Background

The Salt-Nomane-Karamui (SNK) District is located about 60km south of the provincial capital of Kundiawa. It occupies two thirds of the total land mass of Simbu Province, thus it is the largest electorate compared to the other five (5) districts in the province, in terms of land area. The Electorate consists of 3 local level governments (LLGs): Salt, Nomane and Karimui. Collectively, the 3 LLGs have 64 ward councils with 24 in Salt LLG, 13 in Nomane LLG, and 27 in Karimui LLG.

Observations on Campaign Strategies

1. **Money to Food (MTF):** Money to food is a campaign culture that is commonly practiced and is very popular in SNK.
2. **Digital Campaign:** Candidates buy phones and flex cards for voters and other goods.
3. **Social Media Campaign:** Candidates use social media platforms (Whatsapp groups/Facebook groups) to campaign.
4. **Educational Qualifications and Experience:** Voters want better educated candidates to represent them.
5. **Nere–Tere (Take and Give):** Nere-Tere or Kaikai na Givim (Tok Pisin) and “Take and Give” is a factor for voters.
6. **Candidates Alliance:** Candidates align themselves with other candidates to share their second and third preferences of votes.
7. **Money Power Play:** It was also observed that candidates with more money were becoming more popular and powerful than those who had less money.
8. **Pre-polling Intimidation and threats:** High powered rifles were carried around openly by supporters and clan members of candidates.
9. **Hausman turned into campaign Houses:** Hausman is a big house specifically designed to accommodate only males belonging to a particular clan but in the election, they served as the house of meetings for candidates and their supporters.

Observations on Polling

- **Late arrival of polling team:** The polling team arrived very late in the afternoon therefore, people from one of the ward council did not vote.
- **Control, block and distributive voting:** In one of the LLGs, the ballots from Wards 2, 3 and 4 were all taken to one spot where votes were distributed to candidates accordingly.
- **Security issues:** in most polling stations in SNK, there was coercion and intimidation to which the security personnel had little control over.

Observations on Counting

- **Common Roll:** There were more ballot papers than the numbers on the common roll.
- **Names and numbers not matching:** Some of the marked ballot papers had numbers and names not corresponding.
- **Absences of ARO for Salt:** The absence of the ARO for Salt LLG was due to threats received during polling.
- **Two Ballot Boxes set a side:** Reports of hijacking of ballot boxes were made. There were complaints about ballot papers being marked outside and put into ballot boxes.
- **Delay in payment for Counting Officials:** The counting was suspended unnecessarily because of the delayed or non-payment of the counting officials which prolonged counting.
- **Counting Officials:** Most polling and counting officials were teachers and counting was easier.
- **Integrity of Ballot Papers:** There was a big argument between the scrutineers from Karimui LLG and Salt Nomane LLG.
- **Quality Check (common errors with Informal ballot papers):** Many ballot papers did not have the signature of the Presiding Officer at the back of the ballot papers.
- **Representation of Counting Officials:** All the counting officials were from Salt and Nomane LLGs and none from Karimui LLG.

Recommendations

- **Qualification of Candidates:** A legislation is needed to raise the minimum level of qualification for candidates.
- **Electoral Commissioners:** Election laws must be changed to allow for a team of Commissioners to run the Election rather than one Commissioner.
- **Common roll:** An updated common roll is a must.
- **Increase the presence of security personnel:** The current arrangement of security personnel is inadequate because there were instances where security personnel were over-powered by the locals.