



## **Opening Remarks – Launch of the 2024 Solomon Islands Elections Research Report**

*Professor Transform Aqorau*

*Vice Chancellor, Solomon Islands National University (SINU)*

**April 10, 2025 | SINU Kukum Campus | 4:00–6:00pm**

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, friends, colleagues, and students,

Good afternoon to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here today for the official launch of the 2024 Solomon Islands Elections Research Report—a landmark collaboration between the Solomon Islands National University and the Australian National University, particularly the Department of Pacific Affairs.

This project is, without doubt, one of the most comprehensive and methodically grounded studies of electoral processes in our country. Drawing insights from over 5,300 citizen surveys and 570 detailed observer reports

across 15 constituencies, it reflects the depth, rigour, and collective commitment that was brought to bear by our teams.

At the heart of this endeavour lies a powerful partnership—between our own SINU and the ANU—a partnership that is far more than just institutional. It is a people-to-people collaboration, grounded in mutual respect, the sharing of knowledge, the exchange of skills, and the cultivation of lasting relationships. These collaborations enrich both sides, academically and professionally, and they foster a deeper understanding of our region’s challenges, aspirations, and democratic journeys.

This is what academic cooperation should look like. It reflects the reality that inquiry knows no borders. In an age marked by geopolitical competition and shifting global alignments, we must actively encourage cross-border academic mobility and cooperation. The joint work conducted by staff from both our universities is an inspiring example of such mobility in action—fluid, dynamic, and productive.

As Vice Chancellor of SINU, I am pleased and proud of this achievement. But more than that, I am excited about the future—about what this dataset enables us to do. The findings from this research open up new opportunities for joint publications, deeper investigations, and policy-relevant engagement. The challenge now is to translate this wealth of information into tangible impact.

We know that gathering this kind of data in a country like Solomon Islands is not easy. The costs are high, the logistics are complex, and the risks—especially given our vulnerability to natural disasters and conflict, and our geographic fragmentation—are real. Yet, the need for data-driven, evidence-based policymaking has never been more critical.

Our country must begin to move toward decisions grounded not in speculation or anecdote, but in robust research and clear-eyed analysis. That is how we can build resilience, improve governance, and deepen democratic participation.

This report covers a wide range of issues that matter deeply to our people and our democracy. It explores what shaped the 2024 elections—from voter education, party strategies, and campaign dynamics, to voter registration, election integrity, and security. It examines the administration and experience of polling day, as well as the evolving participation of women in the political process—highlighting both encouraging trends and stubborn barriers.

Importantly, the study also looks at constituency development funds—how they are governed, their impact on electoral outcomes, and the way they interact with perceptions of political accountability. And it does not stop there. Post-election dynamics—money politics, government formation, and public confidence in leadership—are also interrogated with clarity and nuance.

Together, these threads offer us a powerful picture of how elections are shaped and experienced—not just as a one-day event, but as a long-term, evolving process.

Because in truth, democracy is not just what happens on polling day. It is about what happens in the months and years in between. It is about how those who are elected engage with those who elected them. Yet all too often, we see a troubling pattern: after casting their ballots, voters are pushed to the margins, treated as spectators in the governance process. Decision-making becomes the domain of a few. Power consolidates. And the very people who gave that mandate are left behind.

This is not just a procedural flaw—it is a democratic deficit. And it carries consequences: growing apathy, disengagement, and ultimately, disillusionment.

That is why initiatives like this research matter so deeply. Because they bring the voices of our citizens into the heart of the conversation. They remind us that democracy is not a spectator sport. It must be participatory, inclusive, and transparent.

As we close this chapter and look ahead, I want to acknowledge and thank the incredible team from the Australian National University, and especially those from the Department of Pacific Affairs. Your commitment to this work, and to this region, is invaluable.

To our own staff here at SINU who conducted surveys and participated in election observation—thank you for your dedication and professionalism. This is your achievement too.

And to all of you who have joined us for this launch—your presence speaks to your interest in the future of our democracy. Thank you.

Let me end with the words of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, who once said: *“The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all.”* Today, we are reminded that an informed electorate is not just a goal—it is a safeguard. It is our best defence against tyranny, poor governance, and exclusion.

Let us move forward from today inspired—not just by what we have learned, but by what we can do with that knowledge.

Thank you and may this be just the beginning of even more impactful work ahead.

