

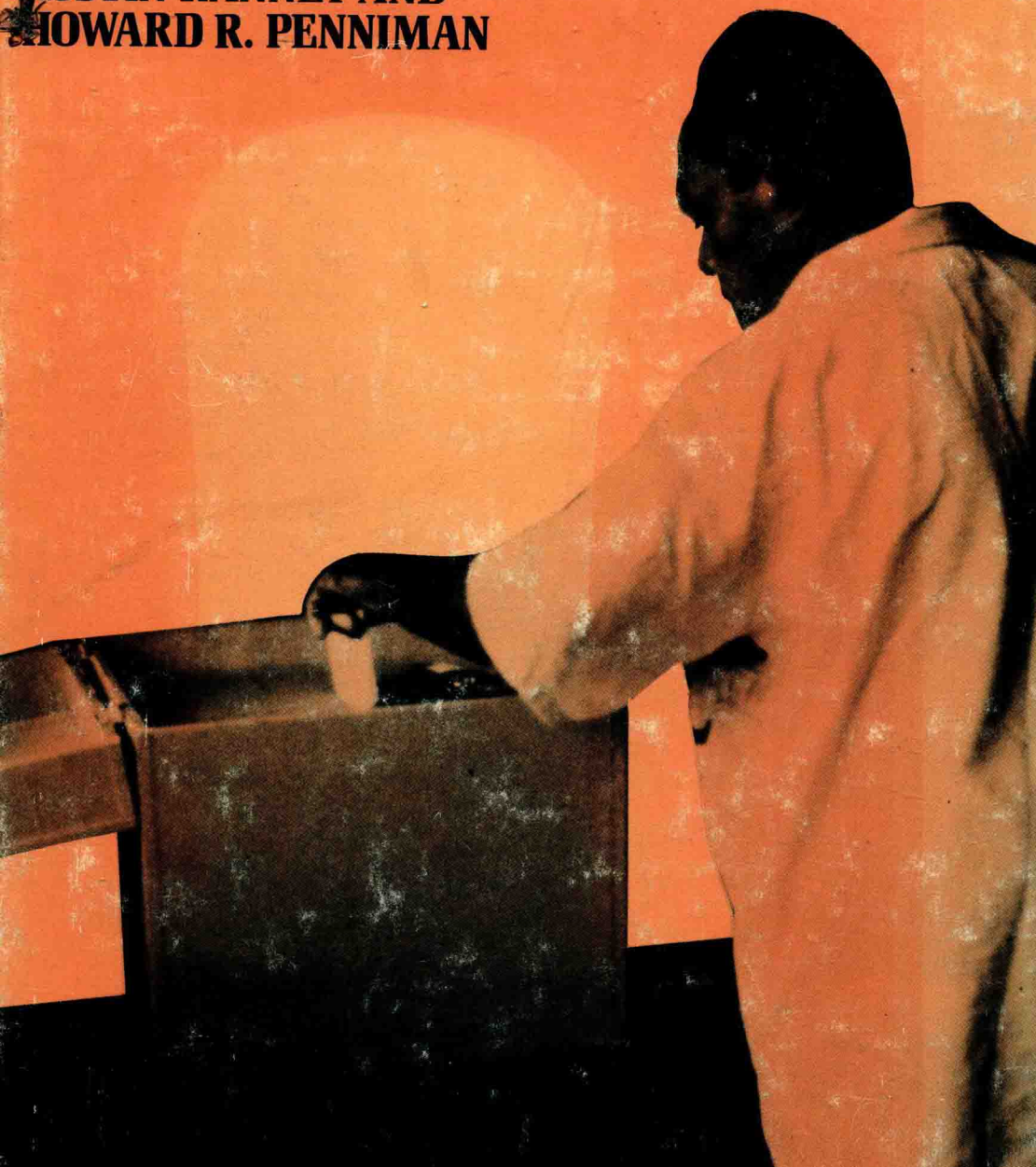
# **DEMOCRACY IN THE ISLANDS**

## **THE MICRONESIAN PLEBISCITES OF 1983**



American  
Enterprise  
Institute  
Studies in  
Political and  
Social  
Processes

**AUSTIN RANNEY AND  
HOWARD R. PENNIMAN**



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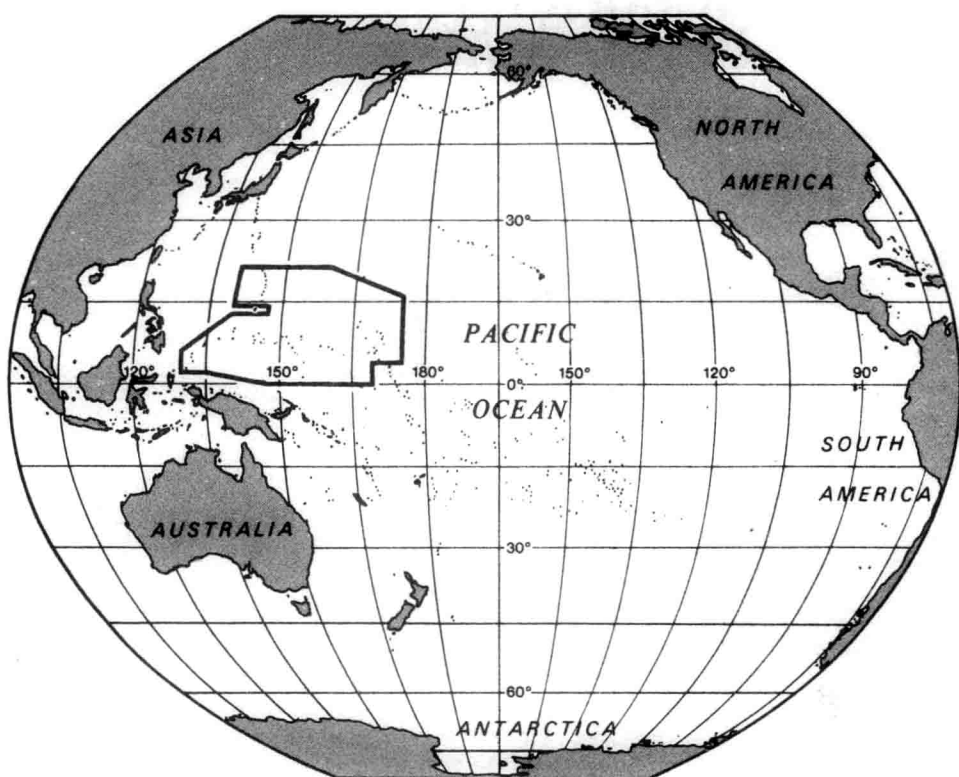
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ON THE COVER: A Palauan voter deposits his marked ballot in a double-lidded ballot box similar to those used in the FSM and the Marshall Islands. The cover photograph and the other photographs in this book were taken by Howard Penniman and Austin Ranney.

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# **DEMOCRACY IN THE ISLANDS**



The U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which includes most of Micronesia, is made up of 2,141 islands, 98 of them inhabited. They cover a land area of only 1,850 square kilometers but are scattered over 7.8 million square kilometers in the western Pacific Ocean.

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## President's Foreword

The research for this study was funded by the United States Information Agency, and its publication is supported by the Asia Foundation. The book, written by Austin Ranney and Howard R. Penniman, the codirectors of AEI's Program in Political and Social Processes, combines two of the program's longstanding interests: the conduct of competitive elections in Western and third world countries, and the role of referendums in democratic government. Although the three Micronesian polities involved have a combined population of less than 120,000, their problems and their future are of major interest for students of Pacific affairs as well as for people concerned with third-world politics in general. The area is of considerable strategic importance for the United States, its political and economic development has been a major test for American administrators and diplomats, and its future is a matter of concern for both the United Nations and the United States.

To conduct its study of the 1983 Micronesian plebiscites, AEI assembled an international team of scholars drawn from The American University, the University of British Columbia, the University of California, Berkeley, and Georgetown University. The six scholars made a total of seven trips to the area, observed the pre-election voter education programs, political campaigns, and voting, and participated in many discussions with Micronesian government and opposition leaders, election administrators, and journalists. Their report is another instance of AEI's continuing concern with democratic institutions and practices as well as with U.S. foreign and defense policies. We believe it sheds useful light on an important, though little known, part of the world.

WILLIAM J. BARODY, JR.  
President  
American Enterprise Institute

# Foreword

Where is Micronesia? Most people, hearing of the plebiscites described and analyzed in this book, start with that question. But it quickly leads to many others, because the events, so well described here, involve many wider issues such as the part the United Nations, and particularly the Trusteeship Council, have played in the ending of colonialism; the difficulties that administering powers have encountered in fulfilling the tasks undertaken in their trusteeship agreements; and the problems that small and scattered islands with minimal natural resources and a growing population face as they seek to take their place in the international political scene.

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which comprises most but not all of Micronesia, is the last of the eleven Trust Territories that have been administered under the United Nations Trusteeship system. The other ten, administered variously by Australia, Belgium, France, Italy, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, have all determined their future. Some have opted for independence; others have chosen to combine with neighboring countries or territories. The process has been as varied as one would expect with the differing geography, history, and, above all, human elements involved.

In the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations interest is now therefore centered on the political future of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The process of constitutional and political development, so well described in this book, had by the end of 1982 reached the point at which three of the four component parts of the Territory were ready to embark on consulting their people on their future political status by means of plebiscites. The fourth, the Northern Mariana Islands, had already chosen in 1975 to become a United States "Commonwealth." The government of the United States of America, as the administering authority, invited the Trusteeship Council to send missions to observe the three plebiscites—an invitation accepted by the council on December 20, 1982. I found myself, as president of the council, with the interesting task of leading two of the three observer missions.



Although the United Nations missions and the academic teams led by Professor Ranney and Professor Penniman, observed the same things, their interests and perspectives were different. The aims of the UN missions were practical and limited: first, to satisfy ourselves that the voting public understood the issues involved and, second, to satisfy ourselves that the plebiscites were fair and were carried out in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations, ensuring, *inter alia*, the secrecy of the vote and the accuracy of the counting. The findings of the UN missions were published in the official records of the Trusteeship Council.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Ranney and Professor Penniman and their colleagues observed the plebiscites from a different angle. As authorities on electoral processes, they saw these plebiscites in a larger context. They were interested in the social and geographical problems involved; for example, the problem of holding a referendum on complicated constitutional issues where culture is based on the spoken rather than the written word and the problem of organizing a plebiscite in a country consisting of islands scattered over a huge area of the Pacific Ocean. Their book examines the plebiscites in historical depth, not just analyzing the immediate political context in which they were held but also drawing conclusions about Western-style referendums in traditional societies. All this makes rewarding reading, not only for the student of political science but also for the practicing politician and diplomat.

Inevitably the paths of the two observing missions, diplomatic and academic, crossed on many occasions. We were able to exchange impressions to our mutual benefit. Reading both the UN reports and this book, I am struck by the general agreement on all matters which both considered. This is not surprising. I am revealing no confidences when I say that the UN mission, composed as it was of diplomats from four countries representing both the Western and the third worlds, reached agreement on their reports very easily. I find it very satisfactory that Professor Ranney and Professor Penniman, with their far greater knowledge and experience of plebiscites, should have reached similar conclusions. They do us, at the UN missions, the compliment of quoting our reports on many occasions. If only we had had the advantage of reading their book before writing our reports we should, I am sure, have used it extensively. But Professor Ranney and Professor Penniman do what the UN reports could not do: they paint in the complicated sociohistorical background. They compare and contrast the plebiscites and place them in a political context of democratic practices, which only scholars such as the au-

thors could undertake. In short, they have written the definitive book on a fascinating page of political history.

J. W. D. MARGETSON  
British Embassy, The Hague

## Note

1. Report of the UN Visiting Mission to Observe the Plebiscite in Palau, February 1983 (UN Document T/1851, 1983). Report of the UN Visiting Mission to Observe the Plebiscite in the Federated States of Micronesia, June 1983 (UN Document T/1860, 1983). Report of the UN Visiting Mission to Observe the Plebiscite in the Marshall Islands, September 1983 (UN Document T/1865, 1984).

# Preface

This book is a study of the plebiscites held in the Micronesian polities of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands in 1983 on the Compact of Free Association with the United States of America. The area called "Micronesia" includes a large number of small and thinly populated islands scattered across an area of the Central Pacific bounded by Hawaii, the Philippines, Japan, and New Guinea. Many of the islands were captured from Japan by the United States in World War II, and in 1947 the United Nations placed most of them in a UN "strategic trust territory" to be administered by the United States.

During the course of the U.S. trusteeship, four distinct Micronesian polities have emerged: the Northern Marianas, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. In 1976 the voters of the Northern Marianas voted to become a Commonwealth of the United States (a status similar though not identical to that of Puerto Rico). The other three polities negotiated with the United States a Compact of Free Association, according to which each Micronesian polity would gain control over its domestic and international affairs with the notable exception that the United States would retain control over the defense and international security of each polity and would provide substantial economic aid to each for at least fifteen years after the Compact went into effect.

In 1983, plebiscites<sup>1</sup> were held in Palau (February), the Federated States of Micronesia (June), and the Marshall Islands (September) in which the voters registered their approval or disapproval of the Compact and also indicated their preferences for independence or some other future status if the Compact were disapproved.

These plebiscites are interesting for several reasons. They interest students of international law because they were a major step in establishing a new and unusual form of international status. They interest students of American strategic affairs because they were a necessary step in defining the American status in a part of the world that was the scene of major fighting in World War II and that remains

today an area of considerable strategic significance. They interest students of political, social, and economic development in the third world because they came after centuries of foreign rule—first by Spain, then by imperial Germany, then by Japan, and finally, from the mid-1940s to the mid-1980s, in a trusteeship by the United States.

The present writers, however, are concerned mainly with the conduct of elections in democratic polities. We have analyzed both general elections for public offices and referendum elections on specific issues in more than thirty developed Western-style countries,<sup>2</sup> but we have never before had the opportunity to observe elections conducted in conditions as unusual and demanding as those surrounding the 1983 Micronesian plebiscites. It is therefore not surprising that we eagerly seized the opportunity to make this study when it was presented to us.

In the pages to come we will describe the unusual circumstances of the plebiscites in more detail. We will note here, however, that in many ways they resembled those described by J.-H. Hamel, the chief electoral officer of Canada, in his account of elections among the Indians and Eskimos in Canada's Northwest Territories. Elections in both places have had the following characteristics:

- Very small electorates divided into tiny communities separated from one another by vast distances
- Native cultures built mainly on oral rather than written communications
- Many different native languages and cultures
- A severe climate and a subsistence economy<sup>3</sup>

Micronesia's climate is hot and humid rather than subarctic, and its peoples are scattered over vast expanses of ocean rather than tundra; but in most respects Micronesia's electoral problems are similar to those in Canada's Northwest Territories. And the fact that in both areas those problems have been handled quite well is a matter of both interest and encouragement for observers like Hamel and ourselves.

Let us say a word about the circumstances of and the participants in the study reported here. In 1982 the United States Information Agency made a grant to the American Enterprise Institute to study the 1983 plebiscites and to engage in seminars and other discussions with Micronesian political leaders, public officials, and journalists concerning the plebiscites. The present writers served as the project's codirectors, and we assembled an international roster of the following scholars to work with us:

David Butler, Nuffield College, Oxford University  
Alan C. Cairns, University of British Columbia

Eugene C. Lee, University of California, Berkeley  
Richard G. Smolka, The American University  
Raymond E. Wolfinger, University of California, Berkeley

The roster of scholars was divided into teams, and the teams made the following visits to the three polities:

- Republic of Palau  
Howard Penniman and Richard Smolka, October 1–8, 1982  
Howard Penniman and Richard Smolka, November 18–27, 1982  
Alan Cairns, Howard Penniman, and Richard Smolka, February 3–16, 1983
- Federated States of Micronesia  
Eugene Lee and Austin Ranney, to Ponape and Truk, February 14–22, 1983  
Eugene Lee to Yap, Truk, and Ponape; Richard Smolka to Ponape; Raymond Wolfinger to Truk and Ponape; Austin Ranney to Ponape, June 17–25, 1983
- Republic of the Marshall Islands  
Austin Ranney and Raymond Wolfinger, to Majuro and Kwajalein, November 11–21, 1982  
Richard Smolka, to Majuro, August 8–14, 1983  
Howard Penniman and Richard Smolka, to Majuro, September 1–11, 1983  
Austin Ranney and Raymond Wolfinger, to the East-West Center, University of Hawaii, and to Kwajalein, September 1–11, 1983  
David Butler, to Kwajalein and Majuro, September 1–11, 1983

The observers' scholarly inclinations and the terms of the grant led us to focus on the quality of the elections, not on the merits or demerits of the Compact of Free Association. Most observers of most elections probably develop some preference for one side or another, and very likely we were no exception. From the few and fragmentary remarks our scholars made on the subject, however, we seemed to be divided on the question of how we would have voted had we been Micronesians. In any event, like all scholars of elections, we know that properly conducted elections do not guarantee good results, however defined; and how the Micronesians managed their plebiscites and why they voted as they did, not which side had the best cause, were our concerns.

The purpose of this book is to set forth in some detail our observations and conclusions about the conduct and significance of the plebiscites. In writing it we have been greatly assisted by the special help of Alan Cairns for the chapter on Palau, Eugene Lee for the chapter on the Federated States of Micronesia, and Richard Smolka

for the chapter on the Marshall Islands. Brother Henry Schwalenberg, S.J., read the entire manuscript and made many helpful suggestions. We are also deeply grateful to E. C. Downs and Donald Hannaford of the Department of the Interior's Office of Territorial and International Affairs, who guided us skillfully through Micronesia's physical, cultural, and political geography; and to Dr. Gregory Winn of the United States Information Agency, who administered our grant with energy and attention. Finally, we are grateful to The Asia Foundation and its president, Ambassador F. Haydn Williams, for the grant supporting the book's publication.

It should be noted, however, that, although our colleagues provided many materials and insights, we who wrote this book are solely responsible for its contents.

AUSTIN RANNEY AND HOWARD R. PENNIMAN

Washington, D.C.

January 1985

## Notes

1. The term *plebiscites* is sometimes considered synonymous with *referendums*—that is, elections in which voters vote directly upon questions of public policy rather than indirectly by choosing the public officials who decide the questions: see David Butler and Austin Ranney, eds., *Referendums: A Study in Practice and Theory* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), chap. 1; and Jean-Marie Denquin, *Référendum et Plébiscite* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1976). Here we follow Denquin's usage, which defines a plebiscite as a particular kind of referendum in which the voters of a jurisdiction vote directly upon its international and legal status—as was the case in the three Micronesian polities in 1983.

2. The American Enterprise Institute's "At the Polls" series, under the general editorship of Howard R. Penniman, has published more than twenty volumes on the conduct of general elections in major democratic countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela. In addition, David Butler, Howard R. Penniman, and Austin Ranney edited *Democracy at the Polls* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), a cross-sectional study of candidate elections in twenty-eight democratic countries. Austin Ranney has edited volumes on the 1980 and 1984 U.S. national elections. AEI has published several volumes on referendums: David Butler and Austin Ranney, *Referendums*; Anthony King, *Britain Says Yes: The 1975 Referendum on the Common Market* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1977); and Austin Ranney, ed., *The Referendum Device* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981).

3. J.-H. Hamel, "Native Participation in Free Elections: The Case of the Northwest Territories (Canada)," *Electoral Studies*, vol. 2 (1983), pp. 149–154.

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