

Vot tru o sans moni? A study of DWU students' behaviour during the 2007 national elections in PNG

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Abstract

Students at tertiary institutions in PNG are targeted by political candidates during the national elections. Studying away from home, students are often unable to vote in their home electorate for candidates that they know. However, candidates in the electorates where the institutions are based try to get the students to vote for them often by offering inducements. This study examines the behaviour of Divine Word University students during the 2007 National Elections when certain candidates tried to secure their votes. It highlights what the students think about the practice of candidates offering inducements to voters and whether they have traded their votes for inducements. It also raises an ethical issue that DWU and other tertiary institutions need to be aware of and to address during the election year.

Key words: Inducements, corruption, ethical behaviour, responsible behaviour, ethical practices, ethical training, tertiary students, tertiary institutions, national elections

Voting and corruption

During the polling period in the Papua New Guinea National Elections held in 2007, two female students from Madang Teachers College were arrested while attempting to impersonate other persons and vote (Kaut, 5 July 2007). The students' story which appeared in *The National* newspaper did not surprise many people. In Madang in the 2007 election there had been attempts by candidates to get votes from the student population. Many tertiary students who attend institutions away from their home electorates normally do not vote because they know little about the candidates in the electorates where they are studying. However, in situations where there is intense competition for votes, candidates go after all the votes they can get and tertiary institution students' votes become a prime target. In the 2002 elections at DWU the author witnessed some students being organized to impersonate former students whose names were still on the electoral roll to vote for a certain Madang Open candidate. A student, who was a former political staff member of the candidate, organized and paid the students.

The incidents highlighted the need to study the students' behaviour at tertiary institutions during the National Elections. While the behaviour of the general public during national elections has been documented in PNG by political scientists, no specific studies have been done at tertiary institution level where there are normally large numbers of students who are old enough to vote. Such a study is important for several reasons. Tertiary students are commonly

regarded as future leaders and therefore it is important to see how they behave during this important democratic process to select our political leaders. A well-publicized case happened in the 2002 elections when a candidate gave out envelopes with cash to reporters who attended his press conference in Port Moresby. When the envelopes were discovered, editors made sure the money was returned and the incident was publicized in the media. A result of the incident was that the media organizations put out a code of behaviour (Post-Courier example below) for media personnel to abide by.



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This Code of Conduct sets the standards editorial employees of the South Pacific Post will maintain in the coverage of the 2002 general elections in Papua New Guinea.

1. Journalists employed by the South Pacific Post are not to be part of any political party.
2. Journalists are not to wear or be in possession of political party paraphernalia whether on (or off) duty covering the elections.
3. Journalists shall cover the campaign by all political parties and candidates accurately, impartially and in a balanced way. Relevant facts about any aspect of the campaign are not to be knowingly withheld.
4. Journalists shall ensure that any official statement from a political party is signed by the party leader or a recognised official on the party letter head that bears the true name and address of that party. Unsigned statements are to be rejected.
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10. Any stories or photographs published from trips stated in (9) shall be declared publicly at the end of the first story or picture published.
11. Journalists must declare any personal conflict of interest that may affect their coverage of the elections.

Any questions on this Code of Conduct should be directed to the Editor.

OSEAH PHILEMON
Editor

Another reason which applies particularly to DWU is that students are taught Christian and professional ethics in all the programs at the University. It would be interesting to see if students are practicing what they are taught. There is already evidence obtained especially from Communication Arts students working in the field that they often ignore the ethical training received at

university when confronted with situations where money is involved. Another reason for the study is that in a developing country like PNG, where the majority of our people have limited or no access to education, the few educated elites also bear the responsibilities in setting examples of acceptable behaviour. So it would be interesting to find out if tertiary students are identifying electoral practices that are unlawful, unethical and considered corrupt and are avoiding them; or are they succumbing to illegal and corrupt polling practices because of the increased value of their votes that candidates are often willing to purchase at a price.

In a bid to clean up elections in 2007, the Electoral Commissioner Andrew Trawen decided to discard the existing electoral roll used by the Commission and to make a fresh start (Trawen, 2011). Fresh rolls were compiled in wards using the Local Level Government ward recorders in the villages and urban centres. This was also done to make the roll transparent to ward residents before and during elections. The ward rolls seemed to have worked well in some parts of the country especially in the coastal and island regions of PNG where voting has generally been orderly and peaceful. However, throughout the highlands and in the urban and certain parts of the country, there were continued attempts to corrupt the electoral rolls.

For the tertiary institutions in PNG, it was generally expected that the students as future leaders would take the lead in demonstrating ethical behaviour and to abide by the rules and process of elections. At Divine Word University where there is a clear emphasis on teaching Christian ethics in all the programs, students are generally expected to demonstrate responsible behaviour when participating in major public events such as the national elections. In fact, PNG Arts students at DWU staged election awareness for the public before polling during the institution's Open Day.

However, from anecdotal evidence and what was witnessed in the 2002 National Elections, many students did not demonstrate lawful nor ethical behavior before and during the election period. There were stories about students getting money and other benefits from candidates in return for a promise to vote for them. Some students were also seen using names of former students on the Ward 5 roll in Madang Urban to vote for particular candidates after they were allegedly bribed to do so.

The action by the students demonstrates the continuous challenge that educational institutions face in addressing the negative cultural influences that affect the behaviour of students despite their exposure to higher education. And this has been experienced also in other professions such journalism and business studies where former students have been known to engage in unethical practices.

Elections in PNG

Elections in PNG have been lively affairs since 1977 when the first national election was held after independence. Unlike other developing nations, PNG as

a democracy has been able to successfully conduct elections every five years and elect a new government into power. However, the election process itself has been plagued with problems, some of which have become so serious that they have endangered the democratic process itself. One of the major problems has been the increasing inability of the First Past the Post (FPTP) system of voting to elicit true representatives of the people as members of Parliament (Okole, p.37 2002). This has been caused by large numbers of candidates contesting many of the seats and effectively breaking down the votes. For instance, May (2003) reported that in 1977, there were 879 candidates, 1987 – 1513, 1992 – 1655, 1997 – 2371, 2002 – 2875.

The high number of candidates has generally meant that leaders were being elected to Parliament without a clear majority especially using the FPTP system. For instance in 1987, 41 candidates won with less than 20 per cent of the vote in their constituency and in 1997, that had increased to 63 while 16 were voted in by less than 10 per cent (May, 2003,p.158). This created other problems. Candidates who won with a smaller percentage of the votes tended to concentrate on appeasing their voters and generally neglected the majority in the electorate who did not vote for them. Thus the practice of bloc voting along clan or village lines through bribery had seriously compromised secret ballot voting as required under the law. Leaders elected under such circumstances could not actually claim to be genuine ‘representatives’ of their electorates.

Other problems also affected the national elections. The main one was the difficulty in producing an accurate common roll, a problem that the Electoral Commission has had to grapple with at each election (Trawen, 2006, p.2). Candidates and their supporters resorted to stacking the roll when the Commission updated the roll before the elections in order to boost their chances of winning and having access to political power and the privileges that go with it. With limited resources, the Commission could not thoroughly check, update and cleanse the roll before each election year. The result was that the rolls were often inflated to contain many more names than the voting population in each electorate and this was done by including names of children, dead people, ghosts names, etc (Trawen, 2006). Violence, intimidation of rival candidates (particularly women) and voters, hijacking and destruction of ballot boxes became major issues affecting the national elections. The issues came to a head in 2002, when the country experienced one of the worst election periods resulting in polling in parts of PNG declared as having failed because of mass violence and irregularities in the election process (Trawen, p.3, 2006).

After the experience of 2002, drastic measures were taken to ensure a better election in 2007. The interventions taken to ensure a successful election included introducing a new Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) system, a completely new ward-based electoral roll, increased security operations before and during the polling periods, increased awareness conducted by Electoral Commission with the help and support of civic organizations and other specific changes to ensure a successful election. Despite the efforts by the Commission, 2007 elections were still marred by widespread voting irregularities especially in the highlands areas. As usual, most of the coastal and island areas of the

country experienced much less drama with voting progressing smoothly and seats being declared without disruptions.

New voting system

The Limited Preferential Voting system was introduced to replace the FPTP which was being abused and was producing leaders who could not claim majority representation. A preferential voting system had already been used prior to independence in PNG but was abandoned afterwards for the simpler FPTP system. The LPV system allowed each voter to mark three choices in the hope that it would break up bloc voting, ensure a more peaceful election and enable the winner to be elected by a majority (Trawen, pp.2-3, 2006). Major awareness campaigns were conducted throughout the country in each electorate by the Electoral Commission and civil society groups as well as in the media.

Many people were sceptical about the complex LPV system which they thought would not be understood by the majority of the nation's illiterate people and would create major problems. Initial surveys carried out by pre-poll monitoring observers (including the author) suggested that many people were still unsure and could not explain the LPV process of voting when asked to do so. However, some people told the author that the main issue was that it was a system they had never used and that seems to have created the uncertainty that was recorded in the survey. On the other hand, those who were able to be involved in a mock election process conducted by electoral officials were able to understand the process of marking three choices. As expected, the areas in PNG that normally experience peaceful and orderly elections conducted successful elections using the LPV system. These were the New Guinea islands and most of the coastal areas on the mainland.

There were a number of things that the proponents of LPV hoped that the new system would achieve. The main one was that it would ensure that the eventual winner would be elected through an exhaustive process and by a majority of the voters (Standish, p.196, 2006). However, as it turned out the high number of candidates that many PNG electorates are notorious for nominating continued to prevent the eventual winner getting majority votes from all the votes cast. Instead many victorious candidates won after a large number of votes had been exhausted. Their win came from the remaining ballot papers. For instance, in the 2007 national elections for the Madang Provincial seat, a total of 152,260 ballots were allowed for count after the removal of informal votes. Of that 57,091 (37.5%) ballots were exhausted or eliminated in the process of counting. The remaining ballots totalled 95,169 (62%) from which the winner Sir Arnold Amet scored a majority vote of 55,936 (58.8%) to win. In effect out of the original 152,260 ballot papers allowed for counting, Sir Arnold only scored 36.74%.

The LPV also hoped to ensure that more women would be elected into Parliament since voters were now offered three choices (Trawen, p.3, 2006); however, this did not happen.

DWU students' participation in elections

DWU was involved in various ways in the preparations and lead up to the 2007 National Elections. This included students participating in LPV awareness campaigns, students conducting elections for the Students Representative Council and mock elections using LPV, students involved in reporting election preparations, staff members engaged in election studies, and university facilities being used for election awareness. During the polling period, one of the polling booths was located within the DWU campus and a large number of students joined the residents of Ward 5 in the Madang urban electorate to vote. After polling, the counting of votes for the Madang Open electorate was held in the hall at DWU's Modilon campus.

As for eligibility to vote, the law in PNG says that a person who has reached 18 years of age is able to vote. Most, if not all, students entering the university are eligible to vote as the youngest students would have already reached 19 by then. However, another law states that a voter has to reside in an electorate for a period of six months or more before he/she can enroll and vote in that electorate. This law generally disqualifies most first year students because the academic year usually begins early February and polling takes place in June/July during the election year. Only first year students originating from the electorate or the province can be eligible to vote in this situation. Students in their second and later years of studies are usually all eligible.

Well before the polling in 2007, the author observed some students' behaviour as well as activities of certain candidates who were coming on campus to try and woo students' votes. A certain candidate was a frequent visitor on campus to 'talk to the students' and entertain them. A female student leader of a provincial group said she and fellow provincial group leaders were invited to the candidate's home to listen to a talk. After the talk, the students were asked to list the names of the students in their provincial groups so that they could be 'enrolled'. The electoral laws do not allow this (Electoral Commission PNG, 2010). In return, the students were offered benefits such as free entry to the candidate's entertainment venue and alcohol.

There have also been a number of students who have chosen to exercise their rights not to participate in voting in Madang Open and Provincial electorates. The main reason, as some have expressed to the author, was that they were not from Madang and therefore did not know the candidates and preferred not to participate. The students chose not to enrol on the ward roll during the enrolment period.

Yet there were many other non Madang students who chose to participate in the elections. Were the participating students exercising their rights to elect their leaders? Or were they participating in the widespread practice in PNG of selling their votes for money or other benefits? These were some of the questions that prompted the mini survey to find out some of the reasons why students were participating in the 2007 National Elections. This survey was part of my role as a research observer for the National Research Institute to

monitor the 2007 elections. This was also the first time for national observers to be recruited to monitor the country's national elections.

Another major motivation for the mini research as stated was the report by *The National* newspaper that two students in Madang were caught by election security officers while attempting to impersonate other people and vote (Kaut, 5 July 2007). As mentioned earlier, my general observation seemed to suggest that students were involved in illegal activities in the period before and during polling and there was a need to carry out a proper study to confirm this. The general method that was used by the observer team was to observe and conduct interviews to gather information for the election study. Although the observation and interviews did confirm that some students were involved in illegal practices, it was hoped that a survey amongst student may be able to provide firm data on the issue.

Methodology

The main methods used in this study were observation and a survey questionnaire that was distributed using the convenience sampling method amongst the students. The 50 survey questionnaires were completed anonymously and the identity of the participants has been protected as they have given information honestly and voluntarily. The questionnaire recorded demographic details such as sex, age and institution attended. Nine of the questionnaires were distributed to Madang Technical College students. The questionnaire was divided into three parts to cover Enrolment, Campaign and Polling periods. This was done to capture information about students' enrolment, why and how they enrolled, and whether they had enrolled themselves. Again there was information that some students were being approached by candidates to get their names enrolled in exchange for some cash or other benefits. Part B of the questionnaire on campaign was to find out whether students who voted had actually attended campaign rallies which would have helped them make up their minds about who to vote for. It is also during campaign periods that there were attempts to secure voters using both legal and illegal means and it was hoped that the questionnaire would capture the behaviour amongst students during the campaign period. For the polling period, the questionnaire was designed to find out who the students voted for and why. There were additional questions about the students' views on corruption and bribery.

Apart from the questionnaire, the participant observation method was used throughout the election period from pre-polling to well after the elections as part of the main NRI research.

Findings

Of the 50 questionnaires given out, 42 were returned by 19 males and 23 females, their ages ranged from 18 to 35. Nine of the questionnaires were handed out to Madang Technical College students; however, only one out of the nine completed the questionnaire. More than half the respondents (55%)

admit to receiving inducements of cash and other benefits during the 2007 elections.

Table 1: Sample of data from election study on students' voting behaviour

	Form No	M/F	Age	School	Enrolled	Not enrolled	Inducement	Vote for?	Benefit
1	1	M	25	DWU	x		Yes	Candidate One	Alcohol, Dance
3	3	F	21	DWU	x		Yes	Candidate Three	Lunch
4	4	M	35	DWU		Enrolled by a friend	Yes	Candidate Four	Cash
5	5	M	23	DWU		Enrolled by named person	Yes		Cash K600
7	10	M	24	DWU	x		Yes	Not revealed	Cash K2
8	11	M	23	DWU	x		Yes	Not revealed	K30
9	12	M	21	DWU		x	Yes	Candidate One	Alcohol
11	14	M	26	DWU	x		Yes	Candidate One	Alcohol, dance
13	16	M	21	DWU	-	x	Yes	Candidate One	cash
14	17	M	23	DWU		x Club president	Yes	Candidate one	other
18	21	F	23	DWU	X		Yes	Candidates One and Three	Alcohol
19	22	M	29	DWU		X Not sure	Yes	-	Cash
23	28	F	23	DWU	X	X Name appeared twice	Yes	Candidates One and Two	K2
24	29	F	24	DWU	X		Yes	Candidate One	K2
25	30	F	23	DWU	X		Yes	-	Cash & Kind
26	31	F	23	DWU	X		Yes	Candidates One and Four	Cash
27	32	F	32	DWU	X		-	Own choice	
28	35	F	21	DWU		X A candidate	Yes	Candidate One	K4
29	36	F	22	DWU	-	-	Yes	Candidate One	Cash
31	38	F	20	DWU	X		Yes	Candidate One	K200 to club
32	39	F	22	DWU		X	Yes	Candidate One	Other
39	46	F	23	DWU		X Named candidate	Yes	Candidates One and Two	K200 club, K7 for me
M=19 F=23									
Source: Author									

The amounts that they received ranged from as low as K2 to K600. (The large amount of K600 was given to a provincial student group and not to an individual). Eighteen of the 23 students who admitted receiving inducements named the candidates who had offered the inducements. Candidate One was named 14 times, Candidate Two was named three times, Candidate Three was named three times and provincial Candidate Four was named twice. It must be noted here that while these candidates' names have been mentioned in the questionnaires, the inducements may not necessarily have been given in person by the candidates but by their campaign officials. The officials would no doubt make it very clear who was providing the inducement or even tell the recipient who to vote for. This even happened when students lined up to vote.

Sixteen students admitted that they did not enrol themselves before the polling period. Out of those, nine stated that someone else enrolled them. Three named a candidate as the person that enrolled them, three said a friend had enrolled them and three said they did not know who had enrolled them. A student, who had enrolled himself, later found out that another person had also enrolled him; thus his name appeared more than once on the electoral roll.

The study also showed that 19 students (45 per cent) while admitting that they accepted cash/benefits from candidates in return for votes condemned the practice as wrong, corrupt or bribery. When asked why they had accepted the cash and benefits, they gave varying reasons. Twenty-three students on the other hand said they did not accept any cash/benefits because the practice was corrupt or wrong.

Analysis

The major finding of this study showed that more than half the students (23 out of 42) admitted to receiving cash and other benefits from candidates' campaigners hoping to secure the students' votes. The result is consistent with the general practice throughout PNG where candidates give out cash, food and other benefits in the hope of securing votes. Observations and interviews with students who were offered cash and benefits confirmed that the practice was widespread amongst students during the elections.

Even during polling time, the author observed a female scrutinizer of a certain candidate offering money in small amounts to female students waiting in the queue and saying it was for their 'betel nut and cigarettes'. The students accepted the money although the author did not find out how they voted later.

The students who admitted receiving cash and other benefits gave a number of reasons why they accepted the offerings. Table 2 shows a sample of respondent data in response to the questions: Do you believe getting cash/benefits from candidate is wrong? and Did you accept the cash/benefits offered and if so, why?

Table 2. Sample data including comments from the respondents

	Do you believe getting cash/benefits from candidate is wrong? Why?	Did you accept the cash/benefits offered? Why?
1	Yes. Because by being corrupt we tend to corrupt those around us.	No. Corruption.
2	Depends. I would get cash if I really needed it/Unethical. It's morally wrong.	No. Did not take it too seriously.
3	Yes. If they can offer cash/benefits now, what will stop them when in office.	Yes. Friends put my name down but I didn't attend.
*4	Yes. Voting should be done on the basis of sound policy – no cash or kind.	Yes. The cash was given to me right in the night and also I had no cash on me.
*5	Yes. He is a country man had leadership quality. There was no doubt in getting cash. I would have voted for him even without cash.	Yes. He is from my province.
*7	Yes. It's like they are trying to buy power, which they can easily abuse if they get to power because they feel ownership of it.	Yes. Because I needed the cash that time.
*8	Yes. Because of three choices, I choose to accept the cash.	Yes. I was offered some money.
*13	Yes. Signs of corruption at its early stage.	Yes, I just tricked the students. I got the money but I didn't vote for him.
14	Yes. It supports the trend that it is okay to receive money from corrupt people who should not be standing in the first place.	No, because PNG needs to change.
*18	No. I did not ask for any but was given so I guess the benefits were free.	Yes. Not that I wanted to vote for that person but (it was) an opportunity not to miss.
*19	Yes. Wrong leaders with 'money power' get to the government.	Yes. I'm poor.
20	Yes. Bribery – bribing us to vote/buying votes and we shouldn't be accepting any cash.	No. Don't want to get involved. Too scared to part take.
*23	Yes. Because it's plain corruption, it's a 'handout' mentality which is dragging the country's progress.	Yes. I didn't know until afterwards.
*24	Yes. Because then it troubles you and influences your vote.	Yes. It doesn't make any difference. I have my own candidate.
*26	Yes, definitely. Unprofessional and it influence your God given power to choose who you prefer.	Yes. Free money.
*28	Yes. Because I for one felt guilty to vote for another person. Coming from the Highlands you must and have to vote for the person you got money from.	Yes. They said it was just a little, just for smoke and buai.
*31	Because ethically it's like being bribed and that leads to corruption but if it's given without any attachment then it's okay to get it if they willingly give it to you.	Yes because we need it for our club and students thought it was free money.
*32	Yes. Because from my point of view, I believe this is part of bribery to get people to vote for a particular candidate.	Yes, because that was part of their campaign but unfortunately I was not registered so they could not force me into voting. I would vote for leaders of my own preference.
35	Yes. Because they called it bribery.	No. I was scared.
*36	Yes. Because this is sort of bribery.	Yes. As a club patron contribution.
*39	Yes. Corrupt, lead PNG into the ground.	Yes, because I wanted to make a fool out of the candidate.
*40	Yes. It is the form of bribery.	Yes. For alcohol.

*Students who said receiving inducements was wrong yet accepted cash and other benefits

Source: Author

The answers range from; 'need for money', 'feeling of allegiance to the giver' (candidate), accepted because 'money was offered', accepted because 'it was an opportunity to earn money', accepted money 'but was going to vote for someone else', accepted 'because of poverty', accepted 'to be part of the group', 'accepted cash but not aware of it', 'does not make any difference', 'free money', 'it was just little for betel nut and cigarettes', 'we need it for our club', 'it was part of their campaign', 'a club contribution', 'wanted to make a fool out of the candidate', and 'for alcohol'.

These answers show that the students generally believe that there is nothing wrong about receiving cash or inducements offered by candidates during elections. The students seem to have been caught up in the election culture that engulfs PNG every five years where candidates are expected to dispense cash and other benefits to voters and make promises in order to secure their votes. Following this common practice, students might have expected something from candidates who were trying to woo their votes. Five of the students accepted cash that was offered but said they were not going to vote for the candidate anyway. Their answers indicate that they saw nothing wrong about accepting cash from candidates during elections and probably view the practice as 'normal' during the election period.

In all PNG societies, the cultural practice of gift-giving always has a reciprocal obligation attached to it whether immediately or in the future. It is the basis of the 'wantok system', PNG's social security system that guarantees support for everyone through the immediate and extended families and within clans and tribes. The intensity to which the practice of gift giving is observed varies. In the rural villages strong customary laws regulate the practice of giving gifts which is usually set in the context of traditional relationships forged through clan or tribal relationships, marriages, etc, that have existed for many years. The relationships and practices spill over into the urban areas as well and Papua New Guineans feel obliged to observe the cultural practice of gift giving although they may not be traditionally related in any way.

Indeed many Papua New Guineans dread receiving gifts while others like the aspiring politicians thrive on it for better or worse. In Madang during elections, it was observed that many candidates gave out gifts of food – mainly lamb flaps, pigs, rice and beer, while others gave out cash to the voting population. Others provided sponsorships for various sporting and social activities within the communities. Some members kept close records of who got what and how many votes were expected from those areas. Of course, the LPV system allowed individuals three votes so the voters were able to trade the three votes for the gifts that they were receiving. Some candidates shunned the practices and openly condemned them during their campaigns advising the people not to sell their votes for lamb flaps and rice.

Culturally candidates felt obliged to give something to the voters they were trying to attract while the voters expected something from the candidates. This was observed at DWU where some candidates tried to woo students' votes by

giving gifts. The response of some of the students to the questionnaire seems to reflect this attitude.

Conclusion

This limited study has indicated that the general election behaviour in PNG is very much entrenched amongst tertiary students at Divine Word University. It shows that despite their high level of education, students remain vulnerable to the widespread culture of candidates offering inducements to secure votes. The units on ethics that are delivered across the programs at the university need to address the issue of proper electoral practices and behaviour expected from candidates and voters every election year. This can be delivered either through the existing units or through general election awareness sessions that can be organized on campus.

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