

Of But Apart: Profiling Politicians in Solomon Islands

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Abstract

In this article we examine key attributes of Solomon Islands politicians. We draw upon a MP bio-data, interviews and election results, and find politicians are getting older, have atypical education levels and come from an increasingly diverse range of occupational backgrounds. We also find that while Solomon Island MPs are a political elite of sorts, they remain tightly tied to the society they have emerged from. We consider the implications of these findings for three literatures – ‘developmental leadership’, political professionalisation, and elite theory – arguing that in different ways they fail to adequately capture the political trajectories of politicians in Solomon Islands. This, in turn, has ramifications for those seeking solutions to the practical problems of Solomon Islands politics.

Introduction

Personalisation is a key theme in the literature on politics in the Pacific generally and Solomon Islands in particular. Both within aid agencies and amongst Solomon Islanders themselves the country’s political problems are often discussed as if they stem, first and foremost, from the personal attributes of elected representatives, who are frequently stereotyped as suffering from a capacity deficit (defined by low levels of education and inadequate understanding of parliamentary processes). In short, they are problems to be solved and although such beliefs are rarely drawn directly from political theory, theoretical work can be found that might lead to similar conclusions. Yet, paradoxically, there is little empirical analysis of who Solomon Islands politicians are and what they did before entering parliament.

To redress this we draw on a range of different data to profile Solomon Island MPs elected since the 1970s, and analyse patterns and changes in MP characteristics over that time. We

find that politicians in Solomon Islands, on average, have atypical education levels, are getting older, and come from an increasingly diverse range of occupational backgrounds. We also find that despite being in possession of attributes that set them apart from their constituents, politicians in Solomon Islands remain embedded within a plurality of networks and relationships that link them in multiple ways to voters and the communities they represent.

The implications of these findings are threefold. First, although MP capacity has increased against measures such as education, there has been no increase in the quality of political governance experienced in Solomon Islands as measured by international indices. This is at odds with predictions of the emerging ‘developmental’ leadership literature (for review see Leftwich 2010) which contends that the capabilities of political leaders play an important role in determining governance and development outcomes (see, for example, Theron 2011). Within the development literature a similar elite capacity argument has been advanced by Francis Fukuyama (2008) in his aid funded work on Western Melanesia in which he recommended funding elite schools to train a generation of nation-builders. Comparable sentiment is also common in popular commentary in Solomon Islands itself (for example, Roughan 2002) with proposals for political form advocating changes such as mandated levels of educational attainment for MPs (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012).

Secondly, beyond development theory, studying the form and function of the ruling elite has long been staple fare of political analysis. Representative government is premised on the ideal of popular rule, yet elite theorists have long observed that it tends to perpetuate the dominance of small groups whose socio-economic profiles are often atypical (for review see Kane and Patapan 2012, 14-18). We find that theories of elite or leader democracy have some explanatory power in Solomon Islands in the sense that politicians do tend to possess

economic resources, employment histories and levels of educational attainment that set apart from voters. However, they do not account for the fluidity of national politics and the ways politicians remain embedded within networks and relationships that link them to the communities they represent (for discussion see Steeves 1996).

Thirdly, broadening occupational backgrounds and high levels of incumbent turnover reveal the relative absence of a professionalised political elite. The prevailing consensus in this in European and American dominated literature is that public office has undergone a transition whereby it has become controlled by professional politicians who, in Weberian terms, live ‘off’ rather than ‘for’ politics (see Best and Cotta 2000; Norris 1997; Weller and Fraser 1987; Pickering 1998). And despite the relative absence of analysis on the form and function of political elites in places like Solomon Islands, the professional parliamentarian remains the standard against which aid donors work. To foster professionalisation, donors fund initiatives designed to train Solomon Islands’ MPs (alongside those from other Pacific countries) through institutions like the AusAID funded Centre for Democratic Institutions (see Stapenhurst and Pelizzo 2012; Kinyondo 2012; Rozzoli 2012; Roughan 2002). However, our analysis suggests such work, based on an institutional model of professionalism, has limited utility in the Solomon Islands context.

Background

The election of MPs to the Legislative Council of the then British colony of Solomon Islands, began properly in 1967 (Corrin 2009; Moore 2004). The 1976 parliament presided over Solomon Islands’ transition to statehood in 1978 and there have been eight general elections since independence (Corrin 2009). Post-independence elections have been characterised by low winning candidate vote share (the median winner vote share for all post-independence

elections is 33.7 per cent), and high levels of incumbent turnover in elections (on average 53 per cent of incumbent MPs who have contested elections have lost).

The Solomon Islands parliament is unicameral and since 1997 has contained MPs representing 50 electorates. MPs are elected through a single member district plurality (first past the post) voting system (Levine and Roberts 2005, 278). While the formal processes of the Solomon Islands parliament would be familiar to observers of other Westminster democracies outside of the Pacific, its functioning differs. Political parties exist but they are not bound by ideology and are fluid and fractious. For example, the Solomon Islands Democratic Party was the largest party in parliament in the wake of the 2010 elections and yet internal tensions caused it to split, and it currently has MPs in both the government and the opposition. Similarly, 17 members of the current parliament changed their political affiliation during the campaign period prior to, or in the days immediately following, the 2010 election¹.

Formation of government requires aspiring prime ministers and their allies to create and hold together a coalition of MPs large enough to form a parliamentary majority. Absent party or ideological loyalty, MPs change sides frequently. Consequently parliament is often prorogued as the governing coalition of the day attempts to stave off no-confidence motions and ensure the support of wavering MPs. There have been eight mid-term changes of government since 1980.

In the late 1990s, partially as a result of poor national governance, the Solomon Islands experienced significant social unrest and a small-scale armed conflict (Moore 2004). This led in 2003 to the arrival of an Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission (RAMSI) whose main goal was the restoration of law and order (Allen 2009; Dinnen and Firth 2008). RAMSI

¹ This figure was calculated by comparing party affiliations reported by candidates when registering to stand in the election with party affiliations as reported in the media in the immediate wake of elections.

brought with it significant amounts of aid designed to strengthen state capacity. However, despite this, the quality of national governance in Solomon Islands remains stubbornly poor when measured against international indices. For example, the World Bank (2011) placed Solomon Islands in the bottom quartile of all countries with a Government Effectiveness Score of -0.85 (on a scale of plus 2.5 to minus 2.5). Significantly, this score was no higher than the country's score in 1998 (the first year that the World Bank has data for).

Data and Methods

This article is derived from three main primary sources: a database of Solomon Islands election results; a database of MP biographical-data; and interviews conducted with Solomon Islands political actors. The databases were compiled from official records kept in the Solomon Islands parliamentary library, plus information on the parliament website, newspaper clippings, information shared by other academics, and in-country interviews. The election database contains results for general elections in all constituencies since 1967. The MP bio-data was coded across three key areas — age, education and career — and has information on slightly more than 80 per cent of members elected to parliament since 1976. While this is proportionally a large sample, there is nevertheless a risk that it may be skewed by selection bias. However, in key aspects that we *are* able to observe, such as election results, there is no obvious difference between MPs for whom we have data and those we do not. For example, the mean winning vote share of those MPs for whom we have data is 36 per cent compared to 34 per cent for whom bio-data is missing. Given this, the likelihood of selection bias significantly skewing results is small. Table 2 in Appendix 1 shows the proportion of MPs in each parliament for whom we have data.

While the bio-data and electoral results data enable us to describe key trends, the relatively skeletal nature of these sources limits the extent to which we can explain many of the patterns

observed. To overcome this, and to provide greater depth in the analysis presented here, we conducted in-depth interviews with 33 past and present MPs as well as a number of other political actors, such as campaign managers. Importantly, interviews provided narratives of how multiple factors impact on the career trajectories of politicians. In some cases interviews were granted on the expressed condition that as far as possible we would suppress the identity of informants.

Building a Profile and Reputation

Age

Writing about different systems of traditional leadership in the Pacific, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins' (1963) highlighted a differentiation between the achieved leadership of the Melanesian 'Big Man' and the ascribed leadership of the Polynesian 'Chief'. While contested, it remains the classic reference for subsequent scholarship (for a review see Mosko 2012). Echoing Sahlins' distinction of the characteristics of traditional, local-level leaders, Ron Crocombe (2008, 452) has argued that something approximating it also exists at the parliamentary level. Specifically, that societies where heredity and seniority are emphasised in traditional leadership (Tonga, Fiji and Samoa) also tend to elect older politicians, while countries in Western Melanesia, including Solomon Islands, have elected relatively young leaders. Crocombe's depiction of Melanesian MPs being young was true for early post-independence parliaments in Solomon Islands — for example, inaugural Prime Minister Sir Peter Kenilorea, was Chief Minister at the age of 33 while his predecessor, Solomon Mamaloni, became Chief Minister at the age of 31 — but our data (see figure 1 below) show that since independence the median age of MPs has increased substantially, notwithstanding a decrease in age in 2010. Politicians in Solomon Islands are getting older, from a median age

of 36 years in 1976 to 50 years in 2006². This increase is not simply the product of the aging of sitting MPs: the mean age of first term MPs increased from 35 to 46 over the same time. While Solomon Islands voters may once have held culturally determined preferences for younger political leaders, this is changing. Either cultural norms of leadership are shifting more generally, or other candidate attributes are increasingly shaping voter choices about preferred political leaders. In addition, the rising age of politicians also stands at odds with conventional professionalisation trends which are believed to favour younger candidates who take up politics as a first career (Weller and Fraser 1987; Pickering 1998).

[Figure 1]

Education

There are a number of possible explanations for the trend towards older politicians in Solomon Islands, including rising campaign costs, which are more likely to privilege experienced candidates with greater resources. However, to appreciate the significance of this ostensibly counter-cultural pattern requires an understanding of how education policies of the late colonial period advantaged younger candidates, and how this has subsequently been altered. The Second World War was catalyst for a myriad of social changes in the Pacific region, particularly in Western Melanesia (for discussion see White and Lindstrom 1989). Combined with pressure emanating from proto-nationalist movements like *Maasina Ruru*, the global emphasis on decolonisation in the aftermath of the Second World War manufactured a sense of urgency amongst colonial administrators to identify and train future political leaders. It was during this period that a small number of Solomon Islands secondary schools such as King George VI, Pawa, and St Joseph's began educating a new Solomon Islands elite. The

² Because we are working on sample data not a population we formally tested for the presence of an aging trend by running an OLS regression with Age as the dependent variable and Year as the independent variable. The adjusted R² for the regression was 0.23, the regression coefficient for Year was 0.369 and the standard error was 0.037 (P<0.05). Results that suggest that it is extremely unlikely that the trend is merely the result of random sampling error.

late colonial focus on elite education meant that in early elections predominantly younger Solomon Islanders, who had received formal education, were elected.

Owing to there being very few national secondary schools and limited opportunities for secondary study overseas, secondary education played an important formative role in the socialisation of political elites in Solomon Islands. Many met first at school where friendships were established, and in some cases significantly shaped later political behaviour. For example, in his autobiography, Sir Peter Kenilorea (2008, 97) recalls sharing his first trip on an aeroplane with Solomon Mamaloni (together these two leaders are the most significant political figures in independence era Solomon Islands) en route to New Zealand to complete their secondary schooling. And despite having spent more than a decade as political opponents, in explaining his decision to join the 1990 Mamaloni government, he (2008, p. 265-266) stated that:

When my old friend Solo requested that I join him to form a Government, I willingly obliged ... I felt compelled to cross the floor... Outsiders looking at Solomon Islands politics often note the unusual combinations of individuals which may seem totally devious and self-seeking. They fail to realise that our reasoning often comes out of our traditional cultures, our long knowledge of each other – and for Solo and me, that meant as far back as when we were schoolboys ...

Secondary schooling, however, is only part of the education story. As shown in Figure 2, in the independence parliament around 51.5 per cent of members had undertaken some form of tertiary study, with teaching and theology the most common disciplines. Since then, the percentage of MPs who have undertaken academic tertiary study has risen significantly,

peaking at 90.7 per cent in 2001³. The percentage of MPs with post-graduate academic qualifications has also increased. Above average education levels are a common characteristic of politicians the world over (see Edinger 2010; Brannelly, Lewis and Ndaruhuste 2011; Theron 2011) and this is also apparent in Solomon Islands. In contrast, 2009 Census data shows that only 4.4 per cent of the Solomon Islanders had received tertiary education (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2011a, 2).

[Figure 2 in here]

As noted above, proposals for political reform in Solomon Islands are often predicated on the belief that inadequately schooled MPs are one source of poor governance; yet our data show 85 per cent of all post-independence MPs received at least some secondary schooling. In this they differ considerably from their constituents. Preliminary 2009 census data show that only 24.3 per cent of adult Solomon Islanders have any secondary schooling at all (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2011a, 2).

The 2001 parliament was the most highly educated in Solomon Islands history. However, at odds with the predictions of the ‘developmental’ leadership agenda, this highpoint also coincided with the period of civil unrest known as ‘the Tensions’. Indeed the rise in proportion of MPs with tertiary education up until 2001 corresponded with the post-independence breakdown in political governance, declining government services, unsustainable logging, and deteriorating fiscal situation conditions (Moore 2004; Frazer 1997).

For most of its history, Solomon Islands had no domestic provider of academic tertiary education and while in recent times the local University of the South Pacific (USP) campus

³ Because we are working on sample data not a population we formally tested for the presence of trends over time in tertiary education by running a multinomial logistic regression. Relative to the base category of no tertiary education both the under-graduate and post-graduate tertiary categories had relative risk ratios commensurate with trends of increase (1.031 and 1.104 respectively). Both categories had p-values of < 0.05.

has changed this somewhat, predominantly Solomon Islanders have sought out academic education opportunities overseas. From the late colonial period, many of the most able Solomon Islanders were sent overseas to pursue tertiary studies underscoring Crocombe's (2008) theory that Pacific Islanders have historically elected 'foreign educated' and 'foreign orientated' politicians (see also Corbett 2012). Like secondary education, this began in the late colonial period with students sent to universities and theological colleges in Papua New Guinea and Fiji, and a variety of tertiary institutions in New Zealand, Australia and Europe. On average, 87 per cent of Solomon Island MPs who we have data for attained their tertiary education overseas. However, in contrast to Crocombe's (2008) emphasis on education around the Pacific Rim, approximately half of those who attained overseas tertiary education did so in the Pacific (typically in Fiji or Papua New Guinea).

Interviews with MPs suggest that for many Solomon Islands MPs overseas education was an important foundational experience. As one interviewed MP noted:

My interest in politics perhaps began at the USP Campus [Suva]. In the 70s politics was quite hot in-terms of the Fiji situation. It was the time of Ratu Mara and all of these other people, and there was a very active trade union movement and that sort of interest got into the campus ... We once vied to put a Solomon Islander as President of the USP Students Association. He became a politician also ...

Consequently, not only does above average education set politicians apart from the constituents they serve, but the experience represents a significant 'site' in their politicisation (Corbett 2012). Electorally, education benefits aspiring politicians in two ways: first, as discussed below it provides access to a wider range of employment activities; and, second, it affords aspiring MPs greater profile. Secondary and tertiary education is relatively rare in Solomon Islands and so those who have degrees are immediately set apart.

Occupation

While tertiary education remains an important signifier, the rising number of politicians with business backgrounds, discussed below, points to the plurality of ways candidates can generate a public profile above and beyond education qualifications. In part, this dynamic may explain why the percentage of those with tertiary qualifications has dropped slightly since 2001, although it remains double 1976 levels⁴.

Table 1 below shows the pre-parliamentary occupations of MPs in the Solomon Islands parliament.

[Table 1 in here]

By means of contrast, preliminary 2009 Solomon Islands Census data finds 7 per cent of the population working for the government; 19 per cent working in the private sector; 12 per cent working as small scale farmers; and 62 per cent working in subsistence agriculture or other unpaid work (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2011b, 2). As with education, politicians in Solomon Islands have employment backgrounds different from those of their constituents.

Historically, public administration has been the most common a career before moving into politics in the Solomon Islands: prior to 2001 nearly 70 per cent of MPs who we have data for had at some point worked in the civil service. As Crocombe (2008, 430) observes, this pattern partly reflects the localisation policies of the late colonial period and the need to indigenise the civil service. Promotion was rapid, while relatively early retirement ages meant that politics was an attractive post-career move. Importantly, a civil service career, particularly in the early post-independence years, offered aspiring MPs some prestige amongst potential

⁴ Another possible explanation is that voters have, to some extent, turned away from elite candidates, favouring fellow villagers. Yet inspection of non-tertiary educated MPs elected in 2010 does not provide strong support for this view: several were relatively well known businessmen, one was a casino owner, two were former militant leaders and two came from high profile political families.

voters. Civil servants were relatively few in number and government work was associated with education and understanding of government. Over time the proportion of MPs with civil service backgrounds has declined, although it is still high: nearly 50 per cent in 2010. The likely explanation for this decline is the rise of alternate means, particularly business, through which aspiring MPs can attain a profile.

Early post-independence parliaments also contained relatively high numbers of MPs that had previously served as teachers or school principals. Again, the prevalence of teachers broadly reflects the education policies of that period and the status educators enjoy in the community. And, similarly, the subsequent decline in the proportion of MPs with a teaching background likely reflects the rise in alternate means through which MPs could attain profile.

A similar trend of decline is apparent in the proportion of MPs who served in provincial parliaments before changing to national politics. Downwards trends in the proportion of MPs with a background in the education sector, or as provincial members, in part reflects the diversity of means by which politicians are now able to obtain a personal profile. In addition, the declining number of MPs with backgrounds in provincial politics may reflect voters' perceptions of deterioration in the quality of provincial administration. A nationally representative survey in 2011 (n=4966) found that only 15.5 per cent of Solomon Islanders stated that they were satisfied with the performance of their provincial MP (ANU Enterprise 2011, 112).

Despite this trend, some current national MPs, such as Stanley Sofu from Malaita and Alfred Ghiro from Makira have still been able to transition from provincial to national government, but for many others such attempts have been unsuccessful. The premier of Choiseul Province, Jackson Kiloe unsuccessfully contested the seat of South Choiseul in 2010, while the former premier of Isabel province, Clement Rojumana, captured only 6.6 per cent of the vote when

he contested in the Maringe/Kokota electorate in 2006 national elections and less than one per cent when he tried again in 2010.

The one group that has trended upwards is politicians with backgrounds in business (this trend is most pronounced prior to 2001, with some decrease since then, although the overall trend is still clearly positive). In part, as discussed above, this story is embedded in the historical context of colonialism and the relative absence of an indigenous bourgeoisie around the time of independence. It also reflects changes in the nature of campaigning and voters' financial expectations of candidates and MPs, something that advantages those with private sources of funding.

Notably absent from our data were examples of politicians who came from what is conventionally referred to as 'politics facilitating positions' in political parties or as staff of an MP (see Cairney 2007). Although political parties do exist in Solomon Islands, they are loosely bound and largely devoid of any organisational apparatus that might provide a structure through which an aspiring politician might rise. What is more, as we show in Figure 3 below, high incumbent turnover rates during elections means that typically MPs' tenures in parliament are short: very few MPs stay national politicians long enough for the work to become a lifelong 'career'. Taken together, these features indicate that politics cannot be accurately described as a profession in Solomon Islands.

The quantitative database provides limited insights into the relationship between traditional leadership (hereditary chief or community selected big man) and contemporary political pathways. However, interviews and other material afford a sense of the connection. In a country where traditional local-level leaders play an important role in community governance (White 2007) it might be expected that this would be a common background for prospective politicians. Yet, this is generally not the case. Some do — Leslie Boseto was a paramount

chief in Choiseul, Albert Laore is from a chiefly family in Shortland Islands, and Denis Lulei is the descendent of renowned chiefs in Isabel — but most do not. Indeed, in some instances, such as David Day Pacha from South Guadalcanal, MPs have lived outside their home villages since they were children and as a result it is virtually impossible for them to fulfil the day-to-day responsibilities of village leaders. What is more, traditional leadership status does not guarantee electoral success. Timothy Laesanau gathered only 7.8 per cent of the vote in Small Malaita in 2006 while Ambrose Bugotu won less than one per cent of the vote in Gao and Bugotu in 2006 despite both holding senior chiefly roles⁵.

[Figure 3 in here]

Notably absent from Solomons politics is any rise in numbers of female MPs. Female candidate numbers have increased but there have only ever been two women MPs. And women are not becoming more competitive. Figure 4 illustrates this. Data points are women candidates. The Y axis shows their votes won as a proportion of those won by the winning candidate, a measure of competitiveness. A value of one indicates victory; winners are named on the chart. The point almost at one is Afu Billy who lost by two votes. The trend line suggests women candidates are actually becoming less competitive, although it should be noted a similar downward trend exists for men.

[Figure 4 in here]

Poor performance does not stem from female candidates who want for talent. Almost all in recent years have been well educated, and a number high-profile, well-regarded members of civil society. Interestingly, survey data suggest poor performance may not be a result of voter prejudice either: 85.5 per cent of respondents to a recent survey said they would vote for a

⁵ This information was gathered from interviews with MPs and political actors from Choiseul, Shortlands, Guadalcanal, Isabel, and Small Malaita.

hypothetical women candidate (McMurray 2011, 7). Even accounting for social desirability bias inflating this figure somewhat, it suggests that much of the issue lies elsewhere. While more work is needed before we can speak definitively, it seems that the most significant impediments to female electoral success probably lie in the fact that many women voters are expected to follow male household heads' voting decisions, depriving women candidates their most likely supporters. Also, women candidates often lack money for campaigning. And the patriarchal nature of local level leadership combined with the belief women should follow men and not the other way round appears to make it harder for women candidates to obtain influential local supporters.

Democratic Elitism?

The average politician in Solomon Islands differs from the typical voter by virtue of being drawn from a very small subset of the population that is well-educated, almost inevitably male and employed in high profile positions in the cash economy. However, there is more to becoming an MP in Solomon Islands than simply being well educated, having a work background that affords prominence, and being able to command material resources. To achieve political success, politicians must negotiate overlapping identities and roles. Indeed, much as politicians in Australia or Europe progress through the ranks of the party machine, politicians in Solomon Islands gain leadership via networks that connect them to the people and communities they represent.

Family name and standing *can* also be advantageous. Former Prime Minister, Solomon Mamaloni's father was a leader before independence, as was the father of former Minister for Foreign Affairs and veteran MP David Sitai. Familial connections also often link MPs to their constituents. Coming from a large family, village or clan can provide the candidates with a loyal 'base-vote' and supporter networks.

Support from influential chiefs and other local leaders or ‘gatekeepers’ is also crucial. For example, former MP Sam Alasia (1997) recounts how his decision to stand was prompted by local traditional leaders, while decisions regarding his allegiance within parliament were influenced by his constituency committee, which included the paramount local leader from his area. Similarly, MP David Day Pacha was able to win the South Guadalcanal election in 2006, despite having lived almost all his life in the capital, Honiara, through the support of influential community leaders amongst from his part of his electorate. A combination of votes won by Pacha in his village of birth, and votes won via leaders leveraging their own networks during campaigning, enabled him to win the plurality of votes in the constituency⁶.

While such connections are important, it would be a mistake to conclude that they are the only determinant of success. Pacha was subsequently able to expand his support in the 2010 election through judicious spending of government constituency development funds in his electorate. And while the support gathered through traditional structures is often important, communities are rarely as homogeneously loyal as they seem to the outside observer. Community leaders may be disobeyed and it not unheard of for close relatives to stand against each other, as one of our interview subjects detailed:

Three of my relatives they contested with me ... the young graduates finished from university and came in. They said ‘it is high time that we take over the responsibility’ ... the [opponent from another island] took advantage and he won. All of us lost.

Churches are another avenue through which politicians can develop a profile and establish electoral connections. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) in New Georgia. Edvard Hviding (2011) describes how the CFC maintains connections to national government via the current leader, His Grace the Reverend Egan

⁶ On this matter we were fortunate to be able to interview political actors, local leaders and voters from this constituency.

Rove, KBE, whose brother, Job Duddley Tausinga, and nephew, Silas Kerry Vaqara Tausinga, are both MPs. Recent schisms in the church have complicated this picture but historically, the CFC has been able to provide its approved candidates with the almost unanimous electoral support. Similarly, prior to the 2010 election in the electorate of Small Malaita, a decision was made by local South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) leaders to support Rick Hou (a SSEC church member). While the SSEC church in Small Malaita lacks the internal cohesion of the CFC, interview subjects stated that the majority of SSEC pastors followed this decision – endorsing Hou from the pulpit..

That said, the influence of denominational allegiance on electoral politics is generally believed to be declining. As one politician noted when interviewed:

Things have changed a lot ... [previously] if you were Catholic you would all vote together... [but] things have changed ... I would put it say 1990s, or the end of 1980s onwards.

Indeed, recent elections provide as many examples of failed attempts to foster political unity within church groups as successes. For example the village of Walande, which is also part of the Small Malaita constituency, is almost entirely Anglican and large enough that in the past it has had a candidate succeed electorally with the assistance of other Anglican communities. However, in 2010, not only was there no cooperation amongst Anglican villages, but the Walande congregation itself stood four candidates, a move that predetermined their defeat.

Money Politics and Largesse

Families, chiefs and churches, combined with a prominent job and tertiary education can all help a politician to raise their profile. However, increasingly, having a profile is not enough. To succeed an aspirant must also have a reputation as someone who is willing and able to

help constituents. Those politicians we interviewed generally believed their reputation attached to whether they were perceived as having served their community and constituency. Service could be demonstrated in a number of ways but most politicians talked about supporting community activities and also helping with government forms, providing bride price, compensation payments and school fees. Such contributions are costly and the common narrative is that the financial expectations that people place on prospective politicians is rising, especially as MPs have access to discretionary funding allocations for use in their constituency (for discussion see Fraenkel 2011). MP expenses also provide a means for extractive industries and foreign governments to influence individual campaigns and coalition formation (see Allen 2011; Bennett 2000; Kabutaulaka 1998).

Conclusion

Political anthropologist F.G Bailey (2001, 53) argues that politicians are confronted with the unenviable paradox in that to gain the trust of voters they must simultaneously demonstrate that they are one of them, so they can understand them, and yet also above them, so they can rule over them. Former Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare, at an event at the Honiara USP campus, described how he began his career as a toilet cleaner in the Tax Office and ended up as the leader of the nation (*Solomon Star*, August 17 2011, p3). In the process he became a senior civil servant and undertook postgraduate study in New Zealand. As outlined throughout this article, in many ways Sogavare's profile mirrors that of his parliamentary colleagues. Education and career mark him out as atypical in Solomon Islands – a man apart. Yet the narrative he drew from on that day portrayed him as being of the people.

In this article we have sought to explore this tension by investigating who gets elected to parliament in Solomon Islands. Examining qualitative and quantitative material we found that

on average politicians in Solomon Islands are getting older, have atypical education levels, and come from an increasingly diverse occupational backgrounds. Politicians in Solomon Islands can justifiably be called elites in the sense that their lived experiences are different from the majority of voters', while the privileges of public office provide additional status and prestige. But to succeed politically they also have to foster and maintain networks and relationships which tie their political trajectories in complex and multifaceted ways with the constituencies they represent.

Our findings have theoretical implications, at least for the Solomon Islands context. The trend towards higher educated, older and more experienced politicians over the same period of time (1976-2001) as quality of governance declined stands in contrast to the predictions of the 'developmental' leadership literature which posits that leader capacity is an important variable in achievement of 'developmental' outcomes (for further discussion for why this is the case see Corbett forthcoming [2013]). Meanwhile, high levels of incumbent turnover, rising ages, falling percentages of MPs previously in provincial government, and broadening occupational backgrounds points to the relative absence of professionalisation amongst Solomon Islands parliamentarians. Which in turn suggests that donor attempts to train MPs in an institutional model of professionalism are unlikely to have widespread success in Solomon Islands. Rather, attempts to engineer political outcomes must pay greater attention to the socio-institutional context within which politicians are embedded.

Lastly, while elite or leader democracy theories have some explanatory power in Solomon Islands, they understate how politicians remain embedded in networks and relationships that link them to the communities they represent, including via families and churches, but also largesse and other forms of money politics. In this respect while 'elite' refers to their background, status and influence, it remains too crude a term. As much as it involves

elevation, getting elected also necessitates immersion in social and cultural relationships. In short, Solomon Island MPs remain ‘of, but apart’.

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Appendix

Table 2 – Data Possessed by Attribute and Year.

Year	Number of electorates	Percentage of MPs With Age Data	Percentage of MPs With Tertiary Data	Percentage of MPs With Employment Data
1976	38	87%	87%	82%
1980	38	37%	47%	39%
1984	37	57%	59%	54%
1989	38	97%	97%	95%
1993	47	96%	100%	98%
1997	50	92%	90%	94%
2001	50	88%	88%	94%
2006	50	76%	80%	90%
2010	50	94%	92%	98%
Total	398	82%	83%	84%

Charts and Tables From Main Body of Article

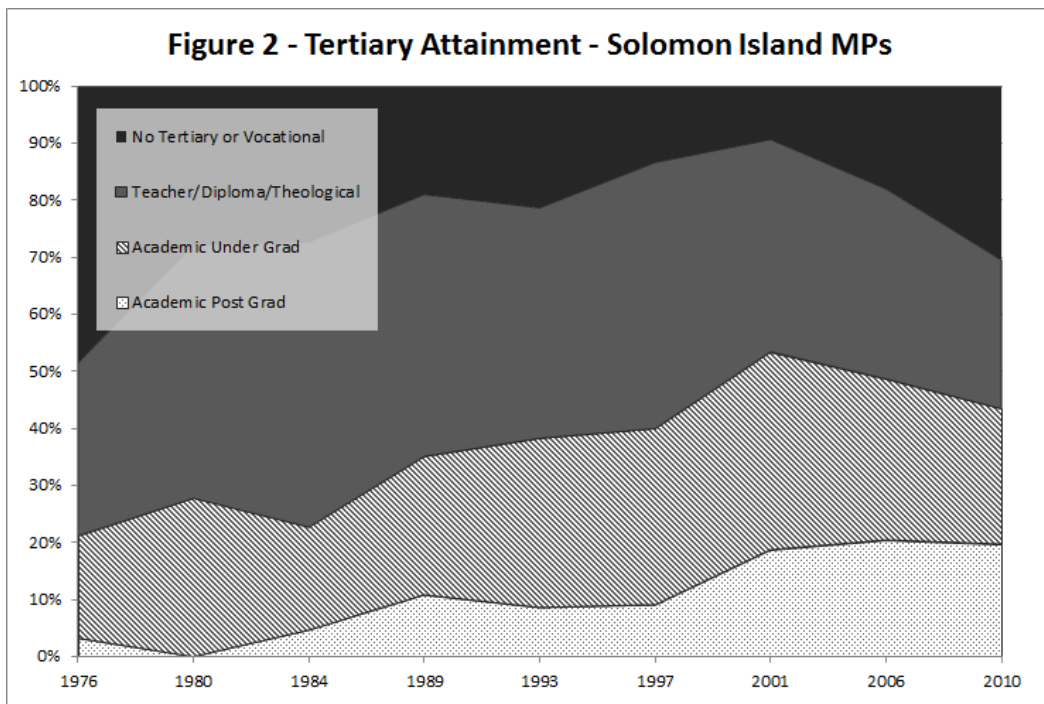
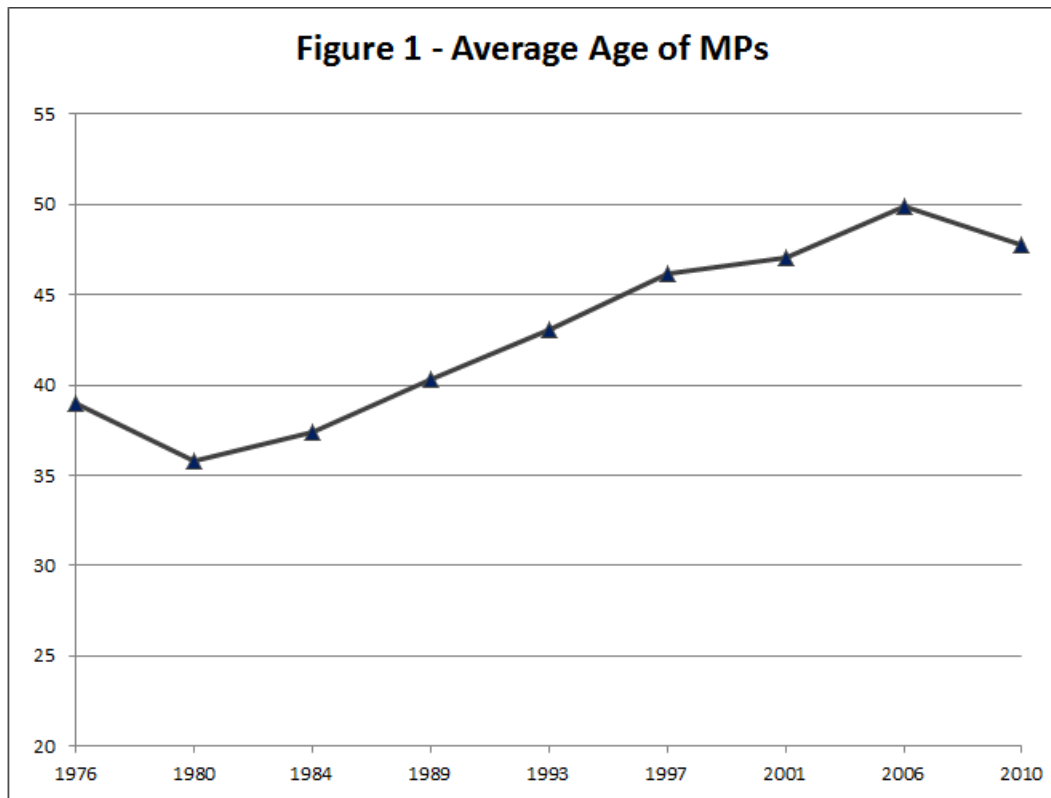


Table 1 – Occupations of MPs Before Entering Parliament

Year	Private Sector	Provincial Government	Civil Service	Teacher/Principal	Other
1980	20%	27%	80%	33%	0%
1984	30%	35%	70%	35%	5%
1989	31%	17%	69%	28%	11%
1993	35%	24%	70%	20%	13%
1997	43%	23%	68%	17%	11%
2001	62%	19%	45%	11%	11%
2006	44%	18%	49%	11%	9%
2010	41%	8%	47%	20%	10%

Table notes: Percentages are the percentage of MPs listing that occupation in the year in question. Because some MPs have multiple occupations row totals can add to greater than 100 per cent. Logistic regression was used to check the statistical significance of the trends. Observed trends were significant at conventional levels ($p < 0.05$) for Private Sector, Provincial Government, and Civil Service and significant at $p < 0.10$ for Teacher/Principal.

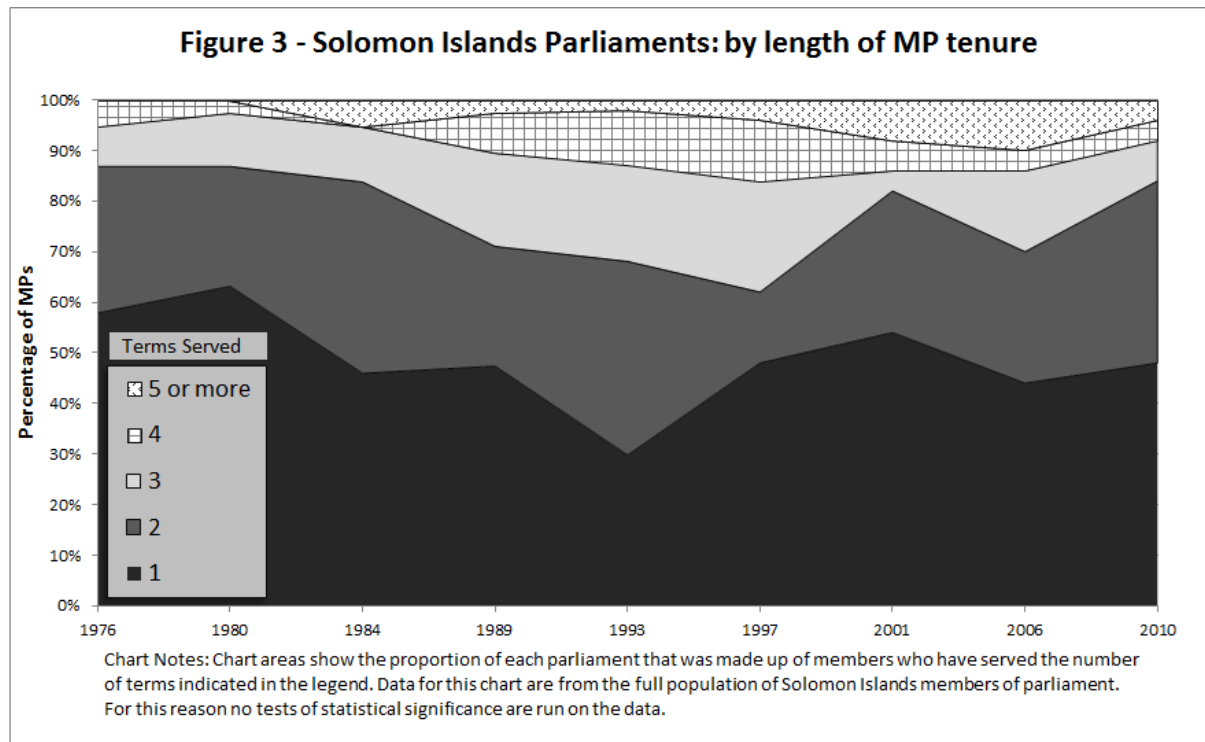


Figure 4 - Competitiveness Ratio, Female Candidates

