a number of views of the future of the Pacific.

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Political parties are a central feature of the political process in most states, both democratic and otherwise, and thus rightly gain considerable attention from political scientists. As in other respects, so here too systematic scrutiny of the topic has lagged behind when it comes to Pacific Island states and territories. This is a gap that this book aims to fill and in many ways it succeeds in doing so.

Political Parties in the Pacific Islands brings together respected, experienced academics, many of them from the countries whose politics and party systems they have been commissioned to write about. Others (such as Ron May, writing about Papua New Guinea) have long been associated with scholarly work on their particular country. The result is an informative volume, well written, detailed, yet clear in depicting developments within particular countries and across the group of countries as a whole.

The book also benefits from its conceptual clarity. The contributors endeavor, with much success, to situate their studies of particular party arrangements—it is, as most demonstrate, too much in every case to talk of party “systems”—within familiar and accepted parameters of the political science literature. This permits comparisons to be made not only between one Pacific entity’s party system and the next but also, of course, between Pacific parties and developments as they have evolved elsewhere—in Western countries, but also in Africa, Asia, and in other island communities (in the Caribbean, for instance).

While the title of the book suggests a panoramic coverage of “the Pacific Islands,” as is often the case with such ambitions the final product is somewhat less comprehensive. For the most part, the focus is largely on Melanesia, no doubt reflecting, at least in part, the publication’s Australian origins. The very useful case studies, in which historical perspectives supplement contemporary assessments, review the origins and functions of political parties in Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor), Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji, with the closing chapter on Sāmoa perhaps allowing the editor, with his publishers, greater scope for deploying “the Pacific Islands” in the title.

An additional three chapters introduce the book, one (by the editor) striving to offer an overall analytical assessment of Pacific political parties; a second, by Steven Ratuva, looking at linkages between political parties and “tradition”; and a third, by Jon Fraenkel, examining the impact of Pacific electoral laws on Pacific politics and political parties. The themes and
patterns examined in these chapters—and particularly in the editor’s introduction—not surprisingly reflect the country-specific findings emphasized in the various case study chapters.

Scholars with interests in Pacific Islands politics will benefit considerably from the country studies contained in this work, and also from the broad comparative conclusions developed by the contributors. The editor’s use of a typology developed by Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond, and published in *Party Politics* in 2003, is well judged, allowing the character and basis for Pacific political parties, such as they are—“often the leaders of parties are also the only members” (29)—to be more readily understood. A table providing a summary of Pacific political parties is less well considered (30); while commendably going outside the seven countries discussed in separate chapters—thus broadening the book to encapsulate the wider Pacific—its author has been allowed to omit from the table two polities that are covered in the book (Timor-Leste and New Caledonia), as well as French Polynesia with its significant political party competition. A note could also have been attached to the entry on Niue—which is shown as having no political parties as of October 2004—advising that a political party, the Niue Action Party (formerly the Niue People’s Action Party), had previously held office there. The table—which includes a New Zealand dependency, Tokelau, but none of the French or US territories—also afforded an opportunity to bring some other Pacific entities, such as Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, and American Sāmoa, within the broader reach of the study’s comparative and conceptually precise aspirations. Even Jon Fraenkel’s otherwise admirable table summarizing Pacific electoral systems, political parties, and their predominance (or otherwise) in Pacific legislatures has been allowed to exclude Timor-Leste from its coverage (47).

The overall picture provided by this book is of a region in which parties have yet to achieve their full potential. It is not evident that they will ever be able to do so. Political parties developed to become an important component of politics and government under circumstances not easily replicated in the contemporary Pacific. Faced with the evidence of weak, fragmented, and dysfunctional parties that lack stability and coherence and are implausibly positioned to make any constructive contribution to the challenges of contemporary Pacific governance, Fraenkel wisely cautions against “institutional experiments designed to conjure into being party-based systems” (63), and he is surely right to do so. Efforts at institutional engineering, intended to contrive contexts conducive to the emergence of robust parties where they are absent, or their strengthening where they are present, may succeed, but there are no guarantees, and in any case this is surely one area in which the admonition “be careful what you wish for” also seems apposite.

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