



2016 SAMOA GENERAL ELECTION

Domestic Observation Report

Nicole Haley, Roannie Ng Shiu, Kerryyn Baker,
Kerry Zubrinich and Salā George Carter

August 2017



Australian
National
University



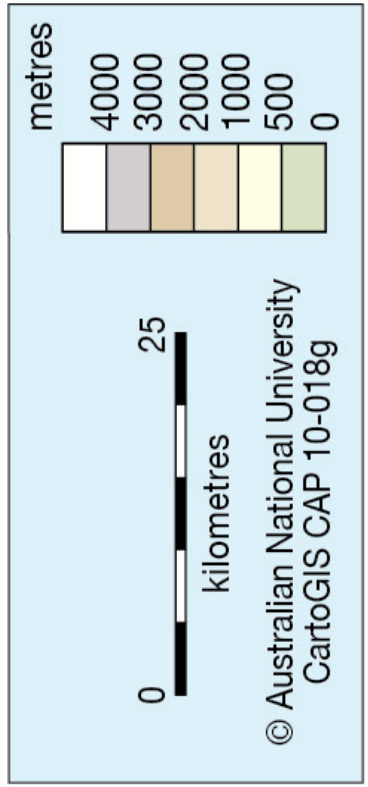
State, Society
& Governance
in Melanesia

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GLOSSARY

<i>Aiga</i>	An extended family
<i>O'o</i>	Formal presentation of food and gifts by an individual acknowledging an honour conferred to them
<i>Fa'amatai</i>	Chiefly customs and protocols
<i>Fa'asamoa</i>	Samoaan customs
<i>Faipule/Sui o le malo</i>	Government village representative
<i>Fa'afafine</i>	Third gender
<i>Lauga</i>	Formal speech or sermon
<i>Ma'imau taimi</i>	Waste of time
<i>Matai</i>	Chief, titled head of an <i>aiga</i>
<i>Meaalofa</i>	Gifts
<i>Momoli</i>	See <i>O'o</i>
<i>Monotaga</i>	Service of <i>matai</i> to village where they are titled
<i>Nu'u</i>	A village
<i>Palemene</i>	Parliament
<i>Pulenu'u</i>	Village mayor
<i>Sui tama'ita'i</i>	Women's representative
<i>Tautua</i>	Service
<i>Tala tau sua</i>	Inappropriate comments or jokes, jesting
<i>Tupe</i>	Money
<i>Komiti</i>	Committee





ABBREVIATIONS

ANU	Australian National University
AEO	Assistant Electoral Officer
COI	Commission of Inquiry
DRO	Deputy Returning Officer
HRPP	Human Rights Protection Party
IPPWS	Increased Political Participation of Women in Samoa
NUS	National University of Samoa
RO	Returning Officer
SOEC	Samoa Office of the Electoral Commissioner
SSGM	State, Society and Governance in Melanesia
SUNGO	Samoa Umbrella of Non-governmental Organisations
TRB	Temporary Registration Booths
TSP	Tautua Samoa Party
WST	Samoa Tala



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Friday 4 March 2016, Samoa conducted its 15th general election since independence in 1962. The 2016 general election was particularly significant because of three key constitutional or electoral amendments enacted during the election cycle, namely the Constitutional Amendment Act 2013, the Electoral Amendment Act 2014 and the Electoral Amendment Act 2015. The amendments reconfigured the electoral landscape as follows:

- » The Constitutional Amendment Act 2013 introduced a parliamentary gender quota, making Samoa the only independent Pacific state to have legislated for Temporary Special Measures (TSM) at the national level. It mandates that women hold at least five seats in Parliament. In the event fewer than five women are elected there are provisions for up to five additional seats to be created and filled by the highest-polling unsuccessful female candidates.
- » The Electoral Amendment Act 2014 restricts the conduct of *o'o* or *momoli* — presentations of money, food and gifts (typically traditional fine mats and tapa cloth) to a village or villages within a constituency by a candidate to announce their intention to run — to a period immediately after the election, in an attempt to reduce undue influence and subsequent election petitions.
- » The Electoral Amendment Act 2015 divided the six dual-member constituencies into 12 single-member constituencies, such that all constituencies are now single-member constituencies. It also created two new urban seats to replace the two Individual Voters' seats, in which citizens of non-Samoan heritage were previously registered.

With the approval of the Samoan Cabinet and Office of the Electoral Commissioner (SOEC), academics from the Australian National University (ANU) and the National University of Samoa (NUS) observed the elections in partnership with the SOEC and local civil society organisations, including Leadership Samoa and the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Government Organisations (SUNGO). The observation, funded by the Australian Aid Program through its head contract with ANU's, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) Program, was led by Associate Professor Nicole Haley and Dr Roannie Ng Shiu. The observation team comprised 12 Samoa-based academics/researchers in team leader roles, 12 ANU-based academics in mentoring roles, 39 Samoan observers from civil society and NUS, and two ANU undergraduate students.

Observations were undertaken in 13 of Samoa's 49 single member constituencies (26.5%), including 11 on the main island of Upolu and two on Savai'i. Constituencies were purposefully selected to be broadly representative and included: the two newly established urban seats; seats with one or more female candidate; seats with no female candidates; two seats with the highest number of candidates; two seats where the incumbent MP ran unopposed; and the seats with the highest and lowest numbers of registered voters. Teams undertook observation in these constituencies across a four-week period during the campaign, pre-poll, polling and counting periods.

The observation also included two citizen surveys taken during the campaign and post-polling periods. In total 2163 citizens were surveyed concerning their election experiences, and observations were made at 103 of the 360 (28.6%) polling stations nationwide. The key findings arising from these observations are contained within this report.

Key Findings

Overall the 2016 election should be considered a success, and we congratulate the then Acting Electoral Commissioner Faimalomatumua Mathew Lemisio¹ and his team for delivering a highly credible election. Certainly there were some challenges, particularly in relation to the number and location of polling stations in urban Apia. For example, the provision of extra polling stations, which were intended to mitigate anticipated concerns arising from the new regulation prohibiting candidates from offering transport to voters and the difficulties some voters might experience getting to a polling station, saw SOEC capacity stretched thin and seemingly did not go far enough to address the anticipated logistical challenges. This should easily be mitigated in future elections. Looking forward, another key area requiring attention is the electoral legislation. It has been amended several times resulting in terminological inconsistencies. It should be reviewed for consistency as a matter of priority. Notwithstanding the high degree of confidence voters and observers registered in relation to the election, the relatively low turnout is of concern. The turnout rate in 2016 in the 45 constituencies in which voting took place (noting that four MPs were elected unopposed) was 72.7 per cent compared to 78.7 per cent in 2011.

Election Preparations

For the most part, election preparations proceeded smoothly and without major incident, although the recruitment, training and retention of sufficient polling officials proved to be somewhat of a challenge and led to delays with the deployment of polling teams. The swearing in and mobilisation of polling teams and resources from the SOEC headquarters on polling eve proved to be a chaotic affair, mostly due to polling officials, not being where they needed to be at particular times. In several constituencies, polling officials were co-opted very late in the process and received little or no formal training. While polling officials in general conducted themselves well, these last-minute personnel changes presented some administrative challenges.

Another issue highlighted by the observation team is the uneven size of constituencies in Samoa which, although in some ways an inevitable by-product of traditional political divisions, creates significant representational disparities, particularly in urban areas. The election awareness campaign the SOEC ran in the lead-up to the 2016 elections was regarded as highly successful by observers and citizens alike, and cited as one of the most-improved aspects of the election.

Nominations

Nominations opened on 5 February 2016 and closed two weeks before polling day on 18 February 2016. Only *matai* title holders, registered in the constituency they intend to contest, are qualified to contest elections in Samoa, provided that they are a citizen of Samoa, satisfy the residency and service (*monotaga*) requirements and are not an undischarged bankrupt, under sentence of death or have been convicted of an offence punishable by more than four years imprisonment.

In total, 171 men and women were nominated to contest the 2016 elections. Two subsequently withdrew and five were ruled ineligible (SOEC 2016:26–27). Of the 164 candidates who contested the election, 24 were women, 81 were Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) endorsed candidates, 22 were Tautua Samoa Party (TSP) endorsed candidates and 61 ran as independent candidates, although, of these 29 candidates were aligned with HRPP and one was aligned with Tautua (ibid.:27). On average three candidates contested each constituency, although in three constituencies (Alataua West, Lefaga and Falease'ela, and Anoama'a East) there were as many as six candidates.

The 2016 elections also saw greater enforcement of *monotaga* (the requirement for candidates to have served their community). Five eligibility challenges prior to the election concerned whether or not particular candidates had satisfied the *monotaga* (service) and residence requirements.

Campaign Period

During the campaign period there was little tension. Campaign activities were mostly low-key and peacefully conducted. Nonetheless there were a few isolated incidents such as the vandalism of one candidate's billboards. In part the subdued nature of campaigning can be attributed to the lack of a vibrant opposition in Samoa. Indeed, over three-quarters of candidates were party-endorsed or party-independents affiliated with the ruling Human Rights Protection Party, which has governed Samoa since 1982. Campaigning in the 2016 elections continued the trend of being highly personalised, with party platforms not playing a significant role in voter choice. Vote-buying, gifting and treating activities on the part of candidates or their agents were considered to be more limited in the 2016 elections than in previous elections, although in each and every constituency where observations were undertaken there were a small number of citizens who reported receiving food, gifts or cash in return for their vote.

Polling and Counting

Notwithstanding the delayed deployment of polling teams, polling proceeded peacefully and in an orderly fashion, with few irregularities noted. Candidate's campaign team members, referred to locally as *komiti*, were an obvious and at times intimidating presence at polling stations. Some voters seemed genuinely unclear about the role of scrutineers in the election process, noting that many were in fact members of candidates' *komiti*. That scrutineers were aligned with particular candidates is not unexpected given that scrutineers act as a candidate's eyes and ears on polling day and during the count.

At most polling stations there were voters who required assistance, which slowed the voting process somewhat, and led in a couple of cases to procedural breaches, such as voting taking place in vehicles outside polling stations. More significantly though, polling in urban Apia was slowed by having to process large numbers of out-of-constituency voters. Information regarding special booths was not conveyed effectively to voters and there was considerable confusion amongst voters in Apia as to whether they were registered in the new single-member territorial constituencies or the new urban constituencies. Consequently, some voters had difficulty locating their names on the roll and, although many were eventually able to vote, the fact that many polling officials did not have access to SOEC laptops and could not reach SOEC headquarters by phone during the day caused some disruption to the voting process.

With the exception of the special booths in Apia for the rural Upolu and Savai'i seats, voting in many areas had effectively concluded by 2pm. Nevertheless, polling stations remained open until 5pm as they are required to do by law. Preliminary counts conducted at the close of polling were completed within 30 minutes at most polling stations, although many polling teams experienced delays transmitting preliminary results to the SOEC due to congestion in the phone lines. In many cases there were also significant delays transporting ballot boxes back to SOEC headquarters.

Cross-cutting Issues — Women, Inclusion, Culture and Politics

The new parliamentary gender quota generated much discussion during the election period. Approximately three-quarters of all citizens surveyed during the campaign period (n=1159) felt there should be more women in Parliament (72%), and an even greater proportion claimed they would vote for a good women candidate (77%). Only three in five (60%), however, felt there were good women candidates contesting this election.

Conversations which took place while conducting the citizen surveys also revealed there to be strong opposition to greater women's political representation from one in six women (16%) and one in five (21%) men. Certainly, past research has shown there are a number of formal and informal barriers to women's participation in decision-making at the village level and these have clear and significant effects on women's participation in national politics (Meleisea et al. 2015).

The vast majority of citizens surveyed (87%) expressed the view that people with disability should have the right to vote, and each observer team witnessed people with disability actively participating in the election, often with assistance from family. The new regulations restricting the transport of voters to polling stations could be seen, however, to unfairly discriminate against voters with mobility issues, particularly the elderly and infirm. As such they may warrant review. In terms of inclusion, the political participation of *fā'afafine*² also warrants further exploration. Little is known about their participation as voters, although their general absence from polling teams as well as their non-participation as candidates was noted.

At independence Samoa adopted a system of *matai*-only suffrage and extended the right to contest elections to *matai* title-holders alone. As a consequence, few women were enfranchised and even fewer contested elections (see Meleisea et al. 2016). A nationwide plebiscite in 1990 saw suffrage extended to all adult citizens — regardless of rank or title — at the 1991 general election. Eligibility to stand for election remains restricted to *matai*, although this is not a topic of much debate in contemporary Samoan politics.

An area of concern, however, and one that was the subject of much discussion during the 2016 election was the politicisation of *monotaga* (the requirement for candidates to have served their community) and the restriction of *o'o* or *momoli* (presentations which in the context of an election might be considered treating) to the period immediately following the election. Voters in Samoa seem to be weary of election-related court cases and, as such, generally welcomed SOEC moves to restrict political gifting and money politics.

Overall Assessment

The vast majority of citizens (95%) surveyed considered the 2016 elections better than both the 2011 and 2006 elections. Of the three most recent elections, the 2011 elections were considered to have been most affected by political gifting, money politics and electoral fraud. Fui Professor Asofou So'o, the Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Samoa, described the 2016 elections as 'the most peaceful, most orderly and the most organised elections I have witnessed as a voter'. While this is to be commended, there are areas of improvement that can be made in the delivery of future elections. Two key areas warranting attention are the number and location of polling stations and the controversial new regulation concerning the provision of transport to polling stations by candidates.



Recommendations:

- » That stand-by polling officials be recruited and trained, or over-rostering be implemented for the next election in order to mitigate the effects of late withdrawals of recruited polling staff. Recruitment of polling staff could also take place closer to the election, to try to limit attrition.
- » That a different system be developed to deploy teams and resources to and from SOEC headquarters to constituencies for the next election. This could involve a marshalling area for polling teams, and separate vehicles for each team.
- » That SOEC laptops be distributed to more polling stations.
- » That more special polling stations be set up in Salelologa, Savai'i.
- » That staff be recruited to increase the capacity of the SOEC to deal with calls on polling day, both relating to issues with the roll, and to relay preliminary results.
- » That the SOEC consider reducing the number of polling stations for the next general elections in order to reduce the strain on its resources and recruitment capabilities.
- » That the SOEC either overturn the ban on candidates transporting voters to polling stations, or investigate alternative options of providing transport to voters on polling day, with particular attention paid to how to target voters with mobility issues; voters in remote areas; and voters without access to vehicles.





SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Observation of the 2016 Samoa General Elections was undertaken by a consortium of academics from the Australian National University (ANU) and the National University of Samoa (NUS) in partnership with the SOEC and local civil society organisations, including Leadership Samoa and the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Government Organisations (SUNGO). Funded by the Australian Aid Program through its head contract with State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) Program³ at the ANU, the observation was led by Associate Professor Nicole Haley and Dr Roannie Ng Shiu. The observation team comprised 12 Samoa-based academics/researchers in team leader roles, 12 ANU-based academics in mentoring roles, 39 Samoan observers from civil society and NUS, and two ANU undergraduate students.

While this was the first in-depth research-based Domestic Election Observation of its kind to be carried out in Samoa,⁴ the research design and methodology were based on previous projects led by ANU academics in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The approach generates quantitative and qualitative data in a systematic way (see Haley and Zubrinich 2013), which not only provides for comparison between constituencies but also enables cross-country comparison. The 2016 general election were particularly significant because of three key constitutional or electoral amendments enacted during the election cycle, namely the Constitutional Amendment Act 2013, the Electoral Amendment Act 2014 and the Electoral Amendment Act 2015. The amendments reconfigured the electoral landscape as follows:

- » The Constitutional Amendment Act 2013 introduced a parliamentary gender quota, making Samoa the only independent Pacific state to have legislated for Temporary Special Measures (TSM) at the national level. It mandates that women hold at least five seats in Parliament. In the event fewer than five women are elected there are provisions for up to five additional seats to be created and filled by the highest-polling unsuccessful female candidates.
- » The Electoral Amendment Act 2014 restricts the conduct of *o'o* or *momoli* — presentations of money, food and gifts (typically traditional fine mats and tapa cloth) to a village or villages within a constituency by a candidate to announce their intention to run — to a period immediately after the election, in an attempt to reduce undue influence and subsequent election petitions.
- » The Electoral Amendment Act 2015 divided the six dual-member constituencies into 12 single-member constituencies, such that all constituencies are now single-member constituencies. It also created two new urban seats to replace the two Individual Voters' seats, in which citizens of non-Samoan heritage were previously registered.

Given the constitutional and electoral amendments noted above, the observation tool used in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands required substantial revision, to take account of the Samoan political context.

To this end, two research officers from the SOEC, Francis Ainuu and Ah Kau Palale, visited the ANU and participated in SSGM's annual Pacific Research Colloquium in January 2016. During their stay they worked with SSGM scholars to revise the research instruments for the Samoa Election Observation. The draft research instruments were provided to colleagues at NUS and the Samoan team leaders for feedback in late January 2016. Particular efforts were made to ensure terminological consistency between the terminology employed in the observation journal and that used by the SOEC as part of its education and awareness campaign concerning the recent electoral amendments.

The observation utilised field-based methods to observe and assess the 2016 General Elections in order to:

- » generate quantitative and qualitative data to provide a snapshot of voter behaviour and voter opinion in Samoa and to enable cross-election and cross-national comparison

- » generate quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to provide recommendations to the SOEC for future election management
- » assess how recent constitutional and electoral legislation reforms have affected the conduct and outcomes of elections in Samoa.

Observations were undertaken in 13 of Samoa's 49 single member constituencies (26.5%), including 11 on the main island of Upolu and two on Savai'i (see Table 1 below). Constituencies were purposefully selected to be broadly representative and included: the two newly established urban seats; seats with one or more female candidate; seats with no female candidates; two seats with the highest number of candidates; two seats where the incumbent MP ran unopposed; and the seats with the highest and lowest numbers of registered voters. Teams undertook observation in these constituencies across a four-week period during the campaign, pre-poll, polling and counting periods.

Typically, teams comprised an academic team leader, an ANU mentor, and two to four civil society or academic observers. Each team undertook observations in their respective constituencies over a four-week period from 11 February to 11 March. This allowed for observations to be made during the campaign, pre-poll, polling and counting periods. All observers completed a day-long training program before deployment, and each was issued with an observer journal to complete over the course of the observation.

Table 1. Electorates subject to observation

Team	Electorate	Island	Registered Voters	ANU Mentor
1.	Urban West	Upolu	4564	George Carter
2.	Urban East	Upolu	2483	Colin Wiltshire
3.	Vaimauga West Nu. 1	Upolu	3164	Roannie Ng Shiu
4.	Vaimauga West Nu. 2	Upolu	3278	Rodney Ng Shiu
5.	Faleata West	Upolu	5091	Nicole Haley
6.	Sagaga Le Usoga	Upolu	3219	James Batley
7.	Falealili West	Upolu	2951	Rochelle Bailey
8.	Lotofaga/Lepa	Upolu	1062/764	Hannah McMahon
9.	Lefaga & Falese'ela	Upolu	3354	Nicholas Halter
10.	Safata West	Upolu	3209	Scott Robertson
11.	Alataua West	Savai'i	1516	Kerryn Baker
12.	Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West	Savai'i	2136	Thiago Oppermann

1.1 Research Methodology

The project utilised field-based methods to observe, assess and review the 2016 general elections. In order to ensure observers collected relevant data, in a systematic way, a comprehensive observer journal, divided into 12 sections each relating to a different part of the election process was developed. For the most part, the journal comprised questions designed to gather information that would allow for qualitative analysis and direct comparisons to be made between constituencies. The observer journal was based upon similar research instruments developed for election observations in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Albeit significantly revised for the Samoan context with the help of SOEC researchers, the journal included questions pertaining to all stages of the election process. Observations were made at 103 of the 360 (28.6%) polling stations nationwide: observers were encouraged to provide rich detail and thick description wherever possible.

Gathering this information involved:

1. direct personal observation during the campaign period, on polling day, during the count and scrutiny of votes, and
2. interviews with key interlocutors, including village mayors (*pulenu'u*), village women's representatives (*sui tama'ita'i*), members of village councils, candidates, campaign managers, members of candidate *komiti*, polling and counting officials, and security personnel.

Two key sections of the observer journal (Sections 5 and 9) involved undertaking citizen surveys, during the campaign and post-polling periods respectively. Specifically, each observer was asked to survey 40 citizens (20 men and 20 women) over the course of the observation. Survey responses were recorded on iPads and smartphones. The campaign-period survey principally focussed upon voter registration; voter education and awareness initiatives; the use of mobile phones and social media; voter intimidation; attitudes towards female candidates and people with disabilities; and experiences of political gifting/bribery. The post-polling survey, by contrast, related to the accuracy of the roll; voters' experiences at the polling station; voter intimidation; factors influencing voter behaviour; experiences of political gifting/bribery; and comparisons with past elections.

In total 2163 citizens were surveyed either during the pre-poll period (n=1159) or in the post-polling period (n=1004). The sample included 1072 men and 1091 women. Table 2 below offers a breakdown of the quantitative sample by setting and gender.

Table 2. Quantitative sample – by setting and gender

	Pre-polling Survey Sample				Post-Polling Survey Sample			
	Total n	Setting	Sample n	Sample %	Total n	Setting	Sample n	Sample %
Setting	1,159	Rural	642	55	1,004	Rural	645	64
		Urban	517	45		Urban	359	36
Gender	1,159	Male	586	51	1,004	Male	486	48
		Female	573	49		Female	518	52

1.2 Challenges

Given the large scale of the project and the fact that this was the first research-based domestic election observation of its kind in Samoa, there were some challenges at each stage of the observation.

Stage 1: Design

Adapting the journal to the Samoan context involved ensuring terminological alignment with that country's electoral laws. In Samoa's case the relevant legislation is the Electoral Act 1963, which was enacted soon after independence. As pointed out by the *Commission of Inquiry into Electoral Matters following the 2006 General Elections*, Samoa's Electoral Act 'has been amended often to deal with issues which have arisen from one election to another' (Government of Samoa 2006:3–4). As a consequence, the legislation is now replete with terminological inconsistencies, such that key electoral roles or positions are referred to by different names in different parts of the legislation. For example, the terms Assistant Electoral Officer (AEO), Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) and Presiding Officer (PO) are seemingly used interchangeably, reflecting, we suspect, the preference of the different drafters responsible for the legislative amendments enacted at various times. The Commission of Inquiry following the 2006 elections had in fact recommended that 'the Electoral Act 1963 be repealed and replaced by a completely new and revised Electoral Act given the significant changes recommended in this report and anomalies which exist in the current Act' (Government of Samoa 2006:19), although this did not transpire.

Although the journal was developed in English and all observers completed the journal in English, translating the citizen surveys into Samoan was considered a high priority, as it was anticipated that the majority of surveys would, in fact, be conducted in Samoan. This proved to be the case. Francis Ainuu and Ah Kau Palale, the lead research officers from the SOEC with whom we collaborated to revise the journal, and Leasiolagi Dr Malama Meleisea, Director of the Centre for Samoan Studies at NUS, ensured the accuracy of the translations despite the inconsistency within the legislation itself.

Stage 2: Training

A full day of training was provided to observers in Samoa on Monday 8 February. The training in Samoa progressed more quickly than elsewhere, in part due to time constraints and because the entire observation team was well educated and fluent in English. The single day's training also meant, however, that would-be observers who could not attend the training session were then unable to participate in the observation. An additional training session would have proved beneficial if time had permitted.

The ANU mentors, many of whom had observed elections elsewhere in the region, underwent separate pre-departure training in Canberra. Their training principally focussed on Samoan culture and politics. Once the ANU mentors arrived in-country there was a full team mobilisation briefing involving mentors, team leaders and local observers. This provided an opportunity to address any questions that had arisen during the nomination and early campaign periods.

Stage 3: Data Collection

For the most part observers were well received by polling officials and the general public. It proved important in the Samoan cultural context for observers to go through appropriate channels within the village to introduce themselves and explain the nature of the observation. Many teams did this in the week preceding polling, making themselves known to the village mayor (*pulenu'u*). Given that such an observation had never before been undertaken, team leaders also found it useful to introduce their team members to polling officials the day before the election.

A single observation team was assigned to the neighbouring Lotofaga and Lepa constituencies, both of which have small enrolments. As it turned out, the MPs for both constituencies were elected unopposed. This team conducted citizen surveys during the campaign period in both constituencies. On polling day, however, observers from this team were reassigned to conduct observations in the larger constituencies of Lefaga and Falease'ela, Urban West and Faleata West. In total, 1159 citizen surveys were completed in 13 constituencies during the campaign period.

In a few instances on polling day, there was confusion about whether observers were connected to the Samoa Observer, Samoa's daily newspaper, in some way. In one case an observer was turned away from a polling station because the police believed he was a media representative. In other places, voters initially treated observers with suspicion, believing them to be observing on behalf of candidate *komiti*. Such suspicion was quickly allayed in most cases; however, at one polling station, officials claimed that the presence of observers deterred people from voting there.

For the most part, citizens were happy to participate in the pre-poll and post-polling surveys, although observers noted that some older Samoan men were reluctant to answer the post-polling surveys and some scrutineers questioned why an Australian university would be interested in the Samoan elections. In total 1004 citizen surveys were completed post-polling in the 11 constituencies where polling was observed.

Stage 4: Data Analysis

In most cases observers completed their journals in full, although some mentors found it difficult to complete the full complement of citizen surveys, due to lack of local language proficiency. When analysing the data, it became evident that teams that met regularly and worked collectively had developed shared assessments and views concerning the elections. Oftentimes they had seen and witnessed the same things. By contrast, teams that worked less collectively tended to report greater variation. This is not necessarily a data integrity issue.

Recommendations:

- » **A comprehensive review of the Electoral Act 1963** should be undertaken ahead of the 2021 election with a view to achieving greater terminological consistency, and removing anomalies and obsolete provisions. Ideally this would entail revisiting recommendation 20 from the COI following the 2006 general elections, which called for the Electoral Act 1963 to be repealed and replaced with a new Electoral Act.
- » **Domestic election observers should be retained, and encouraged in future elections.** In order to ensure a robust and high quality domestic observer presence in future elections, preparations should commence earlier in the election cycle (at least 12 months prior to the issue of writs). This would allow academic staff at NUS to take a lead role and for observers to be recruited and properly trained well in advance.
- » **In the event that domestic observers are retained, there should be greater awareness about their role,** in order to mitigate confusion on polling day.



SECTION 2: ELECTION PREPARATIONS

This section summarises the observations relating to election administration in the pre-polling period. For the most part, election preparations proceeded smoothly and without incident. The primary issue that emerged was the recruitment of a sufficient number of polling officials.

As in previous general elections a two-day public holiday (3 and 4 March 2016) was passed as the General Elections holiday. The date of the 2016 election — 4 March — was announced six months prior to the election in September 2015. Table 3 below summarises the election timetable.

Table 3: 2016 election timetable

Election Timetable	
Close of registration	31 October 2015
Issue of Writs	5 February 2016
Close of Nominations	18 February 2016
Polling Day	4 March 2016
Return of Writs	14 March 2016

2.1 Election Boundaries and Equal Suffrage

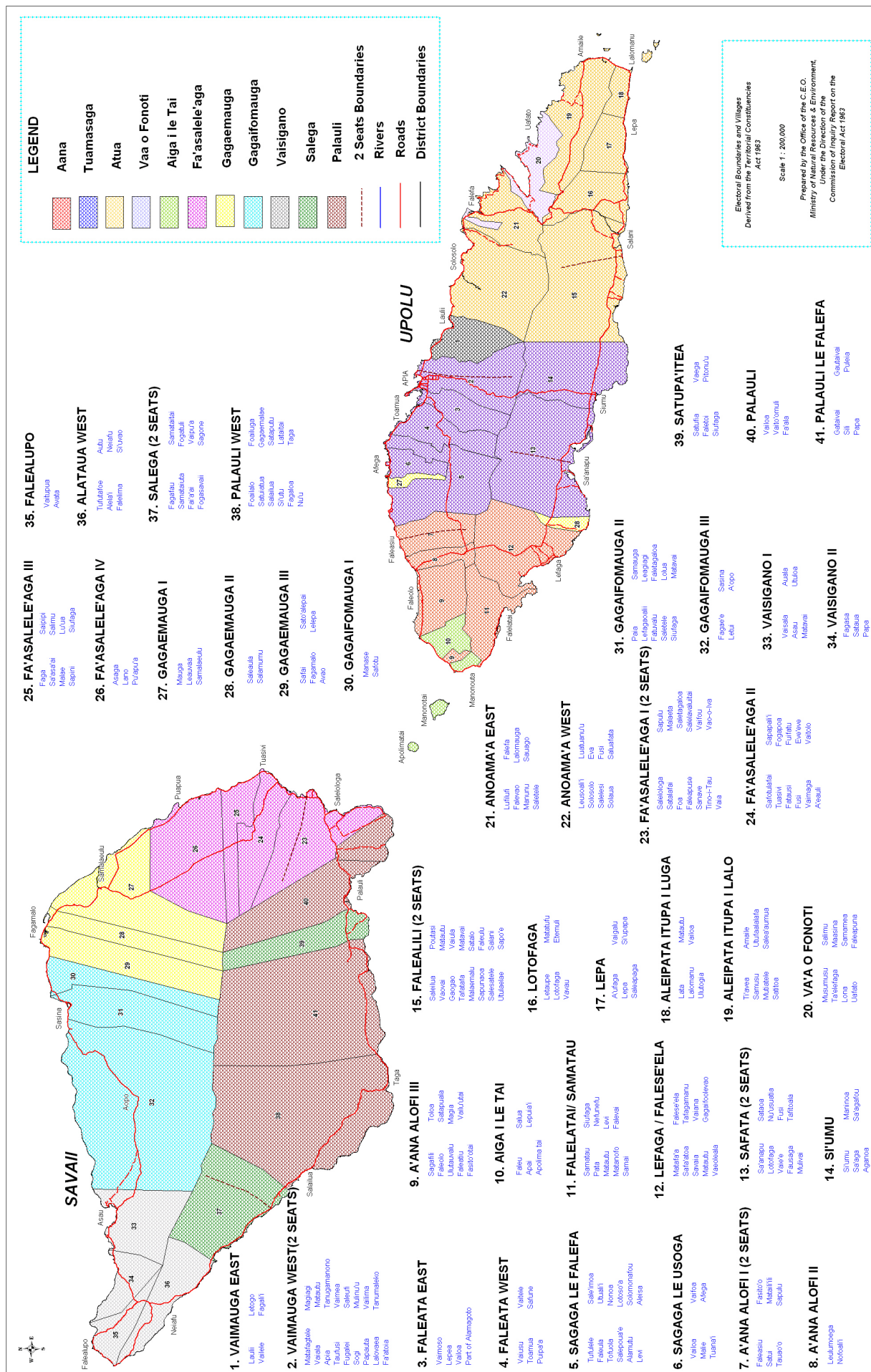
At independence Samoa adopted a system of *matai*-only suffrage and extended the right to contest elections to *matai* title-holders alone. As a consequence few women were enfranchised and even fewer contested elections (see Meleisea et al. 2016). A nationwide plebiscite in 1990 saw suffrage extended to all adult citizens (over 21 years of age) regardless of rank or title at the 1991 general elections. Eligibility to stand for election remains restricted to *matai*.

Unlike other countries where electoral boundaries are drawn and periodically redrawn based on shifts in population, constituencies in Samoa were and continue to be organised around traditional political districts that were associated with ranked *matai* titles.⁵ Indeed as outlined in the *Commission of Inquiry Report on Electoral Matters* following the 2011 general elections, when defining its electoral districts and constituency boundaries, Samoa deliberately sought to preserve 'as far as possible the traditional linkages and political affiliations between village communities. Population density was relevant but not overwhelmingly so' (Government of Samoa 2012:5).

This link to Samoa's traditional political organisation continues to be important (So'o 2008) and is considered advantageous, despite resulting in constituencies which vary dramatically in size. As at the 2016 election the smallest constituency was Lepa, with 764 registered voters; whilst the largest constituency was Faleata West, with 5091 registered voters. On average there are 2365 registered voters in each Samoan constituency.

Apart from the variation in the size of electorates, the prioritising of traditional political organisation results in uneven representation across the country, and especially between the two main islands. In Savai'i the ratio of members of parliament to registered voters is 1:1868, compared to 1:2738 for Upolu. Indeed while Upolu has three times the population of Savai'i, it has only seven more constituencies.⁶ Because Samoa's constituencies are not and never have been relatively equivalent in size, citizens in some constituencies and some parts of the country have greater voting powers than others, meaning Samoa fails to achieve a key cornerstone of representative democracy. The following map illustrates both the traditional political districts and electoral constituencies in Samoa.⁷

Figure 1: Political boundaries map



Source: National Mapping Section (MNRE)

Source: National Mapping Section (MNRE)

Inequities arising from the uneven size of constituencies are a source of contention in Samoa. Nonetheless, traditional political divisions remain salient and so redrawing boundaries would be a highly controversial measure. Moreover, it is not clear to what extent Samoa aspires to fundamentally be considered a representative democracy. After all, successive Commissions of Inquiry have advocated preserving and accommodating custom and tradition within the electoral process (Government of Samoa 2012:12; Government of Samoa 2006), although the 2006 COI report highlights the difficulties that have arisen through attempting 'to marry culture and independent voting in one electoral system' (Government of Samoa 2012:38). One way of preserving tradition and customary political divisions, whilst delivering more equal representation for citizens, would be to revisit recommendation 25 arising from the COI following the 2006 general elections, which advocated additional seats within the Legislative Assembly for those constituencies with larger populations. It was proposed that the number of seats for each constituency be based on a sliding population scale.

Despite Samoa's demonstrated reluctance to redraw election boundaries, the Electoral Amendment Act 2015 saw 12 new territorial constituencies established prior to the 2016 election. Specifically, the Act saw Samoa's six dual-member constituencies divided into 12 single-member constituencies,⁸ and saw the creation of two new urban seats to replace the individual voters' roll (see below). Both initiatives had been recommended by successive Commissions of Inquiry into electoral matters (Government of Samoa 2006, 2012). To some extent the creation of these new constituencies eliminated the previous unevenness in representation wherein voters in dual-member constituencies cast votes for two candidates, while voters in sole-member constituencies cast a vote for a single candidate.

During the course of the election, there was some debate concerning the extent to which traditional political divisions were respected in the process of redrawing boundaries. Despite the redrawing of boundaries and the redistribution of voters between the newly established constituencies, significant size differences remain. This is particularly so in the case of Safata, where the number of registered voters in Safata West exceeds that in Safata East, by 1500. In the same vein there are over 1200 more registered voters in the newly established Falealili West than in Falealili East. In Safata West, observers reported one candidate who campaigned denouncing the new electoral boundaries. Opposition to the new boundaries tended to be couched in terms of a perception that the new boundaries would adversely affect the sociopolitical context in Samoa, by shifting the cultural and political importance assigned to certain villages.

Ahead of the 2016 elections, the anachronistic individual voters' roll was abolished. It had been established at independence to provide representation for citizens of non-Samoan descent and those without connections to traditional villages (Government of Samoa 2006:42). With the passage of time and the shift from *matai*-only suffrage to universal suffrage at the 1991 elections, the individual voters' roll was held to have outlived its utility, particularly in view of the fact that the descendants of those who originally registered have since been incorporated into the existing village governance arrangements.

In 2016 voters residing on freehold, leased and other non-customary land in urban Apia were able to register for the first time in one of two newly created urban constituencies. To do so they needed to have been residing in the constituency for no less than six months prior to the election. Those with ties to a traditional village could elect to register in either the urban seat or in a territorial constituency to which they could establish traditional village ties.

The changes were intended to improve the franchise of those from traditional villages in Faleata and Vaimauga. In the wake of both the 2006 and 2011 elections, constituents complained that urban settlers had co-opted the electoral process, and were influencing election results in these constituencies without necessarily having kinship connections to the traditional villages of their constituencies (Government of Samoa 2006: Appendix 2; Government of Samoa 2012:8–9).

2.2 Voter Registration

Samoa employs an ongoing voter registration process. Voter registration closes temporarily approximately six months prior to a general election and reopens upon its conclusion. Registration for the 2016 general election closed on 31 October 2015.

In preparation for the 2016 elections, the SOEC office undertook a series of voter registration drives including one which coincided with the rugby union international test match between the New Zealand All Blacks and Manu Samoa in Apia on 8 July 2015. This particular drive, which took place in the fortnight to 10 July 2015, targeted citizens eligible to enrol in the new urban constituencies (SOEC 2016:16). It saw Samoans ordinarily resident in Australia and New Zealand who had travelled 'home' for the historic game register to vote in the 2016 elections.

Temporary Registration Offices were also set up at Vaitele and Salelologa markets in Apia between July and October 2015 (ibid.) and Temporary Registration Booths (TRBs) were set up at seven police outposts and one district hospital (ibid.:17). Collectively these temporary registration facilities processed over 3700 new enrolments, 4400 transfers, and re-photographed 4925 registered voters (ibid.:16–17). In the month leading up to the closure of the electoral roll, the main SOEC office at Mulinu'u also opened on Saturdays between 8am and 1pm, thereby allowing 554 new voters to register, 525 transfers to be processed and 237 enrolled voters to be re-photographed (ibid.:18). There was also a last-minute rush on enrolments and transfers in the week prior to registration closing. In order to process the long queues, registration booths remained open until 4am.

Section 17(2) of Samoa's electoral law provides for eligible citizens to transfer their enrolment between elections if: they no longer reside in the constituency in which they were last registered, have an immediate family connection to a *matai* title holder in the constituency they are seeking to transfer into; or if they are a plural *matai* title holder and wish to transfer into a constituency for which they hold a title. Voters may only transfer their registration once in a five-year period.

In the lead-up to the 2016 elections, a record number of transfers were processed. Many of these transfers were occasioned by the creation of the new urban seats and the establishment of 12 new single-member constituencies. Observers and voters alike reported active campaigning during the voter registration and transfer period, and allegations of bribery and undue influence were also levelled against some candidates.

Of the 1159 citizens surveyed during the campaign period, 671 (58%) reported that they had been actively encouraged to register by a family member; by a *matai* title holder (19%), by a candidate (9%), or by a member of their campaign *komiti* (13%). Additionally, 5 per cent of citizens surveyed reported being offered some form of direct inducement to register or transfer their enrolment. The types of inducement reported varied, and included: modest cash payments (WST10–WST20); transport to a Temporary Registration Booth; food; assistance securing health treatment; payment of school fees (WST500–WST600); an 'A pass in a course the candidate was teaching'; and, in one case, a house.

Between 2011 and 2016 the number of registered voters in Samoa increased by 15 per cent (SOEC 2016:8), with the highest percentage increases recorded in the urban areas. Of the 47 single-member traditional territorial constituencies, Faleata East recorded the greatest percentage increase in enrolments (48%). Although the overall increase in enrolments was far more modest in Faleata West (0.7%), it recorded the highest number of transfers out (1568) and still remains the constituency with the highest number of registered voters (5091) (ibid.).

Historically there has been 'no clear correlation between the population of a constituency and the size of a constituency's electoral roll' (ibid.:12) in Samoa. This is because people living in one constituency can enrol in another by virtue of family connections and/or *matai* titles (ibid.). It is also the case that members of the Samoan diaspora can and do register to vote, although not all travel home to do so. During the course of the

observation, observers encountered a number of people ordinarily resident in Australia and New Zealand who had returned to Samoa to vote.

Cleaning of the electoral roll took place in late 2013 in Upolu and early 2014 in Savai'i. It resulted in the removal of 2412 deceased persons from the roll (ibid.:13). Removing deceased voters from the electoral roll requires confirmation of the death by an immediate family member or from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (ibid.). As such there are likely deceased people, particularly those who died overseas, who are still on the roll. Certainly the SOEC estimates that in 2016 there were almost 20,000 more registered voters than the estimated population of eligible voters (ibid.:7).⁹ Possible explanations include those deceased people who have not been removed from the roll and Samoans living overseas who had registered to vote. Of the 1004 citizens surveyed post-polling, only 638 (64%) considered the 2016 electoral roll accurate, although 85 per cent considered it more accurate than either the 2006 and 2011 electoral rolls. Close to a third (28%) were unsure about the overall accuracy of the current electoral roll.

2.3 Nominations

Nominations opened on 5 February 2016 and closed two weeks before polling day on 18 February 2016. Only *matai* title holders, registered in the constituency they intend to contest, are qualified to contest elections in Samoa, provided that they are a citizen of Samoa, satisfy the residency and service (*monotaga*) requirements, and are not an undischarged bankrupt, under sentence of death or have been convicted of an offence punishable by more than four years imprisonment.

In total, 171 men and women nominated to contest the 2016 elections. Two subsequently withdrew and five were ruled ineligible (SOEC 2016:26–27). Of the 164 candidates who contested the election, 24 were women, 81 were Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) endorsed candidates, 22 were Tautua Samoa Party (TSP) endorsed candidates and 61 ran as independent candidates although 48 were affiliated with HRPP (ibid.:27).

Nine election petitions, including five eligibility challenges, were filed and heard prior to the election.¹⁰ These eligibility challenges concerned whether or not particular candidates had satisfied the *monotaga* (service) and residence requirements; and in one case whether a candidate should be disqualified on the basis of an undisclosed criminal conviction. Four HRPP candidates were elected unopposed, including the Lepa and Lotofaga seats where observations were made. Observers reported widespread disappointment on the part of voters in Lotofaga. Many enrolled in the constituency, including those supporting the incumbent MP, expressed a strong desire to vote. Less disappointment was noted and reported in the neighbouring constituency of Lepa.

On average three candidates contested each constituency, although in three constituencies (Alataua West, Lefaga and Falease'ela, and Anoama'a East) there were as many as six candidates. Table 4 shows the number of candidates in each of the constituencies observed.

Table 4: Number of candidates in each constituency observed

Electorate	Island	Number of Candidates	Number of female candidates
Urban West	Upolu	4	-
Urban East	Upolu	3	2
Vaimauga West Nu. 1	Upolu	3	-
Vaimauga West Nu. 2	Upolu	3	-
Faleata West	Upolu	4	-
Sagaga Le Usoga	Upolu	4	-
Falealili West	Upolu	5	-
Lepa	Upolu	1	-
Lotofaga	Upolu	1	1
Lefaga & Falese'ela	Upolu	6	3
Safata West	Upolu	3	-
Alataua West	Savai'i	6	3
Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West	Savai'i	5	2

In Samoa, village endorsement is critical to election success. In large villages, village endorsement is highly sought after. For example, four candidates vied for endorsement from the village council in the most populous village of Alataua Sisifo constituency. For the first time ever, the village council eventually chose to endorse two candidates, namely the incumbent, and a challenger who went on to win the election. They also issued a statement making clear they did not endorse the candidacies of the two other aspirants, one of whom went on to seek, and win, endorsement from a neighbouring village.

Candidates who contest elections without village council endorsement typically perform poorly. Such was the case in Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West where the only candidate that ran without village council endorsement won the least amount of votes. The overall level of advantage gained through village council endorsement depends in large part on informal norms and the extent to which group consensus informs decision-making within any particular community. Certainly village endorsement is a real formal barrier for women's political participation, particularly for women from villages which ban women from sitting on village councils. Three of the constituencies observed, Faleata West, Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West and Sagaga Le Usoga, include villages that ban women from sitting on village councils.

The office of village mayor (*pulenu'u*) was established during German administration as an interface between the colonial government and the village. The office was retained after independence and has since become a core feature of Samoan society. The duties of the *pulenu'u* are wide ranging, and include witnessing or endorsing claims for enrolment and transfer requests, and attesting to a candidate's service (*monotaga*) to the community. On the face of it such activities have the potential to be quite political (So'o 2008).

More than half of the citizens surveyed post-polling (52%) were not sure whether their *pulenu'u* was aligned to any particular candidate. Twenty-nine per cent of all those surveyed felt the *pulenu'u* were not politically aligned, whereas 19 per cent felt they were. Three in five (62%) of those who considered the *pulenu'u* to be partisan were based in rural constituencies. Typically, the concerns raised centred upon the role of the *pulenu'u* in promoting particular candidates. By contrast, two-thirds (66%) of those who were unsure whether the *pulenu'u* was politically aligned were registered in an urban electorate. It is also worth noting that church leaders were

also seen to be influential. Observers in Savai'i, for example, noted the key role a vocal church minister had in influencing his congregation to vote for a particular candidate.

2.4 Election Awareness

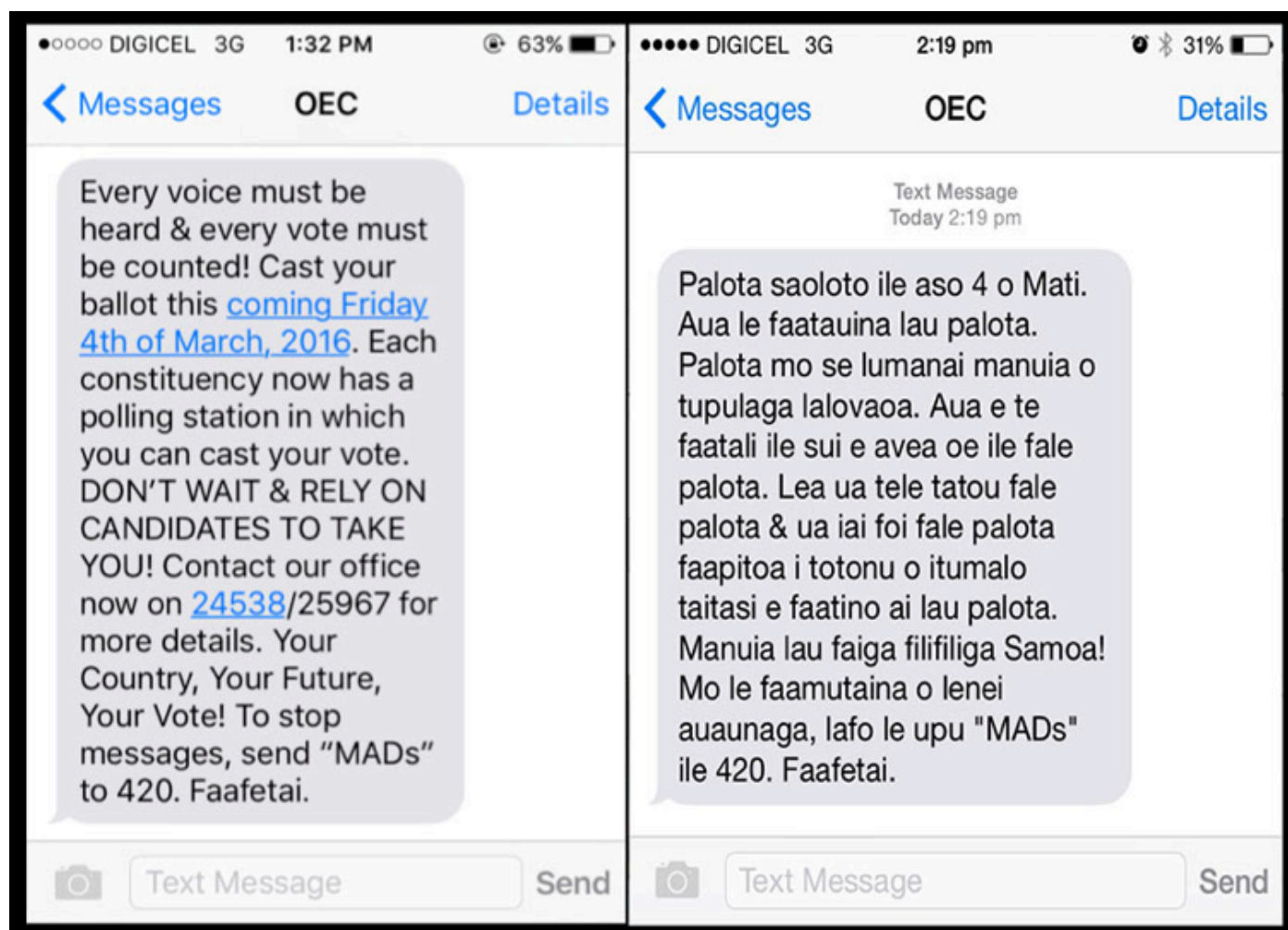
Public awareness commenced a full two years prior to the election (SOEC 2016:24). The need for a comprehensive and aggressive media campaign in the lead-up to the 2016 elections was necessitated by the Constitutional Amendment Act 2013 and the Electoral Amendment Acts of 2014 and 2015 which: introduced a parliamentary gender quota; restricted the conduct of *o'o* or *momoli* until after the election; saw the creation of two new urban seats; and divided the six dual-member seats into single-member constituencies. The public awareness campaign provided general election-related information and specific information concerning changes to the electoral laws.

Team leaders, observers and citizens alike all considered the SOEC's awareness campaign a resounding success and one of the most improved aspects of the election. In large part it was the success of the public awareness campaign that contributed to the overall success of the election. Specifically, the SOEC employed a multimedia public awareness campaign aligned to different stages of the electoral process, to convey information about the key changes. Television advertisements, radio announcements, print media, social media, bulk text messaging and face-to-face awareness/village-based outreach sessions were all used to great effect.

Concerted efforts were made to target different sections of the community in different ways. Notably social media including Facebook was used to connect with Samoan youth while radio announcements were scheduled at times and in programs more likely to appeal to older citizens. Overall, television advertisements had the greatest reach, with 85 per cent of the 1159 citizens surveyed during the campaign period reporting that they had seen such advertisements. Nearly half of those surveyed (46%) had also heard radio advertisements, while close to a quarter (23%) reported exposure to print media. A much smaller proportion of citizens surveyed reported having accessed information about the election via social media (7%) and 6 per cent reported receiving a bulk text message from the SOEC.

Whilst it is not particularly surprising only a small proportion of those surveyed had accessed information about the election via social media, the limited reach of SMS/text message service is somewhat surprising. Especially as 967 citizens surveyed pre-polling (83%) reported owning a mobile phone, and a further 55 (5%) reported having regular access to a phone owned by someone else. Yet only 73 (7%) of citizens surveyed reported receiving one of the SOEC's election-related text messages. This warrants further investigation. Figure 2 below provides one example in English and Samoan of an SOEC text message sent to voters.

Figure 2: SOEC bulk text messages



Source: SSGM

Such was the reach of the media awareness campaign that all but two of the 1159 citizens surveyed during the campaign period reported exposure to one or more media advertisements. That said, one of the two had attended a face-to-face awareness session conducted by SOEC staff.

Exposure to the SOEC's public awareness campaign varied somewhat, depending on where citizens lived. Not surprisingly those living in urban Apia were more likely to have reported exposure to multiple forms of awareness. Three in five people registered in these urban constituencies (61%) reported exposure to multiple forms of awareness, while just under half of those living in rural constituencies (48%) did. For those living in more remote locations, such as Alataua West constituency in Savai'i, radio proved the most effective means of communication, and the only reliable source of information concerning the elections. Indeed, close to half of those surveyed (46%) in Alataua West reported exposure to radio advertisements alone. The lack of TV reception was the source of much discontent in one village, with residents asserting they had not received as much information about the election as other villages.

2.5 Recruitment and Training of Election Personnel

Polling officials were selected, and trained, well in advance of the election. The SOEC reports training 1700 public servants and private sector employees over a two-year period between 2013 and 2015 (SOEC 2016:23). Separate training was provided to police charged with the responsibility of securing the election, and refresher training was provided to polling officials in the month prior to the election. Nevertheless, there was significant attrition of polling officials close to the election, necessitating last minute recruitment.

In Samoa, candidates have historically transported their supporters to polling stations on polling day. Successive Commissions of Inquiry have raised concerns about undue influence on the part of candidates in relation to this practice. Ahead of the 2016 elections the SOEC resolved to enforce an existing law, which renders it an offence for candidates or their *komiti* to provide transport for voters. Much awareness was conducted in relation to the practice, seeing it discussed at length during the election period. Understandably, citizens were divided over the merits of this response, noting the lack of public transport on public holidays. Some felt the SOEC should have provided transport for voters instead.

On several occasions the Electoral Commissioner took to the media and publicly responded to criticism about the SOEC position on the matter saying, 'if you can walk to church then you can walk to a polling station in order to vote'. Observers in six of the 11 constituencies where polling day observations were made (predominantly those in the Apia area) reported that candidates were providing transport to voters — using their own car, cars belonging to *komiti* members, or paying taxis to transport voters. Specifically, observers noted the same cars regularly dropping off voters and/or *komiti* members paying taxi drivers transporting voters.

Because of this crackdown on candidates transporting voters to polling stations, 100 additional polling booths were established for the 2016 election, taking the total number of polling booths to 360. As a consequence, SOEC resources were stretched. In total 1372 polling officials and 422 police officers were engaged on polling day. As with previous elections, polling officials were mostly teachers or public servants.

In six of the 11 constituencies where polling day observations were made, there were polling officials who were recruited as last minute replacements. Specifically, observers encountered reports of officials recruited the day before the election, and in one case at 2am on polling day, after the designated officials failed to turn up and collect their election materials on the eve of polling. For the majority of polling officials, though, training did take place well in advance and was considered to be comprehensive.

As noted at the outset, observers visited all polling stations (101) in the 11 constituencies where polling day observations were made, and two special booths in Apia as well. Detailed observations were made at 85 of these polling stations. For the most part observers noted that polling officials properly understood their roles (87%), conducted themselves well and managed their polling stations well (92%).

Last minute changes to the composition of polling teams did, however, give rise to administrative challenges and general disquiet in some places. For instance, the two Savai'i-based teams reported disgruntlement from polling officials in relation to their mobilisation, which was delayed by several hours due to the late arrival of polling officials. They also reported having not met their fellow team members until they reached their assigned constituencies. Observers from one of the Savai'i teams noted a booth that did not open at all due to a lack of staff to man it. At 17 of the 85 polling stations (and 7 of the 9 polling stations in Savai'i) where detailed observations were made, there were fewer polling officials than had been assigned for at least part of the time period observed. Voters' polling day experiences are considered later in the report, namely in Section 4..

Recommendations:

- » That stand-by polling officials be recruited and trained, or over-rostering be implemented for the next election in order to mitigate the effects of late withdrawals of recruited polling staff. Recruitment of polling staff could also take place closer to the election, to try to limit attrition.
- » That the SOEC consider recruiting and training local polling officials in Savai'i.
- » That an electoral boundary review be undertaken to examine whether some of the size discrepancies between constituencies could be ameliorated, while still respecting the traditional political boundaries in place.
- » That cleaning of the roll, especially to remove deceased persons take place closer to the election to ensure that the roll is as accurate as possible.



SECTION 3: CAMPAIGN PERIOD

This section provides observations concerning the campaign strategies employed by candidates, the importance of *monotaga* (service), and the influence of *aiga* (family), political parties and money politics on the conduct of elections in Samoa.

3.1 Campaign Strategies

Campaign teams (*komiti*) are critical to a candidate's campaign. *Komiti* campaign on behalf of candidates and are lead actors during the voter registration period. Observers reported that *komiti* actively engaged in the process of registering new voters and facilitated the transfer of enrolments. Indeed, *komiti* were particularly important in mobilising a large voting base for candidates in the new seats as well as in highly contested constituencies. Outside of the immediate family it is *matai* and *komiti* who most influenced people to register. Of those who were influenced to register/re-register for the 2016 elections, approximately one in five (19%) were influenced by a *matai* and one in four (24%) by a campaign manager or *komiti*. Campaign managers and *komiti* were also implicated in the money politics associated with voter registration. Of the 56 people who reported receiving an inducement to register, close to half (48%) reported receiving food, modest cash payments and/or transport to a temporary registration both from a campaign manager or *komiti*.

In various constituencies, candidates, campaign managers and *komiti* were observed to be campaigning house-to-house. Campaigning by *komiti* was seemingly the most popular method of campaigning observed in Alataua West and Safata West constituencies. In Safata West it appeared to be the only campaign activity that was actively encouraged. In Sagaga Le Usoga constituency, *komiti* members campaigned at Afega market, rather than going house-to-house.

In seeking to explain the importance of house-to-house campaigning in the context of the 2016 elections, one observer in Urban West team noted that face-to-face contact with candidates or their *komiti* was important for undecided voters. Observers also noted that some candidates contesting the new urban seats used phone campaigning to connect with their constituents. In such cases telephone contact was used to make a 'personal connection' with voters and create presence within the constituency.

By contrast, observers in Lefaga and Falease'ela constituency reported that voters found visits from candidates or their *komiti* 'annoying'. Six candidates including three women contested Lefaga and Falease'ela constituency in 2016. At the time of the election the seat was effectively vacant following the retirement of the previous incumbent LeMamea Ropati Mualia who held the seat from 1979 to 1988, and from 1991 to 2016.

The most popular campaign strategies employed in all 13 constituencies observed included: the use of billboards and posters (reported by 45 observers); newspaper, radio, and/or television advertising (reported by 45 observers); and hosting small community gatherings (reported by 33 observers). The hotly contested Lefaga and Falease'ela constituency was the only constituency in which all observers noted one or more candidates campaigning with money and/or *mea'alofa*. In general, the nature and extent of campaign strategies employed varied slightly according to region. In Urban West, for example, observers considered the use of billboards and social media to be more extensive than in other constituencies.



Source: SSGM

Fewer candidates used billboards in rural areas. In Sagaga Le Usoga, only one billboard was seen, and in Alataua West and Safata West there were no billboards. The effectiveness of billboards and posters in campaigning was questioned by some:

*The whole idea of billboards is interesting, particularly in villages.
Everyone knows what you look like, why billboards?*

Faleata West Observer

A female candidate in Alataua West expressed similar sentiments with regards to the use of candidate posters. In general, observers noted that the use of media in campaigning was more frequent in the 2016 campaign than in previous elections. Certainly newspaper, television and/or radio advertising was the campaign strategy most commonly reported by observers in rural Upolu and Savai'i, and the second most common strategy reported in Apia and surrounding areas. Sometimes such media was credited with having a big impact. In Alataua West, a radio speech delivered by one candidate the week before the election addressed controversy that had arisen over her candidacy; it was very widely discussed in the constituency, and it was believed to have won her more votes.

*[The candidate] gave a moving speech over the radio [and] swayed many
people to support her despite being banned from the village.*

Alataua West Observer

In Urban East and Alataua West constituencies, female candidates were observed to campaign more actively than their male counterparts. In both these constituencies, the male incumbents¹¹ were not seen to be actively campaigning at all. In Lefaga and Falease'ela constituency too, female candidates had billboards where their male counterparts did not, and were observed to be making more grandiose election promises during the campaign. Women candidates in Lefaga and Falease'ela held village meetings where they relied heavily on male *matai* and *komiti* members to speak on their behalf. This is not altogether surprising as research from around the region has demonstrated the importance of strong male backers to the success of women's electoral campaigns (Haley and Zubrinich 2015b). Based upon the detailed reports provided by observers, there was little to differentiate individual candidate's campaigns. Key issues discussed by candidates during the campaign included service delivery, good governance, leadership, national development and employment.

The 2016 elections saw active campaigning in urban seats for the first time ever. In contrast to the individual voters' roll which constituted an invisible constituency, in that voters could live anywhere in the country, the new urban seats have defined boundaries (albeit ones that overlay territorial constituencies). Candidates contesting the new Urban West and Urban East constituencies, male and female alike, made prolific use of billboard advertising, including the use of electronic billboards in Apia's town centre. One candidate for Urban West had his billboards vandalised on two separate occasions in the weeks leading up to the election (see Figure 3 below). The sabotage of his billboards proved to be the subject of much discussion.

Figure 3: Billboard vandalism — Urban West Constituency



3.2 Importance of Monotaga (Service)

In Samoa *matai* are expected to serve the community or village from which their title derives. Such service is referred to locally as *monotaga*. It is a requirement that all candidates in Samoa perform *monotaga* or service to the community. As a consequence, candidates often campaign on their service track record. Part 2 of the Electoral Act defines *monotaga* as 'the compulsory service, assistance or contribution (such as, contribution in form of cash, kind or goods) rendered for customary, traditional or religious activities, events, function or similar purposes pursuant to the customs of a particular village'.

In the context of the 2016 elections, candidates principally sought to demonstrate service through financial contributions to the community and through participation in the village council. In some parts of Samoa, including in the constituency of Sagaga Le Usoga, women's participation in village governance is prohibited. Indeed, although discrimination on the grounds of sex is constitutionally prohibited in Samoa, appeals to custom and tradition are regularly used to usurp women's voice and their active participation in village governance (Meleisea et al. 2015:8). Some villages, for instance, will not allow *matai* titles to be bestowed upon women.

A recent survey of women's participation in village governance in Samoa by Meleisea et al. found that only 76 per cent of traditional villages actually have a women's representative (2015:30). The same survey found that most village women's representatives 'did not participate in village council meetings unless they were summoned to provide information on a particular matter' (ibid.:31), and that although village councils are comprised of *matai* title holders, few women with *matai* titles actually have a say in village decision-making

(ibid.:28–29). Moreover, 36 of Samoa's 240 traditional villages and sub-villages (15%) exclude women from village decision-making altogether (ibid.:27),¹² and even in villages that recognise women with *matai* titles, few in practice sit on village councils (ibid.:41).

As such, aspiring women candidates often find securing village endorsement to run for election difficult. They may also experience difficulty satisfying the service requirement, and if they succeed in being nominated may face resistance from voters. For many candidates, campaigning principally involves simply being in the constituency: participating in village council meetings; attending church services; contributing to various church activities; and being actively engaged in community activities. In both of the Savai'i constituencies in which observations took place, visibility in the village — through taking part in community discussions, church services and other activities — was highlighted by observers as the key determining factor in electoral success. For candidates who did not live in the village, groundwork for a successful or near-successful campaign usually began well before the election, with regular trips back to the village, and financial contributions to community events.

In the election context, *monotaga* becomes highly politicised. Indeed, there is a long history of election petitions which have considered whether individual candidates have satisfied the *monotaga* requirement, and, as noted above, the *pulenu'u* (village mayor) and *faipule/sui o le malo* (village representative) are called upon to attest to whether a candidate has carried out his or her *monotaga*. In the lead up to the 2016 elections, three aspiring candidates were disqualified from standing on the basis that they had not fulfilled the *monotaga* requirements. Such cases proved highly controversial and generated much discussion within communities and in the media, particularly in relation to how one's service to the village can be manipulated for political gain. One participant commented:

Politics is dirty and they are using fa'asamoa as a way now that is political like the monotaga. I don't have much confidence that this election will change anything. Everyone knows who will win.

Male respondent, 30–59 years

This issue of *monotaga* was highlighted acutely in the pre-election period when the eligibility of a Palauli Le Falefa candidate, Le Tagaloa Pita, was successfully challenged by incumbent MP Faumuina Tiatia Liuga. Faumuina's petition argued that Le Tagaloa had not rendered compulsory service (*monotaga*) to his village, as required. The case was particularly interesting as Le Tagaloa holds the title of high chief (Papa). According to custom, Papa titleholders such as Le Tagaloa are not required to render service (*monotaga*) in the same way as other *matai*; *monotaga* is only performed by *matai* who hold titles of lesser status. The petition gave rise to considerable discord within the village of Sili during the election period and led to the banishment, since lifted, of the petitioner Faumuina,¹³ on the basis that he had brought disrepute to the village, and had broken village protocols with his election challenge. Also banished was the *pulenu'u* (village mayor) who had endorsed Faumuina's claims.

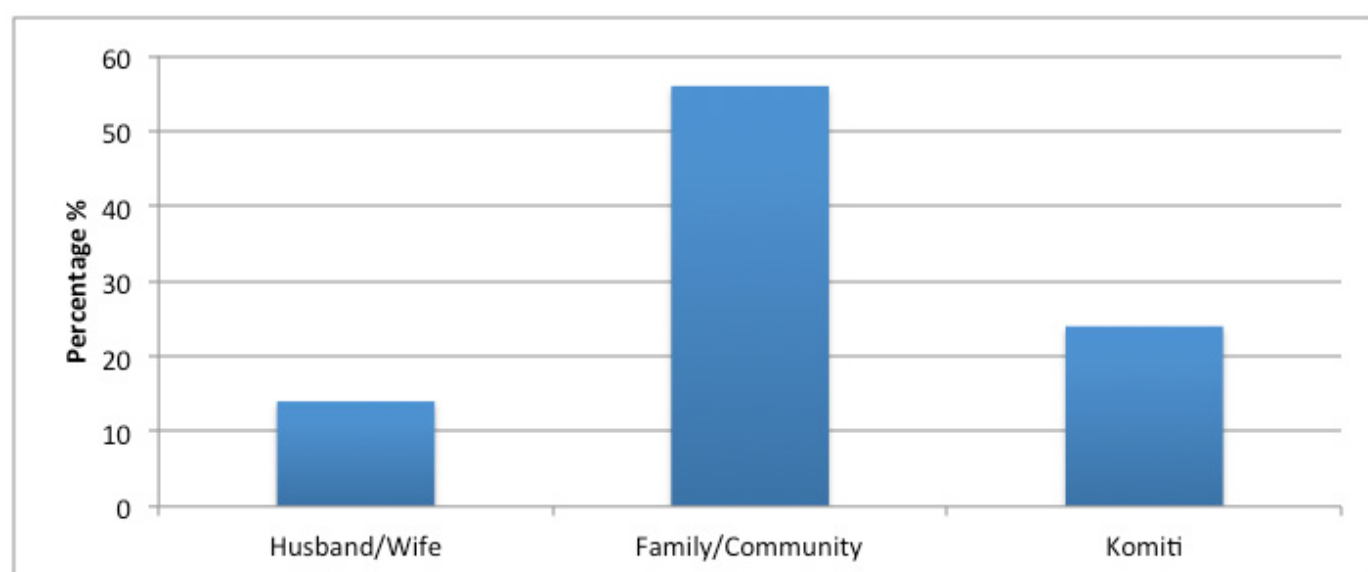
3.3 Influence of Aiga (Family)

Aiga or family and village connections were seen by many observers to be the single most important factor influencing voter choice. Although the extent to which family ties dictated voter behaviour seemingly varied between constituencies, family clearly influenced registration behaviour and voting behaviour. As noted above, three in five (58%) of the 1159 citizens surveyed during the campaign period reported that they had been actively encouraged to register. Of these, 57 per cent were influenced by family.

In large part family also influenced polling day behaviour. As part of the post-polling survey, citizens were asked: Who or what factors influenced how you voted? Family was the single most common response, with 47 per cent of the 1004 citizens surveyed post-polling reporting that family had influenced how they voted. By contrast only one in four voters surveyed (24%) reported being influenced by a candidate's character, while one in ten reported being influenced by candidate promises (11%) or village and family obligations (10%).

Family also figured centrally in relation to the intimidation some voters experienced on polling day. For example, 11 per cent of voters surveyed post-polling reported that they either did not vote (4%) or experienced intimidation when casting their vote (7%). Of the 70 men and women who reported being unable to vote freely without intimidation, 49 (70%) were intimidated to vote in a particular way by their spouse or a family member. Tellingly, women were also twice as likely as men to experience intimidation from family. Figure 4 below illustrates the relative importance of family/community, one's spouse and *komiti* in relation to experiences of voter intimidation.

Figure 4: Key sources of voter intimidation (n=70)



Of the voters who experienced intimidation on polling day, 56 per cent attributed the intimidation experienced to a family member, 14 per cent to a spouse and 24 per cent to a candidate's *komiti*. Results from the post-polling survey clearly indicate that *aiga* or family was the single most important influence on voter behaviour in the 2016 elections.

3.4 Influence of Political Parties

In total, 164 candidates contested 2016 elections, up from the 159 candidates who contested the 2011 elections but down on the 210 who contested the 2006 elections (SOEC 2011:2). Four candidates were elected unopposed. Three in five candidates (63%) ran with formal party endorsement, although the number affiliated with parties was significantly higher (88%), as indicated in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Number of candidates nominated per political party

Political Party	2011		2016	
Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP)	79	50%	81	49%
Tautua Samoa Party (TSP)	41	26%	22	13%
HRRP-aligned Independents	29	18%	40	24%
TSP-aligned Independents	1	1%	1	1%
Independents	9	6%	20	12%
Total	159		164	

Source: SOEC (2011:2); SOEC (2016:27)

HRPP has dominated parliamentary politics in Samoa since the early 1980s. It has a policy of not endorsing candidates challenging its sitting members of parliament. They do, however, maintain a list of HRPP-affiliated candidates, who are formally registered as independents but are publicly aligned with the HRPP. Both HRPP-endorsed and HRPP-affiliated candidates campaigned with HRPP campaign posters and flew the party flag.

During the official announcement of the HRPP candidate roster on Friday 5 February 2016, the caretaker Prime Minister and HRPP leader, Tuilaepa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, spoke directly to the issue of HRPP-affiliated candidates. He was reported in the Samoa Observer, as saying: 'the Party would always prioritise the incumbents' whom he described 'as passengers with first class tickets'. He went on to liken the other HRPP-endorsed and HRPP-affiliated candidates as passengers holding 'business class seats', noting at the same time that both first class and business class seats recline, and that if you slept in either seat on a long haul flight to Los Angeles you would arrive feeling refreshed (Tupufia 7/2/2016).

Altogether, 121 candidates (74% of all candidates), including 17 women, were endorsed by or affiliated with HRPP. At least one HRPP candidate contested each constituency. In 16 of the 49 constituencies, HRPP-endorsed candidates ran against each other, and in a further 23 constituencies a HRPP-endorsed candidate ran against one or more HRPP-affiliated candidates. HRPP-endorsed candidates only ran against each other when there was no incumbent, a Tautua Party incumbent, or two incumbents as was the case some of the new single member constituencies due to both members of the former dual member constituency being from villages within the new constituency. In addition to the four constituencies that HRPP won without contest, there were 14 constituencies which were contested by HRPP-endorsed or HRPP-affiliated candidates alone. As a consequence, HRPP was guaranteed 18 seats even before voting commenced.

Tautua Party fielded 22 candidates (13% of all candidates), including four women, in the 2016 election. It also claimed that a number of candidates contesting as independents were aligned with the party. Interviews with candidates revealed this was true in at least one case, although the exact number of Tautua-aligned independents is unclear. In at least three constituencies two Tautua Party endorsed or aligned candidates contested against each other.

While both parties released party platforms before the election, party policies were not observed to figure significantly in candidates' campaigns. This was not unexpected, as all candidates were aligned to a single party in over one-third of all constituencies (37%). It is also the case, as noted above, that candidates tended to principally campaign on their personal record of service. Although the leaders of both parties did appear in television and radio advertisements outlining their party policies during the campaign period, they were not seen to engage in campaigning on behalf of other candidates within the party.

As the majority of candidates were party endorsed or party affiliated, it is unlikely that party affiliation influenced voter choice to any great extent. Nevertheless, it was recognised, by observers and voters alike, that given HRPP's domination of politics over the past three decades, and the fact it went into the election with 18 guaranteed seats, only HRPP candidates could reasonably claim they would be likely to secure a ministerial portfolio if elected.

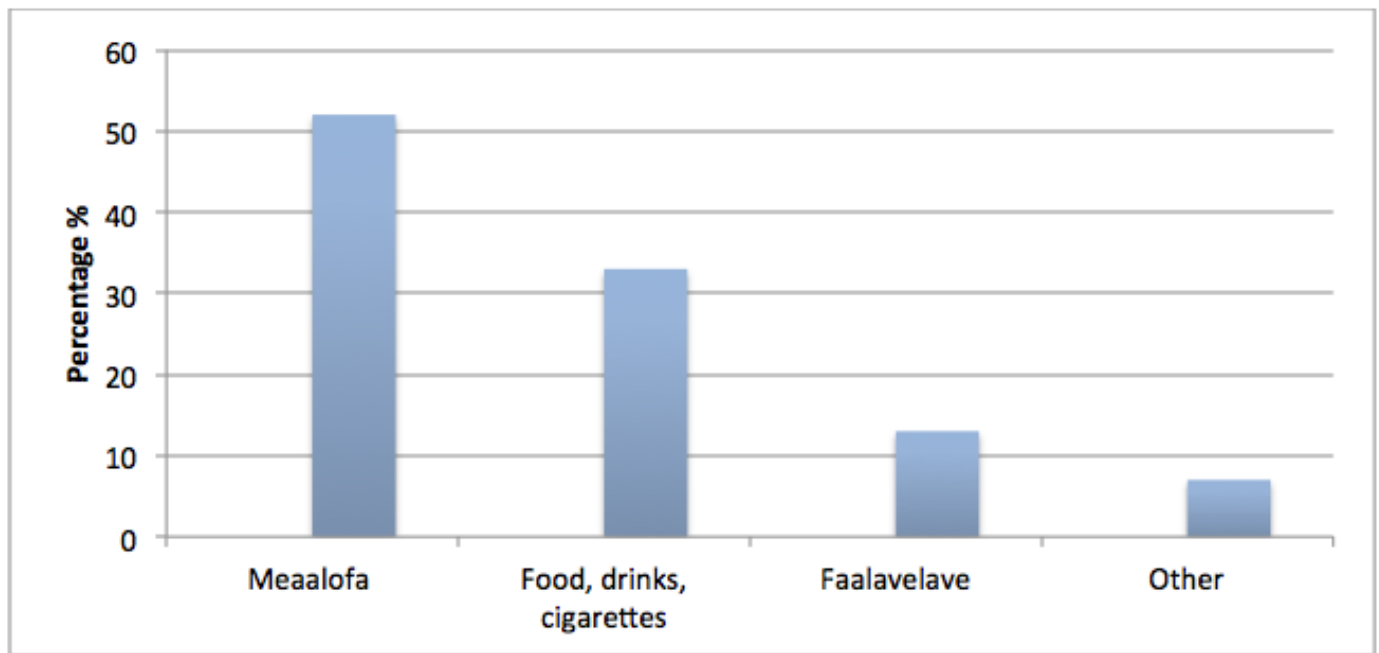
3.5 Influence of Money Politics

The influence of money politics — including vote buying, gifting and treating — was difficult to ascertain. No observers reported seeing direct evidence of vote-buying or gifting in their constituencies, but observers in Fa'asaleleaga Nu. I West, Lefaga and Falease'ela, and Urban West reported second-hand accounts or rumours from respondents. Three observers also cited reports of vote-buying in other constituencies not covered by the observation.

Observers in one constituency noted that where villages did not put forward their own candidate, money politics seemed more prevalent as candidates from other villages vied for extra votes, and candidates did well where they targeted villages that had not endorsed a candidate.

In each constituency observed, one or more citizens reported receiving gifts from candidates. However, the proportion of those who received gifts was relatively small. Only 69 of the 1003 citizens surveyed post-polling (7%) reported receiving gifts from a candidate. Of those, 36 reported receiving mea'alofa (52%), while 23 (33%) reported receiving food, drinks or cigarettes as highlighted in the following graph:

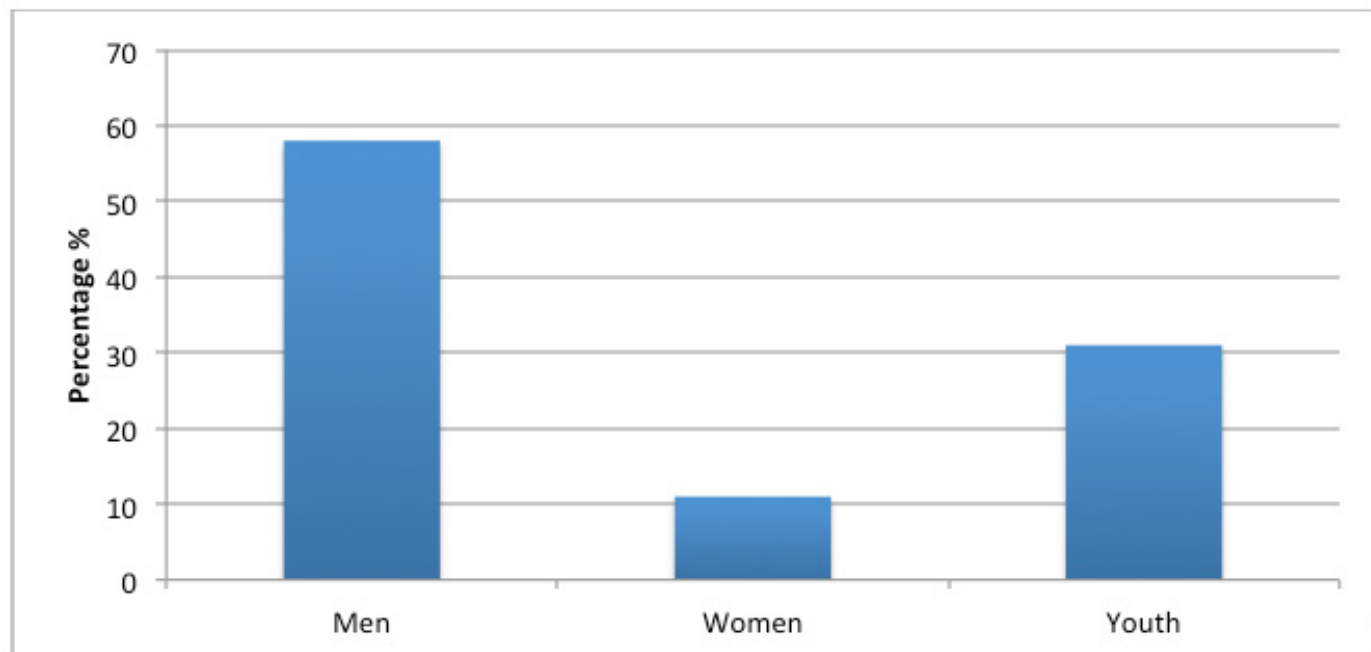
Figure 5: The different types of gifts or treats respondents received from candidates



Nineteen of the 69 citizens who reported receiving gifts (28%) received gifts from more than one candidate. What is interesting is that close half of those who reported receiving gifts (46%) were all registered in Faleata West constituency, and over three-quarters (79%) of those who received gifts from multiple candidates were also from Faleata West. Under a third of those who received gifts (19/69) reported eliciting the gifts received.

Only 45 citizens surveyed post-polling (4%) reported receiving cash from a candidate. Of those who did, 25 were men and 20 were women. Almost half of those who received cash from candidates (22/45) were registered in Faleata West. On average, citizens received WST76.

Money politics in Samoa does not appear to be gendered in the same way that it is in Melanesia (cf. Haley and Zubrinich 2015a); for instance, a similar proportion of men and women reported receiving either cash or gifts. However, when asked *Who benefits most from gifting/vote buying?*, three in five (58%) said men, 31 per cent said youth, and only 11 per cent identified women as the principle beneficiaries, as shown in Figure 6 below, which suggests there may well be a gendered aspect to money politics in Samoa.

Figure 6: Citizen's responses to 'Who benefits most from gifting/vote buying?'

It was noted (Government of Samoa 2006, 2012) that in previous elections significant time and resources were used to address corruption and bribery allegations against candidates directly after the elections. This often meant that official election results were delayed while court cases were pending. To address this issue the SOEC office took a number of measures and steps to address corruption and bribery. These steps include:

1. The Electoral Amendment Act 2014. Provisions in this legislation mandated that the practice of 'o'o or *momoli*' was to be done within 12 months after an election.
2. An awareness campaign on treating and gifting (see Figure 7 below).
3. Regulations restricting the provisions of transport to polling booths by candidates.

Figure 7: SOEC television advertisement on corrupt practices

Recommendation:

- » That the SOEC continue its anti-bribery and anti-treating awareness campaign in the next election.





SECTION 4: POLLING AND COUNTING

This section outlines key issues pertaining to pre-polling activity on polling eve, polling day and the counting process. This section of the report is based upon sections 9 and 10 of the observer journal, in which observers were asked to record their polling day observations and to complete a voter time survey. These findings are based on 97 observation reports written by observers at 85 polling stations (23.6% of total) as well as the official final count at the SOEC headquarters. Specific questions included in section 9 concerned the layout of the polling station and the time it opened, the size and composition of the security presence, the conduct of polling and the nature of any irregularities and/or electoral offences witnessed.

4.1 Pre-Polling

Polling eve was declared a public holiday in anticipation of Election Day, also a public holiday. By 6pm on polling eve all campaign materials were to be removed and all campaign activities to cease. Most candidates in the observed constituencies complied with this ruling. However, polling eve was fraught with problems relating to the allocation of ballot boxes and the deployment of polling teams.

Each polling official was given a specific time to meet at the SOEC headquarters; however, they all arrived by 9am. Even though many of them arrived unscheduled, people who had come to collect boxes became impatient and unwilling to wait to complete the process properly. Consequently the SOEC office then abandoned their deployment schedule and tried to address the congestion by deploying teams early. This meant the attempt by the SOEC to manage and coordinate the deployment of polling teams and polling resources by giving polling officials appointed times failed to meet its objective.

Figure 8: Ballot box collection on polling-eve at SOEC headquarters



Source: SSGM

The failure of the SOEC to take control of the situation necessarily had ramifications for the organisation of polling. In some cases, polling officials would collect their boxes before the full team was assembled. In several cases, this meant ballot boxes were left unattended while officials searched for team members in order to be transported to their allocated booths; four of the observers present emphasised the lack of security at the deployment stage. In Urban West and Vaimauga West Nu. 2, observers noted polling teams and ballot boxes either leaving SOEC headquarters or arriving at their designated polling stations without their assigned security escort. Three officials travelling to Savai'i missed the ferry, although they were able to catch a public ferry later. Some polling transportation to rural areas left without some team members. There were cases of polling officials arriving at polling booths where hosts were unprepared to provide overnight accommodation.

Figure 9: Unattended ballot box at SOEC headquarters on polling eve.



Source: SSGM

4.2 Polling

While the vast majority of polling stations in which observation took place had been set up properly, there were some inconsistencies with certain polling booth set-ups that observers felt compromised voter secrecy. In at least one polling station, where the pastor of the church said they had not been advised to provide fabric for voting compartments, ballots were marked in view of the public. In total, observers reported that eight polling stations did not have adequate screens shielding the voting compartments. In general, communication between church/community leaders and the SOEC was lacking.

Having said that, polling was generally well managed and peaceful. Incidents were rare and mostly handled appropriately. There was one polling station where an observer witnessed a confrontation between supporters of rival candidates, in which the *pulenu'u* and police officers intervened. In Urban West, a candidate's *komiti* attempted to conduct a formal *fa'asamoa lauga* before polling started, but they were advised by the Returning Officer (RO) that this was illegal and would delay the start of polling. In Vaimauga West Nu. 2, after a voter put

a blank ballot paper in the ballot box, it was opened and the blank paper was removed for the voter to cast their vote (a similar incident was observed in Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West, although in that case the polling official stated that the voter could not vote again).

Voting, in many cases, was a community event and was seen as a social activity. Many voters would go to the polling station in groups. In the urban seats especially, observers noted that voters would bring their children along to the polling station, and that there was a positive and family-friendly atmosphere. This was in stark comparison to Safata West, where an observer noted a serious and tense atmosphere at the polling booth. While lines were sometimes long, especially in the morning, there was little tension observed over the length of time people had to wait in most constituencies. Observers saw several instances of votes that were cast outside the polling station, with the voter in a vehicle, because the voter was unable to get inside. The process was mostly observed by a police officer. There was one instance observed where voting took place in view of members of the public.

Polling started on time at 8am in all but 10 polling stations observed; of those, two began polling early, and the longest delay to start was 35 minutes at a polling station in Vaimauga West Nu. 2. In five cases, however, the ballot box was not exhibited empty prior to the commencement of polling. Most polling stations were very busy in the morning, with the crowd thinning by lunch. The most notable exception was the special booths in Apia for Savai'i and rural Upolu voters which were consistently busy until well after 3pm. Indelible ink was generally administered consistently, with some exceptions. Three observers voting in two different constituencies did not have their thumbs inked after voting. In Urban West and Falealili West, observers noted that polling officials were not consistent in checking thumbs for ink before processing voters. In Safata West, an observer witnessed two voters attempting to remove the indelible ink immediately after voting.

While special polling booths were set up to manage out-of-constituency voting, observers reported that visibility when casting their vote was obviously important for some voters. As a consequence, they would choose to vote at booths where a *komiti* member of their chosen candidate in preference to more convenient or accessible booths. Access to special booths was an issue, with observers in the Apia area noting that there was a lot of confusion over the location of special booths.

This was compounded by the fact that there was also a lot of misinformation regarding special booths, and the polling stations that could process special votes. Observers were asked by voters where the special booths were, particularly for voters in urban seats and the overlapping territorial constituencies. Processing special votes in regular polling places was a time-consuming process that held up the processing of other votes, as reported by observers. Although there were laptops and fingerprint scanners to help process special votes most DROs were unable to operate the devices. The fingerprint scanners were time-consuming, as voters had to remember the precise positioning of their finger in the first scan. One observer reported that the voting process in a special booth was very slow, to the point where some would-be voters left without voting, as it was taking too long.

Slowness at the polling booth was also a significant factor where people needed assistance to cast their vote because polling stations did not designate an official to provide assistance and this tended to slow down the voting process. Observers saw voters who required assistance to cast their vote in 63 out of 85 polling stations. At one polling station in Alataua West, 11 people required assistance in the first 2.5 hours of voting, which significantly held up the processing of voters. However, overall, people with disability that required assistance were assisted appropriately by polling officials. In instances where voters required assistance, officials seemed very aware of the rights of family members and worked to mitigate any undue influence. For example, at one polling booth, an observer noted that a family member was trying to influence the vote of a person with disability. An official stepped in and intervened by providing assistance, directing the voter to the booth away from the family member.

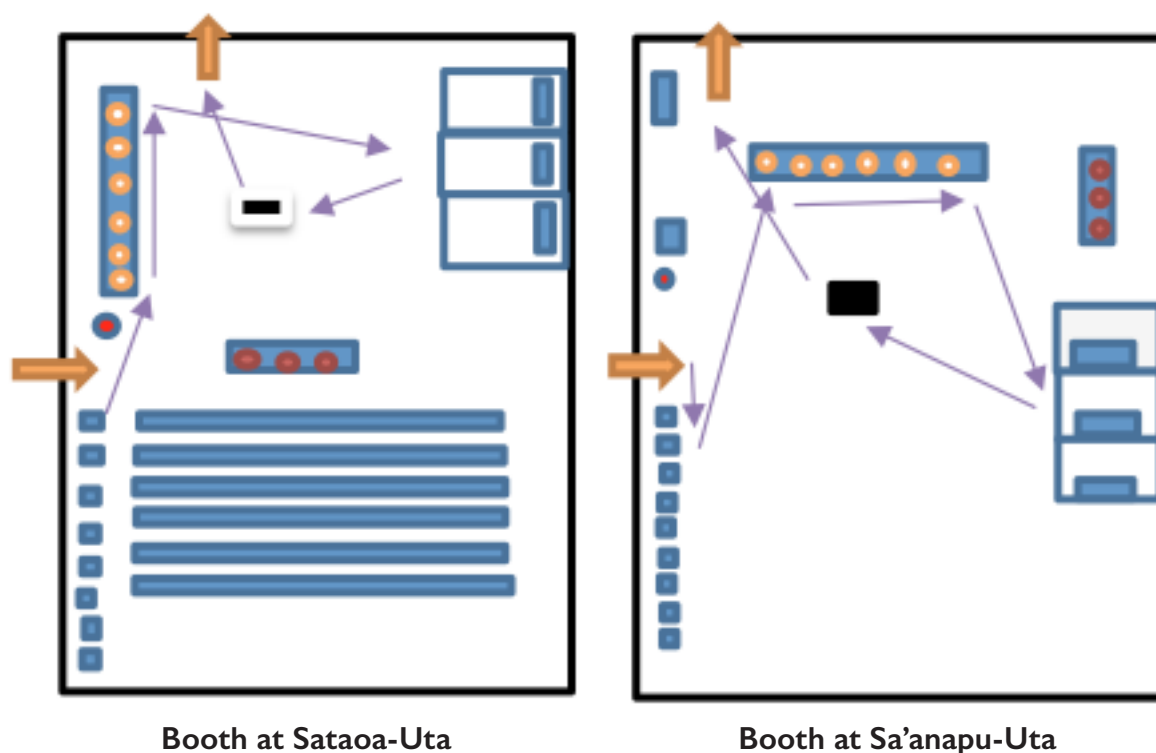
While 53 out of 85 polling stations were observed to be set up to accommodate the needs of people with disability or mobility impairments, accessibility was still a significant issue in many polling stations. In Sagaga Le Usoga and Alataua West, there were at least three instances where voting took place in a vehicle parked outside the polling station, as the elector had a disability and could not access the polling station. There were also complaints in three constituencies of long queues in exposed conditions. One observer reported that a would-be voter collapsed in line and had to be taken to hospital.

Komiti members were an obvious presence at polling stations, either as scrutineers or loitering outside. Observers at six polling stations (in Faleata West, Urban West, Sagaga Le Usoga and Safata West) reported seeing candidates or *komiti* members seeking to interfere with or influence voters. In Urban West, police intervened to stop a *komiti* member speaking to voters and asking them to vote for her candidate. In Urban East and Vaimauga West Nu. 1 too, observers reported groups of people, assumed to be *komiti* members, near polling stations, either speaking to or seemingly monitoring voters. In Sagaga Le Usoga especially, observers reported confusion over the role of scrutineers amongst officials, police and voters. Scrutineers did frequently assist polling officials in finding voters' names on the electoral roll, in cases where the names given by voters did not match exactly the name recorded on the roll.

In 39 out of 85 polling stations (45.9%), observers reported that polling officials had difficulty locating names on the roll. There was significant confusion in the urban seats, and their overlapping territorial constituencies, over whether voters were registered in the urban or territorial seat. This slowed down the voting process significantly, and led to polling stations becoming overcrowded at times, according to reports from Urban West, Urban East, Vaimauga West Nu. 2, Faleata West, Sagaga Le Usoga, Alataua West and Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West.

There were 48 informal votes due to people voting in the wrong place and not knowing where they were registered. In addition, in Urban West one of the nine advertised polling stations was not operational. In total, observers saw 113 men and women turned away from polling stations because their names could not be found on the roll.

One of the issues with the roll was that *komiti* members had registered voters on their behalf. In such cases, often the names listed on the voter roll did not match those given by the voter, or the village they were registered was different. Finding names on the roll was a major difficulty in many polling stations. These issues especially affected young people who were voting for the first time. In the vast majority of cases, the person was registered and was able to vote eventually, but it took some time to find the correct name and/or village on the roll. As stated above, scrutineers were often able to find voters' names on the roll before polling officials could, and where polling stations had SOEC laptops, they were very useful in this respect. Not all polling stations had laptops,¹⁴ however, and in these cases trouble finding a name on the roll could slow voter processing down for a long time.

Figure 10: Polling booth set-ups in Safata West

Source: SSGM

According to SOEC (2016) figures turnout was lower compared to previous elections, at 69.6 per cent compared to 76.2 per cent in 2011,¹⁵ and anecdotal evidence suggests that there were people who wanted to vote who could not due to lack of transport. One of the most controversial issues arising out of the new regulations was that of prohibiting candidates from transporting voters to and from polling stations. This was considered an additional barrier to voting, especially for those who lived in more remote areas. It was exacerbated by the fact that polling day, and polling eve, were both public holidays, meaning that public transport was not operational. In Alataua West, one voter spoken to said she had travelled to the village where her polling station was located via public bus two days before polling to stay with relatives in order to vote, but others who lived nearby had decided not to make the effort. Observers reported that some candidates had hired taxis for the day to try to get around the regulations on transporting voters. In urban seats these regulations were circumvented; as observers noted, voters were dropped off in groups at gates or at properties adjacent to the polling stations by candidates or *komiti* members.

4.3 Performance of Electoral Personnel

In terms of gender balance, there were equal numbers of female and males ROs in the constituencies observed, and around 80 per cent of the DROs were women. Overall, observers' assessment of the performance of key electoral personnel was positive. For example, in Vaimauga West Nu. I it was reported that the DRO was very efficient in moving between booths and keeping to protocol. At the close of polling at one church polling booth, the church minister announced that officials should eat first before beginning the preliminary count. However, the RO had arrived shortly after 3pm and informed the church minister as well as the polling officials, who were already seated at the food table, that it was important they follow protocol and begin the preliminary count immediately.

Nevertheless, observers found there were a number of concerns around the selection and actions of electoral personnel. For example, when asked whether the ROs and DROs were unbiased and impartial, only 76 per cent of observers replied affirmatively. In Urban East, it was reported that one polling official was a close

relative of a candidate. A further concern was that in half the constituencies in which polling was observed it was noted that ROs were not, or only sometimes, available on the ground when needed. At one polling station in Urban West, the observer reported that the DRO was not sure who the RO was.

While, for the most part, the DROs seemed to have previous experience and be well-trained, there were several instances of DROs being recruited at the last minute without the necessary training. And it is interesting that whereas only three observers (6%) reported DROs who did not have a good understanding of their role almost a quarter (24%) of observers reported that the DRO was not in control of the election at the polling station at all times. In one case, the DRO refused to display ballot papers — even informal ones — to scrutineers or observers during the initial count.

Some voters seemed genuinely unclear about the role of scrutineers in the election process, noting that many were in fact members of candidates' *komiti*. Under the Samoan Electoral Act (1963) candidates have the right to select their own *komiti* members as scrutineers at polling booths within their contested constituency to oversee balloting and counting of votes. First-time voters were unaware that scrutineers were in fact *komiti* members with some observers particularly from Urban seats and the Vaimauga seats noting that young voters were surprised to *komiti* in official roles at polling stations. Scrutineers in all elections are aligned with particular candidates, given that they act as a candidate's eyes and ears on polling day and during the count.

In terms of security personnel, the assessments of performance were varied. Police took different approaches to their roles in different polling stations. Three observers noted that it was a police officer, rather than the DRO or RO, in control at a polling station. One observer in Vaimauga West Nu. I reported a conflict between polling officials and a policeman at a polling station. Other police officers went out of their way to help with the smooth running of their polling station; in one case in Urban West, the polling station had no running water and police bought water for officials with their own money.



4.4 Post-Polling and counting

All regular booths closed on time at 3pm except for the special booths in Apia for Savai'i and rural Upolu electorates. At 3pm officials at these booths distributed polling papers to those still waiting in line. These booths closed at 5pm once all those with a voting paper had cast their votes. All officials were able to vote once their booths had closed although some officials voted during quiet periods on the day.

Preliminary counting commenced immediately after polling stations closed. The increase in the number of booths meant that counting was faster than in previous elections; in most instances the preliminary count took less than 30 minutes. This meant that most polling officials were calling in with their final preliminary counts soon after polling had closed, which tested the capacity of the SOEC. Phone lines were inundated with calls and there were significant delays in returning ballot boxes to the SOEC headquarters. In one polling station, it took more than 30 minutes for the RO to get through to the SOEC to give the results after the preliminary count. This was a common complaint. DROs and ROs were all given \$20 phone credit; however, when it came time to phone in the preliminary count one observer reported that the polling team in Urban West had run out of phone credit and was not able to call in their results, also contributing to the delay in announcing preliminary results.



Source: SSGM

In various cases, the security of the ballot box in the post-polling period was of low priority or neglected altogether for periods of time. In part this was due to the lack of vehicles to transport the boxes back to SOEC headquarters. For example, in Upolu the lack of vehicles available to take the ballot boxes back to Apia was a real issue. Elsewhere, there were two reports of polling teams not having transport to take the ballot box back to SOEC headquarters in Urban East, whilst in Vaimauga West Nu. 1 police officers asked observers to transport them back to SOEC headquarters after waiting for transport for over two hours. Police officers who were responsible for the return of the ballot boxes were frustrated by the delays.

The scrutiny of the rolls took place three days after closing and the final count was completed by Friday 11 March. The process for the scrutiny of the rolls highlighted those who double voted (56). There were 519 informal votes (0.7% of total votes). Urban East had the largest number of informal votes at 45 (1.4%) which, by percentage was double the national average.

4.5 Election Petitions

After the election, six petitions were filed contesting the results. They were lodged by unsuccessful candidates in the constituencies of A'ana Alofi Nu. I West, Alataua West, Faleata West, Falelatai and Samataua, Safata West, and Urban West. The post-election petitions were all filed on corruption, bribery and/or treating grounds; all petitions were eventually withdrawn. In addition, there were three election-related civil suits filed after the election that were also eventually withdrawn or settled out of court.

Recommendations:

- » That a different system be developed to deploy teams and resources from SOEC headquarters to constituencies for the next election. This could involve a marshalling area for polling teams, and separate vehicles for each team.
- » That procedures be implemented for situations where a voter cannot physically get into a polling station, but still wishes to vote at that particular booth.
- » That more special polling stations be set up in Salelologa, Savai'i.
- » That the role of scrutineers be incorporated into voter education initiatives so that voters are clear on their rights and responsibilities.
- » That procedures be developed to create more consistency in polling booth set-up, to safeguard the secrecy of the vote.
- » That the role of Returning Officers be clarified so that they are on the ground at polling stations when needed on polling day.
- » That inexperienced police officers are paired with more senior officers on polling day.
- » That SOEC laptops be distributed to more polling stations.
- » That staff be recruited to increase the capacity of the SOEC to deal with calls on polling day, both relating to issues with the roll, and to relay preliminary results.
- » That the SOEC consider reducing the number of polling stations for the next general elections in order to reduce the strain on its resources and recruitment capabilities.
- » That the SOEC either overturn the ban on candidates transporting voters to polling station, or investigate alternative options of providing transport to voters on polling day, with particular attention paid to how to target voters with mobility issues; voters in remote areas; and voters without access to vehicles.

SECTION 5: CROSSCUTTING ISSUES – WOMEN, INCLUSION, CULTURE AND POLITICS

This section discusses key issues that are relevant across all stages of the election process. This includes women's participation in elections, inclusion of people with disability, culture and politics.

5.1 Women in politics

Almost all of the observers in every constituency noted that they believed female voters were able to vote freely and without undue influence. Indeed, survey data shows that only 7.7 per cent of female respondents were not able to vote freely without intimidation compared to 10.1 per cent of male respondents. While there are more men than women aged 21–30 in Samoa more women than men in this age group actually cast their vote in 2016. This means young Samoan women are participating in elections as voters at a higher rate compared to their male counterparts.

There was generally high awareness of the new parliamentary gender quota — often referred to as the '10 per cent law' — and much debate over the issue of women in politics. In the pre-polling survey conducted by observers, 72% of respondents said there should be more women MPs, and 18% said there should not, with 10% undecided. When asked if they would vote for a good woman MP, over three-quarters of respondents (77%) said yes, with 13% saying no and 10% not sure. When asked if there were any good women candidates running in the election, 60% of respondents agreed, 22% disagreed and 18% said they were not sure.

In the four constituencies observed where women candidates were contesting,¹⁶ there was general agreement among respondents that there were good women candidates contesting the election (see Table 6). The notable exception was Lefaga and Faleseela where 20 per cent of respondents believed there were no good female candidates running.

Table 6: Responses to the question 'are there any good woman candidates contesting?' from constituencies with at least one woman candidate.

	Total respondents	Yes		No		Unsure		No response	
Alataua West	65	55	84.6%	4	6.2%	3	4.6%	3	4.6%
Fa'asaleleaga No. 1 West	101	91	90.1%	8	7.9%	2	2%	NA	
Lefaga & Faleseela	109	75	68.8%	22	20.2%	12	11%		
Urban East	105	89	84.8%	5	4.8%	11	10.5%		

While the majority of survey respondents agreed there should be more women MPs, conversations while conducting the survey revealed that there is still opposition from both men and women to greater women's representation in politics. The citizen survey interviews demonstrate that amongst women there is a lack of consensus on the issue of women in politics. This is exemplified in the statements below recorded by observers:

From the ads and T.V you can see some women are o.k but others are ma'imau taimi¹⁷

Female, 21-29

*The bible does not say we need more women in parliament, there should be no women in parliament, we should have no women MPs. E malepe palemene ia latou.*¹⁸

Female 30-59

Only woman with high ranking titles and from political families should run. Fiamē and Gatoloai should be enough. Politics is dirty, women shouldn't be subjected to the kind of 'tala tau sua'¹⁹ that Tuilaepa likes to give.

Female, 60+

The above quote reflects sentiments of a feature of women's political representation generally in Samoa, and generally, to some extent across the Pacific. Women from political high-ranking families are more likely to succeed in politics. In Samoa two of the current female MPs are daughters of past prime ministers, while others also have a high profile family history of participation in national politics. The quote also supports findings by Meleisea et al. (2015:9) where male *matai* argue that women should be banned from village councils so as not to be subjected to male jesting.

Explicit campaigning on gender issues was rare, perhaps due to the fact that relatively few candidates engaged in campaign activities besides village meetings and door-to-door campaigning. Women's leadership and the lack of women in politics was the predominant gender-related issue discussed during the campaign period. In the lead up to the 2016 election a number of initiatives were implemented to encourage the participation of women candidates including the Increasing Political Participation of Women in Samoa (IPPWS) program. Led by the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women in partnership with the Samoan government and the Australian Government's Pacific Women program, IPPWS conducted training for women candidates as well as general awareness on the importance of women's representation. Local advocacy groups including Samoa Ala Mai (Wake Up Samoa) also worked to promote women's political participation in the lead up to the elections including a mock parliament for women candidates. Samoa Ala Mai used a grant from the US Embassy to hold a training workshop for women candidates, and brought a political strategist to Samoa for the event.

One of the key messages in women candidate training was to run a clean campaign, an emphasis that some criticised after the election. For example, a woman candidate from an urban seat noted during a post-election interview that 'clean campaigning doesn't work'. Another woman candidate stated during a post-election workshop:

I am a winner. I spent 48 years in all levels of education but with that experience when it came to elections — it didn't count. It was the power of money and I didn't give my money. Even my nephews and nieces were bought by \$5 on the last day! They never considered my work, only money!

Women Candidate, Savai'i

Overall, 14 of the 49 constituencies were contested by one or more women. Women made up 15 per cent of the total number of candidates in the election, with 24 female candidates among the 164 nominations. While this is low, it is a higher proportion of female candidates than in other recent elections in the Pacific Islands region — in the four national-level general elections held in the region in 2015, women made up 9 per cent of candidates. It is also higher than the proportion of eligible women in Samoa. To run for election in the Samoan Parliament, you need to be a *matai* title holder, and according to 2011 figures only 10.5 per cent of *matai* are women.²⁰ Furthermore, women candidates in the 2016 Samoa general election won higher vote shares compared to other women in recent Pacific elections. Over half of those contesting won more than 10 per cent of the vote and one in three won more than 20 per cent. This indicates that women candidates in Samoa are generally competitive, especially in comparison to neighbouring Pacific countries such as Tonga where over 80

per cent of female candidates in 2014 won less than 10 per cent of the vote (Baker 2016).

In constituencies where female candidates were contesting, they were mostly actively campaigning, and in several cases were the most visibly active candidates. Alataua West and Lefaga and Falease'ela had the equal highest number of female candidates, at three. In the former, all three female candidates had won endorsement from a village in the constituency and were seen as credible candidates. Many female voters who were interviewed talked about their excitement to be able to vote for a female candidate for the first time. In the latter, the women contesting ran highly visible campaigns, with billboards and newspaper coverage, and at least one female candidate was endorsed by her village. One observer noted, however, that many voters (including senior male *matai*) were opposed to women's involvement in politics in general, even though the female candidates were treated with respect during the campaign. Ultimately, female candidates collectively won over 70 per cent of the vote in Alataua West, with all three candidates winning the most votes in at least one ballot box. In Lefaga and Falease'ela, while two of the female candidate won less than 4 per cent of the vote each, one woman placed third with 18 per cent of the vote. These two cases highlight both that female candidates can perform well even in rural areas where attitudes towards women in politics may be considered hostile, and that female candidates can perform well even when running against each other.

The visibility of female candidates was highlighted in the observer journals. The IPPWS project had given funding to produce campaign posters for women who were contesting the election, and many female candidates had professional-looking posters. In Urban East, the two female candidates were visibly campaigning with billboards (traditional and electronic) and TV spots. It is important to note, however, that visibility on the campaign trail did not seem to correlate in any significant way with success at the polls. In the two constituencies we observed that were won by a female candidate — Alataua West and Fa'asaleleaga Nu. I West — the winning candidate was not observed to be 'actively' campaigning, instead focusing on village meetings and door-to-door campaigning.²¹ This was also true of male winners in many other constituencies. In a post-election workshop, several successful candidates noted that posters and billboards do not necessarily work, but what does is being 'visible in the village'. This means participating in and contributing to community discussions, church services and other village activities on a regular basis and not just in the lead up to elections. Village participation was seen as more important than 'campaign'-type activities. This aligns with the Samoan traditional value of *tautua*, reciprocity and service. In Alataua West, the winning candidate had declined the UNDP's offer of assistance with posters, claiming that posters were not an effective method of campaigning.

The barriers to female candidacy in elections were apparent in the constituency of Sagaga Le Usoga. Women are not permitted to sit on the village councils of any of the three villages that make up the constituency, and this was interpreted by observers as effectively a ban on female candidates. The levels of support expressed for women in politics were generally lower than other constituencies (see Table 7).

Table 7: Sagaga Le Usoga responses to questions on women in politics

Do you think there should be more woman MPs?			
	Yes	No	Not Sure
All constituencies	72%	18%	10%
Sagaga Le Usoga	61.3%	27.5%	11.2%
Would you vote for a good woman candidate?			
	Yes	No	Not Sure
All constituencies	77%	13%	10%
Sagaga Le Usoga	55.7%	27.8%	16.5%

5.2 Inclusion

There was a high level of support for people with disability having the right to vote. From the campaign period survey, 87 per cent of respondents agreed that people with disability should vote, 8 per cent disagreed and 5 per cent were unsure. In general, voters with disability were given priority at polling stations, but not all polling places were accessible for people with mobility issues. While efforts were made to provide accessible polling booths this was complicated by the fact that it was important to be seen voting in particular polling places. Voters with mobility issues may have felt more comfortable in polling booths where their accessibility issues were not necessarily met. On several occasions voters with disability preferred voting at their church rather than at a more accessible booth.



Source: SSGM

Voting is a social activity and this is also important for people with disability. The policies and procedures to give priority to people with disability were not always welcome. It was clear that police officers and officials were given strict instruction to prioritise the elderly and voters with disability. Observers noted several instances of people with disability refusing special treatment to vote first at polling stations choosing instead to wait in line, chat to other voters and in general be seen to vote.

The new regulations concerning the transport of voters to polling stations could be seen to unfairly target people with disabilities. People with mobility issues may rely on transport by candidates in order to vote. If this regulation is in place for the next election, consideration could perhaps be given to how the SOEC could ensure people with disabilities have transport to polling stations.

One issue that was raised in terms of inclusion was in reference to the political participation of *fa'afafine*. This was one key issue that observers noted as a result of their observation. Observers noted that discussions about *fa'afafine* stemmed from the survey questions regarding women in politics that subsequently led to, what about *fa'afafine*? Those that were most vocal on these issues tended to be younger observers.

There should be more fa'afafine in parliament because they represent both males and females.

Female, 21-29, Urban West

Although they play an integral part of village life, to date there has never been a *fa'afafine* in parliament. In the 2016 election there were no *fa'afafine* candidates. More information about the participation of *fa'afafine* in elections as voters and potential candidates is needed. In addition more research into the political participation of the LGBTIQ community in Samoa in general is important to get a clearer picture of election related inclusion issues.

5.3 Culture and Politics

To stand for elections in Samoa you must hold a *matai* title, meet the three-year residency qualification and meet the requirements for village service also referred to as *monotaga* requirements. There are also restrictions relating to bankruptcy and criminal convictions. According to Part 2 of the Electoral Act *monotaga* means 'the compulsory service, assistance or contribution (such as, contribution in form of cash, kind or goods) rendered for customary, traditional or religious activities, events, function or similar purposes pursuant to the customs of a particular village'. The *faipule/sui o le malo* signs the nomination form to confirm that a candidate has carried out her or his *monotaga*.

The issue of *monotaga* is the basis for numerous petitions at every election. Prior to the 2016 election three potential candidates were disqualified from standing on the basis that they had not fulfilled the *monotaga* requirements. This has led to some controversy over the issue of *monotaga* and how service to the village can be manipulated for political gain. One participant commented:

Politics is dirty and they are using faasamoa as a way now that is political like the monotaga. I don't have much confidence that this election will change anything. Everyone knows who will win.

Male 30-59

Several teams reported rumours of potential election-related banishments, fines or other punishments to be issued against voters who had not voted for a particular candidate. Other village disputes related to the filing of court challenges either before or after the election. The practice of court challenges is a controversial component of Samoan politics. In Alataua West, one village issued a ban on court challenges to the election result (one candidate from that village did file a petition after the election, but it was then withdrawn after mediation).²² There was one high-profile case of the banishment of a candidate during the campaign period, Faumuina was banished from the village of Sili due to the election petition detailed above. Shortly after the election, in which Faumuina was re-elected, the banishment was lifted. Some observers noted a backlash against candidates who had filed pre-election petitions (although this was not universal).

A prominent issue of debate during the election campaign was the new law relating to *o'o* or *momoli* — the presentation of money and gifts to a village or villages within a constituency to inform them of a candidate's intention to run. The Electoral Amendment Act 2014 mandated that this practice could only occur within a 12-month period following the election. This was generally unpopular with voters; the *o'o* or *momoli* was seen as a cultural practice that had been unnecessarily limited through legislation. The change was also seen to broadly affect processes of reciprocity within the village, and to have a negative impact on other gift-giving for title bestowals, funerals or weddings that happened to take place around election time. As one observer put it: 'suddenly culture revolves around [the] election'. One observer in Lefaga and Falease'ela did note that it was thought the rules made it cheaper to run as a candidate, with some candidates in the past reported to have declared bankruptcy after unsuccessful runs.

The impact of electoral politics on *fa'amatai* is a commonly discussed issue in Samoan politics. Observers note that electoral aspirations are now a reason for people to seek out *matai* titles. Some also commented on a change over time in the type of *matai* titleholders being elected, with candidates who have higher ranked titles

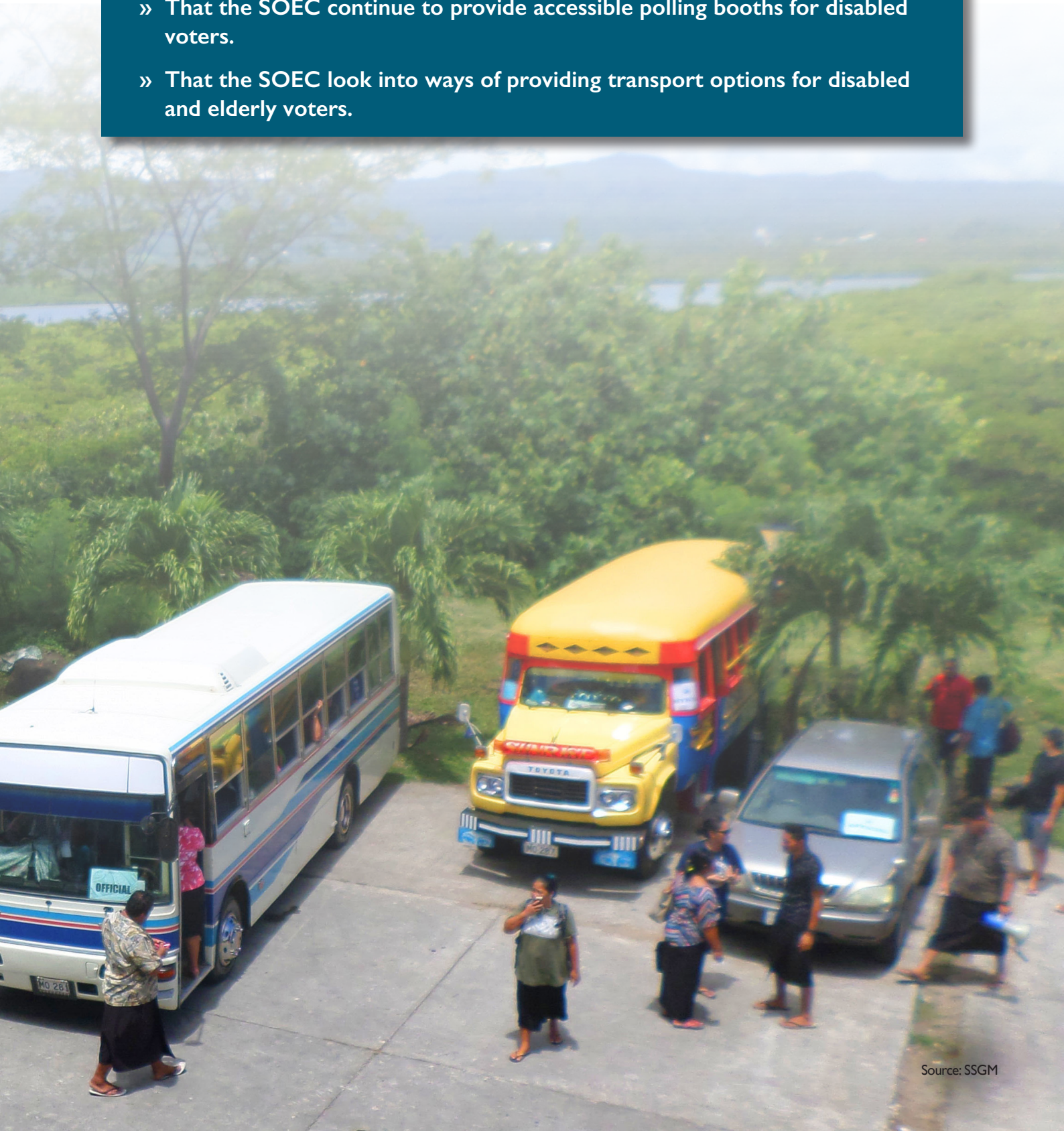
losing to those with lower ranked titles. The increase in female candidates was noted, and observers suggested there were also increases in younger candidates and candidates with multiple titles.

While the number of women with *matai* titles has increased over time, many female *matai* are urban-based (or based overseas) and do not participate in the village governance work that often provides a platform for a successful election campaign. While a clear majority of voters surveyed believed there should be more women MPs, almost half of the respondents disagreed that there were good female candidates running in the election. Participation in village council decision-making was seen by observers to be a crucial determinant of a 'good' candidate. In this way, both formal barriers — such as village-level bans on women attending council meetings — and informal barriers — such as norms that favour urban-based women over village-based women as recipients of *matai* titles — can affect women's participation in national-level politics. During the debate around the introduction of the parliamentary gender quota there were suggestions from various actors to remove the *matai* requirement for female candidates. This did not eventuate but is an ongoing discussion. It should be noted that *matai*-only eligibility is a widely accepted facet of Samoan politics, and so lifting this requirement for women would not necessarily increase their electoral chances.



Recommendations:

- » That the government encourage more women into politics.
- » That the government continue with normalising women in the legislature by maintaining the gender quota system.
- » That the SOEC continue to provide accessible polling booths for disabled voters.
- » That the SOEC look into ways of providing transport options for disabled and elderly voters.



FALEATA SASAE													
CANDIDATES													
ULAVEMAI, Tarito, S. Faaliga	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	TOTAL		
VEALL, Niko, Palamo													
ULL, Tapasu, Leung, Wai													
SALALISA, John, Ah, Ching													
INFORMAL VOTES													
SPECIAL VOTES													
TOTAL													

FALEATA SISIFO													
CANDIDATES													
ALE, Vena, Ale	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
LEALALEPULE, R. Aiafi													
MOALA, PANDA, Tavita, Moala													
ULLI, Bismarck, Crawley													
INFORMAL VOTES													
SPECIAL VOTES													
TOTAL													

SAGAGA LE FALEFA													
CANDIDATES													
LOALI, SOLA, Keneti, Sio	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	TOTAL		
TAGALDATELE, Pasi, Poloa													
TUISA, TULIMASEAL II, Tasi, Patea													
INFORMAL VOTES													
SPECIAL VOTES													
TOTAL													

SECTION 6: ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

This section outlines the overall assessment of the election as well as reflections on the observation process. The section concludes with a brief comment on cross-cultural research. While there were some challenges in the administration of the election, particularly in regards to logistics and capacity, the 2016 election was overall a successful exercise.

6.1 Election Assessment

When asked directly how the 2016 elections compared to the 2011 election, 70 per cent of citizens surveyed considered the 2016 elections better than 2011. Citizens also consistently identified the 2016 elections as better than both the 2011 and 2006 elections across a range of measures, including in relation to gifting and treating, vote buying, election related tension and electoral fraud and malpractice (see Table 8 below).

Whilst only 7 per cent of citizen surveys considered gifting and treating to be most pronounced in 2016, half of these (49%) were in fact registered in urban Apia, and 24 per cent in Sagaga Le Usoga. A similar pattern of response was identified in relation to vote buying and electoral fraud. For instance, 42 per cent of those who felt vote buying was most pronounced in 2016 were registered in urban Apia, while 28 per cent were registered in Sagaga Le Usoga; meanwhile, 50 per cent of those who considered electoral fraud greatest in 2016 were registered in urban Apia, while 24 per cent were registered in Sagaga Le Usoga.

Of the 11 per cent of citizens who felt electoral tension was greatest in 2016, one-third (34%) were registered in the Savaii constituencies surveyed, namely Alataua West and Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West, and another third (32%) registered in urban Apia. Overall, these findings reflect the intense competition evident in the urban seats in 2016. That a significant proportion of citizens in Alataua West and Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West also noted tension is not surprising either, as there were public tensions between certain candidates and village leaders in both of these constituencies.

Table 8: Responses to questions comparing money politics, election tension and fraud between elections

Survey Question	2006	2011	2016
In which election was gifting/treating greatest?	36%	57%	7%
In which election was vote buying greatest?	40%	55%	5%
In which election was tension greatest?	40%	49%	11%
In which election was electoral fraud greatest?	42%	53%	5%

Observers, too, generally considered the election period to be relatively peaceful. No observers reported increased tension during the campaign period: 71.2 per cent reported little or no tension, while 28.8 per cent reported the usual amount of tension. The manner of campaigning was described as accommodative or mostly accommodative by all observers except one, in Vaimauga West Nu. 2, who described it as tense and conflictive. When asked to compare campaigning in 2016 to 2011, just over half (51.1%) described it as better, 42.2 per cent described it as about the same, and just three observers — in Alataua West, Lotofaga/Lepa and Vaimauga West Nu. 2 — described it as worse. One observer in an urban seat noted there had been tension over the election on social media, and in particular Facebook. In Safata West and Alataua West, although observers noted that the campaign period was generally peaceful, there was tension around which candidates could campaign in which villages. In Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 West and Vaimauga West Nu. 2, there were incidents of stone throwing by youth on the two nights following polling.

Fui Professor Asofou So'o, the Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Samoa, called the election: 'The most peaceful, most orderly and the most organised election I have witnessed as a voter'. Observers also reported comments from voters on how peaceful the election was. This was attributed in large part to the awareness campaign that the SOEC had conducted in the lead up to the election. The thorough awareness campaign planning and targeted strategies meant that it was widely viewed as effective as observers reported broad knowledge of key election issues amongst voters. People and voters therefore had a better idea of what to expect and what was expected of them on polling day. A strong media presence that consistently informed voters of key aspects of the election was a key strategy. This included use of TV and radio programs and ads as well as social media activity to target younger voters.

The increase in polling booths and related logistical difficulties proved to be the greatest challenge of the election. Although the general goal of enabling easier access to polling booths and reducing voters' reliance on candidates for transport was admirable, the implementation of the policy stretched the SOEC's capacity in terms of logistics and in terms of recruiting an adequate number of officials. We note that voter turnout was much lower than in immediate past elections despite the increase in polling booths. In 2016 turnout was 69.6 per cent compared 78.7 per cent in 2011 and 1 in 5 constituencies had turnout lower than 70 per cent compared to 1 in 40 in 2011 (SOEC 2016).

6.2 Observation Assessment

Overall the observation project was very successful. This can be attributed to the partnership with NUS and the SOEC where all groups took ownership of the project. The SOEC's engagement throughout the observation process as well as their involvement in the design of the questions was of particular importance. Being based at NUS also provided important guidance for conducting sociocultural and political research.

Although initial discussions for the project began in July 2015 and preparations commenced soon after, the logistics and organisation of the project was hindered by the shutdown of both NUS and ANU during the Christmas and New Year period. This meant that there was little time available for training compared to previous observations. Therefore, ANU researchers as mentors who have conducted previous observations proved to be important resources particularly as there was insufficient time to provide follow-up training. Their main role was to provide team leaders with guidance and clarification over the observation journal while the team leaders managed the data collection, logistics and expectations of their individual teams. Therefore, ownership of the project and research lay with local observers. At the same time, having non-Samoan team members helped to alleviate the suspicions of voters when local observers requested interviews who initially thought local observers were *komiti* members.

All observers understood their roles and responsibilities and the aims and goals of the project. This was reflected in their journals where many observers made detailed comments and observations throughout the process providing invaluable insights. There were some questions raised in regards to translations of the citizen surveys; all observers noted the importance of consistency in translations with electoral language. Similarly, there were some questions, particular in regards to security, that observers thought were irrelevant in a Samoan context; however, most understood the value of gathering this information for cross country comparisons.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the observation was the research engagement of young observers and their subsequent appreciation for elections and politics. This is reflected in the statements below:

Seeing how much people want to vote has changed the way I think about the importance of voting.

Observer, Urban West

Never had an opportunity like this to observe the election process in person — to see what was really going on at the village level.

Observer, Sagala le usoga

This was also my first time to vote. To see all that is happening behind the scenes and what is happening across the country, meeting and talking to all kinds of people has been quite special.

Observer, Vaimauga West Nu. 1

Younger observers all noted that the opportunity provided them with valuable research insights, lessons and skills. Science students particularly highlighted this; as one observer noted, his involvement has taught him about 'conducting qualitative research'. He went on to say,

*I would like to acknowledge everyone who conducted and put together the journal.
It's been an awesome and amazing experience to collect data for this journal.
I'll be looking forward to working with you all again but for now God bless.*





ENDNOTES

- ¹ In August 2016 Lemisio was confirmed as Electoral Commissioner (Samoa Observer 14/8/2016).
- ² *Fa'afafine* constitute Samoa's 'third gender'. They have been an accepted part of Samoan society since at least the early 20th century. They are currently estimated to account for 1–5 per cent of the total population.
- ³ The **State, Society & Governance in Melanesia Program (SSGM)** is a leading centre for multidisciplinary research on contemporary Melanesia and the broader Pacific. One of the most vibrant units in the ANU's College of Asia and the Pacific, an established world leader in regional studies, SSGM represents the most significant concentration of scholars conducting applied policy-relevant research and advancing analysis on social change, governance, development, politics and state-society relations in Melanesia and the wider Pacific. SSGM enjoys close working relationships with donor agencies, NGOs, Australian government agencies and governments in the region.
- ⁴ Previous election observation missions have been carried out in Samoa by international observers from the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pacific Island Forums Secretariat (PIFS). There was also a domestic observation project undertaken by Vaa and colleagues during the 2001 elections (see Vaa et al. 2006). The 2016 elections again saw international election observation teams mobilised, including delegations from PIFS and the US Embassy.
- ⁵ For more information on Samoan traditional political organisation see So'o (2008).
- ⁶ It should be noted that many residents of Upolu (especially residents of Apia) are registered voters in Savai'i constituencies. In fact, the voting-age population (as per census data) of Samoan constituencies usually does not correspond closely at all with the number of registered voters, which would be an additional difficulty in a review of electoral boundaries.
- ⁷ This map does not include the new constituencies created under the Electoral Amendment Act 2015.
- ⁸ Fa'asaleleaga Nu. 1 and Salega in Savai'i were divided as were Falealili, Safata, Vaimauga West and A'ana Alofi Nu. 1 in Upolu.
- ⁹ Eligible population is an estimate based on 2011 census figures.
- ¹⁰ These concerned nominations in the constituencies of Anoma'a Sisifo, Aleipata Itupa I Lufa (two challenges), Gagaemauga Nu. 2, Gagaifomauga Nu. 3, Lepa, Lotofaga, Palauli Le Falefa and Vaimauga East.
- ¹¹ In the case of Urban East the incumbent for one of the abolished seats.
- ¹² Meleisea et al. (2015:27) specifically found that 21 of Samoa traditional villages or sub-villages do not recognise or bestow *matai* titles on women on the grounds of tradition, while a further 15 villages exclude women with *matai* titles from village council meetings.
- ¹³ See Likou 4/3/2016.
- ¹⁴ There were 210 laptops that were dispersed among polling officials.
- ¹⁵ If unopposed constituencies are excluded, turnout is 72.7 per cent in 2016 compared to 78.7 per cent in 2011.
- ¹⁶ Excluding Lotofaga where a woman candidate ran unopposed.
- ¹⁷ *Ma'imau taimi* — a waste of time.
- ¹⁸ *E malepe palemene ia latou* — they will divide parliament.

¹⁹ *Tala tau sua* — inappropriate comments or jokes, jesting.

²⁰ Source: Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Apia, pers. comm., 2012.

²¹ Another constituency in which observation took place, Lotofaga, was also won by a woman, but she was unopposed.

²² See Keresoma 15/4/2016.



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