

Unspoken Rules of Politics: Uncovering the Motivations of Voters in Vanuatu's Elections

Why This Research?



Vanuatu's Electoral History:

Since 2019, Vanuatu has had two snap elections, with minimal success for women candidates, highlighting gender disparities in political representation.



Low Female Representation:

Women's participation in elections is low, with women comprising less than 10% of candidates in recent elections. Only six women have been elected since independence, with only two serving multiple terms.



Barriers for Women Candidates:

Women face financial constraints and lack party endorsement, limiting their electoral success, especially in rural areas where voters prioritize service provision over legislative roles.



Political Instability:

Frequent government changes due to weak coalitions and motions of no confidence create an unstable political environment, affecting women's chances in elections.

What explains voters' motivations to elect candidates in Vanuatu?

The research found there are three main voter motivations among ni-Vanuatu:



Voters are motivated by their own understanding of community decision making processes

"In the islands, there are tribes in the community. The tribes have subcommittees. So, in those tribes, it's the same language, there is nothing to hide. So, we all mutually agreed on one candidate to vote for" – Research Respondent



Voters are motivated by their own expectations of MPs

"The MP should be the first person I see after a disaster because I voted them in. Because I cast my vote for them. The government can come after. The [disaster] cluster can come next" – Research Respondent



Voters are motivated by their own assessment of women's potential to win

"Really you cannot blame the women for not voting for the women. It's the men who drive the whole thing" – Research Respondent

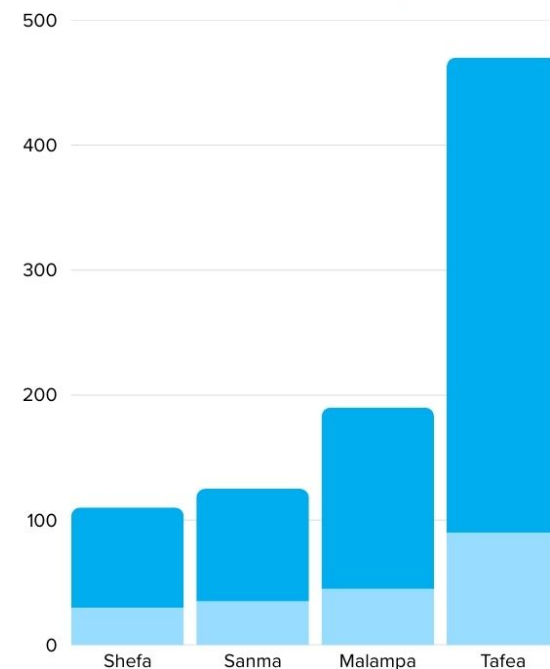
Participants

397 Answered the Questionnaire

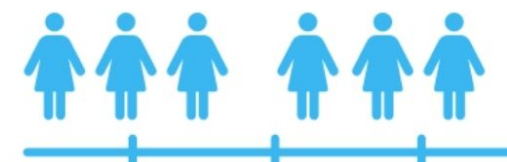
10 Forums

85 Interviews

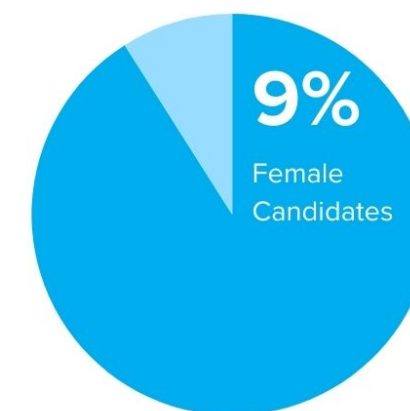
● Questionnaires & Forums ● Interviews



The Power of Community Consensus



Only 6 women elected since independence



Low Representation of Women in Palimentary Elections

What would inclusive, transformative governance look like in Vanuatu?

The research found that inclusive, transformative governance is possible if:



There are new relationships between voters, parties and MPs

"Kastom is different; politics is different. If the men understand this, then we can put a woman into parliament" – Research Respondent

"For the women to contest, that's fine, but during the political campaign, there should be strong male advocates to campaign for them" – Research Respondent



There are community-designed and -led strategies to support women candidates

"Chiefs and leaders must encourage the women to step forward and start helping them prove themselves in supporting communities" – Research Respondent



There is greater balance between men and women in decision making

"If a woman can be a pilot, why can't we have a woman in parliament?" – Research Respondent