

# LIMITED PREFERENTIAL VOTING AND ENGA POLITICAL CULTURE

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The experience of the 2002 Elections in the Enga Province shows a political culture developing in which healthy competition and individual freedom are compromised. It is a culture of violence and intimidation, with new kinds of tribalism and a new type of leader who has access to guns and the ability to open or obstruct access to money and resources.<sup>1</sup> The stakes are high with large discretionary "electoral development funds" available to members of parliament. Elections are viewed by many as a form of investment, with successful candidates rewarding their supporters and disregarding others. There were seventeen candidates for the Enga provincial seat covering the entire province, and 137 candidates for seats in the five open electorates in Enga. Following the elections, there were court challenges in all electorates. This article will focus on events in the Wabag Open electorate.

During the confusion and violence of the 2002 Elections in Enga, Samuel Tei Abal was declared elected for the Wabag Open seat. The results provided by the Electoral Commission on 26 July 2002 showed that of the twenty-five candidates, two were obviously in the lead: Samuel Tei Abal with 12,438 votes (24.7%) and Daniel Kapi with 10,234 (20.3%). Daniel Kapi successfully challenged Abal in the National and Supreme Courts, which judged that the election of Tei Abal was null and void on the grounds of "determining ballot papers being destroyed by Av-gas bombing at the Wabag police station during the 2002 National Elections" (*Post-Courier* 15 Nov 2004:4).<sup>2</sup> A By-Election was ordered. Unlike the 2002 Elections, which followed the first-past-the-post (FPP) system, this By-Election for Wabag Open was to be held using the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) System for the first time.

With the By-Election set for 16 November 2004, campaigning began in earnest in the Wabag District. It became obvious that it would be a contest between Kapi and Tei Abal. Daniel Kapi, a former Director of Consumer Affairs, had held the Wabag Open seat from 2000 to 2002 after his successful court challenge following the 1997 National Elections.<sup>3</sup> His unseating of Takai Kapi from Maramuni meant a loss

of support in 2004 in the Maramuni District.<sup>4</sup> The son of Sir Tei Abal, a former Opposition Leader and long term member for Wabag, Sam Abal had worked overseas with the Department of Foreign Affairs, and had been Provincial Administrator in the Enga Province; in the latter role he had had influence on the distribution of development projects throughout the province. Sam Abal was reputedly being supported by Governor Peter Ipatas, though the Governor denied this (*Post-Courier* 9 Nov 2004:3). Supporters of “action” Governor Ipatas point to his support for education, the construction of the Provincial Government building (Green House), the Enga Mioks Rugby League Club’s efforts to engage school leavers and unemployed men in sports, the provision of vehicles, the improvement of the annual Enga Show, and the sealing of the Wapenamanda to Wabag Highway. However, others claim that Peter Ipatas’ supporters get wealthy overnight and “eat rice” (= money), while they struggle to survive with few services provided for them. Five weeks before the election, the political climate heated up considerably when it was announced that Governor Ipatas had been referred to the Public Prosecutor for alleged misconduct in office over his annual financial statements to the Ombudsman Commission and use of public funds (*Post-Courier* 12 Oct 2004:1). Consequently, in some of his campaign speeches, Daniel Kapi referred to Governor Ipatas as a “dead man”. Just eight days before the election, newspaper headlines reported Kapi’s claim that he had been assaulted by Governor Ipatas, “inflicting cuts and bruises on his face and body” (*Post-Courier* 8 Nov 2004:1). The apparent antipathy between Governor Ipatas and Daniel Kapi is remarkable, since they are “brothers”, their mothers being sisters.

In order to help maintain peace, a liquor ban was declared during the campaign and election period. An additional 800 police personnel were brought into the province (normally there are 150 police officers stationed in the Enga Province). No doubt this contributed to a much more peaceful election than that of 2002. The police contingent for the Wabag Open By-Election cost K3.8 million (*Post-Courier* 17 Dec 2004:2).

This paper will address the issue of whether and how the LPV System of voting has so far made any difference to the culture of politics in Enga. The focus will be on voting for the two leading candidates, Samuel Tei Abal and Daniel Kapi.

## Campaign Period

It is particularly difficult to get concrete facts about the distribution of money and resources to aid candidates during the campaign and election period. However, it is common knowledge that the system of material incentives given to attract votes continued in 2004. When is a government vehicle being used for legitimate purposes and when not? When is a call for unity in the province desirable, and when is it a threat against any form of dissent? Why were magistrates and peace officers in the Wabag District paid their wages before the elections, while those in other districts had to wait? Truth and falsehood, right and wrong appear relative to which side of the political fence one is sitting (see Lakane and Gibbs 2003, Kanaparo 2003). In fact, many public servants fear losing their jobs if they speak out against the Provincial Government or are known to support any candidate opposing the Government. This is the logical consequence of a politicised public service, which is characteristic of contemporary Enga political culture.

## Voting

It seems that many people did not have a secret individual vote as is the democratic ideal promoted by the Electoral Commission. Near Wabag Town itself, with the significant presence of police, people did have a chance to come and mark their own ballot papers. However, in other places the voting followed any of three procedures typical of Enga electoral politics.

1. Turn the Table (*tanim tebol*). Through argument, bribery or perhaps intimidation, voters at a polling place give all their votes to one candidate. In this case, the common roll is not used and "voters" are concerned with first preferences only. Papers are all marked by polling officials or community leaders.
2. The common roll is read only partially. Electoral officers ask heads of families: "X (name), how many papers?" The head of a family tells the number in his family who he wants to vote and the electoral officer gives him the papers to mark for his family or he gets help from electoral officials to mark the papers.
3. Local leaders arrange for people to separate into groups, in this case, those supporting Abal and those supporting Kapi.

Each group then appointed a person to mark the ballot papers for them. When names are called from the roll, it is obvious who a person is voting for. They simply give a sign and the appointed scribe takes the signed ballot paper from the polling clerk, marks the ballot paper and drops it in the ballot box. Again, this method concentrates on first preferences. Those questioned on how they participated in this form of “voting” say they do not know how the second and third preferences were marked.

## **Women**

It is argued that the LPV System allows more freedom to women, particularly women who feel constrained to vote for the candidate of their husband or brother’s choice in a FPP system. It is thought that at least women will be free to mark their own second and third preferences. As can be seen from the above description of the voting, where it followed the ideal promoted by the Electoral Commission, women may have had more choice. However, in the many places where the “Enga system” was followed, women appear to have had no more choice than they had following the FPP system in the 2002 Elections.

## **Electoral Roll**

Electoral officials say they had to use the same roll in the By-Election as in 2002, because it was a continuation of the 2002 National Elections. It is recognised that there are many invented “ghost” names of non-existent people on this roll (*Post-Courier* 2 Dec 2004:11). There are also incidences of the same name appearing in several places on the roll. There is a striking disparity between numbers on the electoral roll and census figures. The 2000 Census records 58,750 persons in the Wabag District (National Statistical Office of PNG, *Final Figures*). The Wabag District includes Wabag Urban LLG, Wabag Rural LLG and Maramuni Rural LLG – the areas covered by the By-Election. This census figure of 58,750 includes children. Based on census figures, the number of people eighteen years and over and therefore eligible to vote would be about half that figure. Yet the numbers on the electoral roll are approaching that same figure. Thus, it appears that the numbers on the roll are inflated by almost 100%.

“Ghosts” or not, 53,867 papers were counted in the Wabag By-Election. However, unlike the election two years previously, 17,133 papers were unused and returned in 2004. This shows a change from the previous practice of community leaders, having exhausted the names on the roll, continuing to mark all available ballot papers anyway until they were all used up. Returning more unused ballot papers no doubt has reduced the level of double (multiple) voting.

### **Differences Between 2002 and 2004**

Of the twenty-five candidates for the Wabag Open electorate in 2002, only six contested the By-Election. These included the top four from the 2002 Elections. The other two were in strategic positions to split votes, like Paul Nili, who helped Dan Kapi by taking Yakane tribe votes away from Sam Abal. The other, Meck Warip, scored only two votes in 2002, but received 317 votes in 2004 – votes that might otherwise have gone to Kapi. Of the various reasons why some chose not to contest, four were surely discouraged by not receiving a single vote in 2002. Another reason could be the lack of support from political parties. In the National Elections, parties will endorse a candidate and pay the nomination fee. This level of support was not available in the 2004 By-Election. The thirteen new candidates included vote splitters like Geoffrey Apakali, men with money like Amos Yali (who had contested a previous by-election), and Jacob Yangari – a businessman and brother-in-law of Sam Abal, who had supported him in 2002 and appeared to be competing with him in 2004.

In some respects, it is difficult to make a direct comparison between the results of the two elections because in the 2002 Elections, many ballot papers were destroyed or not counted. In addition, some polling places were combined resulting in eight fewer polling places in 2004. Electoral officials say this change was rationalisation based on population patterns. Details for the 2002 Elections supplied by the Returning Officer, Henry Kyakas, are tabulated next and discussed below.

**Table 1 Wabag Open 2002: Ballot papers issued**

| Details for Wabag Open Electorate (2002)                         | No. of Ballot Papers |
|--|----------------------|
| Number of ballot papers issued as per common roll                | 80,000               |
| Number of ballot papers not issued and burned by officials       | 12,168               |
| Number of ballot papers issued to 72 polling places              | 67,832               |
| Number of ballot papers returned from polling in 72 boxes        | 63,654 <sup>d</sup>  |
| Number of ballot papers destroyed at polling places              | 4,178                |
| Number of ballot papers burnt at Wabag Police Station in 6 boxes | 7,693 <sup>a</sup>   |
| Number of ballot papers rejected/not counted in seven boxes      | 5,023 <sup>b</sup>   |
| Number of ballot papers counted at scrutiny in 57 boxes          | 51,002 <sup>c</sup>  |

Note: a+b+c should = d, but the numbers supplied do not tally.

Despite the destruction of papers and boxes in 2002, it is possible to compare some details of the two elections, summarised in the following table.

**Table 2 Wabag Open: Comparison 2002 and 2004**

|  | 2002   | 2004        |
|--|--------|-------------|
| Number of candidates   | 25     | 19          |
| Number of polling places   | 72     | 64          |
| Ballot papers issued to polling places                                     | 67,832 | 71,000      |
| Ballot papers counted  | 51,002 | 53,867      |
| Ballot papers unused in polling places and returned or burned by officials | 4,178  | 17,133      |
| Ballot boxes destroyed or disputed and not counted                         | 13     | All counted |

## Counting

Counting began nine days after polling finished, mainly due to the time required to set up a large board to record the results and a tent for the counting. In an effort to be transparent, the count was conducted in front of the Wabag administrative building. Here, in the presence of strong security, the public could witness the counting process. Counting was done by teams of public servants in shifts from 8am to 6pm, with ten boxes to a shift. Teams were given a day of training before the election and each team was given last minute instructions on the procedures before taking up their duty. Counting of first preferences took six days and the distribution of preferences three days, making it nine days in all before a winner could be declared.

**Table 3 Wabag Open 2002-2004: Votes for leading candidates**

|             | 2002   |      | 2004              |       |             |       |
|-------------|--------|------|-------------------|-------|-------------|-------|
|             |        |      | First Preferences |       | Final Count |       |
|             | Votes  | %    | Votes             | %     | Votes       | %     |
| Samuel Abal | 12,438 | 24.7 | 20,230            | 37.87 | 25,754      | 53.19 |
| Daniel Kapi | 10,234 | 20.3 | 15,922            | 29.81 | 22,661      | 46.81 |
|             | 45.00% |      | 68.70%            |       | 100%        |       |

One may see from the details above that in 2004 both candidates gained a much higher percentage of first preferences, supporting the view that the election was very much a contest between these two. One may also see from the Appendix below how Abal and Kapi figure in the top three candidates in seventy-nine percent of the polling places overall, and ninety percent of the polling places in the Wabag District (excluding Maramuni).

With the LPV System, once the first preferences are counted, and if no one has an absolute majority, then candidates are excluded, starting with the one with the least votes. The next valid preferences for that candidate are then dealt out to the other candidates. This continues until one candidate obtains more than fifty percent of the valid votes still in that count. Each voter should mark three preferences (1,2,3) which all carry the same weight as they are the same vote. If the voter's choice has been transferred and counted three times, the vote is then "exhausted", and drops out of the count. The absolute majority of fifty percent plus one is based on the number of "live"

votes in the count, which, after several redistributions, is reduced. Hence, the absolute majority can be much fewer than half the number of votes in the original count of first preferences. The following table shows how preferences were dealt to the two leading candidates.

**Table 4 Distribution of Preferences to Leading Candidates**

| Exclusions                              | Primary Vote | Number of Preferences Redistributed | Kapi | Abal | Percentage of Preferences to Both |
|---|--------------|-------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Alfred Dean B Saitos                 | 3            | 3                                   | 1    | 0    | 33%                               |
| 2. John Kapi                            | 6            | 6                                   | 1    | 1    | 33%                               |
| 3. David Kaiti Kandiu                   | 10           | 10                                  | 1    | 2    | 30%                               |
| 4. Lyons Paul Putupen                   | 68           | 68                                  | 24   | 21   | 66%                               |
| 5. Enga Anderson Aipit                  | 71           | 72                                  | 19   | 15   | 47%                               |
| 6. Geoffrey Apakali                     | 172          | 175                                 | 133  | 11   | 82%                               |
| 7. Meck Warip                           | 317          | 319                                 | 90   | 90   | 56%                               |
| 8. Teiakane Enokae                      | 413          | 421                                 | 71   | 154  | 53%                               |
| 9. Mek Alphone Kun                      | 534          | 538                                 | 140  | 132  | 51%                               |
| 10. Michael Kamap Kandiu                | 878          | 873                                 | 327  | 267  | 68%                               |
| 11. Japi Ambi                           | 907          | 981                                 | 280  | 400  | 69%                               |
| 12. Paul Nili                           | 1157         | 1203                                | 369  | 553  | 77%                               |
| 13. Kelly Aiyok                         | 1011         | 1082                                | 342  | 318  | 61%                               |
| 14. Jacob Utaeng Yagari                 | 1492         | 1499                                | 464  | 607  | 71%                               |
| 15. Takai Kapi                          | 2580         | 2656                                | 895  | 433  | 50%                               |
| 16. Amos Yaoufo Yali                    | 3466         | 3149                                | 1704 | 1126 | 89%                               |
| 17. Minal Keoa Marinki                  | 4181         | 3272                                | 1878 | 1394 | 100%                              |
| <b>Votes gained through preferences</b> |              |                                     | 6739 | 5524 |                                   |
|   |              |                                     | -30% | -21% |                                   |

As seen in Table 4 (above), with the exception of exclusion 6, and perhaps 8 and 15, the assignment of preferences was relatively equitable. One can see also that only in exclusion 6, 16 and of course the last – 17– was there a clear concentration of votes for the two



dominant candidates. This is evidence against the argument that strong candidates arranged for voters to give preferences to minor candidates to gain their preferences. If they did try to do this, it appears not to have been very effective (the preferences of the two leading candidates themselves would not have been counted).

**Questionable Returns**

Ballot boxes from several places contained votes for only one candidate. In Enga this is often a sign that people at that rest house agreed to “turn the table” and vote together for one candidate. Otherwise, it can be a sign that a ballot box was “highjacked” and surreptitiously filled with voting papers for one candidate. Examples in the 2004 By-Election include the box from Biak (Pai) which contained 434 votes for Minal Keoa Marinki and none for anyone else. Another, from Net, contained 236 of 237 for Sam Abal and none for Daniel Kapi. The ballot boxes from these two rest houses were disputed (Biak) or destroyed (Net) in the 2002 Elections, so it is not possible to make comparisons. Some results can be compared however. Consider the three following polling places:

**Table 5 Votes for Leading Candidates at Selected Booths**

| Polling Place | Votes for Abal |                         | Votes for D. Kapi |                           |                                       |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|               | 2002           | 2004                    | 2002              | 2004                      |                                       |
| Tole          | 18             | 8                       | 715               | 3389 from a total of 3408 |                                       |
| Kaimatok      | 0              | 858 from a total of 867 | 0                 | 0                         | In 2002 all (860) votes to Takai Kapi |
| Penale        | 0              | 93 from a total of 94   | 0                 | 0                         | In 2002 all (288) votes to Takai Kapi |

In 2002, a total of 1035 votes were cast at the Tole rest house, sixty-nine percent of them for Daniel Kapi. In 2004, the number of votes cast at that rest house had increased by over 200 percent, with Daniel Kapi claiming ninety-nine percent of them. In 2004, there were almost 4000 on the common roll at Tole because two polling places from 2002 were combined at Tole for the 2004 By-Election. Still, the

high percentage of votes to Daniel Kapi must raise questions as to how the voting was conducted. With Kaimatok and Penale, both very isolated rest houses, it appears that people have a habit of block voting. In 2002, the boxes from those two rest houses contained only votes for the local candidate, Takai Kapi. In 2004, with a few exceptions, the boxes contained votes for Sam Abal. At that stage, Takai Kapi had lost favour in Maramuni, however, his supporters voted against Daniel Kapi, thus supporting Sam Abal because Takai Kapi had been unseated by Daniel Kapi in a court challenge following the 1997 National Elections.

### **Voting Patterns**

There are many factors influencing voting patterns. Nine principal factors include:

1. The "base vote" for a candidate in his "home" polling place.
2. Alliances (with the Enga Provincial Government) through the councillor. Many councillors see it in their own interest to maintain and strengthen those links with the government in power.
3. Alliances through marriage.
4. Experience of receiving projects such as roads while either Dan Kapi was sitting member, or Sam Abal was Provincial Administrator.
5. Threats and intimidation. It is alleged that at least one candidate was present holding a firearm during voting.
6. "*Tanim tebol*". This could be linked to force and fear.
7. Disruption due to tribal fighting, which meant in some cases that groups had to vote out of their own home area, and in other cases, that there was a poor turnout which outsiders could take advantage of (as happened with the Rakamanda vote).
8. "Money politics" such as paying money into school accounts, then withdrawing the money and distributing it to voters.
9. As in Maramuni, leaders tried to co-ordinate support for one candidate (Marinki) at the expense of another (Takai Kapi).

These and other interrelated factors are illustrated in the Appendix to this paper.

## **Vote Splitting**

The 2004 Elections continued the practice of vote-splitting that had been part of previous elections. This became evident in rallies held for the two main candidates, Abal and Kapi. Weaker candidates would accompany either of the two main candidates and indirectly show support for their strong affiliate. For example, many people are of the opinion that Geoffrey Apakali was in a position to split the Abal vote, especially at the Aipiyape clan's rest house at Keas. Apakali had supported Abal in the 2002 Elections, but after losing his job with the Ipatas Government, he was reputed to have become an opponent of Abal, who was considered a supporter of Ipatas. One can see in the sixth exclusion (see Table 4) that 133 (76%) of Apakali's preferences went to Kapi, with only eleven (6%) going to Abal.

Some people were surprised when two blood brothers from Irelya, Michael and David Kandiu, both paid nomination fees to contest in the By-Election. A few weeks later, however, David Kandiu stepped down because he found that both he and his brother had the same motive: to prevent Sam Abal from getting votes in Irelya, which is the home of Governor Ipatas. It was clear during the campaign rallies that Governor Ipatas was supporting Samuel Abal. As a consequence, at the Irelya rest house, Michael Kandiu received 612 first preference votes as against 433 for Sam Abal, indicating that when faced with "gunpoint democracy" Ipatas can be vulnerable even in his home.<sup>5</sup>

## **Political Parties**

In the 2002 Elections, eleven of twenty-five candidates stood as independents. In the 2004 Elections, seventeen of nineteen stood as independents with only two being officially endorsed by parties: Kelly Aiyok by the United Party and Takai Kapi by the United Resources Party. During their campaigning, both Abal and Kapi claimed connections with the ruling National Alliance Party (even though Abal had been affiliated with the PNG Party). Since being elected, Abal has joined with the National Alliance Party. It seems that the party affiliation of candidates was not a very significant factor in voting patterns.

## Churches

The churches, particularly the Catholic Church, preached against corruption in politics, but it is questionable that this had much effect. Pastors were called in for prayers at the beginning of campaign rallies. Supporters on both sides claimed that their candidate was chosen by God. Afterwards, on 23 December, there was a “dedication” of Samuel Abal, with a public worship service conducted by pastors from most of the churches in Wabag Town. Samuel is portrayed as a devout Christian and rumours have it that the Governor once made a somewhat disparaging remark, “*Wane emba pasta jepenge mende mee memba jipilamo*” (Boy, you are more fit to become a pastor than a member of parliament)!

## Conclusion

It is difficult to say to what degree the LPV System was really tested in the Wabag Open By-Election. The focus throughout remained on first preferences, and the local political culture involving intimidation and material enticements appeared to dominate both during the campaign period and on election day. Technically, Samuel Tei Abal won using preferences. However, the preferences were somewhat incidental and reinforced the trend as he was well ahead across most of the electorate with the first preference vote. Although his rival, Daniel Kapi, picked up more preference votes to start closing the gap between them, the primary vote lead by Abal ensured his victory.

What are the advantages of the LPV System? Firstly, people seem to like it, as they feel it gives them more choice and a chance to tell more than one candidate that they will vote for them or have voted for them. Secondly, though the strong police presence made a difference, no doubt having more choice helped to reduce tensions and to make the By-Election more peaceful. Thirdly, where national rules of conduct were followed, people, particularly women, had more choice than they would have had under the FPP System.

As to the disadvantages, first, people appeared not to understand the LPV System; so more education is needed before the next general elections. Second, the accuracy of the vote is still hampered by an inadequate common roll. This must be rectified in each council ward

before 2007. Third, it appears that the LPV System takes longer for counting and so increases the cost of elections, and risks raising tensions in the community. It took nine days for counting in the By-Election for one electorate. Election officials estimate that in the next general elections, they will need to have teams counting day and night in order to complete the counting in time.

There are two other factors not directly connected with LPV, but of major importance for future elections in the Enga Province. First, there were 800 extra police brought into the province at a cost of K3.5 million. In any future general elections, will so many police be available to come to the province? If so, they will be spread over five electorates, thus lessening their effectiveness in any one place. The 2004 Wabag Open By-Election shows no indication of whether there can be a peaceful election without an overwhelming police presence.

Second, no matter how hard the police work or how honest some electoral officials may be, the practice of using public servants as presiding officers is open to abuse, because in the local political culture, public servants have a vested interest in promoting the government of the day. Moreover, other public servants such as teachers say that it is better not to vote at all than to risk voting for the “wrong” candidate. This issue is a major factor influencing the integrity of the administration in the Highlands region.

In Enga Province, with a flawed electoral roll, the continued focus on first preferences, the ever present prospect of intimidation or violence, and shortcomings in the system of choosing impartial presiding officers, the full effect of reforms through the LPV System in Enga remains to be seen.<sup>6</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 For a revealing commentary the Political Culture of Enga during the 2002 Elections, see the film *Tanim* from Faraway Pictures, [www.tanim.cc](http://www.tanim.cc)
- 2 National court decision on EP 57/2002 upheld on 21 Mar 2003. Supreme Court Review 16 of 2003 delivered on 30 July 2004 by Judges Kapi and Los and Salika.