

# One year on, towards public accountability: Vanuatu's legislature

by Anna Naupa

21 January 2026



Vanuatu Parliament, 19 December 2025  
Photo Credit: [Youtube/Vanuatu Parliament](#)

Surviving the first year with a coalition intact tends to look promising for government stability for the remaining parliamentary term. That was a **recent assessment** given to Vanuatu's coalition government led by Jotham Napat.

Formed after a **snap election** held in the aftermath of 2024's devastating 7.3 magnitude earthquake, by the end of 2025 Napat's government had defeated one **motion of no confidence**, earned global accolades for the historic **ICJ advisory opinion** on climate justice and struck a VT4.25 billion (A\$58 million) **collective bargaining agreement** that resolved longstanding grievances over teacher pay.

These milestones, among others detailed in the Vanuatu government's initial **100-day plan**, deserve praise. They reflect the commitment of the 14th legislature to disaster recovery and national development priorities.

Vanuatu's opposition, led by former prime minister Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau, also played an important part in holding government to account on the parliamentary floor, interrogating policy proposals and **defending the opposition's right** to ask questions in the public interest.

The public reporting on the 100-day plan and a vocal and stable opposition go some way towards repairing a decade-plus of declining **public trust** in parliamentary stability.

These things augur well for Vanuatu's continued democratic health into 2026.

Vanuatu's courts remain the preferred avenue for resolving political grievances. In 2025, four parliamentarians (including a state minister) **faced court** for criminal charges. This resulted in the first application of the 2023 Electoral Act provisions for **the filling of vacant seats** via a threshold percentage rather than a by-election: convicted MP Simeon Seule of Epi Island was replaced by John Nil Supwo.

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A commitment to just and fair governance was notable in prime minister Napat's vocal defence of the **inclusive nature of nakamals**, a demand for the revocation of the **controversial presidential commutations** of the sentences of 70 prison inmates that would return them into communities (many convicted for serious crimes and gender-based violence), and **his call for repeal** of the bizarre and discriminatory Shefa provincial by-law banning menstruating women from market vending.

However, further work is needed in 2026 and the remainder of the parliamentary term to respond to public calls for more transparency and accountability from Vanuatu's leaders and state institutions.

First, we need to see an official, public release of the long-awaited 2024 Commission of Inquiry report into the controversial citizenship-by-investment scheme. Despite regular **calls for transparency**, the government has been silent. The public remains in the dark, with many speculating that the report will reveal high-level **conflicts of interest** and bring down a political house of cards within parliament. Meanwhile, poor regulation produces internationally embarrassing headlines, such as those relating to the questionable granting of a passport to **high-profile figures** undergoing criminal investigation, which negatively affect genuine **ni-Vanuatu travellers**. Transparency Vanuatu has cautioned that the non-release of the report undermines public trust and international confidence.

Second, there needs to be advance public awareness and consultation on draft legislation before tabling in Parliament. This includes consistent and clear communication about new regulations and orders (for example, public nuisance orders), and measures to ensure these are promptly made available to the media. In 2025, approximately 50 new laws and amendments and 250 regulations and orders were issued, yet few made it into the media. Fewer still can be located on the parliament's website.

Consultation is inconsistent. Some bills receive wider consultation than others, with a lack of clarity as to the reasons for the different treatment. For example, an **NGO bill** and a **Child Protection bill** were made widely available for stakeholder input over several years. Conversely, the **Stable Coins bill** was fast-tracked and underwent minimal public consideration and parliamentary debate. A 2025 bill for the amendment of the **Customary Land Management Act** was withdrawn to allow for greater provincial consultation as it proposed to **separate lease and customary land dispute resolution processes**.

Third, overdue public service reforms must remain a priority. **Long accused** of corruption, nepotism and inefficiency, Vanuatu's public service regularly comes **under fire** from the public it is meant to serve. Earlier this month, media veteran

Moses Steven called for “a new mentality to serve the public.” **Former senior civil servant Howard Aru** said, “We need to create a culture of accountability across the entire public service spectrum.”

But change is slow. In one recent example, **Napat issued explicit instructions** for government offices to remain open during the lunch hour, but several government departments ignored these instructions at the expense of efficient revenue collection and accessible service delivery. Frequent, prolonged and costly disputes over recruitment and performance management further undermine institutional capacity. **The newly appointed Chair** of the Public Service Commission, Meto Nganga, will need to be strict and swift in steering reforms and in ensuring the full provisions of the *Public Service Act* are enforced.

President Nikenike Vurobaravu’s first term comes to an end in July 2027. During his tenure, he has **dissolved national parliament** twice, **pardoned** and **commuted the sentences** of numerous convicted criminals — a move that was reversed following **public backlash** — and spearheaded **an ambitious national unity program**. The relationship between the President, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary is founded on mutual accountability — yet this needs strengthening, as demonstrated by the poor advice given to the State House on presidential commutations and the variable scrutiny of legislation for consistency with the Constitution (for example, the approval of the gazettal of the discriminatory by-law against menstruating women, notwithstanding its eventual repeal). Whether Vurobaravu’s term is renewed, or a new president elected by the Electoral College, the State House must model the highest, inclusive ethics for the country, and continue to uphold accountability in the interests of all Vanuatu’s people.

Global concerns about the **retreat of democracy** fortunately do not need to include Vanuatu, provided that a continued whole-of-society investment in parliamentary and state accountability is nurtured. Addressing the areas identified above for public accountability in 2026 will go some way to strengthening the foundations of Vanuatu’s longstanding democratic state culture.

*Listen to the author talk about democracy in Vanuatu on a Devpolicy Talks podcast, **Pacific Democracy: global indices and lived realities**.*

### **Author/s:**

#### **Anna Naupa**

Anna Naupa is currently a ni-Vanuatu PhD candidate at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University.

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