

CHAPTER 3

The Campaign and the Media

Campaign Methods

Although there is no official campaign period in Solomon Islands, section 78 of the National Parliament (Electoral Provisions) Act 1980 infers that campaigning may take place from the date of proclamation to the date of publication of the results. Candidates would normally start their campaigning as soon as they had been validly nominated and allocated their symbol with background colour. Campaign rules for electoral campaign activities, candidates and their supporters were however included in the manual issued for the guidance of the police on security arrangements. However, campaigning was not allowed within 50 yards of the polling station, while no address system was allowed within 200 yards of the perimeter of any polling station.



ON THE ROAD . . .
campaigning for a
candidate

Candidates used posters with pictures of themselves displaying their symbols and parties, where applicable, while two parties (PAP and Labour) made their manifestos available to us.

It is our understanding that candidates also held village meetings and campaigned from door to door. We however saw no rallies and in one instance attended a political meeting. We also witnessed two motorcades on the eve of the poll which were peaceful.

Campaign Expenses

In accordance with section 45 of the 1980 Act as amended, each candidate must:

- (a) not exceed the total amount of fifty thousand (50,000) SI dollars;

- (b) submit a Statement of Account, specifying all expenses incurred by the candidate in the election campaign, within one month of the declaration of the result for the respective constituency.

It is our understanding that there is no mechanism to control or account for campaign expenditure and at the last elections no returns of campaign expenditure were submitted. We recommend that a review of campaign rules should be undertaken, and enforcement action implemented.

It is to be noted that every Member of Parliament receives a Constituency Development Fund (CDF) of approximately SI\$500,000 each year for development projects in their constituency, which gives the incumbent MP an unfair advantage. However, because of the lack of funds, no CDF payments were made in the year preceding the 2001 elections. Many incumbents failed to be re-elected.

Key Policy Issues

In our discussions with all of the groups we met, we noted that the major policy issues were the restoration of law and order through the re-establishment of confidence in the disciplinary forces, the disarmament of militants and an urgent desire on the part of many Solomon Islanders for a return to peace. Other key issues were the economic recovery of Solomon Islands and the need for the introduction of a suitable political structure.

The Media

We met with representatives of media organisations.

It was explained to us that the broadcast media in Solomon Islands comprised the public sector owned radio station, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC), and privately owned Paoa FM.

Two newspapers are owned by journalists who started them. One is the daily *Solomon Star* and the other is the weekly *Solomon Express*.

Unfortunately, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation had received no money from the Government and had thus been forced to demand payment. Voter education broadcasts had therefore to be financed by the donors. Donors had also provided additional finance for public sector broadcasting during the elections. In the same way, donors provided money to the Electoral Commission to pay for advertisements of candidates standing, locations of polling stations, counting centres and electoral results. Candidates were able to obtain 30 to 40-second and 15-minute radio slots which they had to pay for in advance at an agreed rate. Similarly, the newspapers would report news items concerning the elections at their editorial discretion. Any candidate or party wishing to use their columns had to pay before publication in the same way as any other advertiser. The result was that only the richest candidates and parties could use the media for election purposes. We recommend that each candidate should, by right, be given free access and equal time allocation to the radio.

The Group was on the whole impressed by the national election awareness coverage provided by the SIBC, which was part of a joint awareness campaign with the Electoral Commission.