	725	725	725	725	725	725	elim						
522	522	522	522	522	522	522	elim							
393	393	393	393	393	393	elim								
372	372	372	372	372	elim									
325	325	325	325	elim										
259	259	259	elim											
255	255	elim												
elim														

elim. = eliminated

Notes: All eliminated candidates' ballots assumed to rank the top three first-count candidates as 1, 2 and 3. The 'droop quota' is 12,946, meaning that no candidate is declared a victor until they reach that threshold.

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five seats per constituency, which is often thought necessary to yield a proportional result (Taagepera and Shugart 1989), in the process diminishing one of the major benefits commonly associated with STV.

Whether to make the marking of preferences compulsory or optional makes a major difference to preferential-voting systems. Where preferences are optional, voters often choose only to 'plump' for a single most-favoured candidate (Punnett 1986:35). They opt to mark only a '1' on the ballot paper and to not record a '2', '3', or '4', and so on. Where lodging preferences is compulsory, voters are required to rank in order a certain number or percentage of the candidates (for example, three candidates must be so ranked in Papua New Guinea and 75 per cent of the candidates must be ranked in Fiji).

Under the present system in Tonga, multiple voting is compulsory in the sense that voters must lodge three preferences on Tongatapu and two on Ha'apai and Vava'u to cast a valid vote. Sometimes, as we see above, voters have only a strong first preference and therefore deliberately cast their second and third preferences for no-hope candidates (*tamate fika*), so as not to endanger their first choice by promoting potential rivals.

In countries where recording preferences is compulsory, large numbers of invalid votes have sometimes been recorded.[6] This is particularly common where voters are required to rank in order a very large number of candidates to cast a valid ballot. If many voters plump only for first-choice candidates or fail to rank all candidates, electoral systems such as STV and AV can work similarly to the block-vote or first-past-the-post systems.

To deal with this, a complex ballot paper has sometimes been adopted (as, for example, in Fiji or the Australian upper house elections), giving voters the option of simply indicating a preference for a political party (so-called 'ticket voting').

Such votes are taken to endorse lists of preferences specified by the political parties. Many observers, however, believe that this destroys the advantages of preferential-voting systems and gives too much power to political party officials.

Conclusion

Three electoral systems that might work reasonably well in the Tongan context have been considered. These are also the three options that have been discussed most frequently within Tonga. On balance, there is a strong case for retaining the existing mixed block-vote/first-past-the-post system and (assuming that the number of people's representatives is increased) for increasing the number of constituencies for the Tongatapu electorate. Another option is to shift to single-member districts, using a first-past-the-post system. There is, however, no indication of widespread antagonism towards the existing multi-member constituencies and such a change could, in some cases, reduce MPs' focus on island-wide or national issues. The third option, of adopting a multi-member, preferential voting system—the single-transferable vote—on the grounds that this can happily accommodate political parties *should these emerge*, makes the choice of electoral design dependent on accommodating hypothetical possibilities. Should political parties emerge in the future or should hitherto unknown objections against the existing electoral system become widespread, the question of which electoral system is best for Tonga should be revisited.

Notes

[1] For these reasons, Salmond's suggestion that a proportional-representation system should be adopted for Tonga because if a party

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system were to develop then there would likely be problems of disproportionality seems to put the cart before the horse. He writes that 'with the probable growth of a political party system in Tonga, the current voting mechanism of simple plurality voting in multi-member constituencies should be altered. This is because of the excessively disproportional results of this mechanism in a system of active political parties' (Salmond 2002:183). Development of a political party-based system has, however, not been an inevitable accompaniment of electoral democracy in the Pacific islands (see Fraenkel 2006). The better approach would be to wait and see if the problem identified is or is not severe if a party system should emerge. Not only does Salmond claim that Tonga is 'on the brink of developing a party political system' (2002:184), he predicts that it will be a multi-party system, rather than a system in which a single party establishes hegemony: 'the nature of the Tongan system at present is such that a single party majority would not be returned regardless of the electoral system' (2002:185). How can one be certain of this outcome, as opposed to the alternative, as witnessed in neighbouring Samoa, where the Human Rights Protection Party emerged from a previous no-party context and now dominates the political stage?

[2] In Palestine, where the block vote was adopted in 1995, one of the largest constituencies was Gaza, with 12 members. In 1996, voters in Gaza had to cope with a ballot paper about 1 metre long to handle the 87 contestants. Palestine replaced the block-vote system with a mixed system ahead of the 2006 election.

[3] Tuvalu has eight island-wide constituencies, with seven members elected from seven islands on a block-voting basis, and one elected from one island on a first-past-the-post basis (see Panapa and Fraenkel 2008).

[4] This is further complicated by the fact that the 'surplus' votes to be recycled are often not arbitrarily chosen. Instead, all the victor's ballot papers are redistributed at a fraction of their face value. For example, if a candidate had 20 votes, and the threshold for victory was 15, all 20 ballot papers would be examined and the preferences indicated

calculated at one-quarter of their face value in order to transfer the five remaining votes to the candidates remaining in the contest.

[5] In Fiji, such miscounting resulted in one court case in the Tailevu North/Ovalau Open constituency after the 1999 election (see High Court of Fiji 1999). Other errors are discernible in the published results for 1999, 2001 and 2006, although in most cases they are not sufficiently large to change the final result.

[6] Australia, for example, witnessed Senate elections in which more than 10 per cent of votes were discounted as invalid before the introduction of ticket voting in 1984 (Hughes 2000:162). In Fiji, which has ticket voting, 9 per cent of votes were declared invalid at the elections of 1999 and 2006, and 12 per cent were declared invalid in 2001.

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