Strengthening political parties in the Pacific

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Is clientelism to blame for political misbehaviour?

• Politicians in developed democracies seem better behaved than those in the Pacific.

• But are politicians in developed democracies not particularist rent-seekers?
  – US 2006 Federal Budget had 9,963 programs in it-mostly put there by politicians
  – Robert Byrd, a US Senator, moved an entire FBI office with 3,000 staff to his state of West Virginia.
  – Australian PM, John Howard, flew to Tasmania to deliver $50m to “save” a local hospital.
Why do politicians join parties?

• Politicians need two things to win elections: money and labour.

• Outside the Pacific, it’s the parties who provide the money and the labour that are needed.

• In most democracies parties are partly supported by the government.
  – In Australia the AEC gave $41m to Australian political parties after the 2004 election.
Why are Pacific parties so weak?

- In PNG politicians do not need parties for money or for labour.
- Individual politicians have access to money through the slush funds/development funds.
- Individual politicians have access to labour through clan and social networks.
- What then does a party offer a politician? Electoral engineering of parties won’t work unless politicians need parties.
Why weak parties lead to misbehaving politicians

• Four potential groups could punish political misbehaviour: voters, Parliament, courts or parties.

• Voters can only discipline at an election. Parliament does not discipline in the Pacific. Ombudsmen, police and courts are erratic in the Pacific.

• In developed democracies, such as the US and Australia, it is the parties that punish the politicians:
  – In 2008, the NSW Labor Party dismissed the entire Wollongong City Council for corruption.
Parties as brands

• Membership in a political party communicates the brand of the party to the electorate.
• A strong brand like the Labor Party of Australia communicates a lot about the politician to the voter.
• A weak brand like most pacific parties communicates next to nothing about the politician.
• Only strong brand parties can discipline its members, weak parties can not discipline as the politician does not fear losing the brand.
Why OLIPPAC failed

• As Gelu (2005) reported, PM Somare still had to resort to extraordinary measures in PNG to be able to avoid instability.
• OLIPPAC changed the rules, but it did not change the incentives politicians faced.
• Some politicians still thought it would be financially advantageous to cause instability.
• Need to change the incentives politicians face.
Solution 1. A new “slush fund” for PNG

• Instead of slush funds going to the politician, channel the slush funds/development funds to the party, as is done in Australia.

• Currently each registered party in PNG gets around K10,000 per member of Parliament under OLIPPAC. Using the slush funds would raise that by a factor of 100 or more.

• Instead of being financially independent, each politician would be reliant on the party.

• But we also now possess a strong means of controlling parties- the party support money.
What would party funds look like?

• Each party receives a fixed amount per member of Parliament.
• The funds are paid quarterly or biannually.
• If a member changes parties, the funds disappear and don’t transfer to the new party. So there is a real cost to switching parties midway through an term.
• Parties have to be a minimum size to be eligible—ie. 6 or 8 members. There is now a financial incentive to be in a party.
Solution 2. Bloc voting amendment to OLIP PAC

- Amend OLIP PAC to require bloc voting by parties on more types of legislation— in particular, selection of the PM after an election.
- Allow for an option on any legislation that the legislation require a “party vote”— so only bloc voting is allowed.