Cost of Politics

The cost of politics in Solomon Islands

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List of acronyms

CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CDO	Constituency Development Offices
CDP	Constituency Development Plans
MP	Member of Parliament
PPIA	Political Party Integrity Act
SIEC	Solomon Islands Electoral Commission
SBD	Solomon Islands Dollar

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Executive summary

The high and constant cost of politics in Solomon Islands, which often exceeds formal limits during campaign periods, is driven by a multitude of factors. One of these is the demand from potential voters for goods or money. Responding positively to these demands is important as it portrays a candidate as caring and enhances their chances of winning a parliamentary seat. Another factor relates to the logistical expenses required during registration periods and election day to move voters to their constituencies. Campaign tours are also critical and costly, with expenditure shaped by the topography of a constituency, the size of the campaign team, and the style of campaign used.

Individual candidates largely bear the burden for these costs, tapping into personal savings or business proceeds to raise the resources required, with political parties notably absent. For incumbents, access to constituency development funds provides an advantage not just on election day but across their time in office, as it grants them access to resources that are used to consolidate and strengthen voter support within constituencies. While spending significant sums of money does not guarantee electoral success, it can be a critical factor in the outcome of an election contest.

This high cost of politics has become a barrier that excludes individuals from marginalised groups from running for parliamentary seats. It also incentivises corruption and undermines development-driven governance. Solomon Islands must implement stricter campaign financing regulations to create an inclusive space for political participation. This can be supported by establishing structures to ensure compliance with these revised regulations. Alongside this, there is a pressing need for disadvantaged groups, like women, youths, and disabled persons with disability to be supported both financially and technically through dedicated programmes that will enable them to compete more effectively during elections.

Aspects of the election process also need to be reformed. Remote registration, and even voting, has the potential to significantly reduce the costs of participating in polls, which citizens would have to incur if politicians did not do so on their behalf. These and other suggestions can play a key role in making contests for political office in Solomon Islands less about the resources at an individual's disposal and more about the ideas they have for constituency and national development, a message that should be at the heart of ongoing civic engagement and awareness campaigns.

Methodology

This study adopted Westminster Foundation for Democracy's (WFD) "cost of politics" approach, which focuses on the expenditures of individuals, rather than parties, across the entire electoral cycle. As a first step, an extensive literature review of writings covering politics and the role of money in politics in Solomon Islands was conducted. This was supplemented by 11 key informant interviews, which used a semi-structured interview guide, with current members of parliament (MPs), former MPs, and former candidates who had run unsuccessfully, to gather insights about their experiences seeking and maintaining elective office. These conversations also supported a deeper understanding and better knowledge of how these experiences have been shaped by the cost of politics in Solomon Islands.

The interviewed MPs included those who had served three or more terms in parliament, as well as those newly elected in 2024, and included those from the various island provinces to account for the diverse contexts and logistical challenges. In parallel, six focus group discussions were conducted with special interest groups, (including women, youths, individuals with disabilities, and advocacy organisations) to further strengthen the nuance of the predominantly qualitative findings. All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analysed to inform the report's key findings, which are situated in the wider literature of politics in Solomon Islands.

Contextualising politics in Solomon Islands

Between 1950 and 1978, several constitutional reforms paved the way for Solomon Islanders to participate in the administration of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. These reforms accommodated a local demand for representation at the highest levels of decision making. In 1950, the Advisory Council Regulation was amended to allow for the nomination of five non-official members who were indigenous Solomon Islanders to the council. 1960 then saw the establishment of a 21-member nominated Legislative Council (which evolved into an elected council over the next decade), six members of which were Solomon Islanders.

The move towards a Westminster system of government began under the 1974 constitution, which saw the Governing Council – a combination of the existing legislative and executive councils - become a 38-member Legislative Assembly. Elections were held in 1976 to elect these representatives. Previous polls had taken place in 1967, 1970, and 1973 but the 1976 polls saw a marked increase in popular participation as well as vigorous campaigning by candidates. The introduction of a ministerial system under the 1974 constitution ushered in the need for political parties and increased rivalry among major political figures within the Legislative Assembly: notably the People's Progressive Party (PPP) led by Solomon Mamaloni and the United Solomon Islands Party led by Benedict Kinika. Mamaloni became the first Chief Minister in 1974 with his PPP

forming a government as part of a coalition it struck with independent MPs; a trend that would continue after 1978 in the post-independence period.

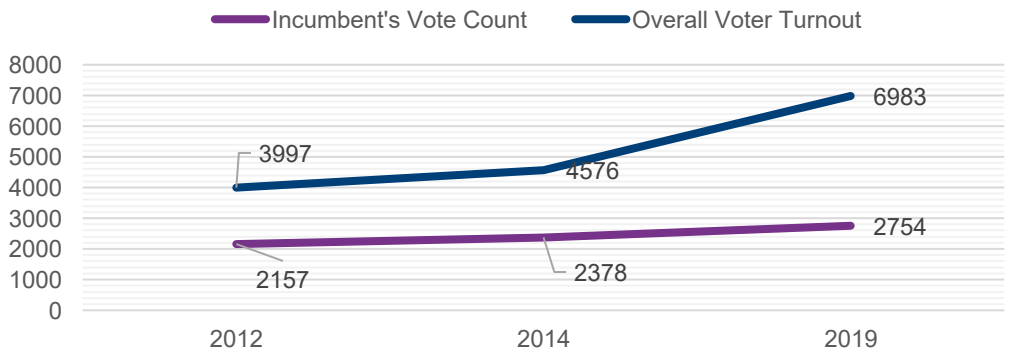
Elections in the post-independence period have been relatively peaceful. While vote buying and a degree of voter coercion do occur, systemic fraud or electoral violence has not undermined the integrity and results of elections. This is a significant achievement given the logistical challenges Solomon Islands faces in conducting elections such as poor transport infrastructure in rural constituencies, which makes distributing election materials safely and securely a challenge. However, despite these regular and free elections, Solomon Islands has not produced strong and responsible governments. This is primarily due to how people vote and the factors influencing political alliances within constituencies.

Voting behaviour

When discussing voting behaviour in Solomon Islands constituency politics, scholars have referred to two major theories to explain behaviour and political alliances: *rational choice theory and cultural theory.* Although factors such as party policies or religious affiliations also influence some voter decisions, these are less critical.

According to the rational choice model, voters are likely to support candidates who offer benefits and incentives in exchange for their support. With its roots in the field of economics, rational choice theorists view the exchange between candidates and voters as transactional, where voter decisions are based on the anticipated returns from candidates. Voters therefore make political choices, selecting candidates they believe will benefit them the most.[1] Proponents of this argument highlight economic realities within constituencies as factors shaping voter decisions and alliances. For instance, Haque says voter behaviour in Solomon Islands "reflects the broader economic context",[2] where government services are poor and economic opportunities limited. He argues that altruism and irrational loyalty, as often promoted by cultural theorists, cannot adequately explain voters' focus on short-term benefits.

Figure 1: *Manepora'a's vote count vs overall voter turnout 2012-2019 (Are'are constituency)*



However, the example in Figure 1, which shows the results for Andrew Manepora'a, the East Are'are MP from 2012 to 2019, highlights a shortcoming of relying solely on the rational thesis argument. During his time in office, Manepora'a had access to around SBD 50 million[3] in constituency development funds (CDFs) but he only added 221 voters to his 2012 result in 2014, and 376 between 2014 and 2019. His sudden access to huge state resources did not result in a sudden spike in support for him. If indeed voters were rational and made rational decisions based on access to resources, Manepora'a's support would have grown exponentially with the resources he was able to access and redistribute.

Constituency development: funds and politics

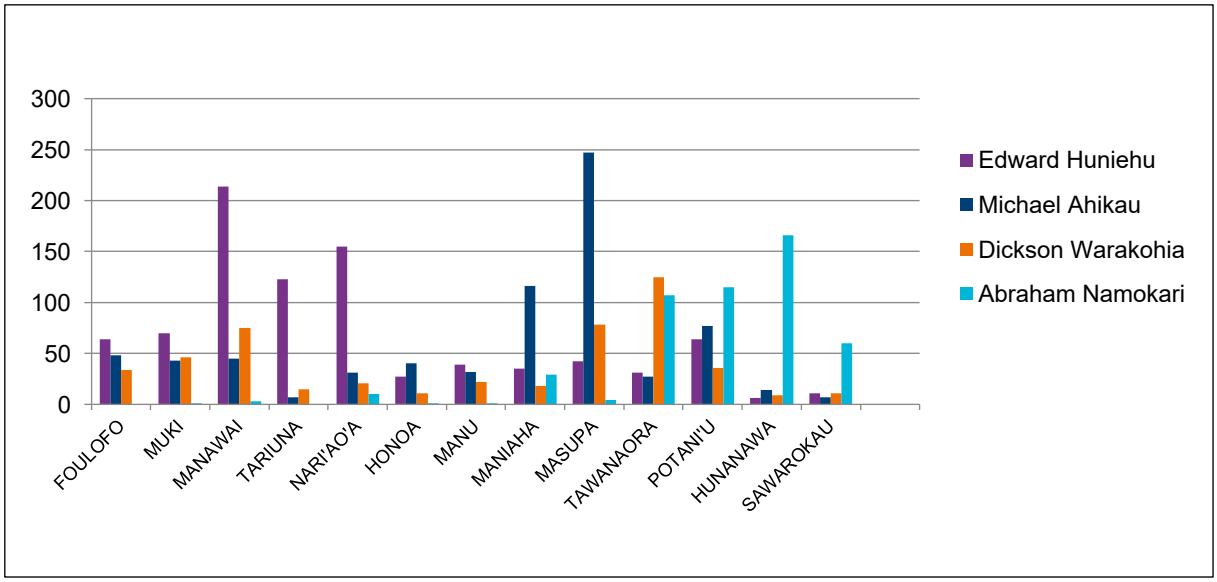
CDFs, which have existed since the 1990s, in theory offer more equitable resource distribution. This enables local communities or beneficiaries to be involved in developing and implementing development projects, which in turn can strengthen development outcomes. However, its application in Solomon Islands has been challenged by the continued exclusion of constituents from CDF benefits and problems of misuse and unfair distribution. Constituency Development Offices (CDOs) and the Constituency Development Committees – the key implementers of CDF programmes – in constituencies are primarily made up of MP sympathisers and supporters, enabling MPs and CDOs to hijack and benefit from the processes, either directly or indirectly, that should otherwise be left to constituents and communities. A 2017 survey conducted by Transparency Solomon Islands found that just 1% of respondents had participated in developing the Constituency Development Plans (CDPs). Without constituents' involvement in development planning, CDF spending tends to focus on short-term benefits that yield political results rather than helping constituencies achieve long-term development goals.

To explain this voter behaviour in Solomon Islands, experts point to the gifting practice that remains a feature of modern politics, and which resembles, and is an extension of, the traditional Melanesian Bigman leadership and culture.[4] Dinnen notes that in the case of Solomon Islands, "the skilful distribution of resources and manipulation of relationships by modern politicians are reminiscent of older Melanesian leadership strategies".[5] Proponents of the cultural thesis argue that people enter politics having been conditioned by the culture and society in which they grew up, which hinges on the reciprocal aspect of the traditional "Melanesian Bigman" phenomenon, where the distribution of wealth to followers is reciprocated through loyalty.[6] In this conceptualisation, candidates and MPs are seen as modern "Bigmen" who maintain followers by offering them gifts and incentives in exchange for voting loyalty.

While both theories have a role to play in understanding voter behaviour in constituency politics, these theories do not satisfactorily explain the way many electorates behave. For instance, one feature that is not adequately explained by either is the "home booth popularity" phenomenon, which is common in rural constituencies.[7] Candidates often receive most of their votes at their

home polling stations, where they have kin connections, as opposed to areas where they do not. This is illustrated in Figure 2, with the spikes illustrating how the four leading candidates in the East Are'are constituency election of 2006 each got most of their votes from their home area(s). This pattern, which exists across Solomon Islands rural constituency politics, has led academics Pendeverana and Nanau to argue that "the outcome of elections relate mostly to personal and kin connections and have little to do with party manifestos."[8] However, these decisions are also rational ones as the norms of reciprocity within kin groups mean that individuals are more likely to obtain assistance from their kin than from strangers.

Figure 2: *2006 Are'are election: top four candidates according to polling units*



Note: Authors own data. Huniehu is from Manawai and Potani'u, Ahikau is from Masupa, Warakohia is from Tawanaora and Namokari is from Hunanawa. Family and relational ties would also extend to nearby polling stations.

In the kin-based politics of Melanesia, gifts only yield political results when given within the context of an existing relationship, in this case, a kin relationship. Without a kin connection, gifts are not binding, nor do they automatically turn recipients into faithful followers. Steeve[9] refers to this as "unbounded politics" because, outside of existing relational networks, there is little to no allegiance, and the impacts of gifts are uncertain. For this reason, while candidates enter elections with the backing of their kin groups, they depend on campaign managers and intermediaries to duplicate the kin-based alliances in their own territories to secure pockets of voters. As a result, the role of campaign managers and power brokers has become increasingly important in recent elections, as beyond the candidate's immediate kin base, voters pledge allegiance to their intermediaries.

The role of political parties

Political parties in Solomon Islands operate primarily as conduits of patronage that channel ministerial portfolios and financial incentives to prominent political figures and their cronies.[10] First emerging in the early 1970s in response to the colonial administration's legislative reforms, political parties, of which there were eight officially registered in 2024, remain institutionally weak. Party membership is often fluid, and MPs readily switch allegiance when and where it is convenient.

Usually, this has to do with incentives offered by coalitions. The weak party system in Solomon Islands has been attributed to several factors.

Firstly, political parties are primarily used as lobbying platforms to form governments during national elections. Therefore, the focus has always been on securing the numbers required to form a government rather than coming together based on policy preferences.[11] This has often led to the demise of political parties shortly after the conclusion of general elections because "political parties tend chiefly to be loose factional alliances which assume significance only in the wake of general elections when the issue becomes who will form the government".[12]

Secondly, political parties in Solomon Islands tend to centre around individuals, not shared ideologies or principles. Party members are usually MPs who have closer ties with the party leader. These party leaders resemble the traditional Bigman, maintaining a following within parliament by promising and offering incentives in exchange for loyalty and support. These incentives typically include ministerial positions, chairmanships of statutory bodies or state-owned enterprises, and political appointments.[13]

Thirdly, most political parties are largely disconnected from voters. As a result, voters focus on individual candidates rather than the political parties they belong to when making their political choice. Despite an increase in parties holding launches and campaigns in recent years, these activities have not been successful in persuading voters to cast ballots along party lines. Furthermore, because MPs are primarily elected based on their local performance, particularly the way in which they distribute the CDF, rather than national performance, the general electorate does not see the value of holding political parties or coalitions accountable for poor performance.[14] Furthermore, in the context where relational ties and political support go hand in hand, candidates do not prioritise working collectively on party platforms to win votes, as this would likely overshadow individual achievements.

Table 1: *Independent candidates' electoral participation and success (2014-2024)*

Year	Total number of independent candidates	Total candidates	Successful independent candidates
2014	246	444	32
2019	162	332	21
2024	115	334	11

The introduction of the Political Party Integrity Act (PPIA) in 2014 was an attempt to politically engineer a statutory mechanism that would enhance the development and operations of political parties. Before the PPIA, the operations of political parties were accommodated under the constitutional provisions for the "freedom of assembly and association". Without statutory provisions, political parties tended to operate on an ad-hoc basis and in an undisciplined manner. The PPIA sought to address this by ensuring that MPs must pledge allegiance to a political party before or after elections.[15] While this has resulted in a significant decline in the number of

independent candidates contesting and winning seats (see Table 1) it is debatable as to whether the decline in the number of independents has solved the issue of political instability.

Since the 2024 election, there has already been an attempt to move a “motion of no confidence” against Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele. Equally, the switching of several MPs from the opposition to the ruling National Government for Unity and Transformation coalition over the past few months shows that political fluidity remains a defining feature of Solomon Island politics and suggests that the PPIA’s role in fostering party allegiance, so far at least, remains limited.

The PPIA has also fallen short in its efforts to increase the number of female candidates and MPs. Despite the PPIA providing financial incentives to political parties who nominate more women, the number of female candidates has declined from 26 to 20 over the last three elections.[16] This trend is shaped by the wider challenges female candidates face in running for parliamentary seats due to their limited participation in the formal economy.[17] This lack of access to steady income streams diminishes their chances of accumulating the resources needed for an effective campaign. Moreover, gendered preferences emanating from the patriarchal cultures common in Melanesia continue to favour men over women for leadership responsibilities and shape voters’ behaviour. These culturally accepted stereotypes also limit women’s access to actors such as brokers and intermediaries who play an important role in garnering support at the constituency level.[18] As women’s chances of winning a seat are significantly reduced when compared to those of their male counterparts, political parties are more likely to back the latter, given that the gender provisions within the PPIA are not mandatory.

Drivers of the cost of politics

Establishing your credentials

In the lead-up to elections, and upon declaring their intentions to run, aspiring candidates often receive multiple requests for help from individuals and groups. How candidates respond to such requests often has implications for their candidacy. By responding positively to requests, an aspiring candidate projects themselves as a caring person who would look after constituents’ needs if elected. This reflects the political culture of Solomon Islands, where candidates or MPs are judged on how much attention they give to constituents’ needs rather than how well they fulfil legislative responsibilities. As one MP explained:

> *As a candidate, you have to show support towards community events. Sometimes, during the death of a community member, you must give support to show that you care. While such practices are in line with our culture, your intention is to show yourself as a candidate to consider, and it helps with your election campaign.*[19]

The amount of money or cost of goods for each request can range from a few hundred SBDs to thousands, depending on the type of assistance provided and the financial standing of a candidate. For instance, one MP stated that he had paid for the soccer uniforms for all the clubs within his constituency in the lead-up to the 2024 election. He did that intentionally so people would start talking about him during the 2023 end-of-year organised sports gala. “Expectations from voters also influence candidates to give money or tangible things so that voters can vote for them during election. This is not right but this practice is becoming normal in the country”[20] contended one individual interviewed.

But this sort of gifting does not automatically win votes, especially in environments where kin relationships predominate. The uncertainty of gifting outside kin networks prompted one MP to say: “normally, when spending money, you have to know who you are spending the money on: whether they will vote for you or not”.[21] However, there will always be prospective voters who lack prior connections with candidates and may be open to forming new political relationships. This is especially true for voters who do not have kin candidates or who are not attached to intermediaries and campaign managers in their constituency. These intermediaries and campaign managers tend not to be directly compensated for their work, but they do it in expectation that they will benefit from the CDF funds allocated to the MP when they are elected.

Campaign tours

Campaign tours, which take place just before election day, are costly endeavours determined by the geographical size of the constituencies and/or the inhabiting population. For those campaigning in Ysabel Province – which is a large island but not densely populated – the need to cover more ground comes with cost implications, especially when using motorised boats to move campaign teams around. For those in urban constituencies, such as in the capital Honiara, logistic costs are much lower due to the road network within the city. Similarly, in more densely populated locations, such as Malaita, logistic costs are reduced mainly because constituencies cover a smaller area. While Malaita has 14 constituencies, Ysabel has only three, despite the two being almost the same size geographically.

This was reflected in the interviews conducted for this study. While one candidate who had a road network that ran through his community spent just SBD 30,000 on campaign tours, another, contesting a constituency far from Honiara that is spread over several islands, spent more than SBD 1 million. Within that range, campaign costs can also fluctuate based on the campaign’s style and the number of campaign supporters who participate in the tour. To make a lasting impression on voters, candidates who can afford to do so take along many supporters and campaign managers with them. This requires numerous motorised canoes or, in areas with roads, several vehicles. Besides meeting hiring and fuel costs, the candidate must feed the team, pay for their accommodation, and cover other convenience costs, such as cigarettes and betelnut, for those who smoke and chew. This is in addition to the public events themselves, which can include feasts, floats, and parades, which significantly add to the costs. One former candidate noted that “my contenders had spent more because some were hosting big feasts during the campaign”.[22]

Limits on expenditure

Under the 2018 Electoral Act, campaign spending is officially capped at SBD 500,000. While a failure to stay within the limit or to submit reports within 90 days of the conclusion of the election carries a high penalty – a fine of SBD 50,000 or five years' imprisonment – no candidate has ever been prosecuted for overspending. Given the indicative figures for actual expenditure collected for this study, systemic underreporting appears likely.

Registration and election day logistics

During the voter registration period, which normally occurs a couple of months before election day, the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) sends its employees to the constituencies to register voters. Anyone wishing to register to vote must travel to the constituency within this period. For eligible voters who do not reside in their constituencies, candidates take on the responsibility of transporting their supporters to their respective constituencies to register. A process they repeat on election day.

Most respondents agreed that registration and election day costs are the most significant outlay that aspiring candidates must make. With a considerable portion of voters residing in the urban centres or the capital city of Honiara, getting them to the registration venues in the constituencies can be very expensive. Often it requires chartering ships, which can cost between SBD 200,000-500,000, depending on the size of the vessel, the number of trips, and the travel time. The costs for candidates standing in constituencies spread over several islands are often the highest as a result. But registration is crucial for electoral success in the view of one MP, who spent a significant chunk of his campaign budget on this phase.

> *I spent most money during registration for transport, food and other needs to move people to the registration stations and back to their villages. You have to get the registration right in order to win.*[23]

In past elections, candidates have also been involved in moving voters from other constituencies to increase their voter bases. Since voter registration is not residency-based, these "cross-border" voters are hard to track, especially if they register in urban constituencies like Honiara or provincial headquarters. But they can be decisive in closely contested races, with former leader of the opposition in parliament, the Hon. Matthew Cooper Wale, arguing in 2023 that "some elections are won purely on the basis of cross-border voters".[24] Candidates also highlighted how these costs can repeat on voting day.

> *The cost during the election doubled, it was twice the cost of registration. During the election, voters and candidates had to travel home before election day. It was like a race where everyone had to get to their constituencies. Ship owners often quickly ran out of boats to charter.*[25]

But they are critical to electoral success. In 2014, incumbent MP for the Gizo/Kolombangara constituency, Gordon Darcy Lilo, narrowly lost the election after a boat carrying his supporters, travelling from Honiara, failed to reach the polling stations on time.

However, not all candidates charter boats during registration and election day. In fact, only candidates who are business owners or incumbent MPs are likely to be able to afford to incur this type of cost, with the latter often using their access to CDFs to pay for it. This can perhaps explain why, in the past, certain constituency payments have been released just a few weeks before the election. In April 2024, for example, just a week before the election, MPs received SBD 400,000 as a terminal grant.[26] This places non-incumbent candidates at a significant disadvantage as although it is still possible to win seats without incurring significant costs during the registration and voting periods, it is more difficult.

Sources of funding

While most aspiring candidates rely heavily on their own savings or money from their businesses when deciding to run for a parliamentary seat, in some instances, candidates secure support from their political parties or, in the case of incumbents, leverage resources available to them through the CDF.

Personal savings and family and friends support

Almost all interviewees agreed that personal savings were an important source of funding for campaigns. One admitted to investing SBD 30,000 of his own savings into the campaign, with this added to by support raised from his family. Another claimed to have used SBD 60,000 of his savings to run his campaign. Both were public servants prior to running in the 2024 election, and both were successfully elected. But these amounts were dwarfed by the expenditure mentioned by other respondents. One candidate claimed he had spent more than SBD 1 million to win his seat, while another was able to raise SBD 800,000 from a combination of his own personal resources and that of his business. Many current MPs had run businesses before getting elected, with the financial backing these can provide viewed as key to their success. Property can also be used to raise the resources needed to run, with one aspirant admitting that he sold two pieces of land to fund his 2024 campaign.

Political party support

A lack of financial resources prevents political parties from financially supporting candidates. Interviewees received minimal financial assistance from political parties, even when contesting under party banners. Where assistance was provided, it was most often by supplying posters and, on some occasions, having party leaders appear and support candidates during campaign launches. This lack of support further reduces the sense of obligation a candidate feels to remain attached to a political party.

Constituency development funds

The increase in the CDF amount in the past two decades to about SBD 30 million per constituency per parliamentary term has incentivised many candidates to run for office in the first place. But for those seeking re-election it offers a valuable resource that can be used to enhance their political prospects. The lack of effective oversight in how the funds – which amount to SBD 6–7 million per year – are spent enables incumbents to directly supplement their election campaigns and to partake in constant campaigning by providing goods and other rewards to their patronage and voter networks. With MPs being equipped with a very large fund through which they can consolidate support, it has become increasingly difficult for newcomers to enter national politics in Solomon Islands.[27] “With the help of the CDF, MPs remain in power for a few terms even when they do not bring change to the constituencies”,[28] argued one respondent. This is reflected in the data, as return rates of incumbents have increased since 2014; over 70% of incumbents retained their seats in 2024.

Implications of cost of politics

Good governance threatened

Using cash and goods to encourage voters cultivates and consolidates a culture of vote buying that erodes good governance. It means candidates with more financial resources have an advantage during elections because they can use these funds to cover the necessary election-related costs and especially meet the demands of potential voters. With individuals elected to parliament based primarily on their potential to meet the needs of individual voters, having enough money allows aspiring candidates to project themselves as caring and concerned about people's needs. In Solomon Islands' constituency politics, the relationship between MPs and voters is primarily premised on reciprocal personal exchanges. MPs offer assistance in the form of cash or goods, and voters reciprocate with loyalty during elections. Therefore, to retain their seats in the next election, MPs prioritise constituency engagements and meeting voter demands over their core legislative responsibilities. "Every day I receive calls, messages and people coming to the office. This really affects my parliamentary responsibilities",[29] explained one MP.

Persistence of political instability

Coupled with the need to amass resources to maintain voter loyalty, MPs often face situations where they must choose between principled governance and the incentives offered by political factions competing for power within parliament. When the latter takes precedence, MPs align with the faction that can offer more rather than the one with which they share similar ideologies and principles. With few statutory mechanisms to restrain inter-party hopping, MPs constantly negotiate with other factions, driving sustained instability in parliament.

Exclusion

The high cost creates a structural barrier that denies marginalised groups an equal opportunity to participate in politics. Respondents highlighted that the high costs accentuate the difficulties already facing women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised communities who wish to run for office as they lack access to the type of resources required. As one interviewee explained, "people with disabilities cannot afford to run during elections. They are capable of becoming candidates, but the cost will not allow them to".[30]

Recommendations

In response to the challenges and impacts identified in this report that relate to, or are shaped by, the cost of politics, the following recommendations are proposed.

- **Implement stricter regulations on campaign financing.** There is a need to implement stricter campaign financing regulations to limit the influence of money in elections. While the Electoral Act 2018 provides guidelines on campaign spending, there is no mechanism to verify expenditures. To address the compliance problem, a fully capable – in terms of resources and technical know-how – separate body or unit should be set up within SIEC to monitor campaign expenditures, enforce compliance, and recommend necessary actions when electoral laws are breached. Linked to this there is a need to review, and revise down, the existing expenditure cap of SBD 500,000, which already puts running for elective office out of the reach of ordinary Solomon Islanders.
- **Out-of-constituency voter registration.** The SIEC needs to provide other alternatives to in-constituency registration to reduce the costs involved for prospective voters. One option to be explored would be to create an online platform that could support this process.
- **Promote more convicing civic messaging.** Educational programmes have been implemented to raise awareness about the electoral process and the importance of voting based on policies rather than financial incentives. Unfortunately, these awareness programmes have had little impact on how people vote. Stronger voter education programmes that show tangible evidence of how voters could benefit from policy-based voting, highlighting examples from the other Pacific nations, could have a greater impact. These education and awareness programmes can be coordinated through government agencies, civil society groups, and other non-government organisations that have experience working with communities and rural populations. Social media platforms can also be leveraged to disseminate important information through prominent online influencers where these can be identified as non-partisan.
- **Introduce measures to support disadvantaged groups.** Special interest groups, such as women, youths, and persons with disabilities face a much steeper climb when contesting for nominations and seats in national elections. Although registered political parties must aim to provide a 10% quota for female candidates under the PPIA, the incentives are unattractive, and the requirement is not obligatory. Linked to this is the need to provide dedicated resources to marginalised candidates. One of the major constraints facing women, youths, and persons with disability face is access to finances for a campaign, given that the formal cash economy in Solomon Islands is predominantly the domain of men, particularly in its upper echelons.[31] Donors could explore matching the funds contributed by a candidate in the form of a grant for these marginalised candidates, through partnerships with national bodies such as the National Council of Women. Technical support, to aid their campaigns and ensure the effective spending of these resources, can also help strengthen the effective political participation of marginalised groups.

- **Fund political parties directly.** Action should be taken to expand the coverage of the PPIA to include state funding for political parties. The underlying logic is to empower political parties to exert more influence over candidates through financial assistance. Political parties have little at their disposal to influence candidates. If candidates can depend on parties for financial support and endorsements that can aid their chances of winning, this will enhance political party allegiance, limit inter-party "grasshopping", and strengthen political stability driven by ideology and values.
- **Reform the constituency development fund award process.** The CDF Act 2024 provides superficial and almost deceptive protection for MPs. While it removes MPs' control over the fund by denying them the ability to sign cheques, it still gives MPs the final say over the CDF programmes and recipients. A revised Act should remove the MP from the whole process and reassign the responsibilities for the management of the CDF to the Ministry of Rural Development and CDOs. Linked to this, given that CDO officials are recruited as public servants, there is no reason for their employment to start and end with the election cycle. Continuity in the office, and programmes, will be enhanced if they are not connected to the length of the parliamentary term. This change would also gradually reduce MPs' influence over CDFs in the long term.

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