

***An Electoral Miscarriage: Limited Preferential Voting and Cultural Interpretations in Papua New Guinea***

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## **Abstract**

For the first time in Papua New Guinea a new electoral process was trialed nationwide through its scheduled 2007 general elections. There had been prior widespread skepticism however, over its ability to ensure fairness and success. The main areas of concern were at the implementation level starting with the Electoral Commission and all its technical support through to the susceptibilities of officers, candidates and voters alike largely stemming from their own biases and corrupt predilections.

Despite all of the misgivings however, PNG went through a fairly smooth election event with relatively minimal technical setbacks, which perhaps only time will uncurl. While noting some of the author's experience and observations as a first time candidate in the national elections, this paper highlights some principal technical applications of the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) that should require subsequent attention and improvement at policy level.

This is a subjective discussion on the author's experience as a candidate in the 2007 election in Papua New Guinea.

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## **Prologue**

I wanted to serve my people with a more effective representation over their welfare. I intended to ultimately secure an educated voting population that relies on its conscience than the un-sustained material goods religiously handed out by candidates during elections. I wanted to thread the simple line of “When the food and money (i.e. materialistic handouts) run out, it is one’s own wit and agency that is relied upon.” After all this had been the story for the average Papua New Guinean across generations.

I am nonetheless aware of the enormity of the task then faced by the former Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Bob Hawke, when in the late 1980s tried to advocate for a ‘Clever Australia’ at the policy and rhetoric level. Regardless of the level of success or failure however, this was and still is inspiring.

I also wanted to tell the world of what happened, beginning with this one experience in the national elections. Hopefully, research institutions like universities could exploit existing avenues such as furloughs and sabbaticals for their staff to be actually involved in civic programs like general elections rather than having to resign from one’s job in order to attain well founded knowledge. There is indeed a need to *document and learn by involvement* from the trajectory of our own footprints throughout the history of social interaction and development.

Ultimately however, I wanted to show that the LPV process was not exploited to its full potential during the 2007 elections. And these shortfalls should be addressed at the policy level in order to improve the process, and at the same time ensure a just polling process.

## **A Bird’s Eye View**

Damon’s (2003) analysis of the U.S. elections, and those of others from Melanesia<sup>2</sup> along with various commentators such as media callers and contributors towards the 2007 PNG elections have highlighted the features and much of the flaws and shortfalls of the LPV electoral process. Much of these were leveled at the implementation of the electoral procedures, stemming all the way from the Electoral Office through to the provincial, constituency, district, and wards. Predominantly therefore, sustaining impartiality and ensuring full security towards the distribution of ballot boxes and papers, disseminating information, counting of ballot papers, were never totally free from bias and undue influence.

For instance, it is almost ironical that Paias Wingti, the next best performer to the declared winner of the 2007 Western Highlands Provincial seat, Mr. Tom Olga, had to pursue his disappointment in the Court of Disputed Returns. After all Wingti’s previous election victories did not go down without allegations of voting process abuse and suspected undue manipulation. If Wingti’s current allegations bear any substance, Olga’s team may be squarely justified as it only dished back what the team members had learnt

from the 'master' previously; Wingti was made to swallow his own medicine, so to speak. Tom Olga must have been a young voter during the heydays of Wingti who might have had a keen eye on the 'master's' techniques. Elections in PNG have been on one hand, breeding grounds for 'politics', and 'hunting grounds' for social scientists, on the other!

Established Melanesian principles of reciprocity loomed large as intervening factors for a candidate's survival in PNG elections. From the attainment of bigmanship status through to the reinvention of tradition and customs, and/or adaptation of, altogether leave behind little breathing space for a fair electoral process. Elections for the average voter particularly for the person in between are in fact an opportune moment to gain cash and store goods (see for instance Dorney 2002, and Haley 2002). This is generally inevitable given the prevailing level of *modern material poverty* and negligence subjected to the remote and poor people out there, and over a protracted periods of time by the state. This includes the marginalized and unemployed in urban areas.<sup>3</sup> Election is a time to better one's own poor economic standing even if it is only for a few weeks. It is neither the party policies nor, the national issues that matter (cf. Anere 2002: 87-88). Quite crudely, it is a time when the uncouth and the oblivious intensively 'prostitute' their own characters.

Therefore, claims of success by the most victorious political party in the 2007 national elections were both hollow and a rhetorical farce. It is not the National Alliances party's (NA) policies that got the candidate in rather the party candidates' adequate endowment with 'handout goods', which ensured the party's ultimate victory. 'Shrewd distribution' was not in fact a fund management requirement as most NA candidates were excessively and recklessly supported. To the average Kiriwina-Goodenough voter, NA party was a mere name attached to a Michael Somare, Prime Minister of PNG, and thus remains insignificant. His one hour sojourn on the island of Kiriwina during the 2007 campaign period did little to impress the voters for such a well known name glued to an obviously weary face.

The NA sponsored candidate for Kiriwina-Goodenough seat readily assumed the extravagant strategy with a modestly estimated spending of anything between a half and a million kina.<sup>4</sup> It was no surprise that the candidate had an unassailable lead with 3973 votes after the count of the first preferences. This was further vindicated when the lead was surrendered at the last minute to the eventual winner who had surreptitiously garnered the secondary votes everywhere. The NA candidate's, together with the sitting MP's narrow-focused strategy in setting up lavish-feasting 'support bases' cost them the required secondary votes to come from elsewhere. The NA candidate would have won by a mile had the situation been that of the previous First Past the Post (FPP) method.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, and regrettably, the 3973 votes was way below the required 50%+1 absolute majority required for a victory considering the amount of wastage of funds and resources which might as well be used for better causes.

Perhaps the most contemptuous aspect of PNG election process was to do with the unmediated and excessive influence on election rules and procedures by unscrupulous

voters, candidates, and officials alike. Ketan noted the emerging threat on ‘...hijacking of the electoral process...’

The hijacking of polling officials and ballot boxes is a new and dangerous trend in PNG politics. A candidate’s aim here is to increase his share of the ballot papers through theft and fraud, whilst starving his rivals by hijacking ballot papers meant for their strongholds. If however, some do slip through the net, then the next option would be to have them intercepted on their way back and have them destroyed (2002: 17).

Compare Ketan’s observations with the reported marked ballot papers for the 2007 Madang regional seat allegedly recovered by loosing candidates at the Madang town’s rubbish dump (EMTV 6pm news, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007). The similarity of the scenario further vindicates Ketan’s prophetic remarks even if it was locally specific to the highlands region of PNG, and back in 2002.

Examples are legion on vote buying and rigging before, during, and post election events in PNG. Ad hoc establishments of communal boundaries, voter ‘support bases’, and candidates compelled to pay cash in order to release bygone communal mortuary interdictions (*khatuvivisa*<sup>6</sup> in Kiriwina), church contributions,<sup>7</sup> prayer rituals led by ostensibly impartial clergies, cash handouts, are characteristic of such tendencies. Irrespective of ‘kastom’ and electoral rules, candidates appear desperately undeterred.

... in a recent by-election in one of NCD’s electorate in which the LPV system was used, the winning candidate sponsored three other candidates so that they could get all the second votes from his voters. Voters were advised to scatter the third choice votes so that his opponents would not be in the race with him. This strategy was cemented with promises of cash handouts, contracts and so forth all sworn over the Bible (Kamasua 2006).

The subsequent election of the Kiriwina Rural Local Level Government candidates was subjected to the same conditions and features of electioneering. For the first time however, a female Ms. Jennifer Rudd was elected much to the envy of her many local male counterparts.<sup>8</sup> As a principal strategy of hers she virtually feasted her way through every village with her trade store wealth spending as much as K100,000 perhaps. This was in addition to her generous assistance to locals in need of sea transportation between say the main town of Alotau and Kiriwina.

Another emerging tendency, particularly with the candidates is to do with the deliberate and ruthless exploitation of the rural voters with limited knowledge on governance and modern niceties - the so-called cargo-cult mentality. Characteristically, and using rhetoric, candidates appeal with topical issues and wild unrealistic promises of ‘free education’, major highways, provision of ships and other gigantic infrastructure - that clearly cannot be achieved within the next five years. Again these are made with the intention of exploiting the rural people’s ignorance and prevailing poverty besetting their own local circumstances.

The 2007 elections for the Kiriwina-Goodenough seat had at least a couple of candidates blatantly raising false hopes for the voters that once voted in, they would fight tooth and nail, and open up ducts towards millions of kina. And that the monies would be brought back to the people for their own unconditional 'consumption' and endless feasting! Candidates often failed to explain to voters that government funding is ever so limited, must be properly appropriated, and accounted for. Usually excitement overcomes any rationale thought thereby leaving behind little room for reason. Being so deeply enmeshed and consequently uncritical of the convoluted term 'politics', candidates were clearly behaving irresponsibly by deluding the voters.

This leads me to the other curiously interesting and yet related observation on the final outcome of 2007 elections in the Milne Bay province. This is almost unique to Milne Bay as the phenomenon perpetually repeats itself. Of the five elected members, one was a naturalized citizen, three others were of mixed blood European and PNG, and one a mixed blood of Milne Bay and PNG highlands (but see Anere 2002).<sup>9</sup> From the outset, it would seem as if no full-blooded Milne Bay was fit enough to contest and/or there was a conspiracy to outsmart the autochthones. This is neither a slight nor, a prejudice against the eventual winners or all half/quarter-blooded Milne Bays. However, it is an observation that is worthy of notice.

Milne Bay province has an unenviable history of voting in either naturalized citizens or, half/quarter-blooded Milne Bays to run its political affairs. Naturalized citizens and half-blooded Milne Bays have been generally and economically better positioned candidates compared to the average full-blooded Milne Bay. Naturalized citizens have been of late, super businessmen in the province. The previous Governor and a few others more were such, and so as the present one.<sup>10</sup>

The other half-blooded Milne Bay members of parliament have been all business people except for the Kiriwina-Goodenough member elect. He was a former branch manager of Air Niugini, even then there was speculation during the elections that he was part of a covertly-engineered network of individuals with a zealous eye on marine business interests in the province. Two naturalized citizens have been alleged to be engineers of such a scheme. Three other locals, and two of whom, are close blood relatives of the winning candidate, were said to be scheming to get into the Local Level Government council elections in order to further consolidate this business network.

The point is naturalized citizens and half-blooded Milne Bay candidates are usually better placed to facilitate 'handouts' in order to win votes from the poverty-stricken local Milne Bays (see Anere's Tables 6.4 & 6.5, 2002: 91). Taking nothing away from the piecemeal generosity these individuals provide to the locals however, the 'handout' mentality prevails come election time. Many of such well to do candidates perpetuate these electioneering tendencies including urban-based, albeit full-blooded Milne Bays that had business interests and excessive party endowment.

In a keynote address delivered to the people of Milne Bay at the inaugural Milne Bay Provincial Open Day hosted by the Milne Bay Students Union at the University of Papua New Guinea, in Port Moresby, I stated the following.

We either match the challenge and drive our people to intellectual poverty and persistent economic dependence or, change it by devising creative awareness campaigns among our people for a more conscientious choice of leadership. For that reason alone, I welcome the challenge of [from] the naturalized citizens so that we can play it smarter and promote the intelligence of our own people from erosion through cargo-cult strategies (digim'Rina, September 25, 2007: 6)

When asked, while visiting relatives overseas, as to how he manages to win back his seat in Milne Bay, a naturalized citizen and former Member of Parliament was arrogantly haughty.

Just give them [voters] a stick of tobacco, and a t-shirt, and that's it. (Dr. G. Tokhabilula, personal communication, Alotau, May 2007).

Regardless of the angle of perspective, 'handout' mentality continues to influence, arrest, and play havoc on the political, economic and intellectual freedom of Milne Bay voters, rural and urban alike. After all,

Poverty in Milne Bay is not about daily going without food rather, being intellectually deprived of having to consciously choose one's own path for a desired destiny. A real decent choice is lacking for the average Milne Bay. This is a result of a century of political stagnancy, economic displacement by alien crooks, and cultural illusion (digim'Rina op.cit.: 4).

These are some of the instances noted from Milne Bay that lend support to the general observation of electioneering trend in PNG elections - all for the wrong reasons. Irresponsible candidates, whose conscience is most likely distorted partially by a sudden flush of cash access or, growing inability to provide sound direction and vision amidst misguided cultural influences and/or both together, on one hand, and the voters inability to see and grow beyond their own poor cultural conditions, on the other. Both have in a combined manner provided a 'weak' element in ensuring a fair electoral process. This was the major problem with the electoral processes. Far too many weak and irresponsible candidates backed by unscrupulous influential local voters. Colloquially, prostitution of voters, candidates, kastom, and church protocols become inevitable. My personal observation is that the process is sound enough, but as I will show below it still requires some vital changes towards improvement.

### **My Own Little Story**

My approach to this study had been, by and large, ethnographic. I went in as a participant observer that is an agent with a subjective approach, albeit with a backdrop of a keen observer. In my letter of resignation to the Registrar of the University of Papua New Guinea I clarified my intention to resign.

... I take this technical resignation as a phase within a whole process of my professional career wherein I wish to enter into politics both as an 'agent-citizen', and also a professional researcher of social issues and processes. Meaning, I make the undertaking as a *subjective participant while remaining an objective observer* – perhaps however never attaining the ideal 'participant observer' status, *a'la* Malinowski. It is from such a perspective that I embark on this phase of this [sic] vocational project (digim'Rina, resignation letter Sept 2006 – emphasis added).

I had given some thought on the objectives I would like to achieve during this rare and yet opportune time as a candidate in the national elections. While it remains academically contentious, I took it as an intellectual challenge as well as an adventure in order to broaden my horizons.

In mid 2004 I decided to contest in the 2007 elections. The decision was quietly made known to my village people and especially the area comprising some ten villages in the Luba district of Kiriwina. The years that followed on till the end of 2006 went with little formality except to confirm rumors of my intention to contest for those that cared to ask.

In late September 2006, I submitted my letter of resignation to my employer and convened my first election related meeting with urban-based relatives on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. The meeting was received with mixed feelings, as among the attendees were 'brothers' of a rival candidate who in fact is a brother in law of mine.

Meantime, at least three of the candidates had already commenced their campaigns manifested in sponsored inter-village football competitions involving usually a cluster of some ten villages. Rumors spread like wild fire as the popularity of candidates fluctuate subject to a myriad of social and spatial factors. My own involvement of the BBC to shoot a staged feature film of the famed Trobriand cricket in June 2006, was rashly interpreted by some rival candidates as a Machiavellian campaign attempt. Indeed some ten participating villages were paid at least K1000 each, over and above spinoffs. Admittedly I practically could not exploit the situation for my own personal gain as I was such a busy member of the production team. Some ungrateful villagers and a few urban Trobriand Islanders however failed to understand that I was a contracted consultant. And that was even after I explained to the villagers that this was barter opportunity and not the usual 'handout' cash bundles dished out to them by Members of Parliament and/or intending candidates. Some were even more concerned with the tough line I towed that they had to sweat it out for the cash. I even made their Chiefs, Elders, Leaders, and Councilors sign off consent of participation documents including receipts of payments made. This was not easy given that I was already known to be an intending candidate.

Handouts through cash and kind from intending candidates had already begun to move through kinship, church and established socio-political networks. Scheming middlemen voters opportunistically and on regular basis travelled between rural and urban areas themselves acting ostensibly as spokespersons for their respective village voters. The intention was to woo favors from the unsuspecting intending candidates who were mostly urban based. Quite plainly however, majority of these smooth talking middlemen were seasoned conmen.

I then flew to Kimbe, West New Britain with my two-year old son and spent a couple of weeks with my niece and her family soliciting funding support for my election venture. I successfully secured a commitment of up to K10,000 from Motu Kauyola family. The cost of this leg of the journey was shared between the Kauyola family and I. A total amount of K7150 was eventually disbursed to me by the Kauyola family for my campaign expenses.

In the first week of January 2007, and together with the Kauyola family, I organized the only fundraising event for my candidature at the UPNG Drill Hall and raised K5000 after spending about half of the above amount. This comprised of sales of assorted food items and beverages including alcohol. The attendance was not as good as was initially anticipated, however. The Kauyola family sent me two more tranches of funds thereafter. A foreign colleague of mine sent over K1000, part of which was to cover my campaign expenses.

Between November 2006 and April 2007, I spent all my time in Port Moresby not been able to make a single travel to the constituency. There was much ambivalence among my potential voters of whether I was serious in contesting at all.

As early as late 2005 I signed an expression of interest to be endorsed by Pangu Party as a candidate through an agent from its Alotau party branch. From September 2006 to March 2007, I continued to negotiate and work my way towards becoming a serious Kiriwina-Goodenough candidate for Pangu Party. A reliable official of the party was my contact that continued to cajole my interest.

In January 2007, an agent from the New Generation Party sought for my endorsement by the party at my home in Port Moresby. I respectfully declined the request on ethical grounds as the party had by then engaged a controversial citizen as one of its key party players in the election.

On March 2, 2007 a couple of colleagues asked me to join the Peoples Progress Party (PPP) at my home. Convinced that this was a more promising proposition, as I also trusted Sir Julius Chan's astute leadership and work ethics, I wrote a formal letter of application for endorsement the very next day, and was subsequently enlisted as a potential candidate. I immediately conveyed the decision to my Pangu contacts albeit electronically.

Courting with PPP became more serious and assuring in the coming weeks. This was even after the party Secretary informed me that the party's branch at Alotau had decided to endorse a local candidate based on Goodenough Island, and I was to be a pro-candidate. While I humbly accepted the decision given my late cooption into the party however, I became a bit anxious. In retrospect however, the PPP party branch at Alotau made a good decision as their choice did way better than I, and came third when the winner of the seat was declared.

By the end of April I was worried that party funding was not forthcoming as we were all been impressed earlier by the party officials and officers. After the issue of writs on May 4<sup>th</sup>, I decided to do away with party affiliation and go the mile alone hence nominated as an Independent candidate on May 7th. The decision was made after I had called the party Secretary in Port Moresby and advised him so.

I had planned earlier that my campaign would target locally-specific issues of health, education and poverty. My numerous trips to the island of Kiriwina, and personal knowledge of Goodenough informed me that these were the most pressing issues. The rest were merely manifestations of the three above. And that I should prioritize my focus upon few major local projects along the above lines: human resources (health and education into the future), so as to arrest the prevailing problem of poverty by raising living standards in the long run. Mobilizing and using strengths within was the overarching goal.

I would need a DVD equipment, a multi-media projector to show selected ethnographic documentaries, in order to graphically bring the points across. The film/media-starved rural population will certainly find it amusing, attractive, and educational. Educational was my objective however. The above tools were to be powered by a portable generator. This plus a nine-footer fiberglass dinghy equipped with a 40 horsepower outboard motor had been purchased by my brother and was already back in the village. The dinghy was to cover the transportation requirements to the outliers and Goodenough.

I also purchased a loud hailer, which became a very vital tool during my campaign. Essentially, it proved to be handy by quickly gathering the people together from nearby gardens, for example, and also made my speeches audibly clear. With these and some K10,000 spending money for food and election-related contingencies should see me through the month-long campaign period.<sup>11</sup> This was my simple plot given my personal knowledge of the culture.

By the hour however, I was still unable to purchase the multi-media equipments and had only K7,000 on hand to cover my election campaign. I was anxious, and was indeed broke by the second week of my campaign. I could only afford travel from Port Moresby via Alotau for the nomination, two 44 gallon drums of fuel for the dinghy, another for kerosene, and transportation to Kiriwina with my two very close assistants from Port Moresby. I nonetheless proceeded to conduct my campaign on foot and by dinghy to the outliers except for the Goodenough Island. From then on I grabbed and exploited the opportunity, including the misfortune with inadequate cash, as a challenge. My courage to do so raised eyebrows no doubt, and also got some suspicious voters disgustingly suggesting that I was palpably stingy and therefore not 'crazy-enough' to contest. Both accusations, as I was aware, were indeed contra to some of the key criterion to Melanesian principles of 'bigmanship', however.

Ultimately, I allowed three communal/voter-address gatherings at my home village of Okheboma however with varied attendances and contexts. The first was an introduction to my campaign trail, which comprised of a slaughtered pig, some K200 worth of rice, tea

and sugar, and yams and betel nut bunches sponsored by relatives and close supporters alike. The second was an address specifically made to the male youth on the eve of polling at Okheboma. Under my instruction, they were to observe and police the polling rules while ensuring that supporters and scrutineers of the other candidates, within and without, do likewise. The cost of the gathering comprised of a K100 worth of rice, tea and sugar. The third, was a final gathering with faithful voters to express my gratitude and provide some analytical insights into the electorate's 2007 election event. The cost comprised of three slaughtered pigs variously provided by relatives, yams, and K300 worth of rice, sugar and tea.

Additional to the above were my free gifts of apportioned kerosene supply to those that felt free to come forward and ask of it. Okheboma and a few of Okupukopu villagers were the main beneficiaries. The only 200litre kerosene drum for this purpose was used up within a week. At least one fifth of the kerosene was used for my evening presentations that we carried in portable plastic containers throughout the island. Villagers would offer their coleman lamps while we provided the kerosene. I also generously gave away limited litres of my zoom fuel for the outboard motor to genuine individuals that sought for assistance. This aside, the rest of my campaign trail rested on my character, friendship, and kinship relations.

I did not set up 'voter support base' at my home village and villages within the vicinity. Undoubtedly, this allowed rival candidates to move in with ease, and gnawed at the potential solidarity of my 'village base' with the apparent lure of cash, cheap goods, and lies perpetrated by unproductive cohorts of theirs.

On the other hand, faithful subscribers to 'short-lived local politics' will continue to view my effort as being politically naïve, and gullible thus, approaching incredulous levels of political miscalculation. Such hearkened views of 'politics' will never realize a major positive reform to the socio-economic conditions of the Kiriwina people. Time shall tell.

I was indeed better equipped with a personal knowledge of the culture, records of previous elections, documentation of activities from previous research projects including archaeology, archival search, ethnography, local history of Kiriwina and Goodenough, environment, and political elections too.

I had also vitally equipped myself with the latest demographic and voting population statistics that improved my ability to address the local issues in the parlance of the voters. I could speak the kind of language that is familiar with the voters having on hand a sound knowledge of fundamental local nuances, politics, and island history.

My previous community engagements of the people with the outside world through television documentaries particularly with ZDF of German television (1995), UNESCO tree replanting project (1999-), the BBC (2006), and a University teacher served me well in been adequately known by the people.

My own generosity also included the unprecedented efforts of my brother Rodney and I in distributing 1kg rice freely to households and individuals during the drought crisis ten years ago (1997-1998). This gesture was rivaled only by the then MP, Mr. William Ebenosi, who went out of his way to facilitate the budgeted government relief supply. This nonetheless served the MP well.

However, all of these count to nothing on the eve of voting as if voters conveniently forget genuine efforts for instantaneous 'vote-buying' efforts. I had no regrets and had publicly assured the voters so in various formal addresses.

Of the two main islands covering the Kiriwina-Goodenough electorate however, I was only able to conduct my campaign on one, Kiriwina, the Trobriand archipelago. Kiriwina is politically made up of 33 council wards, with 96 villages<sup>12</sup>, and a total population of just over 30,000. By 2007, the registered eligible voters were just over 16,000 adults. I will return to voter projections later.

I covered all 33 wards comprising 72 main villages, and making a total of 73 lectures in 34 days with an average of three lectures per day.<sup>13</sup> This was literally accomplished by foot<sup>14</sup>, and outboard motor for the outliers. I had between six to twenty followers as assistants in all my rounds. Unlike the other candidates, I alone spoke, commented and answered questions in all my 73 lectures being mindful of the voters' disdain of followers pretending and thereby speaking for the candidate. My followers only listened and quietly discussed with voters that sat next to them. Among many other positives, I was also commended for such an approach, which I had deliberately engineered. Though satisfied with my own personal triumph amidst the odds, I was physically, not mentally exhausted by the time I completed my field campaign.

Weeks before my first presentation, I sent out written advanced notices to village/church/youth leaders, and ward councilors of my scheduled presentations in their respective villagers. The notices were distributed by foot, and through my two most reliable assistants. Overall, the ward councilors were most unreliable in terms of relaying messages and organizing the people before hand. I also noticed that cooperation might be guaranteed if they were given or promised with cash to perform. Indeed some of them were already aligned with another candidate especially the seemingly better endowed provincial seat candidates.

I tried to organize a candidates' forum by going on air through the provincial radio station. This cost me K200 for a series of message relays. Letters were also hand delivered to candidates at their homes and in between campaigns. However this was aborted in the last hour due to late notice, according to a few candidates. The intention was for all the candidate nominees to gather together at two separate public places on each island, and debate electorate related issues of concern. It seemed that certain candidates found the idea tasteless, intimidating, and perhaps feared the potential of being exposed to the voters of some weakness. Hence, they quickly assumed an indifferent attitude to the whole idea. My vision was for PNG to one day arrive at a more transparently competitive approach and openly debate issues of concern rather than the

present surreptitious method of showcasing candidates. This would at the very least allow voters to gain a better assessment of the quality of the candidates and their subsequent performance in the parliament. (I return to this point later on.)

Methodically, I would approach a designated village on the scheduled date and have them gather for the presentation. Subject to size, the average audience ranged between 20 and 100 villagers each time comprising of adults and children of both sexes. The presentation duration was between 45-60 minutes starting with my own profile, *local concerns* on education and health, proposed strategies to address the issues, and ending with a note on LPV awareness (This is captured in my Campaign Lecture which is still in the local vernacular).

Occasionally, adult men and women might be absent due to family/communal commitments. The presentation always ends with a forum of discussion whereby adult male and youths predominantly comment upon and ask questions. Most notably were the cases of some animated women engaged on the subject of lack of proper health support facilities particularly on labor and delivery hardships constantly faced by mothers, including lack of school fees support, and poor accommodation facilities at the only high school on the Island. On five separate occasions, each of five women literally and openly sobbed when relating their own experience of the losses and hardships in this respect, as they languish their overall state of hopelessness from improvement.

Hospitality and generosity among the villagers were never short in supply. Not infrequently my team was offered meals of vegetables, green coconut drinks, and areca nuts, and very rarely would the hosts entertain my plea for time limitations and appreciate my decline of their offer; so that we could move on. Councilors, church leaders, friends and relatives provided such meals of refreshment. Overall however, I owe the hosts much for their generosity and sincerity, as in most cases these were accepted without equivalent return.

Upon entry to a village, I would instruct my assistants to conduct a quick enumeration of households in order for me to make a quick estimation of the population size. The resulting figure from a computation of the number of households multiplied by five individuals as the average number for each household is compared with the 2000 census figures on hand. Usually the estimate figure was near enough. I would subsequently announce the estimate population, eligible voters figures, and so forth to the villagers. Not only this caused much amusement to the people and the ward recorders alike but, it went a long way in advancing my candidature profile.

At the time of my own formal nomination as a candidate, I decidedly severed my political endorsement by the party I was courting with - Peoples Progress Party. I also knew that the chances of securing a poster for my candidature had been truncated.

I consciously went without promotional aids in the form of posters, t-shirts, cards and the like as a result. An amusing line that got the voters laughing with glee was when a

candidate poster is likened to an unanimated artifact. "Election posters are like wood carvings, images that neither they nor can you talk with."

I had also decided to rid myself of the idea of setting up a network of skilled persons in every village/ward so as to do the campaign for me when necessary. I had over the years observed that a good number of them were unreliable with self-serving motives often at the 'expense' of the candidate. 'Expense' had a two-fold effect. On one hand, the candidate suffers the loss on the amount of resources expended, and then fails to secure the promised votes, on the other. There were numerous shameless cases of candidates and/or proxies violently demanding the return of material goods such as outboard motors, Coleman lamps and even t-shirts back to the candidate as the supposed supporter had defaulted during polling! Principal supporters even withheld goods and cash on the condition that voters must swear by the Christian bible their allegiance and first preference vote before they could receive their reward otherwise. This however did not augur well with true Christian believers.

Despite their popularity *cum* influence, a good number of these middlemen were conmen with self-proclaimed knowledge on projected statistics regarding demographic dynamics, eligible voters, and who voted whom at the polls. Such sworn on exaggeration and lies were perpetrated and religiously passed onto gullible candidates that amazingly believed them!

Hence, by choice, I did not assign any scrutineers prior to and during the polls. I did however assign two knowledgeable relatives for the counting period primarily to pick up the statistics on vote distribution (see Table below). These have formed the basis of my discussion and inferences in this paper.

Unlike with at least two other candidates, I decided not to set up the nightly lavish-feasting 'supporter bases' that went on for well over seven weeks. Pigs, betel nuts, assorted trade store consumables (usually rice, sugar and tea), fish and vegetables were the usual items on offer everyday. The cost on garnering the resources together was immense as it was intended to sustain and anchor the supporters' interests. This included commissioning of sporting activities such as football games, groups performing guitar music at night, and having senior clergymen provide pro-candidate religious rituals like long and sometimes outlandish rhetorical sermons and prayers. Such exploitation of 'customs' was intended to consolidate political support. Services of magicians, sorcerers and even witches were surreptitiously solicited to provide 'base' protection as rumors of projected sorcery were rife in those camps.

Despite the effort however, at least two deaths associated with one of the camps occurred and subsequently had the alleged assailants of the victims audaciously spreading self-praise and triumph. Conduct of 'supporters' were prescribed and proscribed often manifested in their daily attire and hyper-charged utterances.

Not only was I unable to but, even if I was, I had already decided not to entertain the notion of enticing votes by making cash handouts each time I spoke at any communal

gathering. I wanted the voters to choose freely – devoid of any undue pressure from me but their own conscience. A particular candidate was virtually under the influence of alcohol, and shamelessly dishing out cash and cheques to communities, groups and individuals on the eve of polling.<sup>15</sup> The leading candidates were guilty of forcefully ‘buying votes’ under the guise of scrutinizing poll stations on the eve of polling in every village. I forbade my closest of supporters from engaging in such conducts – colloquially known as ‘politics’. I was keen on courageously showing the voters the way, even if I did not make it this time.

I prevailed upon voters that this election is neither about feasting and extravagancy nor, is it for individuals to scheme and exploit each other. Rather to consciously choose a servant (*Towotetila*) with clearly stated goals and prioritized activities for the next five years. There is after all no constitutional and/or electoral provision in the Act that prescribes one to buy votes and/or feast with voters in order to be voted in. Nor tradition and custom should interfere with the process hence pigs, conch shells, chiefly privileges and protocols, sorcery, and cash should not be part of the recipe at all. The voters and the candidates stubbornly thought and behaved otherwise, of course. Why is that so? Is it just about winning or, is it becoming a tradition? Misguided professionals, candidates, and ignorant voters alike call it ‘politics’, but for what?

As some Pacific scholars have surmised, individual status, the paraphernalia of rituals, and a growing social fashion invoking the past, that is characteristically oblivious to the actors themselves, I venture to suggest, drive the actors towards cheating, lying, and breaking rules and decorum. Paraphrasing Chand (2008), unless voters and candidates look beyond their ‘cargo and clan’, and I might add, thriving networks between ‘big boys’ and ‘small boys’ tendencies, PNG elections should not hope to ever realize a strong and trustworthy political leadership. Never.

Under the circumstances, the described activities above provided the basis of my approach and perhaps the fate of my electioneering attempt. Since the conclusion of my campaign trail at the village of Okheboma, I have documented all my presentations with every detail though is still in *tok ples* (i.e. local vernacular). It will be subsequently translated into English.

This was my *modus operandi* on the subjective-objective observations of an election conducted in 2007.

### **Looking Across the Shoulders**

There were 19 candidates, including a woman, for the Kiriwina-Goodenough Open seat in the 2007 general elections. This clearly set yet another all male election affair.<sup>16</sup> There had been no woman winner before in this and other open seats of the province save for the regional seat. With exception of four others, all the candidates were regular government employees and/or self-employed based in urban areas.

The socio-environmental features and characteristics of both islands, Kiriwina and Goodenough, are very similar despite the fact that the former is made up of coral atolls, and the latter is predominantly volcanic in geological formation. Kiriwina had about 30000 people while the latter had 21000 with 16000 and 9999 eligible voters, respectively. Majority of the people are subsistence gardeners, fishers and hunters comprising some 9945 households with 25,738 males and 24,228 females for both islands (2000 National census).

Each has a high school, a health center, and numerous community schools from grades 1 to 8, including the Top-Up level. Each also has a separate Rural Local Level Government and together they have 51 wards with about 138 villages in all. Lack of regular supply of medicine, teachers going without pay or, continuously been distracted by cultural obligations, kids electing not to attend schools, kids starving at the high schools and/or dropping out due to unaffordable educational fees are well known stories among the island voters. To them, these are real issues as constant reminders of their life-long predicaments. And yet too often these issues are relegated to individual level as private family matters. Communal cooperative attention is not usually thought of nor advocated upon.

The daily meal of a Kiriwina-Goodenough person comprise of vegetables (yams, taros, sweet potatoes, and manioc) and rice with a rare treat of fish, pork and packaged fish and meat. The vegetable markets operate on irregular basis and are mostly unreliable in terms of supply. The cash flow is often low and only sustained by at least six major stores for the two islands. Since the beginning of the last century, *beche-de-mer* and shark fin harvesting had been but intermittent. Of late however, and thanks to the sustained efforts of late Dennis Young, export of marine products from the island has been on an increase since the 1990s. A lot more coastal locals are involved and heavily dependent on these activities as a more attractive avenue for cash generation.

Sources of cash income is limited to remittance from urban-based relatives, occasional sales of wood carvings to tourists, fish, vegetables, lime powder from burnt coral, betel and areca however usually serving as middlemen to the areca suppliers from neighboring islands, including Goodenough.

Fast declining soil fertility and exponential growth of population concomitant with rising pressure on limited fertile land amidst shorter fallow periods only worsens the situation (see Poschl & Poschl, 1985). Consequently, an overall disintegration of social order, respect and ethical conduct has alarmingly set in. People are only superficially happy thereby belying the reality felt within.

In a nutshell, voters for Kiriwina-Goodenough Open seat are vulnerable to lures of any form of material wealth as they are materially poverty-stricken. This certainly leaves the gates wide open for the desperate and selfish candidates.

My own assessment of the 2007 candidate line up for the seat was that for the first time the voters were presented with a good range of candidates to choose from. This was in

the form of the level of qualification, professional skills, bureaucratic and management savvy, cultural awareness and sensitivity, sincerity and ability of the candidates to serve the welfare of the voters (cf. Anere and Gelu 2002).

As is elsewhere in Melanesia however, territorial, cultural affiliation, and kinship affinities concomitant with the lure of cash and goods loomed large as principal determining variables for the voters. Voting for cash wherewithal rather than local and national issues of concern dictated predominantly everywhere. It was a stark prevalence of 'cash logic' insofar as vote distribution was concerned.<sup>17</sup> This is especially true with the distribution of first preference votes.

A point that came forth rather strongly from the voters was that the candidates should have had a prior meeting together in order to arrive at some agreement on the preferred candidates. This would at least reduce the number of candidates contesting and thereby assist the voters to seriously vote for the best (cf. Gelu 2002, and Kaiulo 2002). I explained that this might not be possible as candidates hardly tolerate the courage to meet and discuss their intentions for fear of being ignored, rejected and sidelined. Candidates usually make individual decisions with personal motives and often cooked up with influential national politicians that might have little to no interest at all on the electorate contested. This is aside from the constitutional right provided for individuals to contest, vote and hold public office (see also Gelu 2002: 163).

I gathered together at least two candidates in Port Moresby and three others in Alotau for the sole purpose of sharing and even critiquing each other's strategies. This was however far too late into the elections. By the nature of extant elections, not too many were courageous enough to share ideas and plans. This is yet another indication of candidates never being sincere with the voters.

I have already alluded to some of the campaign strategies and provided glimpses of where the electoral process was stealthily challenged, sidestepped and 'thumped on the head'. However, I provide below what the Kiriwina-Goodenough candidates tried to do and with what means.

Of the nineteen candidates for Kiriwina-Goodenough seven were Independents and various political parties endorsed the rest. Of that only eleven of us managed to properly campaign throughout the isles of Kiriwina. The regional seat pathetically had only four candidates that campaigned on the island of Kiriwina.<sup>18</sup>

The top six candidates of the first preference count hired out vehicles, out board motors, boats and even groups and individuals to ferry goods and supporters in between villages and islands for campaign purposes. So much cash flowed despite instances where candidates had to become indebted to service and goods providers alike. It had been common knowledge that a good number of elders and chiefs bemoan their lack of tact and shrewdness after elections. There were instances of elders losing pigs, yams and other forms of wealth to candidates in need of such items for feasts and fetes with the promise of cash repayment later on. Such losses were never recovered.

More than the ordinary voters, influential elders, chiefs, ward councilors, youth and women leaders alike without embarrassment rushed to the opportunity of making quick bucks from unsuspecting candidates, particularly those that were rumored to have been stashed with cash. Candidates of the regional/provincial seat but non-Kiriwina themselves, were met and cajoled at the provincial capital Alotau, and even in Port Moresby for their money in return for local voting support to be engineered by these individuals. There were mild conflicts among individual and group supporters on the island over candidate ownership, so to speak. In ways that attempts by other voters to 'steal away' one's candidate naturally generated open verbal abuse at each other. It was a case of paranoid candidates poaching and/or becoming over protected by vote peddlers.

A particular regional seat candidate arrived in a separate gaudy tourist dive boat with his urbane mistress that fatefully had a not-so-pleasant and violent encounter with the rival local mistress. Days later his barge-boat of eight cows, a Front-end Loader Caterpillar machine, and a load of loose gravel arrived. This was to be a demonstration of his commitment to sealing of a K1.3 million road stretch on the island, fulfill his five-year long promises of delivering cows, t-shirts, uniforms and the like. The cows were distributed according to the eight church circuits/divisions along with the rest of the goods. However, the load of gravel has since remained stranded at Mweuya beach. No road was sealed and the candidate's ultimate loss in the election probably sealed the fate of yet another promised 'cargo'.

Clearly the 2007 election on Kiriwina would, one might infer, have flushed the island with cash into the millions, and goods. However, for some unknown reason these rumored goods and cash were never visible nor were they felt in any tangible way for the islanders. Either the rumors were way taller than the amount of cash and goods circulated or, that some crafty voter must have hidden the rumored cash and perhaps reinvested in some place elsewhere but Kiriwina.

Shameless voters feasted, neglected their family gardens, daily family errands, and a few picked up some promised cash and goods. Some were shared at least but majority of the voters remained as they ever were. They voted but only through the lies and undue influences of those individuals that were so close to the 'cash-dishing-out' candidates. These became the immediate beneficiaries of the many promises of elections, even if only for a short while. Such was the overall election delusion on Kiriwina and Goodenough Islands during the 2007 elections.

Voters are entitled to have their own expectations and it is really up to candidates to play it to their whims even treating them like kids. Alternatively one could choose to challenge the voters' thoughts and expectations in order to provide the alternative perception of their world. And offer hopes of how lives in the rural area could be improved through good governance and not by reaping off the meager state resources through deliberate exploitation of rural intellectual poverty. That was what I did and perhaps became the second choice to the voters as a result. I challenged the *status quo*.

Let me now turn to, and underline some of the above points on what I consider as the blue print strategy that appears to be in vogue among many of our aspiring leaders of today. Both Anere and Gelu (2002) attempted some useful criterion of candidate suitability mainly arising from the concern for quality candidates and therefore how good leadership could be attained. Below is what appears to me as the conventional strategies often opted for by candidates during elections.

***Like a raindrop on a taro leaf: the inveterate approach***

Not all voters expect candidates to be ‘crazy’ and dish out cash wherever they stage a campaign rally. There are in fact enough clear thinking voters that look towards a new hope of leadership away from the current misguided and mediocre performers. Concerned parents do recognize the value of quality health and education services for their children and aspire to embrace such opportunities. Some of these parents have been victims of poor education, health and transport services and would certainly prefer a change to prevailing woeful conditions. These voters are determined to have a real say during elections particularly ensuring that elections are fair and just. Most importantly is in ensuring that hardworking, honest and reliable candidates are voted in. Voters are similarly sick and tired of being fooled and treated like ‘prostitutes’ out in the streets providing cheap services. The handouts are similarly seen with derision by the voters, despite what many candidates might like to think along the lines outlined below.

The above subheading was an expressed quote taken from Pearson Kolo in an analogous and yet satirical reference to the goods and cash acquired from candidates during elections (*Post Courier*, March 9, 2007, p. 32). Meaning, voters now see the handouts from candidates and MP’s only as piecemeal efforts – never enough for the electorate and into the next generations, but only a justification of the MP’s own existence.

It is indeed fair to suggest that most candidates contested with the following ‘a must’ list of areas to cover without which one’s attempt is as good as gone.

First and foremost a candidate must secure **adequate funding** perhaps in access of K50,000 before contesting the seat (but see Anere’s Table 6.5, 2002: 91).<sup>19</sup> My own experience among the other eighteen candidates generally showed that at least two thirds of the candidates went in with inadequate funding support. Distribution of primary votes that subsequently got locked up with the top six candidates was a clear indication of votes secured through cash and kind.<sup>20</sup>

Second is for the candidate to attain a reasonable level of **cultural sensitivity on local issues and concerns**. Not infrequently, voters do test the candidates’ command and proficiency in local language usually through metaphors. Although, this prerequisite can be easily subsumed by the first since a candidate’s inherent charisma does count at the end of the day.<sup>21</sup>

Third, and lacking the second, it is useful for the candidate to shrewdly enlist with cash or kind, a **network of skillful and reliably influential locals** to perform the task of rallying

voters while promoting the profile of one's candidature. These could stem all the way from the national down to the provincial, district, ward and village level. Kinship and other social networks come into play as well. Some find the youths and church leaders more effective than the village elders, women leaders and the ward councilors. An obvious risk involves candidates falling prey to skillful local conmen who are adept to lying and spreading tall promises to potential voters. In any case, such skillful individuals come looking for the candidates; to woo, lure, endorse and/or depose by spreading rumors.

Fourth, it is indeed an advantage if the candidate has a long-standing association by **residence among the voters with demonstrated leadership qualities**. Voters can and do openly declare their strongholds as in 'block vote' basis. This prerequisite can again be undermined by the first. For a first timer however, there is no need for a prolonged residence among the voters when one is dishonest enough to strategically distribute 'handout goods'.

Fifth, candidates must count on, and rightly so, their **previous charity handouts and/or 'impact projects'** to the voters as part of their rapport. It helps. Be warned however, that voters do forget easily whether on purpose or by default.

Sixth, **creating impressions with impact** by walking through every voter stronghold, setting up of lavish feasting 'support bases', provision of posters, cards, t-shirts, caps, and casually spending adequate time with the voters are also vital. Details of the approaches are up to individual candidates, as indeed all are subject to resource availability.

Seventh, is an offshoot of the First and related to the Fourth, in which the candidate has to have a competent and reliable management team that will strategically ensure a **constant flow of cash and goods handouts during the weeks and days before and after the actual polling period**. (Although, bribery is strictly speaking illegal during campaign, polling, and counting periods however, there were instances galore of candidates and their teams blatantly breaching this prohibition.)<sup>22</sup>

Eighth, is related to seven though clearly subject to First, and the most commonly cited and talked about by many. In order to win, a candidate's best option is to **bribe the voters, influential leaders and con-persons from the communities, election officials, district officials, police and senior bureaucrats. The most influential and well endowed national politicians cover the spectrum in its entirety. Novices and local operators only go as far as bribing the voters, Chiefs/elders, ward councilors, and polling officials**. Such include candidates accepting extravagant financial support for their election costs from business houses, within or without, albeit saddled with specific requests for business favors.<sup>23</sup>

These are what I describe as prevailing normative methods of campaigning strategies that might ensure victory to candidates. Details do vary in degree but the principles holds. Many of them, I must prevail are *contra* to principles of good governance and respect for

the voters. And yet just as many candidates accept it dogmatically, and see such as a blue print and an electoral norm, as they mentally strategize for 2012.

Voters must also share the blame for being complacent, as not too many of them are actually ignorant of the covert crafts of candidates and their financiers. This is similarly observed in the American elections.

Through the complex electoral process it gathers disparate interests and quantities of money from individuals, corporations, innumerable associations, labor unions and other units – much of this fundraising takes place behind scenes, and is increasingly described as if it was in itself polluting... (Damon 2003: 74-75).

Are candidates and voters that powerless to rise up and counter such a trend? The answer is no. 'Politics' viewed and taken for granted as a 'self-serving opportunity' is indeed deluding us all. Surely it can be changed for the better, and the initiative lies with the candidates more than the voters and the financiers. Candidates must pluck up the courage to break away from such growing yet lazy and counterproductive habits as those noted by Winn below.

As one learned commentator stated, "Patronage is patronage, and that ties in with the "network" which people call "luck" – the social life of the corporation or bureaucracy, where part of an executive's career is spent "politiking".

Like any politician, especially when he is at or near the top of the hierarchy, the successful executive strives to win friends and make alliances (Winn 2007).

Parallels may be drawn from the way senior bureaucrats behave amidst a screaming abundance of rhetoric and hypocrisy on work attitudes and productivity. Indeed one cannot help but become cynical of the growing work culture of the bureaucrats of today. Work for most seems to be chairing and/or attending meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences, officiating some communal celebration. In most instances, their presentations have been both regurgitated and lacked originality supported by poorly researched statements and statistics, with little benefit to their own institutions and divisions. Having the latest car models, renting bigger and better houses at prime locations in the city, and most significantly, constantly haunted by dubious financial deals has become part of that culture too. A day's work for most is spent on running errands as the work on in-trays pile on with major and urgent decisions left untouched. Celebrating a 'corporate plan' with fireworks in popularly designated hotels and restaurants has become an index of ultimate performance for the curriculum vitae rather than a means to a potential productive outcome. This has gradually become a norm for most of the 'Human Resource Managers'.

Candidates must be squarely held responsible for failing to apportion time to clearly explain to voters the actual roles of a member of parliament; rather than what is expected of them by the voters. The paranoia of losing must be done away with and instead replaced with courage to face the voters with the truth.

For instance, voters were surprised when I explained that there are two (not one) principal functions of an elected member. One is to have the ability to learn and

understand that s/he is a legislator and formulator of laws and policies and therefore has to actively participate in the relevant parliamentary debates. Two, elected members are representative voices of their voters, which includes having the knowledge and foresight to activate relevant local governing functions, projects, and activities for their constituency. It seems that only the latter is known to the voters, and is often manifested through parochial projects and cash handout mentality. Almost immediately, some voters realized that a good number of candidates for 2007 Kiriwina-Goodenough electorate were not qualified enough to handle the former or, both.

The latter role is clearly holding the mindset of the average PNG voter at ransom, and limiting their choices for a suitable candidate. Citing the description of Edmund Burke (1729-1797) on classical liberal democratic theories, Gelu (2002) says that representatives are delegates ‘who act as spokesmen, or pipelines, for their constituents.’ (p. 161). Some voters were clearly disappointed when I told them that if I was elected, I would ensure that every village will be made to contribute a fixed amount of money towards the costs of rebuilding our two major and prioritized projects: the high school, and the health center. This would be in addition to my efforts for the same projects through the annual district government budget appropriation, and the overseas funding. ‘Haven’t we elected you to provide funds for our sustenance rather than further squeeze from our meager survival means?’ some retorted afterwards. Perhaps out of ignorance, voters on the whole see the functions of elected members as no more than but ‘pipelines’ for their own subsistence, realized or promised. On the other hand, candidates keep the voters intellectually bottlenecked.

**Table 1. Showing the final figures after the First Preference Count and the subsequent eliminations for the Kiriwina-Goodenough seat in 2007 elections.**

Candidate	Locality	Elimination Rank	First Preference Totals	Final Votes Gathered	Difference by # & % <sup>24</sup>	Overall Ranking
Vincent Sefala	South Goodenough	8 <sup>th</sup>	392	409	17 (4.1%)	12
William Ebenosi	Central/south Kiriwina	15 <sup>th</sup>	2448	3633	1185 (32.6)	5
Ronnie Kaitolele	South Goodenough	17 <sup>th</sup>	2469	4473	2004 (44.8)	3
Jack Cameron	Kitava, Kiriwina east	Declared Winner	2492	6042	3550 (58.7)	1
Jack Dakuna	South Godenough	12 <sup>th</sup>	1605	1873	268 (14.3)	8
Leonard Louma	Central Kiriwina	18 <sup>th</sup>	3973	5767	1794 (31.1)	2
Durisi Toitopola	Central Kiriwina	3 <sup>rd</sup>	66	67	1 (1.5)	17
Gregory Binoka	Central Goodenough	13 <sup>th</sup>	2051	2876	825 (28.7)	7
Robert Makai	Kitava, Kiriwina east	10 <sup>th</sup>	518	574	56 (9.7)	10
Brian Pulayasi	Central Kiriwina	16 <sup>th</sup>	3124	4297	1173 (27.3)	4
Fisher Dakulala	South Goodenough	4 <sup>th</sup>	163	165	2 (1.2)	16
John Tubueya	South Goodenough	9 <sup>th</sup>	443	501	58 (11.6)	11
Benjamin Jacob	West Kiriwina coast	14 <sup>th</sup>	2419	2939	520 (17.7)	6
Boaz Mataio	South Kiriwina	6 <sup>th</sup>	256	288	32 (11.1)	14
Ephraim Moguna	South Kiriwina	1 <sup>st</sup>	26	26	0 (0.0)	19
Aden Moliola	Central Kiriwina	2 <sup>nd</sup>	59	60	1 (1.6)	18
linus digim'Rina	South Kiriwina	7 <sup>th</sup>	356	370	14 (3.8)	13
Selina B. Elijah	West Kiriwina coast	5 <sup>th</sup>	181	189	8 (4.2)	15
Tony Douwa	Kaileuna, Kiriwina west	11 <sup>th</sup>	1279	1377	98 (7.1)	9

<b>Total Eligible Voters</b>	26724						
<b>Total Votes cast</b>					24856		
<b>Total Allowable BP</b>					24320		
<b>Informal BP</b>	536 (2.1%)						
<b>Total Absentees from Eligible Voters<sup>25</sup></b>	1868 (6.9%)						
<b>Total Votes Distributed at elimination</b>	1755 <sup>26</sup>						
<b>Exhausted BP</b>	2562						
<b>Absolute Majority (50%+1)</b>				12160			

**Table 2. Comparing the Top Six, and Last Six Candidates Ranked after the Final Count. Numbers indicate the relative level of financial/resource support from 0 (low) to 5 (high), as observed before, during, and after the campaign and polling periods.**

Rank	Candidate	Party Support	Business &/ Savings (own)	Business donations (other)	Professional & personal network	Kinship	Publicity <sup>27</sup>	Out of Possible 30 score
1	Jack Cameron (PDM)	4	5	5	3	4	3	24
2	Leonard Louma (NA) <sup>28</sup>	5	5	3	4	5	5	27
3	Ronnie Kaitolele (PPP)	5	??	??	??	5	4	14
4	Brian Pulayasi (PAP)	5	3	??	2	4	5	19
5	William Ebenosi (ADP)	4	5	2	3	5	5	24
6	Benjamin Jacob (PBP)	4	5	3	3	4	4	23
<i>Sub total</i>		27	23	13	15	27	21	
14	Boaz Mataio (PKP)	3	1	0	2	3	3	12
15	Selina B. Elijah (IND.) <sup>29</sup>	2	5	2	2	2	3	16
16	Fisher Dakulala (IND?)	0	5	1	2	4	1	13
17	Durisi Toitopola	0	4	1	0	4	1	10

	(PAdvP)							
18	Aden Moliola (NGP)	3	1	0	1	2	3	10
19	Ephraim Moguna (IND)	0	3	0	0	2	1	6
<i>Sub total</i>		8	19	4	7	17	12	
<b>Sum Total</b>		<b>35</b> (58.3%)	<b>42</b> (70%)	<b>17</b> (28.3%)	<b>22</b> (36.6%)	<b>44</b> (73.3%)	<b>33</b> (55%)	

**Key:** PDM = People's Democratic Party, NA2 = National Alliance, PPP = People's Progressive Party, PAP = People's Action Party, ADP = Agriculture Development Party, PBP = Papua Block Party, PKP = PNG Kantri Party, IND = Independent, PAdvP = PNG Advance Party, and NGP = New Generation Party.

Table 2 crudely shows several interesting observations.

First, the main sources of resource and financial support for the candidates came from their kinship allegiances, own business or personal savings and the political parties.

Second, and more so among the top performers, remove party support one would be left with but candidate's own resources and kinship alliances to ensure a sound victory. Under the current electoral method, 'cash logic' promoted by wealthier and influential candidates will continue to win elections perhaps at the expense of civic issues and environmental concerns.

Third, among the lowest performers, the women candidate did way better than her male counterparts. As indeed she spent a greater part of her resources among villagers as well as personally traveling from village to village despite her frail physical state. Despite her hard work and intentions, even LPV was not able to reward her partly because she is a woman venturing into a domain predominantly and passionately protected by gender-sensitive men.

Fourth, even after the final count, it appears that the NA candidate in Mr. Leonard Louma did way better and deserves perhaps a narrow victory. Because the eventual winner walked off with a mere 275 votes ahead of Mr. Louma, there is reasonable doubt surrounding the circumstances during counting. For instance, at the elimination of candidates William Ebenosi (5), and Brian Pulayasi (4), the winner suspiciously picked up the magical figure of 1,118 votes from both (Radio Milne Bay, Vote Counting Updates, July 2008). None of the other candidates were able to register over a thousand votes from the second preferences except the winner. This is weird given that he hardly spent more than a week campaigning on populous Kiriwina.

Fifth, and largely underwritten by political parties, business houses and personal wealth, 'Cash Logic' will continue to usher in dynamic applications and abuse of state, church, tradition, and kastom processes into the coming PNG elections. Therefore, LPV is of no reprieve to the poorly endowed and yet a hardworking, visionary and strong leader.

Sixth, aside from one's own personal wealth in terms of money, and donations from political parties and business houses, all candidates have equal chances. Remove the

influences of money one would come close to realizing a more democratic electoral process. This is the fundamental problem – too much cash illusions – real or promised! This is what could be discerned from the last column.

It is worthy of notice from Table 1 that the declared winner was way ahead of his closest rivals when it came to the distribution of second preferences. And yet, the winner spent much of his campaign time on Godenough Island and not on the populous island of Kiriwina. The logical inference would be that his local network on Kiriwina was firmly sustained with ‘cash and trade store goods’ and monitored by his local businessman and the incumbent LLG President brother-pair. Additionally there is the resource support provided by his naturalized citizen counterparts that might have had a lot to do with his success. For, while his closest rivals were on the 30% added votes from the second preferences he was performing twice (58%) better than all. Many months later however, it became widely accepted that there were some very suspicious instances of possible vote rigging in the scrutiny center at Kiriwina High School during counting. Again, officials were suspected of bribery and playing an underhand in the process.

This lends support to my argument below that had the system allowed for an aggregate count of all preferences for all candidates the scenario might produce a different outcome altogether. Such that had mere leadership popularity rather than influences stemming from the lure of cash and store goods were allowed to come into play a different outcome might have resulted. For instance, both the second and fourth placed candidates could only manage a 31% and 27% gain from the second preferences, respectively. And yet, they were conspicuously the biggest financiers and suppliers of goods during the election on Kiriwina island. This is clearly shown in the First Preference counts column – only to be overtaken in the second preference count.

On the other hand, candidates that were ranked after the sixth place from the first preference count were nowhere to be sighted because their second and third preferences had been discarded. By including an aggregate count of all preferences, I suggest, the seemingly inveterate method of ‘vote buying’ would have been squarely challenged.

### **The Limited Preferential Voting Process (LPV)**

I now move to the LPV process and show how the voters and candidates were deprived of their constitutional rights in not having their preferences counted. It is nonetheless pleasing to note that the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) system is indeed limited as opposed to the unlimited method tried in the mid 1960s. LPV promises to be a just and fair electoral process, and comparatively better than the previous FPP. As such voters were promised, insisted and even implored upon to:

- ❖ select three candidates for each electorate, and
- ❖ mark them in the order of preferences beside the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in their separate ballot papers.

The method is presumably based on the following assumptions:

1. In the event that a voter's primary preference for a candidate fails to win, and his/her second or third preference however become victorious, at least the voter had consciously and intentionally voted for a suitable leader – the eventual winner.
2. Unlike the previous FPP system whereby the winner could get away with a very small percentage of the voting population, LPV now ensures that a winner is declared only after a 50%+1 absolute majority determination.
3. In order to presumably expedite the counting process, elimination commences after no winner is determined at the conclusion of the count on first preferences.

With LPV, voters were assured that all three preferences carry the same weight. However, I suggest that voters nationwide were short changed. As is elsewhere, Kiriwina-Goodenough eligible voters were required to select three candidates each for the two seats; the Kiriwina-Goodenough Open seat and the Milne Bay Regional seat. This sounded simple enough, and yet voters naturally wanted to know more.

There was some degree of awareness conducted by the local officers particularly the Council Ward Recorders. My own assessment of the situation prior to the polling period was that majority of the voters were unsure, to some degree confused, and had by then developed some measure of indifference and ambivalence towards the new electoral method in LPV.

By and large, voters were most comfortable with their primary choice but not for the second and third, nor do they care presumably due to ignorance. Worse was the level of negligence and indifference accorded to candidates from the regional seat (the other seat) whose consideration was in fact pushed to the periphery. This was partly due to lack of ensconced kinship and trading networks and allegiances on Kiriwina. The average voter had in essence comfortably settled with the previous voting method of a single candidate – the choicest. The ease in manouvre from better endowed candidates to entice votes with cash and material goods only worsened the deteriorating ability of voters to consciously exercise their preferences. 'Primary vote would do, the rest are either secondary or, simply immaterial.' seemed to be the prevailing logic among voters.<sup>30</sup>

I made it a point to include LPV awareness in my campaign presentations for all the villages visited. This was much appreciated and in raising their concerns, voters requested for assistance and further elaboration on the voting process. I assured them that the task would be much easier if they were to ignore the counting aspect of LPV, which is complex enough. Let the counting officials worry about that instead voters should concentrate on choosing only three candidates for each of the two seats. And that each seat should have those chosen candidates entered in the order of preference.

*An Electoral Miscarriage*

There are two related issues which I would like to raise in here. The first deals directly with the LPV principal concerns as experienced, and the second concerns the number of contestants and its related consequences.

Let me however begin this aspect of the discussion by making a personal admission on my own shock at the results of my poor performance after the count of the first preferences. I had already heard rumors perpetrated by the self-proclaimed candidate scrutineers of my poor performance on securing sufficient first preferences almost at every other polling station. As a result of my lack of resources during the campaign trail, I confidently told myself of a narrow victory by sneaking in with a flush of second preferences. My secondary votes appeared more assuring than the primaries. But first, I must score more than 2000 first preferences (8-10%) in order to stake a realistic claim for the secondary votes to carry me through. My own stronghold had more than 10% of the required first preferences in which I could organize my resources through and secure the votes. But I decided to challenge the obvious, norm, and/or the taken for granted view.

Of the 26,000 possible eligible voters for the electorate, the winner with 50%+1 absolute majority would need to secure more than 12,160 votes, allowing informal ballot papers and absentees. I confidently projected that no single candidate would win by the absolute majority of about 12000 votes after the first preference count. As it turned out, the leading candidate scored a miserable 3973, the next with 3124, and four others with just over 2000 after the first preference count. The remaining settled within anything below 1000 votes, and the last scoring 26. I only managed a miserable 356 first preferences (1.5%) registering the 13<sup>th</sup> place among 19 candidates (see Table above).

As the rule had it, elimination began immediately after the conclusion of the count on first preferences. This immediately rendered the secondary and third preferences of the eliminated candidates useless – exhausted votes. On the other hand, the surviving candidates went on to collect their secondary preferences from the eliminated candidates – as if rewarded for their better performance in the first preferences. And the process of elimination continued until the last two candidates from which the *winner was determined with a clear 50%+1 absolute majority from an aggregate of his first and secondary preferences – 6042 votes.*

I was fully aware of the process prior to venturing out into the campaign trail. However, it is from the viewpoint of a conscientious voter that I would like to argue a case for. As noted above, LPV promises to be a just and fair electoral process, and comparatively better than the previous FPP. Voters were instructed upon to:

- ❖ select three candidates for each electorate, and
- ❖ place them in the order of preferences beside the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in their respective ballot papers.

The above assumptions naturally invite the following implications:

- By methodically disposing the secondary and third preferences of the eliminated candidates, voters are deprived of their preferences for a potentially more popular candidate/better leader, on one hand, and
- On the other, popular and yet poorly endowed candidates are likewise deprived of the opportunity to improve their standing and competitiveness with their hard won secondary and third preferences, and so as the voters – and is therefore unconstitutional.
- That there is no need for exhausted votes after all the LPV Act has provided for *Preferences* of all candidates.
- And with the prevailing situation wealthier and yet unscrupulous candidates are invited in yet again to further undermine the good intentions of what promises to be a just electoral process. Vote buying through unscrupulous means is perpetuated rather than eliminated.
- Essentially therefore, LPV through the elimination process after the conclusion of the first preference count is no reprieve from vote buying and rigging. It only serves to further promote the ugly sides of electioneering as previously experienced in the First Past the Post (FPP) method.

I venture to suggest the following for the sake of good governance, while ensuring that the full potential of LPV as a just electoral process is realized.<sup>31</sup>

1. Elimination of candidates after the conclusion of the counts on First Preferences should be abolished.
2. All three preferences for all candidates should be counted, and their aggregates are progressively determined.<sup>32</sup>
3. However, determination of 50%+1 absolute majority at the end of each preference should be retained.
4. Therefore, advancement to the next preference may be allowed only when there is no 50%+1 absolute majority winner is determined from the previous preference.
5. Elimination can come into play only at the conclusion of the third preference. (That is, if no 50%+1 absolute majority winner or, candidate with the highest aggregate of votes from all three preferences, is determined at the end of the third preference count then, elimination process may be introduced in order to determine the candidate with 50%+1 absolute majority, and declared the winner.)
6. If a 50%+1 winner or, candidate with the highest aggregate of votes cannot be determined at the end of the count of all preferences, and for all candidates, which

is most unlikely, the prerogative of the Returning/Presiding Officer under the Act may be invoked for a decision.

This will ensure that:

- ✓ All the voters' preferences are seriously considered as promised, and not curtailed,
- ✓ Limited **Preferential** Vote, as the name suggests, is made meaningful therefore.
- ✓ Voters' efforts to sincerely register selected candidates by **preference** is justified and assured.
- ✓ Candidates are practically discouraged from targeting strongholds for first preferences, and subsequently flushing them with cash and trade store goods.
- ✓ Vote buying and subsequently leading towards rigging is therefore curtailed and rendered futile unless one spends over millions across 20-100,000 voters.
- ✓ LPV's full potential in ensuring a fair and democratic process is realized rather than been subjected to abuse.<sup>33</sup>
- ✓ The undesired and ugly lessons from FPP system, and the undue methodical elimination from the current LPV applications on first preferences are completely annihilated.

This will at the very least justify the requirement for all voters to effect votes **preferentially** on their three chosen candidates. Otherwise, **remove the word preferential** in the LPV electoral method as it is so far meaningless, and is indeed unconstitutional. Since by interpretation, LPV through its counting process is so far depriving both voters and candidates of their otherwise valuable preferences.

#### *Too Many Candidates!*

Another conundrum to the PNG elections is the negative effect of having too many candidates contesting in any one electorate. As experienced in the last electoral method (FPP), winning candidates could and do come away with a very small percentage of votes. This consequently raises the question of fair representation of voters in an electorate. Various commentators have raised this issue with great concern, and even suggested ways of putting an end to this unfortunate feature of the electoral process (see for instance May 2002, Gelu 2002, and Kaiulo 2002). Gelu was to the point on the consequences:

This has contributed to the poor performance and leadership style, and has affected the quality of public policies formulated by the decision makers in parliament... This raises serious questions about the capability of elected members (2002:161).

The point cannot be made any clearer. The matter was certainly raised by the Kiriwina-Goodenough voters during my campaign. A good number of voters held strong views on the number of contestants. There was a sigh of relief and reluctant excitement after I related the story of the Lufa district, EHP, and the voters' determination to positively influence this unending problem of too many candidates.<sup>34</sup> Some Kiriwina voters in fact expressed a strong desire for a criterion that would require intending candidates to sit for

an exam in which only the top three would be endorsed as candidates for a seat. This would provide for preliminary screening mechanisms in order to prevent the not so serious, unqualified, inexperienced and mediocre leaders gnawing away vital votes for better candidates. This would further ensure that the member elect is someone from among the best, and not a mediocre.

Quite similarly I suggested to the voters that the electoral commission might as well devise a method that mandates the LLG together with their respective communities to proceed with a series of preliminary local elections through forums, for instance by show of hands, in order to eliminate the unpopular candidates while establishing the remaining 4-8 most popular candidates. As per the consensus of the communities and/or wards, only the remaining 4-8 candidates of any electorate shall be allowed to officially contest in the election. It is necessary that no less than four remaining popular candidates contest in an election. This would ensure that the proposed type of LPV, which is free of exhausted votes, could by all statistic probabilities establish a winner. As all the votes for every candidate will be counted, it might be futile to advance only three candidates in an election.

Voters are voting well enough but either the array of choices is poor and limiting or, the corrupted are still getting away with the lure of cash and trade store goods.

The only reservation for such a proposal is that it might only invite the few filthy rich and unscrupulous candidates back into the scene, once again using cash and goods as lures to buy 'instant popularity' as opposed to 'sincere popularity'. The latter is long term and is usually determined by the integrity of the candidate's character and professional credibility than just cash and goods.

## **A Cultural Rationale**

My discussion of election in PNG began in a major way by drawing from thoughts and observations of other scholars that premised their arguments on history and traditions being the principal factors in bringing about change on cultural behavior (Marx 1970[1859], Keesing & Tonkinson 1982, Hobsbawm 1983, Damon 2003, and Keesing & Strathern 2004).

The case of Kiriwina-Goodenough electorate in 2007 evinced a similar inclination towards traditional practices and cultural environment as the main points of explanation in the way voters perceived the purposes of electoral processes. Though seemingly a recent phenomenon however, voters are bound to justify all their expectations and actions on the basis of 'what they are normally used to' – a cultural praxis.

For the Kiriwina voters, it is within the realm of their own reasoning that a novel state sanctioned electoral process should be subjected to normal customary practices. As a horticultural society, individuals are expected to share their wealth, and likewise the

services of others rendered should be compensated accordingly. When someone works in another's garden or, builds his house, the others are morally obliged to relinquish their own tasks and help the others. One is obliged to provide meals to the helpers in return.

Similarly, candidates contesting the elections are perceived to be vying for greater status and fame. As such candidates would be expected to provide meals by sponsoring feasts on a grand scale. No ordinary citizen would vie for such endeavors unless one is prepared to come forth with the expected lavish feasting. This is normally interpreted as a prerequisite to a show of strong and sound leadership.

In the minds of the average voter therefore, this state-sanctioned process has everything to do with feasting and thereby pushing the much needed basic health and education services to the backstage. And because the venture is perceived as a gain to the candidate therefore candidates are expected to provide the patronage. This is in line with the underlying principles of reciprocity. Failure to meet such would render one's attempt as odd, out of line, and futile. The corollary is that no votes would be guaranteed.

So how can the state of PNG achieve a fair democratic electoral process when the behavior of the voters is dictated by cultural factors that are contra to democratic processes?

This dilemma and internal contradictions perpetuated by candidates and voters alike undermine the process of democracy in a major way. Candidates are then forced to compromise their state leadership instead play the customary 'big men' and other model roles at least temporarily – during elections – but are allowed to behave differently once they are voted in. Unfortunately however, most MPs carry over such influences way into their parliamentary tenure and thereby render their performance as MPs with absolute failure.

With the established morals of sharing and cooperation being rapidly jettisoned by the onset of new foreign ideals and concepts, the contemporary trend is for one to pay for all services solicited from fellow citizens. No one will voluntarily assist the other in making a garden or building a house unless one provides rice, tin fish, sugar and tea. The same logic is applied come the election of candidates. Votes can be seen to have been commodified even along the lines of social relations and networks. Elected leaders in turn, see expenditure during elections as an investment to be returned once in power as an MP, and a Minister. Little did they know that cultural burdens compound once one is elected in. Because the parliament is not designed to serve parochial cultural obligations, MPs constantly find themselves financially over burdened or, susceptible to breaching leadership codes, and a plethora of constitutional procedures.

Ultimately there is therefore less hope of MPs providing services than becoming mere slaves of cultural tendencies. Elections in PNG then become mere handmaidens of cultural predilections and cannot be seen as democratic. Remarks of elders in the likes of Ugwayoba (Okhabobwa), Moyokeda & Gumkwaradu (Okheboma), Beniani & Khabwaku (Okhabulula), Khetoma & Taudiri (Osapola), late Khalumwewa (Khetui),

Toweweya (Okupukopu), Tobelu (Oluvilei), and a Kuyawa elder, vindicate such an assertion. There shall be no votes for you unless you play it our way! Make a feast, set up a support base, give us money, rice, sugar, bicycles, sports uniforms, pay our school fees, shout us beer, give me a ticket to travel to Alotau, and the list goes on.

And yet, there are those others who believe and hope for a strong and better leader/candidate to emerge into the future; where social welfare issues could be allowed to overtake cultural parochialism and serve the people. Endorsing remarks to my campaign strategies for the pan island issues from for instance, Poramwau (Okupukopu), Marigata and Mokhesopi (Kumwageya), Khoubuli (Omarakana), Khaluvalu (Khabwaku), Khapwani elder, Biluma (Khoma), Church Minister John (Sinaketa), Taidiri (Khaulakha), Tom Cat Mowana (Khebola), several mothers from Kwemtula, Kuyawa, Okinai, Kudeuli, Osesuya, and Oyuveyova, Khawawewa (Oheboma), and a few others more is of no surprise. A succinct and precise remark was made by an elder at the opening announcement of my campaign in Okheboma village.

All you elders should be ashamed of yourselves. We see you all openly 'been bought off' by the various candidates that surreptitiously move in and out of your verandahs. Do you think that we do not have eyes? Where is your integrity? (Kheguyau of Sinaketa at Okheboma, May 25, 2007)

Such endorsements from concerned individual leaders no doubt bring about hope for a more democratic representation of people's wishes and desires for a better change.

### **Conclusion: *Leading the Leaders***

The evolving trend is sadly falling short of the overall goals of providing good governance, fair and just democratic electoral process. While there is room for improvement in the legislation however, majority of the candidates are of the belief that vote buying and/or hand out approach is demonstrably the inveterate method among the impoverished rural voters.

With this one experience as a candidate, I could not help but appreciate the prevalent characteristic behavior of voters and candidates alike. I make the following summary of observations from the 2007 elections.

Majority of PNG's aspiring leaders are high talking hypocrites that are either oblivious to the plight of majority of the voters or, simply plain selfish. In ways that they have a tendency to evince every sign of desperation, selfishness and ruthlessness in attaining power, even by deceit and illegal schemes.

Other leaders of similar characters appeared misled and misguided to the point of being intimidated by the middlemen that influence votes. Consequently they render themselves vulnerable to compromises of principles and astute leadership. Leaders cannot even provide ambitious guidelines towards achieving huge goals. Such leaders are forever led by the voters – those that are supposed to be led – and similarly obliged to re-invent their

traditional perks and privileges in order to fit into the scheme of things. This is often reasoned as a cheap exit out of the election web of social obligations.

Under such circumstances, one wonders whether our leaders will ever become real leaders after having succumbed to the improvised cultural pressures imposed upon them by the voters. Many winning candidates would never see relief from election related social burdens that had its origins from the candidate's own making. What would have been clearly foolish at professional level, it is however becoming a norm during elections.

Most leaders of today will continue to compromise their leadership, and render themselves unfit to hold public offices, and impartially fight for the rights and welfare of their citizens. Politicians of today may be squarely described as moving about like robots without visions and principles, and forever prone to the vices of moral decay. Lies and hollow rhetoric has become but their breath of life.

If a candidate cannot provide sound leadership during elections, then there is no guarantee of performing any better at the national and international level. Having been dictated by the vicissitudes of parochial local whims, decisions will always be weak and suspect, and so as the leader's overall conduct in office.

Citizens will forever view their political leadership and fiscal policies with skepticism as they continue to languish their own state of powerlessness. To paraphrase Damon, our elections here in PNG are in effect 'vacuous charades' that have been perilously undermined by unscrupulous voters and candidates alike. There are only a very few exceptions that have become very rare species indeed.

Yet it is not such a bad idea for voters to take charge and determine the fate of leaders, as indeed this is the principal purpose of elections; to achieve democratic political representation. The case of Lufa district is exemplary and should indeed be emulated by many other constituencies in the country. The Kiriwina voters certainly approved of its novelty and noble intentions.

There is room still for especially the emergence of conscientious candidates to go on a year long protracted campaigns against the seemingly *tsunamic* forces of cash handouts. Voters are willing to offer their trust to leaders that can evince astute leadership. Meaning, the average voter is equally weary of lies, rhetoric and cheap images. The days of the so-called 'impact projects' are indeed numbered.

The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate an emerging farcical myth on elections in PNG. This myth on 'handouts mentality' has arrested the mindsets of both candidates *cum* leaders and voters alike. The introduction of a new electoral method of voting promises much in curtailing these growing negative aspects of PNG elections. While welcoming the introduction of the LPV electoral method for good governance however, it is argued here that the scourge from winning elections by fraud, lies, and deceit could be curtailed and undermined by amending a relevant section of the LPV Act.

That is, remove the aspect on elimination of weak candidates after the count on first preferences and in its stead, introduce compulsory counts for all three preferences by the voters for every candidate. Elimination may be effected only after all preferences have been counted and that no winner is determined.

If vote buying and vote rigging is indeed a scourge in our zeal to foster a democratic electoral process the best alternative before us is to undermine and remove it completely by amending the section that is of greatest concern. This will put some controls and safeguards in place against abuse stemming from current cultural illusions as promulgated by amorphous terminologies like ‘politics’.

Ignorance speaks when those in the know are silent.

Malinowski wrote his future wife of his reluctance to say anything about *kula* due to the fact that any Trobriander might know a great deal more than he (Wayne 1995), (Cited in Crain, Darrah & digim’Rina 2004, p. 998).

So please stand up, speak up, and challenge the current. Politicians and scholars alike have a moral responsibility to usher in and even push for a fair electoral process in order to realize the well worn, and yet rapidly becoming meaningless phrase in “good governance”.

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To the Okheboma community, I thank you for your tolerance over my rhetoric at Wawewa, and the ab/use of our village name throughout *Obweyowa* – the Trobriand archipelago.

I only hope that the children of *Obweyowa* learnt some of the things I believed in, and said them then.

.....  
linus silipolaKhapulapola digim'Rina  
Ensis valley, National Capital District  
December 2010

**Appendix. An Overview Assessment of Candidate Performance in the 2007 General Elections for Kiriwina-Goodenough and Milne Bay Regional seats**

Candidate	Seat	Party Endorsement	Potential Voter Base	Key Resource Means	Limitations & Disadvantages	Campaign approach	General assessment
A. Sefala	Kiriwina - Goodenough (KG)	Independent	Mataita villages, southern Goodenough Island (GI)	???	Basic local education – former ward Councilor, lacks national & international exposure	On foot & dinghy	Did not campaign on Kiriwina
W. Ebenosi	KG	Agriculture Devt. Party	Central & southern Kiriwina	Cash	Basic education, lacks international exposure – previous MP. Mediocre devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Cash, posters, previous 'impact projects' & social networks	General coverage of both islands & running rivalry with former MP. Exploited customary practices.
R. Kaitolele	KG	Peoples Progress Party	Bwaidoga district, southern GI	Cash	lacks national & international exposure???	Cash, posters & local social networks	Did not campaign on Kiriwina. Networking campaigned helped a bit for his Kiriwina leg of campaign.
J. Cameron	KG	Peoples Democratic Movement	Central & eastern Kiriwina	Cash, Party, business & kin network	Educated with management savvy but perhaps lacks international exposure. Unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Cash, posters, social & business networks	Rode on growing local kin network set up by business brother. Exploited customary practices.
J. Dakuna	KG	Independent?	Diodio-Faiava, southern GI	Cash & kin network	Limited education, administrative savvy, but lacks national & international exposure	Cash, posters & social/professional networks	Did not campaign on Kiriwina Exploited customary practices.
L. Louma	KG	National Alliance	Central Kiriwina	Cash, international and national renown, social & professional networks	Limited knowledge on local project priorities. Unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Cash, posters/t-shirts, modern transportation, & kin network	Extensive networks complimented by a diversity of resource base and support both nationally and internationally. However, exploited poor people's ignorance with the lure of goods & cash. Exploited customary practices.
D. Toitopola	KG	PNG Advance Party	Central Kiriwina	Cash & Social networks	Adequate local networking, educated but lacks national & international	Limited campaign activity resulting in unfulfilled potential	After 2-3 weeks of covert campaigning, candidate left for Port Moresby never returned.

					exposure		
G. Binoka	KG	??? Party	Northeast Goodenough	Previous best performing candidate, cash & social networks	Educated but perhaps lacks national & international exposure.	Cash, posters & social networks. Only Goodenough Island candidate that campaigned on Kiriwina.	Intra-local 'politics' probably undermined his potential to perform better than previously. Exploited customary practices.
R. Makai	KG	Pangu Party	Kitava Island, Kiriwina	Cash & social networks	Educated, familiar with bureaucratic politics but not in tune with local voters. Unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Left his campaign too late and too limited in geographical scope.	Candidate was more dependent on cash to do the job. Exploited customary practices.
B. Pulayasi	KG	Peoples Action Party	Central Kiriwina	Cash, exploitation of traditional authority, & social networks. Sitting MP.	Exploited traditional privilege, lured votes with cash & goods, used social networks	Educated with unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives, however. Questionable personal repute. Lacks visionary planning.	Poor performance affected his chances of retaining the seat. Cash came to the rescue in the final hour. Exploited customary practices.
F. Dakulala	KG	Independent ???	Bwaidoga area, GI.	Cash & social networks	Limited local renown	Leadership at national & international level is questionable	Investigation in progress
J. Tubueya	KG	Independent???	GI	Cash & networks	Limited local renown	Leadership at national & international level is questionable	Investigation in progress
B. Jacob	KG	Papuan Block Party	South-western coastal Kiriwina	Cash & Social networks	Limited education, & unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Cash, social networks & humor	Previously contested but leadership at national & international level is questionable. Exploited customary practices.
M. Boaz	KG	PNG Kantri Party	Southern Kiriwina coast	Cash & social networks	Limited education, & unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Cash with unrealistic promises, albeit late launch on and campaign	Relied much on church network but perhaps did not cultivate it well enough. Exploited customary practices.
E. Moguna	KG	Independent	Southern Kiriwina coastal	Cash & social network	Educated but not well endowed with cash.	Shied away after a few campaigns in at least four villages.	Delay of Party funding caused his chance to campaign a bit more extensively.
A. Moliola	KG	New Generation Party	Central Kiriwina	Former administrator, had several previous attempts, and can lure votes with cash	Limited education, & unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Resisted campaigning overall, and only keen to exploit party resources	Went in with self-interest and was not genuine in serving the electorate.
Dr. I.s. digim'Rina	KG	Independent	Southern Kiriwina & Kitava	Highly educated with clear devt./welfare goals & objectives & social networks	Stubbornly daring to 'local politics'/parochialism – anti-cash handout mentality, & rejected normative campaign approaches, and 'too nice'.	Great presentation of campaign speech, unique and almost suicidal campaign moves, and lured votes with cash and goods	Lost on First Preference votes due to no cash handout in the weeks before and during polling, and 'failed' to network potential support base or, create greater awareness on 'Do Nots' of elections much earlier. Gathered mostly Second Preferences instead.

S. B. Elijah	KG	Independent	South-western coastal Kiriwina	Educated with administrative savvy with good resource base.	Gender and age probably let her down.	Began early enough, covered the electorate extensively with cash and goods.	Male ridicule, and failure to effectively organize women voters affected her potential to gather votes.
T. Douwa	KG	PNG Conservative Party	Western Kiriwina Isles	Cash handout & social networks	Educated with unclear devt./welfare goals and objectives.	Effectively distributed cash in the last minute at his own support base.	Quite sensitive to local parochialism thus, exploited customs and social networks with cash.
T. Neville	Milne Bay Regional (MBR)	Independent	Alotau urban area & northern Milne Bay rural	Sound resource base as a provincial business tycoon & sitting MP	Naturalized citizen & businessmen with suspected self-serving interest	Lured votes with cash & goods, and established social & political networks.	Perhaps out-smarted by the other naturalized citizen with similar campaign approaches.
J.L. Cretin	MBR	Independent	Milne Bay marine rural	Sound resource base as a provincial business tycoon, and MP elect	Naturalized citizen & marine businessmen with suspected self-serving interest	Lured votes with cash & goods, and established social & political networks	Candidate's extensive popularity with marine areas served him well.
N. Liosi	MBR	New Generation Party	D'Entrecasteau x group of isles & United church networks	Educated with administrative savvy & elderly Christian	Not so well known among voters	Campaigned well with good overall support on his policies.	Good potential but without much cash distribution made him a second choice.
L. Sharp	MBR	Independent	D'Entrecasteau x group of isles	Sound support base with husband's shipping business	Gender bias with locally-specific goals let her down	Limited campaign coverage & cash handout.	Being a woman married to a naturalized citizen made her a suspect of being not so genuine.
Dr. J. Edimani	MBR	Independent	D'Entrecasteau x group of isles	Educated, skilled but still unpopular	A new comer & yet to become popular	Limited campaign coverage & cash handout.	Good potential but without much cash distribution made him a second choice.
Dr. W. Peta	MBR	National Alliance	Alotau bay area	Educated, skilled but not so popular	Cash, professional skills & potential to deliver services	Limited campaign coverage & cash handouts	Limited campaign coverage & cash handouts

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is derived from an original draft that had a greater depth and comparative discussion on election-related ‘politics’ in the region.

<sup>3</sup> Dinnen (2001) describes such as ‘materialistic’, been one of the three tendencies contributing towards election related violence in PNG.

<sup>4</sup> There was widespread speculation during the elections that NA party had sponsored two candidates for the Kiriwina-Goodenough seat, and that one was official while the other was through furtive financial assistance.

<sup>5</sup> The ‘support base’ strategy did not escape censure either. The style generated a good measure of scorn amongst voters as it smacks of arrogance, which is *contra* to the Massim-wide decorum on humility and regard of others.

<sup>6</sup> Experiences from the Kiriwina-Goodenough Seat in 2007, registered candidates misappropriating the cultural contexts of mortuary rituals like *Khatuvivisa*. After the death of a person a place/village is generally under some modest prohibition from major formal gatherings and ceremonies until such time that the kin of the deceased formally release the place from such terminal interdiction through a modest feast. Whether oblivious to the procedure or not, some uncouth candidates who were unrelated to the deceased proceeded to publicly present cash with verbal invocation of *khatuvivisa* context over say a big man’s death. Whether this was a blatant ‘invention of tradition’ or, privately communicated and compelled by the kin of the deceased, who are the voters themselves, remains speculative. What was clear however was that the candidate operated out of cultural context and hence the cash was merely to please listeners and/or buy votes. A particular candidate nonetheless got it right, as he was directly related to two recent deaths of two of his relatives in two separate villages. He was in the right as per his kinship obligations by proceeding with *khatuvivisa* prior to his campaign presentation.

<sup>7</sup> Loani Henao, a well known lawyer with several attempts in the national elections as a candidate gave an enlightening paper on the role of the Church during national elections. He cited several cases of overt manipulation by the Church to influence voters and candidates alike and even demand cash payments for votes from candidates (Wagani Seminar, August 2008, University of Papua New Guinea).

<sup>8</sup> Ms. Rudd is a successful young entrepreneur on the island with a thriving trade store business at the main entrance to Losuia government station. She is of a mixed parentage between a naturalized citizen of Australian origin, and a local mother from Pari village in the Central province. Ms. Rudd however gained her primary education on the island of Kiriwina, speaks the local language fluently, and audaciously displays herself a very passionate Trobriand Islander.

<sup>9</sup> Half/quarter blood or, naturalized are convenient categories used to assist us explain and understand a developing phenomenon. Strictly speaking however, no one is pure blooded, so to speak. We all are half here, quarter there, and perhaps third over there. For our purpose, skin color and historical vicissitudes have played a part in defining our personhood and images held by others. This is indeed no slight, certainly with no malice and innuendos intended rather terms introduced merely as tools of observation over a particular perspective. Deep down a lot of these people so described are as good Milne Bays as are the so-called full blooded autochthones.

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<sup>10</sup> The 2007 Governor elect is a provincial tycoon on marine businesses particularly with *beche-de-mer*, owning about 22 boats in the province, and a thriving grapevine winery and recently completed hotel business back in his European country of Switzerland (Sir Dennis Young, Personal Communication, July 2007). He had been consistently scoring well in the last three elections: second in 1997, third in 2002, and first in 2007.

<sup>11</sup> I had initially budgeted my resignation entitlement as the major financier of my election costs. However, due to an administrative oversight much of it went towards the purchase of my home from my employer. This left me with very limited latitude to operate come the campaign period.

<sup>12</sup> Weiner (1987), and Lepani (2001), also cited in Crain, Darrah & digim'Rina (2004) had 60 villages registered. My count was done both manually and also in consultation with the 2000 National Census booklet on Milne Bay Census Register (2002). However, if new and isolated hamlets were included the number might just exceed 100 at this time.

<sup>13</sup> In more than one occasion, and due to proximity and convenience along with the consent of village leaders, I would speak to a combination of several villages instead of one at a time. Hence, the reduction on the total number of villages from 96 to 72 for the island of Kiriwina. A few of the medium-sized villages could not be visited due to time limitations like Lobuwa, Siviyaigila, Simsimla, Munu wata, and Tuma. Tuma was visited by my team but because all the men were out in the far off reefs diving for *beche-de-mer* so did not make a presentation.

<sup>14</sup> Insofar as I know, I was the only candidate that covered the entire island of Kiriwina by foot during the campaign period. The other candidates did so partially by foot and hired vehicles. A candidate however, regularly did it with a fleet of trucks loaded with supporters.

<sup>15</sup> At the time of writing, the purveyor of the beer was still chasing after the outstanding payments of those beer cartons.

<sup>16</sup> I must acknowledge the efforts of the woman candidate namely, Ms. Selina B. Elijah, in taking the lead by covering much of both major islands of Goodenough and Kiriwina by foot, vehicle, boat and outboard motors. She was indeed among the few that managed to complete their obligated rounds. She was unfortunately pitched against her 'brother' from the same village, which to some measure affected her ability to muster a decent first preference votes. This is aside from her old age, and her being a woman in a male-dominated society, albeit within a matrilineal descent system. Her first preferential vote total was 182 (0.7%).

<sup>17</sup> With 'Cash Logic', I mean that votes are literally retailed by voters whose consciousness is dominated by the lure of cash and store goods in exchange for their first preference vote in particular. This is in total contrast to the general ideological expectation of consciously voting in responsible candidates with or without the lure of cash.

<sup>18</sup> The poor level of a genuine interaction with the usually ignorant voters by candidates as displayed by most was simply appalling. Most notably and yet disappointing to note was that of the eventual winning candidate of the Regional seat who, personally did not campaign on Kiriwina at all. In its stead, he took advantage of his monopoly over the *bech-de-mer* business by permanently berthing one of his fishing boats on the island, with perpetually drunk crews that moved around to entice votes among *beche-de-mer* fishers. Their socially undesired state of being generated derision from others. On land, he relied heavily on the networks of another naturalized businessman combining with an influential local and former losing candidate of several national elections for the Regional seat.

<sup>19</sup> I went through the election with an estimated expenditure of just under K17,000. This amount however, only afforded me travel, accommodation, and information dissemination costs. I was broke by the second week of my campaign, which apparently undermined my own potential to secure primary votes from what could be considered as my stronghold. I was previously advised that anything between K50-70,000 is

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comfortable for one to shrewdly go through the elections, and successfully. I am certain that my rivals spent anything within the range of K50,000 and K1,000,000. At least three other candidates were seriously not interested in contesting but merely took advantage of the opportunity to rip political parties of some free handouts in terms of cash. One was chronically unemployed, and even had the audacity to suggest that there was no need for him to conduct village-to-village campaign as the party-sponsored poster is doing just that. Voters were pretty clear towards the end that such candidates were obviously out of contention.

<sup>20</sup> The NA candidate probably spent as much as K1m judging from the scale of his distribution of cash, sporting uniforms, consumable goods and materials such as dinghies, Coleman lamps, nylon fishnets, and bicycles over a period of some 18 months. Other party endorsed candidates were however quite content to dish out cash, consumable goods, and providing free transportation either by land or sea in order to lure votes during the campaign period.

<sup>21</sup> The Milne Bay Governor elect evaded this necessity by effectively employing an experienced local schemer to perform the task on his behalf.

<sup>22</sup> In the final hour, a particular candidate rushed through his campaign by moving hours and a few kilometers ahead of the ballot box during the polling period. When voters pointed out his possible breach of polling and campaign rules he retorted by explaining that only if he was campaigning within seven meters radial from the ballot box or, designated polling area. The other was shouted down and forced to return home with his Coleman lamp by very concerned villagers on the night before polling.

<sup>23</sup> I did not bribe a single person. This is a fact. My financial support came from, my Kimbe-based 'son in-law' and his wife, contributions from my colleagues at the University, a colleague from overseas, my brother, and I. *Em tasol!*

<sup>24</sup> This generally gives an indication of the candidate's potential to improve were we to include the allowable votes on second and third preferences for all the candidates.

<sup>25</sup> Absentees and even abstention is generically misleading as there are several reasons resulting from voters not been able to exercise their rights. These ranged from common roll inadequacies and inaccuracies of entries to been unavailable at the time of polling due to illness and other commitments. A brother in-law of mine could not vote because he was physically not able to walk up to the polling station. He was utterly disappointed even after much genuine pleas upon the officials to provide escort to purveyors of a ballot paper to the man's house for him to vote. Out of fear for their jobs perhaps, the officials stuck to the rules rather than allow precedence.

<sup>26</sup> I must admit that I am at a loss as to what this figure means when for instance, the eventual winner was able to collect 3550 votes more from Secondary Preferences. This is an increase of 58.7% from his First Preference votes! Almost the same quandary may be extended towards the Exhausted Ballot Papers with a registered total of 2,562. And yet a total of seventeen candidates were eliminated prior to the declaration of the final winner.

<sup>27</sup> Publicity includes issuance of t-shirts, candidate posters and pamphlets, use of media, and ceremoniously drumming up support from the various voter strongholds.

<sup>28</sup> Mr. Louma was then the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff as he entered into the elections.

<sup>29</sup> Candidate was formally endorsed as an Independent however, there was much speculation of furtive financial support from a political party.

<sup>30</sup> I am grateful to Matthew Leavesley (Archaeology, UPNG) for providing a counter view to the one I have presented. Leavesley suggests that perhaps the mindset of the average voter is not familiar with the 1, 2 & 3 preferences rather a decisive one choice is preferred. He further likened the context to a father suggesting to

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the son to indicate in the order of preferences the top three girls he loves and perhaps will marry subsequently! Indeed there were a good number of voters that expressed disdain with the new method of choosing candidates. And it might be that not only are they more used to the previous FPP method than the present LPV rather perhaps due to a culturally imbedded thought process.

<sup>31</sup> The whole idea dawned upon my late brother Rodney, and I during a discussion over the election outcome so far on July 20, 2007 under his house at Okheboma village. The drive that saw me writing on through my notes and observations continued when back in Port Moresby. I subsequently presented a seminar through the Melanesian and Pacific Studies Center, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, UPNG on September 2008. A good number of colleagues that attended the seminar were just as surprised and so as the IT manager of the PNG Electoral Commission office based in Port Moresby. Indeed, I was very surprised that not a single 2007 election commentator or a radio caller had noticed this flaw. However, a contributor to *Post Courier's* Viewpoint going by the pen name of Don Quixote (PNG), 'Voters made to look like fools', alluded to some of these points though was somewhat ambiguous (*Post Courier* August 28, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Currently, weaker candidates are eliminated and/or their second and third preferences are being locked up with the surviving top candidates after the count on first preferences. Consequently, weaker candidates miss out on their potential to compete with their second and third preferential votes when all are added together.

<sup>33</sup> In my effort to enlighten the voters on the projected costs involved if I were to buy votes, the figures for Kiriwina-Goodenough interestingly appear thus. With about 26000 eligible voters going at K100 per head distributed on the night before casting their votes, the total cost would have been a staggering K2.6m. For the 16000 Kiriwina eligible voters, the cost would be K1.6m at K100/head or, K80,000 at K50/head. But because I only need a 50%+1 of the electorate's votes to win, so I would target a figure of some 12000 voters. The cost would be about K120,000 or, K60,000 at K50/head. Very few foolish candidates, go to the extent of sacrificing this much, anyway. So what kind of money were our candidates spending in order to buy material items, provide cash, set up feasts and sporting events for our voters? What about the provenance of the funds? These must come out. Voters were clearly struck with awe and incredulity given that many of them hardly pick up a K100 note from their candidate. Ultimately voters were exploited and deluded with illusions of unattainable state of well being. This will continue even with the presence of LPV model.

<sup>34</sup> In 2006 Lufa District of EHP set up the Frigano-Hugamate United Movement (FHUM) that called for expressions of interest from intending candidates for the 2007 elections. The movement conducted awareness campaigns among voters for quality leadership and candidates were screened, and subsequently endorsed on merit. Twenty 'applications were received and candidates were issued a formulated oath of agreement to sign and abide by the articles of association' in the event that a candidate is chosen. "We don't want leaders who we don't know to lure us during the elections with a cargo cult style of campaigning and run away for the next five years." said a Chief of one of the 17 tribes [sic] from the Frigano-Hugamate people, Lufa (*Post Courier* March 9, 2007: 32). Potentially, of the few that contested the winner would walk away with an overall satisfaction from all voters. Since, everyone had agreed in principle that the member elect is just as good a leader. The winner was after all voted by the majority regardless of whether it is one's first, second or, third preference. [I need to confirm with the Hon. MP elect, Mr. Silupa, as to what actually happened.]