Australian National University

Department of Pacific Affairs

2019 SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTIONS

OBSERVATION REPORT

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About the authors

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Athena Rogers managed the data collection process for the research undertaken during the observation mission. She also contributed significantly to the research design and analysis of results that produced this report. Athena is a Research Officer who contributes to DPA's broader research agenda in Solomon Islands, particularly the Managing Development in Solomon Islands Constituencies project. She has a Master in Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development from the ANU.

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We thank in particular the 15 Solomon Islands academics and researchers who led the constituency observation teams, the 62 observers and team members recruited from civil society and the tertiary sector in Solomon Islands and our academic and professional staff colleagues from Australia who took part in and supported the observation. It was a privilege for our Australia-based members to work with such a talented and dedicated group of Solomon Islanders: you taught us all so much. We greatly appreciate the hard work and dedication shown by each team member in their commitment to the long hours the observation mission entailed. We are also grateful to the families of our observers who put up with the absence of their loved ones for a considerable period of time. We also extend our thanks to those Australian High Commission staff who accompanied some of our teams in the field.

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Abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Forces
ANU	Australian National University
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
CDF	Constituency Development Funds
CDO	Constituency Development Officer
DPA	Department of Pacific Affairs
KFPL	Kolombangara Forest Products Limited
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Forces
PA	Polling Assistant
PO	Presiding Officer
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RO	Returning Officer
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
SBD	Solomon Islands Dollar
SIEC	Solomon Islands Electoral Commission
SIEO	Solomon Islands Electoral Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	Solomon Islands United Party
VRC	Voter Registration Centre

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National general elections were held in Solomon Islands on 3 April 2019. These were the 10th general elections since independence in 1978, and the first since the mid-2017 departure of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). There are inherent challenges to successful election delivery in Solomon Islands due to its cultural and geographic diversity and population that is scattered across urban, rural and remote locations. Despite these constraints, national elections have generally been peaceful and credible in post-conflict Solomon Islands and the 2019 election continued upon this trend.

The Office of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) conducted elections following the passage of a new Electoral Act in 2018. The main reforms and regulations associated with the new Act[1] that came into effect for the 2019 election were: changed procedures around the registration of voters and the process of counting votes; changes to the candidate nomination process and increases to campaign budgets; more severe penalties for electoral offences; and the imposition of a 24-hour campaign blackout immediately prior to election day.

The SIEC was tasked with implementing these new provisions in a short amount of time ahead of the 2019 election. They also faced substantial administrative challenges, which included delays with receiving allocated budgets and understaffing at head office. At the same time, the election attracted widespread media coverage on the movement of voters between constituencies and overall increases in the voter roll. It is within this context that the Australian National University (ANU) conducted observational research and analysis for the 2019 election.

The ANU, through the Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA), conducted a large-scale observation of the election comprising 90 observers, 77 of whom were Solomon Islanders. The observation covered almost a third of the country (15 of Solomon Islands' 50 national constituencies). Fieldwork was carried out from 23 March to 10 April 2019 in order to comprehensively cover the pre-polling, polling and post-polling periods.[2] The research comprised direct election observations and citizen surveys. In total, almost 5000 citizens were interviewed either before or after the election, and nearly 600 observation reports were completed. In terms of the breath and scope of the data collected, this study represents one of the largest and most comprehensive research exercises to have been undertaken in Solomon Islands.

Main findings

The key findings identified within this report are detailed under the following broad themes. These results are based on the data collected during the observation and are elaborated on further in the body of the report.

Conduct of the election

Our report finds that citizens' expectations of a free and fair election were generally met. Broadly, the election was conducted in a peaceful manner with few observed instances of election-related tension or violence before and immediately after polling. Electoral administration, in terms of the implementation of electoral procedures and processes, was generally well managed by SIEC. Our findings

1 The Electoral Act 2018 (National Parliament of Solomon Islands 2018) was not fully implemented for the 2019 elections.

2 The ANU observation period did not cover the early voting period or the period surrounding parliament's election of the prime minister in late April 2019.

suggest that citizens were largely able to cast their ballots in secret and without intimidation. The electoral processes in place ensured a secret vote, however many citizens still believed the winning candidate would be able to find out who they voted for after the election. This is despite efforts put in place by SIEC prior to the election to further anonymise voting and counting procedures.

Cross-border registration and the electoral roll

Compared to 2014, there was a 25 per cent increase in total voter registrations and a 20 per cent increase in actual votes cast for the 2019 election. There was, however, significant variation by province and constituency. The largest increase in the number of registered voters was 83 per cent in West Honiara, while in two constituencies (South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepari and Small Malaita) the number of registered voters decreased (see Table 2.1, pp. 16–17). With the introduction of the biometric voter registration system ahead of the 2014 elections, the 2019 election was the first in which accurate assumptions could be made about irregularities of the electoral roll.[3] Overall, SIEC recorded 54,000 instances of voters wanting to change their registration to a different constituency (Solomon Star 2018a). This is an unexpectedly high number and suggests voters were seeking to change for reasons other than what was intended under the law. This practice has become known as cross-border registration. It means voters are seeking to register in constituencies where they do not reside in order to gain personal benefits from candidates.

Our observations suggest that candidates also motivate and facilitate this movement of voters in order to gain political advantages by increasing their support base. A new provision for out-of-constituency registration allowed voters in Honiara to register to vote in other constituencies without having to travel to them, which may have contributed to the increased movement of voters. Our research found that in many constituencies this has resulted in voters questioning the legitimacy and accuracy of the electoral roll.

Women's political participation

Women continue to be underrepresented in most aspects of national elections in Solomon Islands. In 2019, only two women were elected; both had previously been MPs. This is a slight increase from previous elections, where no more than one woman won a seat. Since independence, only four women have served as MPs. The number of women contesting for national parliament has also stagnated, continuing a long-term trend. Our findings suggest that it is hard for women to acquire the social and material resources needed to win an election in Solomon Islands. Responses to our citizen surveys show that most voters claimed to be open to the idea of more women MPs, though fewer said they would consider voting for a female candidate.

Women and men participate in equal numbers when exercising their right to vote, though our results show that women are more likely to be influenced by family members when deciding who to vote for. Politics is still considered to be the domain of men, making it difficult for women to hold positions of political influence such as campaign managers or agents and in local-level leadership. The majority of women's political participation appears to be limited to supporting roles that align with gendered expectations. Improving the participation of women in all aspects of political life in Solomon Islands remains a perennial challenge.

3 To increase public confidence in the electoral roll, a biometric voter registration system was used ahead of the 2014 election. This resulted in the roll being 'cleaned' from 448,149 registered voters for the 2010 elections to 287,567 registered for the 2014 election.

Money politics

Money politics is a major factor that influences electoral politics in Solomon Islands. Candidates using money to directly influence voters can range from vote buying to gift giving to promising material benefits to supporters prior to the election. Our 2014 observation report found that money politics featured heavily in campaigning in the lead up to the election. In particular, observers witnessed candidates handing out benefits such as cash and material goods on the night before the election (colloquially Devil's Night).

The new Electoral Act introduced harsher penalties for electoral offences and a 24-hour ban on campaigning prior to polling to reduce the prevalence of money politics. SIEC carried out voter education and awareness campaigns that focused heavily on electoral offences and penalties. Our observers reported that these campaigns were effective in increasing voters' awareness of the repercussions associated with vote buying and gifting. Consequently, observers witnessed fewer direct instances of money politics in 2019. While it is plausible that these reforms have had some impact on reducing money politics, it is more likely that such practices have been driven underground. What is clear is that voters were reluctant to disclose their involvement in, or knowledge of, these illegal activities to our observers.

Constituency Development Funds and MP incumbency rates

Incumbent MPs are reputed to have a significant advantage over rival candidates, mainly due to their direct access to Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), which are annual allocations of discretionary funds provided to MPs for development programs in their constituencies. CDFs are spent by MPs across the electoral cycle and can be used to strengthen their supporter base. They may start to resemble money politics when they are spent in ways that directly reward individuals in the lead up to an election. Our data provides insights into the influence of CDFs on electoral politics. Observers noted that the politicised spending of CDFs was a major election issue. CDFs are often seen as an effective mechanism for incumbent MPs to deliver benefits to constituents, but voters believed supporters of MPs generally receive a larger share. Citizens surveyed said a candidate's personal qualities, accessibility and contributions to the community are more important than their policies and party affiliation when deciding who to vote for. This speaks to the common expectation that it is the role of the MP to deliver benefits to constituents, which can be achieved through CDF spending.

CDF spending appears to be a significant factor that impacts re-election prospects for MPs. Higher retention rates have coincided with significant increases in CDFs over the last decade. For the 2019 election, 72 per cent of incumbent MPs managed to retain their seats, which was similar to the previous 2014 election. This contrasts with earlier elections where incumbency rates were around 55 per cent on average since independence (Wood 2019). In fact, fewer candidates nominated to contest in 2019 than in previous elections, which may suggest that prospective candidates believe it is difficult to compete with incumbent MPs.

Changed counting procedures

For the 2019 election, counting procedures were changed to provide less information on how polling stations, which are often individual villages, voted. This served two purposes: one was to limit candidates' ability to determine where their votes came from within their constituencies; the other was to provide assurances to voters and communities that their political preferences would remain anonymous. To do this, ballot boxes were counted in batches. This meant votes cast at each ballot box were mixed with other ballot boxes (normally up to five) from within the constituency and then counted together as a batch of votes. This was a different process to the 2014 election when ballot

boxes were counted individually, which made it clear how each community voted. As a result of the batch counting reform, candidates will have to rely on local sources of knowledge about where their support base lies. This was likely one reason why some candidates expressed strong opposition to this counting reform prior to the election.

Our analysis shows that batch counting achieved its intended purpose of significantly reducing the potential for candidates to determine how polling stations voted. From an administrative perspective, however, the new counting procedures were not uniformly implemented and some constituencies took much longer to complete the counting process than expected.

Other observer missions

Our main findings are consistent with statements made by other international and domestic observation groups that observed the 2019 election. Two of the larger observation missions, the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) and Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), also recognised that voters participated in a free and fair election that demonstrated a high level of citizen engagement (COG 2019; MSG 2019). Their reports mention that cross-border registration and concerns about the integrity of the electoral roll were major issues. They also noted some issues surrounding the inefficiency of the new counting process. The COG's report also suggested there were some broader social and political factors that impacted the integrity of the election, specifically the politicised spending of CDFs and the additional challenges faced by women candidates.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on detailed analysis of our research findings. We also consider broader contextual factors of running elections in Solomon Islands to ensure that these recommendations can be applied for improving electoral conduct in the future. The recommendations are presented in sequential rather than priority order, and generally follow the structure of the report. They are summarised below and re-stated at the end of each section.

Election preparation

- **Consider extending the omissions and objections period to allow more time for citizens to review the preliminary roll.** Conducting the omissions and objections period earlier and for longer would also allow more time for SIEC to update the roll.

- **Voter Registration Centres (VRCs) should accommodate all voters, including those with limited access to transport or with work or school commitments.** A rolling registration process, extended registration period or increasing the number of VRCs would ensure all citizens have the opportunity to register to vote.

- **Strengthen procedures for encouraging citizens to check their registration.** This could be achieved through broader awareness campaigns earlier in the electoral cycle and by improving text message and online services.

- **Implement a more rigorous approach to removing deceased names from the roll.** This could be addressed on an ongoing basis rather than just prior to an election.

- **Minimise the commodification of voters through cross-border registration before it becomes a permanent feature of electoral politics.** One measure could be a rolling or ongoing registration of voters, which would minimise the impact of a last minute rush of registrations ahead of elections.

- **Consider narrowing the definition of 'ordinarily resident' for purposes of registration and explain what falls outside of this definition.** Prior to the registration period, awareness campaigns should be conducted on the definition of 'ordinarily resident' and what falls outside of this definition.

- **Expand face-to-face voter education programs.** The focus of these programs should be on rural areas where access to national media is limited and Pijin may not be the preferred language.

- **Increase awareness campaigns about the purpose of voter ID cards.** The commonly held belief that voter ID cards are required to vote has created opportunities for voter intimidation and fraud that could be reduced.

- **Collaboration between SIEC and Royal Solomon Islands Police Force on security arrangements proved effective and should be maintained.** In the post-RAMSI environment, cross-institutional collaboration on security arrangements is critical for free and fair elections and should be formalised early in election preparations.

Candidates and campaigning

- **Review how campaign spending is monitored and reported.** New increased limits on campaign spending should be enforced to improve accountability.

- **Consider the long-term barriers to greater women's political participation.** Rethink short-term support strategies and focus on addressing societal factors that inhibit or promote women's ability to occupy roles of political influence.

- **Community groups that advance women's rights and gender-based issues could be encouraged to promote their work in the context of elections.** This could help to change attitudes towards women in politics and gender roles more broadly.

- **Support for women candidates should focus on identifying and supporting women leaders over the entire electoral cycle.** This would allow women to mount strong and credible campaigns well in advance of the election.

- **Continue awareness campaigns on electoral offences and penalties.** These could be extended to run throughout the electoral cycle. They could also address money politics and the use of CDFs.

Election day administration

- **Conduct longer and more detailed training for electoral officials.** This would improve consistency in the application of election processes across constituencies.

- **Staff could be placed outside polling stations to direct voters when a number of polling booths are located at the same premises.** This would reduce confusion around where to vote which was mainly due to the co-location of polling stations in urban areas.

- **Ensure that polling station venues are functional and provide secrecy for voters.** Some polling stations were too small to accommodate voters and arranged in a way that allowed onlookers to view citizens voting.

- **Continue to enforce the liquor ban prior to the election and during the count.** This likely reduced the amount of alcohol-related disturbances during the election period.

- **Consider deploying electoral officials and security personnel to locations where they do not reside or have strong social connections.** This would reduce perceptions of bias and improve citizens' confidence in electoral processes, though it could significantly increase costs.

- **Mobile polling booths could be used for voters who are unable to enter the polling station venue.** Polling stations should be accessible for all voters, but where this is not possible, the option to use mobile polling booths should be widely publicised and encouraged by polling officials.

Counting period

- **Provide frequent updates on the counting process to the public**. Regular announcements could be made to citizens gathering outside counting centres to ease any tensions.

- **Arrange counting venues in a way that allows agents and observers to properly view the process.** This would improve accountability and discourage formal complaints from candidate agents.

- **Standardise and enforce a consistent set of protocols for conduct in all counting centres.** This should include the use of mobile phones and who can enter and exit the venues.

- **Improvements could be made to the security, speed and efficiency of the transportation of the ballot boxes.** The process of collecting ballot boxes and transporting them to provincial centres delayed the commencement of the count.

- **Formulate a uniform approach to batch counting, particularly in regard to whether ballot box names should be displayed.** While batch counting achieved its intended purpose, administrative processes and procedures could be standardised.


ENTRANCE

1 – INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

The ANU election observation mission was designed to produce a comprehensive data set on national elections and political participation in Solomon Islands. A rigorous research approach was adopted that utilised the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to inform an impartial assessment of the 2019 national general election. The research findings are intended to contribute towards strengthening SIEC's capacity to manage elections in the future, particularly in areas such as voter registration, roll administration and electoral politics. In addition, the observation mission has produced data that could be utilised for political economy analysis relevant to Solomon Islands. The findings provide insights into civic awareness, political participation — including the participation of women in elections — money politics, changing political culture and local-level development issues.

1.1 National elections in Solomon Islands

Elections in post-conflict Solomon Islands have been mainly fought on local issues and hotly contested, as reflected in the large numbers of candidates. Voting is not compulsory, but participation rates are generally high. The first-past-the-post electoral system means winning candidates can be elected with a small margin of votes. While there have been isolated incidents of election-related violence, elections have been conducted in a reasonably orderly manner and have delivered legitimately elected parliaments. Tensions have often surfaced in the post-election period during the formation of government as they are mainly formed by a loose coalition of MPs. Public disappointment with the outcome of this process resulted in disturbances in the capital, Honiara, in 2006 and 2019.

While elections have been generally peaceful and inclusive, important issues have recently surfaced. One of the biggest challenges facing national elections has been adequate and timely resourcing, with the electoral commission facing significant capacity challenges to deliver elections in a geographically and culturally diverse country. The accuracy of the voter roll was a significant issue that affected public confidence in the integrity of elections, though it has improved significantly in recent years with the introduction of biometric registration. Women have faced challenges participating equally in elections, epitomised by the very low number of women elected to parliament. Election delivery has also benefited from significant donor support, which has focused on long-term electoral strengthening, security and logistical assistance.

The ANU conducted detailed observations of the 2014 Solomon Islands national general election. The observation report found that one of the main improvements from the previous election was the biometric voter registration roll update that significantly increased voters' confidence in the accuracy of the roll.[4] It also documented progress in the conduct and coordination of security personnel that contributed to a safe election. On the other hand, the 2014 observer report found that there were challenges associated with widespread confusion in assigning voters to polling stations and significant numbers of voters, particularly women, experienced intimidation in the lead up to the election.

The ANU also conducted observations of the May 2018 Gizo/Kolombangara by-election. The by-election was observed to be generally well-run, with polling officials performing their roles effectively. It provided an opportunity for SIEC to identify and address potential issues in the lead up to the 2019 election. For example, the issue of cut off times for voting at the close of polls was addressed before the 2019 election. These previous election studies in Solomon Islands have allowed for comparisons to be made over time, as well as for the documentation of potential trends.

4 The biometric voter registration system was introduced to verify the identities of registered voters by taking their photos and displaying them on the official voter roll.

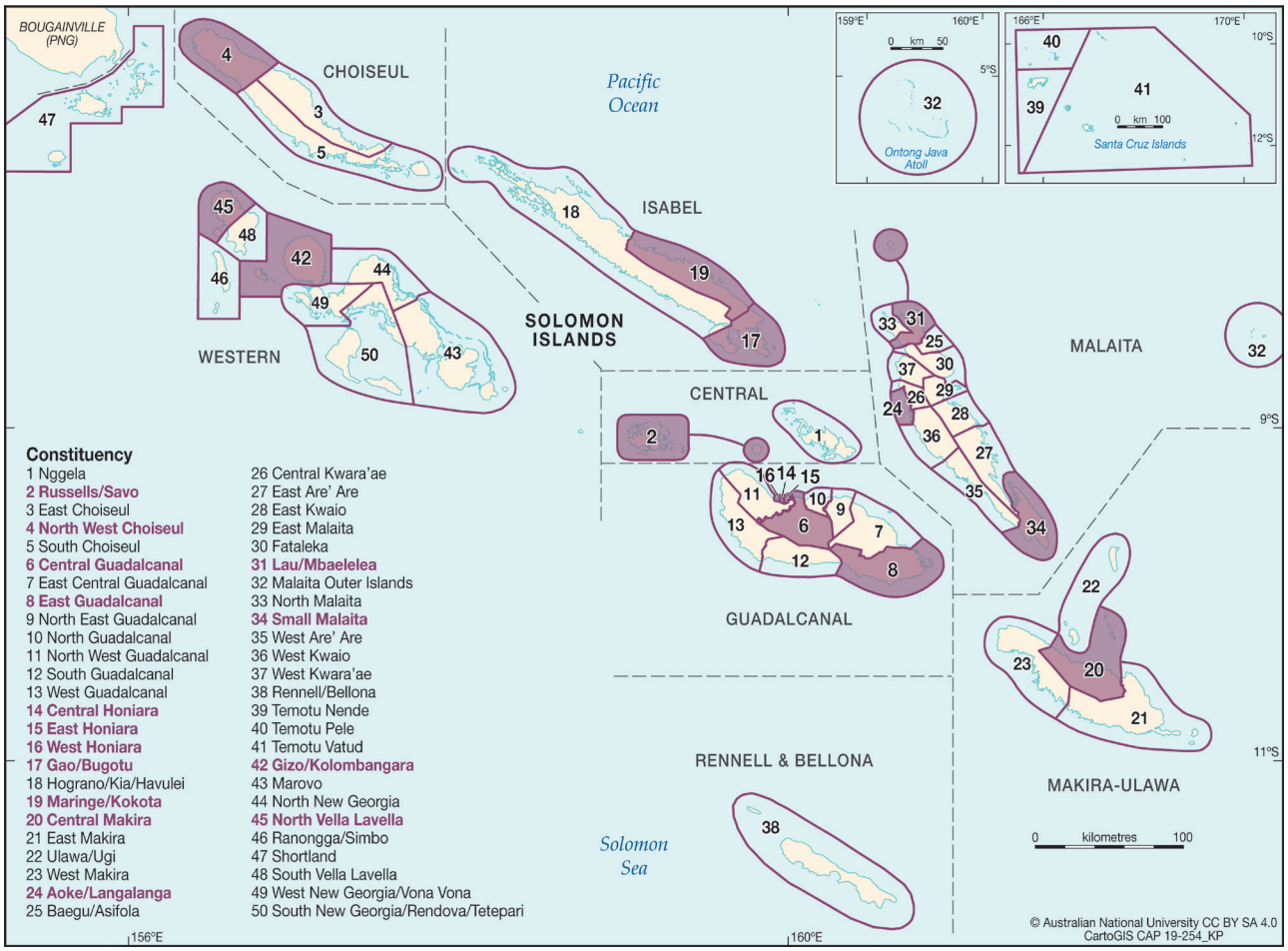
1.2 Approach to 2019 election observation

The research approach to election observation undertaken by ANU, through DPA, is deliberately different from those typically adopted by international election observation missions. The latter tend to be limited to election day and the immediate pre-polling and post-polling periods, are narrow in their geographic scope and are designed to provide a formal assessment of the integrity of the election. They are often published soon after an election as a formal assessment of electoral credibility based on international standards. By contrast, DPA's approach is not designed to provide a formal assessment or offer explicit judgement on the credibility of elections. Instead, this observation exercise is principally aimed at supporting long-term research on elections and electoral politics in Solomon Islands and supporting electoral policy development in the broader Pacific region. The ANU observation also involved a significantly larger research team that conducted observations in a range of constituencies over the course of three weeks.

The 2019 Solomon Islands Election Observation Mission was the second of its kind led by DPA in Solomon Islands and the sixth in the Pacific region. In 2014, DPA's observations covered 12 constituencies. For the 2019 Election Observation Mission, DPA extended the scope of its observation research to cover 15 constituencies. The election observation was conducted in six of Solomon Islands' nine provinces — Western, Isabel, Central, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Makira — as well as in the national capital, Honiara. Figure 1.1 shows a map of Solomon Islands highlighting the 15 sampled constituencies. Our increased sample meant observation teams were deployed to around one in three constituencies and spread across the country to ensure findings reflected the significant diversity found across Solomon Islands.

Constituencies were sampled purposefully, not randomly, in consultation with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Therefore, data from the sampled constituencies will not necessarily produce nationally representative results, regardless of whether survey weighting and/or clustering is incorporated.

Figure 1.1 Constituencies sampled across Solomon Islands



The selection of constituencies did, however, ensure a mix of rural and urban locations spread across the country. This allowed the research to capture regional variations found across Solomon Islands and make comparisons between urban and rural areas. Other factors involved in the selection included access to services, provincial location and relative disadvantage. Ten of the 12 constituencies sampled in 2014 were reselected with the intention of producing comparative data for assessing electoral trends.

The data collected provides rich insights into both electoral administration and electoral politics in Solomon Islands. Our findings on electoral administration pertain to issues of procedures, management and logistics as they relate to the running of the election. Electoral politics refers to the broader political environment and culture of campaigning, which impacts on the experiences of citizens and candidates.

1.3 Observation research design

DPA worked in collaboration with the Solomon Islands National University and a local recruitment firm to recruit 77 election observers (15 of which were in the role of team leader). The observation mission explicitly set out to build local capacity to observe, research and monitor elections by working with predominantly Solomon Islands researchers. These researchers also provided valuable knowledge about local conditions and context, and conducted citizen surveys in Pijin or local languages where appropriate. Observers were split into 15 teams and assigned one constituency per team. Teams comprised five or six Solomon Islands observers, including one experienced researcher acting as team leader. Most of the teams also included one researcher from the ANU. Prior to deployment to the constituencies, all observers took part in an extensive two or (in the case of team leaders) three-day training and accreditation program to ensure they fully understood their roles as observers and the broader data collection process Figure 1.5 (p. 9) shows the entire observation team after completing training prior to deployment.

Two main types of data were collected in this election observation research. Observers conducted citizen surveys of voters from each constituency who were asked to respond to a series of short answer and multiple-choice questions. Observers also formed and recorded their own judgements about events taking place before, on and after election day. Both research approaches are complementary in that they capture broad quantitative results on the conduct of the election while also documenting the qualitative experience of voters.

Citizen surveys

Observers were required to carry out two citizen surveys: one during the pre-polling period and the other in the post-polling period.[5] In total, observers surveyed 4867 citizens over a period of three weeks. The data taken from these surveys informs most of the quantitative findings of voter experiences reported on and discussed in this report.

Each observer team was asked to interview a total of 16 adult citizens at a number of selected polling station locations in the fortnight prior to polling, and another 16 citizens in the week after polling. Each survey comprised close to 50 single response or short-answer questions. These questions sought to assess key aspects of electoral administration and electoral politics, including voter registration and awareness, and voters' experiences on polling day. Participation by voters in the citizen surveys was entirely voluntary and data was collected in a confidential and anonymous manner. The citizen survey data has been disaggregated by sex, age and constituency. See Table 1.1 (p. 4) for details.

The number of citizen surveys undertaken varied between constituencies. The decision was based on ease of access to research sites within constituencies, which determined the number of polling stations that were sampled. For this purpose, constitencies grouped into three broad

5 The pre and post-polling surveys were not designed to produce longitudinal data. Different people were interviewed in the two phases.

Table 1.1 Number of citizen surveys administered

	Constituency	No. of polling stations/ research sites visited	No. of citizens surveyed						Total no. of citizens surveyed	Registered voters	Percentage of voting population surveyed
			Pre-polling citizen survey			Post-polling citizen survey					
			Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total			
Urban	Central Guadalcanal	12	101	91	192	100	92	192	384	8,150	4.70%
	Central Honiara	12	96	95	191	97	96	193	384	15,986	2.40%
	East Honiara	12	98	99	197	99	91	190	387	15,445	2.50%
	West Honiara	12	97	97	194	96	96	192	386	10,477	3.70%
Mixed	Central Makira	10	79	80	159	72	87	159	318	6,299	5.00%
	Gizo/Kolombangara	10	82	81	163	81	83	164	327	10,527	3.10%
	Maringe/Kokota	10	86	76	162	82	78	160	322	5,893	5.50%
	North Vella La Vella	10	79	82	161	80	80	160	321	4,606	7.00%
	Russells/Savo	10	81	80	161	80	80	160	321	7,098	4.50%
	Aoke/Langalanga	10	81	80	161	79	81	160	321	8,841	3.60%
Rural	East Guadalcanal	8	87	96	183	75	98	173	356	6,640	5.40%
	Gao/Bugotu	8	62	67	129	62	62	124	253	5,543	4.60%
	Lau/Mbaelelea	8	68	69	137	66	68	134	271	10,995	2.50%
	North West Choiseul	8	64	64	128	64	65	129	257	6,816	3.80%
	Small Malaita	8	64	67	131	64	64	128	259	8,053	3.20%
	Total	148	1,225	1,224	2,449	1,197	1,221	2,418	4,867	13,1369	3.70%

categories.[6] In 'urban' constituencies, 12 polling station locations were sampled. In what we have labeled 'mixed' constituencies — which were generally typical of Solomon Islands constituencies — 10 polling station locations were sampled. For constituencies that were more difficult to access, eight polling station locations were selected (labelled 'rural'). During the sampling process, polling stations were stratified by ward to achieve an even spread of research sites across each constituency. All observer teams travelled to their sampled polling stations during pre-polling observations to conduct citizen surveys. They returned to these locations for polling day observations (as far as was possible given there were more polling stations sampled than observers within teams) and conducted post-polling surveys at the same locations as the pre-polling surveys.

Polling stations were selected in a way that gave each individual voter in a surveyed constituency an equal chance of being selected to participate in the research. We used electoral roll data to determine the number of voters registered to each polling station. Polling stations were then randomly selected after accounting for the differences in population size. This form of random selection has produced data that is statistically representative at the constituency level. Figures 1.2 to 1.4 (pp. 6–7) provide examples of the spread of sampled polling stations in three sampled constituencies. They not only represent an even spread of the population but also show a reasonable geographic distribution across the constituencies because they were stratified by ward areas.

After our observers arrived at sampled polling stations, we randomly selected citizens to participate in the research. Only those eligible to vote at the sampled polling station were selected. Observers also ensured they interviewed an even distribution of men and women. Participation rates were very high as there were only a few instances where citizens did not agree to be interviewed when selected. Table 1.1 (p. 4) provides an overview of the citizen survey data collected across constituencies both before and after the election. Due to the way research sites (polling stations) and participants (voters) were selected, no changes to the data in terms of weighting were required in order to report on the results at the constituency level.

Where relationships between two or more questions appeared meaningful, an exploratory logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the statistical significance of these relationships. The analysis was carried out using

6 These are not official or recognised categories but represent a system of classification used by the research team to estimate the ease of travelling to research sites (polling stations) within constituencies.

IBM SPSS Statistics and allowed for clustering in the survey design within the designated constituencies. Since the sampled constituencies were chosen largely on the basis of the 2014 observation mission and not randomly selected, the regression analysis could only be carried out at the constituency level rather than the national level. The logistic regression analyses presented in this report are a preliminary exploration of some of our key findings. Further and more detailed statistical analysis would be required to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the statistical significance of other relationships found within the full data set. Details of the regression analysis are presented in the report where relevant.

Figure 1.2 depicts the polling stations that were selected for sampling in the 'rural' constituency of Gao/Bugotu. The sampled polling stations are shown in purple while the remaining polling stations are shown in black. Since travel was more difficult in this rural constituency, eight of the 19 polling stations were sampled to conduct citizen surveys and other observations. The sampled polling stations cover each of the four wards in the constituency.

Figure 1.3 shows the result of the same sampling process in the constituency of Gizo/Kolombangara, which we classified as a 'mixed' constituency. Since polling stations in this constituency were more easily accessible, 10 polling stations, of a total 15, were randomly selected for sampling. Again, the polling stations cover each of the wards in the constituency as well as the island of Gizo, which incorporates Gizo town, and Kolombangara, a more rural location. The wide spread of polling stations sampled captures the significant diversity of this constituency.

Figure 1.4 shows the results of the polling station sampling for one of the three Honiara constituencies, West Honiara. In the Honiara constituencies, most polling locations were split to accommodate multiple polling stations. Since access to polling stations was much easier in this urban setting, 12 of the 26 polling stations were selected for sampling. They are depicted in purple on the map. The sampled polling stations cover each of the three wards.

Figure 1.2 Polling stations sampled in Gao/Bugotu constituency

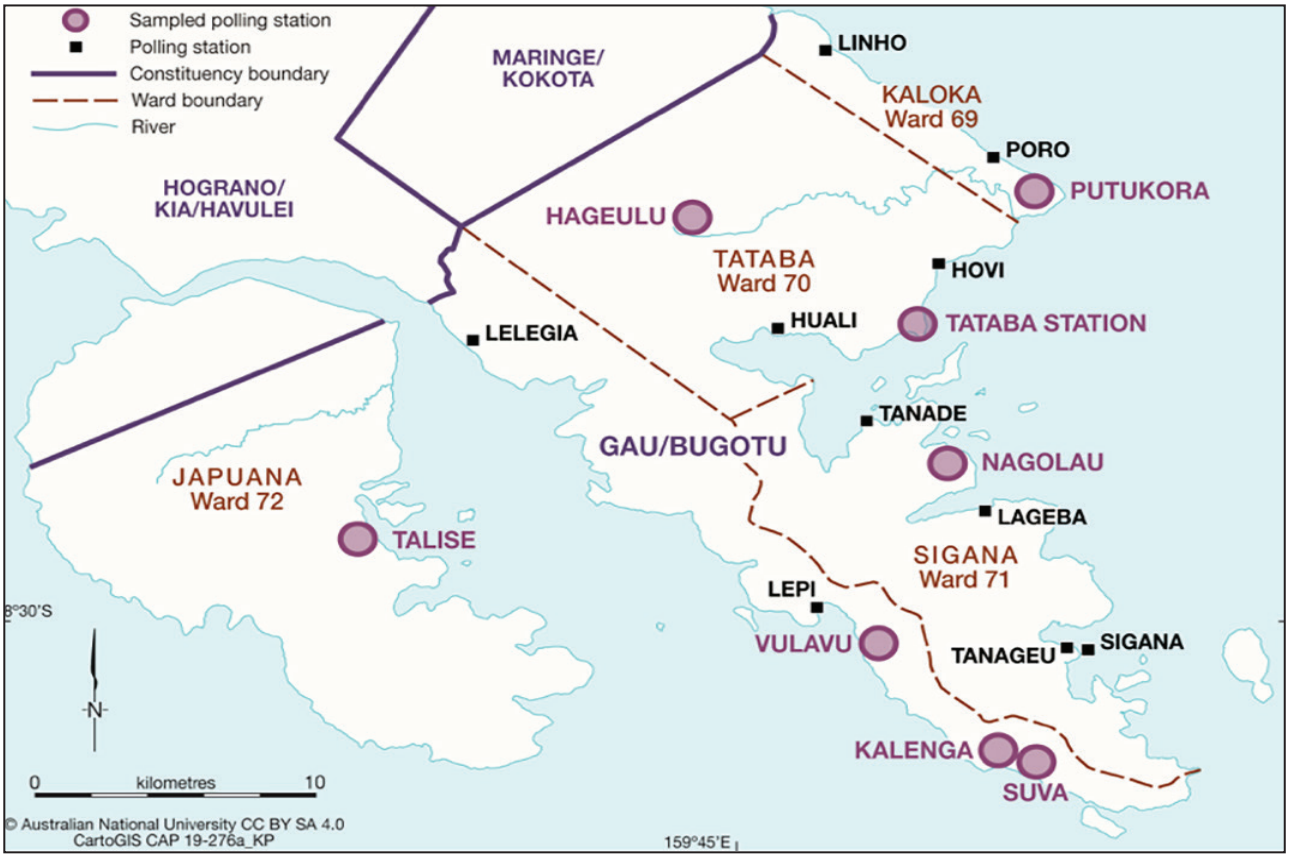


Figure 1.3 Polling stations sampled in Gizo/Kolombangara constituency

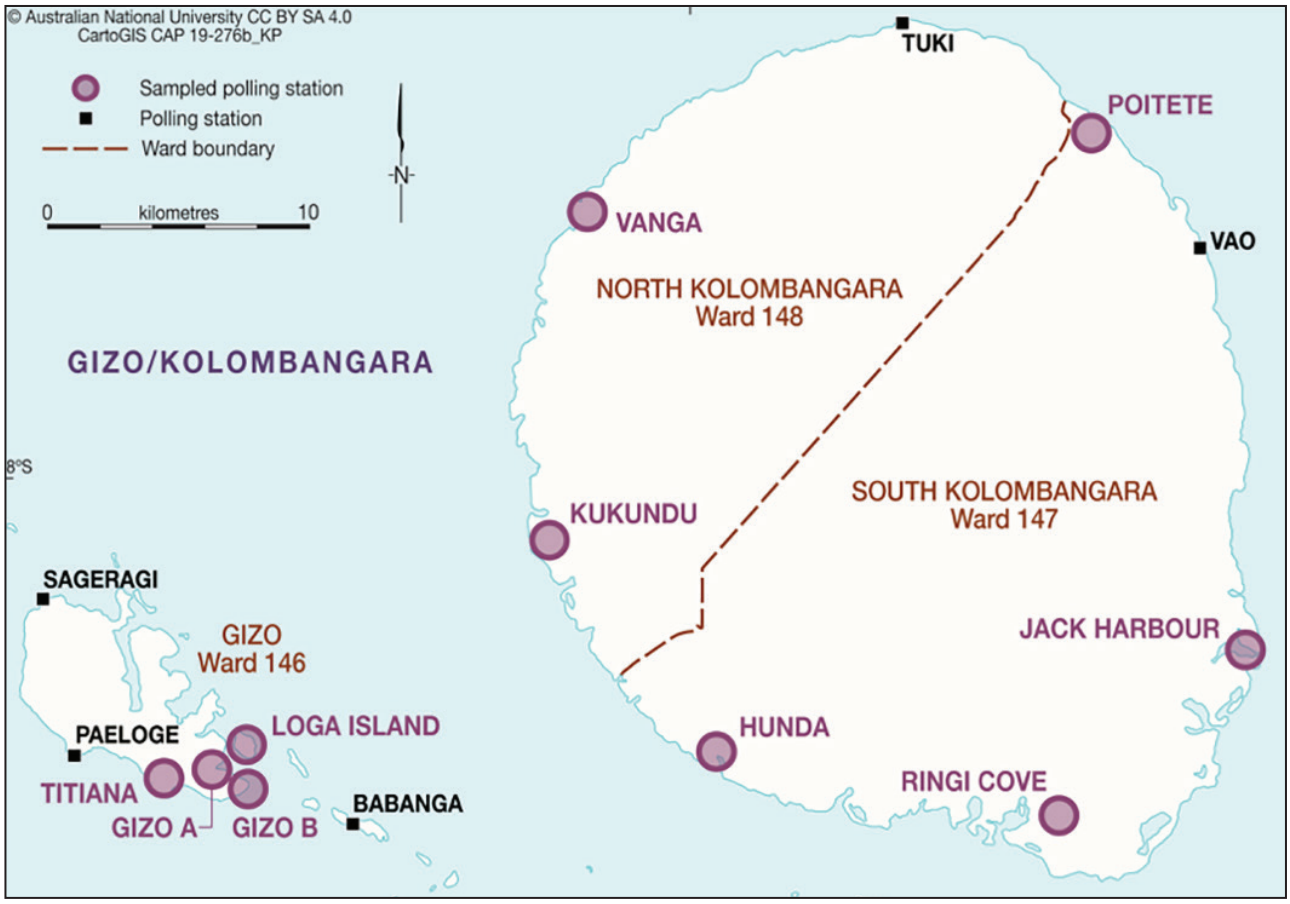
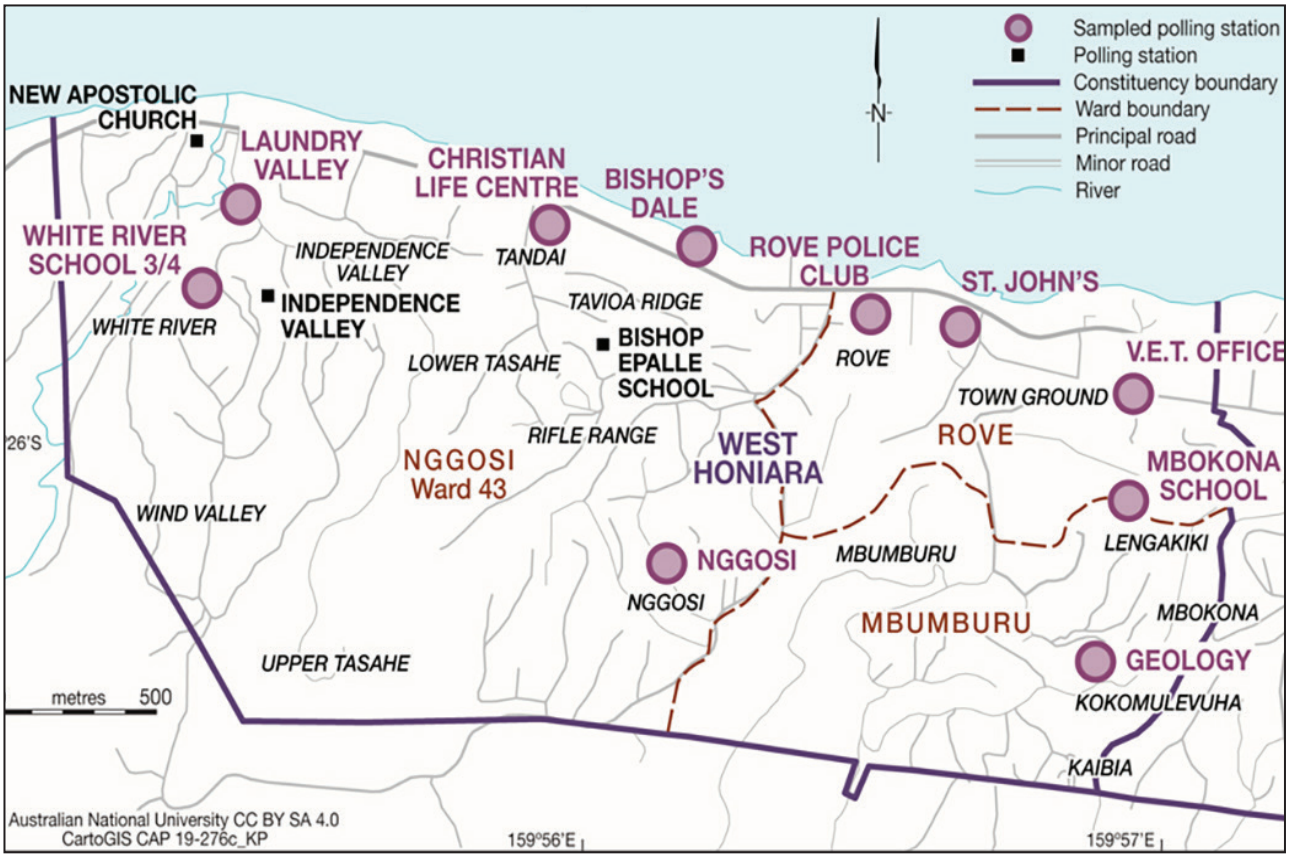


Figure 1.4 Polling stations sampled in West Honiara constituency



Observational surveys

Observations on the conduct of the election were a critical part of the data collected for this research. In many instances, observers were in the best position to make informed judgements about electoral processes and procedures taking place that may not have been apparent to citizens surveyed. Observer teams conducted extensive fieldwork to make informed judgements and assessments of the elections. This included direct personal observations at public election rallies and other events during the campaign period, at polling stations on polling day and in the counting rooms. General observations were also made about preparations for the election, the announcement of results and assessments of the security environment in the lead up to, during and after the election. These observations were recorded in a tailor-made observer journal developed by DPA to ensure observers responded to a consistent set of questions. The journal was split into sections of closed and open-ended questions that corresponded with the different periods of the election. Table 1.2 provides an overview of these surveys.

One observer from each constituency also prepared a constituency report in which they freely recorded their observations with minimal guidance. These constituency reports allowed observers to report on research findings in more detail, record specific events or incidents they witnessed and outline any ideas or concerns they saw emerging from their conversations with a wide range of citizens in the community. These reports drew on the researchers' own observations as well as unstructured interviews with community leaders, teachers and health workers, electoral staff, candidates and their support staff and ordinary voters. These reports, as well as the observational surveys, were used together with citizen surveys to provide a more detailed understanding of the findings. They also highlighted important issues that were not covered by the citizen surveys.[7]

1.4 Structure of the report

The research findings and analysis presented in this report cover the pre-polling period, candidates and campaigning, election day and the post-polling period. The report is divided into seven sections. The data is presented in a chronological order, as it was collected, which reflects the election period.

Section two of the report presents findings from the data collected during the pre-polling period. These results cover issues surrounding the voter registration process, cross-border registrations, voter awareness and education and security arrangements. Section three covers candidates and campaigning, beginning with the nomination period and campaign strategies. It discusses the role of political parties and other forms of influence before addressing women's political participation. Finally, this section presents findings on the role of money politics and the influence of CDFs on electoral politics. Section four then considers voters' experiences on election day. It provides results on voter expectations and the factors that influence how they vote, as well as a comprehensive analysis of electoral administration on polling day.

7 To emphasise the voices of Solomon Islands citizens and our observers, direct quotes from surveys and observer reports are highlighted in blue throughout the report.

Table 1.2 Observer surveys collected

Observational surveys collected (number of entries)	
Campaign period	73
Candidate rallies	143
Pre-polling election preparation	76
Polling day	145
Post polling	73
Counting	34
Disputes	34
Total	**578**

Figure 1.5 2019 Solomon Islands election observers prior to deployment

In section five, the report examines the data collected by observers after the election. Assessments of the general management of the post-polling period are detailed, followed by an analysis of the reforms to the counting process. The conclusion considers the research as a whole, especially how it relates to electoral administration and politics in Solomon Islands.


2019 ELECTION
VOTE
WED 3RD APRIL
Symbol
Hilux
JOHN
Moffat
FUGUI
CENTRAL HONIARA CONSTITUENCY –
"The Heart of the Nation"
"A STRONG Solomon Islands Needs a STRONG LEADER!"
Proverbs 14:34
"Righteousness Exalts a Nation"

2 – PRE-POLLING

The analysis in this section draws mainly on the findings from the pre-polling citizen survey of 2,449 voters as well as observations and informal interviews conducted during the week leading up to the election. Citizens were asked about their experiences with the registration process, which included the roll update and the omissions and objections period, as well as their perceptions of roll accuracy. The registration process was generally well managed, though our research suggests that a number of factors affected the accuracy of the roll to various degrees. The major area of concern regarding the electoral roll, and perhaps the major issue arising from the 2019 election in general, was the high number of cross-border registrations. This was not seen as a prominent issue in 2014, however in 2019, many voters appeared to be consciously selecting their place of registration in order to maximise their chances of obtaining benefits from winning candidates. This has follow-on implications for the public's confidence in the accuracy of the electoral roll.

Survey and observational data collected by our observers also examined the various voter education and awareness initiatives put in place by SIEC in the lead up to the election. Although other civil society groups conducted similar awareness programs, our research focused on official SIEC activities such as posters, newspaper and radio campaigns and face-to-face voter education sessions as well as investigating voters' general levels of awareness of and engagement with the national election. The research points to a fairly high level of voter awareness, though the challenges of a large rural population, often with low levels of access to formal education, suggest that more face-to-face voter awareness would be beneficial. Observations by the ANU team indicate that the pre-polling period was essentially free of violence and tension in the 15 constituencies visited by observers. Voters generally felt free to move around and participate in election-related events, and the only instances of violence witnessed or recounted to observers were relatively minor and did not reflect any widespread or systematic concerns about election-related tensions.

This section begins by presenting citizen survey and observational data on voters' experiences

of the registration process and the omissions and objections period. It then outlines citizens' perceptions of the accuracy of the roll and discusses the issue of cross-border registration. Finally, we present our findings on how citizens engaged with SIEC's voter education initiatives before discussing security arrangements and election-related tension in the pre-polling period.

2.1 The registration process

An up-to-date and accurate record of all registered voters (the electoral roll) is an integral part of well-run elections. It assures citizens of the integrity of the electoral process, forms the basis of all other election-related administration and reduces opportunities for electoral fraud. In previous elections in Solomon Islands, however, maintaining the integrity of the electoral roll was a significant administrative challenge. After accusations that the 2010 roll was significantly inflated, SIEC initiated a nation-wide re-registration exercise before the 2014 national election using a biometric voter registration system. This new roll reduced the number of registered voters from 448,149 on the 2010 roll to just 287,567. According to the 2014 ANU election observation team, the improvement 'was well received, enjoys popular support and has raised confidence in the integrity of the electoral process' (Haley et al. 2015:17).

To build on this previous success, prior to the 2019 election, SIEC ran a biometric voter registration update from 3–27 September 2018. This gave citizens the opportunity to register for the first time or update their enrolment details. Voter registration centres (VRCs) were set-up in numerous locations throughout every constituency and were each operational for a period of several days during the registration period. In 2018, voters in Honiara were able to register in a constituency without having to travel there in person.

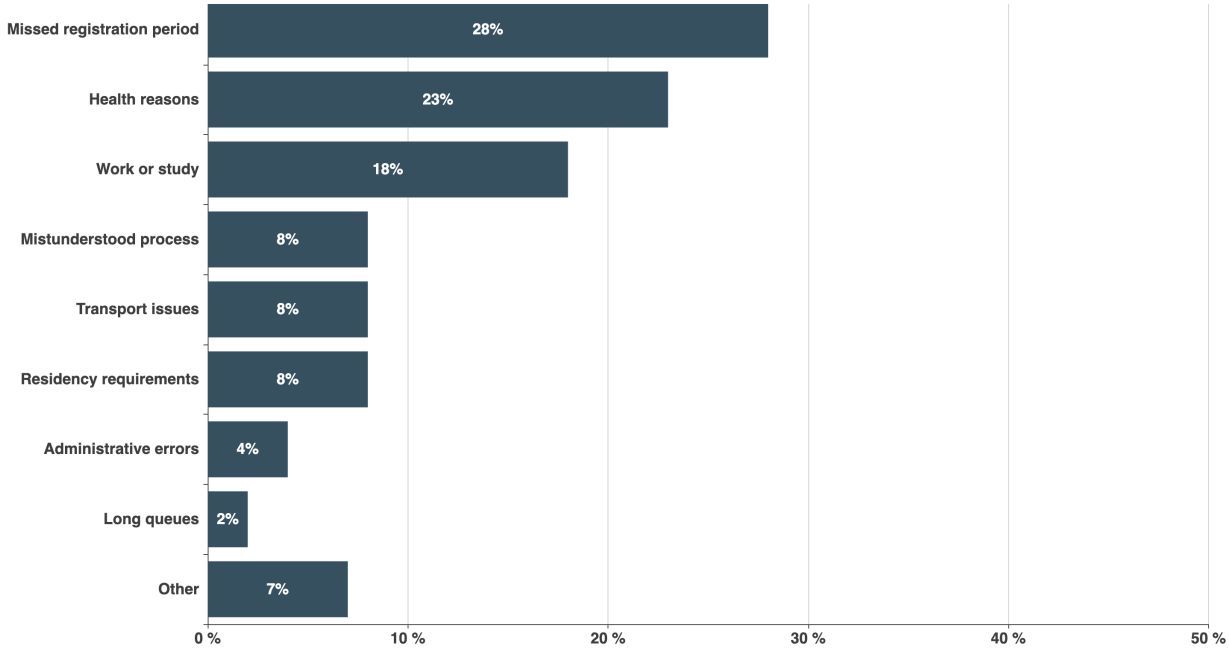
The registration period was followed by an omissions and objections period, which aimed to improve social accountability by giving citizens an opportunity to verify or challenge the accuracy of the roll in particular locations. While the overall inflated size of the roll may have been a major concern in the past, in 2019 the practice of voters registering in constituencies where they were not from, or not a resident of (see discussion of cross-border registration in section 2.2), emerged as the most significant issue surrounding the registration process.

Citizen surveys asked voters to comment on their own experience and that of others in their community regarding the registration process. When asked whether they personally knew anyone who was unable to register, one quarter of those surveyed answered 'yes'. Many respondents (28 per cent) suggested that accessing the voter registration centres during the allocated time period was a challenge, particularly for those who were studying, working or living far from a registration centre (Figure 2.1, p. 13). Respondents also suggested that people with a disability, the elderly (23 per cent) or those who simply could not afford the associated transport costs (eight per cent) were unable to register due to the amount of travel required. Illiteracy, shyness or a lack of understanding about the registration process (eight per cent) were also identified as barriers to registration. Particularly in the more populated, urban areas, long queue times were a deterrent or source of frustration for voters who were sometimes forced to wait hours in order to register (see Figure 2.2, p. 13).

The omissions and objections period gave voters from 7 to 28 November 2018 to scrutinise the preliminary 2019 roll and register a formal objection against names they believed did not belong on the roll or names that were omitted for the polling station in question. Names of registered voters with objections against them were then published in newspapers and on community notice boards. People whose names appeared on these lists were then required to attend 'a public inquiry to defend or present [their] case' (Solomon Star 2018b). These inquiries were held between 5 and 23 December 2018. SIEC received over 13,000 objection petitions during the objections period (Bau 2018).

Overall, the objections process was a valuable and welcome system for engaging communities in accountability processes, though one observer in Gizo/Kolombangara noted that **'some of**

Figure 2.1 Perceived reasons why people were unable to register to vote



(n=400)

the objectors felt vulnerable in the aftermath of the process' due to the public nature of the objection inquiries. This was no doubt compounded by the fact that a prominent candidate in the constituency turned discrepancies in the roll into a campaign issue. According to one observer, this candidate's campaign team **'engaged in a concerted effort to identify non-resident registered voters during the objection period'**. Others questioned the ability of SIEC to accurately carry out the challenging administrative task of updating the roll after objections had been settled. One citizen believed the roll at their polling station was inaccurate because, **'during objections our eight people presented their case and passed'**. This meant that after the objections process, these voters were eligible to remain on the roll. When the roll was officially updated, however, their names were no longer on the roll. In a similar instance, it was noted that **'previously registered voters were unable to vote because their names were omitted from the final list, even though their names had not been removed during the objections period'**. To avoid these mistakes, several observers commented that the omissions and objections period could be improved by extending the timeframe for registering and responding to objections.

Figure 2.2 Facebook post regarding the registration process

During the 2014 election, many voters experienced frustration and confusion when it came to locating the correct polling station on election day. According to the ANU observation team, particularly in Honiara:

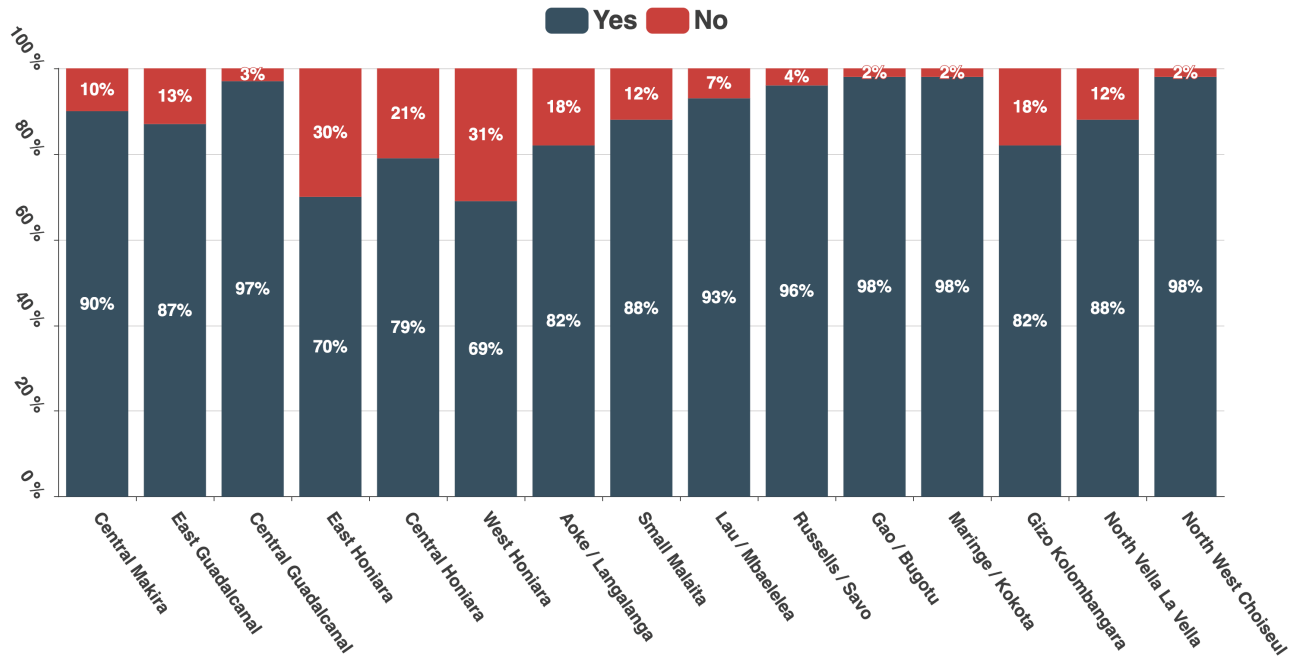
> ***the disenfranchisement of voters proved an issue and stemmed from voters appearing on the electoral roll for polling stations other than those at which they had registered (Haley et al. 2014:5).***

While it was unclear whether this was due to confusion on the part of voters or administrative errors with the roll, making information about where voters are registered clear and accessible before the election is valuable in both cases. In 2019, almost all citizens surveyed in the week leading up to the election (96 per cent) claimed they knew where to vote on election day. Similarly, 87 per cent said they had checked their names at a VRC in person to confirm this information. This finding indicates that public awareness raising by SIEC on the importance of citizens checking their registration generally achieved its purpose.

Figure 2.3 shows some variation between constituencies in terms of voters checking their registration details. In urban constituencies, particularly Central, West and East Honiara, voters were less likely to check their name at a VRC than in the rural constituencies that were sampled. Men and women attended VRCs in roughly equal numbers to check their registration details.

Our findings also reveal that, overall, 11 per cent of citizens surveyed had checked their registration online, though this was just as common for voters registered in rural constituencies as for voters registered in urban constituencies. This means that the large majority of voters physically went to a VRC to find out if they were registered to vote as opposed to checking the SIEC website or using the text message service. Even so, the fact that 11 per cent of respondents used mobile phones or other devices to check their registration suggests that using this kind of technology to facilitate the registration process is valuable and could be expanded in the future.

Figure 2.3 Citizens who checked their name at a voter registration centre (by constituency)



2.2 Cross-border registration

Prior to the 2019 election, changes to the Electoral Act sought to clarify eligibility requirements for voter registration with respect to residency. Ambiguities surrounding these requirements appears to have fostered a practice known as 'cross-border registration', whereby voters register in constituencies other than where they live. Solomon Islands' constitution (Section 55(2)(b), as amended in 2018) states that 'no person shall be entitled to be registered as an elector in any constituency in which he is not ordinarily resident as prescribed by Parliament'. Section 4 (paragraphs 1 and 2) of the Electoral Act 2018 defines 'ordinarily resident' as follows:

> ***1. For Section 55(2)(b) of the constitution, a person is 'ordinarily resident' in a constituency if:***
> ***(a). the person has been continuously residing in the constituency for at least six months; or***
> ***(b). the person is taken to have been residing in the constituency under subsection (2).***
> ***2. A person is taken to have been residing in a constituency even if the person is not residing in the constituency if the person is entitled to be or is a member of a group, tribe or line indigenous to the constituency.***

It is clear that Section 4(2) provides individual voters with a wide scope for determining where they are enrolled, notwithstanding what might be considered the everyday meaning of the words 'ordinarily resident'. For voters, the Act legitimises a choice between registering in their 'home village' or in their current place of residence, where this is a different location. In Solomon Islands, this is complicated by the strong ties that most citizens have to places associated with their ancestral lineage. Equally, for prospective candidates, the Act would appear to legitimise activities aimed at encouraging or facilitating voters to switch registration to a different constituency in which they have a link to 'a group, tribe or line'. This has resulted in the so-called phenomenon of 'cross-border registration', which can refer to both legal and illegal instances of voters changing their place of registration for these reasons.

This issue was prominent in public discussion prior to the election, with numerous reports in the media (Solomon Star 2018c), as well as from observers, of citizens being encouraged, and facilitated, by candidates to change their registration to a new constituency in order to maximise support at the ballot box. ANU observers noted that there was significant concern among citizens over the issue of cross-border registration and in many places it was a key campaign issue.

The level of cross-border registration in the lead up to the 2019 election was significant and, in some cases, abnormally high. At the close of the registration period, SIEC announced that it had received 54,000 applications (15 per cent of all registered voters) to transfer registration to another constituency (Solomon Star 2018a).

It is likely that many of these registrations were illegitimate. SIEC stated that it had identified 100 cases of electoral fraud amongst the voter transfers. This included one case where a voter had tried to register in 10 different constituencies (Solomon Star 2018a). Because of difficulties proving residency in Solomon Islands, identified cases of fraud almost certainly understated the issue by a significant degree. The extent of cross-border registration appears to have varied widely between constituencies (see the following, including Table 2.1, pp. 16–17).

Information collected by ANU observers indicates that instances of both facilitated and self-initiated cross-border registration (including possibly illegitimate cross-border registration under both categories) may have been fairly widespread. For example, around one in six people who were surveyed prior to the election said that someone had asked them to register in a different constituency. There was some difference between genders, as 20 per cent of men claimed to have been asked to re-register compared to only 14 per cent of women. Strikingly, in Honiara, when East, West and Central Honiara constituencies are considered as a whole, the result was double the overall figure, or around one in three of those surveyed (Figure 2.4, p. 18). In contrast, only three per cent of citizens surveyed in Central Makira claimed to have been asked to register in a different constituency.

Table 2.1 Number of registered voters by constituency (sampled constituencies highlighted)

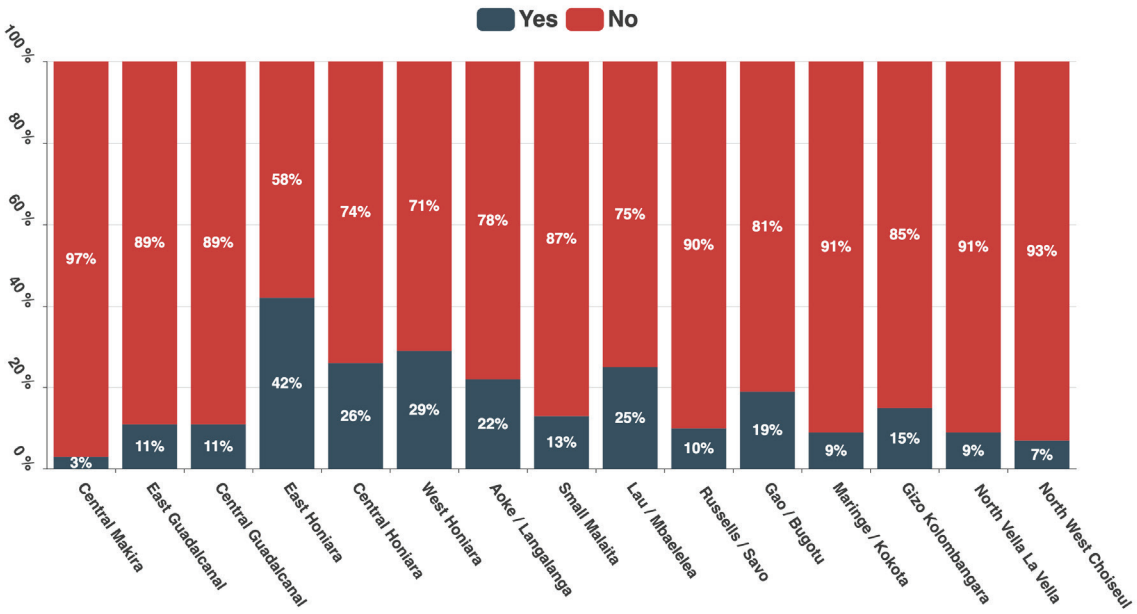
Constituency	2014 Registered voters	2014 Votes cast	2019 Registered voters	2019 Votes cast	Participation rate*	Registration % increase (2014 to 2019)	Votes cast % increase (2014 to 2019)
Central Province							
Nggela	9,025	8,495	10,322	9,651	93%	14%	14%
Russells/Savo	6,522	6,045	7,098	6,342	89%	9%	5%
Total	15,547	14,540	17,420	15,993	92%	12%	10%
Choiseul Province							
East Choiseul	3,074	2,530	3,802	3,138	82%	24%	24%
North West Choiseul	5,404	4,685	6,816	5,748	84%	26%	23%
South Choiseul	5,346	4,419	6,575	5,241	80%	23%	19%
Total	13,824	11,634	17,193	14,127	82%	24%	21%
Guadalcanal Province							
Central Guadalcanal	5,156	4,898	8,150	7,549	93%	58%	54%
East Central Guadalcanal	5,988	5,595	6,953	6,345	91%	16%	13%
East Guadalcanal	6,124	5,632	6,640	5,874	88%	8%	4%
North East Guadalcanal	4,937	4,662	5,168	4,761	92%	5%	2%
North Guadalcanal	4,748	4,435	6,150	5,636	92%	30%	27%
North West Guadalcanal	5,492	5,149	6,565	5,800	88%	20%	13%
South Guadalcanal	5,073	4,788	7,129	6,495	91%	41%	36%
West Guadalcanal	5,121	4,903	7,359	7,051	96%	44%	44%
Total	42,639	40,062	54,114	49,511	91%	27%	24%
Honiara City Council							
Central Honiara	13,529	11,586	15,986	11,966	75%	18%	3%
East Honiara	10,470	8,884	15,445	11,925	77%	48%	34%
West Honiara	5,735	5,098	10,477	8,598	82%	83%	69%
Total	29,734	25,568	41,908	32,489	77%	41%	27%
Isabel Province							
Gao/Bugotu	5,346	4,875	5,543	4,844	87%	4%	-1%
Hograno/Kia/Havulei	6,033	5,558	6,910	6,218	90%	15%	12%
Maringe/Kokota	4,947	4,497	5,893	5,345	91%	19%	19%
Total	16,326	14,930	18,346	16,407	89%	12%	10%
Makira Ulawa Province							
Central Makira	4,226	3,737	6,299	5,417	86%	49%	45%
East Makira	7,426	6,823	8,453	7,330	87%	14%	7%
Ulawa/Ugi	3,753	3,345	4,033	3,407	84%	7%	2%
West Makira	5,787	5,206	7,140	6,107	85%	23%	17%
Total	21,192	19,111	25,925	22,261	86%	22%	16%
Malaita Province							

Continued Table 2.1 Number of registered voters by constituency (sampled constituencies highlighted)

Constituency	2014 Regis-tered voters	2014 Votes cast	2019 Registered voters	2019 Votes cast	Participa-tion rate*	Registra-tion % increase (2014 to 2019)	Votes cast % increase (2014 to 2019)
Aoke/Langalanga	7,016	6,582	8,841	7,923	90%	26%	20%
Baegu/Asifola	6,019	5,373	10,943	9,587	88%	82%	78%
Central Kwara'ae	6,590	6,035	8,458	7,538	89%	28%	25%
East Are' Are	4,932	4,576	7,582	6,983	92%	54%	53%
East Kwaio	6,615	5,871	7,536	6,445	85%	14%	10%
East Malaita	5,377	4,812	6,121	5,274	86%	14%	10%
Fataleka	4,587	4,267	7,139	6,398	90%	56%	50%
Lau/Mbaelelea	10,599	9,561	10,955	9,627	88%	3%	1%
Malaita Outer Islands	2,558	2,328	3,142	2,777	88%	23%	19%
North Malaita	5,841	5,265	8,052	6,946	86%	38%	32%
Small Malaita	8,522	7,523	8,053	6,862	85%	-6%	-9%
West Are' Are	4,931	4,597	6,304	5,779	92%	28%	26%
West Kwaio	5,449	5,061	6,234	5,564	89%	14%	10%
West Kwara'ae	8,189	7,665	9,674	8,584	89%	18%	12%
Total	87,225	79,516	10,9034	96,287	88%	25%	21%
Rennell/Bellona Province							
Rennell/Bellona	2,765	2,257	3,563	3,025	85%	29%	34%
Total	2,765	2,257	3563	3,025	85%	29%	34%
Temotu Province							
Temotu Nende	5,981	5,264	6,239	4,936	79%	4%	-6%
Temotu Pele	3,788	3,254	5,061	3,911	77%	34%	20%
Temotu Vatud	2,993	2,644	3,565	2,854	80%	19%	8%
Total	12,762	11,162	14,865	11,701	79%	16%	5%
Western Province							
Gizo/Kolombangara	6,391	5,362	10,527	8,532	81%	65%	59%
Marovo	6,759	5,956	10,555	9,487	90%	56%	59%
North New Georgia	3,188	2,947	3,975	3,549	89%	25%	20%
North Vella La Vella	3,840	3,547	4,606	4,085	89%	20%	15%
Ranongga/Simbo	5,273	4,549	5,557	4,581	82%	5%	1%
Shortland	2,512	2,001	3,293	2,925	89%	31%	46%
South New Georgia/ Rendova/Tetepari	4,650	4,135	4,274	3,594	84%	-8%	-13%
South Vella La Vella	4,995	4,661	5,985	5,302	89%	20%	14%
West New Georgia /Vona Vona	7,940	6,661	8,383	6,774	81%	6%	2%
Total	45,548	39,819	57,155	48,829	85%	25%	23%
Overall total	287,562	258,599	359,523	310,630	86%	25%	20%

*Proportion of votes cast against registered voters (not voting age population).

Figure 2.4 Citizens who were asked to register in another constituency (by constituency)



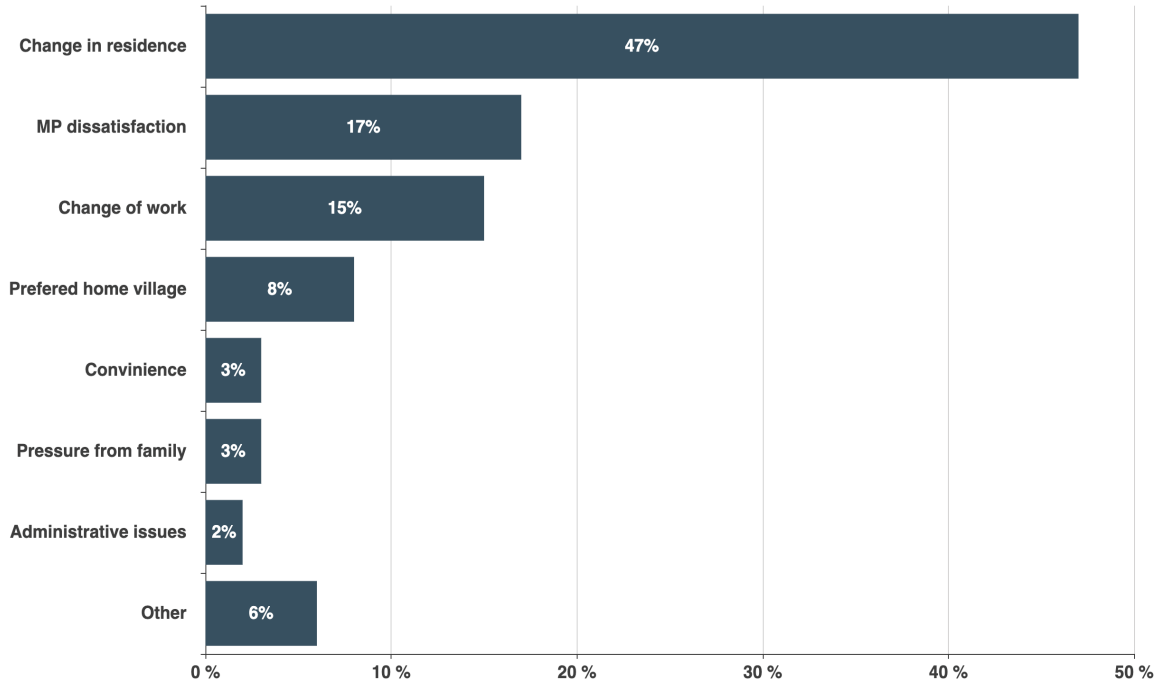
The data indicates that the factors influencing cross-border registration were varied and stronger in some constituencies than others.

It was clear that some candidates were actively encouraging cross-border registrations. For instance, observers in several constituencies noted that particular candidates with the financial means were sponsoring ferry travel from Honiara to their constituency in an effort to attract more voters. Candidates have facilitated the movement of voters in previous elections, however it became a prominent issue in 2019 because some candidates were extending this offer to voters from other constituencies. ANU observers also reported that many respondents were reluctant to answer questions about cross-border registration for fear of incriminating themselves or members of their community. This implies that the amount of cross-border registrations occurring for illegitimate reasons could be higher than the numbers recorded by the citizen survey.

Respondents who said they had tried to change their registration to another constituency were asked a follow up question allowing them to explain why they had done so. In response, they cited a range of factors (Figure 2.5, p. 19), including simple convenience, a shift in place of residence or work and the influence of family. Another common response was that citizens were eager to register in the constituency where they were most likely to receive benefits from the winning MP, even if this was not their constituency of residence (in the everyday sense of the word). Respondents often suggested, or made direct reference to, Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) in their explanations. One citizen said they attempted to change their registration **'because for the last 12 years I haven't received any single assistance'**. Another said they had sought to change constituencies because 'for two solid terms [she] hadn't received assistance on school fees from [the] former MP'. Yet another stated that there was **'no development in my constituency so I have attempted to move to another constituency'**.

Several of our observers noted this direct link between money politics, particularly CDF spending, and the increasing number of cross-border registrations. Citizens commonly believed that particular candidates were openly enticing voters to register in their constituencies (whether or not they were ordinarily resident) through offering gifts, cash and promises of direct CDF benefits such as school fees. In Gizo/Kolombangara, one candidate publicly expressed his suspicion and frustration that other candidates were engaging in this kind of behaviour, claiming, **'If people are coming from outside to vote, they must be getting rewarded.'** The observer also thought that the atmosphere in the lead

Figure 2.5 Reasons why voters changed their constituency of registration



(n=263)

up to polling day suggested that there was a far greater movement of people than in previous years, noting:

> ***People without any obvious connection to the constituency were present in town. On polling eve, a band playing at the market for a John Hopa campaign event opened with, 'Welcome to Gizo, everyone who has just arrived from Honiara.' Packed ships were passing through Gizo up to polling day with up to 1500 people on board, although many voters were passing through on their way to other locations in Western Province.***

In other cases, candidates' reputations as generous benefactors to their supporters attracted voters from other constituencies to change their registration. The voters who claimed to have changed their registration because they preferred or had connections to a candidate elsewhere (17 per cent of responses in Figure 2.5) may have done so after choosing between voting in their home constituency and their current constituency of residence (or even that of their spouse). In fact, eight per cent of citizens surveyed explicitly stated that this was the reason for the change. One voter residing in Honiara who changed back to their home constituency explained that they **'want[ed] to vote out in the province [where] it would be much easier to be recognised by the MP'**.

To further explain the relationship between voters seeking direct benefits from CDFs and cross-border registration, a form of statistical analysis called a main effects logistic regression was performed (see Tables 1a and 1b in Annex). A logistic regression tests a number of explanatory factors against a dependent variable (in this case, whether or not voters changed constituencies) to determine the statistical significance of each factor. If a factor is found to be statistically significant, it means there is a strong relationship between the way citizens answered those two questions. Questions and answers from the post-polling citizen surveys were used for this regression, which allowed us to determine the extent to which attitudes towards CDFs impacted citizens' decisions to change constituencies.

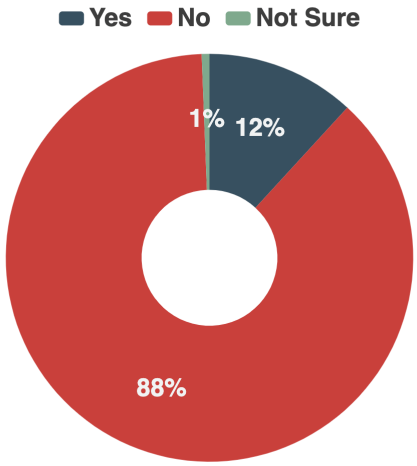
West Honiara was chosen as an example because of the high number of voters who changed their registration to this constituency. The question 'Did you change your voter registration before the election to this constituency?' from the West Honiara constituency data set was used as the dependent variable for this

regression analysis. We tested a number of models (sets of factors) and found that there is a statistically significant and important relationship among perceptions of CDF fairness, distribution and voters registering in another constituency. Voters whose households *had not* received CDF benefits, as well as those who thought CDFs were unfairly distributed in general, were more likely to change their registration to another constituency before the election. Of the people who reported to have changed constituency, 78 per cent had not received any CDF benefits and 96 per cent thought CDFs were unfairly distributed.

The results of this regression analysis show that missing out on the benefits of CDFs is likely to be one of the drivers of cross-border registration. It shows that voters who feel aggrieved from not receiving CDF benefits are more likely to have changed constituencies. This gives statistical weight to the commonly held assumption that voters are moving to other constituencies where they have been promised or hope to receive CDF support from particular candidates.

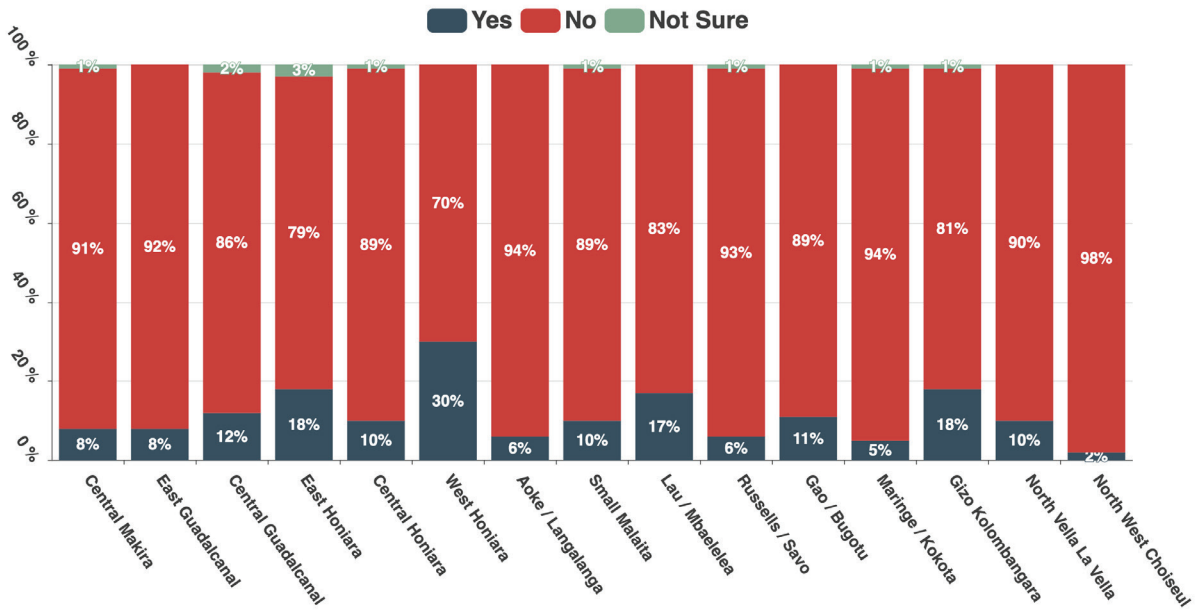
Citizens surveyed after the election were asked if they had changed their constituency of registration. Overall, 12 per cent said they had changed their registration (see Figure 2.6). This result is close to the actual number of applications SIEC received to change constituency, which amounted to 15 per cent of the entire

Figure 2.6 Citizens who changed registration to another constituency (all constituencies)



registered voting population. In West Honiara alone, 30 per cent of respondents surveyed admitted to changing their registration to West Honiara before the election. Both Gizo/Kolombangara and Lau/Mbaelelea constituencies also showed a high number of voters who had changed their registration ahead of the election (see Figure 2.7). Responses to this question did not vary significantly between genders, nor among age groups. This finding is consistent with observations recorded in several constituencies that families were discussing where each member should register in order to 'split' their vote and increase their chances of receiving benefits from an MP. One observer even heard of families encouraging their underage

Figure 2.7 Citizens who changed registration to another constituency (by constituency, surveyed post-election)



children to register so that various members of the family could vote in multiple constituencies. Overall, the extent of cross-border registration appears to have varied widely among constituencies, although further research would be required to identify why it was so high in particular locations. The data on the overall number of voters registered in each constituency, shown in Table 2.1 (pp. 16–17), also supports these findings from the citizen surveys. Only two constituencies showed a lower number of registered voters in 2019 compared to the 2014 election (Small Malaita and South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepari). Among the remaining 48 constituencies, there was a very wide range of increase in registrations, from a three per cent increase in Lau/Mbaelelea to an 83 per cent increase in West Honiara and an 82 per cent increase in Baegu/Asifola. The large variation in the increase of the roll for certain constituencies cannot be explained by natural population increases and is further evidence that changes to voters' places of registration before the 2019 election were widespread.

Citizens were also asked whether they knew anyone who was registered in their constituency even though that person lived in another location. Overall, 37 per cent of all respondents knew someone who had done this. Responses to this question for individual constituencies ranged from 15 per cent for Small Malaita to over half of people surveyed for Maringe/Kokota (Figure 2.8). It is notable that the three highest 'yes' responses were for constituencies ***outside*** Honiara Maringe/Kokota (56 per cent), North Vella La Vella (54 per cent) and Gizo/Kolombangara (51 per cent). Figures for the three Honiara constituencies were close to the overall average for all constituencies sampled.

In rural constituencies, many respondents claimed that voters who mostly lived and worked in Honiara (or other urban centres) had changed their registration back to their home constituency before the election. Even instances of legal cross-border registration were not always considered socially acceptable. Observers noted that many voters in rural constituencies questioned the genuineness of incoming voters' connection to the constituency and to the 'home village'.

Accuracy of the roll

Citizen surveys suggested that public confidence in the accuracy of the electoral roll was mixed. As shown in Figure 2.9 (p. 22), only 58 per cent per cent of those surveyed said they were confident in the accuracy of the register of voters, with 29 per cent saying they were not and 14 per cent unsure. In five constituencies, fewer than half of those surveyed were prepared to express confidence in the accuracy of the roll. Confidence in the electoral roll appears weakest in urban areas: Honiara overall 43 per cent, Aoke/Langalanga

Figure 2.8 Citizens who know of voters who registered in their constituency but live somewhere else (by constituency)

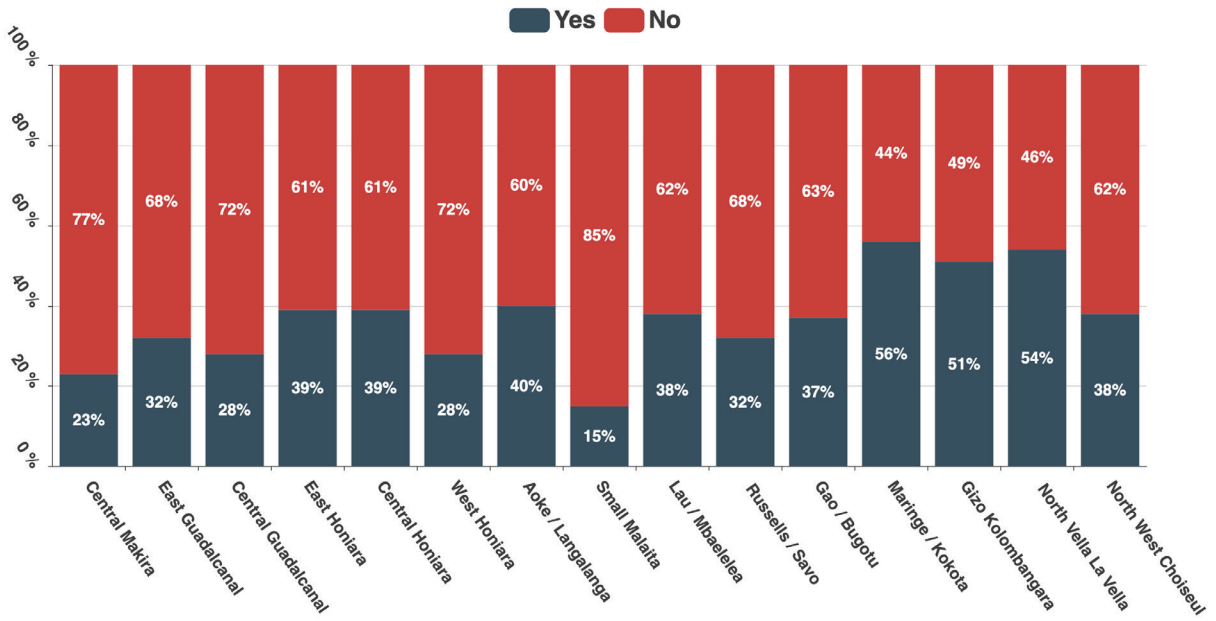
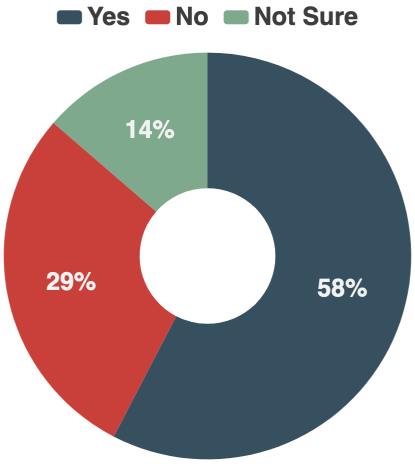


Figure 2.9 Citizens who thought the electoral roll in their constituency was accurate



51 per cent and Gizo/Kolombangara 48 per cent (see Figure 2.10). In rural areas, confidence in the register of voters was weakest in Russells/Savo (32 per) and Small Malaita (48 per cent). When asked to explain why they did not have confidence in the electoral roll, voters gave a range of answers (Figure 2.11, p. 23). A small proportion of voters (3 per cent) said the roll was incomplete because some people were unable to access registration due to living in a remote area, having limited mobility or being unable to leave work to register. A large number of citizens (15 per cent of those surveyed) also claimed that many deceased people's names had not been removed. For instance, one observer heard that:

A women tried to get her dead mother's name removed from the list but when she went to vote her name and not her mother's name had been taken off, so she wasn't able to vote.

Some citizens claimed that leaving deceased names on the roll created opportunities for others to vote in the deceased person's name. The second largest group of responses — comprising 27 per cent of answers — claimed that the large number of cross-border registrations gave them little faith in the accuracy of the roll. One respondent commented, **'The registration of voters who live in this village should only be for those who are in the village and not for those who live in town and other provinces.'** The most common response (45 per cent), however, was simply that there were names missing from the roll. Many respondents claimed there had been administrative errors, such as one voter who said, **'Some names were not on the list even though ID cards were issued to [these same] voters.'** Whether this was due to actual administrative errors or voters misunderstanding the registration process is difficult to discern. The suggestion made by some, however, that names appeared on the provisional roll later disappeared from the final roll despite no objections being raised, suggests that at least some degree of administrative error may have ocurred.

A certain amount of natural movement between constituencies is to be expected between

Figure 2.10 Citizens who thought the electoral roll in their constituency was accurate (by constituency)

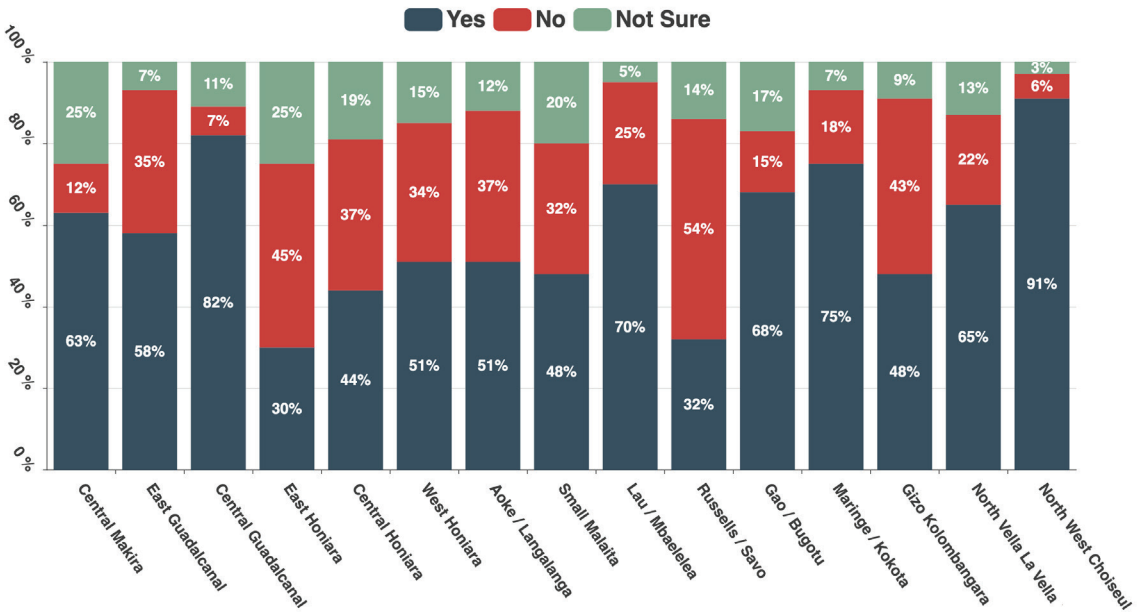
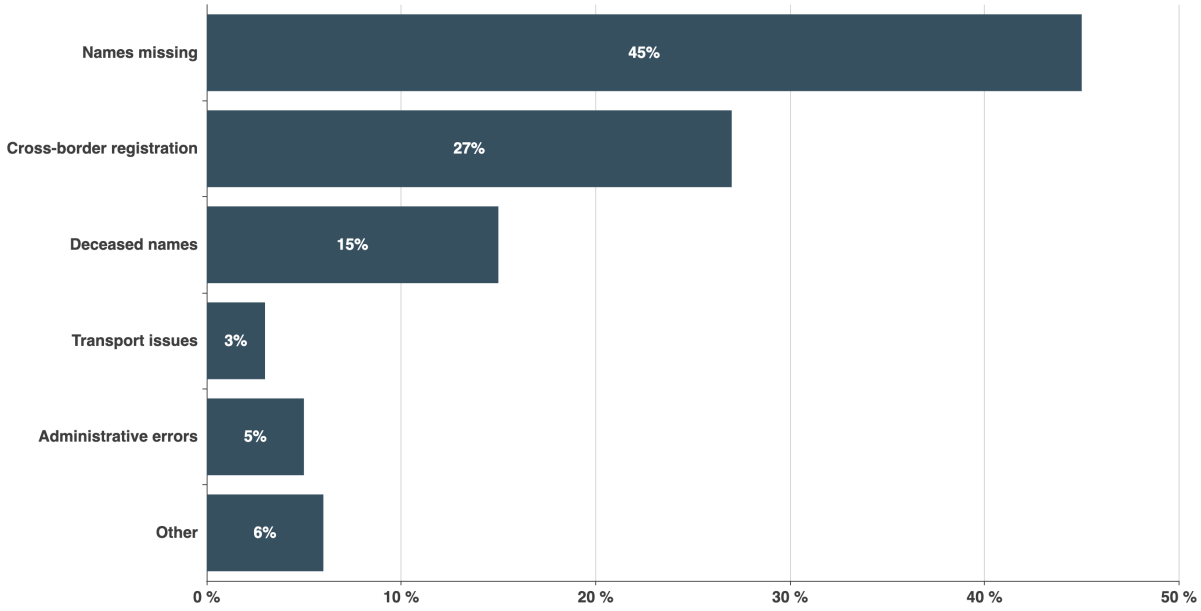


Figure 2.11 Reasons voters thought the electoral roll was inaccurate



(n=704)

elections. Even so, SIEC registration figures and the data collected by our observers suggest that other factors were at play. The findings presented in this section suggest that the 'commodification' of voters through cross-border registration has become a significant issue. This may be driven by candidates seeking to bolster their support base. At the same time however, our results show that many voters are willing and active participants in the process of using the registration process to seek benefits for themselves and their families.

2.3 Voter awareness and education

Voter education and awareness for the 2019 national elections was conducted mostly by SIEC with some support from civil society organisations. SIEC's seven areas of focus for election-related awareness were how to register, how to vote, election offences, why voting is important, personal safety, security and secrecy (SIEC 2015:7).

Constraints around mobile phone reception and ownership in Solomon Islands, as well as the limited reach of the internet, represent significant challenges for election awareness campaigns. Our citizen surveys found that just over a third of voters did not have regular access to a mobile phone. As expected, a larger proportion of voters did not regularly access a phone in rural constituencies. In recognition of this, education and awareness materials covered a variety of mediums and included face-to-face awareness sessions as well as materials displayed on posters, in newspapers and communicated via radio and text message. SIEC also established an Electoral Office telephone hotline and, in collaboration with UNDP, disseminated 110,000 copies of a voter education booklet attached to packets of rice (EEAS 2019). In the lead up to the election, SIEC awareness activities (billboards, newspapers, radio and text messages) successfully reached just under three quarters of those who were surveyed. Figures varied from constituency to constituency, with the highest level of penetration (around 85 per cent) recorded in urban areas (Honiara and Aoke/Langalanga), though figures close to this were also recorded in Small Malaita, Gizo/Kolombangara and North Vella La Vella (Figure 2.12, p. 24). The lowest levels of penetration were recorded in the more rural or remote constituencies of North West Choiseul, Central Makira and East Guadalcanal. Observers also noted that many citizens' experiences of awareness were through speaking with others who had attended sessions or seen SIEC materials.

As shown in Figure 2.13 (p. 24), the most commonly cited medium for electoral awareness was text message (just over half of all respondents), followed by radio (seen by just under one third) and then newspapers (fewer than

one in five). Overall, 29 per cent of those who attended face-to-face voter education sessions also saw other forms of voter awareness, while 17 per cent of those surveyed saw neither SIEC awareness nor attended any voter education sessions. Overall, just over one third of those surveyed had attended face-to-face voter education sessions before the election.

As demonstrated in Figure 2.14 (p. 25), face-to-face awareness was more prominent in rural constituencies than urban areas. It was also more common for men to attend face-to-face awareness, with 41 per cent of men surveyed attending a session compared to only 33 per cent of women surveyed. Observers noted that candidates' campaigns also generated a high level of awareness around the election in general, but were sometimes confused with official SIEC education sessions. Observers in rural areas also reported a strong preference for more face-to-face voter awareness sessions due to difficulties accessing other forms of SIEC educational materials.

Despite the relatively high level of engagement with SIEC voter education materials across the constituencies sampled, it was clear that some of the recent changes to the electoral process were not always well understood by voters. As discussed further in section 4.1, there was some confusion around the use of voter ID cards as well as the changes that increased the secrecy of the ballot, such as anonymising ballot papers and counting ballot boxes in batches rather than

Figure 2.12 Citizens who saw any SIEC media or awareness (by constituency)

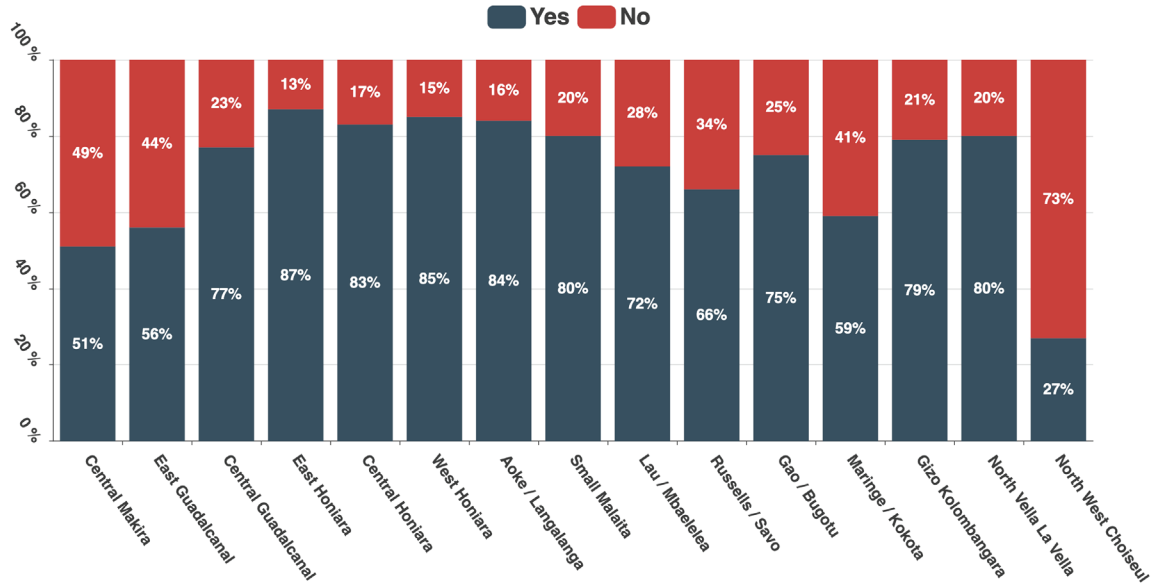
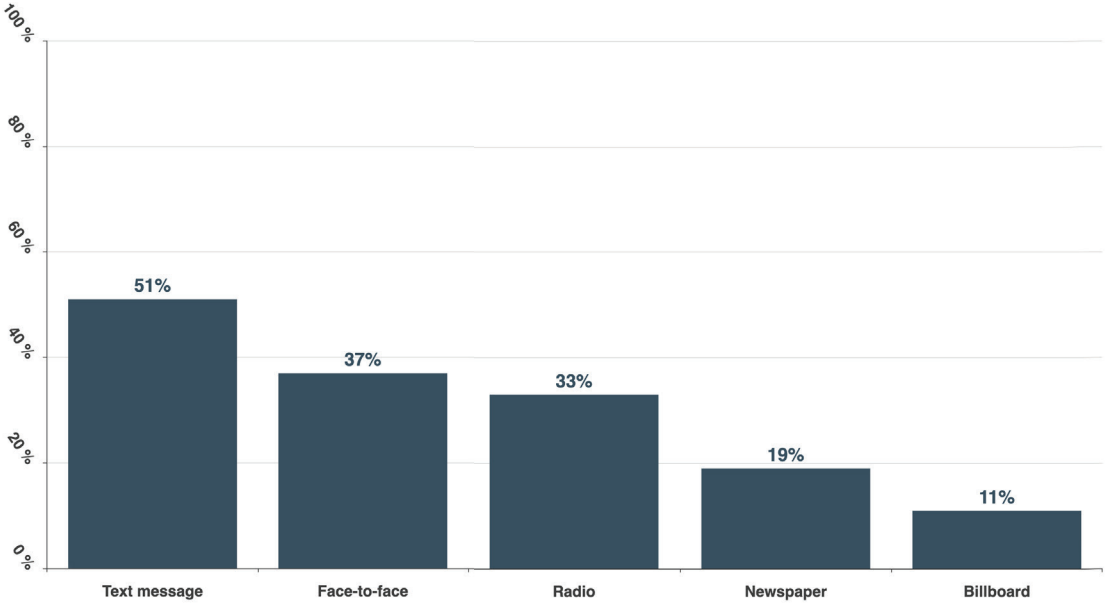


Figure 2.13 Citizens who saw SIEC media or awareness (by category)



individually. These reforms were not well understood by, or even known to, many voters. This suggests that even where SIEC materials did reach voters, education on the details of the voting and counting processes was not always sufficient.

Survey data also revealed interesting patterns on the more general use of social media and mobile phones during the election. Overall, only 10 per cent of those surveyed had either received or shared any kind of information about the election on social media. In Honiara, the figure was double this; the only other constituency to record a similar figure was Gizo/Kolombangara (Figure 2.15). These findings are roughly consistent with the expected patterns of differing access to mobile phones and internet connections, as use of social media was extremely low in rural areas. Nevertheless, the data shows that in urban areas where access to internet connections is higher, social media was a useful platform for the discussion of election-related topics and the sharing of relevant information. Predictably, far more young people participated in social media discussions about the election than the older age groups (Figure 2.16, p. 26). In fact, while the overall figures were low, almost one in five people aged 18–29 discussed the election on social media. This suggests that the role of social media will only continue to grow in future elections.

Figure 2.14 Citizens who attended face-to-face voter awareness sessions before the election

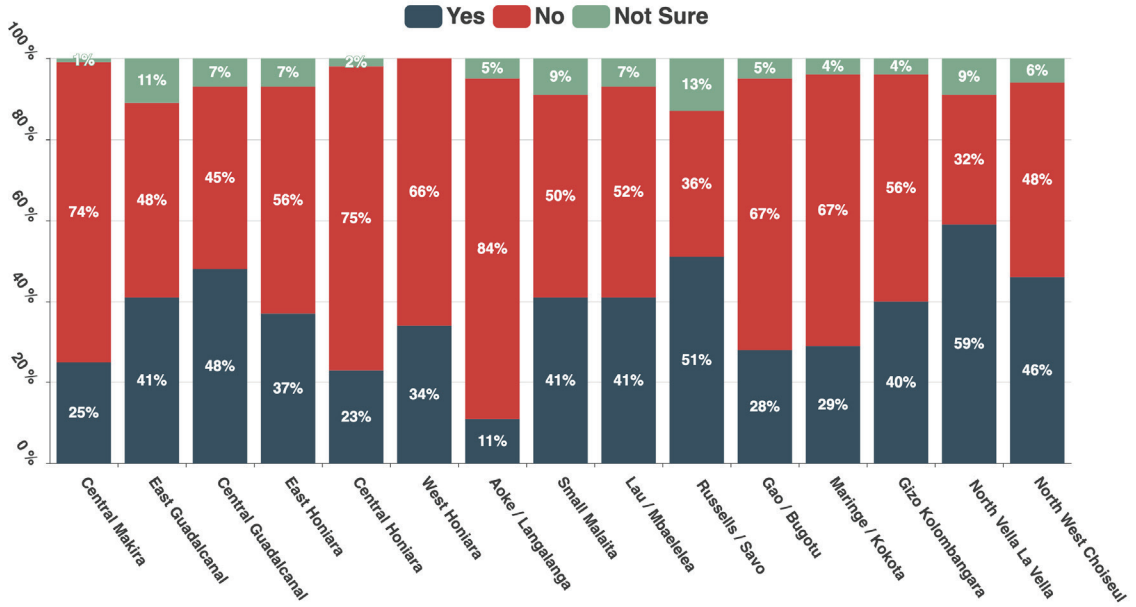
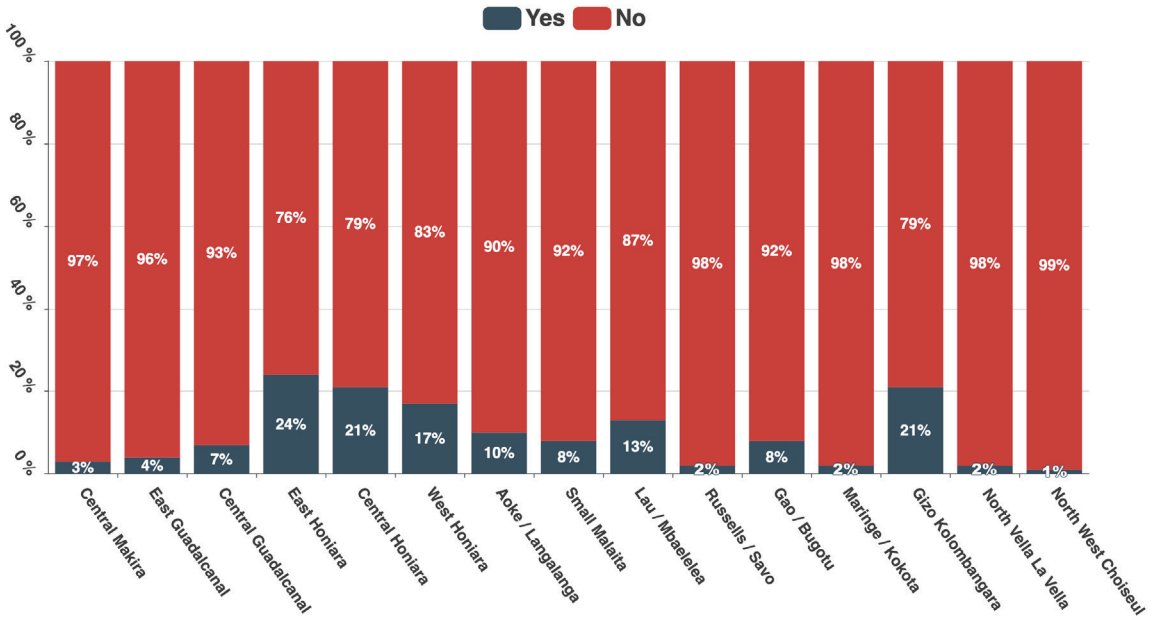


Figure 2.15 Citizens who discussed the election on social media (by constituency)

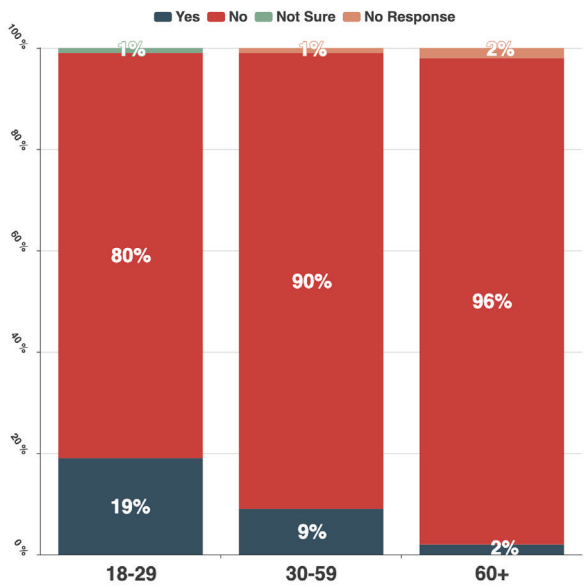


2.4 Security arrangements

Election-related violence during the campaign period has not been a major issue in recent Solomon Islands elections. In previous elections, RAMSI contributed significant personnel and resources to the security effort. According to Barbara and Wood (2018:2), 'one of the benefits of RAMSI was that electoral authorities could use its policing assets in the case of emergencies'. During the 2014 election, RAMSI personnel did not play an explicit security role. However, in the eyes of many Solomon Islanders, their presence added additional assurance. As the first national election since the June 2017 departure of RAMSI, there was significant interest in how the security situation would be managed in 2019.

Prior to the 2019 election, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with SIEC to establish a framework for cooperation. This was considered 'essential for the planning and the good conduct of a fair and free election' (Island Sun 14/9/2018). The MoU specified provisions for joint training and information sharing, as well as considerable financing for the RSIPF's role in providing election security. Overall, 1763 officers from RSIPF and the Correctional Service Solomon Islands (Solomon Star 2019) were deployed across the country. At the same time, the Australian and New Zealand Defence Forces, at the request of the Solomon Islands Government, sent a 'combined task group' that provided 'transport, logistic, advisory and communications support, including four MRH-90 helicopters from the ADF and two from the NZDF' (Australian Government Department of Defence 2019; New Zealand Government 11/3/2019). The task group did not have an explicit security role and was unarmed, although anecdotally at least its presence appeared to have boosted confidence in overall security arrangements for the election.

Figure 2.16 Citizens who discussed the election on social media (by age)



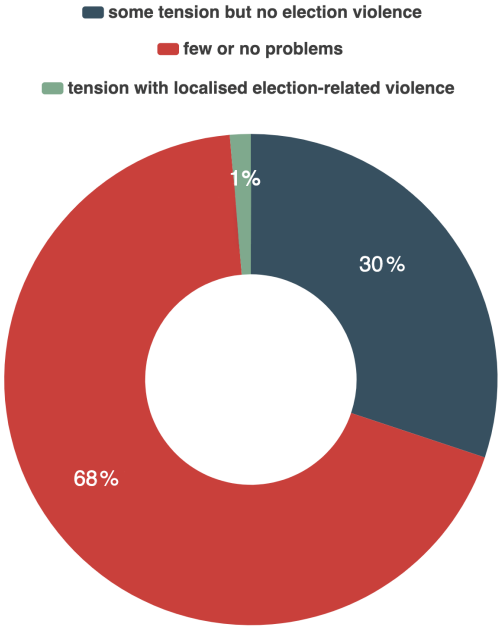
Citizen surveys, as well as the experiences of observers themselves, indicate that the campaign period was largely free of violence and, in most cases, free of significant tension in the 15 constituencies we observed. During the final week of campaigning, over two thirds of our observers thought the law and order situation had 'few or no problems', with just under a third noting 'some tension but no election violence' (Figure 2.17, p. 27). Observers described the atmosphere at times during the campaign period as 'tense' or 'hot'. In one constituency, our observers heard that groups of men were preventing a candidate they disliked from campaigning in their village. One observer described their team's arrival in this particular village when they were mistaken for that candidate's campaign team:

> ***I noticed tenseness from men who peeped out from between houses and whispered to each other. Around two men held big bush knives and moved forward in a tense manner … I hurried out of the boat to inform them that we are not campaigners but observers … and the men with knives withdrew.***

Underlying tensions surrounding the election may have resulted in numerous incidences such as this, however, they did not escalate or transpire into any large-scale cases of violence.

Only a small proportion of ANU observers reported personally witnessing election-related tension or violence in the field. These were in the three constituencies of Central Honiara, North Vella La Vella and Gizo/Kolombangara

Figure 2.17 Observers assessments of the law and order situation during the campaign period (all constituencies)



(Figure 2.18). Most were disturbances that involved heated verbal arguments, either among voters or between voters and candidates' agents. For example, in Gizo an observer witnessed a verbal and minor physical altercation between supporters of two different candidates. They saw four men arguing and **'watched as they continued and not long started throwing hands at each other'.** Soon after this, **'police came and took them away'**. These kinds of altercations are indicative of the tense atmosphere surrounding the election.

A considerably larger number of our observers (more than a third, and from most constituencies where ANU observers were present) reported ***hearing about,*** as opposed to actually witnessing, election-related tension in their respective constituencies (Figure 2.19, p. 28). In Honiara, observers heard about a serious incident that occurred at one candidate's campaign camp two days prior to the election. Supporters of a rival candidate, who were likely intoxicated, physically assaulted the daughter of the candidate who was also at the camp.

Observers also heard several reports of groups of people blocking candidates from campaigning in particular villages. One observer described hearing about a particular incident where:

> ***supporters of the outgoing MP for North Vella La Vella did not allow a candidate and his supporters to land in a particular place to do their closing rally. They put up custom (ba`kiha), a traditional action that strongly disallows someone to do anything. You will need money in return to put down a bakiha.***

Observers also heard reports of some campaign events that became tense when groups of young men drank heavily and started intimidating supporters of other candidates. These instances occurred before the nation-wide liquor ban, which prohibited the sale of alcohol during the week of the election and the count.

Figure 2.18 Observers who saw election-related tension or violence (by constituency)

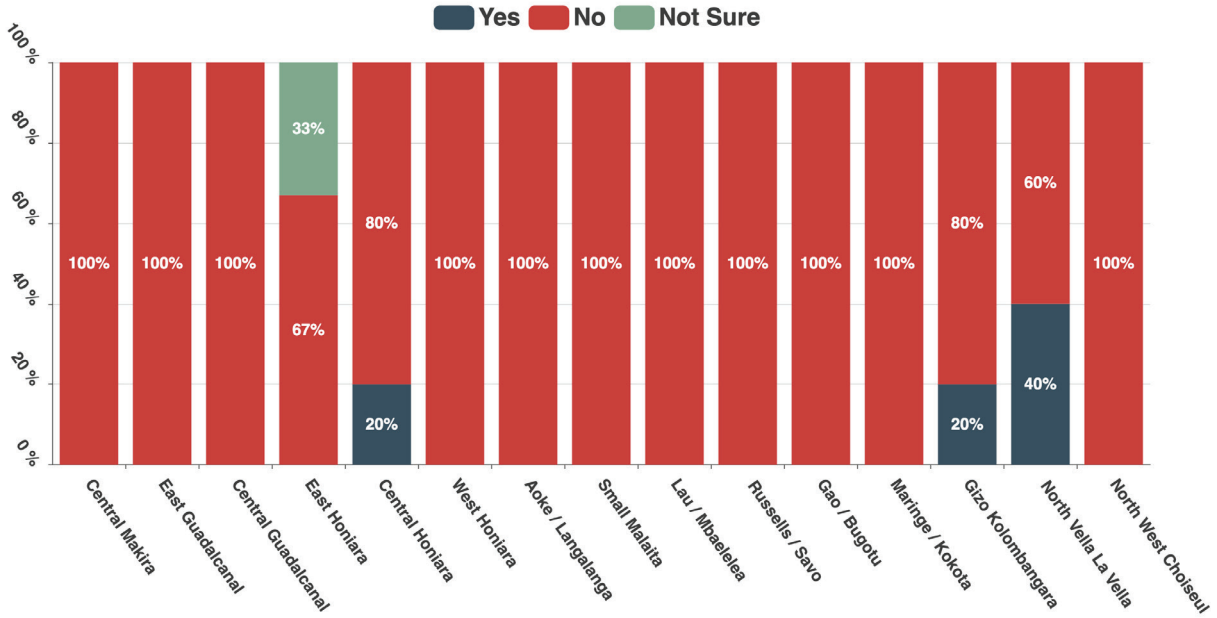
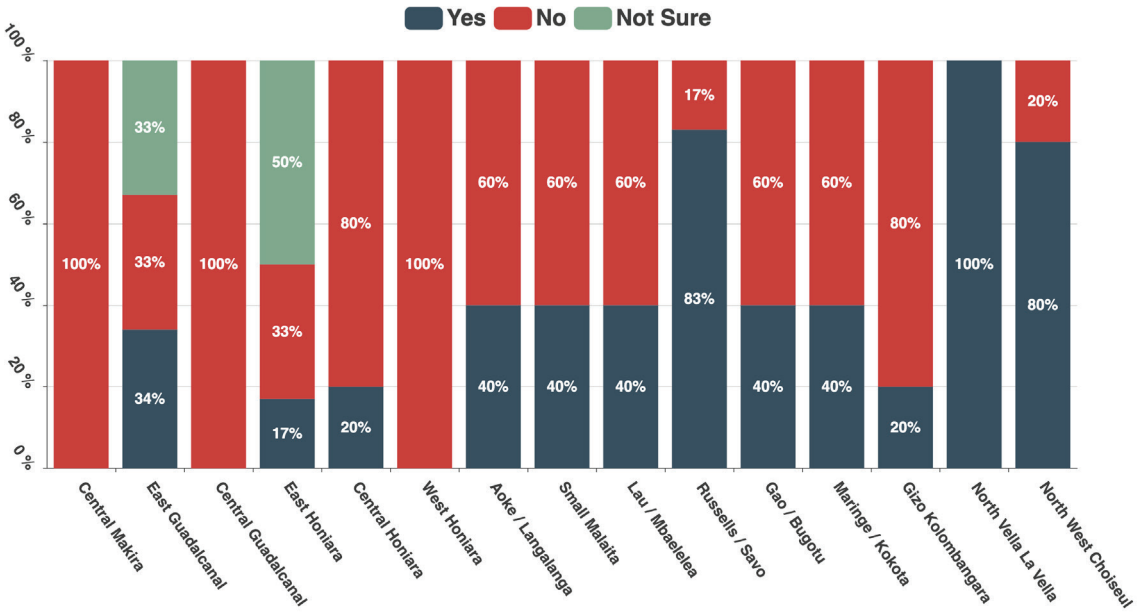


Figure 2.19 Observers who heard about election-related tension or violence (all constituencies)



Conclusion

Overall, the pre-polling period was generally well administered and accompanied by an adequate security presence with no significant incidents of violence reported. SIEC awareness campaigns reached a large number of voters across various mediums, although there was a need for more face-to-face voter awareness programs in rural constituencies. The roll update for the 2019 election continued to build upon the biometric voter registration system established in 2014. Voters did note, however, some administrative issues such as missing names or the inclusion of deceased people on the roll.

The high number of cross-border registrations became a significant issue for the 2019 election. The short time period in place for voter registration and the introduction of out-of-constituency registration in Honiara during the 2018 registration period may have contributed to the large number of cross-border registrations. This lends support to the idea of Honiara as something of a 'vote bank' for prospective candidates. Observers heard that some candidates were actively encouraging citizens to change their registration, but also noted that some voters were also willing to change to another constituency on their own initiative. As it currently stands, the definition of 'ordinarily resident' as a qualification for voter registration is broadly defined and clearly open to interpretation. In these circumstances, the risk is that cross-border registration will become an ever-greater feature of future elections, and an increasing focus of attention for candidates and voters. If cross-border registration became a key feature of elections in Solomon Islands, it may risk undermining the integrity and popular confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process itself.

Recommendations: election preparation

- **Consider extending the omissions and objections period to allow more time for citizens to review the preliminary roll.** Conducting the omissions and objections period earlier and for longer would also allow more time for SIEC to update the roll.

- **Voter Registration Centres (VRCs) should accommodate all voters, including those with limited access to transport or with work or school commitments.** A rolling registration process, extended registration period or increasing the number of VRCs would ensure all citizens have the opportunity to register to vote.

- **Strengthen procedures for encouraging citizens to check their registration.** This could be achieved through broader awareness campaigns earlier in the electoral cycle and by improving text message and online services.

- **Implement a more rigorous approach to removing deceased names from the roll.** This could be addressed on an ongoing basis rather than just prior to an election.

- **Minimise the commodification of voters through cross-border registration before it becomes a permanent feature of electoral politics.** One measure could be a rolling or ongoing registration of voters, which would minimise the impact of a last minute rush of registrations ahead of elections.

- **Consider narrowing the definition of 'ordinarily resident' for purposes of registration and explain what falls outside of this definition.** Prior to the registration period, awareness campaigns should be conducted on the definition of 'ordinarily resident' and what falls outside of this definition.

- **Expand face-to-face voter education programs.** The focus of these programs should be on rural areas where access to national media is limited and Pijin may not be the preferred language.

- **Increase awareness campaigns about the purpose of voter ID cards.** The commonly held belief that voter ID cards are required to vote has created opportunities for voter intimidation and fraud that could be reduced.

- **Collaboration between SIEC and RSIPF on security arrangements proved effective and should be maintained.** In the post-RAMSI environment, cross-institutional collaboration on security arrangements is critical for free and fair elections and should be formalised early in election preparations.


VOTE JAMES APANIAI
WEST HONIARA CONSTITUENCY
VOTE JAMES APANIAI
WEST HONIARA CONSTITUENCY
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WEST HONIARA CONSTITUENCY
VOTE
JAMES APANIAI
FOR WEST HONIARA CONSTITUENCY
"The Dawn of a New Day"
有限会社 藤元産業
一般

3 – CANDIDATES AND CAMPAIGNING

This section addresses the campaign period in the lead up to the election, including the nominations period, candidate campaign activities and other forms of political influence. It also highlights women's underrepresentation in politics as a significant issue. It goes on to examine the longer-term political environment of elections, especially in relation to money politics and the use of CDFs. Overall, there were no major security or administrative issues during the nomination process and campaign period. In terms of women's political representation, Solomon Islands continues to lag behind other countries in the region and internationally in terms of the number of women elected to national parliament. In 2019, only two out of the 26 women standing for election across 22 seats were elected as MPs. According to citizen surveys, many voters claimed to be open to seeing more women MPs in the future, though our research also shows that women candidates continue to face many challenges that heavily affect their chance of election.

Money politics was a sensitive issue with voters and collecting data on this topic was unsurprisingly a challenge. We surmise that it was especially difficult because of the high level of awareness surrounding electoral offences and penalties due to SIEC's campaign that ran in the lead up to the 2019 election. For this reason, data collected may not accurately represent the extent of vote buying and gifting. Observers in 2019 did not personally witness nearly as many instances of vote buying and gifting compared to observers conducting the 2014 observation mission. According to many voters, however, as in previous elections, money politics continued to play a significant role. Citizen surveys also asked voters to consider the relationship between CDFs and elections, and the results suggest that CDFs continue to play a prominent role in elections in Solomon Islands as they can be used by both voters and MPs as a tool of electoral politics.

This section begins with a discussion of the nominations period and presents our observations recorded at 50 candidate campaign rallies. Observers also attended other campaign events and conducted informal interviews with voters, campaign staff, candidates and MPs during the campaign period to inform the research. It then presents the results of citizen survey data asking voters about their attitudes towards women candidates and contrasts it with our observations of women's campaign experiences. Finally, it presents our findings on the role of money politics and CDFs in elections in Solomon Islands, which are derived mostly from the post-polling surveys of 2418 voters.

3.1 Nomination period and campaign strategies

The process for candidate nominations changed significantly with the introduction of the Electoral Act 2018. New clauses included a requirement for candidates to be registered voters, and for candidates to nominate in person in their constituencies. Additionally, candidates were required to pay a non-refundable registration fee of SBD5,000, which was a substantial increase from the 2014 registration fee of SBD2,000. The motivation behind increasing the registration fee was to reduce the number of candidates. SIEC claimed that fewer candidates would concentrate votes in order to give the winning candidate a stronger mandate to represent the whole constituency (RNZ 2019a). It was also hoped that increasing registration fees would become a deterrent for 'shadow candidates' to nominate with the sole intention of splitting votes. The term shadow candidate refers to a candidate who is financed or encouraged to nominate to run in direct competition with a strong competitor in order to give another candidate a better chance of winning (Premdas and Steeves 1981:197). It is not clear whether increased registration fees discouraged candidates from using this tactic, as several observers reported possible instances of shadow candidates running to split votes.

There was an overall substantial decrease in the number of candidates contesting the 2019 elections. Only 332 candidates nominated compared to the 447 who ran in 2014, a decline of 25 per cent (see Table 3.1). It should be noted, however, that the decline in the number of candidates was not reflected in all constituencies. In fact, the number of candidates contesting individual seats varied widely. For instance, only two candidates contested the seats of North Vella La Vella and South Vella La Vella compared to 16 in West Kwaio and Central Honiara. As Solomon Island academic Transform Aqorau (2019:1) puts it, 'even with the increase in fees and costs to stand, a national election still attracts many people who are willing to put their bank accounts on the line to get into parliament'. Apart from the increased registration fee, a number of other factors may have contributed to the decline in overall numbers of contesting candidates. For instance, Cyclone Oma made travel in certain parts of the country difficult during the candidate registration period.

Another potential explanation for the decline in candidate numbers is the sustained increase of CDF allocations approximately SBD10 million per year for MPs (Wiltshire and Batley 2018:1). For the 2019 election, 72 per cent of incumbent MPs managed to retain their seats. This was roughly equal to incumbency rates (74 per cent) for the 2014 election. These results break a long-term trend since independence where incumbency rates were 55 per cent on average (Wood 2019). The increase in incumbency rates has coincided with the sharp rise in CDF budgets. There is a perception that access to these funds provides a significant advantage to incumbent MPs in preparing to re-contest elections. Access to CDFs may also be advantageous to incumbent MPs throughout the electoral cycle as they are able to reward their supporters with CDF benefits or the promise of benefits.

The number of women candidates contesting the elections remained consistent with previous trends. In 2019, 26 women candidates nominated, which was almost identical to the number who ran in the previous two elections (see Table 3.1). While it could be perceived as a positive development that the number of women candidates did not decline in line with the overall 25 per cent reduction in candidate numbers, the discrepancy between women and male candidates continues to highlight significant issues with women's representation in elections, as well as politics more broadly, in Solomon Islands. Women candidates are addressed in more detail in section 3.3.

Table 3.1 Number of candidates contesting national elections (2010–19)

Election year	Men	Women	Percentage of women candidates
2010	484	25	5.1%
2014	421	26	6.1%
2019	306	26	8.4%

Source: solomonselections.org/source-material/

Campaigning

A prerequisite for any successful candidate in Solomon Islands is having access to finances to fund their campaign. Prior to the 2019 election, the maximum candidates were permitted to spend on campaigns was SBD50,000. With the introduction of the Electoral Act 2018, however, the limit was substantially increased to SBD500,000.

This increase reflects recognition of the cost of campaigning in a country like Solomon Islands. Analysis conducted by Aqorau (2019:1) in the lead up to the election explains the expenses involved:

> ***Getting into parliament is an expensive exercise at the baseline there is the geographic dispersal of islands, isolation of the villages and distances that have to be covered to campaign. Then food that has to be bought to feed people during political rallies and meetings on top of that. Voters use the occasion to extract whatever support they can by way of funding from the candidates.***

Our observers witnessed some examples of lavish and expensive campaigns. In one constituency, an observer noted that a member of a candidate's campaign team openly estimated that total campaign costs would have easily been 'at the higher end of the new budget limit'. In this instance, the launch of the candidate's campaign

included a 64-boat flotilla, of which a third of participants stayed with the candidate throughout the entire campaign. At this candidate's campaign rallies, supporters were entertained by rap groups, women 'corruption fighter' dancers and a song commissioned especially for the campaign, which was translated into all three local languages across the constituency.

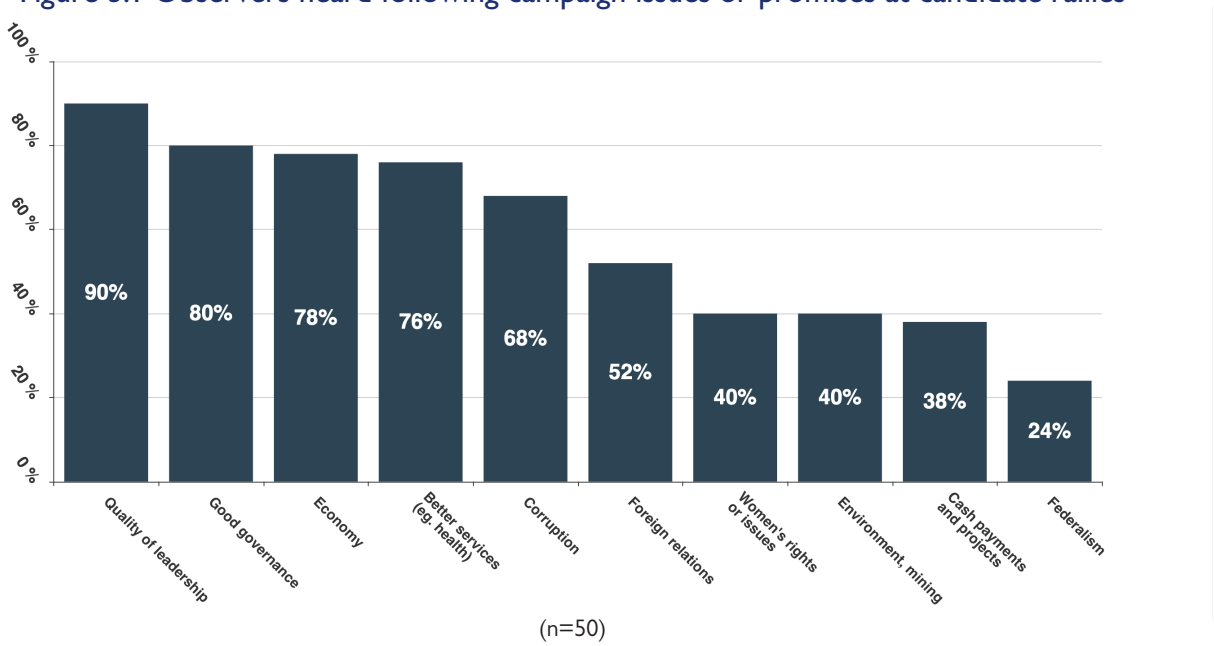
Candidate camps continue to be a key feature during the campaign period of elections in Solomon Islands and are a further campaign expense. Observers in 11 of the 15 observed constituencies recorded the establishment of candidate camps, which included the provision of free food and drink for candidate supporters. In one constituency, a purpose-built temporary stage was constructed for campaign events that included the use of AV equipment and live bands to entertain supporters. Large, commercially printed banners and posters were displayed at these campaign events and throughout the constituency.

Observers attended a total of 50 candidate rallies and campaign events across the 15 constituencies and recorded the issues raised by the speakers. Figure 3.1 shows that the most common issues candidates spoke about were quality of leadership, good governance, the economy and providing better services. Candidates also spoke about how they would spend CDF benefits, and in nearly 40 per cent of rallies observed they mentioned direct projects or cash payments that would be made to constituents. A similar number of candidates raised issues relating to the environment or mining as well as women's rights, though these topics were not as commonly discussed as good leadership and improving services in the community. These results are reflected in the citizen survey responses to questions about what voters want in a candidate. According to these survey results (discussed further in section 4.2), voters were more interested in a candidate's character, their leadership abilities and their ability to provide for the constituency than their stance on policy issues. Candidates did address national policy issues with some regularity in campaign rallies, though these types of issues were not raised as frequently as more direct promises such as improving health clinics or school infrastructure.

At most campaign rallies, the audience was given an opportunity to comment and ask questions. Following a candidate's campaign presentation, one constituent from Maringe/Kokota expressed scepticism, saying that all candidates claim they will bring about **'a paradise in the constituency'** but their well-intentioned plans are always derailed by the **'devil in Honiara'**. Other voters told observers that many candidates campaigned on similar issues and there was little separating them in terms of campaign promises or policy stances.

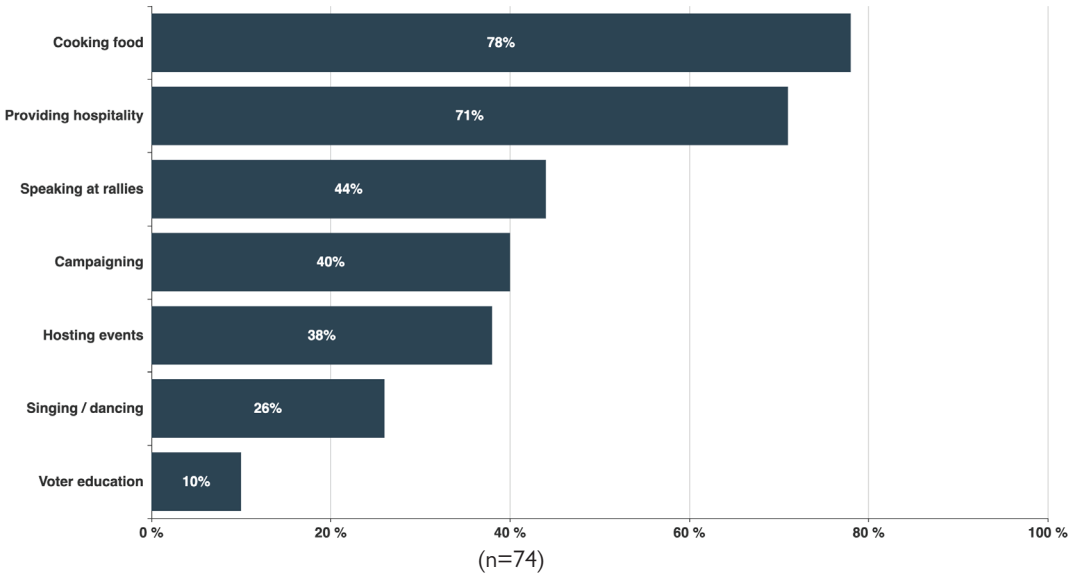
Our observers were also asked to record the role that women played during campaign rallies and in providing general campaign support.

Figure 3.1 Observers heard following campaign issues or promises at candidate rallies



(n=50)

Figure 3.2 Observed campaign activities performed by women



(n=74)

Figure 3.2 shows that the two main ways in which women contributed to campaigns were through cooking food and providing hospitality for events. In some cases, women did take a more public role in campaigning such as speaking at election rallies, campaigning and conducting voter education, although these reported instances were low. Women's participation in campaign activities aligned closely with typical gender roles. Men predominantly occupied positions of political influence in campaign teams, such as campaign managers and agents. It was less common for women to occupy positions such as these that directly influence political decision-making.

3.2 Political parties and other forms of influence

Historically, political parties in Solomon Islands have not been formed around strong ideological commitments or programs. Rather, they tend to be 'small, organisationally thin, elite-based, [and] highly personalised' and have often been short-lived and formed quickly in the lead up to elections (Ratuva 2008:29–30). Generally, political parties have not had much popular support or recognition among voters and it is often claimed voters are more likely to vote for MPs based on personal qualities and what they can do for their constituents (Aqorau 2019:1).

In 2014, the ANU election observers noted that, compared to the previous 2010 elections, the number of candidates running with party endorsements had greatly increased (from just 20 per cent in 2010 to 45 per cent in 2014). They stated that this was likely the result of the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014, which aimed to strengthen the role of political parties in national politics. In 2019, the number of candidates affiliated with political parties increased to 49 per cent, with 42 per cent of winning MPs belonging to one of eight parties (see Table 3.2, p. 35). Despite this increase in party affiliation over the last two elections, the impact of the reform remains ambiguous. While party membership among candidates may be increasing, voters in 2019 did not appear to be more engaged with party policies. This assessment is therefore similar to that made in 2014, when observers stated that 'there is limited evidence that [the reform] encouraged a more programmatic approach to campaigning or politics more generally' (Haley et al. 2014:26). The major concern for the vast majority of voters continued to be the MP's (or prospective candidate's) ability to serve the local community (see section 4.2).

There are ways in which party affiliation can be beneficial for candidates, despite the limited influence of political parties more generally. Observers did note some instances where candidates made appeals to particular party policies in the course of their campaign, though the responses they elicited from voters were mixed. For example, Solomon Islands Kadere Party can-

Table 3.2 Proportion of seats won by each political party

Party	Seats won	Percentage
Solomon Islands Kadere Party	8	16%
Solomon Islands Democratic Party	8	16%
United Democratic Party	4	8%
Democratic Alliance Party	3	6%
Peoples Alliance Party	2	4%
Solomon Islands United Party	2	4%
People First Party	1	2%
Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement	1	2%
Green Party Solomon Islands	0	0%
New Nation Party	0	0%
Pan Melanesian Congress Party	0	0%
Peoples Progressive Party	0	0%
National Transformation Party	0	0%
Independents	21	42%
Total	50	100%

didates gained some interest from voters in East Guadalcanal and Gizo/Kolombangara because of the party's emphasis on policies promoting traditional forms of governance. An observer in Gizo/Kolombangara, however, reported that the Kadere candidate, despite drawing on these party policies as part of her campaign, **'acknowledged privately she was not sure that most voters understood the party system'**. Other observers agreed that specific party policies and the role of parties in the electoral system were not generally well understood by voters.

Political party affiliation may, however, have benefits for at least some candidates in the form of campaign support and financing. In the majority of constituencies visited, observers noted that party officials attended rallies or participated in campaign events on behalf of their candidates. Observers noted that in one constituency the party chairman was campaigning on behalf of a high-profile candidate despite the fact that the party chairman was running for election himself in another constituency. Party-endorsed candidates also benefited from financial support, which allowed candidates to travel across the constituency to talk to voters and conduct campaign events.

There were some issues raised by voters as well as political parties themselves around whether certain candidates were officially recognised as party-affiliated candidates. In Maringe/Kokota, some voters claimed to support the Solomon Islands United Party (UP) candidate, Cathy Nori, because of the UP's commitment to reducing politicians' entitlements. Her opponents, however, questioned the legitimacy of her association with the party, claiming she was not officially endorsed but merely using the popularity of the party to attract voters. Whatever her true party associations may have been, party affiliation did appear to have some relevance in the minds of voters and was an issue of minor contention in the constituency. Similarly, in Russells/Savo, candidate Mark Kemakeza was listed on the public list of candidates as a party affiliate for the Solomon Islands Democratic Party. It wasn't until approximately two weeks prior to election day that he was disqualified from contesting following a complaint to SIEC disputing his association with the party which was filed by the executive of the party (RNZ 26/3/2019). This was not a widespread issue, though these examples demonstrate that there was clearly some confusion around the administration and verification of party affiliation.

Alternative forms of political influence

When asked to comment on the role that churches played during the campaign period, several observers noted that some churches were actively encouraging citizens to vote for particular candidates. The influence of churches was particularly conspicuous in North Vella La Vella, where observers explained that a Uniting Church minister was strongly encouraging his

followers to vote for a certain candidate that he described as 'God's chosen one'. One observer explained that the minister:

> ***Directly asked people to vote for a particular candidate who was present at that village for his closing rally. He was saying that they were so fortunate to have someone who was directly chosen from above who is here now with us and every one of us should vote for him and no-one else.***

In Aoke/Langalanga, observers noted that a significant number of Jehovah's Witnesses did not register to vote because of the church's stance on non-participation in politics. Observers in Central Makira made similar comments about the Platform Movement, which also encourages followers not to participate in formal political activities.

In some constituencies, observers heard that chiefs were also openly encouraging their communities to vote for certain candidates. This ranged from speaking favourably about their preferred candidate to accusations of paid endorsements. In Maringe/Kokota, observers were told that in a number of villages, chiefs had been paid by certain candidates to convince their community to vote for them. One chief claimed that after the announcement of results in 2014, several chiefs from the constituency travelled to Honiara to collect their rewards from the newly elected MP. He was expecting to see this happen again after the announcement of results in 2019. In Gizo/Kolombangara, there were allegations (largely made by a candidate) that management at the timber plantation company, Kolombangara Forest Products Limited (KFPL), had received bribes from the two major candidates to pressure their employees into voting for them. These rumours were persistent enough that the board chair of KFPL posted a public notice refuting the allegations.

3.3 Women political candidates

Women's political representation is low in Solomon Islands and across the Pacific region. There are only 30 women parliamentarians in the entire region, or just six per cent of all national MPs (Baker 2018:1). Historically, the percentage of women sitting in national parliaments in the Pacific has never risen above 10 per cent (Macintyre 2017:4). In Solomon Islands, the first female MP was elected in 1989 and since independence only four women — Honourables Hilda Kari, Vika Lusibaea, Freda Tuki Soriacomua and Lanelle Tanangada — have stood in national parliament. Previous research has found that there are many barriers to women's political participation in Solomon Islands. These include commonly held assumptions that women's spheres of influence should not extend beyond the 'domestic' into the public arena of national politics (Soaki 2017). These expectations, along with wider issues of gender inequality, restrict women's ability to participate equally with men.

For the 2019 elections, a total of 26 women stood as candidates in 22 constituencies. This number has remained relatively stable over the last 20 years. In 2019, for the first time since independence, two women won seats in national parliament. These two women had both previously served as MPs — Lanelle Tanangada of Gizo/Kolombangara and Freda Tuki Soriacomua of Temotu Vatud.[8] No new women candidates managed to win seats in 2019.

The re-election of Lanelle Tanangada presents a particularly interesting case study. She first ran for parliament in the 2018 Gizo/Kolombangara by-election after Jimson Tanangada, her husband and the incumbent MP, was forced to stand down after having been found guilty of misconduct. ANU observers witnessing the 2018 by-election noted that they **'were struck by the extent to which Lanelle Tanangada was seen as a proxy for her husband'**. In contrast, observers returning to this constituency in 2019 found that Tanangada had gained respect

8 Freda Tuki Soriacomua was not currently standing at the time she was elected in 2019, though she was previously elected in 2014 and then dismissed after the High Court found her guilty of voter bribery. Lanelle Tanangada was elected to parliament during the 2018 Gizo/Kolombangara by-election.

and popularity in her own right. One observer reported that:

> ***There was a consensus in the constituency that Lanelle was a more popular figure than Jimson; supporters emphasised her effectiveness as an MP, in particular her CDF policies and her parliamentary work on the anti-corruption bill.***

Previous research found that women MPs often have lower rates of re-election than their male counterparts in the Pacific (Baker 2018:542). It has been suggested that this is because voters tend to hold women candidates to higher standards than men. In this context, the re-election of Tanangada (and Freda Tuki Soriacomua) is especially noteworthy.

In the lead up to the election, donors invested resources into supporting women candidates. For example, in June 2018, the United Nations Development Programme ran a practice parliament workshop in Honiara to provide support for women intending to contest in 2019. The two sitting women MPs at the time gave presentations to the group.

Recent legislation has also sought to improve women's political representation in national parliament. The Political Parties Integrity Act 2014 provides some legislated incentives for political parties to endorse more women candidates. It also allows for the provision of a 'special measures grant' to any political party that successfully enables the election of a woman into parliament. In addition, the Act requires political parties to 'reserve for women at least ten per cent of the total number of candidates it selects and endorses to contest an election' (National Parliament of Solomon Islands 2014:1,48). This is weakened by the caveat that when political parties receive less than 10 per cent of applications from women they are not required to reserve any places for women. This means that parties are not incentivised to actively recruit more women, only to accept them in certain situations.

The Political Parties Integrity Act 2014 may have encouraged more women to become affiliated with political parties than in the past. For the 2019 elections, 65 per cent of women candidates contested as members of political parties, very close to the 69 per cent that were endorsed by political parties in 2014. This was significantly higher than in 2010, before the introduction of the Act, when only 24 per cent of women candidates were affiliated with parties. In 2019, however, only four of the 13 political parties endorsed more than the required 10 per

Table 3.3 Proportion of women candidates endorsed by political parties in 2019

Political Party	Total Candidates	Men	Women	Per cent women
Solomon Islands United Party	29	28	1	3%
Democratic Alliance Party	23	18	5	22%
Solomon Islands Democratic Party	22	21	2	9%
Peoples Alliance Party	21	21	0	0%
United Democratic Party	18	18	0	0%
People First Party	17	12	5	29%
Solomon Islands KADERE Party	13	11	2	15%
Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement	10	10	0	0%
National Transformation Party	7	7	0	0%
Green Party Solomon Islands	3	3	0	0%
Pan Melanesian Congress Party	3	1	2	67%
Peoples Progressive Party	3	3	0	0%
New Nation Party	2	2	0	0%
All parties average	171	155	17	10%
Independent	162	153	9	6%

cent of women candidates (see Table 3.3, p. 37). Despite encouraging more women to become officially endorsed by a political party, the Act does not appear to have had an impact on the overall number of women contesting national elections. This number has not increased since the introduction of the Act.

Citizen surveys conducted prior to the election were used to gain insights into the attitudes of voters towards women candidates. When asked whether there should be more women MPs, three-quarters of respondents said 'yes' (with a further 10 per cent 'not sure', leaving a remainder of about one in seven who said 'no') (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). 'Yes' responses ranged from 86 per cent in Central Honiara to 59 per cent in Gao/Bugotu (where the 'no' response was also highest at 29 per cent).

There was very little separating men and women when responses to this question were disaggregated by gender (Figure 3.5, p. 39). These findings indicate that, at least in the abstract, both men and women are open to the idea of more women in parliament. Respondents regularly noted that there were reasons why few women participated in national politics and often made references to gender roles that emphasised politics as men's business. Despite these perspectives, respondents commonly claimed to be open to the idea of more women MPs. For example, when one elderly man answered 'yes' to this question, he added that:

> ***the Good Book says that women shouldn't be in politics, but we've had men MPs since independence and we haven't gotten very far, so maybe we should try women.***

When citizens were asked a follow-up question of whether they would vote for a women candidate, only half of those surveyed said 'yes' (Figures 3.6 and 3.7, p.39). This figure is slightly lower than responses to similar

Figure 3.3 Citizens who believed there should be more women MPs (all constituencies)

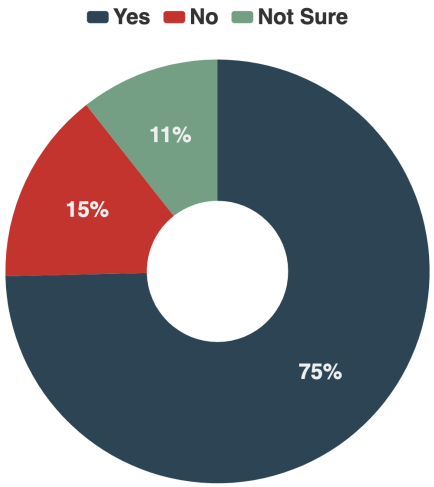


Figure 3.4 Citizens who believed there should be more women MPs (by constituency)

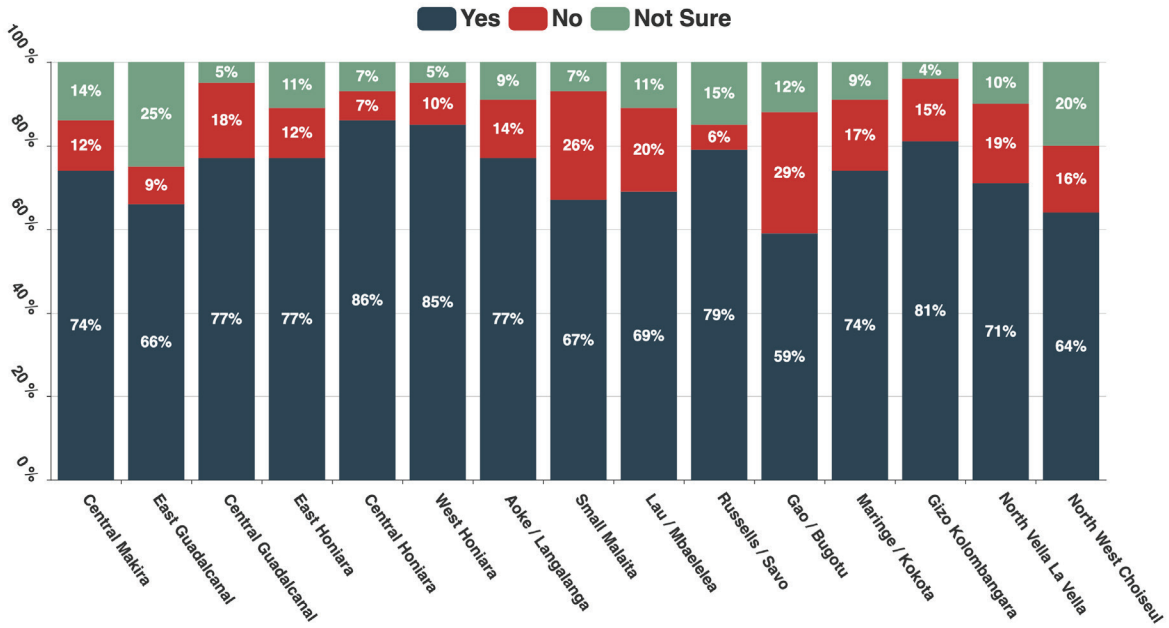


Figure 3.5 Citizens who believed there should be more women MPs (by gender)

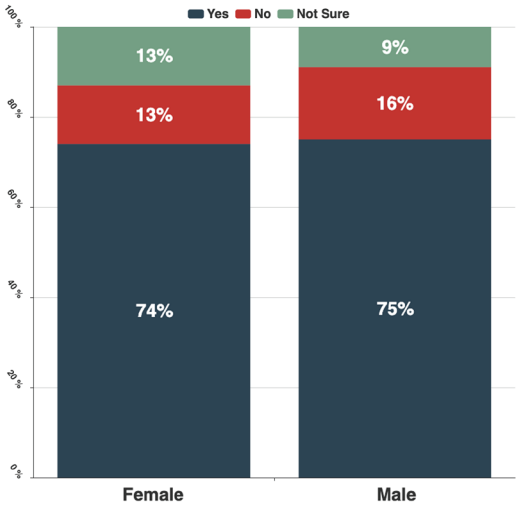
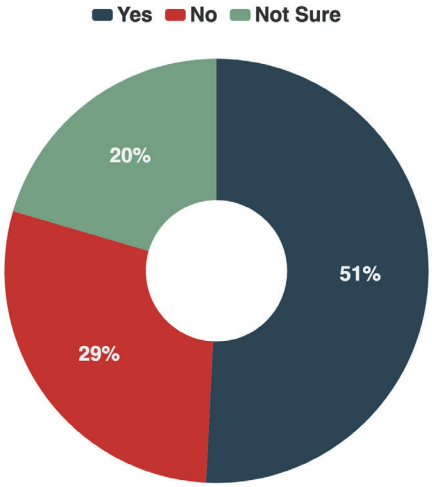


Figure 3.6 Citizens who said they would vote for a woman candidate (all constituencies)



questions recorded by other surveys in Solomon Islands (see McMurray 2012:7). One observer noted that when respondents answered 'yes' to this question, they often qualified their answer, adding that the woman would have to be a very capable candidate to receive their vote. Another observer recorded that many of the 'no' responses, even from women, were accompanied by remarks such as **'it is not the time for women, maybe in the future'**. Voters answering 'no' would often attempt to justify the response by pointing to the importance of women's contributions to the family or local community in less public ways. As one observer summarised:

People often say that women exert their influence through 'pillow talk' and via more subtle ways of influencing their husbands or other male family members who are more likely to speak out loud during community gatherings.

Figure 3.8 (p.40) shows that, again, very little separated men and women in response to this question, with men providing marginally stronger responses in both the 'yes' and 'no' categories (and therefore fewer 'not sure' responses than women). There was, however, some variation in results across constituencies. Observers from Gizo/Kolombangara noted that the high number of 'not sure' responses was due

Figure 3.7 Voters who said they would vote for a woman candidate (by constituency)

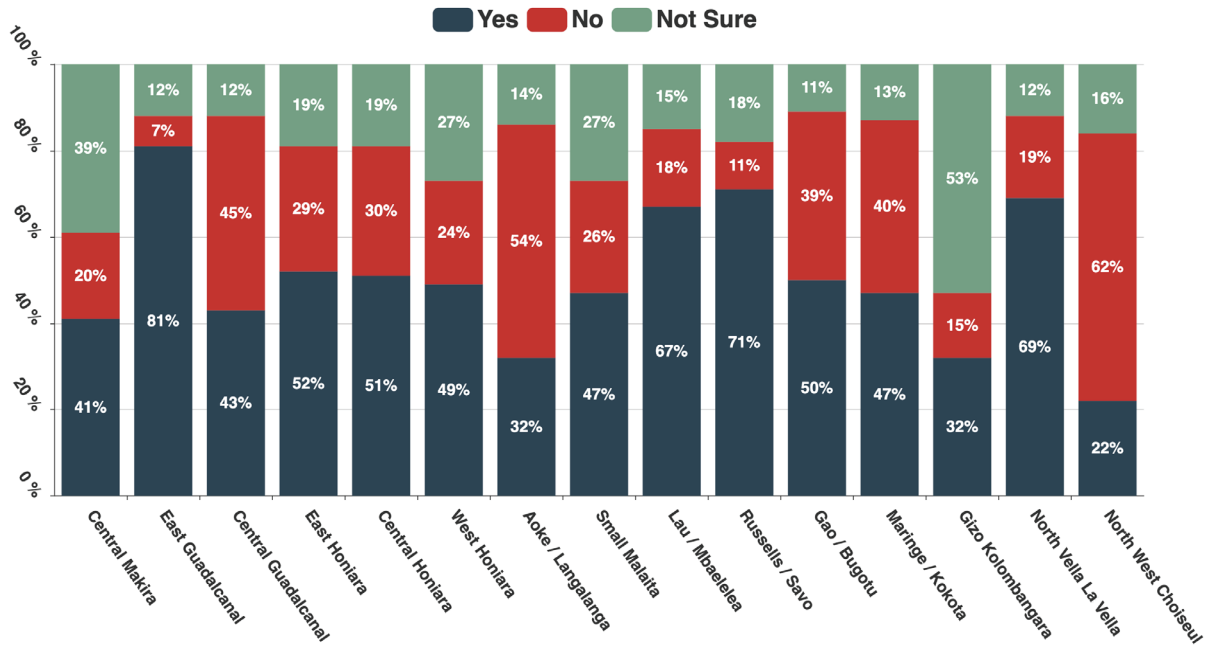
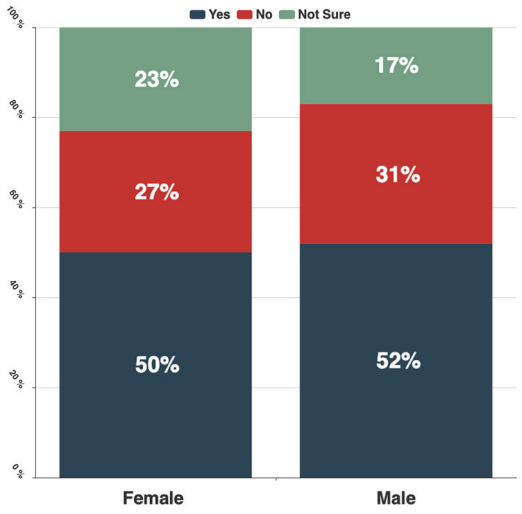


Figure 3.8 Citizens who said they would vote for a woman candidate (by gender)



to the fact that many citizens preferred not to discuss this topic since there was a high-profile woman candidate in the constituency. On the other hand, some constituencies with high profile women candidates, such as Maringe/Kokota, received a relatively large proportion of 'yes' responses. This openness to electing a woman in Maringe/Kokota was partially reflected in the election results, where the only woman contesting received the second largest share of votes.

Similar research conducted in Solomon Islands has recorded comparable but slightly more positive results. The RAMSI People's Survey consistently found that the overwhelming majority of both men and women answer that they would vote for a good woman candidate and that there should be more women MPs (McMurray 2012). These surveys have also found that the most common explanation for women's underrepresentation given by respondents has to do with the strong associations between men, masculinity and political leadership. (McMurray 2012).

Many voters responding to our questions regarding attitudes towards women's political participation claimed to be open to both seeing and voting for more women MPs. In practice, however, observers reported that women candidates continue to face a number of additional challenges. In contrast to the opinions expressed by respondents in our citizen surveys, observers did note that often women candidates were not treated with as much respect as men during the campaign period. One observer in Maringe/Kokota heard that supporters of another candidate blocked the woman candidate from campaigning on a number of occasions. Her campaign was met with hostility in several locations, and transportation providers were said to have increased their prices when her campaign team needed to use their services. The observer noted, **'We believe that the candidate was treated harsher because she was a woman.'** An observer attending a rally in another constituency commented on how the crowd received the candidate's presentation, noting, **'you could sense that people were not taking her seriously … for men candidates it is more quiet and very serious.'** This suggests that Solomon Islanders — both women and men — claim to be more comfortable with the idea of more women MPs in the abstract than they are in practice.

3.4 Money politics

Political gifting and vote buying, commonly referred to as money politics, plays a significant role in elections in Melanesia (Haley 2014). Money politics in Solomon Islands manifests itself in two main forms. The first occurs in the lead up to an election and pertains to gifts or money being directly exchanged for the promise of votes. Gifting in this context may range from the distribution of food, phone credit or other goods to potential voters, to buying larger scale items such as vehicles and outboard motors for particular communities. The second form can take place throughout the electoral cycle and involves candidates or MPs cultivating support by assisting with community and individual requests in the expectation or hope of future electoral support. This form of money politics can often be associated with CDFs and is addressed in detail in section 3.5.

Historically, money politics in both forms has been a persistent and prevalent factor in Solomon Islands elections. Earlier election reports note that candidates provided money and gifts to supporters to secure votes. For instance, Prem-

das and Steeves (1994:52) note that during the 1993 election, high profile candidates were providing large amounts of food and other goods to their supporters in the lead up to the election. The data and subsequent discussion presented in this part of the report focuses on money politics around the election.

The Electoral Act 2018 introduced harsher penalties for a number of electoral offences relating to money politics. For example, the penalty for election bribery (for both candidates and voters) was raised to SBD150,000 and/or 15 years imprisonment. In past elections, the night before polling, colloquially referred to as 'Devil's Night', has been used as a last minute attempt to sway voters through gifting, vote buying and intimidation. In an effort to reduce these types of activities, the Act also introduced a 24 hour ban on campaigning on the eve of the election.

Vote buying and gifting

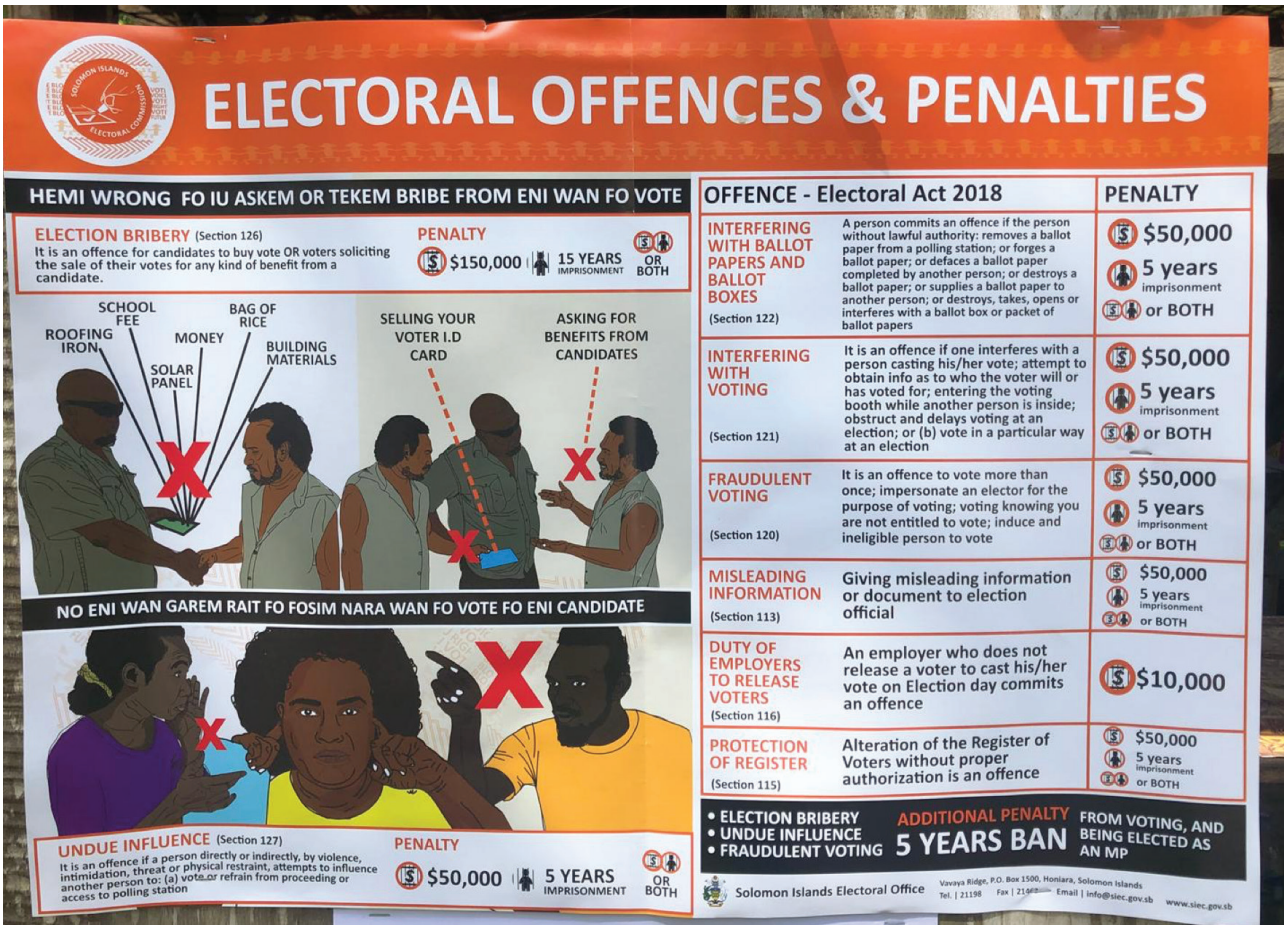
In 2014, ANU observers reported that money politics, in terms of cash and gifts changing hands immediately before and after the election, was evident in all observed constituencies. The report stated that:

> ***Money played a significant part in this election, and there is no doubt that 'money politics' has become normalised in the Solomon Islands political context and is more significant than ever before (Haley et al. 2014:32).***

One of the conclusions reached from the 2014 report was that the growing influence of money politics had the potential to undermine the credibility of election processes in Solomon Islands elections if left unchecked.

In the lead up to the 2019 elections, and in line with changes introduced in the Electoral Act 2018, SIEC conducted extensive awareness campaigns and renewed its focus on electoral offences and penalties for candidates and supporters who attempted to solicit votes. This included television, radio, print and social media campaigns that aimed to inform citizens about what constituted electoral offences and their penalties. SIEC posters distributed to polling stations prior to election day were perceived

Figure 3.9 SIEC poster on electoral offences and penalties

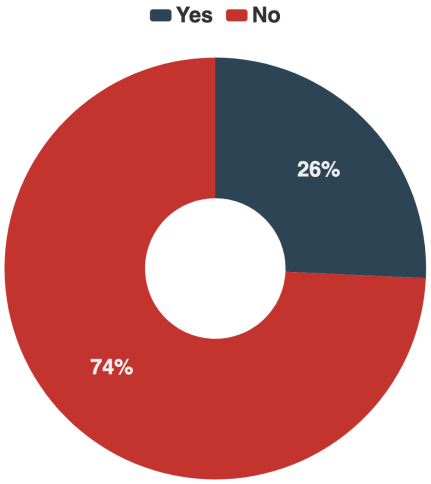


by our observers to be a particularly effective mechanism for raising awareness on issues of money politics. These posters provided clear examples of electoral offences and penalties using a mixture of Pijin and English.

Figure 3.9 (p.41) shows one of these posters displayed at a rural polling station prior to polling day. Most notable is the definition and illustration of election bribery that states that 'it is an offence for candidates to buy votes OR voters soliciting the sale of their votes for any kind of benefit from a candidate'. Other offences include interfering with voting, ballot papers or boxes; fraudulent voting; providing misleading information; and the duty of employers to release voters. Most of our observers attested to seeing these posters displayed at polling stations. Even in North West Choiseul, one of the most rural constituencies sampled, our observers commented that these posters were **'even in the most remote corners of the constituency'**. They were also located alongside voter registration rolls so that citizens could see these messages when they checked their names on the roll prior to voting.

Given what seemed to our observers to be a heightened awareness of electoral offences and penalties among citizens, collecting reliable data on the extent of vote buying and gifting proved challenging. International research shows that collecting quantifiable information about the

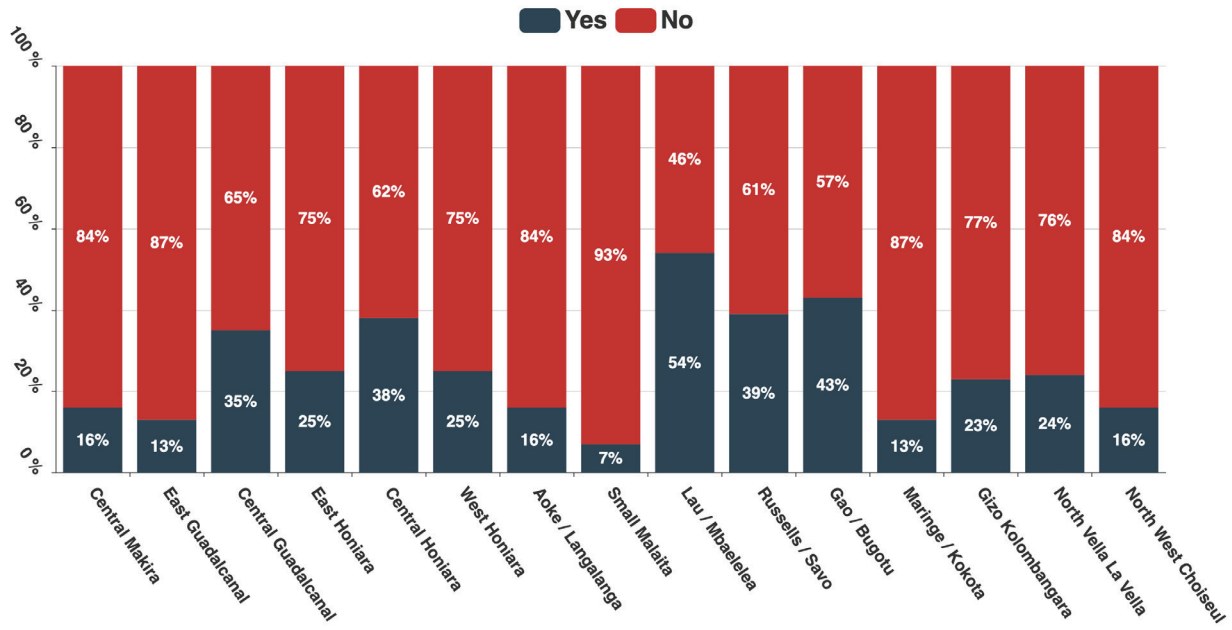
Figure 3.10 Citizens who were promised support by candidates (all constituencies)



extent of vote buying, particularly through surveys, is notoriously difficult as survey respondents typically report very low rates of vote buying even when it is known to be a widespread practice (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012:203).

Citizens surveyed during the campaign period were asked whether they had received any inducements (either as cash or in kind) in return for their vote. Only around eight per cent of those surveyed admitted to having received a gift in exchange for their vote, and less than half that number acknowledged having received cash. These figures did not vary significantly when the results were analysed by constituency or gender. There is reason to believe that these results un-

Figure 3.11 Citizens who were promised support by candidates (by constituency)



derstate the role of money politics during the campaign period. For example, observers from the East Guadalcanal team said that as a result of voters receiving:

> ***Electoral offences and penalties, people were very aware this year that gifting was illegal. Nobody would answer this question [on money politics] unless they were willing to risk the penalty.***

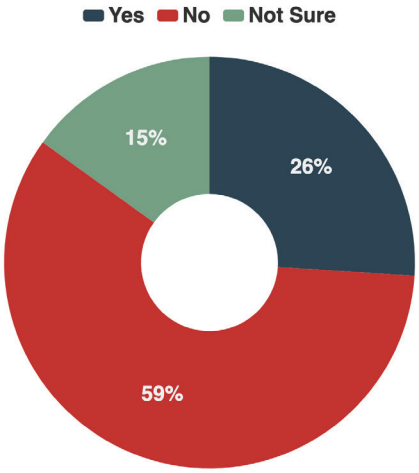
Many observers stated that while citizens were generally reluctant to acknowledge having received inducements from candidates in a formal interview setting, some were more prepared to do so informally at the conclusion of the interview.

It is notable that more respondents were willing to acknowledge that candidates had promised them or their families direct support in the future. Figures 3.10 (p. 42) and 3.11 (p. 42) show that around one quarter of those surveyed said that candidates had made such promises. It should be noted that responses to this question varied significantly by constituency, with more than half of respondents in Lau/Mbaelelea saying that the candidate had promised future support compared to only five per cent in Small Malaita.

In addition to surveying citizens about their own experiences, our observers also reported on whether they had heard of candidates or candidates' agents handing over cash to obtain support from voters. This question has the benefit of being less sensitive (respondents are no longer being asked if they have broken the law). As a result, it may provide a more accurate sense of the magnitude of the problem. Figure 3.12 shows that 26 per cent of our observers heard of such activities taking place. These results do, however, vary significantly by constituency, with all observers in West Honiara and Lau/Mbaelelea saying they heard of cash exchanged for votes compared to no observers reporting similar instances in North West Choiseul (Figure 3.13, p. 44).

In Lau/Mbaelelea, one observer reported that there was a candidate who was well known for engaging in vote buying, stating:

Figure 3.12 Observers heard reports of candidates or agents handing over cash (all constituencies)



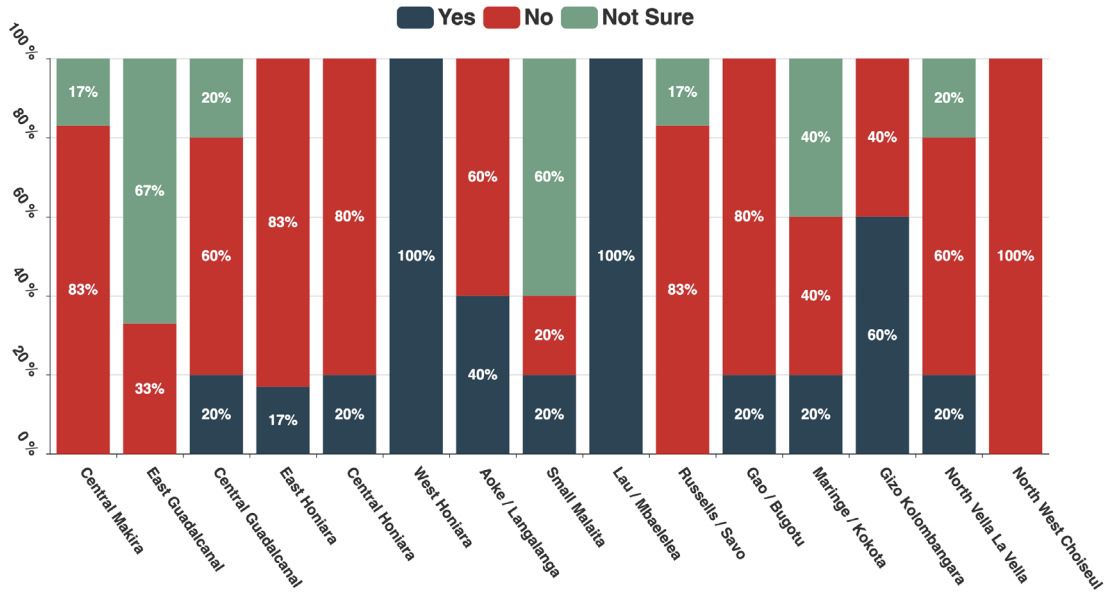
> ***On a sizeable number of accounts (relayed to myself and the team), and as discussed on social media and in local newspapers, he gave intending voters the sum of SBD200. This gifting was widespread, [and] said to be as a sign of appreciation. An issue of puzzlement and concern in the constituency was the blatant manner in which he had gone about this, seemingly oblivious to the law.***

Our observers stated that informal conversations with citizens often elicited more open discussion about vote buying than formal surveys. One explained that they **'rephrased the [survey] question to casually discuss the generosity of candidates to start conversations around gifting and received some answers to questions about cash amounts this way'**. Across the sampled constituencies, observers heard that candidates were paying voters between SBD200 and SBD5,000 for their vote, with the highest amounts recorded in Aoke/Langalanga and West Honiara. One observer noted that changes in spending patterns were also evident in the lead up to the election:

> ***Gizo is a small town and it is easy to know who has money. Many people known to not have much money were seen drinking beer — money seemed to be going around'.***

These noted changes in citizen behaviour and claims of candidates buying votes suggest that money politics was more prevalent than survey responses indicate.

Figure 3.13 Observers heard reports of candidates or agents handing over cash (by constituency)



This data on reports of, as opposed to personal experience of, vote buying may get us closer to an understanding of the role that money plays in (short-term) electoral campaigning in Solomon Islands. It is, however, difficult to be definitive on the extent and manner in which vote buying plays out in practice on the basis of this observational data. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to show that vote buying is not a trivial issue in Solomon Islands. The subject of vote buying is clearly a sensitive one in the minds of voters in countries where money politics is prevalent. It is likely that improved awareness efforts on the legalities surrounding money politics in Solomon Islands may further increase this sensitivity.

The night before the election (Devil's Night)

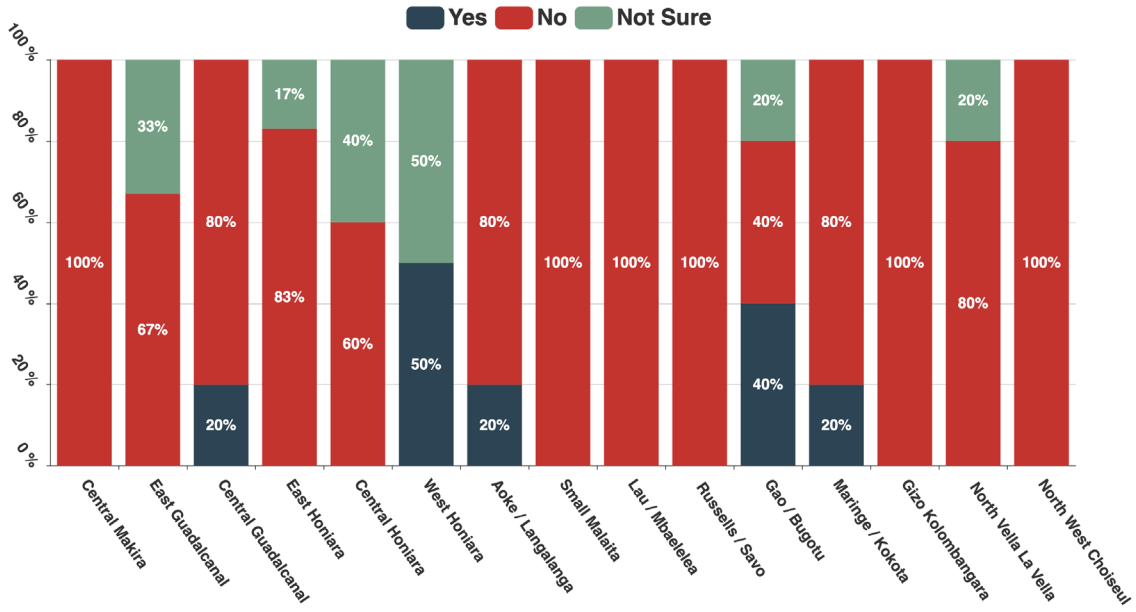
Previous election observations reported that candidates engaged in political gifting and vote buying on the night before polling day (Devil's Night) in order to secure last-minute votes. In 2014, observers noted that vote buying and gifting activities were particularly evident on the night before the election. The report found that:

> ***Candidates themselves were roaming around on Devil's Night with alleged activities including vote buying, the buying of voter ID cards and gifting. In all but one constituency, campaign managers or agents of candidates were reported to be engaging in Devil's Night activity, mostly vote buying, but also gifting and promising access to CDF grants (Haley et al. 2014:32).***

For the 2019 elections, observers recorded comparatively few incidences of candidates moving around on Devil's Night soliciting votes in exchange for gifts or cash (Figure 3.14, p. 45). There were, however, a number of reports from observers that indicate campaigning still occurred on Devil's Night. In Central Guadalcanal, one observer noted that **'I've heard that one of the candidates with his agents went around the villages and shared fresh foods, like mince, chicken, sausages'**. In Aoke/Langalanga, observers also heard two boats and a vehicle moving around the villages on Devil's Night, which they believed was a last-minute attempt to influence voters. Again, it is hard to draw definitive conclusions about this, but the relative absence of reports about Devil's Night activities contrasts with previous elections and may point to the effectiveness of pre-campaign awareness activities, especially the ban on campaigning prior to polling day.

There are two potential conclusions that can be reached about the way money politics was practised during the 2019 elections. The first is that the new legislation may have driven vote buying

Figure 3.14 Observers who heard about candidates soliciting votes on Devil's Night (by constituency)



and gifting activities underground in ways our research was unable to capture. The second is that effective awareness raising activities about the new legislation, particularly in terms of defining electoral offences and penalties, may have succeeded in reducing the willingness of candidates and citizens to engage in money politics.

Our research findings are unable to determine the exact extent of vote buying and gifting due to the aforementioned limitations of the data we were able to collect on such a sensitive topic in a highly contested election context. What is clear, however, is that money politics has and, if left unaddressed, will continue to remain a prominent election issue for Solomon Islands. The ban on campaigning on Devil's Night may have reduced the practice of overt vote buying on the night before the election. However, it has not eliminated the broader practice and may have only served to alter when these activities take place.

3.5 Constituency Development Funds and elections

In Solomon Islands, MPs receive constituency development funds (CDFs) to social welfare activities in their constituencies at their discretion. CDFs have made up almost half of the development budget and are less regulated in Solomon Islands than in other developing countries that have established similar schemes (see Barbara and Wood 2018; Wiltshire and Batley 2018 for further information). This means that incumbent MPs not only have significant budget allocations, but also considerable flexibility in determining how they are spent, including where they should be distributed within their constituency.

Over the last decade, CDF allocations have risen sharply as individual MPs have had access to between SBD8 and 10 million per year (Wiltshire and Batley 2018:1). The ways in which CDFs are spent vary among constituencies, but common usages include solar panels or roofing iron supplied to families and payments towards school fees, as well as larger projects such as contributions to schools, health clinics or infrastructure upgrades.

Citizen surveys explored perceptions of how CDFs influence electoral politics in Solomon Islands. The way CDFs impact voter behaviour,

especially in terms of how political support is garnered and maintained, was an important component of the election observation. Our findings suggest that CDF spending was one of the most decisive factors that shaped electoral outcomes, and has broader implications for electoral politics in Solomon Islands.

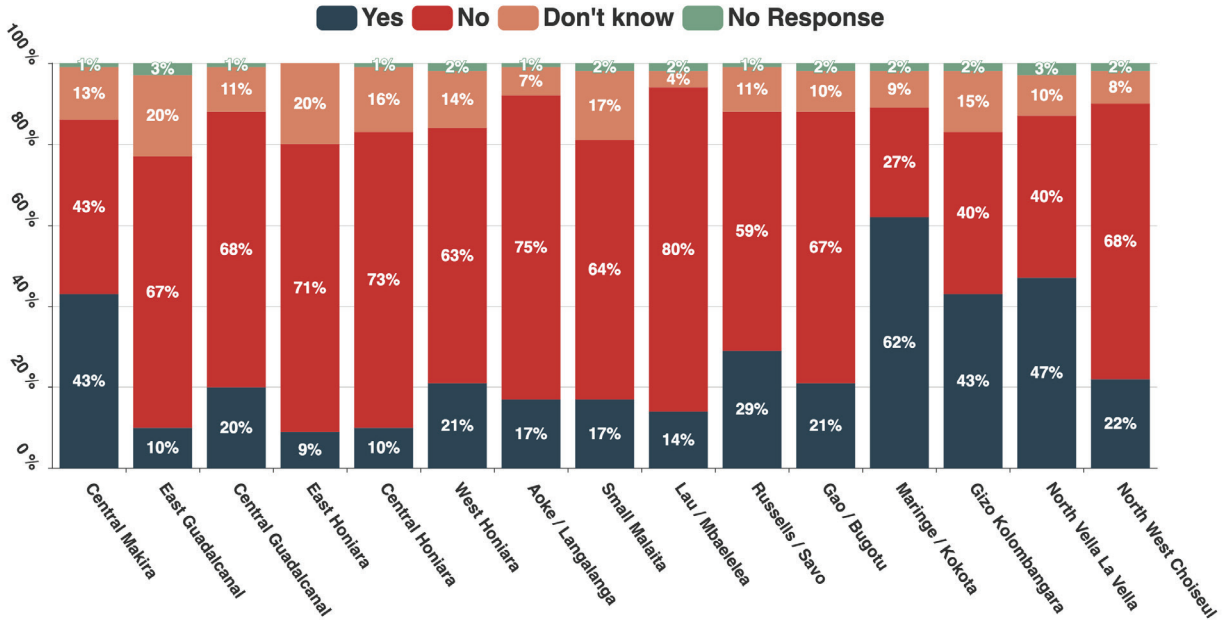
Prior to the election, we asked citizens if they believed CDFs had improved development in their constituency. Overall, only a quarter of respondents thought CDFs had a positive impact on development. These results do, however, mask significant variation found between the constituencies sampled. For example, in Maringe/Kokota, more than 60 per cent of respondents thought CDFs had improved development in their constituency, compared to less than 10 per cent who thought the same in East and Central Honiara (Figure 3.15). Generally, respondents in urban constituencies were less likely to believe CDFs had improved development. The fact that urban constituencies mainly have a significantly larger population size yet receive the same share of CDFs may contribute to this variation.[9]

Citizens were also asked whether they themselves or their community had benefited from CDFs over the last five years. Survey questions made a distinction between CDF spending of a personal or community nature. Personal level benefits include spending on goods that benefit individuals or households, such as solar panels or school fees. CDF expenditures that benefit the community as a whole include projects such as support for a local health clinic or school. Close to half of the respondents surveyed said that they themselves or their family had received direct CDF assistance through the incumbent MP (Figure 3.16, p. 47). There was significant variation in responses to this question among constituencies. Two-thirds of citizens surveyed in Maringe/Kokota and East Guadalcanal claimed to have received benefits compared to less than 15 per cent in Lau/Mbaelelea (Figure 3.17, p. 47).

For those respondents who said they did not receive direct CDF benefits, a further question was asked about their perceptions of why this might be the case. In the large majority of cases, the reason for not receiving support was almost always political in nature. The most frequent explanation given was that the MP only helps his or her political supporters. It was common for voters to simply state, 'I didn't vote for him', 'not a supporter of the member of parliament' or 'because we are not his voters'. On the whole, many voters appeared to be resigned to the belief that CDF benefits are mainly allocated to supporters of the MP. A younger voter (18–29 category) summarised this common viewpoint,

9 The three Honiara constituencies each recorded between 10,000 and 16,000 registered voters in 2019, while the smallest constituencies have registered voting populations in the 3,000s. See Table 2.1, pp. 16–17 for a complete list of registered voters by constituency.

Figure 3.15 Citizens who thought CDFs improved development in their constituency (by constituency)



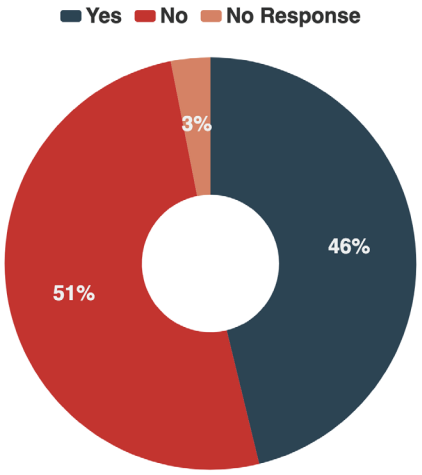
saying, **'I am new to vote, therefore previously I am not eligible to receive projects/ support from MP'**, while voters in other age categories said that they voted for another candidate and **'as a result we are not eligible to receive a share from the CDF fund'**. These responses suggest that many citizens believe there is a direct link between how they vote and their 'eligibility' to receive CDF benefits.

Another common reason citizens believed they did not receive CDF support was bias among local leaders, development committees and administrators involved in the distribution of CDF benefits. These explanations blamed the implementation of CDFs on local-level politicking rather than decisions made by the MP. A typical response provided was that the 'village agent change[d] his initial list of beneficiaries to a new list of his like[ing]'. Another example was that the **'MP gave us support but the village leaders divert it by giving it to their very close relatives'**. One observer even noted that:

> ***the [Constituency Development Officer (CDO)][10] had been changing names of beneficiaries for the MP to sign off on, resulting in unequitable distribution of CDF benefits to the CDO's family with too many people not seeing any benefits.***

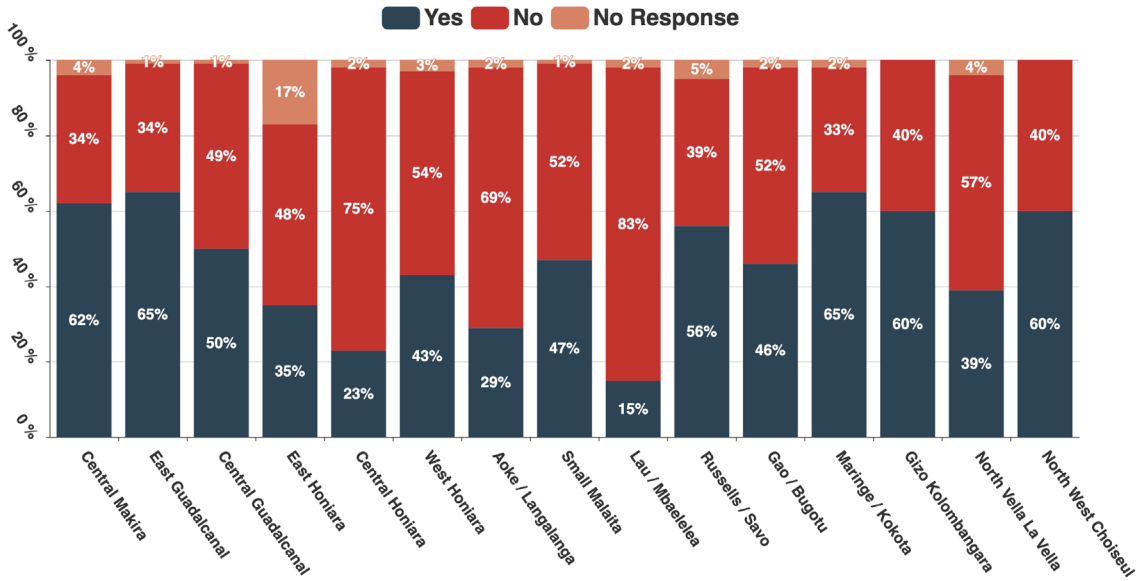
10 MPs have a small CDF management staff consisting of a Consistency Development Officer, Constituency Project Officer and Consistency Accountant who are employed through the Ministry of Rural Development.

Figure 3.16 Citizens who said they or their family received CDF support in last five years (all constituencies)



Several respondents used the term 'middleman' to describe prominent community members who are able to control the distribution of CDFs at the village/local level. For instance, one respondent said the **'MP's middlemen tampered with the list of recipients of project materials'**. Other citizens spoke of the general **'unfairness of project officers who manage the CDF'**. To a lesser degree, respondents said they either applied or requested assistance but did not hear back from the MP. As one survey respondent put it, **'When we go ask MP he told**

Figure 3.17 Citizens who said they or their family received CDF support in last five years (by constituency)



us to come back the next day until we got tired.' These responses clearly demonstrate that citizens believe CDF distribution is politically driven and tied to the way people vote.

Figure 3.18 provides results to a similar question that asked whether the *community* had received CDF projects over the past five years. This question tried to make a distinction between personalised or household level support and benefits that accrue to the broader community. Asking citizens to make such a distinction can be difficult in the Solomon Islands context, as the separation between private and publicly owned goods or projects is not often strictly defined. Responses to this question yielded similar responses, with 47 per cent responding 'yes' compared to 37 per cent responding 'no', while 13 per cent of respondents were 'not sure'. In terms of results for individual constituencies, those claiming that CDFs provided a community benefit, as opposed to an individual or family benefit, increased across all constituencies, except in Aoke/Langalanga and Russells/Savo (Figure 3.19, p. 49).

Just as individual voters believed they had missed out on CDF benefits because they had not supported the MP, so too did some communities. By far the most common reasons cited for not receiving CDFs were variations of the following responses: **'the MP knew majority of the people within the community did not vote for him', or the 'MP did not recognized this community'**. One respondent provided the following more detailed explanation:

> ***The community never received anything from MP for last five years, and it is a very sad and stressful thing for this community, feeling that no one represent us in Parliament.***

These statements speak to the importance citizens place on believing their political representatives support their community, which is often demonstrated through the tangible support CDF benefits can provide. In one constituency, observers noted that the community believed they were overlooked because they had failed to show cohesive, community-wide support for their MP in the past. One observer said:

> ***Voters in each location explained that this was a consequence of their tendency to 'vote loosely' for multiple candidates — because the member did not secure many votes from their community, they did not receive any CDF-funded projects … [A] number of voters explained that the consequence of their 'choice' to 'vote loosely' was receiving no support.***

Some respondents suggested that the MPs' strongholds were to blame for their community not receiving projects, such as one respondent saying that CDF benefits were not delivered **'because his supporters are so greedy with the CDFs'**. Other survey responses also pointed to implementation difficulties with how CDF benefits are distributed, leading to citizens believing that **'middlemen must have taken our share'** or that **'projects were given to individuals not [the] community'**. Other responses spoke to perceived religious affiliations of the MP as a reason, saying that **'because he only helps the United Church communities, hates us SDAs [Seventh Day Adventists]'**.

For citizens who claimed the community had received CDF benefits, there was some consistency in the types of CDF projects received. The most common responses were 'aid posts', 'schools' and 'church buildings'. Some respondents suggested that CDF-funded items typically associated with individuals or households had also benefitted the communi-

Figure 3.18 Citizens who said their community received CDF projects in last five years (all constituencies)

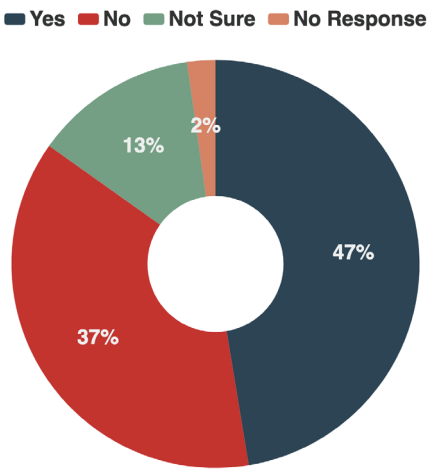
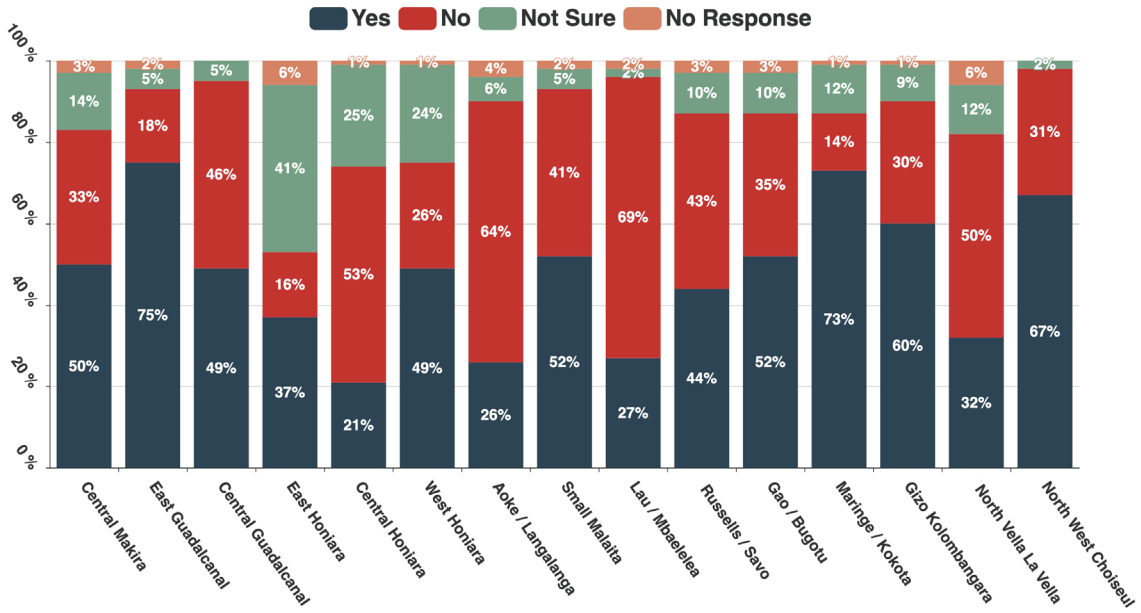


Figure 3.19 Citizens who said their community received CDF projects in last five years (by constituency)

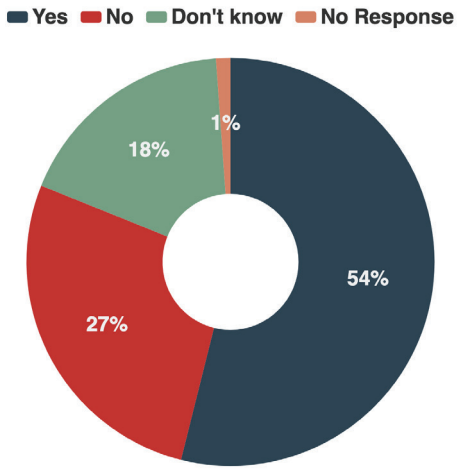


ty as a whole. For instance, observers recorded cases where solar panels had been given to schools to provide electricity and roofing iron was used to build housing for health workers.

Other respondents were able to speak of multiple CDF benefits for their community, such as a **'water tank, iron roofing to assist our school and assist to build the community rest house'**. Similarly, other citizens provided lists of benefits from CDFs, saying **'schools, (health) clinics, housing scheme materials and materials for agricultural products for community'**. Other voters were very informed about CDF benefits received to their dollar value, such as one respondent who said **'SBD100,000 for road maintenance'**. This evidence suggests that, in some constituencies at least, CDFs are being spent in a range of social development areas.

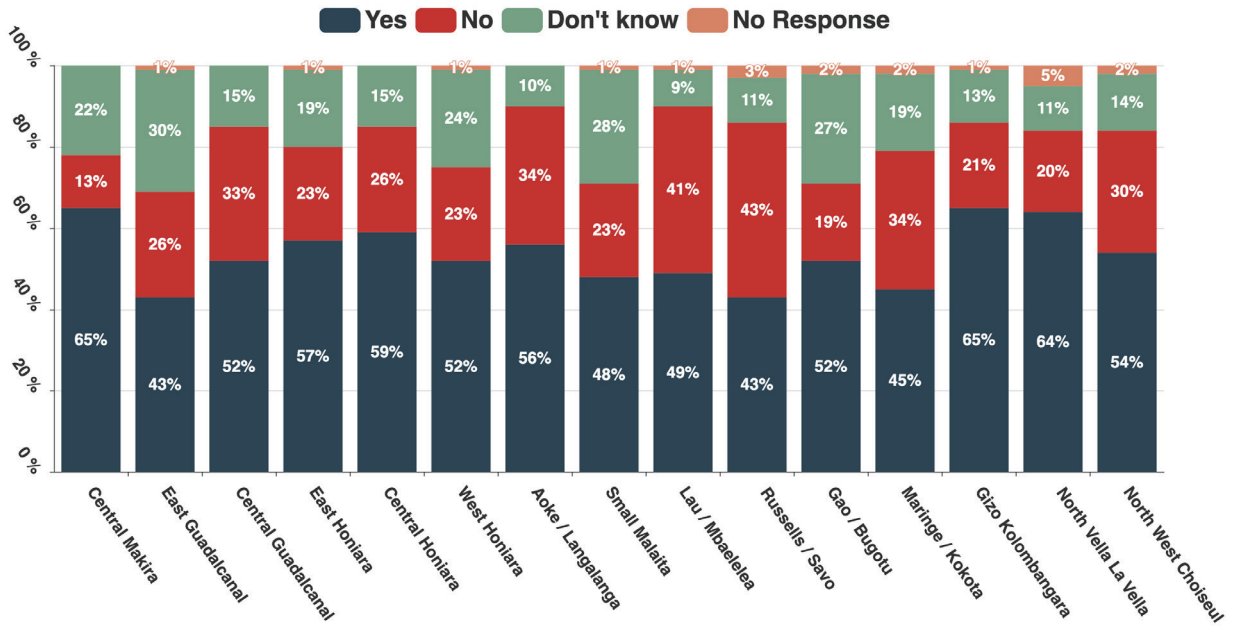
Respondents were also asked if they believed CDF spending over the previous four years would influence the way people voted. Across our sampled constituencies, more than half of those surveyed believed CDF expenditure would influence the decisions of voters, with 27 per cent saying that it would not and a further almost 18 per cent undecided (Figure 3.20). There were fairly consistent responses to how CDFs would influence voting behaviour across constituencies sampled (Figure 3.21, p. 50).

Figure 3.20 Citizens who thought CDF spending would influence voting behaviour (all constituencies)



Citizens were then asked their opinions on the fairness of CDF distribution across their constituency. The majority of citizens thought CDFs were not fairly distributed, which aligns with the aforementioned responses that suggest CDF benefits are delivered to communities that support the MP. Importantly, however, these views are not evenly shared across all constituencies. For instance, in Lau/Mbaelelea and Aoke/Langalanga, almost 90 per cent of respondents thought that CDFs were not fairly distributed compared

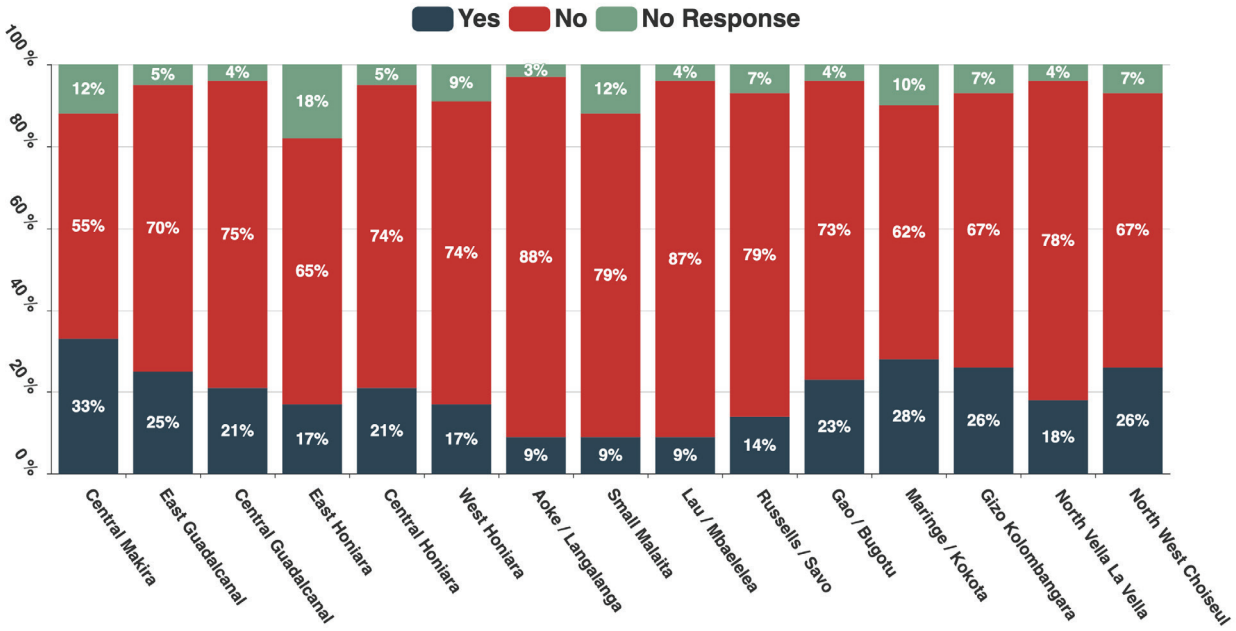
Figure 3.21 Citizens who thought CDF spending would influence voting behaviour (by constituencies)



to 55 per cent in Central Makira (Figure 3.22).

To determine what factors influenced perceptions of CDF fairness, a logistic regression analysis was conducted (see Tables 2a and 2b in Annex). This analysis compares a number of explanatory factors against a dependent variable (in this case, whether or not voters thought CDFs were fair) to determine the statistical significance of each factor. Using Central Makira as an example, our analysis indicates that age and gender were not a significant factor, though personal experiences of receiving CDF support were statistically significant. Of the 63 per cent of respondents who said they believed CDF distribution was fair, almost half (47 per cent) had received personal or family CDF support from the MP. Similarly, half of the citizens who said they thought CDFs were unfairly distributed reported that their community had not received any CDF

Figure 3.22 Voters who thought CDFs were fairly distributed (by constituencies)

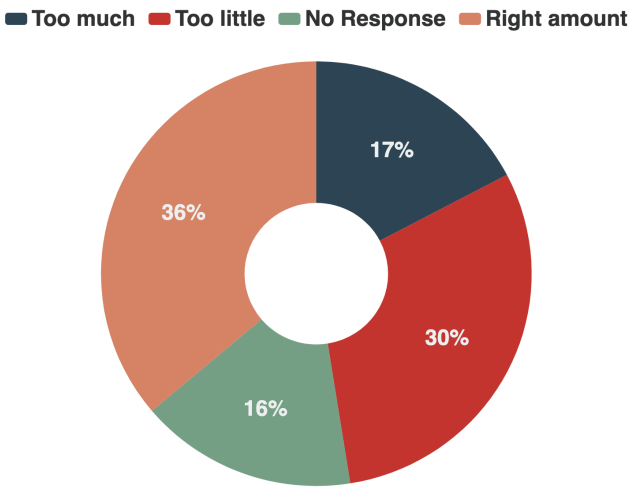


support in the last five years. This suggests that perceptions of fairness are strongly tied to personal experiences. When compared, CDF benefits to families and communities had a similar impact on citizens' assessments of CDF fairness.

Citizens appear to support CDFs as a form of government spending despite believing that there is a high degree of political bias in their management and that they are unfairly distributed. Figure 3.23 shows that 36 per cent of respondents believe the current level of CDFs is the right amount, while 30 per cent believe it is not enough, with only 17 per cent saying that funds should decrease. This means that two-thirds of citizens surveyed believe CDF allocations should remain as they are or be increased even further. This finding suggests that while many claim CDFs are unfairly distributed, most citizens are not calling for them to be abolished. More are actually calling for them to be increased as opposed to decreased. Most citizens want a form of government spending that directly benefits them and their communities.

Most of our observers believed that the distribution of CDF benefits was perhaps the major issue influencing the election in observed constituencies. Our survey findings provide us with a better understanding of the role CDFs play in electoral politics. Based on these responses, there appears to be an accepted level of political bias in the way CDFs are distributed. Many voters even appeared to accept that voting for a losing candidate made them ineligible to receive support from the MP, which is overwhelmingly thought of in terms of CDF benefits. In this way, politicised spending of CDFs may be having an impact on how voters evaluate candidates. These patterns of CDF spending may be further encouraging voters to disregard national policies and issues-based politics in favour of voting for candidates who are able to directly provide for their family or community.

Figure 3.23 Voters who thought the current level of CDFs for MPs was the right amount



Conclusion

Overall, the nomination and campaign period was free of any serious, widespread or systematic misconduct. Campaign strategies differed between candidates, with some focused on the need for improving leadership and governance, while others campaigned on constituency specific issues. As in the past, citizen engagement with political parties, national policies and issues-based campaigning appeared to be less prominent. Similarly, a range of factors continue to inhibit women's political participation. Voters say they are open to seeing more women in national parliament, although they were less likely to actually vote for a female candidate.

Harsher penalties were introduced for candidates or voters who engaged in money politics at the 2019 election. As a result, it was difficult to assess the extent to which vote buying and gifting took place due to extensive awareness campaigns that clearly articulated penalties. Voters were more willing to discuss the impact of CDFs on electoral politics. While CDFs were generally believed to be unfairly distributed across constituencies, they remain a popular form of government spending and were one of the most decisive factors that influenced the election.

Recommendations: candidates and campaigning

- **Review how campaign spending is monitored and reported.** New increased limits on campaign spending should be enforced to improve accountability.

- **Consider the long-term barriers to greater women's political participation.** Rethink short-term support strategies and instead focus on addressing societal factors that inhibit or promote women's ability to occupy roles of political influence.

- **Community groups that advance women's rights and gender-based issues could be encouraged to promote their work in the context of elections.** This could help to change attitudes towards women in politics and gender roles more broadly.

- **Support for women candidates should focus on identifying and supporting women leaders over the entire electoral cycle.** This would allow women to mount strong and credible campaigns well in advance of the election.

- **Continue awareness campaigns on electoral offences and penalties.** These could be extended to run throughout the electoral cycle. They could also address money politics and the use of CDFs.


DO NOT STAND

4 – ELECTION DAY

This section draws on data from the citizen surveys conducted both before and after election day in order to contrast voters' pre-election expectations with assessments of their actual experiences of going to the polls. It also draws on observations recorded by the research team who witnessed pre-election preparations and visited 146 polling stations on election day across the 15 constituencies sampled. Overall, the research shows that citizens were able to cast votes in a relatively safe and peaceful manner at polling stations across the country on election day. Broadly speaking, election day was well administered, with most electoral officials adhering to proper procedures. There were only a few minor complaints regarding the impartiality of polling booth staff.

Comparisons of surveys conducted with citizens before and after voting show that in the vast majority of cases, voter expectations of a free and fair election were met. A very high percentage of citizens were able to cast their votes without issue, knew where the polling station they were registered to vote was and cast their ballot in secret and without experiencing intimidation from others. In general, voters said they preferred candidates that displayed strong leadership qualities and focused on looking after the communities they represented. There were, however, widespread concerns that it was possible for winning candidates to find out whom individual citizens voted for after the election. This belief was the result of candidates and others in the community hearing, seeing or even assuming which individuals, families or villages were offering their support rather than any serious administrative error that would make voters' ballot papers available to candidates (though rumours to this effect do commonly circulate).

This section begins by contrasting voter expectations with the reality of the voting experience. This is followed by citizen perspectives on factors that influenced their vote and what qualities they look for in a candidate. Finally, assessments from observers on the administration of polling day are detailed, from when the polling stations opened to when they were closed.

4.1 Voter experiences

Citizen surveys were designed to make direct comparisons between expectations (pre-polling) and realities (post-polling) of the voter experience. Figure 4.1 shows data aggregated for all constituencies in relation to the expectations of voters before polling day. Almost all citizens (98 per cent) said they intended to vote and a similar number (97 per cent) reported that they

Figure 4.1 Expectations held by voters about election day (all constituencies)

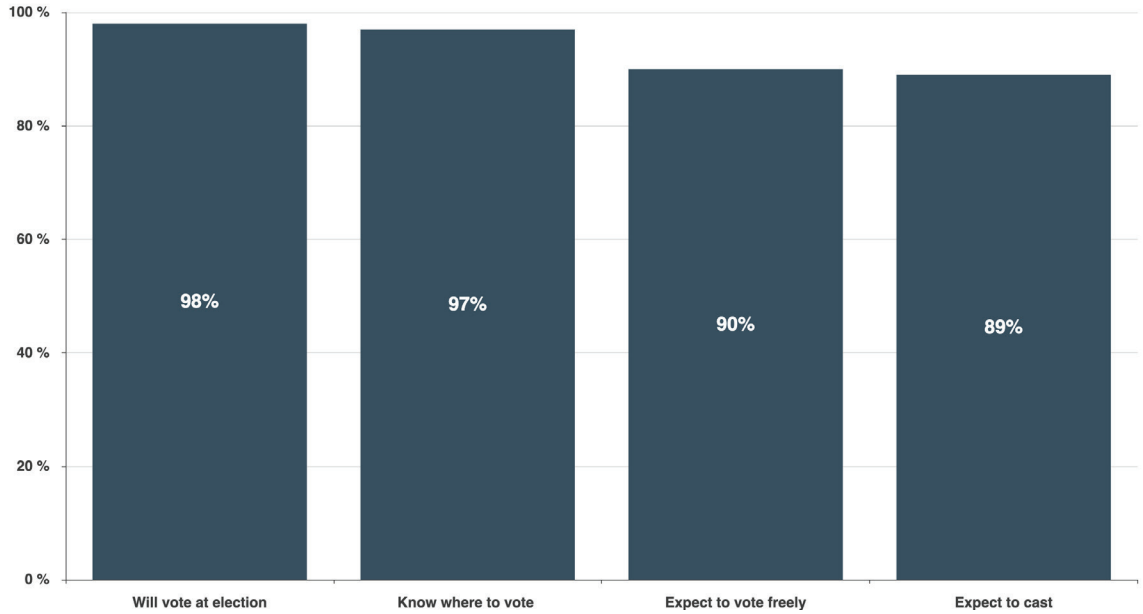
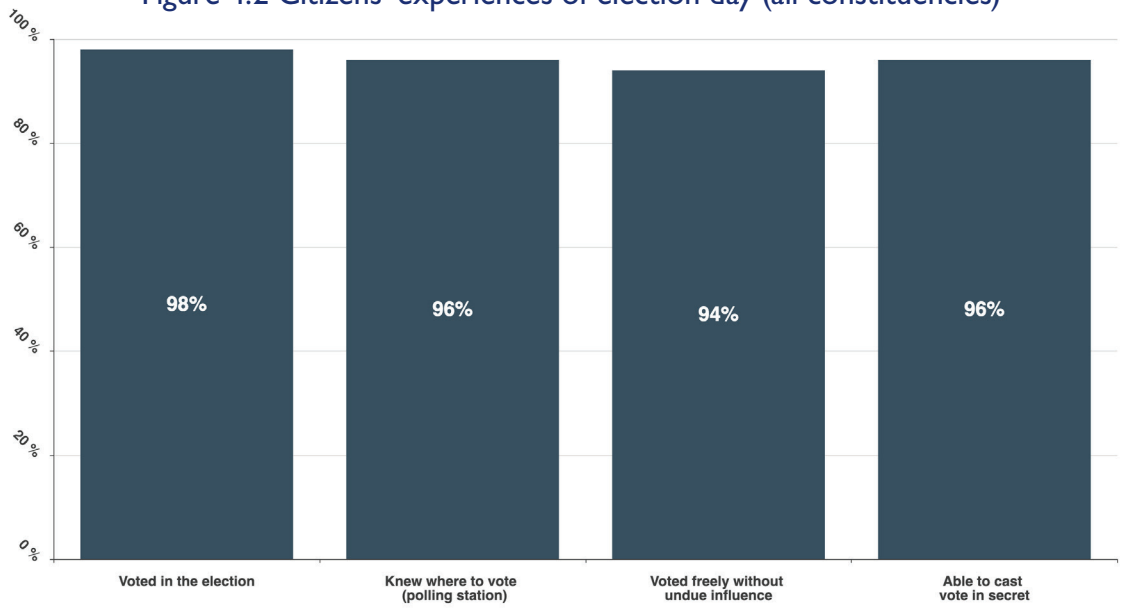


Figure 4.2 Citizens' experiences of election day (all constituencies)



knew the polling station they needed to attend in order to cast their vote.[11] The large majority of citizens surveyed (90 per cent) also expected to be able to vote freely without undue influence, and about the same number thought their vote would be kept secret at the time of voting.

Voter experiences on polling day either met or exceeded their expectations based on responses from citizens in the post-polling period. Figure 4.2 shows that 98 per cent of citizens surveyed said they voted at the election — the same figure as those who said they intended to vote. Figures provided by SIEC suggest that the national participation rate of registered voters in the electoral process was also very high at 86.4 per cent.[12] Less than two per cent of voters interviewed in the post-polling surveys said they did not try to vote, were prevented from doing so or were not on the register. The findings also confirm that most voters (96 per cent) knew the polling station location where they were registered to vote and were able to do so on polling day. Interestingly, 94 per cent of citizens surveyed after the election said they had been able to vote freely, compared to 90 per cent who were asked a corresponding question prior to polling. Similarly, more voters said they were able to cast their vote in secret (96 per cent) than those who thought they would have a secret ballot (89 per cent) when interviewed prior to the election.

As these results show, almost all voters reported that they were able to vote freely on polling day, though observers did report some cases of candidates' agents asserting themselves in an attempt to subtly influence voters. For example, in Aoke/Langalanga, an observer noted that:

> ***Polling agents for candidates are not welcoming. They also make voters uneasy because when voters go to the polling booth those agents [who] belong to those candidates would stand up and walk right up in front, halfway to the polling booth and stare at voters. I can see those voters are uneasy, especially females.***

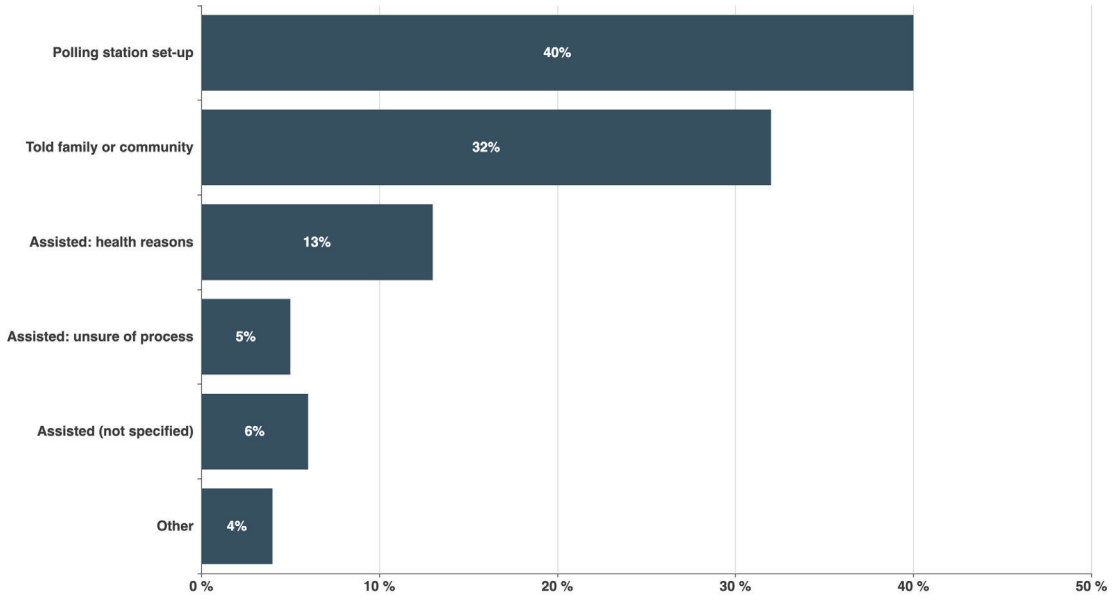
This shows that while overt intimidation was not common, there was still a tense atmosphere at some polling stations with (some) last minute attempts from candidate agents or supporters to influence voters.

Voters who answered 'no' to being able to cast their vote in secret were asked to explain their response. The answers are presented in Figure 4.3 (p. 57). The most common complaint (40 per cent of responses) was that the arrangement of the polling booth or screens was not adequate.

11 In Solomon Islands, registered voters are only able to cast their vote at one polling station located in the constituency in which they are registered.

12 The percentage of citizens who voted at the election was higher for our surveys than the national average of registered citizens who voted (86 per cent). This could be explained by the timing and locations of the surveys. Citizens who were located closer to polling stations at the time surveys were conducted may have been more likely to vote on polling day.

Figure 4.3 Reasons citizens thought their vote was not secret



(n=84)

A large proportion of voters (32 per cent of those surveyed) suggested that their vote was not secret because members of their family or community already knew who they would vote for. Those who were assisted to vote, usually due to age, a medical issue/disability or a lack of understanding of the process, comprised 24 per cent of responses.

While the large majority of voters believed they had a secret ballot on polling day itself, opinions were split on whether the winning candidate would be able to find out who they voted for after the election. Figure 4.4 shows aggregated results for all constituencies to the question 'do you think the winning candidate will be able to find out afterwards who you voted for?' Close to an even third of respondents answered either 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'. There was significant variation in results across constituencies on the question of whether or not winning candidates could find out who individuals voted for on election day. Figure 4.5 (p. 58) shows that close to half of citizens surveyed in North Vella La Vella, Gizo/Kolombangara and Lau/Mbaelelea thought the winning candidate would find out, which was much more than North West Choiseul (13 per cent) and East Guadalcanal (14 per cent). Explanations for the range of responses across constituencies centred on awareness of the current system. For example, observers in Lau/Mbaelelea remarked that some citizens thought their voter ID numbers would be written on ballot papers, which was widely believed to have occurred in the 2014 election.

While this question examined the electoral processes that ensure a secret ballot, many citizens were also quick to add that while candidates may not have proof, they were still likely to assume how individuals, families and entire communities had voted. This concern that candidates would be able to find out who voted for them appeared to be exacerbated by the widely held belief that MPs have access to a list of citizens who voted for them. Many voters believe that such lists are compiled by comparing serial numbers and voter ID numbers on ballot papers and

Figure 4.4 Citizens who believed the winning candidate would find out who they voted for (all constituencies)

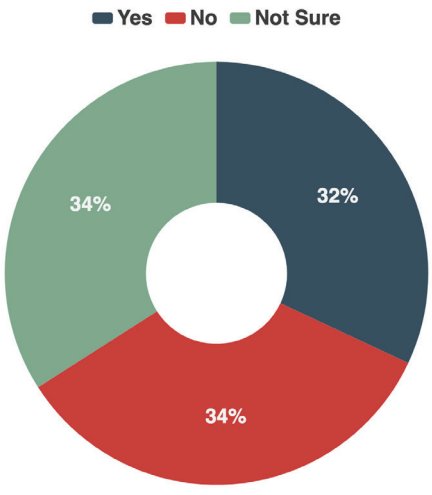
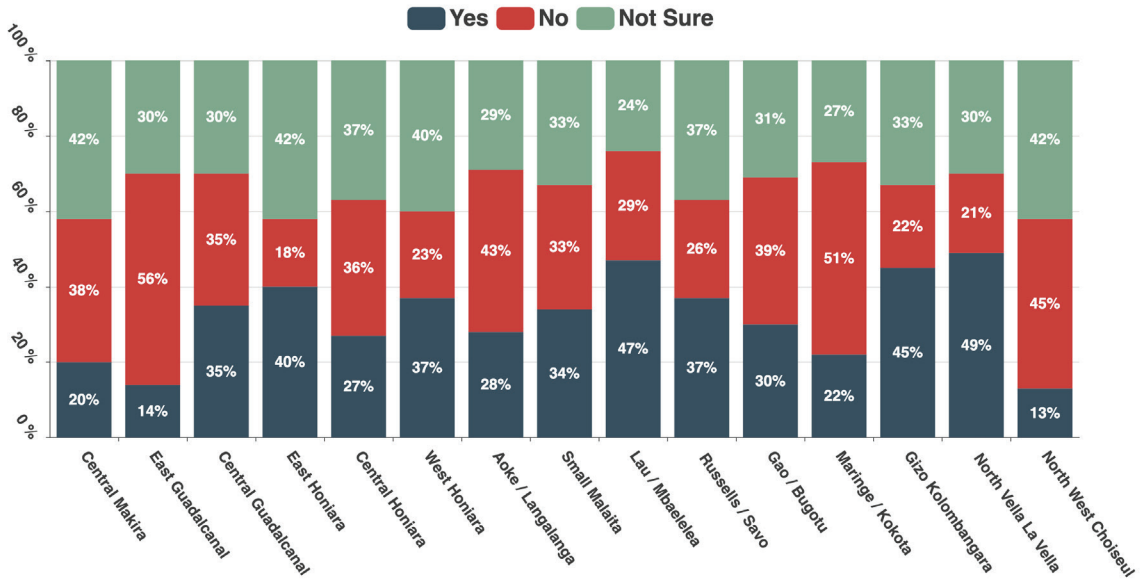


Figure 4.5 Citizens who believed the winning candidate would find out who they voted for (by constituency)



registration lists in previous elections.[13] In 2019, serial numbers were removed from ballot papers, but that does not appear to have made a significant impact on voters' expectations that their vote would remain secret. Observers also noted that, in most cases, the formal electoral system was not at fault. Rather, as one observer explained:

> ***All major candidates have agents in villages whose task, in addition to winning votes, was to work out who will vote for their candidate. In small villages, where there are few secrets, this is not hard … [O]ne community figure was able to tell me exactly how many families had voted for a certain candidate.***

In the past, citizens have assumed that weaknesses in the electoral system would allow candidates to determine who voted for them. This example, however, shows that candidates rely on a range of informal mechanisms for trying to find out who voted for them.

Having the winning candidate know they had their support was not always seen as a negative by voters. In Gizo/Kolombangara, observers reported: **'some people wanted candidates to know who they voted for — they wanted to give candidates proof they voted for them'**. One observer even described an incident where a voter attempted to photograph their completed ballot paper but was stopped by electoral officials. Many voters thought it was in their best interest to make it known who they had voted for in the hope that they would receive benefits from the winning candidate in reward for their vote. Voters may be making their support known in response to direct promises from candidates or of their own volition. This practice is further reinforced by the commonly held view that voters aren't entitled to benefits unless they voted for the winning candidate.

To examine this trend, a logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between citizens who said they received promises and those who thought the candidate would know who they voted for (see Tables 3a and 3b in Annex). As an example, West Honiara was chosen because it had a high number of voters who thought the winning candidate might find out.

Of the citizens surveyed in West Honiara, 24 per cent said they had received promises of support from a candidate. Exactly half of these citizens thought that the candidate *would* find out who they voted for. This finding indicates that citizens who were promised benefits were more likely to believe that their vote would become known to the winning candidate. This suggests that gifting and promising is either leading citizens to make their voting behaviour known or driving the candidates to find out.

13 For a discussion of the plausibility of this, see Wood (2014:6–7).

Prior to the election, most citizens interviewed (more than 70 per cent) believed they required their voter ID card to cast their vote (see Figure 4.6). While voter ID cards can help polling officials identify eligible voters on the register of electors, they are not a requirement for voting. There was some variation in this finding across constituencies, with Central and East Honiara, and, perhaps surprisingly, the rural constituency of North West Choiseul, reporting a higher proportion of voters who knew that voter ID cards were not a requirement for voting (Figure 4.7).

These results suggest that voters may have expected to be turned away from polling stations if they were unable to present their voter ID cards. Our observation data collected on election day clearly shows that this was not the case. Based on observations at 146 polling stations, there were only four recorded instances where observers noted that voters were unable to cast their ballot because they did not have their voter ID cards with them. While electoral officials were generally well informed that voter ID cards were not mandatory, it was observed that in some constituencies they were commonly used by voters and officials on polling day to speed up the process of finding voters' names on the roll.

Another consequence of voters believing they need their voter ID cards to vote is the potential for voter intimidation. An observer in West Honiara witnessed police apprehend a woman on polling day who was in possession of a number of voter ID cards. The woman was only handing them back to their owners once they pledged to vote for the candidate she was supporting.

Figure 4.6 Citizens who thought a voter ID card was required to vote (all constituencies)

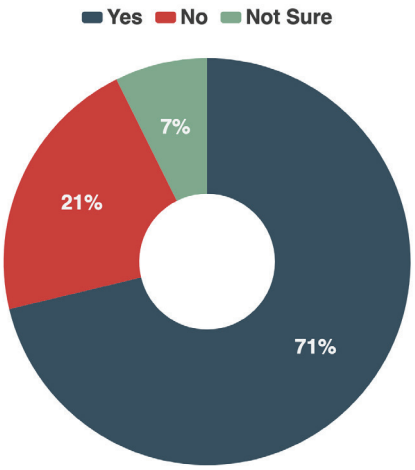
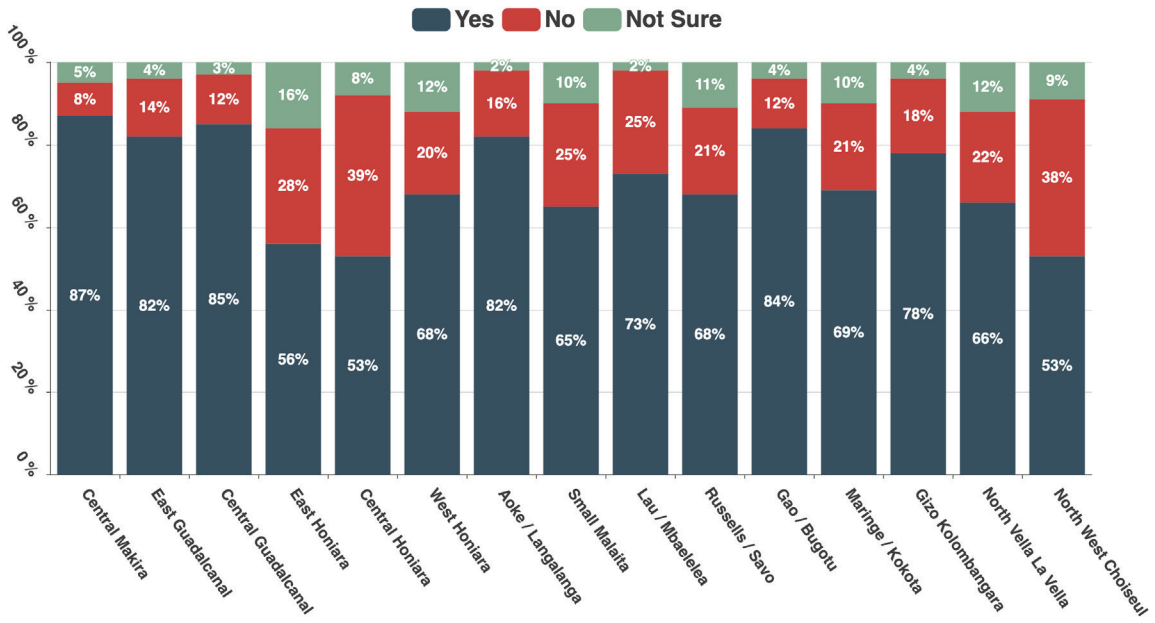


Figure 4.7 Citizens who thought a voter ID card was required to vote (by constituencies)



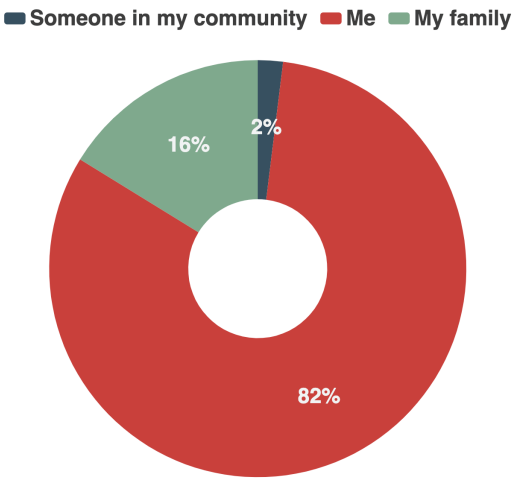
4.2 Factors that influence voter behaviour

This section focuses on the series of questions from the citizen surveys on how voters choose candidates to represent their constituency. Figure 4.8 shows that more than 80 per cent of voters across all sampled constituencies claimed that they themselves determined how they voted. A further 16 per cent said their family was the most significant factor in deciding how they voted, while fewer than two per cent of those surveyed said someone else in their community influenced their vote.

By constituency, this question produced significant variation in results, ranging from 92 per cent of voters in North West Choiseul identifying themselves as having the most influence over their voting behaviour compared to a much lower 61 per cent in East Honiara (Figure 4.9).

When results are analysed by gender (Figure 4.10, p. 61), it shows that women were almost twice as likely as men to have been influenced by their family members. An observer in Gizo/Kolombangara suggested that **'quiet coercion within families'** was common and quoted one interviewee who explained that **'women voters have to vote as their husbands tell them.'**

Figure 4.8 Citizens' perceptions of who influenced their vote (all constituencies)



Another young woman spoke of gaining **'permission from family of who to vote for'**. Our observers who administered these citizen surveys were somewhat sceptical about the high percentage of voters who believed they themselves had the most influence over their vote. The observers suggested that family ties may have a greater bearing on the way citizens decide who to vote for than the results suggest because individuals are not prepared to acknowledge, or are not even conscious of, what influences them. Summarising this commonly held view, one observer stated that:

Figure 4.9 Citizens' perceptions of who influenced their vote (by constituency)

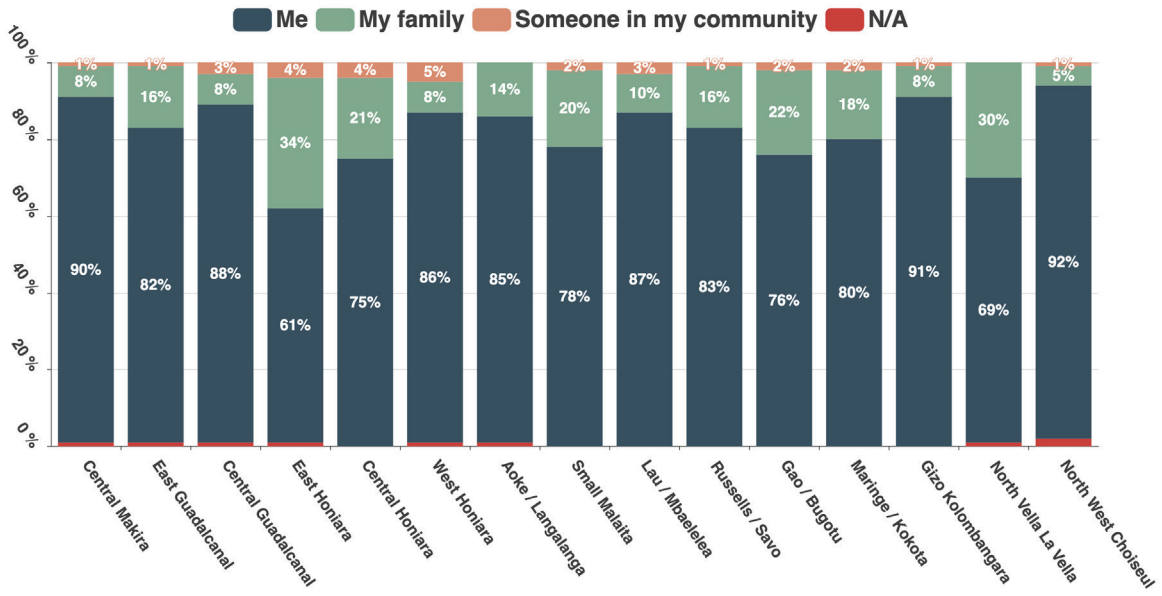
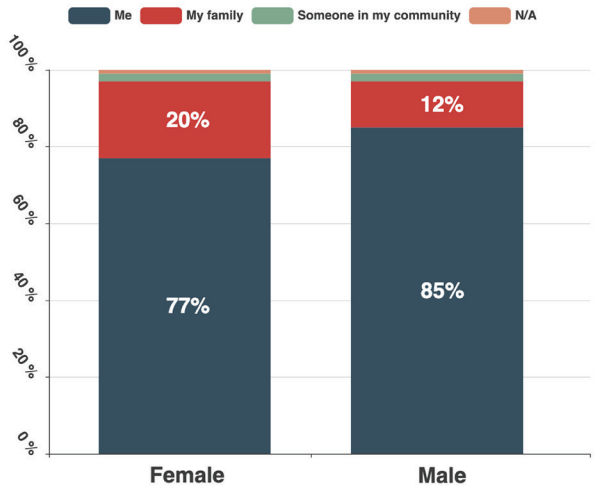


Figure 4.10 Citizens' perceptions of who influenced their vote (by gender)



They [the voters] will say "I made my own decision" but, in reality, we know about the power of family ties. If you don't vote for someone the whole family turns against you. Sometimes they think that they make their own decision but they are really influenced by others.

Voters were asked about the most important qualities they want in a candidate. Figure 4.11 shows that the two most common responses were 'accessible to the community' (51 per cent) and 'looks after the community' (46 per cent). These results add weight to the commonly held perspective that citizens vote for candidates who focus on providing benefits to communities as opposed to assessing candidates based on their policy agendas. In fact, only 24 per cent of respondents stated that 'good policies' was an important quality they wanted in a candidate. As one citizen from Maringe/Kokota remarked:

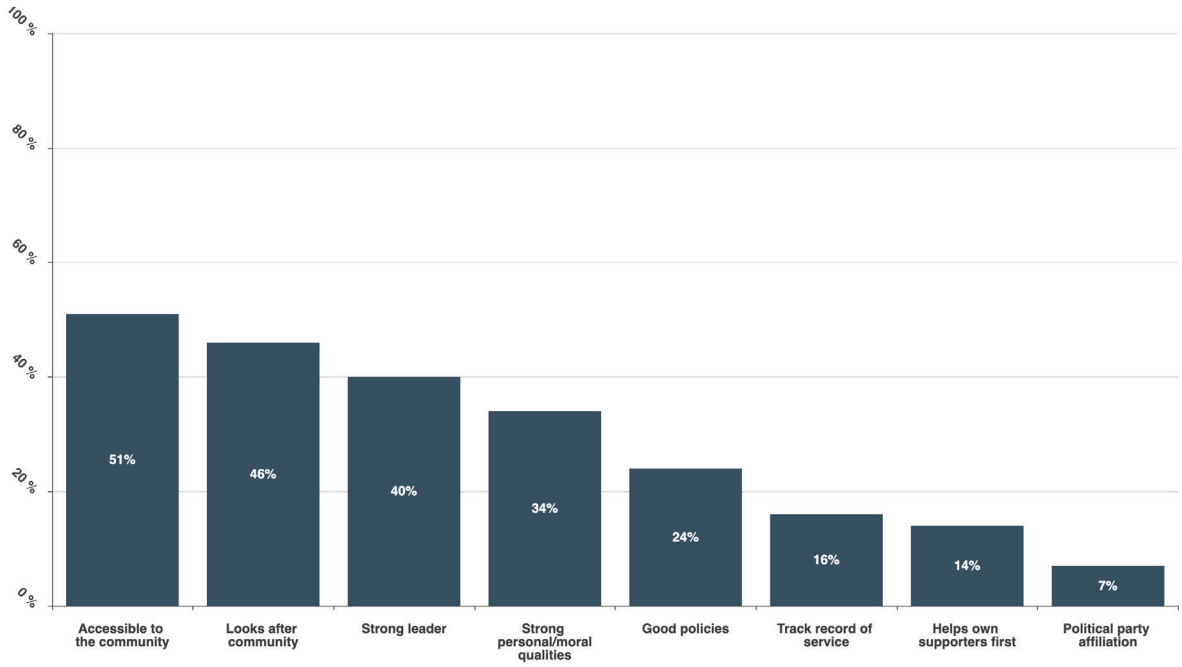
We do not care when politicians talk about national policies and budgets. That is not our problem. Our concern is how they will share that money with our community.

These results suggest that the candidate's perceived character is important to voters. Out of the citizens surveyed, 40 per cent stated that being a 'strong leader' and 34 per cent stated that possessing 'strong personal/moral qualities' were attributes they wanted to see in a candidate. Only seven per cent of citizens surveyed said political party affiliation was an important factor.

Observers in most constituencies noted that the distribution of CDF benefits was commonly seen as one of the most important roles of an MP. An observer in Gao/Bugotu notes that the MP's popularity appeared to stem from his:

Astute use of CDFs to provide small items to meet people's immediate needs. These items typically include solar panels, roofing iron, assistance meeting education and fuel costs and assisting constituents when they are in Honiara.

Figure 4.11 Most important qualities voters want in a candidate (all constituencies)



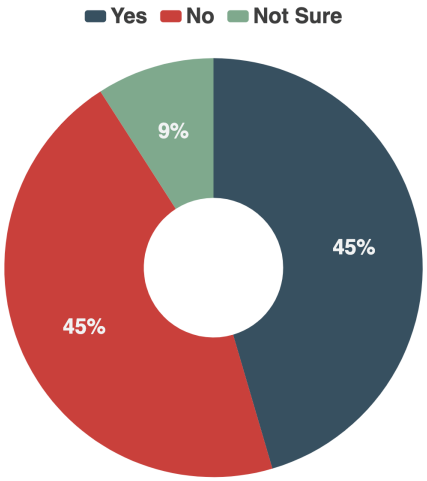
It was also common for citizens to assess their MP's performance based on how responsive they were to direct requests for assistance. In Maringe/Kokota, critics of the current MP told observers they were severely disappointed when the MP turned away a group of his constituents who had travelled to his office in Honiara to ask for assistance with school fees. Voters clearly believe that an MP's accessibility and ability to look after the community are important qualities and this appears to often be understood in terms of their willingness to directly channel CDF benefits to constituents.

4.3 Polling day administration

Observers witnessed the conduct of the election on polling day by making assessments against predetermined questions contained in their journals. The results reported in this section relate to the administration of the election from the set-up of the polling station to identifying voters on the register and the process of voting, security and the closure of the polling station. In general, the administration and conduct of the election was peaceful and orderly and minor tensions were only evident in a few isolated instances. These incidences were usually confined to voters arguing amongst themselves or with electoral officials and candidate agents.

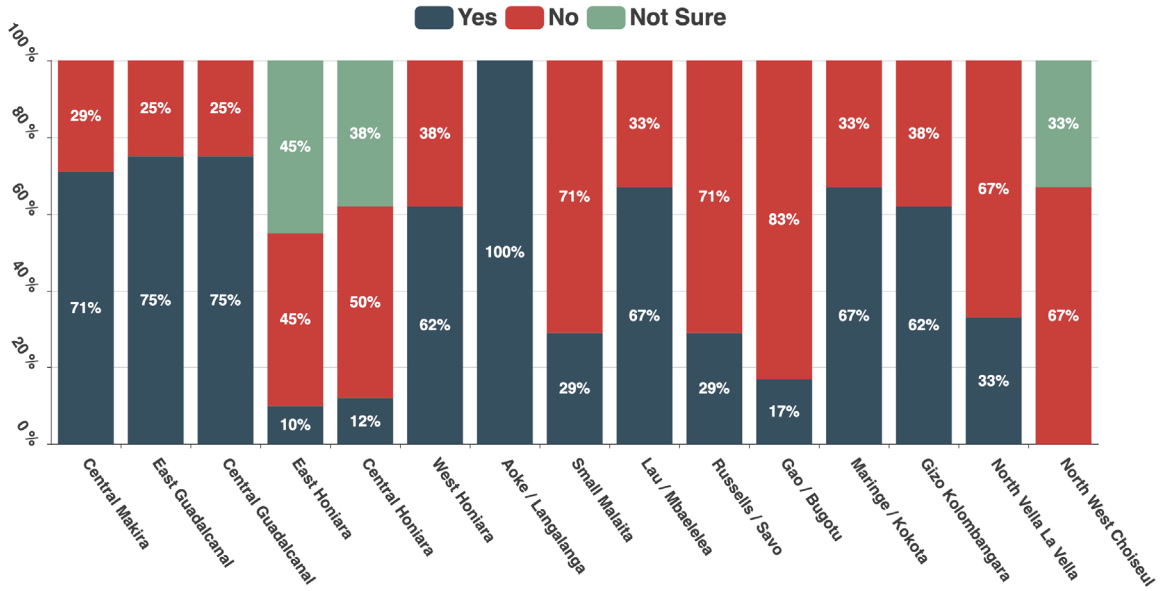
According to the Electoral Act, polling on election day was to start at 7am and close at 5pm, noting that any voter still in line at 5pm was required to be processed. Figure 4.12 shows that voting

Figure 4.12 Observed polling stations that opened on time (all constituencies)



started on time at less than half of the polling stations attended by observers. Of those polling stations that did not open on time, observers recorded that just over half opened within 30 minutes. Our observers recorded five instances where polling stations opened an hour after the official start, with one polling station not opening until 8:50am. There was significant variation in this result among constituencies, ranging from 100 per cent compliance in Aoke/Langalanga to 29 per cent in Small Malaita and Russells/Savo (Figure 4.13). Both rural and urban constituencies experienced delays in the opening of polling stations, which implies that the geographical location did not appear to be a major factor, despite voting taking place in some very rural and remote locations across Solomon Islands. While almost all polling booths visited on election day

Figure 4.13 Observed polling stations that opened on time (by constituency)



closed at 5pm (89 per cent), observers heard that electoral officials at several locations planned to close an hour early because there were very few names left on the roll by the afternoon.

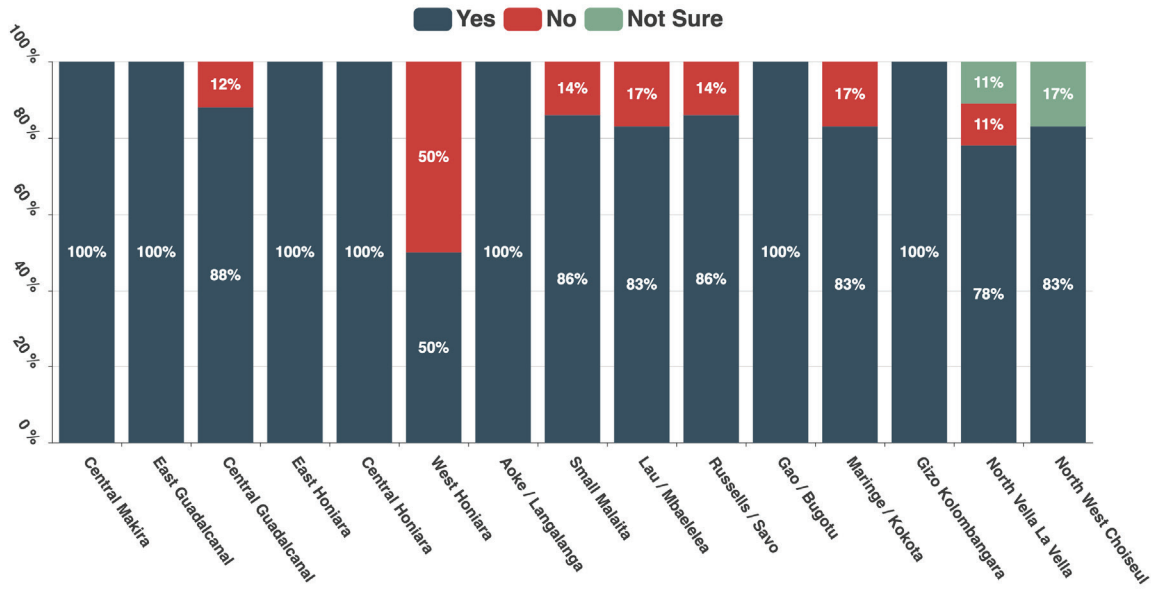
Observation data collected indicates that in most cases voting compartments were mainly positioned to screen the voter from view to ensure a secret ballot. The only constituency where voters did not have a secret ballot was at a polling station in West Honiara (Figure 4.14), which was an isolated incident. Voters suggested that the screens around the polling booths were either too small or positioned in a way that allowed others in the room to see their ballot paper.

Both observers and voters also commented on the inadequate size or layout of the rooms chosen to house the polling stations. For example, one booth was positioned too close to a large window and the room was too small and too crowded to feel private. In the words of one voter, 'the polling station was messy and small and crowded. The setup of the voter screen wasn't confidential'. There were other instances where the choice of polling station location did not offer adequate protection from the weather and the ability of the polling officials to administer the vote was affected. In Small Malaita, one polling station was established in a non-permanent building that did not offer sufficient protection from the heavy rain, which caused delays in election proceedings.

Other important aspects of polling station administration appeared to be broadly complied with across constituencies sampled. This included the list of candidates and the electoral roll with photos of each registered voter being clearly displayed at polling stations. In the lead up to the election, observers noted that some of the rolls outside polling stations had been torn up and certain voters had been cut out or crossed off the roll by other voters. On election day, these damaged rolls had been replaced with new ones in most locations. Observers witnessed polling officials exhibit the empty ballot boxes prior to commencement of polling and openly conduct the fastening of the ballot boxes at the close of polling. These procedures were accompanied by an explanation of accountability measures employed to ensure ballot boxes were not tampered with, which included applying the security seals and then recording the corresponding number.

Generally, observers thought the presiding officers and polling assistants understood their roles and administered them effectively across our sampled constituencies. Observers also agreed that the presiding officers collaborated effectively with polling officials and were able to maintain control of the polling station on election day. According to one observer, polling staff **'shared equal shared equal responsibilities by ensuring every voter has the chance to vote, while keeping the exercise run[ning] smoothly'**. This suggests that polling officials generally took ownership

Figure 4.14 Compartments that were positioned to adequately screen voters (by constituency)



of the operation of polling stations to ensure they were effectively managed.

Our observers noted that returning officers, presiding officers and polling assistants had a sound understanding of their roles, though they raised possible concerns in regard to their impartiality. There were reported cases of biased behaviour in some constituencies. Figure 4.15 shows that the majority of concerns around the impartiality of presiding officers were raised in Central Makira, East Honiara and Lau/Mbaelelea. In one constituency, an observer witnessed a candidate's agent freely moving around the polling station to escort voters to the ballot box to observe them vote. This observer said:

> ***I thought the electoral official there should have taken her out [of the polling station] but he never did. I even asked the polling assistant if that person is an electoral official and he said no.***

Observers were of the opinion that recruiting electoral officials from the local community created the potential for impartial decision-making. This issue could be addressed by assigning electoral staff to locations where they do not reside or have strong social connections. This could improve confidence in the electoral system, though it would create additional administrative challenges and costs.

With regard to inclusion, there was significant variation across constituencies as to whether polling stations were set up to accommodate the needs of voters with disabilities. Overall, less than half of observers believed the polling stations could accommodate such voters. Figure 4.16 (p. 65) shows a lack of consistency in how polling stations were set up. In general, rural constituencies appeared to be better able to support voters with disabilities. For instance, in East Guadalcanal and Gao/Bugotu, observers noted that all polling stations attended could accommodate voters with disabilities or impaired mobility compared to only 20 per cent in Aoke/Langalanga. In Central and West Honiara, less than half of the polling stations attended were set up to support voters with disabilities. The most common accessibility complaint recorded by observers was that voters had to climb stairs to reach polling booths.

The assessment of data collected indicates that citizens with physical disabilities, the elderly and the mobility impaired were still able to cast their votes. However, observers did note issues in regard to wait times that made polling challenging for these voters. In most instances, priority access was given to people with disabilities, although results varied across constituencies sampled.

Figure 4.15 Observers who thought the presiding officer was unbiased and impartial (by constituency)

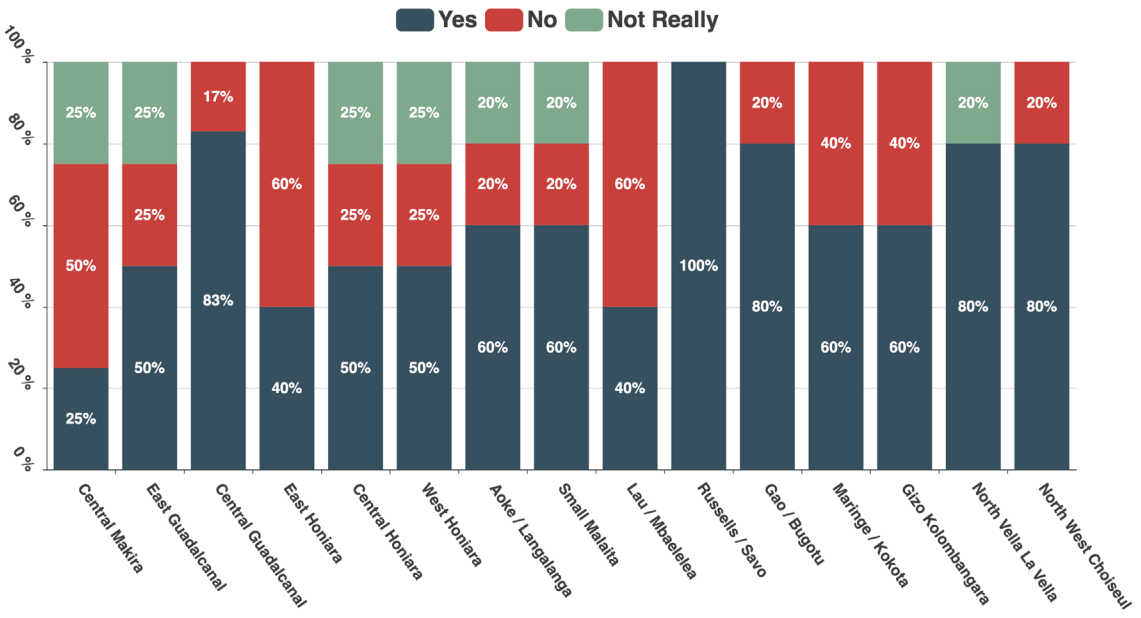
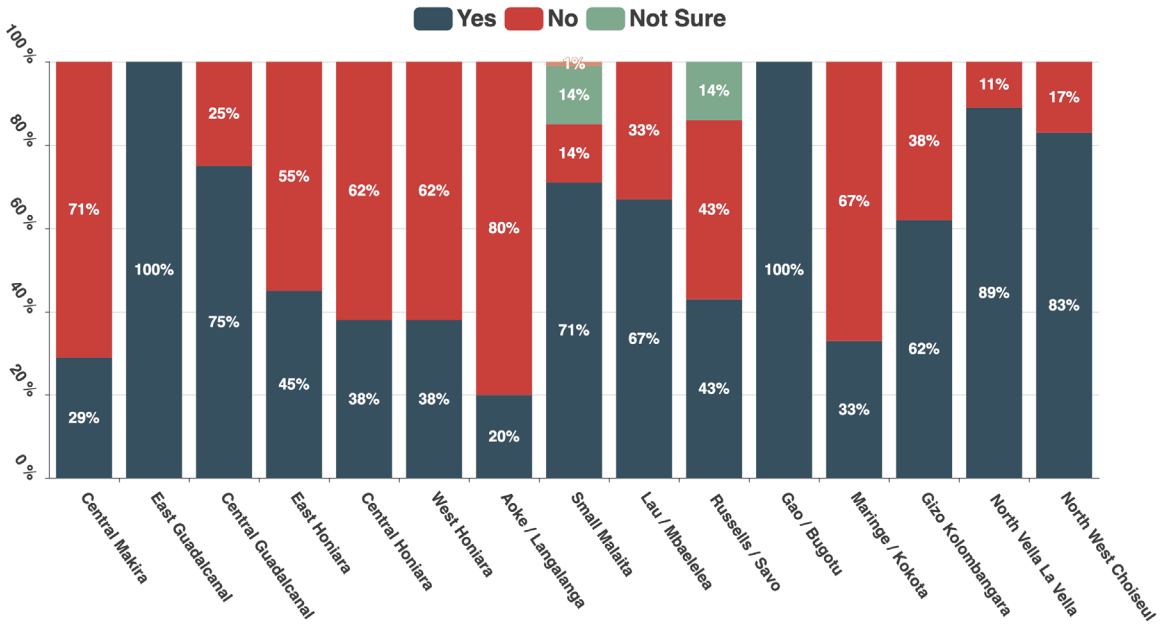


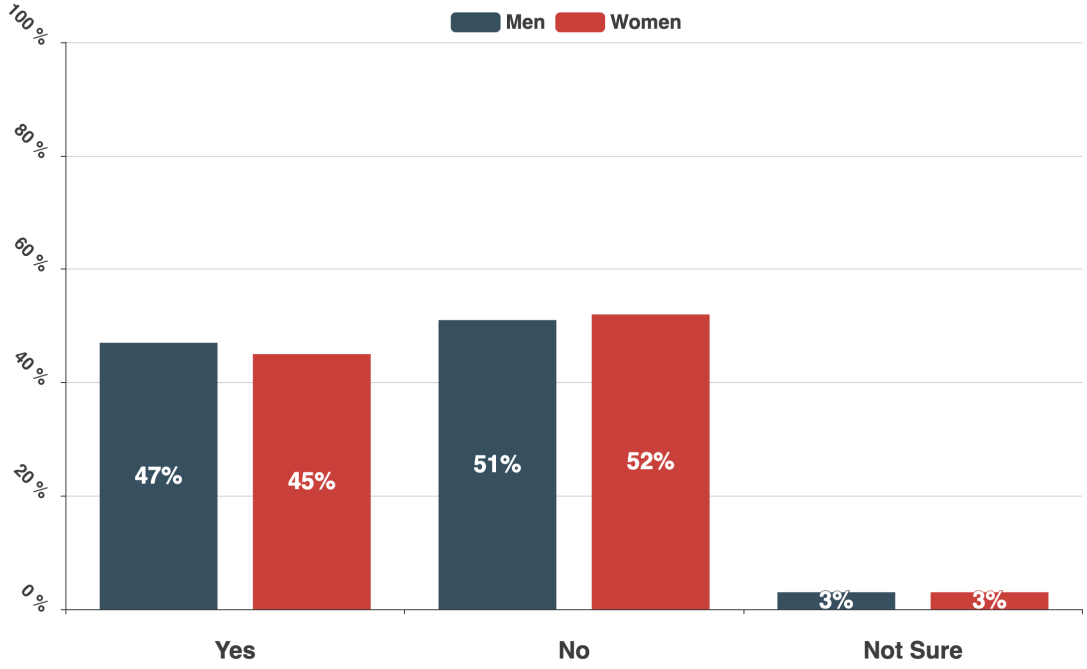
Figure 4.16 Polling stations that accommodated the needs of people with disabilities (by constituency)



There were instances of women and men turned away because their names could not be found on the register of electors. Figure 4.17 shows that almost half of our observers recorded seeing at least one voter turned away because their names could not be found on the roll. These findings were coinsistent between men and women. There were very few instances of voters being turned away because they did not have their voter ID card or looked different to their photo. Instead, most cases of women and men being turned away appeared to be related to confusion or mistakes made during the registration process. Observers did note one instance where a chief was allegedly turning away groups of people who were wanting to vote. There also appeared to be some confusion amongst voters when the location of the polling station had changed from the previous election.

In almost all cases, indelible ink was appropriately used and applied to every voter at the polling stations observed. In addition, it was noted that polling assistants checked all voters' fingers

Figure 4.17 Observers who saw at least one voter (male or female) turned away



before they were permitted to vote. None of our observers personally witnessed any instances of multiple voting. There were, however, some recorded observations of suspected underage voting. Figure 4.18 shows that observers noted possible instances of underage voting, particularly in Gao/Bugotu and Lau/Mbaelelea. For example, an observer in Lau/Mbaelelea recorded multiple instances of underage voting, including a group of approximately eight young boys who appeared to be underage and a grade six student who claimed to have voted. Another observer explained that it is common in some areas of Solomon Islands for married people under the age of 18 to be viewed as adults and therefore have the right to vote. This may explain some, but not all, instances of underage voting.

A large majority of observers (over 80 per cent) believed there were no violations in the conduct of voting at polling stations. There was virtually no evidence of gifting/treating to secure votes on the part of the police or polling officials at polling stations. In some constituencies, however, some minor violations were noted, particularly in Lau/Mbaelelea, and to a lesser extent in Maringe/Kokota and North Vella La Vella (Figure 4.19, p. 67). Observers in Lau/Mbaelelea witnessed a serious incident involving a candidate and former MP at a polling booth on election day. According to the observer present:

> ***He was intoxicated and was driving his vehicle. He drove over gardens in the village and swore at those waiting to vote. He was said to be upset at voters for not voting for him. The following day, the former MP is said to have paid compensation in the form of shell money to various residents.***

The incident was concerning because there were no police present at the polling station and a high level police officer in the constituency was a close relative of the candidate, which gave the community little confidence in the willingness of the police to respond with impartiality. Others noted minor offences related to the conduct of voters or candidates' agents, such as one instance where a voter asked the presiding officer to see another voter's ballot paper, or another case where candidates' agents were allowed by the presiding officer to position themselves inappropriately close to the area where electoral officials were administering ballot papers.

At the close of polling, all observers noted that ballot boxes were sealed in the presence of polling assistants, polling agents and the general public. While unused ballot papers were recorded and secured, there were several instances where officials were unsure of closing procedures, particularly how to return the unused papers. This resulted in discrepancies on counting day when boxes were opened

Figure 4.18 Observed instances of underage voting (by constituency)

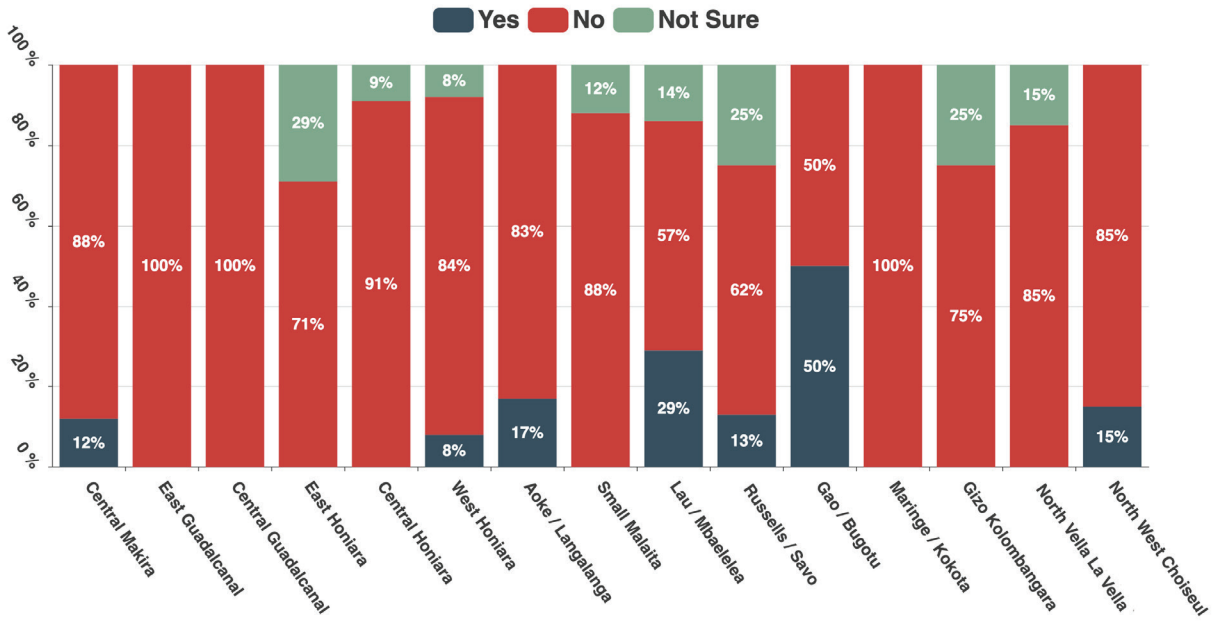
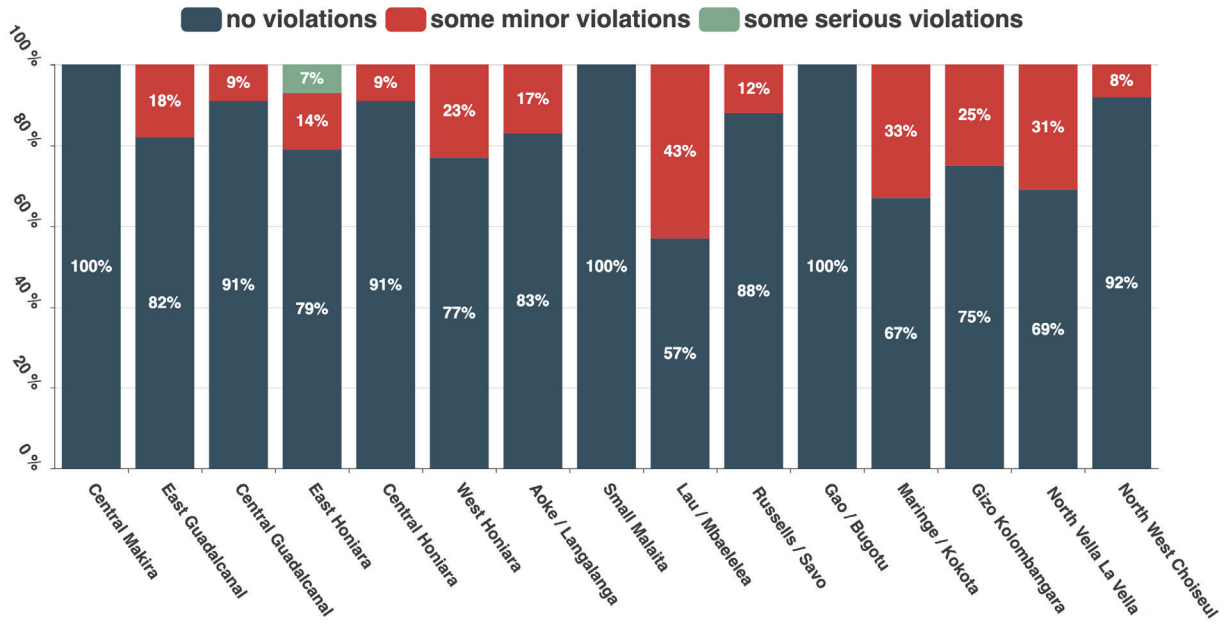


Figure 4.19 Observers' overall assessment of voter conduct at polling stations



and ballot papers were reconciled (see section 5.1). Generally, polling officials performed their duties well, though confusion around closing procedures suggests that further training would be useful.

Conclusion

In summary, voter expectations of a free and fair election were largely met on election day. Our findings show that voters believe a candidates' personal qualities and their ability to provide tangible benefits to the constituency was more important than their political party affiliation or national policy agenda.

For the most part, our observers noted that citizens were able to cast their votes without intimidation. While polling stations were effectively administered on election day, some observers suggested that polling stations could have been better arranged to improve accessibility. In addition, greater consideration could have been paid to the internal lay-out of polling stations to screen voting compartments to ensure a secret vote. Finally, most citizens believed that their voter ID card was required to vote, however very few voters were turned away on polling day because they were unable to produce their ID cards.

Recommendations: election day administration

- **Conduct longer and more detailed training for electoral officials.** This would improve consistency in the application of election processes across constituencies.
- **Staff could be placed outside polling stations to direct voters when a number of polling booths are located at the same premises.** This would reduce confusion around where to vote which was mainly due to the co-location of polling stations in urban areas.
- **Ensure that polling station venues are functional and provide secrecy for voters.** Some polling stations were too small to accommodate voters and arranged in a way that allowed on-lookers to view citizens voting.
- **Continue to enforce the liquor ban prior to the election and during the count.** This may have reduced the amount of alcohol-related disturbances during the election period.
- **Consider deploying electoral officials and security personnel to locations where they do not reside or have strong social connections.** This would reduce perceptions of bias and improve citizens' confidence in electoral processes, though it could significantly increase costs.
- **Mobile polling booths could be used for voters who are unable to enter the polling station venue.** Polling stations should be accessible for all voters, but where this is not possible, the option to use mobile polling booths should be widely publicised and encouraged by polling officials.


HOW TO VOTE
POLLING STATION
QUEUE HERE


2019
ELECTION
OBSERVER
ELECTORAL OFFICER
FORAU
PETER
AKAO
SELWYN
JIM BEAM
BONDED

5 – POST-POLLING

This section of the report mainly draws on observational data, particularly observers' assessments of administrative arrangements and the security situation in the period after votes were cast until the winning candidate for each constituency was announced. Due to the timing of the research, observers were unable to report on the handling of disputes, the period surrounding the formation of government and the announcement of the prime minister. Observers witnessed the counting process in 15 venues across the 15 constituencies and observed ballot box transportation processes and security presence where possible.

In general, the counting and post-polling period followed prescribed rules and procedures and there were no widespread issues identified by observers. During the transport of the ballot papers and counting period, an adequate security presence was noted. Citizens felt safe to move around constituencies and key electoral personnel had a solid grasp of their roles. The introduction of batch counting was a significant reform introduced in 2019 with the aim of obscuring candidates' knowledge of exactly where they received their votes. These new accountability measures improved the secrecy of the vote, though adhering to these procedures while completing the count within a short timeframe proved to be a challenge. Counting was further delayed in some instances where long travel times accompanied the transport of ballot boxes to counting centres. There were also several instances where counting centre rules and procedures differed across the 15 counting venues observed, pointing to problems with consistency. In particular, the announcement of results to the public was handled in a haphazard manner in some of the counting centres observed.

This section begins by providing an initial assessment of the post-polling period, which includes the movement of ballot papers and the performance of key electoral officials. This is followed by an assessment of staff and witness conduct at counting centres. Finally, this section presents an in-depth discussion of the major reform to the count the introduction of batch counting as opposed to counting and recording votes from each ballot box. It then assesses the implications this reform may have on electoral politics.

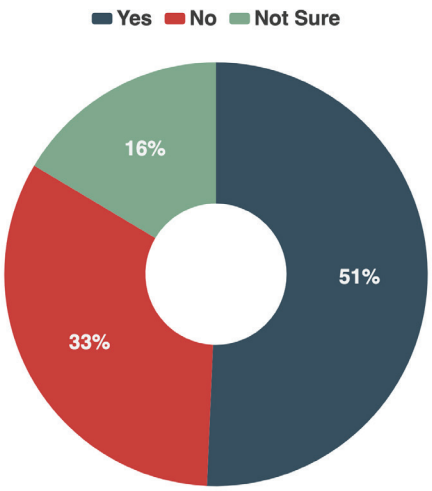
5.1 Administration and security

The counting of votes and the declarations of winning candidates were generally well administered. A large proportion of our observers found that ballot boxes were secured up until they were transported to provincial centres for counting. This indicates that polling agents and security staff were able to implement prescribed SIEC procedures. Observers also said that communication between electoral officials and security personnel was effective. Almost all observers said they were able to freely observe without interference and generally felt safe in making their observations.

It was during the transportation of the ballot boxes at the close of polling that our observers noted some, mainly unavoidable and unplanned, changes to prescribed procedures. For example, some ballot boxes remained at polling stations longer than anticipated due to transport delays and concerns around security. The observational data provided in Figure 5.1 (p. 72) shows that over 30 per cent of our observers recorded that the ballot boxes were not directly transported to the counting centres at the close of polling. This occurred in the East Guadalcanal, Small Malaita, Aoke/Langalanga and Central Makira constituencies.

Observers believed that from the close of polling until the start of the count there were no attempts to interfere with ballot boxes. In Aoke/Langalanga, observers heard there was some discontent from the public regarding the security of the ballot boxes at the counting venue. One observer noted that **'the ballot box should be inspected in a more neutral location because the hotel owner has an association with the MP'**. This was not, however, a widespread issue.

Figure 5.1 Ballot boxes that were transported directly to the counting centre (all constituencies)



Administration of the count

Observers reported that counting in most constituencies (76 per cent) commenced as scheduled the day after the election. For several constituencies observed, however, counting commenced between two to three days after the election was held. This delay was partly associated with the time it took to collect ballot boxes from polling stations across constituencies before they were transported to the provincial centres. In the majority of constituencies observed, counting extended beyond the initially anticipated single day (see Figure 5.2). In some cases, such as in West Honiara, the count took up to five days. In the instances where counting progressed over several days, ballot boxes were adequately secured overnight. When the count continued into the night, observers reported that venues were well lit.

Observers noted that due process was generally followed by the returning officers when accounting for all used, unused and spoilt ballot papers, with some exceptions. As mentioned in section 4.3, there were a number of instances where the correct procedures for collating and securing unused ballot papers were not followed. In two counting rooms in Honiara, this created some tension as candidates' agents demanded that the count be paused until the responsible presiding officer provided an explanation. In instances where questions were raised about the validity of votes cast, polling officials ensured that disputed ballots were scrutinised by candidates' agents and observers. Figure 5.3 (p. 73) shows observed cases in five constituencies where counting officials did not always display ballot papers for proper scrutiny. An observer in Central Guadalcanal described the count, and especially the process of inspecting each ballot paper, as hurried. Electoral officials counted the ballot papers with such speed that observers and agents could not properly inspect each ballot paper. The observer suspected a number of instances where ballot papers were unknowingly assigned to the wrong candidate. She explained:

> ***Approximately 10 per cent of ballot papers were being displayed for scrutiny. I don't think this was due to any malfeasance, though the count wasn't particularly transparent.***

Despite the lack of attention to detail in this counting room, no agents voiced complaints. Observers generally agreed that the count was conducted in an open and transparent manner (see Figure 5.4, p. 73). In Maringe/Kokota, observers and agents were allocated seating far away from the counting table and could not see the marks on each ballot paper. While no agents voiced concerns during the actual count, a losing candidate's campaign team complained about the lack of transparency when they were back in their constituency. In West Honiara, agents were

Figure 5.2 Observers who noted that the count was completed in one day (all constituencies)

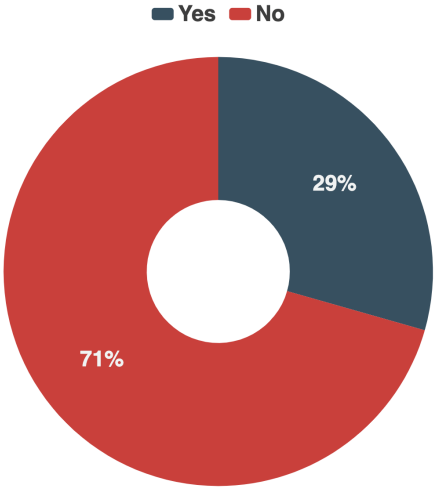
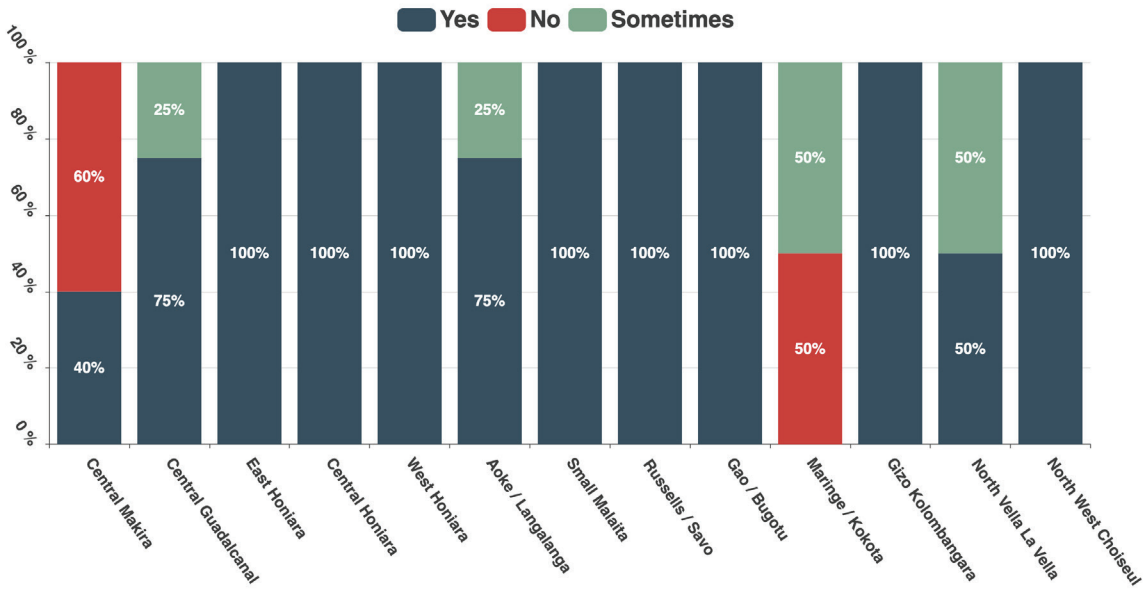


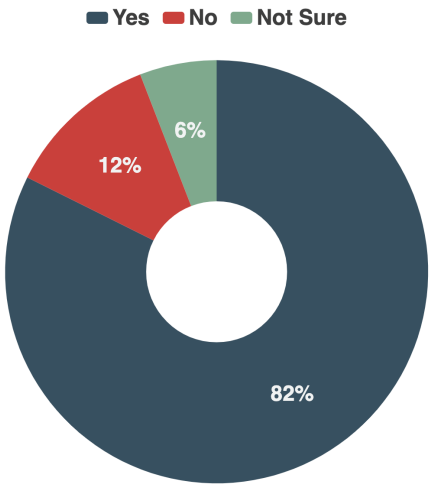
Figure 5.3 Observers who noted that each ballot paper was displayed for scrutiny (by constituencies)



far more vocal in expressing their objections during the counting process. They requested to sit closer to the counting table so they could observe the correct allocation of ballot papers. They also requested that each ballot paper be held up by polling officials to be scrutinised, and electoral officials accommodated these requests. Observers noted that electoral officials had difficulties balancing the competing priorities of completing the count in timely manner while maintaining transparency.

Electoral officials also noticed at least two ballot papers that appeared to be double printed in West Honiara. Candidate agents requested that they be checked against the counterfoils to verify they were genuine ballot papers. After some discussion, the election manager decided these papers were duplicates and they were declared invalid. Several candidate agents expressed their frustration with this decision, but eventually accepted the judgement of the electoral officials.

Figure 5.4 Observers who noted that the count was conducted in a transparent manner (all constituencies)



In the majority of cases, election results were declared as soon as practicably possible after the count. Observers reported that results were progressively reported back to SIEC headquarters in Honiara. In some constituencies, there were insufficient updates provided to citizens from counting centres. One observer noted that this **'only made the counting process seem more secretive than it needed to be.'** In several provincial centres where counting took place, unexpected delays led to large crowds gathering around counting centres to hear the announcement of results. There was one case where this behaviour concerned electoral officials and they requested the police take precautionary actions. One observer explained:

> ***The police put on their riot gear because they thought the large crowd might disrupt the counting … It just made everyone worried when they didn't need to be. They were peaceful and just wanted to know what was going on.***

Providing standardised updates to communities, consistent across constituencies, on the status of the counting process may have alleviated these concerns.

There were some inconsistencies with the use of mobile phones in counting venues. In some cases, candidates' agents and security personal had access to and were able to use their phones. One observer noted that **'on the first day they [the police] allowed mobile phones in counting and people were communicating results'**. In other counting centres, mobile phones were either confiscated or had to be switched off. Mobile phone use across observed constituencies appeared to be at the discretion of the returning officer and was not managed uniformly.

Security after the election

Post-election disturbances recorded by observers were generally minor and localised in nature. It was relatively safe for citizens and observers to move around constituencies. Figure 5.5 shows some observers (18 per cent) noted minor disturbances, but did not report any major security issues following the close of polls. These minor issues were mainly confined to voters swearing and arguing with the supporters of opposing candidates. In a small minority of cases, however, the disruptions were more serious, though still limited in scope. For example, in Aoke/Langalanga, observers reported that youths burnt a leaf hut in response to hearing the election results. In the aftermath of the election, observers also heard of several incidences where voters aligned with the returning MP attempted to reclaim CDF benefits from communities that supported another candidate. For instance, in Gizo/Kolombangara, a group of the winning candidate's voters claimed a CDF-funded outboard motor from a rival candidate's supporters. These examples highlight the types of localised security issues observed in the post-election period.

Following the election, the general atmosphere was described as tense, especially between supporters of winning and losing candidates. There were no serious concerns, however, that the kinds of isolated security incidents previously described would escalate . One observer in Maringe/Kokota described the mood after the election as:

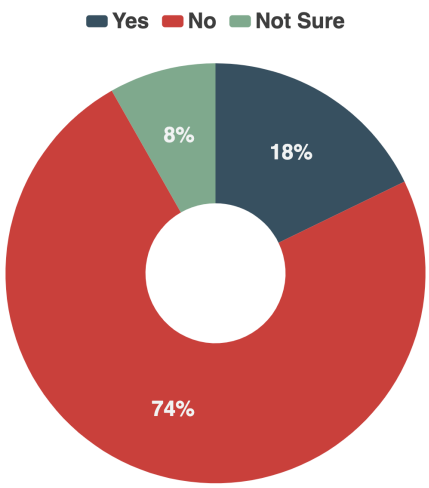
> ***Quite peaceful with regards to post-election violence. However, one can feel that the atmosphere surrounding some of the people in the polling stations we visited was tense and there were also some mixed feeling of sadness and anger.***

The heightened tensions observed post-election are emblematic of the highly contested nature of elections in Solomon Islands. Outside of the period of our election observation, there were violent clashes between police and protestors at various locations in Honiara on 25 and 26 April 2019 following the announcement of the new Prime Minister. Similar acts of past violence have taken place in the past and were not specifically linked to election processes that we observed.

5.2 Reforms to the counting process

The main change to counting procedures for the 2019 election was the counting of ballot boxes in batches rather than individually, which was the standard procedure in previous elections. In each constituency, ballot boxes were mixed together to form a number of batches. Each batch was made up of votes from three to five ballot boxes preselected by the SIEC to ensure there was an even spread of votes across batches.

Figure 5.5 Observers who heard about incidents of minor post-election disturbances in the constituency (all constituencies)



Ballot papers for each batch were then counted together so that results from individual ballot boxes could not be known.

The aim of the batch counting reform was to give voters more confidence that candidates would not be able to determine their support base. This impact was somewhat diminished, however, due to the way the batch counting process was administered. There was confusion around whether or not polling officials should have revealed the names of the polling stations comprised in each batch. For example, in one of the urban constituencies, one observer reported that **'the RO [returning officer] announced the polling station boxes to be mixed so we all knew the boxes that were mixed together'**. In another constituency, polling officials were even more open about which ballot boxes were to be mixed together as they wrote the names of the polling stations in each batch on a whiteboard in the counting room.

By contrast, in other constituencies, polling officials attempted to keep the names of the ballot boxes in each batch secret. An observer said that during the counting process:

> ***We were not told about boxes [that] were mixed together. At least directly. Like, the boxes were faced away from our observers and also the scrutineers. But most of us in the room were able to pretty much work it out, because when votes from one of the boxes were reconciled, we knew that the number of results [votes] came from a particular polling station.***

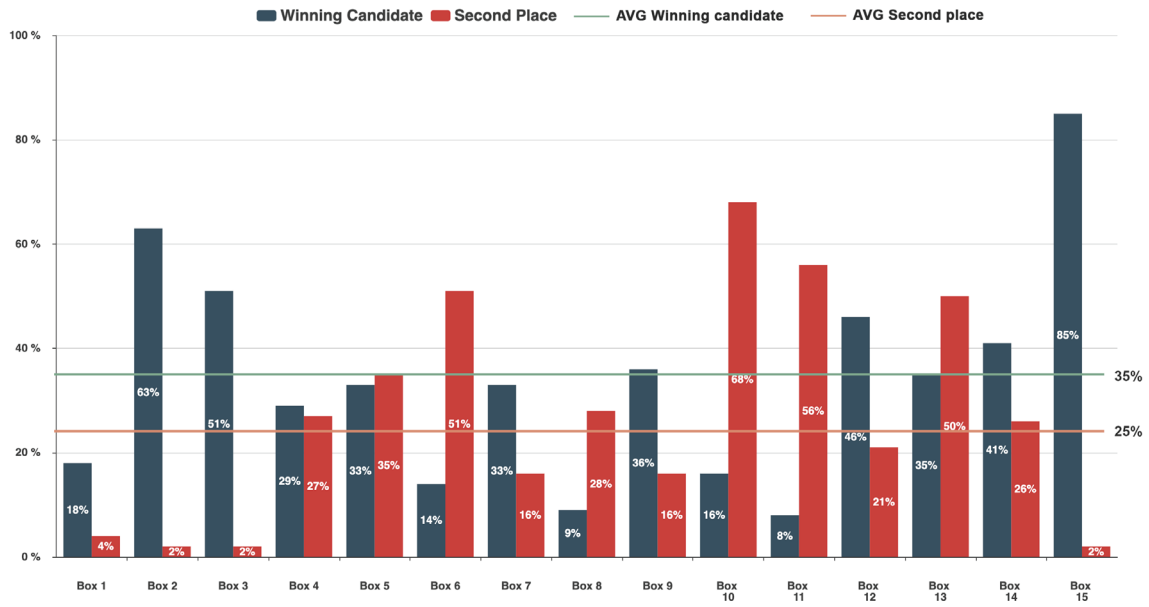
For this constituency, polling officials' attempts to keep ballot boxes secret led to candidate's agents focusing their attention on trying to figure out which boxes were mixed together. There was variation in the way polling officials approached batch counting across constituencies as there seemed to be no clear guidance on whether the batches should remain secret. Clearer policy guidelines and further training for electoral officials would improve the consistency of the counting process.

The introduction of batch counting may have wider implications beyond electoral processes in Solomon Islands. As discussed in section 3.5, incumbent MPs have the ability to distribute CDF benefits to their supporters, which appears to have become increasingly relevant to their chances of re-election. In previous elections, MPs have had access to the number of votes they received from individual polling stations. This has provided them with reliable knowledge on where their support base comes from within the constituency. It is widely believed that MPs have then used this information to distribute CDF benefits to their supporters.

Prior to the election, there were reports that some incumbent MPs expressed strong reservations about the introduction of batch counting. Such reluctance was likely because MPs did not want to relinquish granular knowledge of where their votes came from in the constituency. It is one thing for incumbent MPs to have access to large CDF budgets, but another for them to have detailed voting data that could inform the strategic allocation of funds to constituents to repay voters and solidify political support. At the same time, however, given earlier evidence that most MPs appear to learn who voted for them through informal community processes, it would be unlikely that batch counting has resolved the issue.

It is useful to compare election results by polling stations in 2014 and by batches in 2019 to understand the impact of the batch counting reform and whether it achieved its stated purpose. Figure 5.6 (p. 76) compares 2014 results by ballot box location between the winning candidate (blue bars) and second place (red bars) in North West Choiseul constituency. The range of votes received across polling stations is the main point of emphasis. For instance, the winning candidate received as many as 85 per cent of the vote share at box 15 compared to only eight per cent at box 11. Similarly, second place received 68 per cent of votes at box 10 and only of two per cent of the vote share at box 2. For the winning and second placed candidates, votes received at individual polling station locations were much higher than their overall averages (35 and 25 per cent of the total vote share, respectively). Figure 5.7 (p. 76) demonstrates the impact of the batch counting process for North West

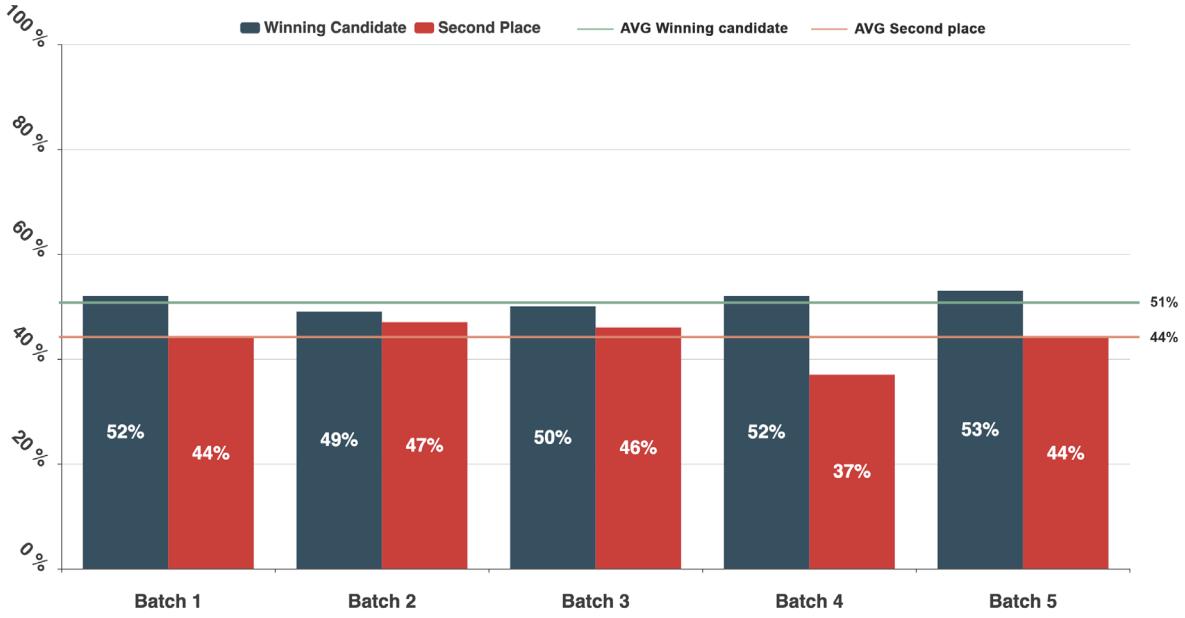
Figure 5.6 North West Choiseul 2014 election results: winning candidate vs second place (by box counting)



Choiseul in 2019. It shows a significant reduction in the range of votes received for first and second place candidates across the five batches compared to counting by polling stations in 2014. The winning candidate received the most votes (53 per cent) from batch 5 and the least votes (49 per cent) from batch 2, with an overall average of 51 per cent from the five batches counted. Similarly, the second place candidate received the most votes (47 per cent) from batch 2 and the least votes (37 per cent) from batch 4, while the overall average was 44 per cent. The main take away from this analysis is the significant smoothing of results between batches, especially compared to the fluctuation of polling station results from 2014. Therefore, it appears the intention of the reform, in terms of aggregating results across the constituency, was achieved.

It would be fair to conclude that the winning candidate in North West Choiseul would be unable to distinguish where their votes came from within the constituency based on batch-counted results alone. It should be recognised, of course, that there are other channels for candidates to ascertain their level of political support within constituencies apart from official counting re-

Figure 5.7 North West Choiseul 2019 election results: winning candidate vs second place (by batch counting)



sults. Kinship networks are strong in Solomon Islands and most candidates would still claim to have good knowledge of their supporter bases. Our observers noted many cases where village agents believed they had a very good understanding of how citizens would vote. For instance, one observer noted:

> ***In one village, one of [the incumbent's] main brokers strongly hinted he knew who would vote for [him] and that this knowledge would be used to determine who got assistance after the election.***

While local-level knowledge of who individuals would vote for in a particular community may well be attainable, polling station results previously provided a reliable and quantifiable basis for verification.

Figure 5.8 shows 2014 polling station results for Maringe/Kokota constituency, again using first and second place candidates. A similar pattern is demonstrated as was evident in North West Choiseul (Figure 5.12). In 2019, the winning candidate received as much as 87 per cent of the vote share at box 18 and a minimum of only two per cent of votes at box 10. At the same time, the second place candidate received 64 per cent of votes from box 10, yet did not acquire a single vote at box 18. The significant range of votes received across polling stations compared to the overall average is again clear, providing candidates with accurate feedback on their political support across the constituency.

In 2019, batch-counted results for Maringe/Kokota show that the winning candidate received 46 per cent of the overall vote share (Figure 5.9, p. 78). This included 72 per cent of total votes for batch 4 and 30 per cent of votes for batch 2. Similarly, second place received a high of 48 per cent (batch 2) and a low of 14 per cent (batch 4) and the overall average was 33 per cent. A comparison of results between 2014 and 2019 for Maringe/Kokota shows that batch counting numbers did reduce the range of votes received, but not as effectively as it did for North West Choiseul. The same analysis was carried out for Small Malaita constituency, which showed a similar pattern to Maringe/Kokota and can be found in the Annex (Figures 1a and 1b).

This analysis of the implications of counting votes in batches across three selected constituencies shows that batch counting greatly reduced the range of results compared to 2014. For winning candidates, the batch counting reform significantly reduces the quantifiable data available.

Figure 5.8 Maringe/Kokota 2014 election results: winning candidate vs second place (by box counting)

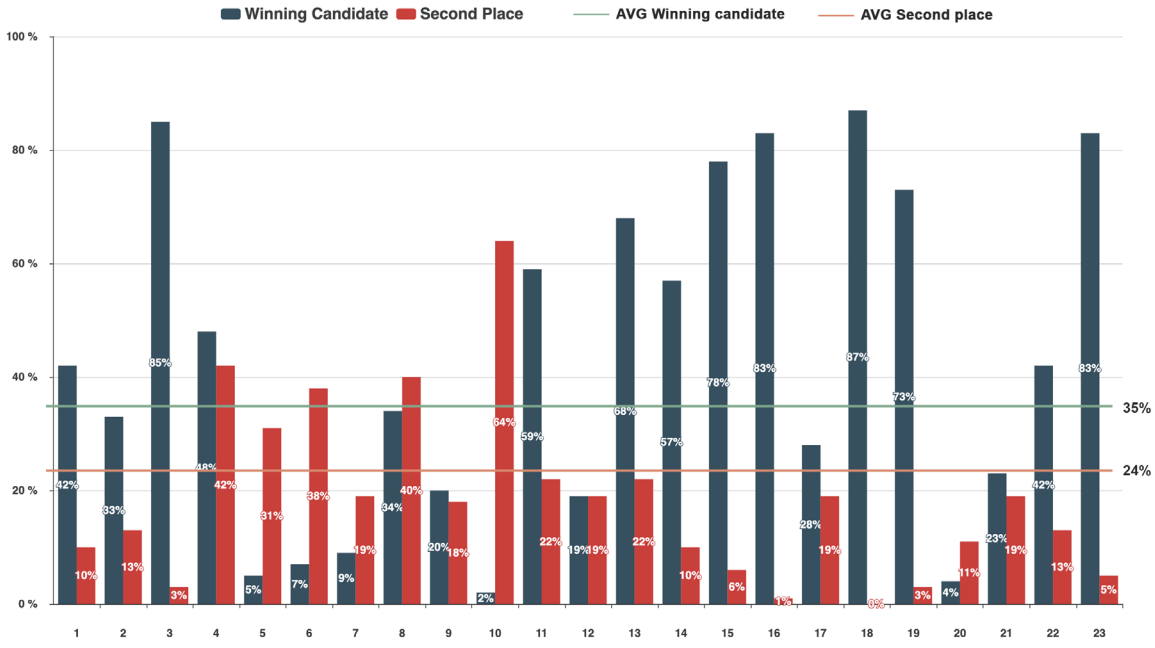
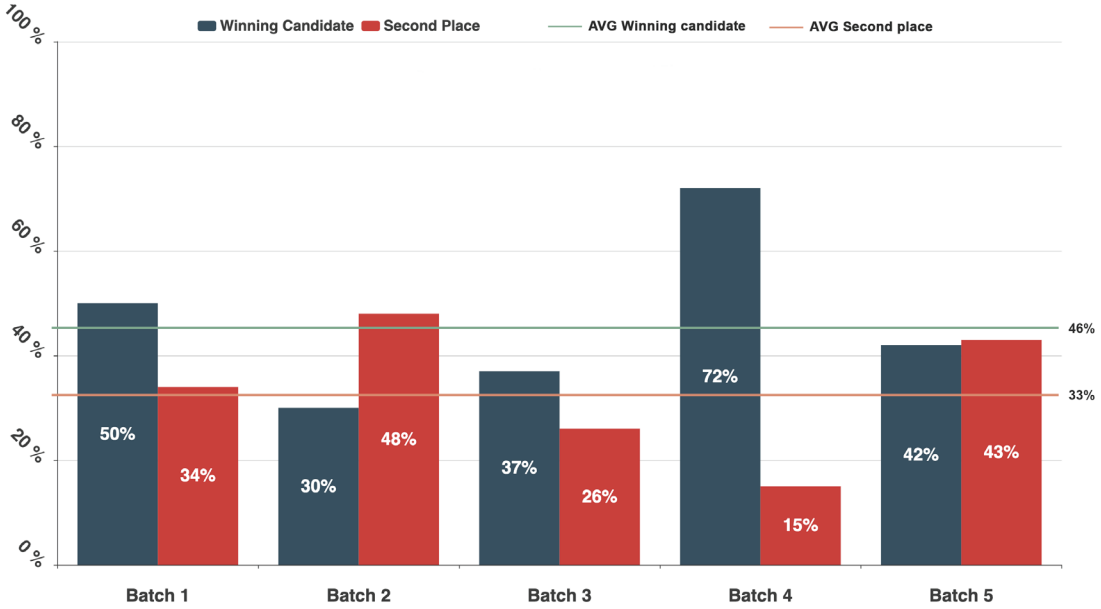


Figure 5.9 Maringe/Kokota 2019 election results: winning candidate vs second place (by batch counting)



Conclusion

Overall, observers noted that security concerns were not a major feature of the post-polling period. Key electoral officials conducted themselves in a professional manner without obvious displays of bias, although some observers suggested that electoral officials should be from different constituencies to improve public perceptions of objectivity. In terms of counting procedures, some disparities were noted between provincial counting centres when it came to how votes were actually counted and results announced.

Our analysis shows that the introduction of batch counting was a positive development that effectively responded to concerns that candidates could access information about who voted for them. This is particularly important in the Solomon Islands context, as communities and individuals often claim to have missed out on benefits from MPs due to their voting preferences. While the batch counting reform may contribute to increased assurance that citizens' votes will remain secret, its actual impact on electoral politics is less certain as MPs may operate on assumptions about voting patterns based on local knowledge.

Recommendations: counting period

- **Provide frequent updates on the counting process to the public.** Regular announcements could be made to citizens gathering outside counting centres to ease any tensions.

- **Arrange counting venues in a way that allows agents and observers to properly view the process.** This would improve accountability and discourage formal complaints from candidate agents.

- **Standardise and enforce a consistent set of protocols for conduct in all counting centres.** This should include the use of mobile phones and who can enter and exit the venues.

- **Improvements could be made to the security, speed and efficiency of the transportation of the ballot boxes.** The process of collecting ballot boxes and transporting them to provincial centres delayed the commencement of the count.

- **Formulate a uniform approach to batch counting, particularly in regard to whether ballot box names should be displayed.** While batch counting achieved its intended purpose, administrative processes and procedures could be standardised.

6 – CONCLUSION

The breadth and scope of ANU's research into the 2019 elections was comprehensive in its geographic reach and sheer amount of data collected. Observers travelled to 148 polling stations across 15 constituencies for up to three weeks to survey voters, conduct interviews, witness campaign events, attend counting centres and record their observations on the conduct of elections. In total, 4,867 voters contributed to the research through 2,449 citizen surveys conducted in the lead up to the election and 2,418 conducted after polling day. By interviewing voters, electoral officials and campaign teams, as well as observing the mechanics of the elections in detail, our research results provide an in-depth analysis of electoral management and political culture. The report also situates the election within the broader social context and provides a richer understanding of the state of democracy in Solomon Islands. This contributes not only to the SIEC's own analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the 2019 national general elections, but also to a better understanding of the political context of elections in Solomon Islands itself.

Overall, the findings from our research suggest that the election was well managed from an administrative standpoint. Some administrative issues were identified, such as inconsistencies in the update of the roll and counting procedures, but there was no evidence of widespread electoral mismanagement. In 2019, cross-border registration emerged as a significant issue. Our research suggests that both candidates and voters contributed to this practice. Some candidates encouraged cross-border registration through promising rewards, buying votes or providing transport to the constituency on election day. Voters themselves were driven by personal connections to candidates or their reputations, which may have encouraged many voters to register outside their constituency of residence.

Voting was conducted in a peaceful manner with only minor disturbances reported. Both men and women said their expectations of a free and fair election were generally met. As in the past, citizen engagement in the 2019 national elections remained high with 86.4 per cent of registered voters casting their vote. Reforms to counting procedures appear to have achieved their intended purpose by reducing the potential for candidates to determine how individual polling stations voted. While election awareness activities and materials were extensive, there was a preference for more face-to-face voter education, especially in rural areas.

Women's political participation in Solomon Islands continues to be a concern. The election of only two women MPs diminishes the national parliament's claim to be truly representative. It also highlights the fact that women continue to face a number of challenges that limit their ability to participate equally in national politics. Our research found that women candidates were often scrutinised more heavily than their male counterparts. While many voters claim to be open to the idea of more women in parliament, the reality suggests that attitudes towards women in national politics (held by both men and women) remains a substantial barrier.

As noted in previous elections, money politics in the form of vote buying, gifting and promising rewards in exchange for support at the ballot box continued to play a role in electoral politics. These activities were not as prominent in 2019 compared to the more overt displays of money politics observers described in 2014. While this may appear to be a promising development, increased penalties and awareness surrounding electoral offences may have driven vote buying and gifting into less public spaces. Whatever the case, legislation and penalties alone are unlikely to eradicate practices surrounding money politics in the short term.

Incumbent MPs were widely perceived to have a significant advantage over rival candidates at the 2019 election. Their direct access to CDFs were seen to benefit their re-election prospects, as 72 per cent of incumbents managed to retain their

seats. Our findings show that the distribution of CDF benefits is front and centre in the minds of voters when they head to the polling booth. The research also suggests that many voters believe CDFs are unfairly distributed, although most are not calling for them to be abolished. Rather, citizens want a form of government spending that directly benefits them and their communities.

The 2019 Solomon Islands national general election continued a trend of peaceful, free and fair elections in a challenging political and geographic context. Our research has identified both long-standing and emerging issues that can be addressed to further strengthen elections in the future.

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ANNEX

Logistic regression 1: Cross-border registration

Table 1a Cross-border registration logistic regression tests of model effects

Dependent variable	Did you change your constituency of registration before this election?			
Factor	df1	df2	Wald F	Sig.
Corrected model	7.000	130.000	5.275	0.000
Intercept	1.000	136.000	16.575	0.000
Did you/your family receive CDF support?	1.000	136.000	14.087	0.000
Do you think CDFs are fairly distributed?	1.000	136.000	3.905	0.050
Sex	1.000	136.000	2.935	0.089
Age	2.000	135.000	7.469	0.001
Did your community receive CDF support?	2.000	135.000	1.679	0.190

Table 1b: Cross-border registration logistic regression parameter estimates

Dependent variable	Did you change your constituency of registration before this election? (No)						
		95% Confidence interval		Hypothesis test			
Factor	B	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig.	Design Effect
Intercept	2.795	1.368	4.223	3.873	136.000	0.000	0.482
Did you/your family receive CDF support? (No)	-1.161	-1.773	-0.549	-3.753	136.000	0.000	0.611
Did you/your family receive CDF support? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Do you think CDFs are fairly distributed? (No)	-1.795	-3.592	0.002	-1.975	136.000	0.050	1.120
Do you think CDFs are fairly distributed? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Sex (Female)	-0.454	-0.977	0.070	-1.713	136.000	0.089	0.491
Sex (Male)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Age (18–29)	1.142	0.391	1.894	3.006	136.000	0.003	0.290
Age (30–59)	0.437	-0.821	1.694	0.687	136.000	0.493	0.915
Age (60+)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Did your community receive CDF support? (No)	0.279	-0.471	1.030	0.736	136.000	0.463	0.638
Did your community receive CDF support? (Not sure)	-0.573	-1.242	0.096	-1.694	136.000	0.092	0.591
Did your community receive CDF support? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.

i. Set to zero because this parameter is redundant.

Logistic regression 2: Perceptions of CDF fairness

Table 2a Perceptions of CDF fairness logistic regression tests of model effects

Dependent variable	Do you think CDFs are fairly distributed?			
Factor	df1	df2	Wald F	Sig.
Corrected model	6.000	131.000	6.538	0.000
Intercept	1.000	136.000	5.306	0.023
Did you/your family receive CDF support?	1.000	136.000	12.530	0.001
Sex	1.000	136.000	0.001	0.974
Age	2.000	135.000	2.287	0.105
Did your community receive CDF support?	2.000	135.000	9.196	0.000

Table 2b: Perceptions of CDF fairness logistic regression parameter estimates

Dependent variable	Do you think CDFs are fairly distributed? (No)						
		95% Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test			
Factor	B	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig.	Design effect
Intercept	0.020	-1.375	1.416	0.029	136.000	0.977	0.661
Did you/your family receive CDF support? (No)	1.334	0.589	2.079	3.540	136.000	0.001	0.372
Did you/your family receive CDF support? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Sex (Female)	-0.015	-0.935	0.908	-0.033	136.000	0.974	0.822
Sex (Male)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Age (18–29)	0.023	-1.651	1.697	0.027	136.000	0.978	0.785
Age (30–59)	-0.604	-1.694	0.486	-1.096	136.000	0.275	0.406
Age (60+)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Did your community receive CDF support? (No)	1.384	0.747	2.022	4.294	136.000	0.000	0.358
Did your community receive CDF support? (Not sure)	0.648	-1.315	2.611	0.653	136.000	0.515	1.555
Did your community receive CDF support? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.

i. Set to zero because this parameter is redundant.

Logistic regression 3: Candidate's knowledge of voter preferences

Table 3a Candidate's knowledge of voter preferences logistic regression tests of model effects

Dependent variable	Will the candidate be able to find out who you voted for?			
Factor	df1	df2	Wald F	Sig.
Corrected model	12.000	125.000	22.878	0.000
Intercept	2.000	135.000	488.977	0.000
Sex	2.000	135.000	0.838	0.435
Age	4.000	133.000	0.895	0.469
Have any candidates made promises about providing you/your family support?	2.000	135.000	3.818	0.024
Do you expect to vote freely without undue influence?	4.000	133.000	719.238	0.000
Has any candidate contacted you by phone?	2.000	135.000	2.971	0.055

Table 3b Candidate's knowledge of voter preferences logistic regression parameter estimates

Dependent variable	Will the candidate be able to find out who you voted for? (No)						
		95% Confidence interval		Hypothesis test			
Factor	B	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig.	Design effect
Intercept	-1.851	-4.580	0.877	-1.342	136.000	0.182	1.087
Sex (Female)	0.361	-0.324	1.046	1.042	136.000	0.299	0.678
Sex (Male)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Age (18–29)	1.213	-0.802	3.228	1.190	136.000	0.236	0.681
Age (30–59)	0.418	-1.370	2.205	0.468	136.000	0.645	0.525
Age (60+)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Have any candidates made promises about providing you/your family support? (No)	1.508	0.285	2.731	2.438	136.000	0.016	1.259
Have any candidates made promises about providing you/your family support? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Do you expect to vote freely without undue influence? (No)	-0.681	-2.080	0.718	-0.962	136.000	0.338	1.109
Do you expect to vote freely without undue influence? (Not sure)	-0.849	-3.314	1.616	-0.681	136.000	0.497	1.233
Do you expect to vote freely without undue influence? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.
Has any candidate contacted you by phone? (No)	-0.707	-1.655	0.241	-1.475	136.000	0.143	0.577
Has any candidate contacted you by phone? (Yes)	0.000[i]	.	.	.	.	.	.

i. Set to zero because this parameter is redundant.

Figure 1a Votes recieved by winning candidate vs second place for 2014 election in Small Malaita (by box counting)

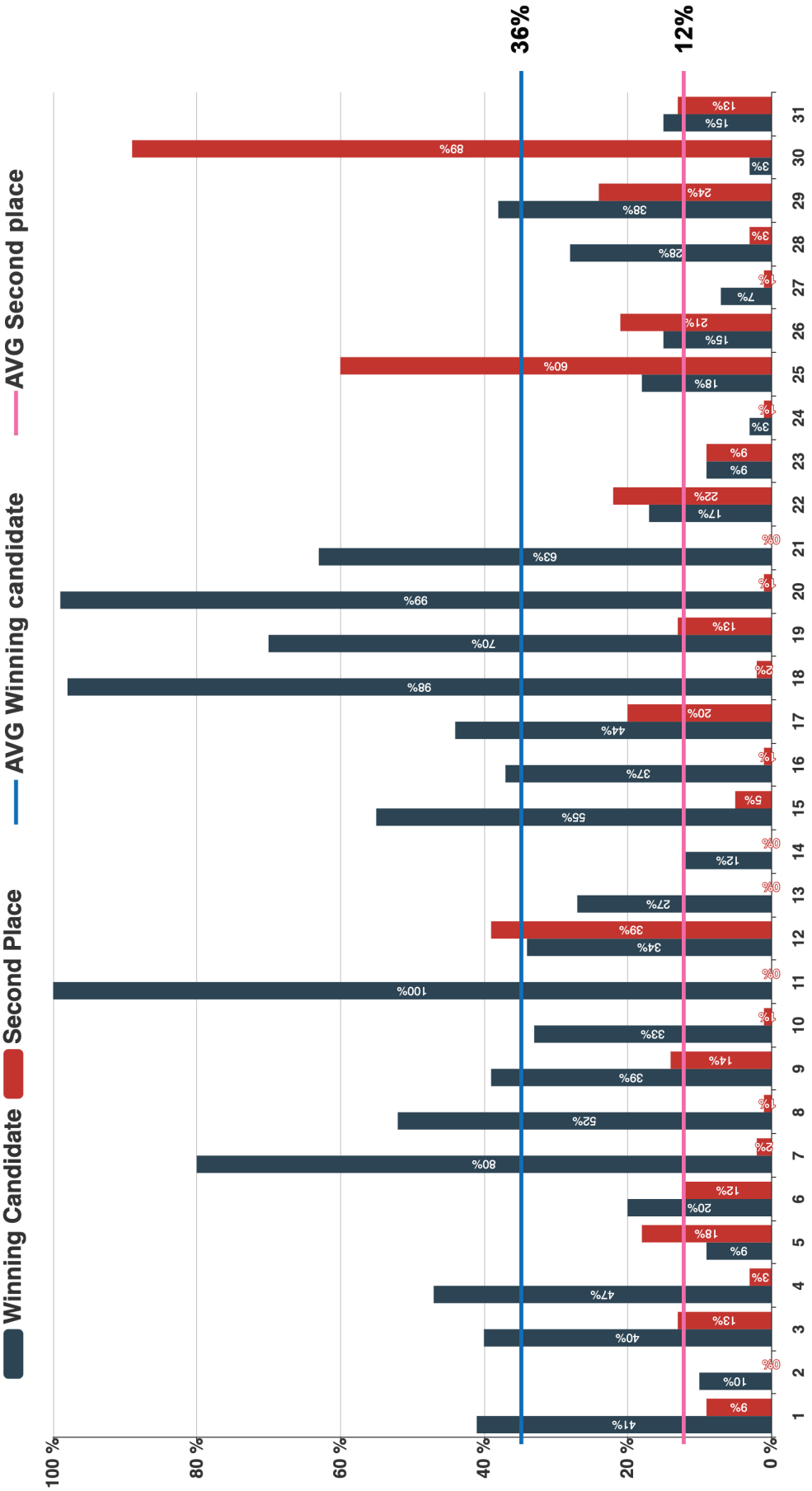
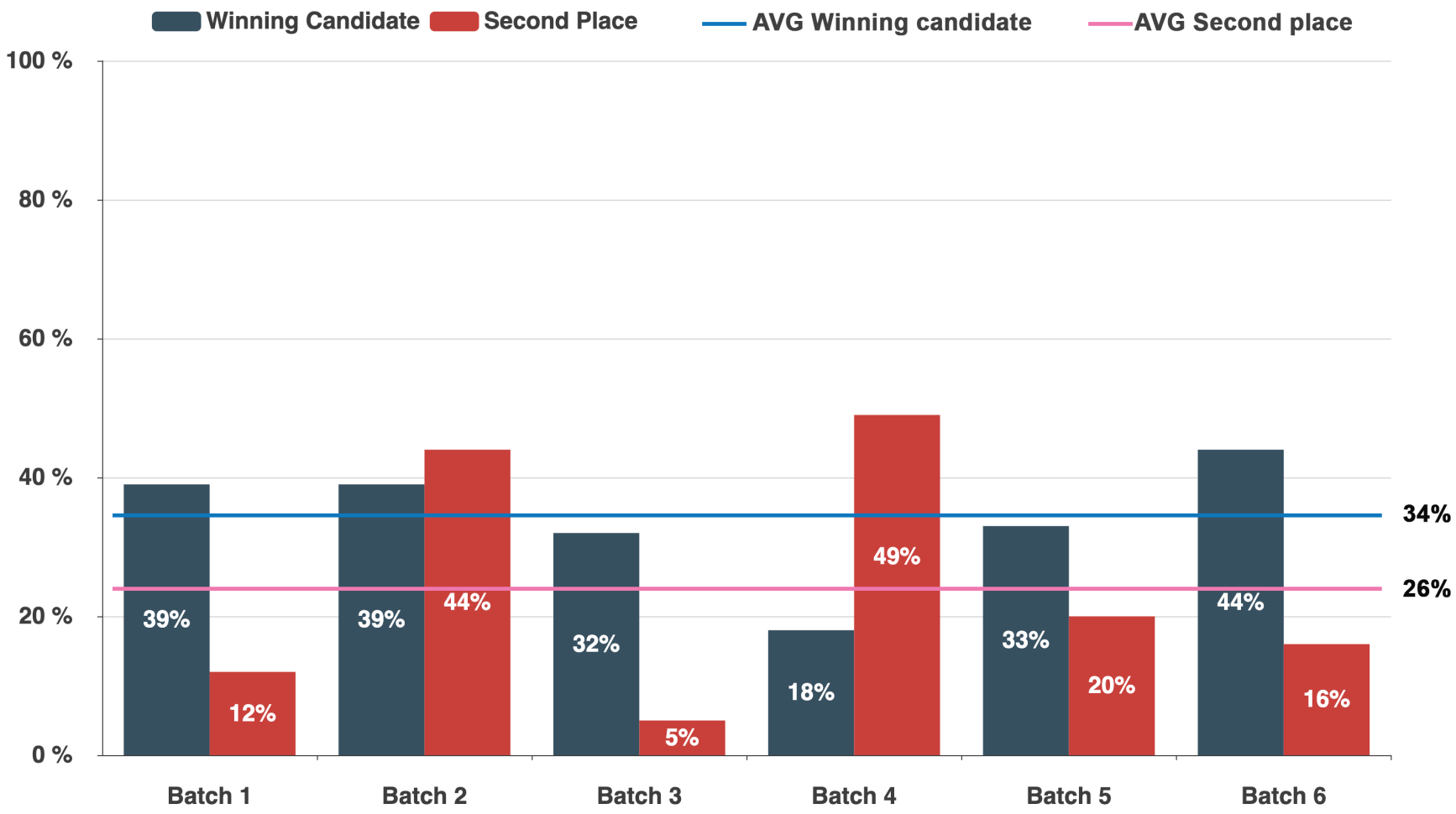


Figure 1b Votes recieved by winning candidate vs second place
for 2019 election in Small Malaita (by batch counting)



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