Operation of the **Single Non-Transferable Vote** in Vanuatu

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The Republic of Vanuatu is the only democracy today that employs what is known as the **Single Non-Transferable Vote** (SNTV)—a method of election using multi-member constituencies in which each voter is allowed only a single vote to cast. The SNTV was also used in Japan, Korea and Taiwan in the past, but was phased out in all three by the early 1990s. Under the SNTV, in a given multi-member constituency with \( m \) seats to be filled, any block can be assured of electing at least one representative with at least a \( 1/(m + 1) \) fraction of the vote, if it can effectively coordinate the votes of its supporters. The ideal consequence of using the SNTV is to achieve a significant degree of *proportional representation* in elections, which often means the success of multiple parties leading to the need to form coalition rather than single party governments. In contrast, there are those in the field of electoral systems who argue that proportional representation leads to instability in government and that a *plurality* method, which depends on a two-party system and single-seat constituencies, is preferable, because it has the potential to produce a more stable government. Vanuatu has, in fact, a mixed system with both single and multi-seat constituencies:

- Banks and Torres 2  
- Santo 7  
- Malo/Aore 1  
- Luganville 2  
- Ambae 3  
- Maewo 1  
- Malakula 7  
- Pentecost 4  
- Ambrym 2  
- Paama 1  
- Epi 2  
- Tonga 1

The mixed SNTV electoral system has been in use in Vanuatu since 1975, when it was adopted under the then Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides for the election in that year of the first Representative Assembly.

**Historical Background**

The Condominium was a region of joint British and French administration, which came into existence in 1906, after a half century of competition between the nationals of Great Britain and France for control over the islands of the New Hebrides (changed to Vanuatu at independence in 1980). It was a compromise solution, resulting from the fact that neither power was willing to see the other take full control. The British and French ruled uneasily over the islands until the 1960s, when the first organized political movement emerged to challenge European control—Nagriamel, a semi-cult movement based on the northern island of Santo, led by Jimmy Moli Stephens. By the mid-1970s, several additional parties had appeared on the scene reflecting a growing political rivalry within the indigenous Melanesian population based on the unusual history of joint British and French colonial rule. The country had come to be divided over the issue of independence into an Anglophone majority, represented by the New
Hebrides National Party (NHNPP) advocating rapid decolonization, and a group of minority Francophone parties, collectively known as the “Moderate” Parties—Union Communautés des Nouvelles-Hébrides (UCNH), Mouvement Autonomiste des Nouvelles-Hébrides (MANH), Tabwemasana, Nagriamel, etc.—following the official French Government position that the country was not yet ready for self-government. Indeed, the French opposed independence altogether and developed strategies in the 1960s and 70s in competition with the British. Their aim was to create a Francophone majority among Ni-Vanuatu in favour of continued French rule.

The Anglophone/Francophone divide was based primarily on the history of the Christian missionaries in Vanuatu. English speaking Anglicans and Presbyterians were the first to arrive in the mid-19th century and spread throughout the group. Several other Protestant groups—Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists and Apostolic—had also established smaller mission operations by the beginning of the 20th century. French-speaking Catholic missionaries only arrived in 1887—the later start resulting in a smaller number of converts—around 15% by the time of independence. The missionaries brought education as well as religion and, thus, the overwhelming majority of Ni-Vanuatu became English-speaking Protestants. The missionaries were allied closely with their respective national administration—the English-speaking Protestants with the British and the French-speaking Catholics with the French—and thus the Melanesian converts found themselves attached to the colonial administration in the same way. Indeed, the link between church and politics manifested itself even further when political parties began to appear in the 1970s and early 1980s. The NHNP had as its leader an Anglican Priest, Father Walter Lini, and several Presbyterian pastors elected to Parliament, while the Father Gérard Leymang, a Catholic priest, became a prominent leader as head of the Union Communautés des Nouvelles-Hébrides (UCNH) and Chief Minister in the Government of National Unity.

Despite their differing views on de-colonization and the growing competition, the British had achieved a degree of success in convincing their French colleagues to be more flexible and by the mid-1970s got agreement to hold an election for the first Representative Assembly. Of major concern was the growing power of the NHNP and the possibility that it would dominate in the election and deprive minority political groups of fair representation. Maintaining French cooperation was essential and thus the political advisor in the British Residency, Keith Woodward, devised a system that would guarantee a degree of proportional representation—the Single Non-Transferable Vote. He was attracted by the SNTV, because it appeared to be less complex with its single vote compared to the usual electoral systems devised to achieve proportional representation, which required voters to number their preferences. He recognized the potential problem when a party put more than one candidate forward in a constituency that voters might bunch their votes on a single popular candidate and thereby deprive the second candidate of a win, but felt it was worth a try. Success would depend in such cases on the ability of party organizers to advise their supporters whom to vote for. Officials in the French
Residency agreed to the proposal and the SNTV was adopted for the 1975 election.\footnote{Correspondence with Keith Woodward.}

It is important to note as well that in addition to insuring minority political representation, the adoption of the SNTV would be an appropriate choice for use in Vanuatu in view of the special nature of its culture. With over 100 languages, Vanuatu is the most culturally diverse country per capita in the world. The group never existed as a single political unit—nor, indeed, have any of the major islands. Cultural divisions have existed for centuries and continue to this day, though the period of missionary activity and colonial rule created circumstances which brought people from different regions together—on plantations and in urban centers—and the emergence of Bislama (Vanuatu’s version of Melanesian Pidgin) has helped to create a growing sense of national identity. With 78% of Vanuatu’s 196,511 people living in the rural areas,\footnote{Vanuatu Government. \textit{Statistical Year Book of Vanuatu – 2002}, p. 24.} individuals still identify strongly with their traditional cultures, including many who now reside in urban areas, but continue to maintain contact through local organizations and family ties. It is important to note that traditional language and cultural continue to be important criteria for voters in the selection of their political representatives.

How to create unity out of such extreme diversity and at the same time acknowledge individual loyalties to language, culture and religion has been the challenge for Ni-Vanuatu politicians since independence. It is significant to note that the SNTV defines constituencies on the basis of islands and thus is a contributing factor to the growing sense of island identification of Ni-Vanuatu. While some decry ‘islandism’ as a dividing factor, creating a sense of island identity where little existed in the past may be seen as a positive first step in the evolution of greater national identity for Vanuatu. It is not uncommon to hear that elected representatives of different parties in multi-seat constituencies confer and work together for the benefit of their common electorate.

The 1975 Representative Assembly Election

In preparation for the election, Vanuatu was divided into 15 constituencies of which seven were multi-seat (see Appendix, Table 1). Campaigning was intense with accusations of French Government involvement on the side of its client parties, but the NHNP won over 54% of the universal suffrage vote and a clear victory in favor of early independence. It should be noted that the new Assembly also included a number of special interest seats—six to be elected by the Chamber of Commerce, three by the Cooperatives (British and French) and four chiefs, one from each of the four districts. There was a dispute over the results on the northern island of Santo and a by-election was required in which the NHNP lost a seat. When the Assembly finally met in June 1976, it was split 21 to 21, including both special interest and universal suffrage seats.

As can be seen from Table 1 (see Appendix), with the exception of the two urban constituencies, Port Vila and Luganville, Party organizers were effective in
directing supporters to distribute their votes to the maximum effect. In Port Vila, the NHNP failed to win any of the six seats despite having accumulated 42.8% of the vote, while in Luganville the reverse occurred with the MANH/Nagriamel coalition winning 46.5% of the vote and failing to win any of the three seats. In both cases, had the two parties fielded just one fewer candidate, they most likely would have shared the seats as the vote distribution for the losing candidates in both cases was quite even. Nevertheless, as seen in Table 2, the overall results clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the SNTV in producing a reasonably fair distribution of universal suffrage seats between the main parties.

**Table 2: Summary Results of 1975 Representative Assembly Election.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Vote %</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Seat %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FMP</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>0.88%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>1530</td>
<td>2.96%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANH – NAG</td>
<td>6299</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCNH</td>
<td>15373</td>
<td>29.77%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHNP</td>
<td>27981</td>
<td>54.18%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>58.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>51640</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Having captured over 54% of the vote and 58% of the universal suffrage seats, the NHNP felt that they did not enjoy the level of power to which their victory entitled them. At its January 1977 Party Congress, in addition to changing its name to the Vanua’aku Pati (VP), members called for the removal of the six Chamber of Commerce seats and made plans to step up political activity as a sign of their dissatisfaction with the two governing powers over the stalemate in the Assembly. In addition to the Santo election dispute, there had also been disputes over the selection of the four chiefly representatives, which delayed the Assembly from beginning operation. In the February 1977 meeting to settle membership, the VP members tabled a motion to remove the special interest seats and that they be allowed to form a government. The motion was defeated and the VP boycotted the Assembly for good.

The British and French agreed that a new election with all seats based on universal suffrage was the only solution, however, the VP refused to participate because there was no guarantee, among other issues, that the party winning the majority would be allowed to form a government. They did not register candidates and on 29 November 1977, the joint administration confirmed by no contest the election of the new Representative Assembly under the leadership of George Kalsakau. The VP responded by declaring a People’s Provisional Government (PPG), raising the Party flag in several centres and taking control of large sections of various islands—i.e. setting up roadblocks, preventing access to Government officials and seizing several disputed, expatriate-owned plantations. The PPG lasted until May 1978.
The 1979 Election and its Aftermath

The increased tension and incidents of violence finally led Ni-Vanuatu political leaders to the awareness that the two sides needed to come together to plan how to move the country forward. Discussions took place and, in a visit in August, the French Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories, M. Paul Dijoud, set out the steps which would have to be followed to get France to agree to independence for Vanuatu. The Dijoud Plan, as it came to be called, required the establishment of a Government of National Unity, a new census, writing of the Constitution which guaranteed regionalization, the preservation of French language and culture, the concept of proportional representation in the formation of the national Assembly in recognition of minority rights, and a new election which would be preceded by the census. In December, discussions between the opposing political parties finally led to the decision to set up a Government of National Unity (GNU), which was achieved through the defeat of the Kalsakau Government in a vote of no confidence with Father Gérard Leymang assuming the position of Chief Minister. The VP joined the GNU and was given five ministerial positions in an enlarged cabinet. Subsequently, in a remarkable spirit of unity, given the troubled period Vanuatu had experienced up to 1978, the Dijoud Plan was fulfilled, including the difficult task of writing the Constitution. Despite the demand for an all single-seat electoral system by the VP during initial negotiations to produce the independence Constitution, the SNTV electoral system was retained and has continued to operate to the present.

The people of Vanuatu went to the polls again on 14 November 1979 to elect a new Representative Assembly. Candidates competed for 39 seats in 14 constituencies, of which 11 were multi-seat. With over 90% of eligible voters casting their ballots, the VP in competition with an array of small, predominantly Francophone parties collectively known as the ‘Moderate’ parties won an overwhelming majority—59.7% of the popular vote and 25 of the 39 seats in the Assembly (see Table 3)\(^3\). It is significant to note that the 25 seats represented 64% of the seats, which equates well with the 59.7% of the votes which the VP won overall (see Table 4). Clearly, the SNTV system delivered a fair proportion of the votes in the 1979 election to both the VP and the other parties that together won 14 sears.

The VP won a majority of the votes on every island and the Government formed by Father Walter Lini was widely representative and included elected members from throughout the group. The Government was, however, made up entirely of Anglophones from the VP, despite the fact that just one year earlier, Francophones under the leadership of Father Gerard Léymang had accepted VP representatives into the Government of National Unity to overcome the political impasse that had developed. The Francophone parties had expected to be given three ministries, but did not receive a single one and, as a result, must certainly have felt betrayed.\(^4\) The VP response was that their overwhelming majority gave

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\(^3\) Note that the individual who won one of the Luganville seats under Natui Tano was allied with the VP and joined the majority when Parliament met, giving the Government a total of 26 seats.

them a mandate to go for independence and they were not convinced the 'Moderates' had the same commitment.

Most people expected the VP to win, but the size of the victory came as a surprise to many with the universal suffrage vote up from 54% to 60% compared to 1975. Most significant was that the 26 seats in the new Assembly gave the VP close to a two thirds majority, which would have been enough to make changes to the constitution. An even greater blow to opposition groups on Santo and Tanna was their loss by a narrow margin to the VP in the Santo and Tanna Regional Council elections, which were conducted at the same time as the general election. Jimmy Stephens, the leader of the Nagriamel movement on Santo—the political/custom group that in the 1960s first challenged the Condominium administration by demanding the return of alienated land—claimed irregularities in the voting and threatened VP supporters from other islands living on Santo. Over the next few months, Stevens and his followers, including the American based Phoenix Foundation, and opposition groups on Tanna—with the tacit support of the French Government—developed plans which would lead by May 1980 to open rebellion. Their goal was secession rather than accept the results of the 1979 election and an independent Vanuatu under the leadership of Father Walter Lini and the Vanua’aku Pati.

The rebellion unleashed incidents of violence between opposing groups and communities on some islands and led to the death of one of the newly elected 'Moderate' party representatives on Tanna and one of Jimmy Stephens' sons. The French Government sent troops to Vanuatu from New Caledonia at the outbreak of the rebellion and then quickly withdrew them, and the British dispatched 200 marines. Despite the fact that the two Condominium powers were obliged under Condominium regulations to deal with the breakdown of law and order, they could not agree to take action—such a move would require 'joint' agreement. The British Resident Commission did, however, dispatch the small British Mobile Force of Melanesian paramilitaries to Tanna when violence broke out there in late May, which helped to calm the situation. As the maintenance of security and control of the police remained in the hands of the British and French, the Lini Government was not able to act on its own.

Despite the rebels still being in control over parts of Santo and other northern islands, Vanuatu miraculously achieved its independence on 30 July 1980. The symbolic raising of the new flag only occurred in those villages which supported the VP and independence—areas under rebel control did not participate in the celebration. Within a few days, troops from the Papua New Guinea Defense Force, with Australian logistic support, arrived in Vanuatu and joined with the small Vanuatu Mobile Force to deal with the situation. Lini had negotiated these arrangements with the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea at the Pacific Forum meeting in Kiribati prior to independence, which enabled him to take the country independent knowing that there would be no need to retain British or French troops and, by implication, a continuation of Condominium rule.

Hundreds of individuals were arrested and, unfortunately, some of the troops lost control in the passion of the moment, resulting in unnecessary physical abuse and humiliating treatment of many of those arrested. Most were eventually
released, but over 500 people were prosecuted and found guilty of various offenses related to the rebellion and those expatriates who were involved—mostly French—were deported to New Caledonia. The leaders were sentenced to jail terms of several years including 14 for Jimmy Stevens.

The 1983 and 1987 Parliamentary Elections

It is important to note that most Francophones were not involved in the rebellion in any way, but the rebellion and its aftermath created a bond between them, which led the various small Francophone parties in 1981 to form the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP). Vanuatu was, therefore, politically polarized after independence—the Anglophone, Protestant Vanua’aku Pati on the one side holding government with the Francophone, Catholic Union of Moderate Parties in opposition. The political strength of the VP led some members to talk of single-party government, reflecting the admiration some had for prominent leaders at the time in the non-aligned world, who were able to dominate their countries through single-party governments over several decades following their own independence.

Such, however, was not to be in Vanuatu’s case. While the VP retained its majority in Parliament in both the 1983 and 1987 elections, it began to experience a decline in its overall vote, dropping from just over 60% in 1979 to 55% in 1983 and 47% in 1987. The decline in the vote was due to the increase in the number of parties contesting and an improvement in the ability of the UMP to attract voters. The VP also was in most cases able to estimate its support fairly accurately and was, therefore, able to maximize its votes in the multi-seat constituencies (see tables 3 and 4). In both elections, the VP campaigned on the fact that it had won independence for Vanuatu, which still attracted its loyal supporters. The decline in its percentage of the votes was due to growing tensions within the leadership group involving two separate incidents in 1983, leading to the expulsion or resignation of several prominent individuals who started their own parties, the Vanuatu Independent Alliance Party and the National Democratic Party, neither of which were able to attract enough votes to win seats (Table 3). At the same time, the UMP picked up two seats in the 1983 election and an additional 5 for a total of 19 in 1987 and saw its percentage of the vote jump from 29% in 1983 to 40% in 1987—a reflection of the success of the UMP strategy to unite into a single party and their campaign focused on the threat to Francophone rights in Vanuatu.

The importance of Church affiliation was another factor which began to affect voter choices during the 1980s. As noted above, when national politics began, the VP attracted most Anglophone Protestant voters of all denominations, which included a number of smaller denominations—Church of Christ, Apostolic, Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), Assemblies of God (AOG)—in addition the Anglicans and Presbyterians. At the same time, the UMP attracted the Francophone Catholic vote. During the 1980s, the VP began to lose the support of many members of the smaller churches due to the position the Government took with regard to the activities of new churches which began to establish themselves in Vanuatu—mainly American funded, fundamentalist organizations
which were attracting a significant following throughout the Pacific Islands. The large, established churches—in particular, the Anglicans and Presbyterians—found themselves in competition with the new groups, which were seen as disruptive and divisive. The Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC), which was dominated by the Anglicans and Presbyterians, began to voice its concern about the new churches. In addition, the presence of several pastors and priests from the two largest Protestant churches in the VP led government, began to increase apprehension among Vanuatu’s established smaller churches—especially the SDAs and AOG. By the time of the 1987 election, significant numbers of voters belonging to these small churches began to desert the VP. When the Government made an open statement in 1989 supporting the VCC’s position, specifically mentioning the SDA and the AOG, the trickle became a flood. To this day, the small church vote has been lost to the VP as a result of this controversy.

The party which initially benefited the most from this shift in political loyalty was the UMP. SDA voters, who have grown to around 10% of the population nation wide, provide an especially significant block of votes. Their shift to the UMP manifested itself in 1983, with the election of a prominent SDA individual from the island of Tonga, resident in Port Vila—Willie Jimmy—who has held one of the Port Vila seats to this day. What is significant is that Willie Jimmy is Anglophone and Protestant, yet he and his supporters found a political home in what began as the Francophone/ Catholic party—an interesting insight into what really constitutes the power base of the UMP.

At the same time, the UMP had its own religious problem, which also continues to this day—the small Francophone community concentrated on the islands of Malakula and Santo, who are members of the Eglise Libre Protestant (the Free Protestant Church). Because they are Protestant, they never felt comfortable in the Catholic dominated UMP and were reluctant to join the VP because of its Anglophone dominance. Beginning in 1983, therefore, they established their own Fren Melanesian Party (FMP) and have usually entered one candidate on Malakula and Santo in each election. The FMP candidate on Santo has won in almost every election and normally joins the UMP faction (see Appendix, Table 3).

The 1991 Election and the Advent of Coalition Government

The five year period from 1987 to 1991 witnessed a political crisis within the Vanua’aku Pati, which resulted in its splitting into rival parties, thus ending its dominance in Parliament. The Union of Moderate Parties benefited most from the decline of the VP, but it too experienced infighting among its leaders and was never able to win enough seats to form a government on its own. From 1991 onwards, no single party was able to control a majority of the seats in Parliament, thus necessitating government by coalition. The cause of this transformation in Vanuatu politics can be attributed primarily to competition for power and influence between various prominent leaders within the major parties.

Though divisions began to emerge within a year of achieving independence, the problems that broke the VP’s hold on power had their origin in February 1987, before the election. While on a visit to Washington D.C. in the
USA, Prime Minister Father Walter Lini suffered a severe stroke, which incapacitated him for the remainder of the year. In fact, he never fully recovered, but remained active in politics until his death in 2001. Following his return to Vanuatu, Lini indicated that he was willing to retire, and made the announcement at the party congress in June 1987, but was convinced by a number of close associates to remain in the position as VP President until after the election. However, one of the VP’s most powerful leaders and part of the original group that had led the independence struggle, Barak Sope from Ifira on the island of Efate, decided to challenge Lini for the position of President. According to party rules, the President is entitled to the position of prime minister in parliament, should the party win the majority. Sope, however, did not have strong support within the leadership group and was not able to dislodge Lini at that time. Lini remained as party President and was returned by his home constituency of Pentecost in the 1987 election. He also decided not to resign as party President and continued on as Prime Minister in the new VP led government.

Sope now wanted to be Prime Minister even more, but found his way blocked. He was not included in the new cabinet and had to approach Lini personally, who eventually gave him a minor ministry. Subsequently, the decision by the Minister of Land to close the Vila Urban Land Corporation (VULCAN), which managed land in the capital formerly belonging to Ifira and other nearby villages, outraged Sope. As a man from Ifira and a member of the board of VULCAN, he interpreted this move as a personal affront and organized a demonstration in Port Vila in May 1988 against the government of which he himself was a minister. The demonstration turned into a riot with damage to businesses and the loss of one life. As a result, Sope was relieved of his position as a minister. He began to flirt with the UMP and, along with four other VP Members of Parliament, became involved in an abortive vote of no confidence, for which he and the others were ejected from the VP and declared by the Speaker to have lost their seats. Parliamentary Standing Orders stipulate that changing party by a Member of Parliament results in the loss of his/her seat, necessitating a by-election. While challenging this decision in court, the Sope group and 18 UMP Members of Parliament boycotted the Parliament leading the Speaker to declare the UMP members as having lost their seats as well. The case of the UMP members was also challenged in Court, which ruled in favour of Sope’s group but against the UMP. Both groups boycotted the by-elections (December 1988 and November 1989) held to replace the 23 members. The eventual result was a 40 seat majority for the VP with 6 seats held by the Tan-Union under the leadership of UMP member Vincent Boulekone, who had been ejected from the UMP for his decision not to support the earlier vote of no confidence.

In mid-December 1988, in reaction to the hard line taken by the VP Government and the conclusion of the first by-elections, President Sokomanu (an uncle of Sope) attempted to dissolve Parliament and set up an interim government with Sope as Prime Minister and including several UMP members. The attempted coup failed and all involved were arrested and tried. They were acquitted in the end, but Sokomanu had in the meantime been replaced and
Sope and the UMP remained out of politics until the election in December 1991. Following this crisis, which resulted in Sope’s exclusion from the VP, he established the Melanesian Progressive Party (MPP) and vowed to see the VP brought down.5

By 1990, confidence among some VP leaders in Lini’s judgment and leadership style began to decline. A major issue was the degree to which Lini was coming under the control of outside interests—in particular, the local Vietnamese Than family and an American millionaire, Jack Scantlan. The issue was power and influence. Tension continued to grow within the party executive resulting in Lini dismissing several close associates from their positions. By mid-1991, one faction began to develop a plan to remove Lini as party President at the next party congress, which he wanted to delay until after the election to avoid a change of leadership. When most ministers and political appointees refused to declare their loyalty to him, Lini dismissed them—as well as the Chief of Police and Attorney General—turning over ministries to VP backbenchers. The party executive then called for a new congress at Mele village, which Lini challenged in court and lost, resulting in his being replaced as Party President by Donald Kalpokas.

The next step was to remove Lini as Prime Minister, since he was no longer President of the party. Lini unsuccessfully opposed the Deputy Speaker’s decision to recall Parliament and a vote of no-confidence was tabled. As a last resort, Lini appealed to President Timakata to dissolve Parliament before the vote, but he refused on the grounds that the political process was already under way and it was inappropriate for him to interfere. Lini was removed on 6 September 1991 by the votes of 18 VP and 6 Tan-Union Members of Parliament. He responded in due course by establishing the National United Party (NUP), with Dinh Van Than as its major financial backer, when the VP got a court injunction to stop him and his group from using the name Vanua’aku Pati. The remaining VP leaders took over Government again and concentrated on re-establishing their control prior to the election which was scheduled for December.

As noted above, this period initially was one of growth for the UMP, which retained the image of a purely francophone party. The results of the 1983 and 1987 elections, however, showed that an ever larger number of Anglophones were running under the UMP banner and supporting its candidates—especially members of the smaller churches, e.g. SDAs, Church of Christ and others. Also, Presbyterians who had benefited during colonial days through the establishment of French-medium schools in their area and had thus become part of the Francophone community. The division between the Francophone Protestants and Catholics was never a major problem as the Fren Melanesian Party usually worked with the UMP in Parliament.

The UMP did, nevertheless, have its own leadership problem. Its origin goes back to the pre-independence period when Vincent Boulekone from the island of Pentecost pulled out of the UCNH to form his own party, the Tan-Union. He felt he was being manipulated by expatriate French members of the party and

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5 Note that these changes in parliamentary membership are not shown in the attached tables of election results.
wanted to work more closely with his fellow Melanesians. However, at the same time, he was not prepared to join the Anglophones, i.e. the VP. With the birth of the UMP in 1981, Boulecone came back and became its first President, though tension remained with the party between those who had joined the rebellion and gone to jail and those like Boulecone who had not. He claimed the rebels still maintained their links with right-wing groups and deportees in New Caledonia and the Phoenix Foundation in the USA and had not given up their unrealistic pre-independence dreams.

A confrontation occurred at the party congress in 1987 over the issue of the position and role of the party President. Unlike the VP, the positions of party President and leader in Parliament in the UMP are held by two different individuals. Boulecone wanted to take on the parliamentary position, but following the election, Maxime Carlot became the Leader of the Opposition, while Boulecone remained party President. His refusal to go along with the UMP’s flirtations with Sope and vote of no confidence led to his ejection—along with one other Tan-Union supporter from Pentecost. As noted above, when the UMP boycotted Parliament and eventually lost their seats, Boulecone remained and fielded candidates under the Tan-Union in the two different by-elections. He also supported the VP vote of no-confidence against Lini, becoming Speaker of Parliament for the two months from September to December 1991.

In the 1991 campaign, the UMP claimed that the VP, was a Communist Government and what Vanuatu needed was free enterprise and true democracy. They promised free education and health, higher prices for copra and a better deal for Francophones. They also advocated creating freehold titles to land, especially for Ni-Vanuatu—the return of alienated land to Ni-Vanuatu custom owners had been at the core of the VP political campaign leading up to independence. The results for the UMP were mixed. They retained their 19 seats in parliament, but saw their actual votes drop from 41% to 39%. The Francophone areas held firm, with the exception of parts of Pentecost which supported Bulekone. SDA Anglophones supported the UMP, but many were attracted to Sope’s new MPP, which saw two SDA candidates elected.

As a result of the splits within the VP, three parties fielded candidates in the election—VP, MPP (Sope) and NUP (Lini). During the campaign, Lini and his supporters spent most of the time in the field—he traveled to almost every major island, despite his ill-health. As noted above, the VP leaders were focused on re-establishing themselves in government and did very little traveling. They clearly did not realize how little people in the island understood the leadership crisis which had occurred in Port Vila. NUP’s tactics were to try to secure the Anglican islands in the north—Lini was an Anglican priest—and to make it impossible for the VP to win elsewhere. Their tactic of introducing ‘dummy’ candidates to draw support away from the VP was quite successful on islands which had formally been their strongholds—Ambae, Santo, Paama and Malakula. There was no clear difference between NUP and VP policy statements, just an appeal for loyalty to Lini who campaigners represented as having been attacked by power-hungry rivals. The bitterness between the two groups was intense. Religious affiliation was an important factor, but personality, local politics and the strategy
of introducing ‘dummy’ candidates were also significant. NUP won what was for the VP a surprising 20% of the vote and 10 seats. To achieve these number, NUP sponsored quite a large number of candidates (30), most likely a number of them ‘dummy’ candidates were intended to pull votes away from the VP and, given the large vote relative to the number of seats acquired, this proved an effective strategy (see Appendix, Tables 3 and 4).

Sope, as head of the MPP, made lots of promises of free services, spent money on helicopters to tour the outer islands and raised the issue of land—in particular, the VP’s policy to make urban land public land and the UMP’s to create freehold titles again. He also made an issue of his support for Jimmy Stephens, who had been released from prison just prior to the vote of no-confidence—Sope paid for him to travel to Australia for health care. This relationship led to an agreement between the MPP and Nagriamel to join forces in the coming election. Many Nagriamel supporters did not understand nor agree with Jimmy Steven’s decision to join with the MPP. On Santo, Jimmy Stevens’ son won a seat for Nagriamel, but their vote over all was split with some groups supporting the UMP, their traditional allies. As noted above, it was Sope’s aim to bring down the VP and the fact that the MPP sponsored 23 candidates, quite a large number for the party’s first election that many were in the election to pull votes away from the VP and, most probably NUP as well. Nevertheless, to have won 4 seats and 15.4% of the vote overall was not insignificant (see tables 3 and 4). His strong personality and reputation as one of the leaders in the independence struggle did much to win him and his party votes. The MPP also picked up support from the individuals and their supporters who had split with the VP earlier. There was, of course, no possibility of a link with NUP—it was Lini, after all, who had turned on Sope in 1988 and led to him to leave the VP and establish his own party.

Both NUP and the MPP pulled votes away from the VP, which saw its total votes drop from 47% to 22.6% and its seats in Parliament decline from 26 to 10—a result they clearly did not expect (see Appendix, Table 3). They lost support in those areas where they did not have strong local candidates to counter the NUP campaign and where the Anglican Church was dominant—the Banks and Torres, parts of Ambae and Pentecost itself, the home island of Lini. None of the true ‘bigmen’ lost their seats, i.e. men who did not have to depend on the party for election, but had strong local followings—e.g. Sela Molisa from Santo, lolu Abbil from Tanna, Edward Natapei from Futuna, and Meto Chilia from Efate.

With no single party winning a majority of the seats, Vanuatu faced the prospect of a coalition government, though it was not clear which parties would be able to agree to work together. A VP/NUP link was impossible because of the bitterness between certain individuals, though the supporters of both parties in the islands still couldn’t understand why they could no longer work with people they had been allied with for the previous 20 years. UMP, as the largest party, considered MPP, but Sope demanded too much and their combined numbers would have given them only a small majority, which would have been subject to manipulation by Sope. The UMP wanted a link with the VP, but the VP also
wanted too much in terms of key ministries. In the end, both the UMP and NUP were prepared to swallow their pride in order to get power, though the decision almost resulted in a split within the UMP itself. It was the long awaited chance for the UMP and NUP wanted revenge and the spoils of power. The coalition was established with Maxime Carlot (UMP) as Prime Minister and Sethy Regenvanu (NUP) as Deputy—Regenvanu had remained loyal to Lini, left the VP to join NUP and was re-elected to his seat on Malakula.

By law, it was not possible to have a new election for at least a year, but the expectation was that the coalition would break apart, which would have led to renegotiations and possibly a new political configuration. There were fundamental differences between the two groups and both parties had to explain to their supporters why they had joined with their former rivals. Disputes and splits within both the UMP and NUP brought the survival of the coalition into question, but to the surprise of many, it survived the full four years until the next election in 1995.

New Alignments

Disagreements between the two parties, which quickly came into public view, but the desire to survive was great and they were patched. By mid-February, 1992, when it appeared that the UMP/NUP coalition would survive for at least the short term, those parties in the opposition negotiated and readjusted their relationships in the expectation that the collapse of the coalition was still only a matter of time. The result was the formation of the Unity Front, combining the Vanua’aku Pati, Melanesian Progressive Party, Tan-Union and Nagriamel, which recognized the continued independence of each party but created the basis for them to work together inside Parliament. Donald Kalpokas (VP) was designated Leader of the Opposition, Barak Sope (MPP) Deputy Leader and Vincent Boulekone (TU) Opposition Whip. The four parties in the Unity Front wanted to be organized and familiar with their relationship in anticipation of a possible general election, which it was felt would be sooner rather than later.

Given their many years as political opponents, it is not surprising that the UMP and NUP would disagree on some major issues. Indeed, there was very little difference between the policies of NUP and the VP—the two parties simply operated under a different leadership. While Lini, for example, would not have been opposed to improved relations with the French Government—the last French ambassador had been expelled by his government in 1987 and not replaced—it was difficult to accept pulling back from full support for independence of New Caledonia, which had been a key VP policy since achieving its own independence in 1980.

One of the top priorities of the UMP, the senior partner in the coalition, was to redress what its leaders saw as eleven years of discrimination against Francophones by the Lini Government. Changes to the education system would take time and money, but an immediate impact could be made through appointments to the Public Service. Within a short period, a number of senior public servants were retired and replaced by people more to the liking of the new Government. NUP members of the coalition were also in favor of cleaning the
Public Service of individuals it saw as having been involved or supported the move in 1991 by the VP against Lini. Attempts to dismiss a number of daily rated workers led to demonstrations and by 1993, with dismissals continuing, several hundred public servants went on strike, 300 of whom lost their jobs.

In time the issue of public servant dismissals became a divisive issue within NUP itself. In November 1992, the NUP executive expelled two of its own ministers for refusing to dismiss certain Public Servants—the beginning of what would lead to a full split within NUP. Eventually, three NUP ministers ceased to recognize Lini’s leadership altogether. He responded by announcing that NUP would withdraw from the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the UMP, but Deputy Prime Minister Regenvanu refused to accept the move and pledged continuing support of what had become a faction within NUP in support of Korman and the coalition. When two VP Members of Parliament crossed the floor to support the coalition, one of whom accepted a ministry, the UMP position was strengthened to the extent that Lini’s withdrawal of support had little effect. In May 1994, the Prime Minister announced that the MOU between UMP and Lini’s NUP was dissolved and, instead, he would only recognize the Regenvanu faction of NUP. At that point, the NUP congress in May 1994, expelled the four members in the Regenvanu faction from the party. The following week, the dissidents founded the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) with Regenvanu as its President and remained firmly within the coalition until the election in 1995.

It was not long before internal problems within the UMP also began to surface—rivalry between Prime Minister Maxime Korman and the Deputy Serge Vohor. In early 1993, the PM transferred Vohor from Foreign Affairs to a less prestigious ministry. In an attempt to take advantage of the split within NUP, Vohor attempted to negotiate a deal with Lini, whereby he and his five NUP supporters would rejoin the coalition. Korman rejected the plan and at that point formally acknowledged the Regenvanu faction as the official partner in the coalition as noted above, replacing the Lini group. The UMP was also able to win back its long-time ally, Nagriamel, when Franky Stevens, the single representative in Parliament, left the Unity Front to join the coalition—a move which split Nagriamel. Franky’s brother, Nakato, would not accept the new arrangement, as he could not forgive the UMP’s refusal to assist their father Jimmy Stevens when he was released from jail. As noted above, it was, Sope who provided the funds and to whom Nakato still felt great loyalty. Despite several other smaller disputes within, including a call by the PM’s own nephew for the old guard to stand aside for younger individuals, the UMP/NUP coalition survived and went confidently into the 1995 election in November.

The 1995 Election

The campaign line-up in the 1995 election reflected the re-alignments that had taken place during the previous four years. UMP was suffering from the ongoing rivalry between Prime Minister Maxime Korman and Serge Vohor, which was obvious to the last minute as disputes broke out over candidate selection. NUP continued under the leadership of Walter Lini, with Sethy Regenvanu leading his breakaway PDP. Unity Front, which was a coalition of the VP
(Kalpokas), MPP (Sope) and Tan-Union (Boulekone) and the Fren Melanesian Party cooperated in fielding candidates to maximize their power against the governing coalition and Lini. Nagriamel ran again as a separate party.

The voting did not produce any radical changes in the makeup of the new parliament, though the number of seats had been increased from 46 to 50. There were moderate changes in votes received, which were not always reflected in comparable adjustments in seat counts. For example, the UMP saw its total vote decline by 3% and lost two seats (down from 19 to 17), while NUP increased its vote by 3%, but also lost a seat (down from 10 to 9). The Unity Front had the best results, winning a combined 20 seats (13 VP, 6 MPP and 1 TU), which represented an increase of 5 seats compared to the three party totals for 1991. As usual, the FMP and Nagriamel each won a seat, while Regenvanu's breakaway PDP did not. What was perhaps the most interesting feature of the election was the significant increase in the number of independent candidates in the race (19), compared to only 4 in the previous election and the success of two—the first time since 1979, when Maxime Korman won in Port Vila, that independents had been successful. One of the victors joined the VP and has been returned in all subsequent elections. The number of independent candidates has continued to increase in subsequent elections, a development which may reflect the dissatisfaction of voters with the increasing infighting among party leaders.

The fact that the major parties accumulated reasonable numbers meant that there were several possibilities for coalition, but the task of creating a stable grouping proved to be very difficult. A coalition between the Unity Front and NUP was impossible—Lini was still resentful of UF leaders and they themselves were not prepared to work with Dinh Van Than, who was the power behind NUP. The Korman/Vohor rivalry within the UMP surfaced straight away, when Korman organized a team to negotiate with possible coalition partners—the role of the party President in the UMP, Serge Vohor, negotiated an MOU with the Unity Front. The Korman group then retaliated, purporting to suspend Vohor, and proceeded to sign an MOU with NUP. At this point, Dinh Van Than entered the fray, engineering a reconciliation between the two UMP factions in coalition with NUP—significant sums of money were rumoured to have changed hands—with Vohor as PM, Lini as Deputy and Korman sidelined to the position of Speaker. With a 28 to 22 seat majority, the coalition looked to have stability.

The Vorhor led UMP/NUP coalition, however, only lasted about two months—a period in which the PM was often absent from Vanuatu and involved with personal matters, thus turning over affairs to his Deputy, Walter Lini. During these early weeks, Lini was able to assert his influence, sacking his enemies were possible and installing a number of NUP supporters in key positions in the ministries and statutory bodies. Dissatisfaction with the NUP/Than dominance created the conditions for the division within UMP to resurface. Six dissident UMP members (Korman supporters) joined Unity Front in a planned vote of no-confidence with the aim of creating a UMP/Unity Front coalition under Korman. Vohor tried to prevent the vote by convincing President Léyé to dissolve Parliament—illegal, since it had been less than a year since the election—which
the Supreme Court on appeal reversed. Vohor then agreed to resign, but when Parliament met to vote on a new prime minister he withdrew his resignation and resumed as Prime Minister. He then set up a commission of enquiry to investigate Korman and the judges, including the Chief Justice, and tried to replace the head of the police with an ally. Having been misled previously, the President refused to sign any of the documents presented to him by Vohor and thus his plan to subvert democracy was aborted. In February, the UMP/Unity Front coalition came into being with the election of Korman as Prime Minister and Kalpokas (VP/UF) as Deputy and Sope (MPP/UF) as Minister of Finance.

In mid-July, politics in Vanuatu were thrown into turmoil with the publication of a report by the Ombudsman, Marie-Noëlle Ferrieux-Patterson, outlining in great detail a scam in which an Australian by the name of Peter Swanson had obtained bank guarantees from the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu amounting to $US100 million, which were basically IOUs circulating in the international community with the potential to bankrupt the country. They had been signed by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Governor of the Reserve Bank and the first Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. This was not the first report from the Ombudsman, pointing out improper behavior by local politicians and officials, and the reaction at first was indifferent then hostile towards the Ombudsman.

Discontent due to the inaction of the Prime Minister and silence of the Deputy began to threaten the coalition with rumors of possible defections of UMP members to Vohor. Korman, therefore, was finally forced to act and reshuffled his cabinet, transferring Sope out of Finance, but he refused to accept the transfer and formed a new alliance—the MTF (MPP, TU and FMP). Sope was, then, dismissed and the others in his group resigned, thus ending the Unity Front and the Korman Government. Sope then joined the Vohor faction of UMP, which included Willie Jimmy, and attempted to table a motion of no confidence. Following delaying tactics by the Speaker and court orders, Parliament finally sat and the government was replaced with a new coalition—UMP/MPP/NUP—with Vohor as PM, Sope as Deputy and including a number of NUP ministers. In the meantime, the Ombudsman continued to issue reports on the deteriorating quality of government in Vanuatu—over 80 by the time she finished her contract. She did mince her words, identifying a number of key politicians as unfit to hold any public office, let alone a ministerial post.

A worrying event occurred in September 1996, while Korman was still in Office. A group of over 100 members of the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) began what at first appeared to be industrial action to force the government to deal with their long outstanding claim for payment of back allowances. Korman did nothing and the dispute began to escalate with NCOs refusing to obey orders. Vohor spoke to the leaders when he came to office and appointed his own man to the position of VMF Commander, but did not actually solve the outstanding pay issue. In October, while Sope was standing in as Deputy Prime Minister in Vohor’s absence, a group of VMF troops took over the armory, seized the radio station, cut international communication and forced the President at gunpoint to fly to the island of Malakala to pick up Sope, where he was on tour, and bring him
back to Port Vila. Upon their return, on 15 October, Sope summoned an emergency Council of Ministers meeting and in negotiations with the VMF leader of the group, agreed to pay the back allowances. The incident has been called a coup or mutiny, as well as an industrial action. The result, however, is clear. There was no disciplinary action taken at the time, i.e. no court martial, and Sope then had the loyalty of the VMF troops.

In a surprise move ten days later, Vohor reshuffled his Government, dismissing Sope and his MTF group and replacing them with VP members—Kalpokas was made Deputy PM and three others were given ministries. What allowed this to happen was a formal reconciliation ceremony between Kalpokas and Lini, where they killed pigs, exchanged mats and kava and pledged to cooperate in the future. Hilda Lini (sister of Walter Lini and elected Member of Parliament from Port Vila) was also relieved of her ministry—supported it is said by her brother Walter Lini because of her refusal to work with Than in NUP. Vohor explained the decision to dismiss Sope in terms of the bank guarantees scam and other unscrupulous dealings and the way he had handled the VMF crisis. Subsequently, evidence was uncovered of a plot to replace the elected government by the military and some 140 members of the VMF were arrested and a small group including the leaders of the revolt were charged with various crimes related to the incident. The Vohor Government also negotiated the return of the bank guarantees and placed criminal charges against Peter Swanson.

In March 1997, an MOU was signed by the three coalition parties—UMP, VP and NUP—to work together for the next two years leading to the scheduled general election. Things seemed to have stabilized when on 20 May, Vohor surprised everyone by again making changes to the coalition—dismissing Kalpokas and the other three VP ministers and two NUP ministers. This was done, it would seem, because Vohor was worried about of a possible vote of no confidence rumored to have been planned by dissident backbenchers in NUP who had become frustrated with having to work under Than and were considering a move to the VP. In their places, Vohor appointed Sope again as Deputy PM and brought into the government the Korman faction of the UMP, but not Korman—appointing Willie Jimmy as Minister of Finance. This was a clever move on his part, which strengthened his control over the party. Subsequently, however, Willie Jimmy was dismissed and outside of power with Korman began to plot a vote of no confidence, which was tabled in the November session of Parliament with the support of the VP. Vohor sought a dissolution of Parliament before the bill could be debated and elections were scheduled for 20 January 1998. The dissolution was challenged in court, but upheld as lawful and the election rescheduled for March.

In early January, Port Vila was shaken by a riot, the result of a report from the Ombudsman revealing extensive corruption and misuse of funds paid into the Vanuatu National Provident Fund. This news, combined with a history of inefficiencies in processing loans for its members led a group of frustrated individuals to take out their revenge on various businesses and properties of individuals believed to be beneficiaries of the Fund. The Government declared a
state of emergency, which lasted for four weeks, peace was restored and the decision was made to allow all VNPF members who wished to to withdraw funds.

**The 1998 Election**

There were several important developments in preparation for the vote. Serge Vohor insured that Maxime Carlot Korman, who had tried to replace him as Prime Minister, was denied the right to run as a UMP candidate. His response was to establish his own political party—the Vanuatu Republican Party. Also of significance was the increase in the number of independents entered in the race—a total of 62, compared to 19 in the 1995 election—an indication, perhaps, of the growing disillusionment among some people in the old parties. It may also have been evidence of the increased rivalry within parties which resulted in individuals not being given support to stand and deciding to run as independents instead. The poor turnout in some constituencies—35% in Port Vila and 48% in Luganville—was another sign that there was a growing disillusionment and lack of confidence in the political system.

The results of the election saw an increase in VP seats (up from 13 to 18), declines in UMP (down from 17 to 12) and NUP (down from 11 to 9). The MPP remained at 6 and there were several others with 1 or 2 seats, including the single Vanuatu Republican Party member, Maxime Carlot Korman. A return of the UMP/NUP/MPP coalition would have been possible, but in the name of stability the VP and NUP agreed to put aside old differences again and established a coalition government with Kalpokas as Prime Minister and Lini as Deputy. Stresses and strains were felt in the early days as appointments were made to various departments and statutory bodies in which Kalpokas made an effort to hold to new guidelines set out in the Comprehensive Reform Program which had been adopted to improve the quality and efficiency of government—Lini and his associate Than did not feel the need to make the same effort and aroused much controversy on their choices of appointees, i.e. both in terms of their relationship to the leaders and their appropriateness in terms of qualifications and experience.

Despite the positive beginning, by October, the coalition was beginning to experience internal problems—pressures within NUP to get rid of the VP and return to the UMP/NUP/MPP alliance of before. The instigator appears to have been Than, but his plans collapsed when Willie Jimmy took his faction of the UMP into the coalition with the VP, replacing NUP. The public reaction was not positive—given all that had happened in recent years, how could the VP find itself in alliance with one of the individuals who had been the focus of so many scathing reports from the Ombudsman detailing corrupt and unethical practices. A motion of no confidence in December was defeated, indicating a certain strength of numbers, and evidence of the continued division within the UMP. The unexpected and sudden death of Walter Lini in February did not have any immediate effect on national politics.

It was not until late in the year that Vanuatu’s recurring political instability again began to appear—the defection of two UMP supporters to the opposition UMP (Vohor) group and threats from Than that a vote of no confidence was
forthcoming. There were those in the VP, who were of the view that they would be better off getting rid of Willie Jimmy’s unreliable UMP faction and renegotiating a coalition with NUP, but the senior leaders rejected a deal worked out to go with NUP and the result was that Sope and Than were able to pull the numbers together, force Kalpokas to resign in late November 1999 and replace him with Barak Sope as leader of a five-party coalition: MPP, NUP, UMP (Vohor), John Frum and FMP. With Walter Lini gone, Than was in full charge of NUP.

Sope took firm control of the coalition, made easier by the ongoing feud within the UMP, to insure that he would continue to dominate. His focus seemed to be on expanding his and Vanuatu’s profile overseas (e.g. through support for the independence of West Papua and a proposal to send Vanuatu police to East Timor as part of the peace-keeping operation) and trying to identify get rich schemes as a way to find an easy solution to Vanuatu’s economic problems. Most famous was his relationship to a Thai businessman of Indian Origin who presented various schemes to the Prime Minister including the present of a ruby, which he claimed to be worth millions of dollars, later found to be almost worthless. Early in the life of the coalition, saw the passage of legislation which significantly weakened the CRP—the undermining of the Public Service by making it subject to ministerial control.

Despite the usual rumours of defections and possible no confidence motions, the Sope led coalition survived well into 2001. The problems facing Sope were whether or not the two factions of UMP could reconcile and stay together—there were statements that they had—and how long Than would be able to control NUP member dissatisfaction with having to work under his control. NUP gained an experienced member when Willie Jimmy resigned from UMP and joined NUP, where he most likely felt his chances for a ministerial portfolio or even the position of prime minister were more likely since there were few heavyweights in the party compared to the others. And then, in a surprise move at the end of March, Serge Vohor and his UMP colleagues in Government resigned and joined with the 19 VP members in tabling a vote of no confidence in the Sope Government. Sope responded by requesting the President to dissolve Parliament, which he refused to do, and then was able to get the support of the Speaker to adjourn Parliament and refuse to call it back into session, despite a court order. In the end, facing contempt, the Speaker recalled Parliament and the vote of no confidence was passed by 27 to 18 with Natapei elected Prime Minister. He had been elected President of the VP by the party during the previous period when the VP held government.

Another result was the resignation of strong Sope supporter, Sato Kilman, from the MPP to form his own party, the Peoples Progressive Party. This may have given Than and Willie Jimmy (now NUP) second thoughts about continuing their alliance with Sope and raising the possibility of returning to the VP in the future if the opportunity presented itself. In August 2001, however, a major reconciliation ceremony was held between Natapei (VP) and Vohor (UMP) in Santo in the hope of cementing their relationship still further.
The coalition did, indeed, last until the 2002 elections in May. The result of the election allowed the VP and UMP to continue their coalition with Natapai as Prime Minister—a concession by the UMP since it had 15 seats to the VP’s 14—which was not all that different from the previous one. Willie Jimmie (NUP) and Korman were in opposition. Sope was convicted at end of July on forgery charges related to the loan guarantees and sentenced to 3 years in jail. There was concern about the reaction from his supporters, but nothing major occurred. To the dismay and disbelief of many, the President pardoned him in November 2002 on health grounds. In the meantime, Sope had forfeited his seat due to his conviction and imprisonment, a decision he challenged in court, but lost. As a result, a by-election was held, Sope contested and won by a large majority. Despite all that had happened, his loyal supporters were still behind him.

Another crisis occurred in August when the Police in Port Vila clashed over the appointment of a new Police Commissioner. Dissatisfied applicants arrest members of Police Service Commission over alleged irregularities in appointments process, which the court eventually upheld and the appointment was quashed. Charges were filed, however, against those who had been involved in the abduction of the Police Service Commission and the VMF had to be called to the Police Station in full battle gear to make the arrests when those involved refused to surrender to authorities. The confrontation became very tense, but several chiefs in Port Vila were called in to mediate and violence was avoided. Subsequently, those involved in the seizure of commission members were convicted and sentenced to a period in prison for their actions.

VP internal problems begin to surface towards the end of 2002. In January 2003, two prominent members, Silas Hakwa and Harold Qualao (both from West Ambae) establish the People’s Action Party in response to what they viewed as drifting within the VP—the basis for a further erosion of the party’s power base. The coalition between the VP and the UMP lasted until November, when Natapai reshuffled and dropped UMP, replacing them with NUP, PPP and Greens. It is said that he acted because of rumors of no confidence motion. Than had also continued to stir the situation, hoping to pull UMP out of the coalition to unit with NUP. It was also rumored that Vohor was talking again to Sope about throwing UMP support behind him in the Efate by-election.

The most serious problem for Nataplei was, however, tension within his own party which had developed as a result of the previous party Congress, when several of the old guard were replaced in the party executive by younger members. Subsequently, Kalpokas, Natuman and Molisa were relieved of their ministerial portfolios—and the party began to divide. Just at this time, the term of office of the President ended and the Electoral College designated to make a new appointment. It consists of the Members of Parliament and the Presidents of the Provinces, thus all the problems which existed at the moment within and between parties was brought into the process of re-electing the President. A compromise candidate was chosen who turned out to be under a suspended sentence for fraud and he was forced to resign. The way in which the Prime Minister handled the election of the President increased the dissatisfaction of the VP opposition faction and they agreed to join the UMP in vote of no confidence.
However, before this could happen, the Prime Minister requested the President to dissolve parliament rather than stand down and a new election was scheduled for the 6th of July 2004.

Three Decades of the Single Non-Transferable Voting System in Vanuatu

Including the election for the first Representative Assembly election in 1975, Ni-Vanuatu have voted in a total of eight general elections using the Single Non-Transferable Voting system. There appears to be widespread acceptance of its use and voters and politicians understand the technique of candidate distribution and voter choices to maximize the results, though they are not always successful in this regard. There has never been any significant objections raised or public debate specifically on the system of voting, though the report of an Elections Observer Group sponsored by Transparency International and its local branch have identified a number of ways in which the voting process itself could be improved. Following on from the above historical discussion of the evolution of national politics, it is now appropriate to examine the actual functioning of the SNTV system—how it works, its positive and negative aspects and the extent to which the system itself may or may not contribute to the changing nature of Vanuatu politics.

Vanuatu's political situation has experienced significant changes over the past three decades. An analysis of the election results indicates that use of the SNTV system did achieve the desired goal of its instigators in the early elections (1979, 1983 and 1987) of producing a high level of proportional representation. While the Vanua’aku Pati held the majority in all three governments resulting from these elections, the proportion of seats equated quite well with the percentage of the votes that it received, though they began to diverge slightly in 1987—the result of splits within the VP and a resulting increase in the number of registered parties. With the unification in 1981 of the various small parties who opposed the VP in 1979 election into the Union of Moderate Parties, it would appear that a stable two-party system was emerging. However, given the events surrounding independence, it is very unlikely that the ‘losers’ in the struggle, which the UMP represented, would have been content to remain in that role forever. The party was beginning to attract Anglophone voters from the VP—members of the smaller English-speaking churches—but the political divide between Anglophones and Francophones was so strong that much more would have been needed to shift a substantial number of voters to the UMP.

The Politics of Personality

This seemingly stable situation was shattered in the end, not over Anglophone/Francophone issues, but by a dispute within the dominant

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6 This does not include the election in 1977, which the Vanua’aku Pati boycotted and seats were, therefore awarded by no contest.
Vanua’aku Pati. What brought this about was the reawakening of a more traditional Melanesian style of politics during the period leading up to independence—a politics of personality—involving strong *bigmen* (big meaning men with power and influence) who build up a following of committed supporters as a power base for their political activities. Until recently women have not played a prominent role in politics. Traditionally, *bigmen* have to prove themselves. They must *earn* the respect of their followers and work to maintain that status over time. They are strong, charismatic in their relations with others and generous in their support of individuals and the community. *Bigmen* are not rich, but they command wealth and are astute in distributing it in their long-term interest and pursuit of power. Expectations of leaders in Vanuatu’s Melanesian communities have changed over time—education, adherence to a particular Christian denomination, experience in the world beyond the village and the ability to intercede on their behalf are added qualities that individuals may look for in their leaders today—but the fundamentals of the *bigman* personality are still relevant today.

It is important to note that in the diversity of cultures that constitutes Vanuatu, a number of communities owe their origin to the arrival in the distant past of individuals of Polynesian dissent, who brought with them traditions of chiefly power based on rank and descent. Four of Vanuatu’s over 100 languages are Polynesian, located mainly in the central and southern islands of the group. These traditions have evolved in contact with the dominant Melanesian cultures with whom they interact, but there are modern political leaders who can also count *inherited* status as one of the attributes which has contributed to their rise to power.

Vanuatu politics over the past three decades has been dominated by *bigmen*, who exhibit the qualities of leadership described above. They have built followings in their home communities, which they can count on to return them time and again in national elections. Most owe their position in politics to their involvement in the events associated with Vanuatu’s independence—in particular, their link to one of the original political parties that emerged at that time. In the 1970s and 80s, almost all of the Anglophones were members of the Vanua’aku Pati and regularly validate their status by mentioning their role in the independence struggle, including those who broke away to establish new parties. At the same time, the Union of Moderate Parties, which did not exist at independence, owes its existence to the coming together of the group of Francophones who found themselves on the other side of the political divide in 1980 after independence in opposition to the VP. As noted above, since the 1980s, a small number of English-speakers from the smaller Protestant churches have joined UMP, which explains why one of the most prominent leaders of the UMP for the past 20 years, Willie Jimmy, has been an Anglophone and a member of the Seventh Day Adventist church.

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8 One women was elected to Parliament in 1987 and 1995, both from Port Vila. In 2002, a woman was elected from the island of Epi and returned in 2004 along with another woman, thus giving Epi two women to represent it in Parliament—Epi has two seats.
The relationship between political leader and party continues to be important today, even for those individuals who may have won their first election as independents. They often find it to their advantage to join one of the existing parties or establish their own once they enter parliament, since, which can gain them a place in a new coalition government. The relationship between individuals and their parties is not, however, always stable, as the Vanuatu’s political history reveals. A major problem has and continues to be leadership succession, which has become the main reasons for the splintering and proliferation of political parties over the past 15 years. The problem has been most acute in those parties where a leadership ‘group’ exists—especially the VP and UMP—where several political bigmen had joined forces. As noted above, Barak Sope broke away from the VP in 1988 and established the Melanesian Progressive Party (MPP), while Walter Lini was pushed out in 1991 and established the National United Party (NUP). The first leader of the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP), Maxime Carlot Korman, refused to share power with Vincent Boulekone, which led the latter to re-establish his Tan-Union Party for the 1991 election. Korman himself got pushed out of the UMP in 1998 by a powerful rival, Serge Vohor, who subsequently got rid of another challenger, Willie Jimmie, who ran in the 2002 election under NUP. The success of the breakaway parties depends on the individual leaders being able to carry voters who supported them in the past with them into subsequent elections. Lini was able to establish a solid power base—a reflection of the size of the Anglophone majority which broke apart. At the same time, Vohor has retained a sizeable block of seats for the UMP. As noted above, there have also been a number of individuals who have successfully run as independent candidates and two parties, which have exited since independence, Fren Melanesian Party and Nagriamel, have consistently won single seats (see Appendix, Table 3). Though limited in their individual success, this cluster of small parties and independents have made the process of coalition building more complicated following recent elections and enabled them to wield considerable power.

It is, indeed, in the parliamentary arena—in the process of creating or bringing down government coalitions—that the other side of bigman rivalry presents itself. One of the negative effects of multi-party coalitions, especially those made up of small parties with only a few individuals, is the added difficulty faced by the coalition king-makers is how to distribute ministerial portfolios and administrative positions in order to satisfy all those concerned that they have equitable access to power and the monetary rewards that go with such positions—a reality that any government anywhere must deal with. The more parties, the fewer the jobs there are for each and thus the greater the possibility for dissatisfaction among those members, both elected and otherwise, who have missed out. One of the most common reasons for the collapse of coalition governments in Vanuatu is the issue of distribution of the spoils and perks that come with victory. Such challenges can come not only from inside the coalition, but from within the parties themselves. As noted above, several of the most serious crises in the VP and UMP have involved conflict over power and control between the most senior leader in the parties. Some of Vanuatu’s political
bigmen have also been seduced by individuals—often from the private sector—offering bribes and largesse, which has made the process of coalition building not only more complicated but squalid as well.

**The Decline of Political Parties**

The increasing political chaos and instability after the 1991 election created by difficulties in sustaining coalition government has undermined the image of political parties as the source of strong political leadership. The passage of time also eroded the ideological basis of the parties—dependence for the Vanua’aku Pati and justice for Francophones for the Union of Moderate Parties. With the exception of the 1991 election, when the UMP waged a campaign against the heavy government control practiced by the VP, labeling them as Communists, and called for democracy and free enterprise, little in the way of ideology or defining themes have entered the debate at election time. The campaign rhetoric of almost all parties and individuals running as independents is the same—promises to deal with Vanuatu’s problems of economic development and deteriorating social services and arguments as to why the particular party or coalition in power needs to be replaced. While this may not sound much different from election campaigns anywhere, it has been a significant change for Vanuatu, given its political history and, as described above, the unique role that organized political parties played in the past.

Not only do the parties face difficulties in defining their identities and dealing with leadership succession, they also face serious problems in the important area of candidate selection. During the 1970s and 80s, the New Hebrides National Party, which became the Vanua’aku Pati was probably the best organized political party in the Pacific. It was developed on the basis of grassroots sub-committees covering most of the islands and spokesmen known as commissars who provided the link between the party executive and the sub-committees. Every year, the VP organized a party congress at which all the sub-committees were represented to confirm party decisions and policies and elect the party executive, and commissar meetings were called as required in the interim to discuss and relay information back to supporters in the islands. At election time, the sub-committees negotiated with the party executive over who they wanted for the candidates in their areas—a difficult issue within the party, when multiple supporters from one areas sought party endorsement for a single place on the ballot. The party leaders traveled regularly, visiting not only their own constituencies, but other areas as well. The party was united and because of its emphasis on collective decision-making was usually able to find compromises when there was disagreement.

The success of the VP in achieving independence did not go unnoticed and its organization became a model for other parties that appeared over the years. The UMP followed the VP pattern of area sub-committees and annual party congresses and, Barak Sope and Walter Lini established similar structures for their own break-away parties—the MPP and NUP. This is not surprising since both were part of the leadership group in the early days of the VP and knew firsthand the effectiveness of its structure and practices. Today, however,
the parties appear weak and to have lost their focus—part of the explanation for their declining strength in parliament and the resulting political instability. It is clear that none enjoy the same unity that they did in their founding years. As political life shifted from the struggle for independence to running government ministries and departments in Port Vila, the leaders of all parties appear to have become detached to varying degrees from the source of their power in the islands. Elected Members of Parliament visit their own constituencies, but there is not the same degree of broad travel to strengthen party ties elsewhere between geographical areas and the diverse communities which have always made up the VP constituency. Annual congresses continue to take place, but in recent years the reports that come back tell of dissension and disagreement with sub-committees divided among themselves.

Another problem relates to the candidate selection process at election time, when there is disagreement within a constituency or between the subcommittees and the party executive over the choice of candidates for an election. This problem has always existed, but seems to be occurring more frequently and is less often resolved to the advantage of the party. Parties often find it necessary to allow an additional candidate to run even though they know that they do not have enough potential votes to secure both seats. The result is that the party loses what might have been a secure seat because its supporters split the vote. Likewise, just as disruptive is the situation where neither of the prospective candidates is prepared to withdraw voluntarily and the party executive decides in favor of one. The official candidate may then end up having to compete against a former party member, who has decided to run as either an independent or under another existing or newly created party. Since they are competing for the same supporters, they often split the vote allowing a candidate from a third party to win.

Another practice relating to candidate selection concerns the decision by parties to intentionally run more candidates in order to defeat the candidate of an opposing party. This can be achieved by running candidates that specifically target groups of supporters of the opposing candidate, i.e. pull votes away and, thus, make it possible for the candidate of a third party to win. The clear intention is to cause the defeat of the opposing candidate with little expectation that the extra candidate(s) will win.

Problem with candidate discipline and selection is clearly one of the main reasons for the decline in overall votes for the major parties, resulting in reduced numbers of seats in Parliament, weak coalitions and increased instability. Moreover, the fact that in cases, where dissident candidates win the election, parties usually accept them back or include them as independents in coalitions after the election. This only perpetuates the practice and weakens party discipline further. Vanuatu very clearly suffers from a weakness attributed to the use of the SNTV—intra-party competition, which leads to problems in candidate selection, the failure to field the correct number of candidates, a wastage of votes, defeat of the party’s candidate and the loss of the seat defeat.9

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While independent candidates have run in every election, the number has been low and they have not, therefore, been a major factor in creating political instability. This changed dramatically in the 1998 and 2002 elections. Not only did the number of independent candidates jump from 19 to 63 and 68

Table 5: Independents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Ind. Candidates</th>
<th>% of Total Vote</th>
<th>Defeated Incumbent – % of Vote in Constituency*</th>
<th>New Candidate – % of Vote in Constituency*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Port Vila – 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>Epi – 33% (1)</td>
<td>Tanna – 7% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tanna – 7% (7) Malakula – 6% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>Banks/Torres – 22% (2) Pentecost – 9% (4) Ambraym – 15% (2)</td>
<td>Santo – 5% (7) Malakula – 4% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Number of seats in constituency in brackets.

respectively, but their total percentage of the vote also increased—15.1 and 19.1 percent respectively (see Table 5). The five successful candidates in the 2002 election represent just under 10% of the total of 52 seats and 19% of the new MPs (5 out of 26), which is quite significant. These figures would tend to add to the evidence that the dominant role of the political parties in defining politics may, indeed, be on the decline—i.e. their ability to determine candidates and coordinate votes to counter increased numbers of independents.

Nevertheless, while the parties are overall clearly weaker, they still are able to maintain a solid core of supporters, who continually re-elect the parties' senior leaders Parliament—the bigman politics of personality discussed above—which gives those groups and they individual who represent them significant power and influence. Again, Vanuatu follows the pattern of the SNTV.10 As noted in Table 5, the overall turnover of members in parliament ranges from 48 to 56 percent, which seems quite high. It should be noted, however, that a consistently high number of incumbents choose for various reasons not to run for re-election—ranging from a high of 41 percent in 1983 to 23% in 2002. Thus, the relatively high total turnover rate takes into account a number of new candidates, who ran to fill vacant seats and did not defeat a sitting MP. Also, the overall percentages take into account new seats in those years where they have been added. This means that the percentage of candidates actually defeated

Table 6: Turnover of Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>New Seats</th>
<th>Re-elected MPs</th>
<th>Did not run</th>
<th>Defeated Sitting MPs</th>
<th>% of New MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Same Party</td>
<td>New Party</td>
<td>No. out of</td>
<td>Same Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19/30 (49%)</td>
<td>16/39 (41%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21/39 (41%)</td>
<td>13/39 (31%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 Ibid.
has ranged from 10% in 1983 to a high of 28% in 1998, which seems low, given the potential for undermining sitting members. Indeed, the relatively high numbers of incumbents in the 1991, 1995 and 1998 elections who switched parties or ran as independents and lost, would indicate that the system did not overly contribute to instability by facilitating the easy election of someone who had deserted his party (or was denied support in re-election) and ran under another banner. While the absolute number of incumbents who are defeated has increased steadily since the 1991 election, it is more surprising that the turnover has not been higher, given the accusations of corruption and obvious needless changes of government that have taken place during this period. As noted above, loyalty to certain bigmen seems to be unshakable—a special characteristic of politics in Vanuatu and perhaps Melanesia as a whole.

### The SNTV as a Factor in Vanuatu’s Political Instability

The search by Bernard Grofman and others on the functioning of the SNTV, focusing primarily on Japan, Korea and Taiwan, provides an useful framework for analysis of the Vanuatu experience. A basic premise which underlies the functioning of the SNTV and is reflected in the analysis of past systems is that it fosters political divergence in electoral districts rather than convergence, manifested in the creation of multiple parties, which leads to a system based on proportional representation and less stability. In comparison, a plurality system, which depends on a two-party system has the potential to produce a more stable government, since or the other will hold the majority. References have been made in the above discussion to aspects of the Vanuatu electoral system which follow the general pattern as explained by Grofman, e.g. in the degree of intra-party competition within multi-member constituencies, the use of the SNTV as a way to engineer voting results to the advantage of the party and the skill at which party organizers have learned to assess voter support vis-à-vis number of candidates in order to maximize results.¹¹

Given the party proliferation, coalition governments and significant political instability, it might appear on the surface that Vanuatu has developed an SNTV electoral system at its most extreme. While there are a number of characteristics attributable to the SNTV, there is evidence that other factors may be more important in explaining the evolution of its political system than the

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political system itself. At issue is whether the electoral system itself is contributing to the proliferation of parties, coalition governments and instability or are the conditions simply the natural result of Vanuatu’s cultural background and political history. For example, Vanuatu was politically and socially divided for thousands of years before the SNTV was introduced in 1975. The SNTV, therefore, had nothing to do with the tendency towards divergence and group competition in political affairs, but are fundamental characteristics of Vanuatu’s traditional culture. Likewise, the nature of Vanuatu’s bigman politics—a politics of personality—is clearly at the source of the party divisions that brought about the political divisions and proliferation of new parties and not competition at the constituency level, which is attributed to the SNTV itself. The proliferation of political parties began as a result of events in Parliament, which reverberated into the electoral system, not the reverse.

Moreover, there is no reason to believe that, had Vanuatu been had a plurality electoral system with single seat constituencies, that Vanuatu politics would have evolved differently. As the new parties emerged during the 1990s, there is no reason to doubt that they would not simply have entered candidates in each of the constituency in competition with the original parties. Likewise, the tactic of introducing independents to draw away votes from opposition candidates would be just as effective in single-seat constituencies as in multi-seat. Indeed, in the 2002 election, the number of candidates in relation to available seats was proportionally higher than in the multi-seat constituencies. Likewise, the ratio of parties to seats is as follows: 1 seat (5.1 to 1), 2 seat (4 to 1), 3 seat (2.3 to 1), 4 seat (2.4 to 1), 6 seat (1.8 to 1) and 7 seat (1.4 to 1).

Table 7: Comparison of Candidate numbers in Single- and Multi-Seat Constituencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>No. of Seats</th>
<th>Total No. of Candidates</th>
<th>No. of candidates – No. of parties</th>
<th>No. of Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banks/Torres</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8 – 7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21 – 9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malo/Aore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 – 8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luganville</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12 – 11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambae</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9 – 7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maewo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 – 5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecost</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15 – 9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malakula</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23 – 11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambrym</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9 – 8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paama</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 – 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8 – 8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongoa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6 – 6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 – 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17 – 10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Vila</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17 – 11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanna</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19 – 10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Islands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6 – 6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leaving aside the functioning of the SNTV as an electoral system, the decision to use multi-seat for a 10 of the 16 constituencies would appear to have
significant positive consequences for the development of Vanuatu’s democracy. As noted, the island group was never politically unified in pre-contact times, nor were any of the islands. Thus attempting to divide the larger islands which are extremely divers culturally would have been difficult. Likewise, the membership of the different Christian churches, the result of the arrival of missionaries in the 19th and early 20th centuries, is often scattered, which adds to the difficulty of drying electoral boundaries. As discussed above, church affiliation is usually reflected in membership in political parties. Vanuatu, therefore, is not burdened today with task of having to draw electoral boundaries, which in almost all cases results very politically divisive gerrymandering and feelings of frustration in those constituencies where minorities are not well represented. In Vanuatu, the SNTV allows for small, scattered political groups in multi-seat constituencies to be represented in parliament if they organize their voting carefully.

Further to the problem of dealing with the extreme cultural diversity of Vanuatu, the multi-seat constituency increases contact between groups within the island thus helping to create a sense of island unity where it did not exist in pre-contact times. It is not uncommon today to find Members of Parliament from the same island, but different political parties, conferring and joining forces to support developments. The effect is a growing sense of island identification among Ni-Vanuatu. Some criticize what has been termed a growing ‘islandism’ among the country’s population as divisive and parochial. However, it makes sense, given the extreme diversity that existed in the past throughout the group, that creating an island identity can be seen as a positive first step in the evolution of a greater national identity—the unifying factor being its very diversity.
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