

Polity IV Country Report 2006: Solomon Islands

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2005</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>2</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>Yes</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2005	2006	Change	Polity:	8	8	0	Democ:	9	9	0	Autoc:	1	1	0	Durable:		2		Tentative:		Yes		
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Tentative:		Yes																							
SCODE	SOL	CCODE	940	Date of Report	1 October 2007																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	3	4																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
4 June 2000			15 August 2004																						
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution																									
1978																									
Executive(s)																									
Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare (SOCRED); elected by parliament, 4 May 2006 (<i>Note: Prime Minister Snyder Rini, elected on 18 April 2006 and sworn in on 20 April 2006, resigned on 26 April prior to no confidence vote in parliament; Sogavare elected on 4 May 2006.</i>)																									
Legislature																									
Unicameral: National Parliament (50 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 5 April 2006) National Party: 4 Rural Advancement Party (SIPRA): 4 People's Alliance Party (PAP): 3 Democratic Party: 3 Lafari Party: 2 Liberal Party: 2 Solomon Islands Social Credit Party (SOCRED): 2 Non-partisans: 30																									
Judiciary																									
Court of Appeal																									

Narrative Description:

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Executive recruitment in the Solomon Islands is characterized by competitive, but personalistic, parliamentary elections. Executive power is vested in a prime minister, elected by Parliament, but in practice the power of the prime minister is limited by rapidly changing political alliances and a weak party system. Prime ministers rarely stay in office for more than two years, and tenures as short as two weeks have not been uncommon. The lack of institutionalized party structures that span and connect the many islands is both a consequence and a contributor to the lack of cohesion at the center and the often sharp

tensions in the contention among local interests. This parochialism organized around paternalistic leaders fueled increasing centrifugal dynamics in the Solomon Islands in the 1980s and early 1990s, as the peoples of some islands pressed for greater autonomy or separation and competition to control the central state apparatus increased on the main island, Guadalcanal (Isatabu).

Since being brought in by US forces to help drive out remnants of the Japanese army from Guadalcanal in 1942, Malaita Islanders remained politically and economically active on the island and, particularly, in the capital city Honiara. Native Isatabu Islanders (local name for Guadalcanal) mobilized their resentment in the 1990s and demanded special compensation from the central government for hosting the capital. When that was denied, local militias (Isatabu Freedom Fighters) were formed to intimidate and drive Malaitans out of the island. Many Malaitans fled to Honiara and a militant group formed to protect them: the Malaita Eagles Force (MEF). Clashes between the militias in the late 1990s culminated in a MEF seizure of the capital on 5 June 2000, and the forced resignation of Prime Minister Ulufa'alu. Anarchy ensued until Australia agreed to lead a peace-keeping force reestablish security and disarm the militias; the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) deployed on 24 July 2003. Legislative elections were again held under RAMSI guidance on 5 April 2006, resulting in the People's Alliance Party (PAP) of former Prime Minister Kemakeza (2001-03) losing substantial support in Parliament. After quickly forming a new government, Synder Rini, the chosen successor of Kemakeza, was elected prime minister on 18 April but forced to resign on 26 April, after his election triggered mass violent protests in the capital city. Manasseh Sogavare, a former Prime Minister (2000-01) and leader of the Solomon Islands Social Credit Party (SOCRED), was able to form a coalition government and was elected prime minister on 4 May 2006.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

The power of the executive is constrained by a fifty-member Parliament that maintains effective parity with the prime minister. In addition to sharing legislative powers with the executive, the Parliament is responsible for electing the prime minister; its rapidly changing party alliances and governing coalitions have resulted in short executive tenures with limited power to act independently. The judiciary is composed of a High Court, whose justices are appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister and an independent judicial commission. The Judiciary is generally considered independent of both the executive and the legislature.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Persistent Overt Coercion (8)

The Solomon Islands achieved self-government in 1976 and independence from Britain in 1977, and has experienced challenging political conditions, characterized by personalistic politics and a weak party system, throughout its independent history. Political participation in the country has been characterized by a phenomenon known locally as "the tensions," reflecting civil unrest sparked by conflict between two militarized ethnic groups: the Isatabu Freedom Movement and the Malaita Eagle Force. This unrest first became salient in 1997 after the election of Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, and erupted into open violence shortly thereafter. Although the two groups came to peace agreements in 2000 and 2001, violence flared again in 2002 and was followed by a prevailing atmosphere of lawlessness and ineffective rule of law. Security was turned over to the international police force RAMSI in 2003, which has since attempted to quell the unrest on the islands and settle the ethnic disputes, to varying degrees of success. The failure of the 2006 elections to produce clear results, and the subsequent dip into riots and lawlessness, suggest that there is still substantial work to do to ensure the stability of conventional political participation.

At particular issue between these clashing ethnic groups is land ownership rights, currently assigned only to Solomon Islanders. In practice land is rarely transferred outside of families, and almost never assigned for non-traditional economic purposes, leaving little room for economic growth or entrepreneurship. Government involvement with China, and policies regarding Chinese immigrants in particular, has also sparked opposition amongst political parties and the public.