

# Public Leadership, political parties, and parliamentary performance in the Pacific Islands

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*Governance in the Pacific Islands is often associated with political volatility and underperformance. In the background, however, a number of capacity building projects are seeking to strengthen capabilities in political and public sector leadership and management with a view to strengthening the fundamental operation of government. This seminar explores the relationship between Pacific Islands' politics and parliaments, and prospects for enhanced stability in the Pacific nations and region as a whole.*

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## II. Introduction

As this is my first public seminar since commencing at the Victoria University of Wellington at the beginning of 2010 I thought it useful to set out for colleagues some of the research questions that I have been interested in, in recent years. It is, at the same time, a survey of what I regard as critical matters of public concern in relation to government and society in the Pacific Islands, and pertinent to the future of relations between the states and peoples of the Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand. In order to achieve this, the paper proceeds by surveying several current issues confronting Pacific states: 1) constitutional review; 2) parliamentary performance; 3) political party establishment and operation; 4) the quality of public leadership; and 5) development projects targeting parliaments, parties, and political leadership.

Election procedures and performance are also of interest, and I note that Pacific States holding general elections in 2010 include American Samoa, Bougainville, Cook Islands, Nauru (twice), Solomon Islands (August 4<sup>th</sup>), and Tonga. Papua New Guinea's election is scheduled for 2012 but already a topic of keen interest. However, given time constraints today, I will leave this topic for another time.

The definition of "Pacific Islands" as a region remains unclear, as noted in Kennedy Graham's 2008 publication *Models of Regional Governance for the Pacific: Sovereignty and the future architecture of regionalism*. (Graham 2008) Graham points out that the Pacific Islands Forum comprises 16 "independent" states, including Australia and New Zealand. I qualify the term "independent", as a number of states are in "free association" with another, in the manner that Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau which have some dependence on New Zealand, whilst some of the Micronesian states, including the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands have "Compact" arrangements with the United States of America. A host of other small states in the Pacific are more specifically dependent on a metropolitan power, such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia, which are Overseas Territories of France; Hawaii which is one of the United States of America; and Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and other smaller islands which have various incorporated and unincorporated status with the USA. A number of these states choose dependence rather than independence, acknowledging the challenges they would face should they choose to enter the global economy on their own.

This reference to diverse status is not included to raise the issue of struggle for sovereignty but to point to the sensitivities involved in determining who has rights to recognition by regional organizations such as the Pacific Islands Forum, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, etc. Thus the Forum has two "associate members" (New Caledonia and French Polynesia) and seven "observers" (Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, Timor-Leste, The United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission). One notes that this list of observers includes dependent territories and regional and global inter-governmental agencies. The varieties of status make it very difficult to gain a complete picture of progress toward human development for Pacific Island peoples, since the data for so many states is embedded in statistics of their parent nations rather than in Pacific scorecards.

I refer to this range in status to emphasize how diverse the region is and to warn against over-generalization. The unique cultures and traditions of Pacific people are not limited to national scale – for what constitutes the "nation-state" is merely an artefact of colonization –and ethnic diversity continues at sub-regional and local levels. A recent mantra supporting a shift to federalism in the

Solomon Islands has been that the societies on each island are “so different” as to require separate governments. Nation-building, modernization, and standardization signal loss of diversity as much as they represent development and material progress. It is with this background of external influence and internal adaptation that we study conditions of government across the Pacific region.

Although the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum have been engaged in a “Pacific Plan” to strengthen regional collaboration and work toward “deeper integration” since 2004 there has been little elaboration as to what this might entail. There is continued support for regional cooperation in fisheries, security, trade, and scientific endeavours, but Fiji’s domestic situation has dampened region-building for the present.

### **III. Constitutional review**

The constitutions of the Pacific Island states provide the framework and to some extent the values that inform the operation of government. As virtually the entire Pacific experienced colonial rule, their current constitutional frameworks are invariably written documents which required at the time of independence the approval of both the departing colonial power as well as newly installed political leaders. They mirror, consequently, the Westminster and Republican models under which they were belatedly tutored, and exhibit in their political lives the strengths and weaknesses inherent in these models.

Few of these independence constitutions, commencing with that of Western Samoa (now Samoa) in 1962 and most recently Vanuatu (1980) and Palau (1981) have experienced other than partial review and renewal. Papua New Guinea’s 1975 Constitution has been modified on several occasions, the most significant recent changes occurring in 2002 to accommodate the Bougainville Peace Agreement. Papua New Guinea also has a system of “organic laws” – laws that have a higher level of entrenchment than ordinary legislation – which alter such significant matters as the composition of provincial government and the operation of political parties – both matters which fundamentally affect the operation of the legislature. In July 2010 the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court struck down sections of the Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Governments, with immediate impact on the nation’s political dynamics, as will be discussed in more detail below.

But the general picture of constitutional review in the Pacific does not show significant change: apart from the Republic of Nauru, where a constitutional review exercise that commenced in 2007 ran its full course (with problematic results, also reported below), review exercises in Solomon Islands (2000-2010) and Vanuatu (on three occasions from the 1990s) remain incomplete, whilst those in Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Micronesia completed their deliberations only to settle on the most minimal of changes (such as changing flags, anthems, and numbers of seats in the legislature). Constitutional review appears to be a periodic activity in Fiji, but no political formula devised to date has been able to withstand the competing pressures existing within that society. Constitutional review in Tonga has been drawn out and fractious but has nonetheless achieved a higher degree of resolution of domestic issues than has been possible in the Solomon Islands and elsewhere. Finally, it is those islands that have experienced bloodshed – Bougainville and New Caledonia in particular - which have achieved the fullest constitutional clarity, even if uncertainty continues to hang over their long term destinies.

Constraints on ‘constitutive dialogue’ in Pacific states in the colonial and post-colonial periods have created serious limitations in their epistemological foundations, their ideological inventiveness, their legitimacy and their effectiveness. Such constraints, in other words, have yielded significant barriers to state functioning, and to the possibilities of full participation by citizens. Ghai argues of the Solomon Islands constitution that despite consultation with the people and active involvement of their leaders, the constitution cannot be said to be rooted in indigenous concepts of power, authority and decision-making. Some politicians were given a chance to consider alternatives to Westminster, but generally chose against it. Ghai describes how, as consultant to the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) in Papua New Guinea he canvassed alternatives to “Westminster”. He found some support for a presidential system, but the CPC saw a parliamentary executive as more participatory, and under control by the elected legislature. The alternatives, he said, were also abstract, and difficult to imagine.<sup>2</sup> (In the Cook Islands, Ghai suggested to a 1998 review the use of a “government by committee” in order to “significantly reduce the role of parties, and to provide for the role of all MPs in policymaking and administration”).<sup>3</sup>

#### **IV. Parliamentary performance**

I noted above that Pacific constitutions generally establish legislatures in either the Westminster or the Congressional tradition. The distinguishing feature of Westminster is that the executive branch of government is established by members of the legislature who chose to work together and whose claim to command the confidence of the majority of elected members is acknowledged by the Crown (since those colonies from the Westminster tradition generally remained part of the Commonwealth and their “heads of state” are termed “governors general” appointed by the British monarch). In the congressional or Republican model, in contrast, the head of the executive is elected by the citizens in elections separate to legislative elections, thus ensuring a more complete division of powers between the legislature and the executive.

Our concern here is with assessing the performance of Pacific parliaments, so what is it that parliaments should do well? Apart from successfully establishing the executive branch, parliaments should undertake several vital roles: enacting legislation, reviewing the work and results of the executive branch, and identifying and clarifying through debate matters of national concern. Much important work in development of policy options and scrutiny of government is undertaken away from the chamber, in committees, whilst members also have important representative functions at constituency level. Of course, this is an idealistic image, and our interest is in determining the extent to which this takes place in practice. An inquiry conducted several years ago sought “base-line”

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<sup>2</sup> Larmour, P. (2002). "Westminster Constitutions in The South Pacific: A "Policy Transfer" Approach." *Asian Journal of Political Science* 10(1): 39-54.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

information on numbers of sitting days per year, numbers of bills introduced, and numbers of laws enacted, with partial information gleaned for ten parliaments, as in the following chart:

Parliamentary Sitting Days

	seats		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Average	
Cook Islands	24	Sitting days	73	37	22	11	23	23	10	37	29.5	
		Bills										
		Laws										
Federated States of Micronesia	14	Sitting days										
		Bills										
		Laws										
Fiji Islands (two houses)	103	Sitting days	50	59	21	32	64	61	60	63	51.25	
		Bills	69	46	16	10	35	23	29	22	31.25	
		Laws	59	43	-	9	34	23	22	14	20.4	
Kiribati	42	Sitting days					20	24	20	20	21	
		Bills					15	14	18	21	17	
		Laws enacted					11	13	15	15	13.5	
Nauru	16	Sitting days										
		Bills										
		Laws			1	7	3	6	19	10	7.67	
Palau (two houses)	29	Sitting days										
		Bills								62		
		Laws								9		
Papua New Guinea	109	Sitting days						71	37	64	57	
		Bills										
		Laws										
Solomon Islands	50	Sitting days					37	27	35	52	37.75	
		Bills					6	7	9	11	8.25	
		Laws							8	10		
Tokelau	20	Sitting days								14		
		Bills										
		Laws						11	13	2	8.67	
Tonga	33	Sitting days					12	44	41	16	28.25	
		Bills							30	25		
		Laws							16	19		
Vanuatu	52	Sitting days										
		Bills						25	16	27	22.67	
		Laws						17	11	27	18.33	

This data suggests that Pacific Parliaments may meet for at least three sessions per year and for an average of approximately 30 sitting days in total. In some instances, such as Cook Islands in 2004,

sitting days were as low as ten per year. The Fiji Parliament averaged 51 sitting days per year between 1998 and 2006, notwithstanding the impact of the coup of May 2000 (which did have significant impact on passage of legislation for that year). In some years Vanuatu's parliament has only agreed to sit following judicial orders pointing to its Constitutional requirement to do so. The Parliament of Papua New Guinea averaged 43 sitting days per year between 2003 and 2009.

A government that fears for its majority will constrain the number of sitting days lest it face a motion of no confidence, as has affected the Cook Islands parliament throughout 2010. In Papua New Guinea the instability caused by no-confidence votes in the first independence decades prompted passage of a law prohibiting no-confidence votes in the first 18 months and final six months of the five-year parliamentary term (suspending Westminster in order to preserve it?).

A small number of parliamentary sitting days inevitably constrains the ability of a parliament to complete its work-load: whether consideration of new bills, and their second and third readings; consideration of reports tabled as constitutionally required or otherwise; as well as legislative reform generally; and questioning ministers of the government of the day with or without notice. The average number of bills passed into law in the Pacific states appears to be approximately 20 per year - which number includes all appropriations and other legislation of a fiscal nature, which facilitates the work of government without otherwise contributing new legislation.

There are no studies, to my knowledge, concerning how MPs distribute their time when parliament is not in session. The figures for parliamentary sessions suggest that a backbencher may have no parliamentary sessions to attend for 300 days of the year. Members of Cabinet will of course be busy with supervision of their Ministry and Departments, and those committee members whose committees are functioning will have business to attend to – although many committee dates are aligned with parliamentary sitting dates in order to reduce operational costs.

Another matter on which there is as yet no scholarship is the quality of legislative debate and parliamentary discourse. Studies inspired by the work of Steiner (Steiner, Bächtiger et al. 2004), which seeks to appraise the effectiveness of parliamentary discourse using a framework inspired by Habermas' theory of communicative action would make a useful contribution to our understanding of political decision-making and strategic action as carried out in parliaments in the region. Given new thinking about deliberative democracy, and recent studies of "de-alignment" between parties and voters, (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000) one should keep an open mind on the question of the centrality of parties to democratic politics in small states. (Anckar and Anckar 2000)

In the absence of scholarship on these matters there are reports assembled or commissioned by development assistance agencies, notably the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).<sup>4</sup> Eight such “legislative needs assessments” undertaken 2000-2003 set the framework for development assistance to Pacific Parliaments.

The findings of the report on the National Parliament of Vanuatu will be quoted here, as they are indicative of the situation in a number of legislatures of similar size and circumstance:

“The National Parliament of Vanuatu is unable to fulfil its responsibilities, particularly with regard to its duty as an oversight body, because:

- The Executive dominates the Legislature;
- Human resources, within the Office of the Clerk of Parliament, the Office of the Speaker and the within departments of the government of Vanuatu generally, are underdeveloped, especially in legal, research and financial areas;
- The content and implications of legislation are not well understood by Members of Parliament;
- No legal or technical secretariat is available to non-government Members.
- Access to information regarding and knowledge of procedures of Parliament and the political system generally is limited;
- Where they have been enacted already, these procedures are not adhered to;
- Little differentiation is made between the role of the Constitution, Acts of Parliament, Government Regulations and the Standing Order.
- Members are not able to liaise effectively with their constituents in a timely and regular manner;
- Women are under-represented in the National Parliament are not adequately advocated for. (There are no women Members of Parliament);
- Recommendations contained in existing reports on and training exercises for parliament have not been adopted. (Morgan 2001)

In 2000 the UNDP and other agencies convened a regional conference on Governance for Pacific islands’ Parliamentarians to promote strengthening the performance of Parliament in several urgent respects: upholding good governance best practises and public accountability; parliamentary oversight; committee performance; reporting to and by Parliaments/Congresses of statutory offices and state owned enterprises; and consultative processes with civil society. (UNDP, ESCAP et al. 2000)

That meeting identified a range of major challenges for Pacific leadership:

- an adequate and independent budget for Legislatures;
- a fully resourced and autonomous Office of the Presiding Officers;
- an autonomous legislative service;
- a strengthening and/or establishment of independent parliamentary/ legislative counsels;

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<sup>4</sup> These are online t <http://www.undppc.org.fj/pages.cfm/our-work/democratic-governance/strengthening-parliaments-democratic-institution/pacific-parliaments/undp-pacific-parliamentary-resources/#Pacific%20Legislative%20Needs%20Assessments>

- an active Committee System as an effective tool of Legislatures;
- strengthening and ensuring the independence of constitutional offices;
- appropriate usage and reference to legislatures of subordinate legislation and regulations;
- legislatures' key involvement in treaties and international obligations;
- consultative mechanisms to ensure engagement of civil society;
- adequate information and advisory service for members of legislatures; and
- effective dissemination of information to the community and, through the education system, improved understanding about the role of the Legislature and the ethics and practices of good governance. (UNDP, ESCAP et al. 2000)

Yet another workshop convened by UNDP in 2005 identified those challenges that Pacific parliaments had in common:

1. Lack of independence in matters of funding, staffing policies and committee functioning;
2. Ineffective committee systems;
3. Unsystematic approach to the introduction of bills and their debating;
4. Lack of training for members of parliament and parliamentary support staff; (Lindroth 2005)<sup>5</sup>

As noted above, there is little scholarship on parliamentary practice in the Pacific Islands. However, an unpublished paper by Mose Saitala, formerly Governance Advisor at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, summarised current challenges when addressing a Commonwealth Secretariat-sponsored conference on "Government and Opposition" held in Fiji in 2005:

1. Parliaments lack real independence, especially from the executive branch.
2. The role of speaker must be enhanced. Five parliaments seek speakers from outside house membership in order to make the position impartial; but in general the position lacks status and speakers are not well compensated.
3. Many Elections Offices lack independence;
4. There are weaknesses in regulatory framework governing parliaments: constitutions and standing orders need to be aligned with best practices of parliamentary democracy;
5. The relationship of parliament and constituents needs cultivation: there is a lack of civic education by parliaments. Weak emphasis on part of public in legislation and law making. There are youth parliaments to educate
6. There are prolonged absences of MPs from sittings
7. There is too short a time between reading of bills.
8. There is lack of will to exercise oversight functions
9. There is need to strengthen audit body – and who audits the auditor?
10. Parliaments are poorly resourced. They lack, for instance, resources for per diems for committees, and this leads to a lack of sittings.
11. There is much political instability within legislatures.<sup>6</sup>

There is thus considerable convergence of views on content of development agendas for Pacific Parliaments: education and learning – (civic and professional), resources (human, financial, and

<sup>5</sup> online at <http://www.undppc.org.fj/userfiles/file/Final%20Workshop%20Report%20050505.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Saitala, M. (2005). "Developments in Forum island Legislatures." GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION - ROLES, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, A workshop organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, Sheraton Royal Denerau Resort, Nadi, 29-31 August 2005.

material), and mustering sufficient will to enforce rules and to implement change. Subsequent assistance projects have included induction programs for new members (Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands (twice), Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu), or longer-term parliamentary support programs (Fiji, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands).<sup>7</sup>

Induction programs have generally been approximately 5 days in duration, and have brought in resource people with particular parliamentary experience, whether in debating skills, committee skills, or knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Although such programs undoubtedly have value, there is no compulsion for MPs to attend, and there may be a tendency for the very MPs who require skills upgrading to absent themselves from these learning opportunities.

Smaller “Parliamentary Assistance” projects have been implemented in Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu.<sup>8</sup> In 2010 the UNDP is supporting induction programs in Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat has played a specific role in promoting leadership development in Pacific parliaments through the establishment in 2000 of the Forum Presiding Officers Conference. FPOC has since been amalgamated with the Pacific Parliamentary Assembly on Population and Development (PPAPD) and been allocated resources for the establishment of a permanent secretariat to be based on Cook Islands.<sup>9</sup>

Other parliamentary studies have taken place. In 2006 the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat commissioned a study on the status of women in Pacific Parliaments (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2006).

Of these various initiatives the Solomon Islands Parliamentary Strengthening project is widely credited as having had significant impact on the conduct of parliamentary procedures, provision of information and research support for members, committee functioning, human resource management, parliamentary education, and community engagement.<sup>10</sup>

## **A. Parliamentary Committees**

Across the region, parliaments appoint parliamentary committee but as indicated in the LNA’s, these need strengthening. Public Accounts Committees, in particular, play a crucial role in oversight of the financial affairs of government on behalf of the parliament. Some PACs have status under a public

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<sup>7</sup> The program for Fiji was suspended consequent to the military’s take-over of government in December 2006, and Papua New Guinea’s program has not been implemented.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.undp.org.fj/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=38](http://www.undp.org.fj/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=38)

<sup>9</sup> “The joint Secretariat is aptly named the “PPAPD-FPOCC Secretariat”:  
[http://www.spc.int/ppapd/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=100&Itemid=80](http://www.spc.int/ppapd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=100&Itemid=80).

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.undp.org.fj/pdf/SOI\\_Parliamentary\\_Strengthening\\_Project\\_Phase2.pdf](http://www.undp.org.fj/pdf/SOI_Parliamentary_Strengthening_Project_Phase2.pdf)

financial management act as well as Parliament's standing orders. However, even the most productive of PACs - that of Papua New Guinea - comprises a staff of just three. Whereas individual committees may operate well from time to time there are some systemic issue to address, such as the tendency for governments to use committee appointments as a form of patronage (in some cases giving committee chairs considerable remuneration and conditions and thus ensuring their continued loyalty), and the danger that MPs only attend meetings for a period sufficient to collect their allotted per diems.

## **B. Constituency Development Funds**

The increasing size and scope of constituency funds is causing concern.<sup>11</sup> Across Melanesia, MPs are allocated considerable constituency funds and a certain amount of time will be spent in their electorates supervising their disbursement. At the current time, each member of the Papua New Guinea parliament receives 10 million kina per year for use under the DISP – District Improvement Services Program. As there are 109 members of parliament, this amounts to approximately 118 million kina annually. As this is a fairly new program no audit information has yet been made publicly available, concerning either the disbursement of funds, or project impact (the first review has been completed, but not yet made public).

In Solomon Islands there is a double concern. First there is the matter of accountability of funds distributed to MPs (both financial and performance concerns), and secondly the fact that for a number of this assistance has been supplied by the Government of Taiwan directly to MPs rather than through formal government channels.

Given the size of electoral development funds (constituency funds), and the role of MPs in decision-making concerning the expenditure of these funds, it is important to consider the relationship between legislative and executive powers. It is interesting to note that a series of benchmarks for Pacific Island parliaments issued in 2009 states at 1.3.3:

“A legislator may not simultaneously serve in the judicial branch or as a civil servant of the executive branch.” (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Forum Presiding Officers Conference et al. 2010, p3)

An additional issue concerns the legitimacy of MPs in Papua New Guinea having automatic membership in provincial government by virtue of their membership in the national chamber. The CPAs 2010 principles state at section 1.3.2: “In a bicameral Legislature, a legislator may not be a

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<sup>11</sup> This concern is shared more widely than Pacific: see van Zyl, A. (2010). What is Wrong with the Constituency Development Funds?, International Budget Partnership. Budget Brief 10.

Member of both Houses.” (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Forum Presiding Officers Conference et al. 2010, p 3)

What has fuelled the growth of constituency funds in the Melanesian states? Culturally, there is an expectation that the Member of Parliament distribute resources in the tradition of a “big man”. Leaving aside the issue of whose resources are being distributed, a second impetus to the involvement of MPs in service delivery has been perception of poor performance by the executive branch of government. This has been, at least, the justification put forward by MPs. It raises the issue of the proper role of a member of the legislature, whether of the government or opposition side, in oversight of executive power.

## **V. Political party establishment and operation**

This section will look in brief at key issues concerning the establishment and operation of political parties in Pacific Islands. Traditionally, democratic theory has proposed that political dialogue is best grounded in the establishment and interventions of political parties. And this theory, in turn, has been premised on presumptions about the legitimacy and representativeness of parties and on the utility of democratic debate in a legislature modelled in some manner after the tradition of Westminster. These are presumptions that much of the literature on political parties in Pacific context has shared.<sup>12</sup>

Close inspection of the legal status of political parties in Pacific Island countries, and of the roles ascribed to their members, suggests that they struggle for the most part to satisfy the requirements of representativeness, inclusiveness, or authenticity as entities established in pursuit of the public interest. I raise this issue not to explore the political alignments of particular parties but to explore the impact of their conduct on the formation and progress of government.

The concept of political parties was introduced into the Pacific at the time of independence. Existing Legislative Councils combined appointed colonial members with firstly appointed and later elected Pacific Island members. At independence, parties were formed to contest seats in the larger legislatures (eg Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa), but the elected members of smaller chambers, including those of Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru, coalesced around ‘factions’ rather than formalised parties.

Some Pacific leaders, including Fiji’s Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, were attracted to the idea of a “government of national unity” in which all the talents of the parliament were made available to government irrespective of party affiliation, but such notions were discouraged in the 1960s and

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<sup>12</sup> Rich, R., L. Hambly, et al., Eds. (2006). Political Parties in the Pacific Islands. Canberra, Pandanus Books.

1970s by colonial advisors who were concerned at the prospect of one-party states developing as occurred in some former colonies in Africa.

In his memoir *The Pacific Way* Ratu Sir Kamisese refers to his attempt, in the lead up to general elections in Fiji in 1982, to establish a “government of national unity”:

To me, with the two main parties fairly well balanced and on reasonable terms (which were likely to degenerate in the heat of the election atmosphere), it seemed an opportune time to promote once more my continuing dream of a government of national unity. I first floated this alternative to the Westminster system in December 1969, during the preparatory talks for the 1970 Constitutional Conference, and I had found that the membership system worked along those lines, though it did not fully recognize it at that the time.

I proposed it to a meeting of the Alliance Council at Sabeto in 1980, only to find that it was strongly opposed by some of my colleagues. I was disappointed, for they were people who were happy to use my name, and indeed my presence at their meetings, but they were unwilling to support this initiative. Were some of them fearful they would lose their ministerial positions? Perhaps that was the reason, for a unity government would certainly have had that effect.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless the idea of a “government of national unity” is raised periodically in the region, although opportunities to experiment with it have been dashed: Fiji’s 1997 constitution required government to be formed through inclusion of parties in proportion to their parliamentary numbers, but the ethno-nationalist Qarase government refused to implement the model even in the face of a court direction; when such an effort was finally initiated following the 2006 general election the labour party, which stood to gain from the opportunity, imploded rather than grasp it.

In just a few instances were parties formed on the basis of clear philosophical or policy platforms. In Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia, parties were focused on achieving independence, and in the cases of Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea (perhaps more than elsewhere) there was an interest in “Melanesian socialism”. John Momis, who has recently been elected President of the Autonomous Province of Bougainville, is among the few politicians in Papua New Guinea who has consistently adhered to a political philosophy of “integral human development”.<sup>14</sup> Tonga’s emergent parties are focused on the characteristics of “Tongan Democracy”. There were also parties premised on sub-regional or ethnic concerns, and in Fiji the National Alliance Party succeeded for several decades on a doctrine of cooperative multi-racialism; but no party has grounded itself on broader Pacific regionalism.

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<sup>13</sup> Mara, K., Ratu Sir (1997). *The Pacific way : a memoir / Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara*. Honolulu, Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i, Pacific Islands Development Program, East-West Center : University of Hawai'i Press.

<sup>14</sup> And perhaps in an earlier period Utula Samana, see “Papua New Guinea: which way?”

There has also been an undercurrent of concern about the need for parties in the Pacific context. There is, after all, no cleavage in Pacific political economy (in the Melanesian states at least) similar to the class divisions between the ruling and working classes of Europe, which gave rise to the conservative and labour ideologies of the modern period. Given the Pacific's reliance on agriculture, the land, and the sea, one might expect green parties to figure more prominently.<sup>15</sup>

This absence of underlying political philosophy has had a significant effect on subsequent behaviour of political parties and their individual members who are not tied to each other by values so much as by strategic interests. We must therefore ask who, exactly, do political parties in Pacific jurisdictions represent? Is it "party members"? My research suggests that party memberships are small, and imprecise. The current paper provides additional empirical data supportive of these propositions. Information was sought through phone interviews with party officials in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Palau, Kiribati, Samoa, Vanuatu, and Fiji. To the extent possible, additional information was sought by fax and email.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of Solomon Islands, 12 of 17 currently active "parties" have legal personality under the *Charitable Trust Act* of 1964. The five without such registration include the Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement, which claims a membership of between 7000 – 8000 but which like the National Party, the People's Alliance Party, the Solomon Islands Liberal Party, and the Solomon Islands Democratic Party, maintains no official records of party membership or meetings. Of twenty currently or previously active parties in the country, eight had memberships under 100, ten between one and five-hundred, and only two claimed to have memberships in excess of 1000; and few if any of these parties kept records of party meetings and decisions, or membership subscriptions. The Solomon Islands Social Credit party led by Manasseh Sogovare is alone in claiming to maintain official record of some 10,000 members. The National Party, which estimates its support base to be 400-500, holds an annual convention in addition to a monthly executive meeting, raises funds through fundraising activities and sponsorship from business interests including logging countries, but is under no legal obligation to report the size or origins of donations.<sup>17</sup> Parties are generally only activated during electoral periods, and at other times remain dormant.

Do parties represent all voters who supported them in electoral contests? In which case, support in many Pacific jurisdictions is "fluid" and fluctuating.

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<sup>15</sup> The Australian Labor Party has sought to cultivate pan-Pacific party links.

<sup>16</sup> The author acknowledges research assistance by Raijijeli Bulatale.

<sup>17</sup> Phone interview with Francis Oridani, 12 September 2007.

Country	Political Parties
Cook Islands	5
Federated States of Micronesia	0
Kiribati	5
Marshall Islands	3
Nauru	3
New Caledonia	30
Palau	2
Papua New Guinea	38
Solomon Islands	21
Tokelau	0
Tonga	2
Tuvalu	0
Vanuatu	17

In Cook Islands, the two parties currently registered (Cook Islands Party and the Cook Islands Democratic Party) do not maintain formal membership records whilst claiming 3,500 and 4,500 members respectively.

In Vanuatu fifteen parties are registered, of which only the Vanu'aku party established before independence by Walter Lini has clear a membership, complete with regional sub-committees, a Commissars' council, and a central administrative council. Such other parties as the National United Party of Ham Lini, the Union of

Moderate Parties led by Serge Vohor, the Vanuatu Republican Party of Maxime Carlot Korman, the Grin Pati of Moana Carcasses Kalosil, the People's Progressive Party of Sato Kilman, the Melanesian Progressive Party of Barak Sope, the National Community Association of Joshua Kalsakau, the People's Action Party of Silas Hakwa, or the Namangki Aute of Paul Telukluk - maintain no membership lists.

My conclusions were set out in a paper written with Professor Ron Duncan in 2008:

While there is intense political-party activity and competition in clientelist states, most such parties remain fluid, populist, legally unrestrained, policy-poor, and administratively bare. Whereas much scholarship on Pacific politics presumes as much, little of it is empirically based or offers reasons why this is so. Our research indicates that just one Pacific state has enacted legislation regulating the conduct of political parties. Papua New Guinea's *Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates 2003* requires political parties to have a minimum of 500 subscribed members and to hold incorporation under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1966* if it seeks to field candidates in general elections. Despite this requirement, current records held by the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties are only as complete and correct as the information provided by party officials.<sup>18</sup>

In the current political climate in Papua New Guinea, in which the court has recently removed as constitutional the constraints set out in the Organic Law describe above that had thus far prevented MPs them from "hopping" between parties, one spokesman has explained a current move against the Somare government in these terms:

<sup>18</sup> Duncan, R. and G. Hassall (2008). "How Pervasive is Clientelist Politics in the Pacific?" Second Annual Interdisciplinary Social Science Conference, Economics and Democracy, Research School of Social Science at The Australian National University, 8-10 December.

“We have decided on this bloc because for too long we have been marginalised, overlooked for ministerial positions in government and funding for the electorates. We have to change this situation and the time has come,”<sup>19</sup>

The issue, as everyone understands, is access to executive power rather than merely legislative. In 2008-09 the Samoan government vigorously sought to suppress the flight of MPs from the ruling party in the context of opposition to its decision to shift traffic from “left hand” to “right hand” drive.

Much of the concern about the operation of party systems in Pacific Island context concerns the “fluidity” of political parties, and the movement of MPs between them. Such “floor-crossing” tactics have had considerable impact on the formation and exercise of legislative and executive power. The most direct impact of party fluidity is executive instability, which is manifest in no-confidence votes, shifts of allegiance, pre-occupation by successive heads of government with maintaining loyalties, and the performance of legislatures (numbers of sitting days, performance of parliamentary committees, progress with passage of legislative programs etc).

Responses to these problems have focused on reforms to mandate stability: party registration, discouragement of independent MPs, restraints on party-hopping, automatic triggering of dissolution through no-confidence votes, power of constituencies to exercise recall, and enlargement of cabinet size to accommodate more sectional interests.<sup>20</sup>

The future operation of parties and their impact on government stability in Westminster systems will therefore remain problematic: the courts will rule, in keeping with fundamental principles of free expression and association as set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that it is improper to legally restrain MPs from choosing and changing allegiances; but the lack of philosophic boundaries between MPs will continue to facilitate such shifts with more prospects of success than of failure (there is no censure for changing sides as affects a conservative who becomes progressive and vice versa).

The statement of basic principles agreed to by Pacific Legislators just this year includes at point four:

#### **4. POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY GROUPS AND CROSS PARTY GROUPS**

##### **4.1 Political Parties**

4.1.1 The right of freedom of association shall exist for legislators, as for all people.

4.1.2 Any restrictions on the legality of political parties shall be narrowly drawn with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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<sup>19</sup> Chimbu Governor, Father John Garia, MP

<http://www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=10766175684c3bf73f289324d5d186>

<sup>20</sup> In 2007 PNG Prime Minister Somare allocated ministry or vice-ministry positions to at least one member of each of 14 parties in his coalition and wanted to expand the cabinet beyond the existing 28 ministries. An expansion in the size of cabinet has also been made in Tuvalu.

And:

### **4.3 Cross Party Groups**

4.3.1 Legislators shall have the right to form interest caucuses around issues of common concern such as Health, Education, Community, Private Sector Development, Women or MDGs. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Forum Presiding Officers Conference et al. 2010, p 9-10)

Henderson has pointed to the dilemma that political parties present in Melanesia: they are seen as essential to the operation of Westminster democracies, but they “have proved to be a particularly divisive factor in the Pacific Context.” (Henderson 2003, p230) In the Solomon Islands context Kabutaulaka has suggested that the riot of 2006 has origins embedded in the operation of Westminster in that country. (Kabutaulaka) Concern was also expressed during debates of the Constituent Assembly of Bougainville, where the suggestion was put for the formation of a democratically elected assembly, but for the banning of political parties:

“1. People do not want political parties because:

They will cause division in Bougainville

- that division will come from different people and groups in Bougainville supporting different parties
- we need to maintain the unity developed during the peace process
- the activities of political parties in PNG work against the interests of the people – we do not want that in Bougainville
- political parties do not operate on the basis of principle or policy. All they are seeking is power. They are not looking after the people.

2. political parties can come later:

- after the systems of government are tried and tested
- after the referendum

3. What’s wrong with Melanesian consensus? Political Parties are not consistent with consensus politics because they highlight division not unity. They are by their nature looking for an opportunity to criticise their opponents not at how they can work together to find consensus. (Bougainville Constitutional Commission 2004) p. 226)

## **VI. Public leadership**

The quality of parliamentary leadership and practice is a topic of interest not only in the Pacific states, but globally, for in a great many countries the performance of Parliaments and parliamentarians does

not live up to ideals or expectations. Whereas people are justified in expecting their elected leaders to perform their duties to high standard, the reality is that members of parliament mostly obtain their positions through popular vote rather than on the basis of specific performance or experience criterion. This means that whereas a member of parliament may be a good organizer of people, a good mobilizer of public of opinion, or an effect orator, there is no guarantee that he or she has expertise in other desirable areas, such as knowledge of public sector management, planning and forecasting, budgeting and finance, public policy assessment, executive oversight, committee functioning, diplomacy, dispute resolution, law, or ethics. In societies experiencing extreme political conflict or even physical confrontation, there is no guarantee that MPs have the capabilities for “peace leadership” even though this is what their situation requires of them.<sup>21</sup> To expect members of parliament to possess skills in all these areas, on other hand, would be to hope for too much, and most probably turn parliaments into management committees rather than the chambers for the expression of democratic thought and leadership they are intended to be.

In general terms, public leadership in the region can be characterised as a contest between those in traditional positions of authority (especially chiefs and religious leaders), and those who contest introduced positions of authority (through democratic politics - (such as parliamentarians, ministers, and prime ministers, etc) and an expanding public sector (principally permanent secretaries/CEOs of government departments and other public institutions). In this often unspoken contest democratically installed leaders may have formal responsibility for their portfolios while moral leadership continues to reside with non-elected traditional leaders who were installed in other ways – and whose consent may well be required if the will of the people is required for them to succeed.

Pacific leaders have been challenged since independence to provide effective public leadership, state-building, nation-building, political coalition-building, dispute resolution, the establishment of national legal and policy frameworks, and economic development, to name a few. But in addition to demonstrable advances in each of these areas, there has been corruption at the highest levels of public office; a lack of responsiveness in such areas as legislative renewal; an absence of parliamentary oversight of the executive or other vital parliamentary activity such as the operation of a parliamentary accounts committee; an inability to see plans through to full implementation and subsequent evaluation; and an inability to make the hard economic policy decisions required to foster economic growth. The “rapid social change” that Pacific states and societies have experienced in the past five decades or so has had significant impact on leadership performance.

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<sup>21</sup> At a meeting in 2005 Sir Paul Tovua attributed the “ethnic conflict” in Solomon Islands 2000-2003 to a crisis of leadership.

The majority of contemporary Pacific societies are influenced by both “traditional” and “modern” leadership practices. In Vanuatu the constitution recognizes a Council of Chiefs, and there are significant “custom” movements on Tanna (Jon Frum) and Pentecost (the Turaga nation).<sup>22</sup> In chiefly societies such as Fiji, the first leaders of the nation were chiefs rather than commoners (notably Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara), and the later emergence of commoners in the highest democratic offices is associated with the decline of stability. In Samoa the Matai system of chiefs continues to play an essential role in all aspects of life,<sup>23</sup> and the late Mālietoa Tanumafili II, head of state Samoa from independence in 1962 until death at the age of 94 on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2007, was renowned for his wise leadership. Yet as Meleisia notes, “While important chiefs continue to demand their traditional rights and privileges, there are signs all around us in Samoa today that they are no longer willing to carry out their communal responsibilities...” (Meleisea)

In some instances political leaders have been unable to mediate between the competing communities in their states, culminating in complete breakdown of the social and political order. In Papua New Guinea efforts by the Ombudsman Commission to enforce the country’s leadership code have resulted in numerous referrals to a Leadership Tribunal; ineffective leadership in Solomon Islands led to virtual dismantlement of state authority in 1999-2000; crises in the quality of leadership have at times also threatened stability in Vanuatu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, and other parts of the Pacific.<sup>24</sup>

Although it may be true that the notoriety of a few Pacific leaders overshadows the vast majority who content themselves with serving the public rather than also seeking private gain, it nonetheless also remains the case that there is widespread public concern in the Pacific states about the motivations and activities of many who seek leadership positions. A recent report in Papua New Guinea, the *Moti Report*, for instance, found anomalies in administration by the police, defence, civil aviation and Prime minister’s department.

In Papua New Guinea, where popular sentiment holds that parliamentarians fail to place the interests of their nation, or of their constituencies, above their own, students at the nation's two major

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<sup>22</sup> The Turaga of Pentecost espouse “Seven laws of the land that supervise”: 1) Peace is paramount and is collectively owned. Chiefs are called *ratahigi* - to remind them of their responsibilities. They are the mother of the people, forms of respect are vital; 2) Matrilineal society –supported by a myth that a woman was the first person on the island; 3) Indigenous politics: Leaders are born and nurtured or become chiefs by their own making but are continuously nurtured on their important role; 4) Leadership is communally owned; 5) Chiefs exist for the people; 6) Sara – refers to the importance of the common ceremonial ground in the village; 7) Gamali – refers to the importance of the village meeting house.

<sup>23</sup> So'o, S. (2008). *Democracy & Custom in Samoa: an uneasy alliance*. Suva, IPS Publications.

<sup>24</sup> See, generally, Brown, M. A., Ed. (2007). *Security and Development in the Pacific Islands: Social Resilience in Emerging States*. Boulder, CO, International Peace Academy and the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies; Lynne Rienner Publishers.

universities rioted in 1991 when MPs voted themselves a pay-rise, and when the MPs refused to back down, preferred to have their second semester cancelled than to give in. Almost two decades on, Pacific MPs continue to make headlines for the size of their salaries and privileges, their breaches of ethics, and their political manoeuvring.

The reputation of MPs in Solomon Islands was recently diminished by an episode concerning entitlements. The Parliamentary Entitlements Commission (PEC), which has status separate from the Parliament, but headed by the Minister for Finance Snyder Rini, awarded large entitlements not only to MPs but to their spouses. Public outrage was such that the Sikua Government was obliged to respond, and it did so by challenging the PEC's decision in the courts. On 22<sup>nd</sup> October Chief Justice Sir Albert Palmer quashed the PEC's ruling on the basis that it had gone beyond its powers in making an award not only to MPs but to their spouses, who were not members of Parliament and who were not therefore entitled to such benefits.

Although codes of conduct have been devised and deployed to ensure greater accountability of Public servants, the parliamentarians of no Pacific state have as yet bound themselves to a similarly high standard of accountability. Papua New Guinea has a leadership code overseen by an independent Ombudsman Commission, and the Commission has been responsible, through reference of leaders to the Leadership Tribunal, for the removal of a significant number of public officials who found to have misused their public office. Yet few of these officials have faced criminal charges or convictions, and have lost reputation and status rather than been stripped of ill-gained wealth.

At the current time several key Ministers stand accused of transgressions of the leadership code: Treasurer and Finance Minister Patrick Pruaitch is currently suspended from office, whilst Minister for State Enterprises Arthur Somare remains in cabinet having challenged the Commission's referral in the courts. Concurrently Esa'ala MP Moses Maladina proposed constitutional amendments purportedly to ensure greater efficiency and accountability to the work of the Ombudsman Commission, but which were widely perceived as being the most recent of numerous attempts by politicians to restrict the ambit and effectiveness of the Commission's oversight of public leaders.

From the point of view of parliamentarians, effective oversight of the bureaucracy is a concern. In the case of Papua New Guinea, the public accounts committee has made more than 50 recommendations to prosecute public servants, with not a single one subsequently facing charges. The benchmarks published by the Pacific legislators in 2010 suggests at 7.1.6:

“the oversight authority of the Legislature shall include meaningful and timely oversight of accountability institutions, such as election commissions, anti-corruption commissions, ombudsmen, information commissions and offices of Auditors General. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Forum Presiding Officers Conference et al. 2010, p 13-14)

These benchmarks further set out at point 10:

## ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

### **10.1 Transparency and Integrity**

10.1.1 Legislators should maintain high standards of accountability, transparency and responsibility in the conduct of all public and parliamentary matters.

10.1.2 The Legislature shall approve and enforce a code of conduct, including rules on conflicts of interest and the acceptance of gifts.

10.1.3 Legislatures shall require legislators to fully and publicly disclose their financial assets and business interests.

10.1.4 There shall be mechanisms to prevent and detect corruption, and bring to justice legislators and staff engaged in corrupt practices. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Forum Presiding Officers Conference et al. 2010, p 17)

The “Biketawa Declaration” of 2000 established a role for leaders in solving crises in the region. Then, the 2001 meeting of speakers of Pacific island legislatures declared a set of guiding principles for legislatures (1st Pacific Island Speakers' Forum 2001) and in 2003 Pacific Leaders endorsed the “Forum Principles of Good Leadership”:

“Key principles of good governance which we hold to be fundamental to good leadership:

1. RESPECT FOR THE LAW AND SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT
2. RESPECT FOR CULTURAL VALUES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS
3. RESPECT FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION
4. RESPECT FOR PEOPLE ON WHOSE BEHALF LEADERS EXERCISE POWER
5. RESPECT FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
6. ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY
7. DILIGENCE
8. NATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY
9. RESPECT FOR OFFICE”<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after, the 2003 “Forum Principles of Accountability” drew on standards developed by the IMF, to provide a basis for a biennial stock-take of implementation of leadership codes and principles of accountability presented to meetings of the Forum Economic Ministers (FEMM).

- 1: Budget processes, including multi-year frameworks, to ensure Parliament/Congress is sufficiently informed to understand the longer term implications of appropriation decisions.
- 2 The accounts of governments, state-owned enterprises and statutory corporations to be promptly and fully audited.
- 3 Loan agreements or guarantees entered into by governments to be presented to Parliament/Congress.
- 4 All government and public sector contracts to be competitively awarded, and publicly reported.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/good-governance/>, accessed 3 March 2009

- 5 Contravention of financial regulations to be promptly disciplined.
- 6 Public Accounts Committees of the legislature to be empowered to require disclosure.
- 7 Auditor General and Ombudsman to be provided with adequate fiscal resources and independent reporting rights to Parliament/Congress.
- 8 Central bank with statutory responsibility for non-partisan monitoring and advice, and regular and independent publication of informative reports. (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2000)

## **VII. Development projects**

Apart from the strong presence of UNDP in Pacific legislatures, a range of other parliamentary associations also undertake development activities. These include the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Harris 2004); the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum; the Centre for Democratic Institutions; the Pacific Islands Association of Legislatures; and Parliamentarians for Global Action. UNIFEM's Pacific Regional Office currently supports a "Women in Politics" program.<sup>26</sup> MPs are also being targeted to show leadership on specific issues, such as reproductive health (The Pacific Parliamentary Assembly on Population and Development) and democratic oversight of the security sector (UNDP).

The Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), based at the Australian National University, has been running workshops for members of parliament since 1999. Between its establishment and 2004 some 77 participants from nine legislatures, including many from the Pacific, had benefitted from the Centre's initiatives, and many additional retreats have been held in the years since. In the process, CDI has developed a valuable set of resources on its website.

The World Bank also conducts training for MPs. In 2008 the leadership program at the University of the South Pacific hosted a Parliamentary Professional Development Course convened over a broadband connection, which was attended by Fiji's parliamentary staff and at least one former MP (Krishna Datt).

Commonwealth and state parliaments in Australia and New Zealand take an interest in Pacific legislatures through recently established twinning arrangements with Pacific legislatures, and there is also interest via the Australasian Study of Parliament Group.

Although each of the projects referred to above has a leadership development dimension, none can be said to have the development of the capacities of MPs as their principle focus. One final

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<sup>26</sup> <http://pacific.unifem.org/index.php?cat=15>

project referred to in this paper does provide such a focus, although it is broader in scope than Pacific legislatures only.

### Parliamentary Careers: ARC project

In 2008 a research project on Parliamentary Careers entitled “Design, Delivery and Evaluation of Improved Professional Development” was awarded funding by the Australian Research Council. The project, led by Associate Professor Ken Coghill of Monash University, comprises a team of academics, administrators, and current members of parliament.<sup>27</sup>

Research undertaken in the course of developing the grant application determined that existing professional development programs, devised by parliamentary chamber staff (also referred to as training or capacity building i.e. ‘the development of the ability of individuals (and) institutions ... to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner’<sup>38</sup>) – as noted in the case of Pacific programs in the preceding section - are overwhelmingly limited to orientation sessions, although some extend to induction sessions (skills development).

In nascent democracies professional development programs are frequently supported by donor agencies through parliamentary assistance projects. Like those offered in established democracies, they emphasise the ‘how to’ aspect but fail to address more fundamental matters such as the importance of maintaining probity relationships between institutions and the crucial role they play in protecting human civil and political rights. In stark contrast to programs for public servants, judges and those working in the private sector, there is little or no training for committee chairs, parliamentary secretaries or ministers.

Consequently, the aim of this research project is to provide independent, evidence-based, research which provides those who seek to design and deliver professional development programs with data on which to base them. Its aims are:

1. Determine the induction and competencies desired by parliamentarians and the extent, nature and effectiveness of orientation, induction and on-going professional development programs.
2. Investigate motivations and incentives for parliaments to offer programs and for parliamentarians to participate in them.
3. Evaluate the extent to which professional development programs affect individual and collective chamber performance and methods for evaluating efficacy.
4. Determine factors influencing the effectiveness of programs supported by donor agencies, with special reference to the Pacific region.
5. Develop a better practice framework and implementation strategy, create and maintain an interactive multilingual website for those delivering programs; provide

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<sup>27</sup> Dr Ross Donohue; Dr Peter Holland; Associate Professor Colleen Lewis; The Hon Kevin Rozzoli AM; Ms Yeshe Smith; Mr Andy Richardson; and Associate Professor Graham Hassall.

evidence-based information; and establish a forum for contact and the exchange of ideas.

In summary, there are a number of initiatives in the region to strengthen democratic processes and the functioning of the legislature. However, when it comes to development of leadership capacity of Members of Parliament, training programs have been delivered through generic programs that lack a contextualised needs assessment. The Monash “Parliamentary Careers” project will make a contribution to remedying this approach.

## **VIII. Conclusions**

This paper has reported empirical findings on the establishment and operation of party systems in the Pacific, and on the development challenges faced by Pacific Parliaments. It is a ‘defence of politics’ in the sense that its fundamental interest is in identifying those political practices which most effectively identify, and help resolve, societal problems. On a theoretic note it has raised questions concerning which deliberative/communicative processes are most conducive to obtaining outcomes that satisfy public interest requirements. Current evidence suggests that Pacific Parliaments have established a fundamental platform for operations, on which they now need to develop more substantial achievements in a number of directions: physical infrastructure and financing, human resource development, research and library services, committee secretariats, etc. Politically, they need to establish autonomy to ensure that they don’t remain the “rubber stamp” of the executive. In order to make these advances the Parliaments require their elected members to adopt a posture of learning. Progress needs to be made, too, with civic education and civic engagement, since it is citizen preferences which place representatives in legislatures and which ultimately determine the choice of activities carried out there. The adversarial nature of Westminster politics places an additional challenge on the parliamentary system as a whole, since Pacific Islands’ politics doesn’t divide conveniently into “two-party” dynamics. Parties appear to be, besides, alignments around personalities and ethnic and geographic groupings rather than fundamental principles, and therefore remain strategically rather than policy oriented. All these factors make it difficult to see how these parliaments will be led by other than transactionally-oriented leaders whose strategic interests remain paramount.

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