

Samoan election results: trends and patterns 1964-2016

Terence Wood and Sachini Muller

Abstract

This paper draws on data from the new Samoa Election Results database to highlight salient features and trends in Samoa's electoral history. It reports on results for all national general elections since independence. It looks at votes and voter turnout, candidate numbers, winning candidate vote shares, incumbent turnover, parliamentary longevity, parties and women candidates. One central finding is an absence of strong trends in many electoral features. This is surprising given the major change to formal electoral rules that occurred with the extension of the franchise in Samoa in 1991. Another finding is that there is considerable variation in key electoral statistics between different Samoan electorates and in the same electorates over time. As electoral statistics are described, the paper makes comparisons between Samoa and Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (two other Pacific countries for which similar election results databases exist). There are clear contrasts in some areas – most notably, differences in candidate numbers and party numbers. Yet there are also similarities, including high incumbent turnover rates, and under-representation of women in parliament.

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Please note that Figure 3 of this version of the paper was modified in 2021 after an error was spotted. We are grateful to Jon Fraenkel for pointing out the error.

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Samoa election results: trends and patterns 1964-2016

1. Introduction

Samoa is a parliamentary democracy. It has held fifteen general elections since gaining independence from New Zealand in 1962. Prior to 1996, elections were held every three years; since 1996 they have been held every five. Universal suffrage (for citizens over 21 years of age) was introduced to Samoa prior to the 1991 general election. Before this election only *matai* (chiefs or family title-holders) were entitled to vote or stand as candidates (Meleisea et al. 2015). Although franchise was broadened, eligibility to stand for election is still restricted to *matai* (Meleisea et al. 2015; Ng Shiu et al. 2017). Samoa's electoral system has been described as a "unique blend of colonially inherited democratic rules and customary political institutions" (So'o & Fraenkel 2005, p. 333).

This paper details key features of Samoan election results, describing how these have changed since independence, as well as variations between different parts of Samoa. A rich body of work already exists explaining the dynamics of electoral politics in Samoa (for example, Corbett & Shiu 2014; Iati 2013; So'o 2008; So'o 2012; So'o & Fraenkel 2005; Tuimaleali'ifano 2001; Va'a 1983; Vaa et al. 2006), issues such as the under-representation of women (for example, Baker 2014; Baker 2017; Fiti-Sinclair et al. 2017; Meleisea et al. 2015), and electoral quality (for example, Ng Shiu et al. 2017). Our task here is not to replicate this work; rather we provide an empirical overview of election results aiming to complement existing analytical work. Samoa's electoral history as an independent nation now spans more than half a century, providing much scope for results data to shed light on patterns and change.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. First, we detail the country's sociodemographic and political context. Then we look at key electoral features: votes and voter turnout, candidate numbers, winner vote shares, unopposed winners, incumbent turnover, terms in parliament, parties, and women candidates. As we do this we compare Samoa with Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea – two other Pacific island democracies that we have gathered similar electoral data for. These countries serve as useful comparators, as both have similar formal electoral rules to Samoa, yet both are home to significantly different social and cultural contexts. If, as political scientists have often posited, formal

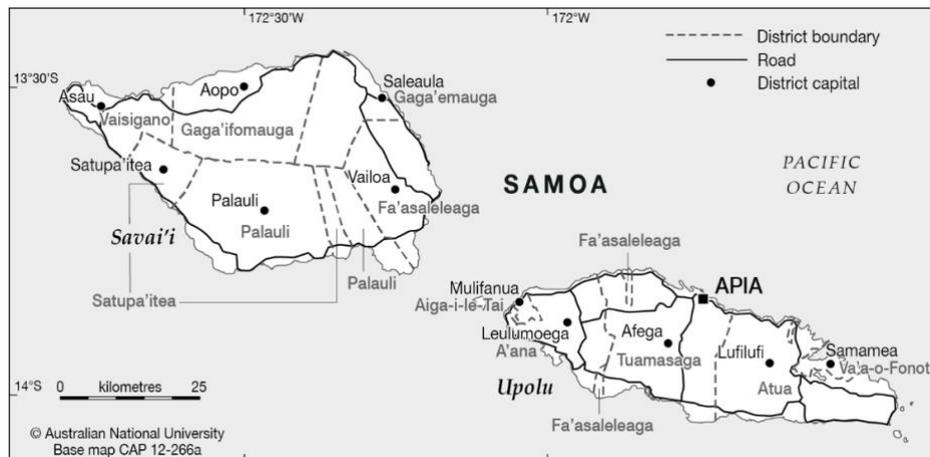
rules are crucial in determining the nature of electoral contests in countries (Duverger 1954; Neto & Cox 1997; Reilly 2001), we should expect most electoral features to be similar across the countries. If, on the other hand, other social factors are important, electoral features may differ considerably.

The data that this paper draws upon are all available online for further analysis at: <http://devpolicy.org/samoelections/>.

As you use the data, and as you read the rest of the paper, please be aware that – although we have vetted the data as thoroughly as we can – there is always the possibility of data errors. In this paper, we highlight instances when we are concerned about data quality. Otherwise, we believe that any remaining data issues will be minor and will not affect the overarching trends that we are describing. If you feel you have encountered errors, please email terence.wood@anu.edu.au.

Figure 1: Maps of Samoa





(For a map of Samoan electoral districts see: Ng Shiu et al. 2017, p. 20.)

2. Sociodemographic and political context

Samoa's population is estimated to have been just over 195,000 in 2016. This makes Samoa the fifth largest of the 12 Pacific island countries that the World Bank collects data on. Samoa's population is only 2.5 per cent of Papua New Guinea's. However, its population is almost 18 times that of Tuvalu (World Bank 2016a). Samoa is one of the most ethno-linguistically homogenous countries in the Asia Pacific (Reilly 2006, p. 57). Most Samoans are religious (only 0.25 per cent stated they were not religious in the 2016 census). Numerous different religious groups have at least some adherents. However, only seven churches had congregations larger than one per cent of the population in the 2016 census (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2017, p. 44). Data from the 2011 census indicate that about nine per cent of the total population held *matai* titles in 2011. The share of the population in possession of *matai* status does not vary much across the country. (The standard deviation across census districts was just over two per cent.) However, there was considerable variation between men and women: in 2011, just over 15 per cent of men held *matai* titles, compared to just under two per cent of women (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2011). Familial, extra-familial, and village-based ties and obligations play a major role in structuring social interactions in Samoa (Tuimaleali'lfano 2001, p. 317).

Compared to its Pacific neighbours, Samoa is a comparatively affluent country. In 2015, Samoa had the third highest GDP per capita of all the Pacific island countries that the World Bank collects data for. Its GDP per capita was more than twice that of Solomon Islands (World Bank 2016a). Samoa was the highest scoring country with respect to

government effectiveness of all the Pacific island countries that the World Bank collected governance data for in 2016 (World Bank 2016b).

Samoa is a parliamentary representative democracy. It has a long history of parliamentary governance, having had a parliament of sorts since the 1870s (So'o 2001). From independence until 2016, the country had 41 electorates based upon geography and traditional socio-political groupings (Ng Shiu et al. 2017). It also had a national electorate for voters on the 'Individual' voters roll. (The individual voters roll was a roll for voters, usually immigrants, who could not claim traditional ties to individual villages.) Throughout the period from 1964 until 2016, most of these electorates used a single member district plurality electoral system. However, a small minority (five from 1964-1991 and seven from 1996-2011) elected two members: the first and second placed candidates in each of these electorates (So'o 2001; see also election results database data). The multimember districts were an attempt at reducing malapportionment. However, in part because of a desire to keep electoral boundaries consistent with traditional political communities, malapportionment remained considerable even in multimember districts.

Prior to the 1991 general election only *matai* were entitled to vote or stand as candidates in elections in Samoa. In the wake of a referendum in 1990 the franchise was extended to citizens aged over 21 years of age. However, eligibility to stand for election remained restricted to *matai* (Meleisea et al. 2015). Between the 2011 and 2016 elections, a series of additional changes to the electoral process occurred. First, all of the multi-member districts were split into smaller single-member districts. Second, the Individual Roll was replaced with two urban seats (Ng Shiu et al. 2017).² These two changes brought the total number of electorates up to 49. A third change involved the introduction of a gender quota under which at least five of the seats of parliament have to be held by women. The quota works in the following way. In the first instance, women are elected in the standard manner: by winning more votes than any other candidate (male or female) in their

² These two changes were introduced for a range of reasons. The splitting of the larger seats addressed a perceived inequity associated with voters in some seats voting for two candidates rather than one. The replacement of the individual role with urban seats was in part driven by the changing nature of voters without traditional ties to rural seats (for a full discussion see Ng Shiu et al. 2017, p. 21).

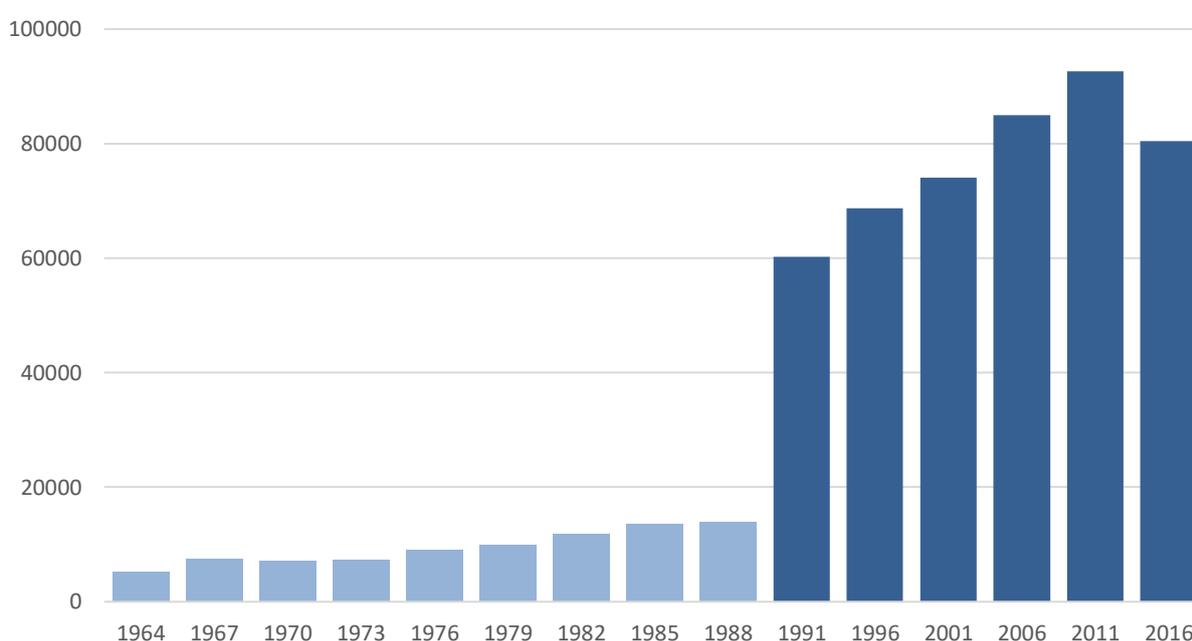
electorate. However, if fewer than five women win in this way, additional female MPs are drawn from the pool of the other women candidates who stood. The criteria for selection of these additional women MPs is the vote share that they won: the unsuccessful women candidate with the highest vote share will be first in line to be brought in by the quota, followed by the female candidate with the second highest vote share, and so on until there are five women MPs in parliament. If women are brought into parliament through the quota, the number of seats in parliament is increased (Baker 2014). In the 2016 election, four women won their seats outright, with one additional female member of parliament brought in through the quota process.

3. Election results

3.1 Votes cast and turnout

Figure 2 shows the number of votes cast in each general election since independence.

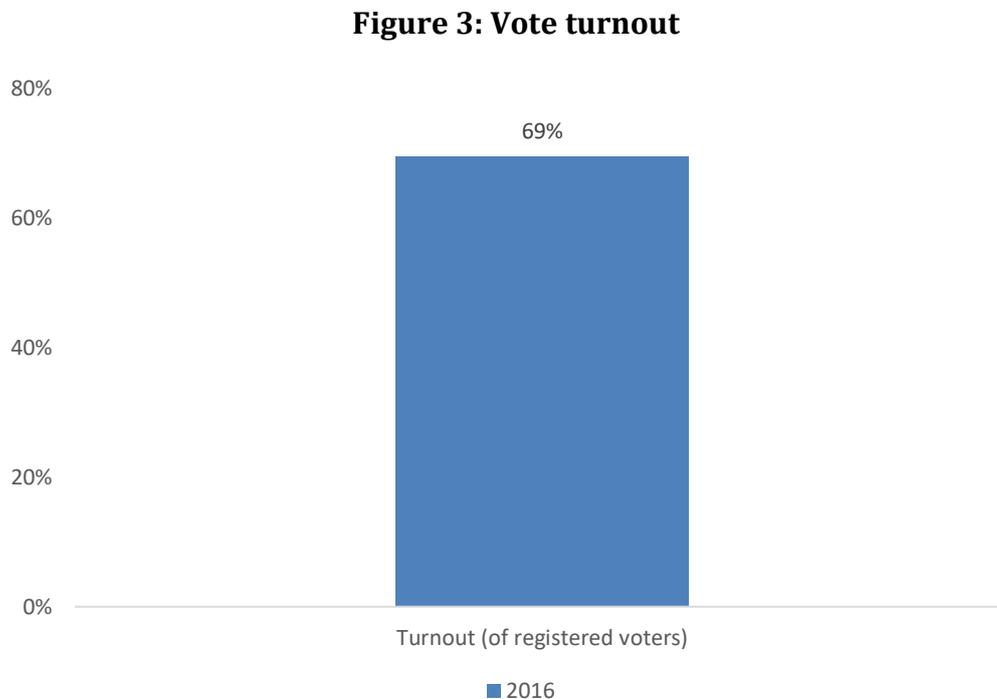
Figure 2: Number of votes cast



As can be seen in Figure 2, the number of votes cast changed dramatically from 1988 to 1991, following the broadening of the franchise to include people who were not *matai*. Almost four times as many ballots were cast in 1991 as were cast in 1988. This is a clear electoral transformation, although as we will show in the rest of the paper, the

transformation associated with removing restrictions on the franchise was often not reflected in major changes to other aspects of electoral politics.

Figure 3 provides estimates of voter turnout for 2016, in which turnout is calculated as a share of registered voters.



Based on available data, 69% of registered voters voted in 2016.³ By means of a comparison, in the 2014 Solomon Islands election, 90 per cent of registered voters voted. (2014 provides a good comparison for Solomon Islands as the roll was particularly accurate in that year, having recently been recompiled. Roll data in Papua New Guinea are too inaccurate for turnout comparisons to be of any use.)

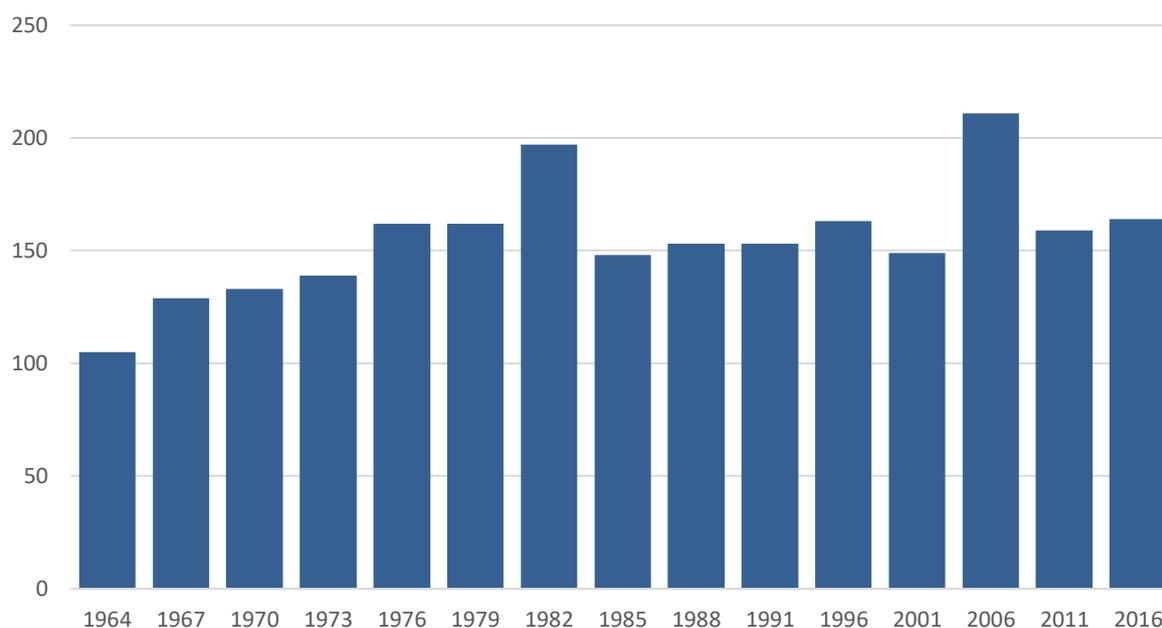
3.2 Candidate numbers

Figure 4 shows trends in candidate numbers over time. There is a steady increase in the number of candidates from independence until 1976. However, from that point, other than two anomalous elections in 1982 and 2006, candidate numbers have grown little.

³ An earlier version of this paper also provided turnout figures for 2011. These figures were erroneous and have been removed in this version.

Moreover, over the same period of time Samoa’s population increased by more than a quarter (World Bank 2016a), and the number of electorates increased (albeit through the splitting of larger multi-member districts). Most strikingly, the extension of the franchise prior to the 1991 election did not bring with it any increase in the number of candidates standing, nor did it bring a trend of increase in subsequent years. One possible explanation for slow rates of change in candidate numbers is the restriction that requires candidates to be *matai*. However, in the 2011 census nearly 17,000 people stated that they were *matai* (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2011). Clearly, the absence of any trend in candidate numbers is not a simple product of their not being enough *matai* to allow candidate numbers to increase. A more plausible explanation is that strong social structures in Samoa place considerable constraints on who can stand (or at least on who can stand with community backing) (Wood et al. 2014).

Figure 4: Total candidate numbers

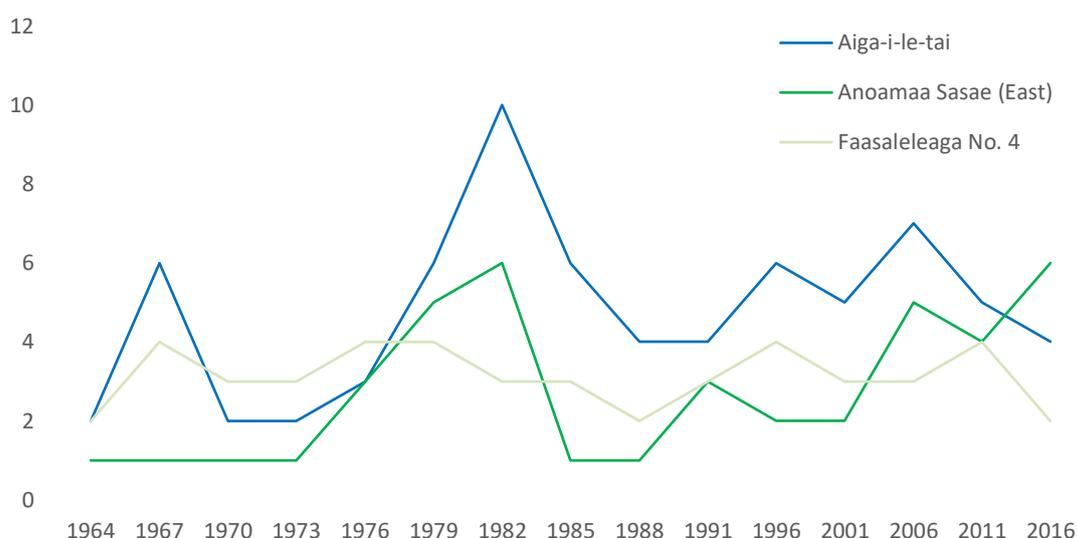


Low candidate numbers and little growth in candidate numbers in Samoa contrasts to some extent with Solomon Islands, and dramatically with Papua New Guinea. In the first post-independence election in Samoa there were, on average, 2.5 candidates per electorate; in 2016 there were 3.3 candidates per electorate. In the first post-independence election in PNG there were 8.1 candidates per electorate on average; in 2012 there were 31.1. In the first post-independence elections in Solomon Islands there

were 6.3 candidates; in 2014 the average was 8.9. Most probably these differences can be explained by differences in populations and population growth, and also by the more socially-fractured nature of electorates in the two Melanesian countries.

Although candidate numbers have been, on average, stable for Samoa as a whole, this has not been the case for each of the country’s electorates. This can be seen in Figure 5, which shows three electorates that illustrate variation. Faasaleleaga No. 4 has had very stable candidate numbers: a minimum of two and a maximum of four. On the other hand, candidate numbers in Aiga-i-le-tai have varied a lot: a minimum of two and a maximum of ten. There has also been much variation in Anoamaa Sasae; in addition, since 1988, candidate numbers have trended steadily upwards in this electorate.

Figure 5: Candidate numbers by electorate



In any given year there is also variation in candidate numbers between electorates. In 2016, some electorates had only one candidate standing, while others had as many as six. We analysed candidate data for 2016 to see what factors explained the variation in candidate numbers across electorates. Specifically, we looked to see whether larger electorates (in this case electorates with more registered voters) had more candidates on average. We also studied whether electorates which had a sitting MP at the time of the election had fewer candidates. The rationale for this latter analysis was that (on average) it is reasonable to anticipate that sitting MPs will have at least some electoral advantage associated with their incumbency. It also seems likely that aspiring candidates will know

this and so will be less likely to make the decision to compete if there is an incumbent also competing. Therefore, we have reasonable grounds for anticipating that on average, seats with an incumbent MP will have fewer candidates than those without one. In Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea this is typically the case. Table 1 below shows the results of a simple regression model run on 2016 data, designed to test for the relationship between electorate size (as proxied by registered voters) and candidate numbers, and for the relationship between the presence of an incumbent MP and candidate numbers.

Table 1: Correlates of candidate numbers 2016

	Candidates
Incumbent is standing	-1.46*** (0.43)
Registered voters 2016 (ln)	1.09*** (0.39)
Constant	-3.79 (2.96)
R^2	0.29
Observations	49

*Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$*

There is a negative, and statistically significant, relationship between the presence of an incumbent and candidate numbers. Similarly, electorates with more registered voters did typically have more candidates on average in the 2016 election.

Two other points are worth noting about the findings from this regression. The first is that the relationship between voter numbers and candidate numbers is log-linear. In practice this means that increased electorate size is associated with large increases in candidate numbers in small electorates but that this effect tapers off in larger electorates. The second is that the value of r-squared for the overall regression model (0.29) is reasonable by the standards of social science research. However, it is still low enough to suggest that many other factors influence candidate numbers. There is scope for further research here to see which of these factors are simply local and idiosyncratic, and which are associated with other social features that vary across different parts of Samoa.

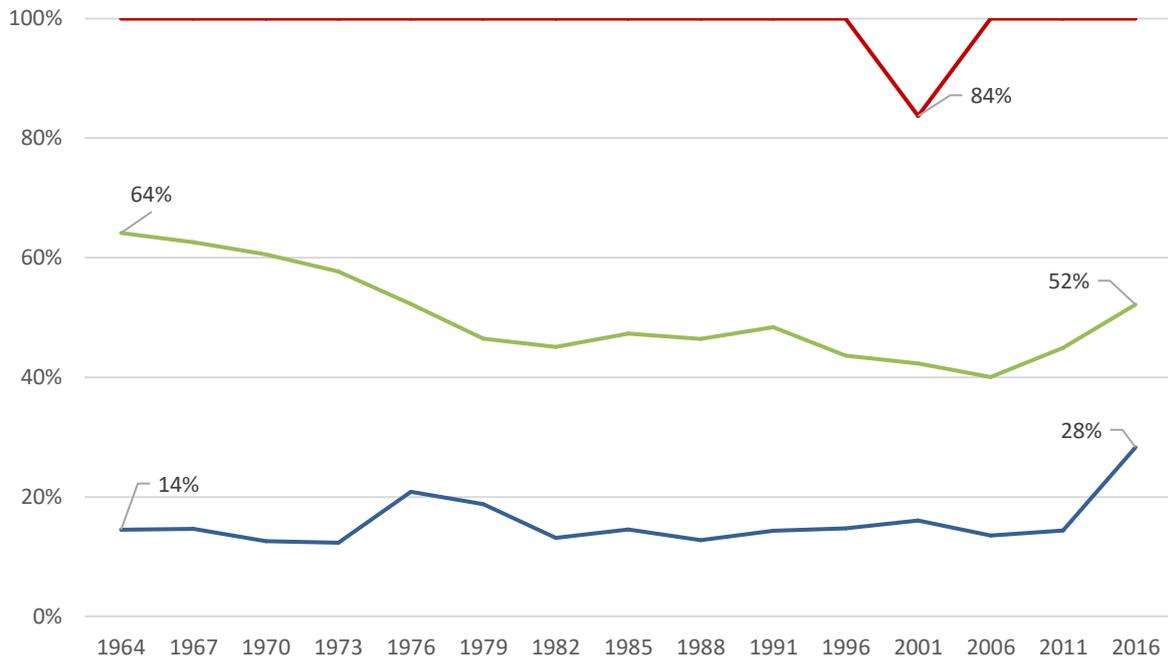
In other regressions (not shown here), we included the number of villages in each electorate as an additional independent variable. Although there was a bi-variate correlation between the number of villages and the number of candidates, this relationship ceased to exist once we added the number of voters into the regression model.⁴ Voter numbers, on the other hand, remained a statistically significant predictor of candidate numbers (with villages controlled for). The absence of a relationship between social features as important as village numbers and candidate numbers is surprising. It would be useful in future work to test and see if a relationship was present in earlier years.

3.3 Winning candidate vote shares

In Samoa, trends in the vote shares of winning candidates are similar to those found in candidate numbers. This can be seen in Figure 6. The mean winning candidate vote share fell through the 1970s, but since then there has been no clear trend. Although change over time has been small, there has been substantial variation between the highest and lowest winning candidate vote shares in each election throughout the period studied. In 1964, a number of winners won uncontested elections (effectively winning 100 per cent of the vote). In the same election, however, one winning candidate was only able to muster 14 per cent of the vote. Although the number of uncontested elections fell in intervening years (discussed in a subsequent section), a handful of candidates still won with 100 per cent of the vote in 2016, while at the other end of the spectrum one candidate won with only 28 per cent of the vote.

⁴ We are grateful to a reviewer of the paper for making the suggestion to include village numbers in our analysis.

Figure 6: Minimum, mean and maximum candidate vote share



Also of note in Figure 6 is the fact that the opening of the franchise in 1991 did not bring any real change in average winner vote shares, although these did fall slightly in subsequent elections until 2006.

By means of comparison, in the most recent election in Solomon Islands (2014) the winner with the highest vote share won 74 per cent, and the winner with the lowest vote share won 19 per cent. In the 2002 election in Papua New Guinea (the most recent election in which an electoral system analogous to that used in Samoa was in place) the highest polling winning candidate won 59 per cent of the vote, and the lowest polling candidate won 6 per cent of the vote. Winning candidate vote shares are, on average, higher in Samoa than in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, but the difference is only one of degree.

3.4 Relationship between candidate numbers and winning candidate vote shares

Figures 7 and 8 show the relationship between candidate numbers and winning candidate vote shares. Figure 7 does this for general elections as a whole. Figure 8 does this for each election in each individual electorate. Figure 7 shows a clear linear

relationship. In general elections where more candidates have stood, the average winner vote share has been lower. Figure 8 shows something similar, albeit a relationship with diminishing returns: each additional candidate is associated with a lower winner vote share; however, the effect of each additional candidate is slightly less than that of their predecessor. The r-squared for the regression equation in Figure 8 is 0.81. This indicates that a very high proportion of the variance in winner vote shares can be explained by a commensurate variance in candidate numbers. The relationship is likely both a product of the fact that every candidate who enters the race has at least some voters (family, for example) who inevitably vote for them and who might have been won by the winner otherwise, and the fact that more candidates are likely to enter into electoral races where there is no obvious front runner.

Figure 7: Candidate numbers vs winning candidate vote shares

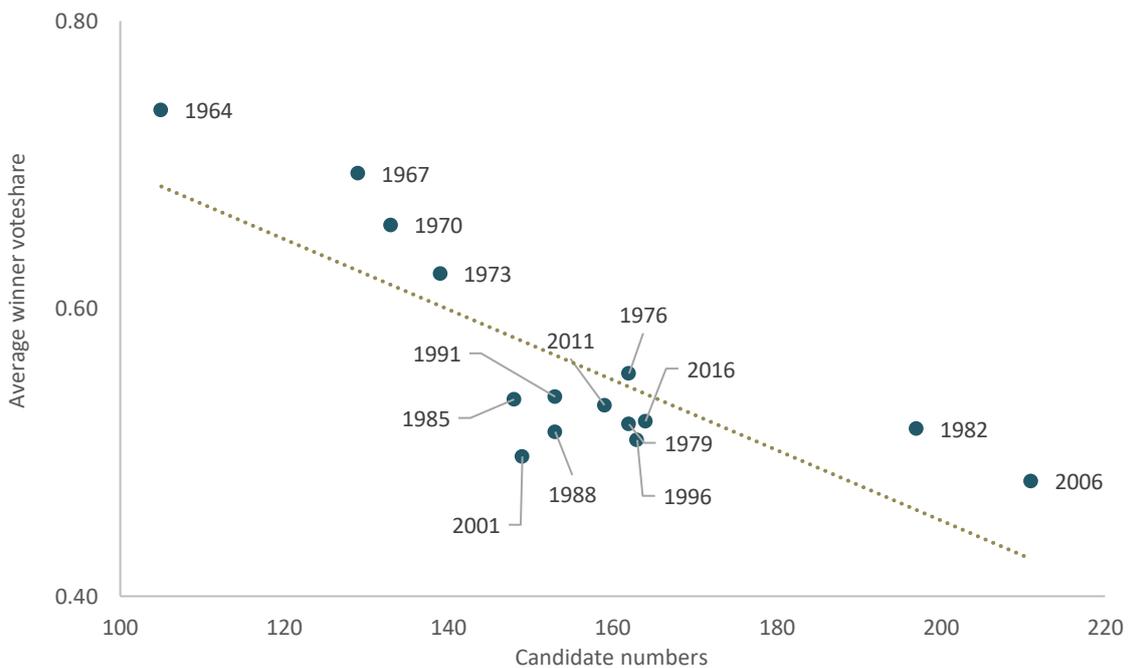
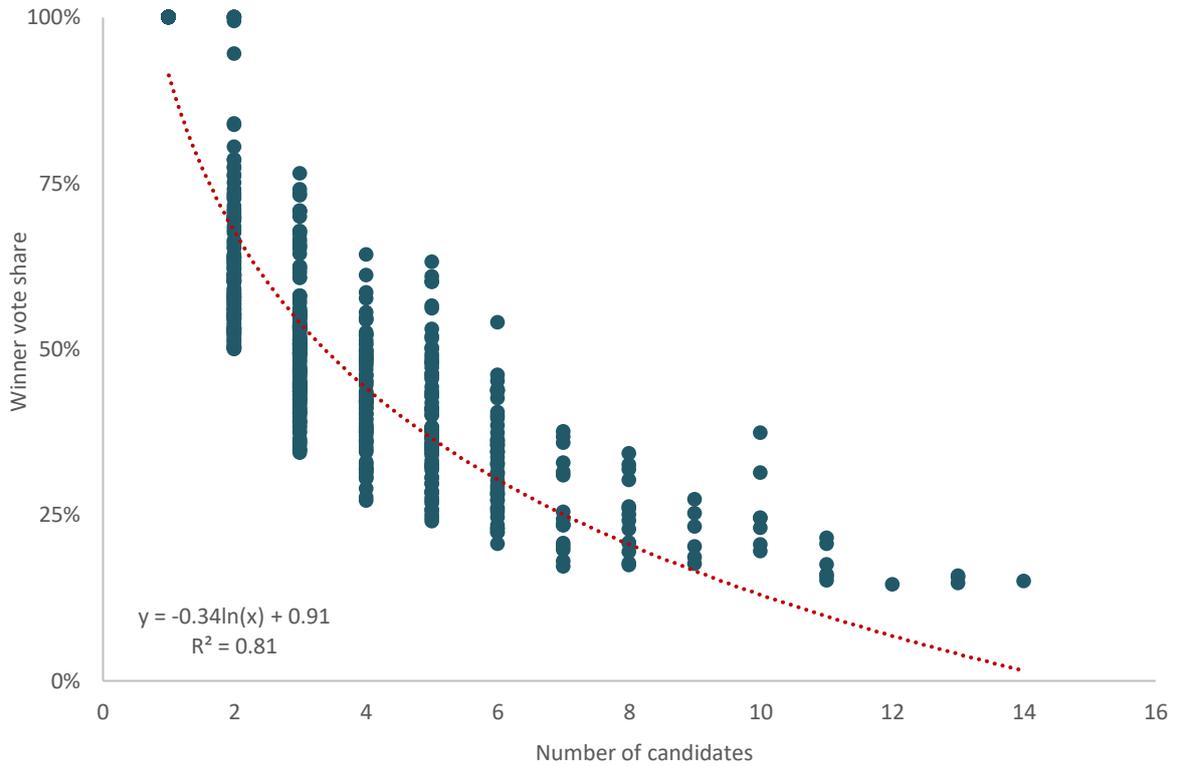


Figure 8: Candidate numbers vs winning candidate vote shares



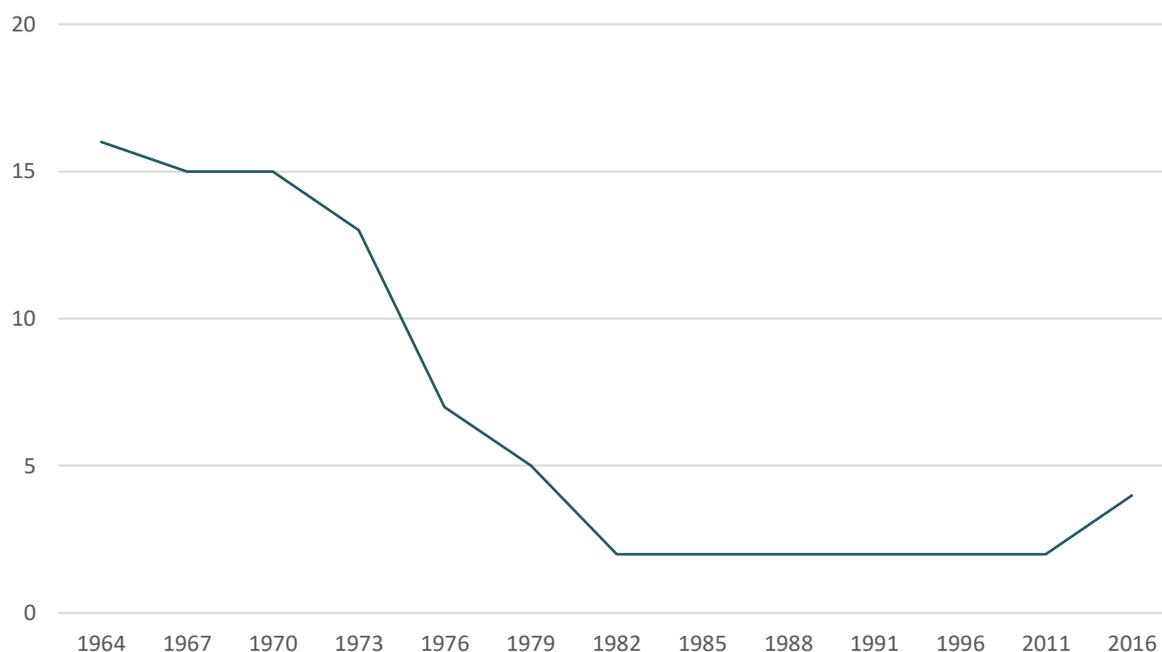
3.5 Unopposed winners

Figure 9 shows the number of electorates in each election that were uncontested, a number that has decreased significantly since 1964. Historically, uncontested elections have occurred in the past when communities or community leaders within an electorate have been able to agree in advance who their electorate's representative will be. This appears to have been particularly prevalent in electorates which were home to particularly senior politicians. In more recent years, the phenomenon has often been the product of particular candidates being able to have opponents deemed ineligible and rendered unable to stand (Ng Shiu et al. 2017). As can be seen in Figure 9, in the early post-independence years, uncontested elections were a common feature of Samoan democracy. From 1970 until 1982 such cooperation became increasingly rare, however, and now there are far fewer unopposed winners than there were 30 years ago.

The absence of recent trends in areas such as candidate numbers and winning candidate vote shares, alongside the fact that the extension of the franchise in 1991 did little to change results patterns, all point to the importance of social factors in structuring

electoral competition in Samoa. However, at the electorate level there appear to be limits to what social cohesion can achieve – in many parts of the country it has not been sufficient to prevent a consensus-type electoral process from becoming competitive over time.

Figure 9: Number of unopposed winners

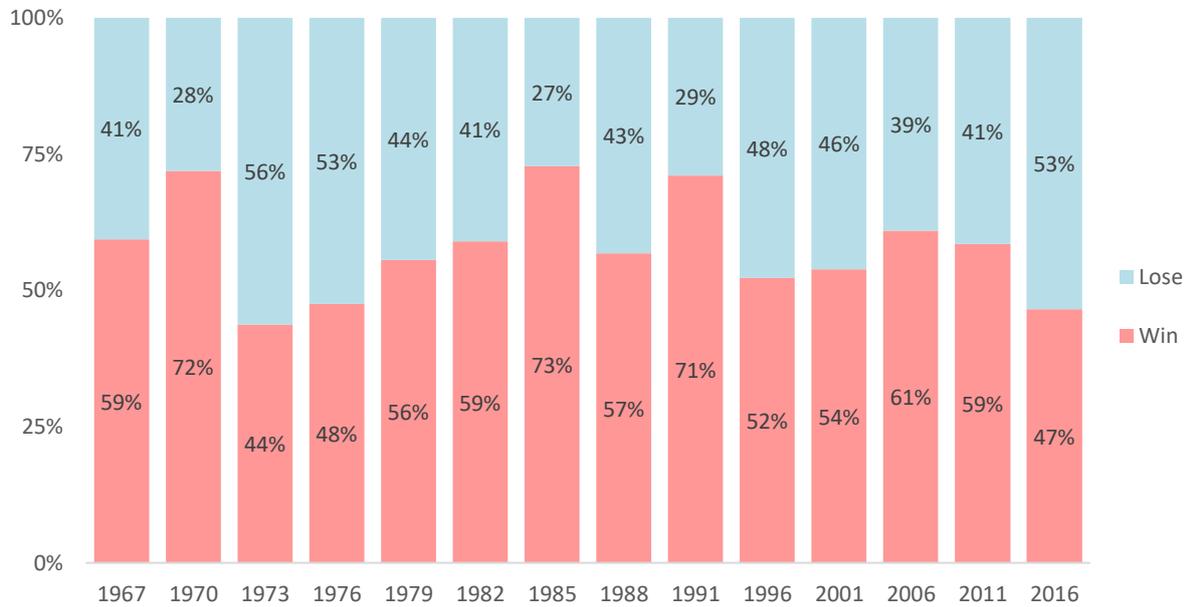


3.6 Incumbent turnover

Figure 10 shows the incumbent turnover rate for each election. The incumbent turnover rate in Samoa is high; on average 42 per cent of incumbents have lost their seat at each general election. This average is very close to that of Solomon Islands (45 per cent), and even quite close to the average turnover rate in Papua New Guinea (just over 50 per cent). Interestingly, incumbent turnover appears to be one area where the 1991 changes in voter eligibility are associated with an unusual election outcome: 1991 was a year with unusually low incumbent turnover. This may have been a product of the expansion of the franchise. However, it would be unwise to leap to this conclusion without further evidence. Not only were there two previous elections in which the incumbent turnover rate was similarly low, but it is hard to think of an explanation as to why an expansion of the franchise would have led to lower than usual incumbent turnover. If anything, it is the

sort of change that one might have anticipated leading to higher incumbent turnover rates.

Figure 10: Incumbent turnover rate



3.7 Terms in parliament

Figure 11 shows the number of terms in parliament that the average MP has had in each parliament since independence (the year on the x-axis is the year of the election immediately preceding the formation of the parliament). In line with the high turnover rates seen in Figure 10, in most parliaments the average MP has had between two and three terms in parliament.

Figure 11: Number of terms in parliament served by MPs on average

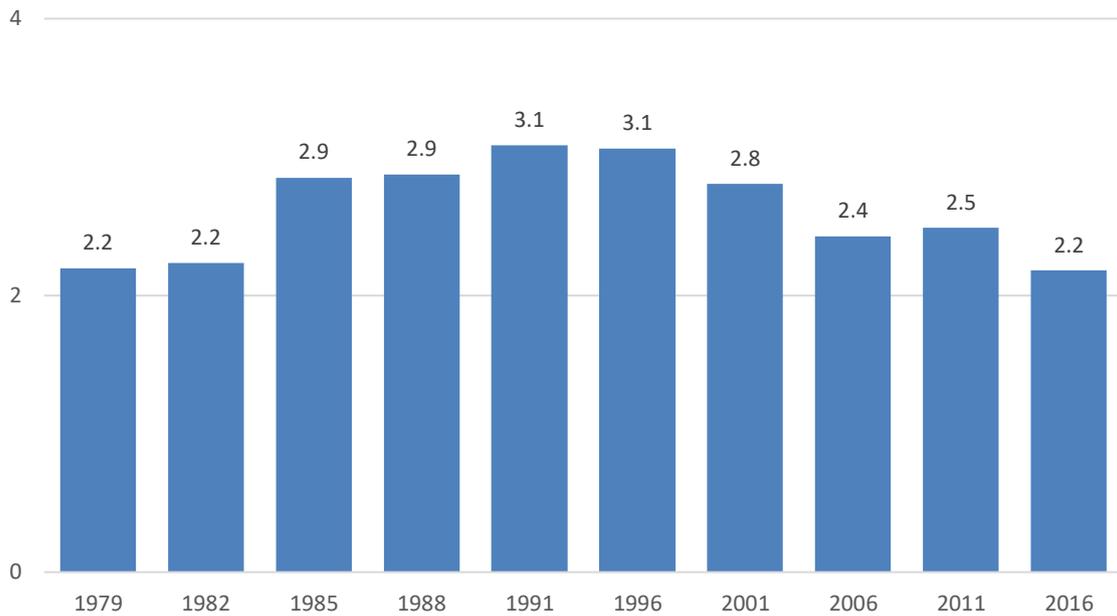
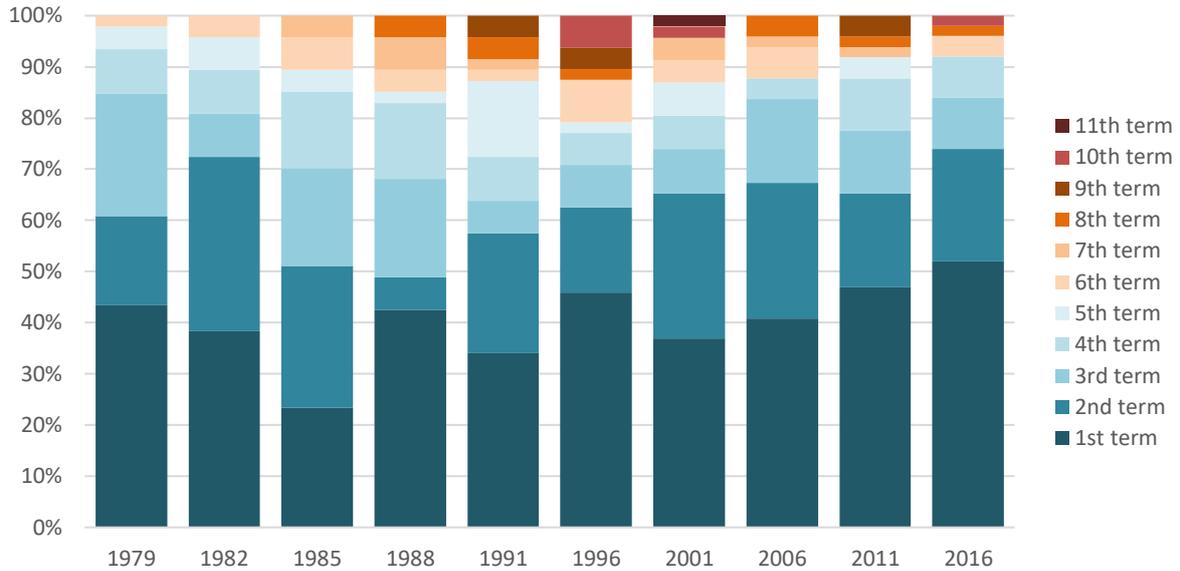


Figure 12 presents the same information in a different manner, showing the percentage of MPs in each parliament who had been in parliament for a particular number of terms. In most parliaments, at least 60 per cent of MPs had been in power for only two terms or less. In any given parliament, the typical MP is relatively new to parliamentary politics. However, in every parliament there has also been a small handful of MPs with much more experience. Although the majority of MPs in most parliaments are comparatively inexperienced, it has not been unusual for something in the vicinity of 10 per cent of MPs to have had six or more parliamentary terms under their belt.

Figure 12: Number of terms served by MPs



3.8 Parties

Unfortunately, our party data is not complete for elections prior to 2006. Party data are also potentially less reliable than other data. In particular, they only capture candidates' official party affiliations at the time of their registration as candidates. The data do not capture any subsequent changes in affiliation, either during elections or post-election; nor do the data capture instances when individual candidates are unofficially supported by a party, a practice that occurs in Samoa. Nevertheless, the data reveal interesting facts about party competition in Samoa.

The first of these facts can be seen in Figure 13, which shows candidates' party affiliations. A significant number of candidates have stood as independents in each election since 2006. In 2016, 37 per cent of candidates were independents. This is less than the most recent election in Solomon Islands (2014, 55 per cent) and the most recent election in Papua New Guinea (2017, 58 per cent), nevertheless it still shows a substantial share of the country's electoral hopefuls contest without the institutional support that a party may be able to offer. In Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, high numbers of independents contesting reflects the weakness of parties. In Samoa it may be the case that the explanation is different, with nominally high numbers of independents actually being a product of the fact that some parties will unofficially support candidates who are

notionally independent. Writing on the 2016 election in Baker (2018, p. 62) provides data that indicate that as many as 70 per cent of the notionally independent candidates were actually HRPP-affiliated.

Figure 13 also shows the small and declining number of parties fielding candidates in general elections. In 2006, six parties fielded candidates (although only four fielded more than one candidate). In 2011, two parties fielded candidates; this was the case again in 2016. This contrasts starkly with the most recent election in Solomon Islands (2014, in which 12 parties stood candidates) and the most recent election with reliable party data in Papua New Guinea (2012, in which 42 parties stood candidates).

Figure 13: Percentage of candidates from individual parties

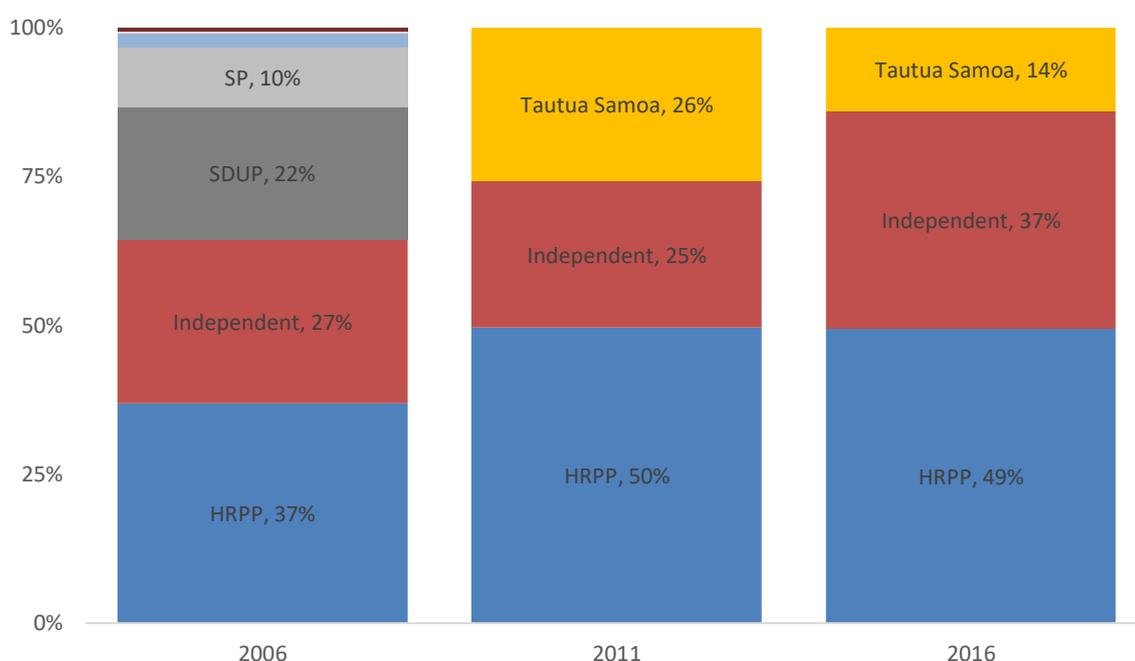
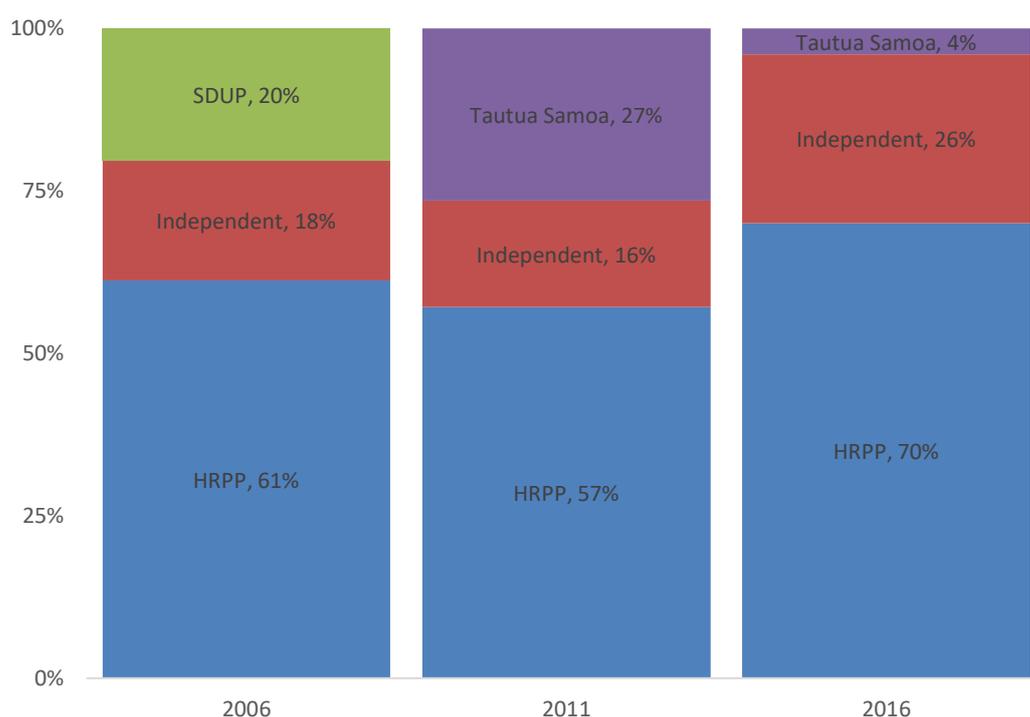


Figure 14 shows the percentage of MPs from each party who won a seat in parliament in the last three elections. The parties with candidates that won in these elections were the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), Samoan Democratic United Party (SDUP) and the Tautua Samoa Party. (The Tautua Samoa Party was formed prior to the 2011 elections from the remnants of the SDUP (Meleisea et al. 2013, p. 67).)

Figure 14 shows that a significant number of independents were elected in both elections. It also shows that the minor parties contesting in 2006 failed to have any of their

candidates elected. Also visible is the fact that the number of seats held by the opposition party in parliament grew between 2006 and 2011 but collapsed between 2011 and 2016. The 2016 election was dominated by the Human Rights Protection Party. In the 2012 elections in Papua New Guinea, 21 parties had MPs elected to parliament. In the 2014 elections in Solomon Islands, six parties had MPs elected. Party politics are much less fluid and fractured in Samoa than they are in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

Figure 14: Percentage of seats won by parties



3.9 Women

The first female candidates stood in Samoan elections in 1970. Unfortunately, the data that we have on candidate and MP gender are not as reliable as we would like. We also have no data on candidate gender for 2011. However, the data we have are sufficiently accurate to highlight some key points about women in elections in Samoa. Figure 15 shows the numbers of women candidates that we think stood in each election since independence. Because we have some concerns about data accuracy in this area, the same chart also contains data from So'o (2012). (The data from So'o do not include 2016, however we are confident of the accuracy of our data for 2016.) As can be seen, the

differences between the two datasets are not major. However, where differences do occur we encourage you to draw upon the numbers produced by So'o.

Regardless of the dataset used, two trends are apparent: stability in women candidate numbers from independence until 1991, then an increase until 2006. Given the timing, it is possible that this increase was precipitated by the expansion of the franchise. This seems plausible. Female candidates may have felt more confident in their ability to win votes from citizens rather than *matai*; however, we have not read any scholarly work which offers substantive evidence to corroborate this explanation. On the basis of So'o's data, female candidate numbers appear to have risen rapidly in 2006, before falling equally rapidly in 2011. In 2016 the number of women candidates increased to its highest level ever.

Figure 15: Women candidate numbers

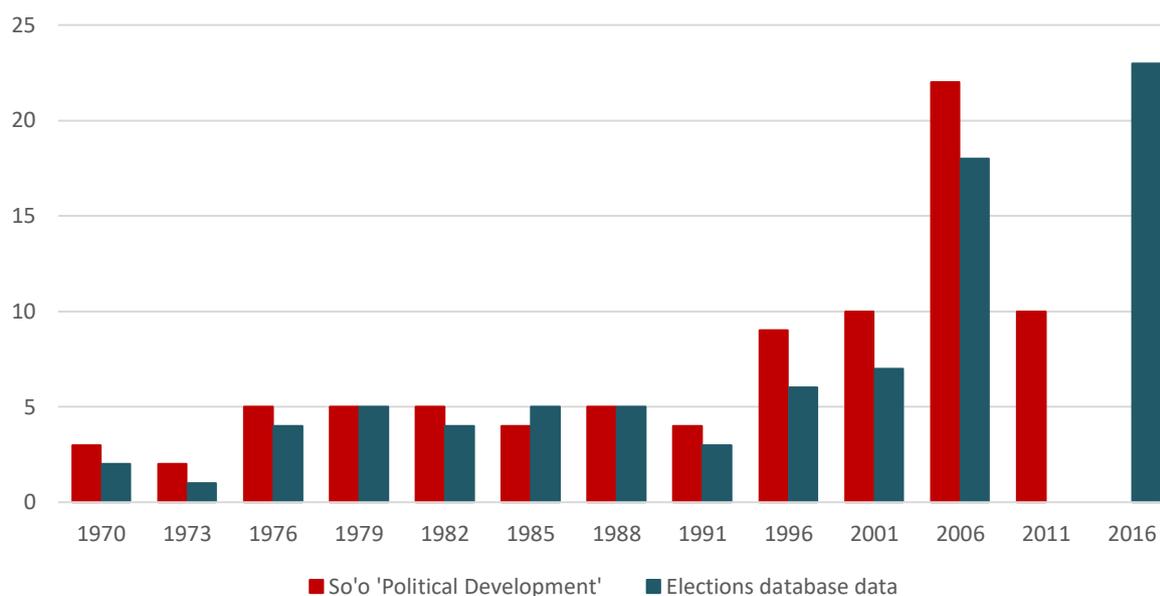


Figure 16 shows the percentage of candidates who were women. This chart is based on our data and so may be off by a few percentage points for individual years. (Also 2011 is missing.) Nevertheless, one point is clear from the chart: the vast majority of candidates in post-independence elections in Samoa have been men. 2016 is the year with the highest proportion of women candidates. It is possible that this increase was prompted by women believing their chances of being elected had been increased by the

parliamentary gender quota, although there are other potential explanations such as increased encouragement provided to women candidates by political parties.

Figure 16: Candidate numbers by gender

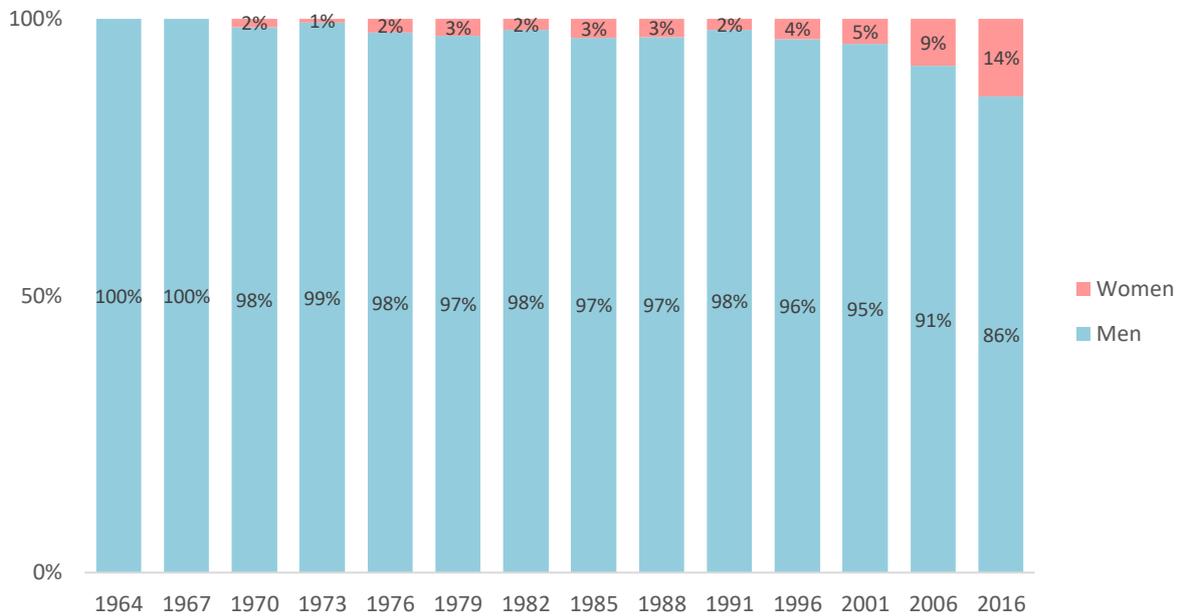


Figure 17, shows the number of successful female candidates. Once again, uncertainty about data is an issue. Not only has accurately coding women candidates proven difficult, but issues such as post-election petitions also complicate matters. The numbers in our chart reconcile with those produced by the Government of Samoa (Ministry of Women Community & Social Development 2009), and with advice from colleagues. However, readers are also advised to refer to So’o (2012) who produces somewhat different numbers. Also note that we have reported four winners for 2016. This reflects the fact that four women won elections in their electorates in 2016. Note, however, that one additional woman was brought into parliament through the gender quota rules, meaning that there are currently five female MPs in Samoa’s parliament.⁵

⁵ Further, note that we have no women winners for 1988 as no women won in the general election that year; however, Afioga Naomi Fiame won a by-election in 1988.

Figure 17: Number of women winning elections

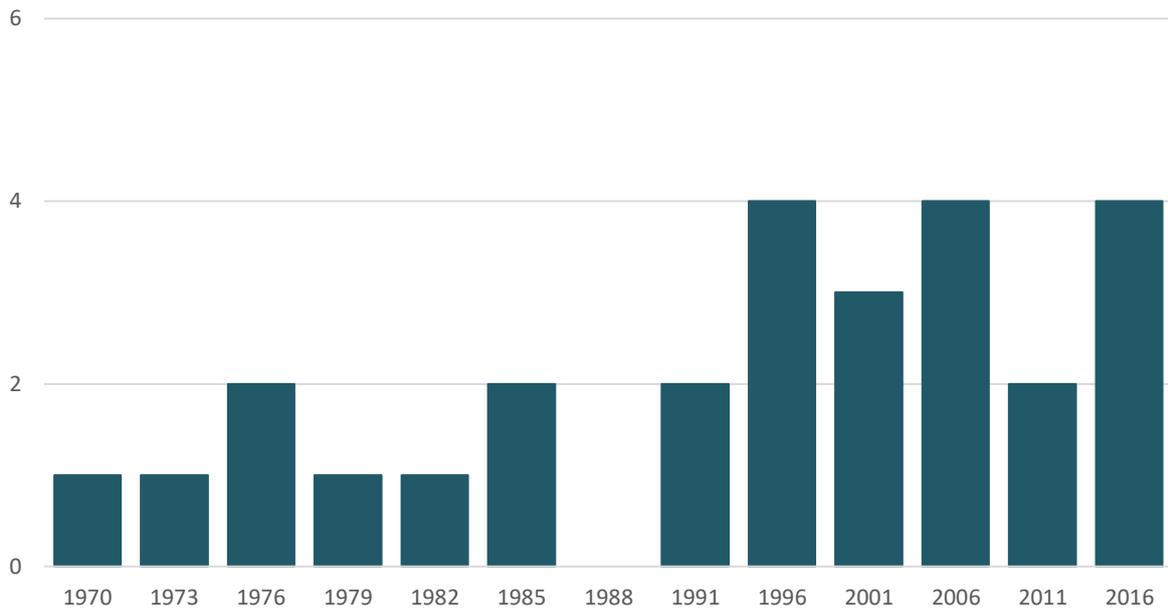


Figure 18 shows the vote share of the highest polling female candidate, the lowest polling female candidate and the average (mean) female candidate. (Data are from our dataset and so may be slightly inaccurate. Also, note that until 1996 the absolute number of women candidates was low enough that some care needs to be taken in interpreting statistics such as mean vote shares.) The numbers for 1970 are best disregarded, as there were only two candidates in that year (one who won an election unopposed). Subsequent years show, however, that while female candidates have not been winning higher vote shares on average over time, the most successful female candidates have been. One woman was elected in 2016 in an uncontested election. While the average female candidate has not become obviously more competitive over time, a subset of women have become increasingly competitive.

Figure 18: Minimum, mean and maximum female candidate vote share

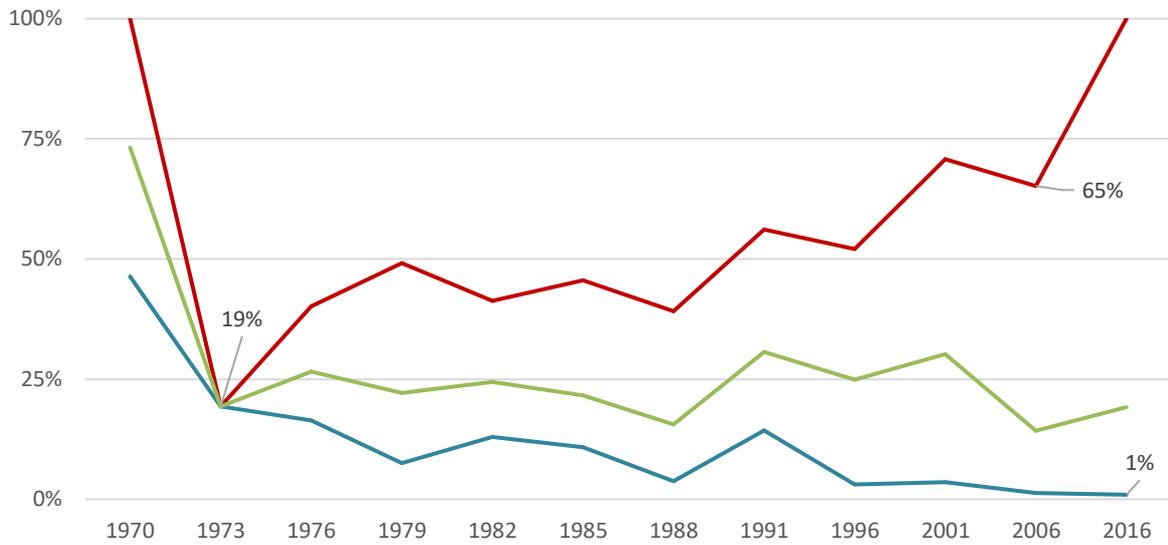
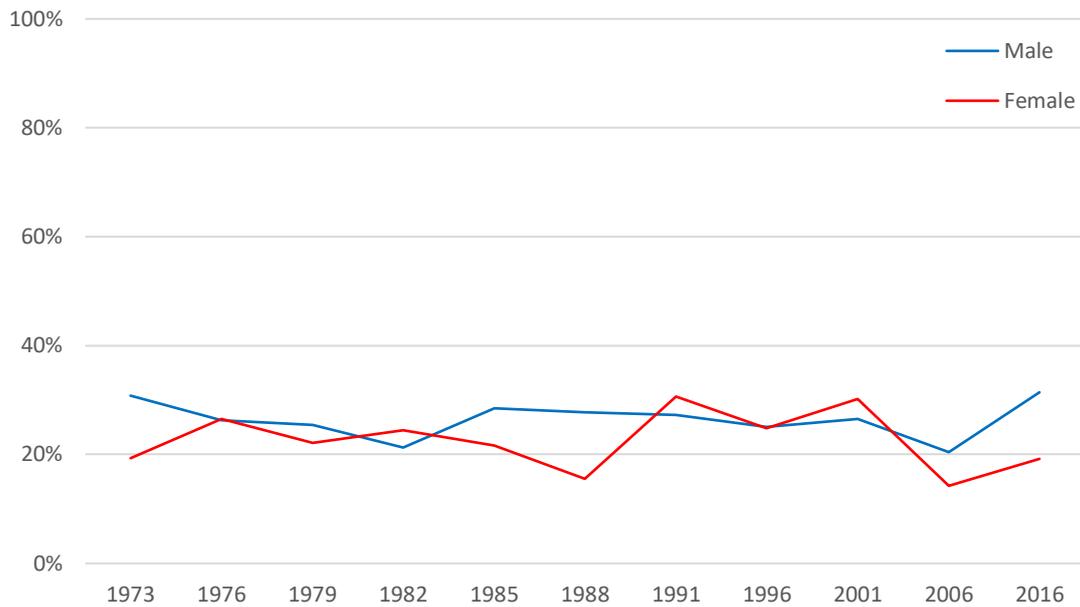


Figure 19 is based on our data and illustrates an interesting point. While there have been far fewer female candidates than male in Samoan elections, and while women have only rarely won elections, in most general elections average female candidate vote shares and average male candidate vote shares have been very similar. On average, female candidates have not performed worse than men do. The challenge for women has instead been the fact that few have been able to outperform the average by enough of a margin to actually win their seats.

Figure 19: Candidate vote share by gender



In terms of what historical election rates show, the challenges faced by women candidates in Samoa have been similar to those in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Although it is probably fair to say they have been very slightly less acute. (At present there are only two women MPs in Solomon Islands and no women in parliament in Papua New Guinea.) There is now one major difference between Samoa and the two Melanesian countries: Samoa has formal rules that guarantee the presence of women in its parliament; Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea do not.

Samoa also compares quite favourably to other Pacific island countries in this area. Of the 12 Pacific island countries that the International Parliamentary Union had data for in 2017, women formed a higher share of national parliamentarians in only three (Fiji, Palau and Nauru).⁶

⁶ Data from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>.

4. Conclusion

In 1991, the formal rules of electoral politics in Samoa were transformed: the number of people able to vote increased by more than a factor of three. And voting rights were no longer limited to holders of chiefly titles – they were extended to all people regardless of their social position. It is surprising, given this major change to a formal feature of Samoan democracy, just how little changed in many electoral statistics either in 1991 or in subsequent elections. Some aspects of electoral outcomes in Samoa have been remarkably stable – at least for the country as a whole. And yet, election results data show that it would be mistaken to talk about Samoan electoral politics as a stable homogenous whole – there are considerable differences between different parts of Samoa, and different electorates have had remarkably different electoral histories. Electoral politics in Samoa is much more varied than might be expected given the country's homogeneity with respect to some sociodemographic features.

Relatively prosaic features such as electorate size, or whether an electorate has an incumbent MP, can explain some of the variation around the country, but there is much else that cannot be explained in this way. Here we hope that in the future the data in the Samoan Election Results Database will be drawn upon by researchers as they use different approaches to studying what causes different parts of Samoa to have had very different electoral histories, and what explains variation around the country. For example, there is considerable scope to take both quantitative and qualitative data to study the role of social features such as the extended family in shaping electoral contests.

There is also much comparative work that can be done by scholars of Pacific politics. As the basic comparisons we have provided between Samoa, and Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea show, there are some obvious differences in electoral politics as conducted in Samoa and as conducted in the two larger, poorer, more heterogeneous, Melanesian states to its west. The most obvious of these differences is clearly the consolidated nature of party politics in Samoa. This difference is not a function of formal electoral rules (which are similar between the three countries). It clearly stems from informal institutions and the countries' political histories. There is useful comparative work that could be undertaken examining exactly what explains the difference in the number and nature of parties between these three countries (as well as around the Pacific more generally).

In other areas there are interesting similarities between Samoa, and Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. In all three countries it is hard for women to win elections. In all three countries it is also hard for sitting MPs to win their seats back, as evidenced by high incumbent turnover rates. Samoa has somewhat lower incumbent turnover rates than Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, but the difference is only one of degree. This is surprising, given stronger large-scale social structures, lower candidate numbers, stronger parties, and generally more stable politics in Samoa. High incumbent turnover rates will be an interesting area for further research in Samoa. It will also be an area where comparative work may shed light on unexpected commonalities between Samoa, and Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. It is possible that the explanation for similar turnover rates might lie in those formal electoral rules that the countries have in common. However, incumbent turnover rates are not normally thought to be an electoral feature that is shaped by electoral rules. If electoral rules are the source, their impact is occurring through some previously untheorised means.

Finally, although there are many aspects of electoral outcomes that have changed little over time in Samoa there is one clear area that has changed a lot: the number of uncontested elections. Learning why constituency-level cooperation collapsed in the 1970s, and what else changed as this occurred, may potentially shed light on how competitive electoral processes can interact with, and possibly undermine, more consensus-oriented aspects of governance. This has the potential to add not just to political scientists' understanding of Samoa, but also to broader theories of electoral politics and deliberation.

Finally, there is the matter of what will happen to electoral politics in Samoa in the future. It would be a very brave social scientist who looked at the absence of clear trends in Samoa's electoral past and claimed that such stability was liable to continue forever. Looking at the charts in this paper it is easy to spot small changes that might, or might not, reflect larger shifts on the horizon. In these circumstances election data on their own cannot tell us what is to come, but they can be combined with other electoral research to slowly build an in-depth picture of the shifts in Samoan politics that are currently underway, and which may one day be transformational.

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