

Democracy, façade or somewhere in between? An exploration of Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe

Abrak Saati

Department of Political Science

Umeå University

Umeå, Sweden

abrak.saati@umu.se

and

Torbjörn Bergman

Department of Political Science

Umeå University

Umeå, Sweden

torbjorn.bergman@umu.se

ABSTRACT: Freedom House holds that small archipelago states such as Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe are high-ranking democracies. This article sets out to explore and analyse how the political systems of these three states function in their everyday practice, and to understand whether the correlation between smallness on the one hand, and democracy on the other, is borne out in political practice. Our study shows that many processes and procedures that we associate with that of a liberal democracy are indeed present in the cases. However, we also show that a number of procedures and occurrences that point to the contrary are likewise present. These include issues that pertain to the lack of actual separation of powers, lack of female political representation, friendship corruption, and nepotism. We propose further inquiry to increase our understanding as to whether these issues are related to the small population size of these countries.

Keywords: democracy, government, Kiribati, São Tomé and Príncipe, small states, Vanuatu

© 2022 – Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta, Malta.

Introduction

Many prominent scholars in the research field of comparative politics acknowledge a statistical correlation between population size and democracy (Anckar, 2002; 2006; 2008; 2010; Diamond & Tsalik, 1999; Ott, 2000; Srebrnik, 2004). Small states, in comparison to larger ones, are more likely to be classified/ranked as democracies, at least when consulting the most frequently employed statistical databases used by political scientists, such as Freedom House's annual report of Freedom in the World (Veenendaal, 2015). The correlation between small population size and democracy is an intriguing one, and one that deserves further inquiry.

In addition to being curious about the correlation between small population size and democracy, we are interested in exploring this correlation in economically underdeveloped states. Our rationale for adding this dimension to our research is because we believe that it has the potential to contribute to an ongoing debate among democratization scholars (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018) when it comes to the explanatory value of modernization theory, i.e. the

idea that democratic progress is dependent on economic progress. This is (in some form or another) probably the most prominent theoretical strand within the broader democratization literature (Gasiorowski & Power, 1998; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski, 2000). The combination of these factors has resulted in the selection of three empirical cases for our inquiry: Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe. These three sovereign archipelagic states are small, in terms of having small populations – 300,000, 100,000 and 200,000 respectively. All three of them are classified by Freedom House as being “free” (Freedom House, 2021b). Moreover, all three states are economically underdeveloped per the definitions of the UN and the OECD.

To be sure, at first sight Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe appear to be consolidated democracies on par with most democratic states in the West. Upon deeper investigation, however, a more complex and nuanced picture emerges. A picture that tells the tale of democratic and less democratic processes and procedures working side by side, and a picture that disputes a clear-cut categorization of these states as democratic. An important finding that we have observed in all three cases is how personal relations, networks and kinship affect political outcomes. As we move forth in the research project at large, this particular observation motivates a strong focus on political elites and their relationships. Both within and across party affiliations, as well as how relations with other segments of broader society play out. Indeed, the small population size of Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe has given rise to a reality in which those in official positions of power many times know – on a personal basis – either directly or indirectly, their constituents. Though this could surely be positive as the electorate can more easily convey their grievances to decision-makers, and likely boost voter turnout in elections (Hirczy, 1995), it can also become problematic and even detrimental if it gives rise to neo-patrimonial politics and friendship corruption.

This study is part of a recently initiated project that centres on exploring two principal research questions. The first asks whether the statistical correlation between smallness and high levels of democracy is borne out in political practice, whereas the second probes the factors that explain democratic performance, or the lack thereof, in these three states. The present article constitutes the initial step of this research agenda and focuses on exploring nuances, complexities and contradictions as regards the state of democracy in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe. As we will show on subsequent pages, this exploration will be useful not only for us as we move forth in our project but also for other scholars who are interested in these specific cases in particular, and for those who are interested in the comparative study of small, democratic and economically underdeveloped states in general. The work that we present in this article is based on a literature review; on previous scholarly work that has studied different aspects of democracy in the three cases under investigation. This literature review allows us to reveal empirical gaps that are waiting to be addressed. We also present our own empirical findings that align with previous research, and discuss theoretical issues that need to be raised. As such we are contributing with new knowledge to this field of research, as well as building on, and corroborating, knowledge of other scholars.

Already at this stage, we wish to bring attention to the fact that our review of the research field, allows us to conclude that in comparison to the work that has been done on various aspects of democracy in São Tomé and Príncipe, more scholarly attention has been devoted to this issue in Vanuatu and Kiribati. This is attributable to many valuable contributions (e.g. Veenendaal, 2021; Corbett, 2015; Veenendaal & Corbett, 2020; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016; Clarke, 2019). The fact that São Tomé and Príncipe is a bit less researched (notwithstanding the valuable contributions of Sanches et al., 2021; Seibert, 2016; Seibert, 2006), is a strong motivator for us to prioritize fieldwork in this specific country in our research project before also conducting fieldwork in Vanuatu and Kiribati.

This article is divided into four sections. Though it has already been hinted at, in the following part we properly define what we mean by “small” states. We also define our understanding of democracy for the purposes of this study. This is followed by a section in which we present and discuss how knowledge concerning the correlation between smallness and democracy has traditionally been acquired in this field of research and the concerns, as we see it, associated with this methodological approach. We then continue to present and discuss how more recent scholarship has approached the relationship between smallness and democracy, and how we hope to be able to contribute to these efforts. This is followed by the empirical section of the article in which our initial findings with regards to the state of democracy in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe are presented and discussed. The final part of the article discusses what our findings imply for the study of democracy in small states in general, and how we foresee continuing the research on Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe as we move forth in our research project.

Defining concepts

As has been brought to attention by previous contributions in *Small States & Territories* (Baldacchino, 2018; Thorhallsson, 2018), as well as by several scholars who have engaged in the study of small states, “small” can encompass many different aspects, including GNP, area, and population size (Anckar, 2010; Dahl & Tufte, 1973; Ott, 2000; Srebrnik, 2004). In this study, population size is the determinant for smallness, and we draw a cut-off point for what constitutes a “small state” to states with a population size below 500,000. Previous research in this field has commonly drawn the cut-off point for “smallness” somewhere around populations below 1 million or below 500,000, sometimes referring to states with populations below 250,000 as “microstates” (Ott, 2000; Srebrnik, 2004; Veenendaal, 2015). Admittedly, “small” remains a relative concept, but the criteria we adhere to here – a population size of less than 500,000 – is squarely within the boundaries commonly used in the literature to which this study aims to contribute.

Democracy, in turn, is a concept that continues to occupy the minds of political scientists. Despite the normative desirability of attaining this system of government, how to define “democracy” is still in dispute. Its etymological meaning, “rule by the people”, is however a baseline definition that most political scientists agree with (Coppedge & Gerring, 2011, p. 248). Beyond this baseline agreement, there is nevertheless an ongoing debate about how it should be defined further, and how it ought to be practised. This likely stems from the fact that “democracy” is a concept that operates on two (very) different levels. Democracy belongs as much to the world of ideals, in which the functioning of political systems that do not exist are imagined, as it does to the empirical world in which we use the term to define systems that do exist (Coppedge & Gerring, 2011; Dahl, 1989; Lively, 2007). For the purposes of this article in which we set out to explore nuances, complexities and contradictions as regards the state of democracy in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe, it is relevant for the reader to know that our understanding of democracy conforms to a *liberal* form of democracy. This understanding is, in turn, greatly influenced by Dahl’s (1989, p. 221) definition of “polyarchy” in which he proposes a number of key indicators to look out for; elected officials; free and fair elections; inclusive suffrage; right to run for office; freedom of expression; alternative information; and associational autonomy. This, the liberal form of democracy has developed into the mainstream approach of defining democracy in the comparative literature (Teorell (2010, p. 30). In a sense, these elements constitute the conventional aspects of democracy: the holding of free and fair elections, universal suffrage, and in addition to these procedural aspects, a number of political rights, civil rights and rule of law related aspects. Indeed, when studying Freedom House’s methodology (Freedom House, 2021a) for how they go about

measuring democracy in countries around the world, it soon becomes clear that they too understand democracy in its liberal form when they analyse and assign states as different levels of “free”.

Statistical correlations, what is the problem?

Research on small states is generally scarce, and the field of comparative politics largely lacks systematic studies of how the political systems of small states function in their “everyday practice”. Scholars have put forth a number of varying reasons when attempting to justify the systematic exclusion of small states from their analysis (Veenendaal & Corbett, 2015). These explanations range from small states being so small that they do not even constitute “real” states (Vanhanen, 1997), to arguments that concern lack of data, which in turn makes small states impossible to include in an analysis (Powell, 1984; Vanhanen, 1997), to small states having such small populations that studying them is simply irrelevant (Huntington, 1991). To the extent that small states and their political systems have been studied, however, this has primarily been done through quantitative methods.

A number of such studies identify a correlation between small states and democratic systems of government, to the extent that the term “small is beautiful” (Anckar 2010, p. 1) has started to take root. Among these, Diamond & Tsaliq (1999) has been influential, as has Ott (2000), Srebrnik (2004) and Anckar (2002; 2006; 2008; 2010). It is however important to note that these studies are largely quantitative and that the observation of a relationship between smallness and democracy begins and ends exactly there. The common method of procedure is to identify “small states” (sometime at a cut-off point that is larger than ours, e.g., states with a population size of less than 1 million), after which the scholar turns to quantifiable data that captures the state of democracy – most usually Freedom House’s index of political rights and civil liberties which is reported in a weighted “freedom” index. Though we do not dispute the relevance nor the important contribution of these studies: indeed, these contributions have been enormously valuable as they, firstly, actually *include* small states in the analysis, and secondly allow other scholars to continue probing the issue by making us aware of, what at least appears to be, a correlation. These benefits acknowledged, we do however hold that statistical correlations do not suffice for a deeper understanding of *why* it is that small states often appear to be more democratic, nor do they help us understand the theoretical conundrum of how it is that some of these small states, despite their low-income status, still appear to be high ranking democracies. Moreover, as we will show later in this article, when leaning on statistical methods alone, one might overlook important nuances which reveal that, upon closer scrutiny, small states may not be entirely as democratic as studies based on statistical correlations may have us believe. Once again, relating back to the theoretical challenge just described, this is something that has a bearing for any conclusions that can be drawn concerning the applicability and limitations of notions concerning a strong economy being essential for high democratic performance. In other words: if small countries that are poor are nevertheless democratic, we are faced with a phenomenon that contradicts the basic premise of modernization theory. But if small countries that are poor are not as democratic as the correlations provided by statistical correlations would have us believe, modernization theory may still be relevant for our understanding as to why countries are more or less democratic, regardless of them being large or small. All these issues and concerns imply that, when studying small states, other methods, supplementary to quantitative ones are called for. This leads us to the next section of this article in which we present and discuss how more recent work on small states and their political systems has been conducted.

Recent research; qualitative, but with conceptual stretching

As already alluded to, a number of scholars have recently devoted attention to the study of small states, including in Europe (e.g. San Marino, Monaco, Luxembourg), in the Caribbean (e.g. Saint Kitts & Nevis, Dominica, Grenada), in the Pacific (e.g. Vanuatu, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Tonga, Samoa), and in Africa (e.g. Seychelles, Cabo Verde, Comoros, São Tomé and Príncipe) (e.g. Corbett, 2015; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016; Sanches et al., 2021; Sanches, 2020; Seibert, 2016; Veenendaal, 2015; 2021). Though it would be misleading to state that quantitative work does no longer occur in this specific field of research, more recent scholarship, appear to have picked up on the same concerns that we raise above when it comes to correlations based solely or primarily on quantified indicators, and has hence attempted to remedy this by a qualitative research design, in some instances involving interviews and fieldwork. To be sure, by going about the research endeavour by qualitative means, the frontiers of this field have truly been advanced. For example, we now have a better understanding of how intra-personal dynamics in small states in which, basically, “everybody knows everybody” (Corbett, 2015) effects political practices, and how kinship affect political processes and procedures in a manner that ought to affect how we assess the overall quality of democracy (Veenendaal, 2015). Hence, a qualitative approach has done much to complement quantitative research, but it has also contributed in terms of correcting an oversimplified understanding concerning the correlation between smallness and democracy.

With that being said, we have also encountered some issues in contemporary qualitative research on this particular topic that relate to two separate yet related matters. Beginning with the first; recent qualitative research that has been conducted on small states which sets out to understand the state’s quality of democracy/level of democracy, still does not always properly define what exactly is being measured (e.g. Sanches et al., 2021). In other words, we are facing an issue of definitional validity; democracy is not being properly defined, and hence we are not sure as to the exact criteria the scholars are leaning on when evaluating a case as being more or less democratic, or democratic/not democratic. Indeed, as pointed to earlier, the body of literature on how to define and measure democracy is, to say the very least, vast (e.g. Coppedge & Gerring, 2011; Dahl, 1971; Diamond et al., 2014; Sartori, 1991; Teorell, 2010). Depending on how one conceptualizes the concept, different conclusions will be drawn when assessing whether or not, or to what extent, a small state is democratic. The second issue, which is related to the first, has to do with conceptual stretching, meaning that the concept of democracy is being either conflated with other similar concepts, or “filled” with criteria that are actually not part of the overarching concept of democracy – i.e., the concept is being overstretched (e.g. Veenendaal, 2020). In a worst-case scenario, this can imply that we end up drawing conclusions about a specific small state being democratic, when what we are measuring is actually something else, for example “political stability”. A country can indeed be politically stable and also democratic; but a country can also be politically stable whilst also being a dictatorship: these two conditions need not negate each other. In a recent contribution, Veenendaal (2021) grapples with these very issues in relation to the Vanuatu case and makes necessary conceptual clarifications in terms of what political stability is, what regime stability is, and what democracy is: an important contribution that illustrates that these concepts are not to be conflated as if they were one and the same.

Democracy, façade or somewhere in between? Exploring contradictions in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe

Vanuatu

The state of Vanuatu, with a population of 300,000, is an archipelago of just over 80 islands, geographically located in the South Pacific. It is the only state in the region that has been colonized by two countries at the same time. France and Great Britain co-colonized Vanuatu until independence was gained in 1980. The country is now a parliamentary democracy with an elected president who mainly holds ceremonial duties. Turning our attention to how the Vanuatu political system works in its everyday practice, occurrences and tendencies are revealed that both support as well as put into question our understanding of the country as a high-ranking democracy.

To begin with, the country has what can only be described as a hyper-fragmented political landscape. Considering its small population, and parliament with 52 representatives, it is astonishing that no less than 19 political parties ran in the 2020 elections (Veenendaal 2021, p. 7). With such a large number of political parties spread on such few representatives, and no thresholds for parties entering parliament, no party is likely to achieve a majority of the votes. Hence, coalition governments are necessary in the aftermath of elections; coalition governments that, moreover, tend to be very unstable, to the extent that they often are unable to complete their term in office, leading to re-elections ahead of time. This can arguably be considered problematic as it leads to political instability and perhaps also to difficulties in terms of authorities not being able to implement government policies since governments are constantly changing. However, it does not necessarily reflect poorly on Vanuatu's state of democracy (Veenendaal, 2021). To be sure, re-elections frequently occur ahead of time (early elections), but they do so within the parameters of what is constitutionally prescribed; they do so without violence; and they do so without chaos. In a sense, one can even propose that, though it indicates political instability, the very fact that the country manages to manoeuvre the failings of its coalition governments, arrange new elections, and to do so without violence or other mishaps, indicates a somewhat mature democracy. To use Veenendaal's phrasing (2021, p. 12) in Vanuatu "instability creates stability", in a sense.

Another incident, which developed into a high-profile case, can also be interpreted in at least two different ways in terms of its bearing on how we deem the state of democracy in Vanuatu. In 2015, fifteen (almost 1/3) of the MPs were sentenced to jail and/or fined heavily after being accused of bribery, and subsequently also being convicted on those charges (Forsyth & Batley, 2016). This suggests that political corruption is rampant; Vanuatu is small, and though it would be an exaggeration to state that everyone knows everyone, there are studies that show how kinship affect political representatives in a manner that can be considered problematic from a democracy perspective (Corbett, 2015; Nimbtik, 2016; Veenendaal & Corbett, 2020). To put it in another way; indeed, universal suffrage is upheld and elections are free, but the extent to which they are fair can be put into question if political representatives are promising – or feeling that they are expected to – deliver various benefits to family and friends in order to secure their vote. At the same time, the very fact that the fifteen MPs in question were trialled and sentenced surely reflects well on the independence of the judiciary in Vanuatu. In so far as the rule of law is an inherent part of a well-functioning democracy, this specific occurrence illustrates that democratic institutions are functioning and that law applies to all – even the lawmakers themselves.

In a recent article, Clarke (2019) focuses on the role of religion in Vanuatu society. As he brings to attention, within Vanuatu, the Christian churches are a cornerstone of civil society;

religion has a prominent role in the country and such has been the case ever since French missionaries arrived in the late 1800s (Clarke 2019, pp.159-162). Based on data from the National Statistics Office, Clarke (2019, p.162) even suggests that Vanuatu may be considered one of the most religious countries in the world, as Christian affiliation reaches 83 % and the proportion of the population who self-identify as Christians is nearly 96 % (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2009). It was actually religious leaders, representatives of the church, who were the first to oppose the French and the British and who were the first to voice demands for sovereignty in the early 1970s.

The church has had a profoundly important – and at the time, critical – role as far as development in Vanuatu is concerned. The church provided social services across the archipelago during the colonial era (as the British and French failed to do so), and as stated above, still plays a prominent role in civil society. As Clarke (2019, p. 164) reminds us, the church has also provided the country with national leaders, in the sense that the religious leaders who demanded Vanuatu independence were the same leaders who subsequently became leaders of political parties. It is difficult to gauge whether this occurrence, i.e. that religious leaders became political leaders (while assumingly still being involved in the church) has had consequences for different types of outcomes post-independence. There is however a specific phenomenon that we find striking, namely that Vanuatu is one of only three countries – along with Papua New Guinea and the Federated States of Micronesia – in the entire South Pacific region that does not have a single elected female MP (Baker et al., 2020). Since independence over four decades ago, Vanuatu has only had five elected women MPs, and not a single one has been voted into parliament during the last three elections (Yi, 2020). Though religion, and in particular the churches in Vanuatu, have played an important and often positive role, we wonder if tendencies towards hierarchical structures and gender imbalances which research has shown that religion can lead to (Fox & Sadler, 2006; Jones & Petersen, 2011; Jurgensmeyer, 2010) has occurred as well. Is it possible that, part of the explanation for the marginalized role of women in Vanuatu politics is attributable to the prominent role of a particular (patriarchal) version of Christianity? To an understanding of what the role of women versus the role of men ought to be in a society? Or is it perhaps rather an effect of the electoral system, i.e. that it is structured as such that it disadvantages women? We are even less sure about this last proposition because when comparing the electoral system of Vanuatu to neighbouring Kiribati, to which we will turn our empirical attention next, they both employ electoral systems that though not identical, are quite similar. The parliament in Vanuatu is elected using a combination of the single-non-transferrable-vote system in multiple-member constituencies and the first-past-the-post system in single member constituencies. Voters cast their vote for one candidate only. Parliament in Kiribati is elected in multi-seat constituencies by absolute majority vote in two rounds. Here too, voters are only allowed to vote for one candidate. Hence, in neither of these two countries are voters allowed to vote for several candidates in order of preference. Though we can only speculate, it could be hypothesized that female representation might increase in cases where the electorate are allowed to list a number of choices on the ballot. Perhaps the “default” option – in patriarchal societies – will be a male representative, but when allowed to list a number of choices it is not unlikely that women representatives will be listed on the ballot as the second, third, fourth or fifth alternative when voters make their ranking. Of course, on the other hand, it is also possible that electoral laws do not matter as much as one might intuitively believe, and that cultural aspects, time trends, and other factors matter more than what has hitherto been acknowledged (Roberts et al., 2012). The point we are trying to make here is that, despite the fact that the electoral systems of Vanuatu and Kiribati are quite similar, female representation in the legislature in Vanuatu is completely absent, while

there are a number of female MPs in Kiribati, and what is more; the Vice President of the country is a woman.

We argue that what appears to be a systematic exclusion of women from the political arena ought to affect how we deem the overall state of democracy in Vanuatu. This is an issue that must be further probed. The role of religion, politics and the intersection in between is actually a matter that clearly illustrates the need for more qualitative research and fieldwork in Vanuatu. This since we do not know if Vanuatu political leaders of today are, as their predecessors were, actively engaged in the church, and if such is the case; whether their political platforms and agendas are influenced by their fate, and whether or not this even matters in relation to gender issues specifically. Hence, interviews with political leaders from a cross section of political parties is called for. This is something that we set out to achieve as we move forth working on site in this specific country context.

Kiribati

The next part of this initial empirical exploration of the state of democracy in our three cases focuses on Kiribati. Kiribati's population of approximately 100,000 people are spread on 33 atolls, geographically located in the Central Western Pacific. The country – a former British colony (known as the Gilbert Islands) that gained independence in 1979 – is also the poorest country in the island Pacific, heavily dependent on foreign aid (Yates, 2020). The issue of aid dependency is actually a matter that has, as we see it, consequences for how politics is practised in Kiribati, and as such ought to have an effect on how we assess its state of democracy, and something which statistical correlation research may have overlooked. We will return to the question of aid dependency and democracy shortly, but first we shall direct attention to some of the formal institutions in Kiribati that also give rise to discussions about the state of democracy in this country.

Kiribati is a parliamentary democracy with an elected president per the stipulations of the constitution which, when scrutinized further, reveals a rather fascinating set-up. According to the constitution, the procedure for election is such that subsequent to the formation of the 44-member strong parliament, the representatives in the legislature choose – among their own members – no less than three but no more than four representatives, who will then run for the presidency in general elections (Constitution of Kiribati, Chapter IV, Article 32). After having won, the person is installed as president (“Beretitenti”) while also *continuing* to serve and perform his/her duties in the legislature (Constitution of Kiribati, Chapter V, Article 53, 2A). Though the constitution vests executive power in the hands of a cabinet of ministers, the president appoints the members of this cabinet, resides over its meetings and sets its agenda. The president, furthermore, has other prerogatives that extend beyond mere ceremonial ones. For example, the president can grant pardons for any type of committed offence, grant respite for committed offences either indefinitely or for a period of time, and substitute a less severe form of punishment for any punishment imposed on any person for any offence (Constitution of Kiribati, Chapter IV, Article 50).

It would be inaccurate to propose that the separation of powers between government branches in Kiribati is in grave jeopardy, since the judicial branch is not effected by the constitutional formulations mentioned above. However, the fact that the president is part of the executive and the legislative branch simultaneously is a cause for concern from a liberal democracy perspective. Moreover, while there is no confusion as to the roles and mandates of the judicial and the executive branch respectively in the 1979 constitution on paper, how politics is practised in the everyday may tell a different story. As Uakeia (2016), himself a national, a former member of the Kiribati Public Service, and presently lecturer in education at

the University of the South Pacific, describes in his study, politics as practised reveal tendencies towards executive interference in what is constitutionally within the jurisdictions of both the legislative as well as the judicial branch of government. Though it is formally within the president's purview to elect the Speaker of the House and to appoint the Chief Justice, it is a possibility that they would do so with a motive that suits either their personal agenda or that of the political party to which they belong. We can hypothesize that potential transgressions of executive authority into the domains of the legislative and the judicial branches is not a common phenomenon at the national level; however, what our initial exploration of the Kiribati case has shown us, is that the blurring of lines between the competences of the three branches of government is all the more prevalent in the everyday politics at the local level, i.e., in the atolls.

It is the National Ministry of Internal Affairs that has the overarching responsibility for the administration of local government on the dispersed atolls. At the same time, Kiribati has a traditional system of government; the *Maneaba* (translated to the "Meeting House") which in effect – though informally – operates at the local level. This means that, throughout the islands, two governing systems, one formal the other informal and traditional, are working side by side. The formal system, under the reins of the National Ministry, is to uphold separation of powers, whereas the informal Maneaba system works on the basis of an entirely different premise in which a separation of powers is completely blurred. The Maneaba takes on all types of issues that concern the local inhabitants, and de facto assumes the role of the individual atoll's legislative, executive and judicial "branch" simultaneously (Low, 2019). At the same time, Low's (2019) study shows that there is a considerable extent of direct democracy being exercised in the Maneaba system. Local inhabitants on several of the atolls describe how the act of coming together with their community neighbours and community elders promotes a sense of unity among the islanders, and that decisions are, or are at least attempted to be, reached in a spirit of consensus (Low, 2019, p. 60). On the other hand, the composition of the Maneaba reveals that it is a patriarchal institution as well as an institution that gives prominence to seniority. In the words of Uakeia (2016, p. 94) "it is here that the old men, by the virtue of their status, come and occupy their sitting positions and make decisions about the affairs of the community". And though consensus is aspired for, it is consensus among the "Unimwane" (the old men), rather than consensus by all villagers.

The matter of consensus is an interesting one, because just in the same manner that certain governing practices appear to trickle down the system – from the national to the local – as the blurring of jurisdictions between branches of government illustrate, other governing practices influence in the other direction, i.e. from the local to the national. The traditional way of practicing politics and practising rules in Kiribati is non-confrontational and consensus based (Low, 2019). Though political parties exist, they are not formed on the basis of ideological platforms such as they are in societies in the Western world. Rather, the Maneaba system with its consensus seeking culture is so entrenched in the political fabric of Kiribati that the confrontational political game found in most westernized systems of government, does not resonate in the Kiribati system. Political parties at the national level are instead formed on the basis of shared interests which, again, speaks to the consensus-seeking political culture of the country (Uakeia, 2016). This might, in part, explain why governments in Kiribati are stable and almost always finish their term in office (Low, 2019); a great contrast to the case of Vanuatu that we discussed earlier. However, even though consensus might characterize political practice to a large extent, political parties and their representatives are not uninterested in gaining power; so much so that corruption of various sorts and vote buying does occur. As Uakeia (2016, p. 96) notes, it is not at all uncommon that aspiring MPs visit all households in

their constituency and “bubuti”: they plead to friends, family and neighbours to vote for them on more or less outspoken promises of largesse to their village, if they get elected.

Earlier, we had noted that, by virtue of being the poorest country in the Pacific region, Kiribati is heavily dependent on foreign aid. This particular circumstance has geopolitical consequences that ought to influence how we understand the state of democracy there. The fact that Kiribati is dependent on aid in combination with Kiribati having very powerful neighbours – in particular China and Taiwan – has resulted in a situation in which Kiribati politicians have had to accept that aid is given to their country *prior* to elections rather than after (Corbett, 2015). This particular sequencing of external funding and national elections might indicate that aid is being conditioned on either specific government policies, specific government coalitions, or both, following elections. Undeniably, if external pressure is the case, Kiribati sovereignty as well as its democracy can be put into question. If external pressure is quite significant, it could even be argued that regardless of how the citizens vote on election day, their political representatives have already settled on certain policies for purposes of securing external aid.

The aspects that we bring to attention here are manifestations that research based on statistical correlations has not – to the best of our knowledge – taken into consideration when labelling Kiribati as a high-ranking democracy. Of course, we are not suggesting that Kiribati is undemocratic; but that these nuances – ranging from issues concerning the separation of powers, to corruption, geopolitical factors and aid dependency – need to be brought to light and discussed, so that a more accurate description of the state of democracy can be conveyed.

São Tomé and Príncipe

In the final part of the empirical section of this article, we direct our attention to the case of São Tomé and Príncipe. As we alluded earlier, in comparison to scholarly work on Vanuatu and Kiribati, how politics is practised in São Tomé and Príncipe is less researched. The scholarly contributions particularly of Seibert and Sanches (Sanches, 2020; Sanches et al., 2021; Seibert, 2006; Seibert, 2016) have however proved valuable for our exploration of the state of democracy in this small island state, and have spurred our thoughts on issues that need to be probed further in order to increase our knowledge about democracy in this specific country. In the following we will present our findings thus far, and conclude with our ideas as to the issues that are most relevant to investigate in more depth as we set out to conduct fieldwork in São Tomé and Príncipe in the near future.

In the Gulf of Guinea, we find 200,000 São Toméans dispersed on two main islands; São Tomé, the larger one, and Príncipe, the smaller. The country is a former Portuguese colony which gained independence in 1975. During the first fifteen years of being a sovereign state, São Tomé and Príncipe was ruled as a socialist one-party state. However, with the end of the Cold War and as a consequence of a devastated economy, demands for democratization and a free market economy were voiced. Multiparty elections under a semi-presidential system were subsequently introduced in the 1990s (Sanches, 2020; Seibert, 2016). Though instability characterizes the political landscape, and despite the fact that São Tomé and Príncipe is one of the poorest countries in the world and as such entirely dependent on foreign aid, it is still a stable democracy; at least according to Freedom House. In a recent ranking, the country scores 84 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2021b). However, São Tomé and Príncipe presents us with a number of conundrums, some of which align with the findings presented in relation to Vanuatu and Kiribati.

Much like the situation in Vanuatu, and quite unlike the consensus-seeking and stable political culture of Kiribati, politics in São Tomé and Príncipe is fraught by instability. Though it is accurate that ever since the introduction of multipartyism, elections to the 55-member

strong parliament as well as to the presidency have been regular, it is highly uncommon that a government completes its term in office. From 1991-2015, São Tomé and Príncipe had eighteen different governments under the leadership of fourteen different prime ministers (Seibert, 2016). The most recent parliamentary elections, in 2018, appear to have given rise to a somewhat more stable situation as the government is still in power (African Development Bank Group, 2021). The results from the September 2021 presidential elections might however give rise to renewed instability. This since Guilherme Posser da Costa, who was backed up by a coalition to the ruling party *Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe-Social Democratic Party* (MLSTP-PSD) lost the vote to Carlos Vila Nova, from the main opposition party *Independent Democratic Action* (ADI) (Reuters, 2021). Hence, the newly elected president and the incumbent prime minister represent different political parties. This can possibly alter the dynamics of how São Tomé and Príncipe is governed, which would neither be uncommon nor out of character for how politics has been practised in this island state. This is due to two different but related circumstances. The first one is institutional: the country has a semi-presidential system in which the prerogatives of the president on the one hand and the prime minister on the other have historically been vague, making it all the easier for the president/prime minister to overstep boundaries that the other understands to be within their domain. Though the constitution was amended in 2003 to among other things make clear distinctions as to the specific rights of the two different offices, individuals holding office continue to transgress what is within the remit of their respective positions (Seibert 2016, p. 997). This is quite likely related to the second circumstance that has more to do with aspects that concern personalities than with institutional features. The fact of the matter is that political parties in São Tomé and Príncipe are neither formed on the basis of ideology nor are their platforms very different. To put it in another way; the policies that they put forth are more or less similar (Seibert 2016, p. 996). When such is the case, politics becomes more centred on the personalities of the leaders of the political parties than on actual politics. Indeed, politics in São Tomé and Príncipe is wedded to the personalities of the leadership of the political parties (Frynas et al., 2003; Sanches, 2020; Seibert, 2006; Seibert, 2016). As a consequence thereof, when leadership alters, relations between political parties may very well also alter. And when such alterations occur among the leadership of the highest positions in the country, the president and the prime minister, the result may be – and in effect has often been – far reaching, leading to dismissals in both directions, resulting in governments not being able to complete their term in office (Seibert, 2016).

This particular circumstance has also led to another feature of the São Toméan political landscape which aligns not so much with our findings on Vanuatu and Kiribati, but to that of politics on a large part of the African continent: namely that of alliances shifting to the extent that politics resembles a virtual musical chairs (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Cheeseman & Tendi, 2010; Saati, 2015). Political adversaries of today are joining forces in government coalitions the next, only to break apart and re-join in a new formation soon thereafter. This would undeniably be more difficult if political parties were ideological in character, but when they are not and the grab for power takes precedence, coalitions that would not seem to be possible, all of the sudden are. What, however, sets São Tomé and Príncipe apart from much of mainland Africa is that – similarly to Vanuatu – the turmoil that has shaped the political landscape ever since the introduction of multipartyism is handled within the boundaries of the constitution and without violence. The mere fact that the country has, for one, conducted regular and free elections to both the legislature and the presidency on a timely manner as stipulated by the prescriptions of the constitution sets this country apart from many of its neighbours on the continent. That these elections have, secondly, resulted in a shift in government power no less than six times (1994, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2018) is also

rather unique in African politics. Furthermore, even though São Tomé and Príncipe is not a high performer when it comes to female representation in parliament, 11% of the country's sitting MPs are female, which is a higher percentage compared to both Vanuatu and Kiribati. Election violence does not occur and candidates and political parties that have lost, have accepted defeat and made room for the new MPs and ministers to take office (Seibert, 2016).

All these particularities, especially considering the regional context of Africa, speak to a democratic maturity that must be taken into consideration when one sets out to understand the state of democracy in this country. We are quite intrigued by these circumstances and are eager to reach a greater understanding as to the factors that explain this specific occurrence in São Tomé and Príncipe. How is it that democratic maturity appears to be so settled despite political instability, a lack of political ideologies among the political parties, constantly changing political alliances, friendship corruption, neo-patrimonial politics and poverty? When it comes to this last aspect, in contrast to the Kiribati case, we have not come across any studies that explore whether geopolitical consequences have been an effect of aid dependency: something that ought to be probed further.

Conclusion

If we were to revisit one of the central questions that was raised at the outset of this article – namely whether the statistical correlation between smallness and high levels of democracy in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe is borne out in political practice – our findings bring to evidence a nuanced picture that is neither a clear-cut “yes” or “no”. As the empirical results have shown, democratic processes and procedures are to a large extent functioning, but so are parallel structures, tendencies and occurrences that are less democratic. The findings from the three separate cases indicate some similarities and some differences. The main similarity – at this stage – appears to be the impact of personalities and various types of relationships when it comes to political outcomes. This is a finding that aligns with previous research on political life in small states in general (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018; Baldacchino, 2012; Baldacchino, 1997; Corbett, 2015; Sanches et al., 2021; Seibert 2006). In Vanuatu, Kiribati, and in São Tomé and Príncipe, smallness has contributed to a situation in which politicians are either family or friends (or know someone who is) with the electorate. Though this could possibly be beneficial in terms of those in power being more “in tune” with their constituents; better able to listen to their needs and wants, it also brings with it a risk of corruption, patronage and expectations to deliver certain outcomes, something that we have seen in all of the cases.

On a theoretical level, this finding highlights the relevance of actor-oriented explanations for purposes of increasing our understanding of the state of democracy in various countries. It encourages us to focus on analysing political elite relationships when we continue studying these small states. It has been theorized that the extent to which political elites are united or disunited can have an effect on the quality of democracy and that this can be determined by analysing whether, and how, political elites in a given society are integrated or differentiated from each other (Burton & Higley, 2001). Scholars Burton & Higley (2001) have developed an analytical framework that makes a systematic analysis for understanding such relationship dynamics possible, by among other aspects, studying communication networks and political party cultures (i.e. in terms of them being hierarchical or flat). This analytical framework has proven quite useful in some of our earlier work (see Saati, 2015, p. 255). Moving forth to investigate such relations in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe, we expect that it will be valuable again.

In regard to modernization theory, its explanatory value in the three cases in this study is mixed. Even though we have only performed an initial review of Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe in this article, we offer some tentative thoughts on the relationship between democracy, economics and religion that can contribute to the ongoing debate among scholars concerning the limitations/merits of this particular theoretical strand. The fact that particularly Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe are among the poorest countries in the world, yet are rather well functioning democracies – albeit with some challenges – contradicts one of the tenets of modernization theory; namely that economic development and democracy go hand in hand, conversely; poverty and democracy do not. Hence, this theoretical lens does not suffice to explain democracy in Kiribati and in São Tomé and Príncipe. Another central tenet of this theory is that, as states become more modern, and hence secular, they will also become democratic. Vanuatu, however, appears to contradict this notion which should also make us more hesitant to overvalue modernization theory in our analyses on democracy, not only in the cases that we devote attention to here, but in our efforts to understand the state of democracy in general.

Continuing this theoretical discussion, by looking at our findings from Kiribati, we also find that yet another strand within the democratization literature that does not receive as much scholarly attention as modernization theory might have explanatory relevance; namely theories that deal with external factors, i.e. structures and factors, that are outside of the state in which we are trying to understand the state of democracy. The geopolitical factors brought to attention when discussing Kiribati is a good case in point. Here, we noticed that Kiribati's low economic development renders its politicians vulnerable to external pressure; something that its powerful neighbours China and Taiwan have taken advantage of in terms of making a habit of granting aid disbursements prior to, rather than after, national elections. Much in the same way that Burton & Higley (2001) propose an analytical framework for systematically studying political elite relationships, Levitsky & Way (2005) have developed a theoretical scheme for systematically studying external factors in terms of various forms of foreign leverage and linkage that can help us understand the state of democracy in individual cases. They propose that foreign leverage can be studied by analysing a government's vulnerability to external pressure, whereas linkage involves studying the density of a country's ties primarily to other democratic states as well as to multilateral institutions (Levitsky & Way, 2005). We have utilized this framework at an earlier time (Saati, 2015, pp. 199-221) and found it helpful for a systematic analysis. Hence, we expect that it will be useful again when we explore these particular issues in depth in our three cases.

Before discussing each of the individual three cases and what we believe are the most relevant issues to pursue as we move forth in this project, we think it is also pertinent to reflect a bit on the standard against which we analyse these countries; i.e. the notion of liberal democracy. It is likely that some would say, perhaps in particular pointing to the Kiribati case and the local Maneaba system, that the very idea of liberal democracy is foreign to this country and therefore it does not make sense to use this standard to evaluate and try to understand politics as practised there. We would however disagree. To begin with, these states indeed exhibit qualities, processes and procedures that we inherently associate with that of a liberal democracy and therefore, the concept as such is analytically useful. Secondly, a major drawback in comparative politics has been to exclude small states from analysis while focusing attention only on larger states. These larger states and their brand of democracy, in turn, are analysed in relation to how well (or not) they reflect the notion of a liberal democracy. Hence, for the purposes of being able to include the study of small states within the same literature; and for the purposes of being able to compare large and small states to each other, the same concept against which we measure the state of democracy must apply.

On a case by case basis, our early analysis of the case of Vanuatu inspires us to increase knowledge about the potential interplay between religion and politics. Political leaders, more so than political parties, seem to have an influential effect on political practices. Thus, it would appear pertinent to deepen our knowledge as to whether or not the politicians of today are simultaneously leaders of churches, such as they appear to have been during the early years of independence. And, if they indeed are, whether this even matters for political outcomes and the state of democracy. To the best of our knowledge, recent scholarship on Vanuatu has not probed this issue and therefore we believe that there is an important knowledge gap waiting to be addressed.

When it comes to the case of Kiribati, we are intrigued by the parallel governing structures that are at play in the separate atolls throughout the country, and believe that this is a matter that deserves further exploring. When conflicts arise between the two different systems, which one takes precedence and how do these power struggles play out? Though we understand that the formal system, headed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, *legally* ought to take precedence, we are not at all sure as to whether this is the case. We would also be interested in understanding what the informal Maneaba system implies for the participation of women and younger people in issues that concern the local governing of the atoll, as the system clearly favours older men. Lastly, the factors brought to attention in this article related to aid dependency ought to be further investigated in order to understand the possibilities for, and how, politicians in this country manoeuvre what appears to be very tricky geopolitical terrain.

Finally, the São Tomé and Príncipe case presents us with intriguing findings, both in isolation and in relation to the broader regional context, i.e. the African continent. The fact that political instability has not resulted in political violence, the fact that government has changed through the ballot box and has done so peacefully no less than six times since the onset of multipartyism in the early 1990s, are truly remarkable occurrences seen in the light of the regional context. These manifestation encourage further inquiry, and we believe that fieldwork and interviews with politicians, members from civil society organizations and journalists will be essential for gaining a deeper understanding about these occurrences. Furthermore, as with the case of Kiribati, the fact that São Tomé and Príncipe is very poor and aid dependent might have given rise to geopolitical effects that we are not aware of since there have not been any studies that have devoted attention to this matter. Hence, as we move forth researching this case, we shall make an effort to increase knowledge about this particular issue.

To conclude, our review of the state of democracy in Vanuatu, Kiribati and São Tomé and Príncipe show that most of the formal procedures and processes that we associate with that of a liberal democracy – that Freedom House in turn uses as its point of reference when making its annual rankings of countries in the world – are present. Our study, however, also shows that informal procedures and other occurrences and phenomenon that are less democratic are present in the three cases as well. We have pointed towards the empirical gaps that we argue are the most pressing ones to address in each of the individual cases for purposes of acquiring an even deeper understanding about how politics is practiced in the everyday, and how this affects the state of democracy. We have also suggested that actor-oriented theoretical perspectives and theories that stress external factors ought to be employed moving forth. Lastly, from a methodological perspective, qualitative work must continue to complement quantitative efforts. We suggest that fieldwork and interviews with different actors, network analysis and participant observations are useful methodological approaches by the help of which, the frontiers of this research field will be advanced.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the funding provided by the Swedish Research Council (grant no. 2020-03991) in order to conduct this research.

References

- African Development Bank Group. (2021). São Tomé and Príncipe - Mid-term review of the Country Strategy Paper 2018-2022 and 2021 Country Portfolio Performance Review. Retrieved from: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/sao-tome-and-principe-mid-term-review-country-strategy-paper-2018-2022-and-2021-country-portfolio-performance-review>
- Anckar, D. (2002). Why are small island states democracies? *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 365, 375-390.
- Anckar, D. (2006). Islandness or smallness? A comparative look at political institutions in small island states. *Island Studies Journal*, 1(1), 43-54.
- Anckar, D. (2010). Small is democratic, but who is small? *Arts and Social Sciences Journal*, 2(1), 1-10.
- Anckar, D. (2008). Size, islandness, and democracy: A global comparison. *International Political Science Review*, 29, 433-459.
- Baker, K., Ng Shiu, R., & Corbett, J. (2020). Gender, politics and development in the small states of the Pacific. *Small States & Territories*, 3(2), 261-266.
- Baldacchino, G. (2018). Mainstreaming the study of small states and territories. *Small States & Territories*, 1(1), 3-16.
- Baldacchino, G. & Veenendaal, W. (2018). Society and community. In Baldacchino, G. (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of island studies: A world of islands* (pp. 339-353). London: Routledge.
- Baldacchino, G. (2012). Islands and despots. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 50(1), 103-120.
- Baldacchino, G. (1997). *Global tourism and informal labour relations: The small-scale syndrome at work*. London: Mansell.
- Bratton, M. & van de Walle, N. (1997). *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime transitions in comparative perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burton, M. & Higley, J. (2001). The study of political elite transformations. *International Review of Sociology*, 11(2), 181-199.
- Cheeseman, N. & Tendi, B. (2010). Power-sharing in comparative perspective: the dynamics of 'unity government' in Kenya and Zimbabwe. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 48(2), 203-229.
- Clarke, M. (2019). Questions to help understand religion and development in Vanuatu. *SITES*, 16(1), 158-176.
- Constitution of Kiribati (1979, as amended to 2018) Retrieved from: <https://constitutions.unwomen.org/en/countries/oceania/kiribati>
- Coppedge, M. & Gerring, J. (2011). Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 247-267.
- Corbett, J. & Veenendaal, W. (2018). *Democracy in small states: Persisting against all odds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Corbett, J. & Veenendaal, W. (2016). Westminster in small states: comparing the Caribbean and pacific experience. *Contemporary Politics*, 22, 432-449.

- Corbett, J. (2015). "Everybody knows everybody": practicing politics in the Pacific Islands. *Democratization*, 22(1), 51-72.
- Dahl, R. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Dahl, R. A. & Tufte, E. R. (1973). *Size and democracy*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dahl, R. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Diamond, L., Fukuyama, F., Horowitz, D. L. & Plattner, M. F. (2014). Reconsidering the transition paradigm. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(1), 86-100.
- Diamond, L. J., & Tsalik, S. (1999). Size and democracy: The case for decentralization. In L. J. Diamond (Eds.), *Developing democracy: Towards consolidation* (pp. 117-160). Baltimore MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Fox, J. & Sandler, S. (Eds.) (2006). *Religion in world conflict*. London: Routledge.
- Freedom House. (2021a), Freedom in the world: Research methodology. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>
- Freedom House. (2021b), Countries and territories. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>
- Frynas, J. G., Wood, G., & Soares de Oliveira, R. M. S. (2003). Business and politics in São Tomé and Príncipe: From cocoa monoculture to petro-state. *African Affairs*, 102, 51-80.
- Gasiorowski, M. J., & Power, T. J. (1998). The structural determinants of democratic consolidation: Evidence from the third world. *Comparative Political Studies*, 31, 740-771.
- Hirczy, W. (1995). Explaining near-universal turnout: The case of Malta. *European Journal of Political Research*, 27(2), 255-272.
- Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Jones, B. & Petersen, M. J. (2011). Instrumental, narrow, normative? Reviewing recent work on religion and development. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(7), 1291-1306.
- Jurgensmeyer, M. (2010). The global rise of religious nationalism. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 64(3), 262-273.
- Levitsky, S. & Way, L. A (2005). International Linkage and Democratization. *Journal of Democracy*. 16(3), 20-34.
- Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review*, 53(1), 69-105.
- Lively, J. (2007). *Democracy*. Oxford: ECPR.
- Low, K. C. P. (2019). The Te Maneaba system and people management: The Kiribati case study. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 10(9), 56-67.
- Nimbtik, G. (2016). *Worlds in collision: An inquiry into the sources of corruption within Vanuatu government and society*. Doctoral Dissertation. School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University.
- Ott, D. (2000). *Small is democratic: An examination of state size and democratic development*. New York: Garland.
- Powell, G. B., Jr. (1984). *Contemporary democracies: Participation, stability and violence*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Przeworski, A. (2000). *Democracy and development: Political institutions and wellbeing in the world, 1950-1990*. Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press.

- Reuters. (2021). Sao Tome opposition leader Vila Nova wins presidential runoff. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sao-tome-opposition-leader-vila-nova-wins-presidential-runoff-2021-09-06/>
- Roberts, A., Seawright, J. & Cyr, J. (2012). Do electoral laws affect women's representation? *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(12), 1555-1581.
- Saati, A. (2015). *The participation myth: Outcomes of participatory constitution-building processes on democracy*. Doctoral Dissertation. Sweden: Umeå University.
- Sanches, E. R., Cheeseman, N., Veenendaal, W. & Corbett, J. (2021). African exceptions: democratic development in small island states. *Journal of International Relations and Development*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nic-Cheeseman-2/publication/352212184_African_exceptions_Democratic_development_in_small_island_states/links/60bf2e9092851cb13d88fe33/African-exceptions-Democratic-development-in-small-island-states.pdf
- Sanches, E. R. (2020). Transitions to democracy, institutional choices and party system stability: lessons from small African islands. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 38(2), 186-204.
- Sartori, G. (1991). Comparing and miscomparing. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 3(3), 243-257.
- Seibert, G. (2016). São Tomé and Príncipe 1975-2015: Politics and economy in a former plantation colony. *Estudos Ibero-Americanos*, 42(3), 987-1012.
- Seibert, G. (2006). *Comrades, clients and cousins: Colonialism, socialism and democratization in São Tomé and Príncipe*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Srebrnik, H. (2004). Small island nations and democratic values. *World Development*, 32(2), 329-341.
- Teorell, J. (2010). *Determinants of democratization: Explaining regime change in the world, 1972-2006*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thorhallsson, B. (2018). Studying small states: A review. *Small States & Territories*, 1(1), 17-34.
- Uakeia, T. (2016). Kiribati. In S. Levine (Eds.), *Pacific ways: Government and politics in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 93-102). Victoria, Australia: Victoria University Press.
- Vanhanen, T. (1997). *Prospects of democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Vanuatu National Statistics Office (2009). The 2009 National Census of Population and Housing. Retrieved from https://vnso.gov.vu/images/Public_Documents/Census_Surveys/Census/2009/2009%20Census%20Analytical%20Report%20-%20Vol2.pdf
- Veenendaal, W. (2021). How instability creates stability: The survival of democracy in Vanuatu. *Third World Quarterly*. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2021.1890577>
- Veenendaal, W. & Corbett, J. (2020). Navigating hyperfragmentation in small states: a comparison of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In L. Briguglio, J. Byron, S. Moncada & W. Veenendaal (Eds.), *Handbook of governance in small states* (pp. 26-37) London: Routledge.
- Veenendaal, W. (2020). When things get personal: How informal and personalized politics produce regime stability in small states. *Government & Opposition*, 55, 393-412.
- Veenendaal, W. (2015). Democracy in microstates: Why smallness does not produce a democratic political system. *Democratization*, 22(1), 92-112.

- Veenendaal, W. & Corbett, J. (2015). Why small states offer important answers to large questions. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(4), 527-549.
- Yates, R. (2020). Dependency on Australian aid and the introduction of inclusive education initiatives in Kiribati. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 7, 112-123.
- Yi, B. L. (2020). End 'embarrassing' all-male parliament, Vanuatu women urge new PM. Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vanuatu-politics-women-trfn-idUSKCN2241LP>