

About this advice

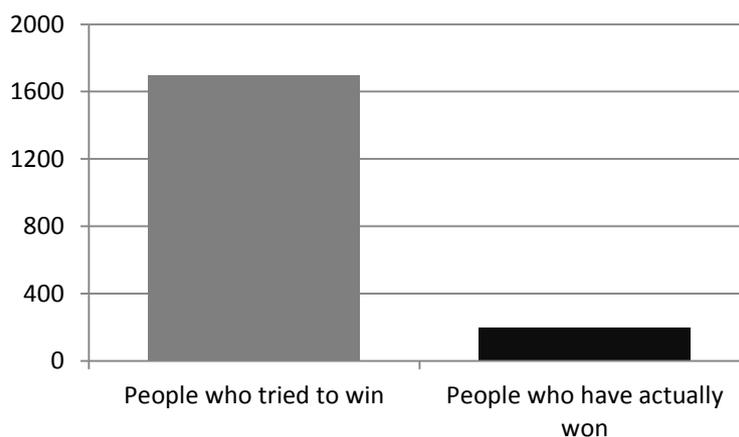
My name is Terence Wood. I am a New Zealander. From 2010-2014, for my PhD degree, I studied Solomon Islands national elections. I interviewed voters, candidates and MPs, and analysed election results. I tried to learn why Solomon Islanders vote for the candidates they vote for in national elections.

In this document I offer some advice for people who are thinking of standing as candidates in the 2014 National Elections in Solomon Islands. I have done this as a way of trying to share some of what I learned with Solomon Islanders. Please note that:

1. This advice is **my personal advice** only. It is not official advice from any organisation. It is what I think based on my research. Importantly, **my beliefs could be wrong** (I am an outsider, still trying to learn about Solomon Islands). Please **use your own judgement when reading my advice**. If you think it is wrong, ignore it. Also, don't just use my advice. Get advice from friends and family whom you trust.
2. **This advice is available to everyone**. You can download it online at (<http://wp.me/sSqRs-si2014>). As a student from another country I have to remain politically neutral. Because of this, **I will not give advice to individual candidates**, and any advice I give I will try to make available to everyone.
3. I cannot advise you personally whether you should or should not stand as a candidate. This is a hard choice, and it has to be your personal choice alone. If you do stand as a candidate – good luck!

Winning Elections

Winning elections in Solomon Islands is hard. Over the eight general elections Solomon Islands has had since independence almost 1,700 different people have stood as candidates. Of these only 196 (12%) have ever won. **Most candidates lose** (see chart below). The average candidate in a Solomon Islands wins just over 10% of the vote in their electorate. Most candidates do not win. Most candidates do not even win very many votes.



Deciding Whether to Stand or Not

Think very carefully about how hard it is to win before you make the decision to stand. You might hear people complaining about the current member, or people might ask you to stand. But this does not always mean you can win. Standing in an election can put stress on your family and cost you money. Being a politician is not the only way you can help your constituency and your country.

On the other hand, although winning elections is hard it might still be a good idea to stand. **Hard is not the same as impossible — it is possible you might win.** And if you do win you may have the chance to help improve your constituency and your country. Also, it is possible that by standing in this election you may raise your profile for future elections, which may help you in the future, although this does not always happen.

Whether you stand or not is an important personal choice. Think very carefully about it.

Winning Support

If you do decide to stand consider the following.

Most Solomon Islands **voters vote for the candidate who they think will be most likely to help them personally**, or help their family (and maybe help their community). For most voters national politics and policy are not something they think much about when they vote. (This is also true in a lot of other countries; the way people vote in Solomon Islands is quite common.)

Therefore, to win people's support you need to convince them you will be likely to help. Doing this needs more than just promises. Voters hear promises all the time.

Generally **voters will be more likely to believe you will help if:**

1. **You have helped them in the past.** Normally to gain voters' trust you need to have helped quite a lot over a long period of time (buying votes on Devil's Night, or just giving something in the campaign, is usually not enough.)
2. **If you have strong wantok ties with them.** Most Solomon Islanders receive the most help in their lives from relatives. So it is natural that they assume candidates who are related to them will be more likely to help if they win. However, voters' loyalty to relatives is not guaranteed. If you are a relative and if you have not helped in the past, voters may still not vote for you. Sometimes, but not always, church ties can also help in a similar way to family ties.
3. If you have the support of **influential people from the voters' family, church or community.** Often these sorts of people can convince voters to vote for you. (However, see my advice below about conmen.)

Other Important Information about Campaigning

In places where you do not have very many relatives, **winning support from influential people in villages is usually very important.** However, winning this support is not easy and it is hard to know who you can trust. Everywhere I went in Solomon Islands I spoke to candidates who complained about **conmen**: people who took money off them and who promised they would support them, but who then supported someone else. I advise you to think very carefully about who you can really trust to help you in this way.

Vote buying on Devil's Night is very common in Solomon Islands elections. Whether you buy votes or not is **an important moral choice you will need to make.** I cannot advise you on this decision, other than to tell you that, if you do buy votes, quite a few of the people who take your money will still not vote for you, and you will have wasted your money. **Also, remember that vote buying is illegal.**

Your chances of winning will be higher if you have strong connections to your constituency. It will be easier if you have strong networks (either church or wantoks). It will also be easier if you have spent a good amount of time in your constituency in recent years helping people and learning very carefully who is influential in your constituency and who you can trust.

Good luck for the decisions in front of you.

If you have any advice or stories you want to tell me, please email woodterence@yahoo.co.nz