

VANUATU ELECTORAL COMMISSION

REPORT OF SNAP ELECTION 2022 (DRAFT)



1. Executive Summary

The 13th General Election of Vanuatu was held on 13th October 2022. The Electoral Commission (EC) and Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) delivered a snap election within few weeks' time. Despite the time constraints, weak legal framework and logistical challenges, the whole process was completed without any major irregularities or complains of mismanagement on part of the electoral authorities. The timely completion of the electoral process and declaration of the results led to the formation of the new government within 20 days after the election day.

The snap elections resulted in suspension of the electoral reform process which was underway by the Parliament before it was dissolved in August 2022. However, it is pertinent that the crucial reform process should be immediately restarted by the current government to bring significant improvements in the electoral process. Two bills, which were at advanced stage of drafting include the Single Harmonised Electoral Bill and the Political Parties Integrity Bill, should be considered by the parliament as a priority.

2. General Electoral Overview

2.1 Political context: The President, His Excellency Nikenike Vurobaravu (newly appointed on 23rd July 2022), dissolved Parliament at the request of the Council of Ministers (COM) on 18th of August 2022 and called a “snap” legislative election. The dissolution of the Parliament was requested in the backdrop of the Vote of No Confidence already tabled with 27 signatures of the 52 member Parliament against former Prime Minister Hon Bob Loughman (MP). The snap elections were necessitated two years ahead of the constitutional date for the next elections projected for May 2024.

Opposition Leader at the time, Hon Ralph Regenvanu (MP), led a challenge against the Presidential decision to the Supreme Court that was ultimately dismissed on 13th September, leaving but a few weeks to plan and implement the poll. The Supreme Court ruled the Dissolution was Constitutional and that a General Election must be held 30 – 60 days after the Dissolution. A COM Decision allocated 150 million vatu for the election expenses to be drawn down by the Vanuatu Electoral Office. The Election Day date nominated was for Thursday 13th October, 2023, as officially announced by the EC.

2.2 Legal and Institutional Framework: With the elections initially scheduled for 2024, the Electoral Commission (EC) had embarked upon a process of strengthening the legal framework underpinning the elections in the country. For the first time in Vanuatu, the Electoral Commission (EC) and the Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) organized a systematic post-electoral review following the 2020 general elections for the members of Parliament. The review had technical, financial and logistical support from UNDP Vanuatu Electoral Environment

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Project (VEEP). Besides electoral officers at both national, provincial and area council level, the EC and VEO also invited various important electoral stakeholders to discuss numerous aspects of the process and draw the appropriate lessons-learned. The review exercise aimed at producing a comprehensive appraisal of the electoral process to guide the EC, the VEO and other electoral stakeholders' planning for credible elections in the next cycle as well as to identify any electoral reform measures required for the future. The post-electoral review covered all aspects of the 2020 general elections, including all phases of the electoral process, including voter registration, candidate nomination, the campaign, polling, counting, results announcements and dispute resolution. In terms of substantive areas, it considered administration and finance, procurement, logistics, operations, information technology, security, legal, regulatory and procedural issues, electoral training, voter education and external relations. Gender and social inclusion during the overall electoral process were crosscutting throughout the discussions. The references for the review were the applicable legal framework, the EC/VEO guidelines and procedures as well as international standards.

- 2.3 The EC sent a paper to the Council of Ministers (COM) on electoral reform, and it was discussed and approved to engage in that wide-ranging proposal to reform the electoral legal framework in the country, well in advance of the next general elections. To this end, the EC launched an Electoral Reform Working Group (ERWG).
- 2.4 With the support from Minister of Internal Affairs, Office of the Attorney General, the Electoral Reform Commission, Senior Management across the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Prime Minister's Office, international electoral experts and other stakeholders, participating in Electoral Reform Working Group, it was proposed to replace existing electoral laws with a single electoral Act, which will regulate parliamentary, provincial government council and municipal council elections in a single harmonised law. Additionally, innovations in the electoral process have been proposed, in order to modernize the institutions and practices in Vanuatu. Another important piece of legislation was also in the process of drafting related to the registration, regulation and integrity of political parties. However, with the announcement of the snap elections, the process of legislative reform was halted and EC and VEO had to rely upon the existing legal framework for conduct of the elections. This also meant that updated data on civil registration and voter registration by the Department of Civil Registration and Identity Management (CRIM) could not be used because the existing law did not support the provision of using only national ID card as voter identity. The electoral card is still a legally acceptable voter identification credential and therefore the old voter register containing all citizens with electoral cards had to be used despite the acknowledgement that this is a highly inflated and outdated voter register.

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However, in 2021 three EC regulations and the code of conducts for political parties and candidates, media and observers had been drafted, vetted, approved, signed and recorded in the official Government Gazette, along with General Election Order no. 127 of 2021, Municipal Government Council Election Regulations Order no. 128 of 2021 and Provincial Government Council Election Regulations Order no. 129 of 2021.

The Codes of Conduct were used by the political parties, observers and media for following the proper protocols. All observers were required to sign the pledge to follow the codes. The result was that the observers were able to monitor without any problems and also without any undue interference in the process.

EC regulation was referred by the trainers, polling officials and candidate agents before and during the election. It was also meant to guide EC for decision making during the pre, during and post-election process.

3. Electoral Operational Planning and Preparations (Including Logistical Preparations, Recruitment and Training of Polling Staff and Update Of Electoral Lists, International Assistance)

3.1 Electoral Administration: Two separate but inter-related institutions administer elections in Vanuatu, the Electoral Commission (EC), the executive and policymaking, oversight body, and the Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO), the corresponding operational arm administering the elections.

The EC and VEO's operational capacity in terms of human resources have continued to improve since the 2020 elections, with the addition of Provincial Electoral Officers as well as central office staff: Principal Electoral Officer (PEO), Deputy PEO, Voter Information & Public Outreach Officer; Voter Registration Officer; ICT & Website Officer; two VEO Data Entry Officers, two administrative assistants (doing finance and logistics) - acting Administration and Finance Officer; Acting Maintenance Officer (who has historically provided logistical administration) in addition to 19 short term contracted Data Verification Officers (DVOs) to improve the accuracy and credibility of the civil and voter registries. The EC/VEO is supported by UNDP/VEEP project through the core international team of five (Chief Technical Advisor & Project Manager, Procedures Consultant, Institutional Governance & Capacity Building Advisor, Software Developer/E-Governance Advisor, and a Project Assistant in-country, and lately extended with an Electoral Analyst) with additional international technical advisors contributing as needed.

3.2 Logistics. Given the nature of Vanuatu as a Y shaped archipelago of 83 islands spread over thousands of kilometres, election logistics remained a key issue of concern, exacerbated by the short time frame of the "snap" election. However, the EC and VEO teams and the Ministry of Internal Affairs capably led the

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process of putting together a robust logistics plan with considerable support of the UNDP/VEEP colleagues based in Port Vila and Fiji Offices. A Standard Operating Procedure for Electoral Logistics was drafted by the REDR volunteer in close cooperation with VEO and Ministry of Internal Affairs (VEO is under MoIA) officers.

Australia provided a REDR volunteer with experience in small Pacific Islands who assisted VEO with its Logistics and Distribution/Retrieval Plan in close cooperation with Australian and New Zealand defence force personnel alongside Vanuatu Government Vanuatu Police Force and Vanuatu Mobile Force personnel. With the GoV Patrol Boat HMS Takuare awaiting repairs, local freight companies – air & sea – were contracted as was the MV HELPR-1, normally used for MoH interventions. Helicopters and DC27 provided by Australia, were of inestimable value in the delivery of an on-time, effective logistics process – outwards and return.

Essential Indelible ink was received from the Fijian electoral authorities (with 25% silver nitrate), funded by UNDP/VEEP, as a mechanism to limit multiple voting, and polling station results booklets were printed in time. Packing of “electoral kits,” including sensitive and non-sensitive materials, were done in Port Vila. The Australian government provided two helicopters and a Hercules C27 which were used for delivery of polling materials. Local ships were contracted to deliver ballot boxes and materials ahead of the poll. VEEP sought support from Australia to provide a REDR Logistics Advisor to the VEO, who arrived in country 2 October.

3.3 Recruitment and training of polling staff:

VEO recruited over 1000 polling staff for 352 polling stations. These were recruited by the Registration Officers of each constituency. The polling staff is recruited based on the experience and qualifications determined by the Registration Officers. They come from both government system and private workforce available. A significant number of the polling staff comes from the National Youth Council members from across the country. This is a good way of engaging youth in understanding democratic and electoral process and prepares them to be future leaders.

Polling officials were trained through a cascade training approach through master training method. Over 60 master trainers were trained initially who rolled out the training for polling staff in all six provincial centres using Zoom meetings. A recording of the face-to-face training in Port Vila was made available to provincial polling officials who were unable to travel to provincial centres to participate.

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A recording of the face-to-face training in Port Vila was made available to provincial polling officials who were unable to travel to provincial centres to participate. Previously training teams travelled to each province, however given the short time frames innovative alternatives have had to be used. VEEP supported the development and printing of manuals for the training, as well as audio-video productions, which have also been uploaded to the VEO website.

3.4 Polling Manuals: Polling and counting procedures were prepared for polling officials. The manuals aimed at consolidating the electoral practices and presenting them in a clear way for immediate guidance and use of the polling officers, as well as to ensure consistent and coordinated polling and counting operations throughout Vanuatu. A graphic designer illustrated the manual to improve accessibility.

3.5 Voter list: While the electoral framework is considered by observers as generally fair, and elections administered without bias, some have noted issues related to an inaccurate/inflated voter list and understaffing of the election management bodies. The voter list is updated on a continuous basis all year round, and closes six weeks ahead of an election. The current electoral database, which is linked to the old electoral cards, holds 302,000 voters.

UNDP/VEEP has worked closely with the national authorities to develop a new integrated identity management database, the new central civil register, which is based on the unique National ID, from which the electoral lists will be extracted in the future. It is hoped this will improve the transparency and validity of electoral lists and mitigate previous concerns. However, the electoral lists for this election was drawn from the old system in a merged format, as well as an electoral list based on National ID numbers. The current legislation is still in a transitional phase whereby voters can be identified by either the new National ID card or the old electoral card. These lists were sent out for inspections and scrutiny working through the Area Administrators of the 72 Area Councils. VEEP also facilitated and funded a Data Centre with 19 data validation officers to “clean” the electoral lists of duplications, relocated voters, and deceased citizens where possible but given the truncated timeline for this election, the updates were not updated in the system within the 6 weeks legal deadline and closure of the voter lists.

Polling stations in Port Vila and North Efate constituencies used voter identification by National ID cards with tablets. The rest of the country used manual identification and “tick-off” on printed electoral lists. Voters could only vote if they were on the electoral list for that polling station and either possessed an old electoral card or had a national ID card.

3.6 Out of constituency voting: Out-of-constituency voting was not exercised. A voter must reregister to vote in their place of residence (if relocated there for over three months). Notable communities that may have been impacted by this

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include some Ambae that fled the Ambae volcanic eruption in 2018 and were evacuated to Malekula and Santo (there remains a significant population in Luganville, Santo). The Registration Officer (Secretary General of Penama Province) in the Provincial capital of Saratamata on Ambae was instructed by the EC Chair and Principal Electoral Officer (PEO) of the VEO not to allow people now returning to Ambae to vote, indicating they have been resident for many years in Luganville and should have registered to vote there, according to the current legislation.

3.7 Proxy Voting: Proxy voting is permitted under the law. A proxy voter casts a vote for the person for whom he/she is proxy in the same manner as he/she casts his/her own vote. When a person votes as a proxy, the voter's original national identify card or old electoral card must be utilised, to underpin the Proxy Form authorising him/her to vote as proxy of the person for whom he/she is voting. Another important requirement is that the proxy must be included in the voter list at the same polling station of the person who is voting on their behalf. A regular voter gets his/her left thumb inked with indelible ink, after casting his/her vote. A voter who votes for a proxy will get also his/her left index finger inked. Labour mobility programs in Australia and New Zealand estimate approximately 20,000 Vanuatu citizens working overseas – all of voting age. Due to the “snap” nature of the election and complexity of application processes for workers who often have no email, internet or poor access to office tools (photocopying & scanning), numbers of proxy votes did not reflect the numbers of potential voters working overseas.

3.8 Out-of-Country Voting (OCV): The legal provisions for OCV in the current legal framework are basic. So far, the practice of Ni-Vanuatu OCV is limited to Nouméa in New Caledonia, with these votes counted/assigned to the Port Vila constituency.

The new draft Single Harmonised Electoral Bill sees new provisions for both Out of constituency voting, Proxy Voting and Out-of-Country Voting, however the Bill has yet to make it to parliament (see below).

3.9 Identification of polling station locations: In total, 352 polling stations were set up nationwide. Two “mega stations” were established; like a regular polling station which can accommodate more voters. Registration Officers supported the identification of the locations for the polling stations in the different constituencies. There were requests for establishment of additional polling stations, but due to the unexpected “snap” decision, the consultation and demographic analysis intended/planned could not take place.

3.10 Ballot papers: Ballot papers consist of a “booklet” with each candidate having an individual page. Ballots/pages feature a candidate photo, name and symbol. Each ballot/page had a party colour as approved by the EC; independent candidates had white ballot papers/pages. Candidates were placed in the booklet

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according to the order of approved nominations: first candidate approved appeared on top, and so on. The ballot booklet contained candidates nominated by political parties on top in the order they were approved, followed by independent candidates. Voters had to choose their candidate, pull out the ballot/page corresponding to their choice, place it in an EC embossed envelope and then vote by placing the envelope in the ballot box. The rest of the booklet/unused pages were discarded. Ballot printing was completed well in time. There were, however, reports of issues with duplicate ballots in some polling stations in an unsystematic manner. As feedback was received, instructions from VEO were quickly disseminated to all polling stations to verify and check all ballots, before to issue to a voter, and to quarantine any ballots with possible duplicates.

3.11 Ballot Boxes: All polling used translucent lightweight ballot boxes that have replaced the wooden heavy padlocked ballot boxes that were previously used. These were donated by UNDP/VEEP ahead of the 2020 elections and in line with international good practices. The lightweight ballot boxes eased out transport, distribution and storage challenges faced due to the geography of Vanuatu. The use of the translucent ballot box and numbered tamper-proof seals were intended to enhance the integrity and transparency of the electoral process.

4. External Relations (Political Parties, Candidates, Civil Society, Media)

4.1. Political Parties: While there is no regulatory framework for political parties, numerous parties do operate in Vanuatu (approximately 48). However, politicians frequently switch allegiances. In mid-2018, the government withdrew proposed constitutional reforms that were meant in part to address party switching and political instability, having failed to reach consensus with the parliamentary opposition. Plans to put these reform proposals to a referendum were abandoned in 2019. Draft political party legislation remains to be tabled before parliament.

4.2. Candidate nomination: In Vanuatu, candidates are nominated individually. They can be nominated either by a political party or as an independent candidate. Aspiring candidates (25 years or older) for parliament need to lodge a declaration of candidature with the Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO), including a declaration that the applicant is eligible as provided by the law. The aspiring candidate should also deposit 100,000 vatu (non-refundable). Candidates nominated by a political party are issued with the corresponding symbol as approved by the EC; independent candidates are required to produce an illustration on paper of his/her personal electoral symbol.

Of note, issues have arisen related to modifications of citizenship and candidate eligibility criteria (naturalized citizens vs. indigenous Ni-Vanuatu),

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and the final candidate lists. The Vanuatu Citizenship program, established in 2017, has seen an increase in the sale of citizenship every year. Clarification from the Attorney General's Office allows naturalized citizens (resident for 10 years) to stand and vote in elections if they have registered and if their names are on a validated electoral list for a polling station. While naturalised citizens are allowed to participate, holders of dual nationality are not allowed to participate.

A total of 219 candidates were nominated for the snap elections (compared to 295 in 2020). Only seven women nominated, down from the previous 17 in 2020.¹ Notable candidates included six former prime ministers (all of whom were eligible to run after being previously pardoned for criminal offences by various former presidents). A total of 35 independent candidates were running (16% of the total candidates). The larger parties included Vanuaku Party (VP) with 26 candidates (9% of total), Leaders Party of Vanuatu (LPV) with 6% of total candidates, Union of Moderate Pati (UMP) with 8% of total candidates, Reunification Movement of Change (RMC) with 5% of total candidates and Graon mo Jastis Pati of opposition leader Ralph Regenvnu with 5%. The formal election campaign period began on 1 October and ran until midnight on 10 October. The campaign period remained free of any incidents and the public's attitude was reported to be optimistic.

- 4.3. Media:** Local media followed the election process closely, with widespread coverage on social media. VEEP supported the VEO with awareness materials on election campaigning, corruption and what makes a good candidate. The candidates' handbook was specially designed by VEEP with a local graphic designer to provide clear, easily accessed information and graphics. The handbook was distributed nationally in hard copy, with an e-copy also available from the VEO website. A VEEP Media Monitoring officer, through the UN Volunteer online programme, was engaged to support VEOs voter information & public outreach officer in analys and reporting on media coverage.
- 4.4. Observers:** Despite the short "snap" nature of the announcement of the General Election, both International and Local Observers were mobilised to oversee the conduct of transparent, well governed elections.

The VEO accredited approximately 49 internationals from both diplomatic and regional originations (includes, inter alia, representatives from the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the Pacific Islands Forum, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Fijian Electoral Office, and election officials from Kiribati and various embassies).

¹ Celine Bareus (running in Malekula as an independent), Vanessa Molisa (Laverwo Movement in Maewo), Maryline Abel (Vanua'aku Pati in Tongoa), Gloria Julia Kings (Union of Moderate Parties in Efate) and independents Nadia Kanegai, Lui Doesday Kenneth, and Evelyne Utissets (all in Port Vila).

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The observers group worked in close cooperation with the Electoral Authority, in this case the Electoral Commission and the Vanuatu Electoral Office who were in charge of accrediting these groups and providing the necessary information for them to conduct their work, independently and objectively.

A full training session for Electoral Observers was held at the Convention Centre on Wednesday 12th October with Observer's Manual, a USB loaded with all required documents and official Observers Badges mounted on lanyards. This session was live-streamed for Observers unable to attend the training to follow. Observers travelled to the provinces as well as observing the elections of Efate.

The Chair of the EC and electoral staff briefed observers on their roles and responsibilities, communication and security, as well as voter awareness and polling procedures. Observation training included a security briefing delivered by the Vanuatu Police Force and by the Vanuatu Meteorology & Geo-Hazards Department. An Electoral Observation Manual/Handbook was produced (designed and printed by VEEP), including the list of polling stations and constituency maps. Detailed GIS electoral maps were provided on USB sticks, enabling observers to accurately locate individual polling stations.

The Observers noted that given the tight timelines, the elections ran smoothly with some minor delays in remote area Ballot Box distribution but also the long lines at some Mega Polling Stations and voter disaffection when after a long wait in queues, the voters found that their ID Cards were not being validated. Work was already underway for both a policy and procedures basis to split mega stations but this was interrupted by the calling of the election and had not been implemented.

5. Public Outreach

The Voter Awareness Committee, chaired by the Voter Information & Outreach Officer in the VEO, conducted its activities on voter information and outreach through various media platforms – press, radio, Facebook, VEO website, television, posters, Wan Smol Bag short song videos, booklets, stickers, roadside billboards – before and during the electoral campaign period in the lead up to polling day. The Voter Awareness Committee is made up of representatives from media groups, Transparency International (Vanuatu), disability, women and youth groups, the Vanuatu Council of Churches and community-based NGOs working for electoral awareness, and functions as a sounding board for all VEO electoral material and key messages. The VEO Facebook has over 7,500 followers.

6. Overview Of Polling and Counting

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- 6.1. Polling day:** Polling passed without any major incident, with polling day characterised as both festive and cheerful. Long lines of voters were seen waiting patiently in the rain with their families and children. Polling procedures were largely followed with few issues. Late delivery of material delayed opening of polling stations in some locations by up to 45 minutes to an hour. Some technical issues with ballot papers and the voter lists surfaced during the morning. The Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) dealt with these matters effectively. The VEO call centre was very busy with voters calling in from the opening to close of polls at 4.30pm.
- 6.2. Polling officials and procedures:** Initial reports indicate polling staff appeared well trained and organized. In the limited number of locations visited, staff had organized polling in an efficient and structured way. Presiding Officers were well versed in the process and able to deal with complaints and reacted quickly to technical challenges as they arose. The indelible ink was successfully applied and acted as a major counter measure against multiple voting – police detained a voter who refused to have his thumb inked (until completion of the count).
- 6.3. Observers, media, political party and candidate agents:** No reports were noted of any refusal of entry or issues with access for any observers, media, political party or candidate agents. It was noted that some of accredited individuals lacked an official badge, but all polling locations visited saw orderly lines of seated observers/agents following the process closely. While no official reports have yet been received, several international observers informally commented they were happy with the overall conduct of the process noting the high police presence in Port Vila, and that much was done for women with children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Media were noted as several locations throughout the day.
- 6.4. VEO call centre and complaints:** The VEO established a call centre in Port Vila with twelve trained staff that answered voter enquiries on election day. Common issues included – help with identifying polling locations, residence requirements to vote (voters registered in the islands but present in Port Vila and had not changed their place of voting), issues with proxy voting (confusion in the process and steps needed to enable proxy voting), and names missing off the electoral list (also reported on Facebook). Additional complaints included one candidate alleging his photograph was missing from some of the ballot booklets. Unfortunately, given the transitional nature of the new electoral list system not yet in place, the old system does not track historic record of transfers,

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registration and verification (as it continues to be drawn from the old outgoing system). This will be enhanced and improved ahead of future elections, pending passage of the draft electoral bill. Future voter lists will be extracted from the biometric national civic registry (based on the national ID card). Voter lists were shared ahead of time for public scrutiny – to the extent possible in the truncated timeframe for the snap election – few corrections were received.

6.5. Security: No security issues were reported.

6.6. UNDP/VEEP: UNDP is providing technical assistance to the VEO and the Electoral Commission through the Vanuatu Electoral Environment Project (VEEP) – and was present at various polling locations throughout Port Vila in its technical capacity.

7. Turnout, Counting and Results (Including Turnout – Gender, Age Groups, Spoiled Ballots, Political Parties/Candidates Etc.)

7.1. Counting and tabulation: All ballot boxes and materials were retrieved from the islands/constituencies and were safely and securely stored in the Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) warehouse. While counting took place at the polling stations, ballots were verified at the Electoral Commission HQ and re-counted and tabulated for the official results. Counting and tabulation was completed by 24th of October.

7.2. Results: A total of 219 candidates contested 52 legislative seats, with only eight women nominating. The Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) opened 352 polling stations across 83 islands with an additional out-of-country location in New Caledonia. This out of country location votes in the Port Vila constituency.

Ten days after election day, the Electoral Commission announced formal results with turnout reported at 44.16 per cent (compared to 51.29 per cent in 2020). Notably one woman (Gloria Julia King) was the first woman elected since 2008 (Vanuatu is the last country in the region to elect a woman to its legislature). A total of 29 new Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected with eighteen parties and one independent represented, leading commentators to observe that Parliament will likely remain fractured. Nevertheless, on the 4 November, and with the backing of 50 MPs, including former-PM Loughman, former-DPM Ishmael Kalsakau was elected and sworn in as Prime Minister. He later appointed an all-male cabinet that also includes a former PM, Sato Kilman, as the new DPM and Ralph Regenvanu formerly Leader of the Opposition, as Minister of Climate Change.

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The following table shows seats won by the major parties and data on how many votes nationwide each party won.

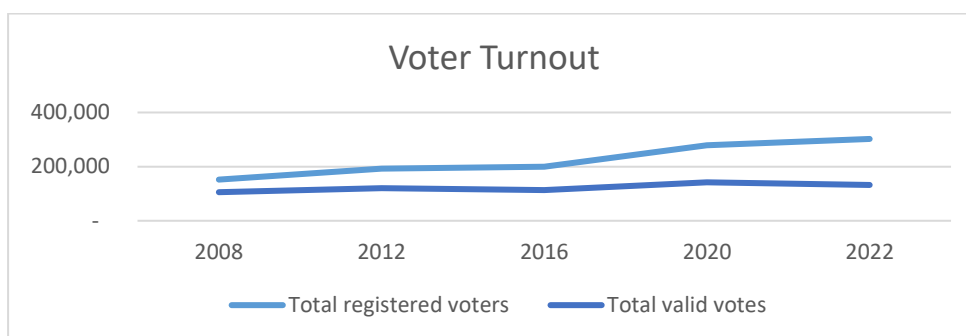
<i>Total Votes by Party Latest Grouping</i>				
Party	# of Votes	Candidates	Seats	Success Rate
United Moderate Party (UMP)	15,223	18	7	38.89%
Vanuatu Party (VP)	20,511	27	7	25.93%
Reunification of Movement for Change (RMC)	10,087	12	5	41.67%
Leaders Party Vanuatu (LPV)	9,736	13	5	38.46%
Graon Mo Justis (GJP)	10,183	12	4	33.33%
Rural Development Party (RDP)	8,606	14	4	28.57%
National United Party (NUP)	5,040	10	4	40.00%
Iauko Party	8,093	6	3	50.00%
People's Progressive Party (PPP)	3,221	4	2	50.00%
Rural National Development Party (RNDP)	1,624	2	2	100.00%
Independents or Single Party	40,007	101	9	8.9%
Total	132,331	219	52	23.74%

7.3. Turnout: On the 23 October, ten days after election day, the Electoral Commission (EC) of Vanuatu announced the formal results of the snap 2022 elections. Official turnout was slightly lower than in 2020 at 44 % (compared to 51% in 2020) based on the old voter register but based on new civil registry data based on National ID (with 93% coverage birth records) the real turnout was 71% of eligible voters. Furthermore, up to 20,000 Vanuatu voters are currently seasonal workers in New Zealand and Australia. To vote in this election they would have had to register as proxy voters. Data suggest this was as low as 1% (proxy voting was decentralized to the provinces due to the short time to prepare for the election). Most of overseas workers/voters, equal to 1/10th of the population did not participate in this election, meaning the more realistic turnout of eligible voters in-country was estimated informally around 77% based on the civil registry data

Vanuatu has thus officially witnessed a notable downward trend in turnout since 2008 while the number of registered voters has significantly increased, based on the old voter register established on electoral cards,.

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There are huge challenges with the voter list accuracy. The Voter Register is as high as the population, and many voters are not registered in their correct constituency. Three months residency requirement also results in another major challenge as people on wrong polling stations and uninterested voters don't make an effort to update their registration. Voter List were sent out for inspection and scrutiny through Area Administrators, but despite best efforts to have the Voter List updated ahead of the elections, few corrections were received in time by the VEO given the legal deadline of closing the list for new registrations 6 weeks before E-day. This led to disenfranchisement in some urban areas where voters currently reside but remain registered to vote on their home island.

Following table summarizes the key trends on turnout and related matters.

VANUATU ELECTION TURNOUT TRENDS 2008 - 2022					
	2008	2012	2016	2020	2022
Total registered voters	152,043	192,632	200,159	278,954	302,258
Total votes cast	107,002	121,792	114,292	143,076	133,486
Turnout	69%	62%	57%	51%	44%
Total invalid votes	1,505	1,589	1,164	1,061	1,155
Total valid votes	105,497	120,203	113,128	142,015	132,331
Political Parties	28	37	31	49	48
Reg. Independents	89	60	-	35	34
Reg. Candidates	249	345	265	297	219

7.1. **Women in Parliament:** Only one woman (Gloria Julia King) was elected to the Vanuatu Parliament in the 13th legislature. She is the first woman elected since

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2008 (Vanuatu is the last country in the region to elect a woman to its legislature). Mrs. Julia Gloria King has been elected in Efate Rural alongside two colleagues. She was the fourth of five elected candidates.

8. Post-Election Review

After the elections, EC, VEO and CRIM with the assistance of UNDP/VEEP conducted a two-days comprehensive post-election review to discuss lessons learnt and plan for the future improvements. Key issues and findings of the review are reflected in the section 11.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite time constraints and logistical challenges, EC and VEO delivered yet another successful General Election as per its constitutional mandate and responsibility. While there have been challenges and petitions in the court, EC and VEO performance and fulfilment of their constitutional mandate have not been questioned by any stakeholders. EC and VEO staff with the support of national and international partners lived up to the expectations of the nation in transacting an important task of democratic transition in the country despite an extremely truncated timeline.

After the successful election and establishment of the new government, it is important that the Government and the Parliament prioritize long awaited reforms which are necessary for political and democratic stability of the country.

Following are the key recommendations for the Government and Parliament to consider:

- 1. Voters list:** Arrangements should be made to take full advantage of newly established data of Civil Registration and Identity Management (CRIM) Department, which will go a long way in ensuring credibility and accuracy of the Voters List. An amendment in the existing legislation is required to facilitate EC and VEO to extract the voters list from CRIM records and use National ID Card as the only means of voter identification and verification. This will help in removing all inaccuracies, duplication and impersonation of voters as National ID Card entails the modern features of unique identifier tools.
- 2. Single Harmonised Electoral Bill:** Significant, innovative electoral reform through a Single Harmonised Electoral Bill is in advanced state of preparation, extensive consultations have been held country wide and with the Office of the Attorney General. The Bill was expected to be tabled in the November 2022 parliamentary sitting. It is recommended that the bill is passed by the parliament as a priority so that any future elections including possible by-elections, Provincial and Local Council elections should be held under the

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improved electoral framework. Some important innovations in the bill include: i) strengthening the independence of the Electoral Commission; ii) recognition of Provincial Electoral Officers; iii) improved electoral lists; iv) campaign financing disclosure; v) electoral campaign and code of conduct; vi) single ballot paper; vii) by-elections; viii) special measures for internally displaced persons; ix) special voting (remote voting); x) out of country voting; xi) electoral petitions; xii) constituency determination; xiii) expanded electoral offences; xiv) regulations for electoral procedures and xv) temporary special measures for women's participation.

- 3. Political Parties Registration Legislation:** Since the 1980's successive Governments have identified that the fragmentation of political parties and the complete lack of guidelines for the formation and operation of political parties is one of the key factors contributing to the instability of Government. There has been further fragmentation in the recent snap election.

In 2019 a package of legislation was prepared to provide for the registration of political parties. The package consisted of three Bills:

- Bill for the Constitution (Eighth)(Amendment) Act;
- Bill for the Political Parties Registration Act;
- Bill for the Charitable Associations (Incorporation) (Amendment) Act.

The three Bills were withdrawn from the Parliament. The political party legislation package remains a necessity to achieving a strong sustainable political party system and political stability in Vanuatu.

- 4.** Electoral Commission and VEO should be equipped with important human, financial and technical resources to implement the proposed amendments in the legal framework. This should be complemented by resources for operations and management of the elections as per new proposed legal framework.
- 5.** It is recommended that the new organogram approved for 2020, including the establishment of substantive units, is implemented soonest with recruitments as agreed. It is also recommended to revisit the organogram and create divisions to enhance clarity of roles and reporting lines, which will also be necessitated after the approval of new proposed legislation.