

## Chapter 4

### The Election Campaign and Media

#### Campaign calendar

Although Papua New Guinea does not have a formally prescribed campaign period, the campaign was generally considered to have begun upon the close of candidate nominations on 24 May 2012. Campaigning was required to officially conclude at midnight on 22 June 2012, the day before the polling period began.

General adherence to the official end of the campaigning period was reported, and the Group mostly witnessed respect for this during the polling period, such as efforts to conceal or remove campaign posters in the vicinity of polling stations.

#### The campaign environment

The Group was in Papua New Guinea only for the final few days of the campaign period. We were able to witness some final campaign activity both in Port Moresby and in deployment locations. We also spoke with a range of stakeholders including representatives of candidates and political parties, civil society organisations, and other observer groups about the campaign.

It was reported to the Group that campaigning was generally competitive and, aside from some regrettable incidents of violence in the Highlands, peaceful.

#### Political parties

At the time of the 2012 elections a record 46 political parties were registered under the OLIPPAC, 42 of which endorsed candidates in the election. Fifteen of these were new parties. Only 1250 of the 3428 candidates represented political parties: the election saw a high percentage of independent candidates, with 2185 standing as independents.

The party system is weaker in Papua New Guinea than in many other countries. While there are some large, well-established parties, most continue to form around particular personalities rather than ideology or policy, membership tends to be fluid, and party affiliation has historically had a limited relationship to voter behaviour. *The Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates* (OLIPPAC) was put in place to strengthen political parties by requiring their formal registration and enforcing some party discipline, but the Supreme Court's rejection of key provisions of OLIPPAC in 2010, and the subsequent political crisis of 2011–12, led to further fracturing in the major parties.

There were two political parties led by women, but the major parties nominated few women,

and the vast majority of women candidates stood as independents. All of the political party representatives who spoke to the Group agreed that women were much less likely to get nominated since they stood a significantly lower chance of being elected. While some supported special measures to address the imbalances, others were opposed or reluctant.

## **Key issues**

### ***Campaign financing and 'money politics'***

The OLIPPAC requires parties to file annual financial returns, but the returns relating to the election period only fall due the following year. While party deregistration remains a threat for those failing to file, the IPPCC lacks the resources to investigate the veracity of the reports submitted. In addition, financial donations to political parties in excess of PGK500,000 must be declared to the IPPCC. However, it was reported that few parties adhered to such requirements.

Concerns were raised with the group about candidates demonstrating their capacity to 'provide' for their constituents and buying support through generous hand-outs of money, food or alcohol in the run up to elections. While such practices have been a long-standing feature of elections in PNG, the Group was informed that in 2012 they were occurring on a scale far greater than ever before. We heard, for example, reports of candidates boasting about the millions of kina they had to hand out, and of amounts as high as PGK3000 being handed to individual voters for their loyalty.

Vote-buying behaviour is further entrenched by high and growing expectations among constituents of material reward in exchange for votes. Members of the Group spoke to voters in some locations who openly acknowledged that they were awaiting the arrival of candidates or their representatives to deliver cash for their votes. The Group witnessed and received numerous reports, particularly in the Highlands, of such bribery and vote buying during the campaign period. However, these reports are very difficult to verify, as are links between vote buying and voter behaviour during polling.

Candidates are generally expected to finance campaigning from their own resources, even when endorsed by political parties. The practices of 'money politics' therefore often lead to high levels of personal debt for candidates, increasing the stakes for success and creating volatility during the count if financial outlay does not translate into electoral success.

The Limited Preferential Vote (LPV) system was largely welcomed as a positive introduction in 2007, helping to reduce violence and antagonism, particularly in the Highlands, between candidates and their supporters as they sought second or third preference votes from their rivals. However, in relation to 'money politics', it was reported that the LPV system had exacerbated a culture of 'votes for sale' by enabling the selling of voting preferences.

Unethical campaign tactics and financing remain a significant concern and are perpetuated by cultural factors such as personality driven politics, a short term and material approach to

campaigning, generally low expectations of what politicians will deliver once elected, and weak links between voter behaviour and political ideology. These issues are compounded by weak institutional oversight and limited capacity to ensure transparency and accountability in campaign activity.

Some candidates met by observers also complained that the effective shortening of the campaign period by three weeks, caused by the delayed issue of writs, had favoured wealthier candidates who were better equipped to deploy resources in the shorter period.

## ***Media***

The Papua New Guinea media is active and growing steadily as the demand for information increases and more Papua New Guineans become aware of the relevance of news and information. Freedom of expression and association are enshrined in the Constitution, with Section 46(2)(b) providing that 'every person has the right to freedom of expression and publication'. It goes on to explicitly cite the right to 'freedom of the press and other mass communications media'.

Papua New Guinea has two dominant daily newspapers, two weekly newspapers, two television stations, the state radio broadcaster (National Broadcasting Corporation – NBC), as well as several FM and AM radio stations. It also has a small but influential and rapidly-growing online community of bloggers and social media users. Mobile phones and other mobile devices have become increasingly accessible within the last few years, and have become a major tool for news and information. Internet services are not as prevalent, with less than 1 per cent of the population having access to the internet. According to a 2007 survey by Anglo Pacific Research Ltd, commissioned by the Media for Development Initiative, radio is the medium with the widest reach, with 51 per cent of the population claiming to be listeners.

The Media Council of Papua New Guinea oversees the performance of the industry with a mandate to promote a free, pluralistic and vibrant media that profits from promoting democratic governance and human development in PNG by 2020. Working alongside the Council, the Independent Media Standards Committee is a stakeholder group, independent from the government, with responsibility for ensuring that media adheres to ethical standards, and which deals with press and broadcast complaints. However, there have been reports, including from the regional advocacy group Pacific Freedom Forum, that the Committee is ineffective in addressing complaints. This is cause for concern at a time when ethical standards are being challenged by the revolutionary changes in the way in which news and information are produced, funded, packaged, disseminated and consumed. In many areas, these changes lead to less accurate reporting; questionable sourcing; an escalation in the use of 'manufactured news'; increase in self-censorship; growth of subjective or objective reporting, and a reduction in sustained, in-depth reporting on the ground, particularly investigative reporting.

### ***The media and the campaign***

The Group was concerned by the lack of any form of guidelines or code of conduct on media coverage of the election, mediated by the industry or the PNGEC, to safeguard fairness or equitable access by political parties to public broadcasters. The PNGEC did not stipulate any requirements for the national broadcaster to offer free air time for political party broadcasts or for local newspapers to offer a nominal amount of free space to political parties for their campaign messages. The two television stations produced special programmes for political parties to state their cases, but because of the high number of political parties contesting the election, only those led by nationally known individuals had much play.

NBC radio, and other stations such as FM100, provided a great deal of media coverage, and carried messages from various political perspectives, live news briefings, and interviews with analysts and political leaders. Election coverage by local newspapers was generally fair, including some editorials on candidates and the electorate, as well as the conduct of the elections. Overall, the media dedicated considerable time to the election campaign with major parties given the opportunity to air their views. New media also played a larger role than ever before, with several dedicated blog-sites offering commentaries on the elections, and Facebook and Twitter being used actively by voters, candidates and parties.

Covering politics in the newsroom is considered a job for senior and more experienced journalists who have developed a good understanding of the government system, the election process, laws relating to political parties, budgetary process, parliamentary processes, public expenditure and campaign financing. Politics is widely covered by the media in PNG and is prominent in most news bulletins. Other positive developments included special programming to encourage support for women candidates (partly sponsored by the United Nations), as well as the establishment of a UK Government-funded Elections Media Centre, which offered media facilitation, including internet-connected work stations where journalists could file their stories, and media rooms for news conferences and interviews. No journalists were seized or appeared in court on any charges during the campaign period.

### ***Voter education***

In the run up to the 2012 elections, the PNGEC informed the Commonwealth pre-election assessment team that the Australian-funded Electoral Support Program was working with around 90 civil society groups at the local level on voter education, including women's, church and youth groups, focusing particularly on the Highlands and other 'high-risk' provinces. In addition to providing information on the electoral process and the LPV system, these efforts also emphasised governance issues, and the importance of electing 'good leaders'.

Election messages for 2012 also integrated and promoted awareness on HIV/AIDS, with posters provided for display around polling stations, and free contraception offered in some polling stations.

Overall, the Group received positive reviews of the LPV system itself, with it being broadly accepted and welcomed in preference to the previous first-past-the-post system. It was commonly reported that voters generally understood the system, particularly with the benefit of experience from the 2007 elections.

However, the Group observed that voter awareness remained an acute issue in rural electorates, particularly amongst voters with little or no literacy. This was seen to lead to high levels of assisted voting, and delays in the processing of voters and the opening of the polling stations. In some polling stations, Presiding Officers purposely delayed the opening to allow voters to congregate in numbers around the station in order to then provide them with information on the LPV system and the correct polling procedures. These briefings were generally informative and clear, but could have been provided in advance of polling day to allow stations to open at 8.00 am as required by law. At particular stations the Group observed a tendency for polling staff and security personnel to assist every voter without their explicit request, which demonstrated a perception amongst officials that voters did not fully understand the process. This practice raised concern for the secrecy of the ballot and the ability of voters to freely cast their vote.

It was reported to the Group that education materials provided to voters were largely in English and Tok Pisin. Greater penetration of awareness campaigns remains an attainable challenge for the Electoral Commission and civil society to tackle in future.

A lack of candidate awareness was a related issue reported to the Group, with some voters stating they felt insufficiently informed to distinguish between candidates and their policies when faced with a large choice of candidates in the polling station. This issue remains to be addressed by political parties and candidates themselves.

## **Recommendations**

- Parliament should strengthen laws relating to the regulation and transparency of candidate financing. This needs to be coupled with more active enforcement of such laws, including by building the IPPCC's capacity to monitor and regulate campaign financing. Real redress for bribery and vote buying as election offences is also required.
- Media houses should introduce policies or guidelines on election coverage. Media industry bodies, working with partners such as the PNG Media Workers' Association and other agencies, should develop and encourage PNG media houses to agree upon a code of conduct on election coverage.
- Consistent and ongoing education on the electoral and registration process should be provided to all stakeholders, from voters to polling staff, scrutineers, observers, candidates and security personnel, in order to promote greater awareness of rights, practices, and legal requirements.

- Government should ensure the availability of civic education which encourages voting based on parties'/candidates' policies rather than personal relationships and clan affiliation. There is a need to foster greater demand for candidates with integrity, whose work does not stop once polling is over. The IPPCC and others are doing good work in this area, which should be continued and scaled up.