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**Custom, Governance and Westminster  
in Solomon Islands:**

**Charting a Course Out of the Political Quagmire**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies

Massey University, Palmerston North,  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates whether the people of Solomon Islands would be better served by a form of governance that is politically hybrid than through the current Westminster unitary-state model.

In remote provinces such as Choiseul, the reach of the state is limited. Here, notions of citizenship and national identity have gained little traction because kin group relations underpin society and form the basis for peoples' identity. In such societies customary institutions, in the form of chiefs, and the church provide order. In these self-governing rural communities governance is distinctly parochial in its application and often hybrid in form.

This study examines whether the hybrid polities of such communities have an application within the proposed Federal Constitution of Solomon Islands. The thesis, first, examines the international concepts of governance that have shaped and provided a framework within which the state of Solomon Islands, and its systems of governance, have evolved. State governance today, is very much a product of historical antecedents. However, an analysis of these antecedents demonstrates that Solomon Islanders have been particularly adept at appropriating introduced systems for their own purposes, and matters of governance are no exception.

Using semi-structured interviews, the fieldwork component of this thesis examines the hybrid form of governance that exists in a Choiseulese village to determine whether such models have an application within the proposed Federal Constitution, thus providing a greater degree of political legitimacy than exists under the current Westminster system. Three tiers of government are proposed in the Federal Constitution – Federal, State and Community Governments. Of these, Community Governments provide a particularly suitable political arena where hybridised forms of village governance, which locally have a considerable degree of political legitimacy, can be combined with such functions of state as are necessary to achieve good governance. This, it is argued, will allow the development of forms of governance that are much more suited to local conditions than is possible under the current constitution.

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