



Report on the Observation of the 2020 General Election of the Autonomous Bougainville Government



**Buka, Bougainville
November 2020**

ABOUT THE BOUGAINVILLE WOMEN'S FEDERATION

The Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF) is an umbrella organisation that advocates for the women of post-conflict Bougainville. Its coverage includes 13 district women's federations and BWF is represented at the Council of Elders, the Community Government and ward levels. BWF engages in advocacy to ensure legislation, policies and programmes developed and amended by the Autonomous Region of Bougainville are inclusive and responsive to the needs and priorities of women in Bougainville.

The women of Bougainville played a central peace-building role in the peace and reconciliation process that ended the Bougainville civil conflict (1988-1997). Building on this strength, the Bougainville Women's Federation was born in September 2012. In June 2020, Bougainville Women's Federation had its Act passed in the Bougainville House of Representatives establishing the organization to be a legislated non-governmental organization representing the interests of women through women's organizations in Bougainville. Members are district women's federations and affiliated organisations. The Executive Committee is the governing body of the Federation and is supported by the Secretariat staff who implement projects for and on behalf of the Federation.

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DISCLAIMER

Data collected, analysis and findings, opinions expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the Bougainville Women's Federation and do not necessarily reflect the views of agencies and organisations that supported the project.

Cover Photo: Bougainvilleans cast their votes in Arawa.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After five electoral cycles, Bougainville has proven its political and social will to conduct peaceful elections. Recognizing the historic importance of the 2020 general elections, voters held high expectations for a well-planned and successfully executed election as they turned out to elect the body that will negotiate the region's independence from PNG. Moreover, the elections presented an opportunity to support greater political participation of women and promote their inclusion in the process for independence.

The new coronavirus pandemic impacted international travel, resulting in limited international election observation and heightening the need for citizen observation and promoting election integrity. Leading the largest domestic observation effort, the Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF) trained and deployed 26 non-partisan citizen observers to 127 polling stations across the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) to monitor voting processes, participation of women and implementation of government guidelines on preventing the spread of COVID-19. The BWF observers also conducted interviews with 181 community leaders, candidates and election officials and collected data on incidents of violence against women.

Conducting an election during the COVID-19 pandemic, in a region already challenged by limited infrastructure and financial resources, is a commendable achievement. Yet, issues pertaining to election administration remain to be addressed as they affect public confidence in the election process. Despite some progress in women's political participation, concerns over women's ability to fully participate in the electoral process as voters, candidates, or polling officials—free from threats and intimidation from their immediate family or clan—persist. These factors make the country's path to independence more challenging.

Concerted efforts are needed to improve institutional capacity to conduct elections and create a functional, pluralistic, representative, and inclusive political system to meet citizens' expectations and set Bougainville on a clear path to becoming the world's newest democratic country. The role of civil society will remain crucial in Bougainville's road to peaceful and inclusive negotiations for independence.

The election observation was part of BWF's continuous efforts to advocate to stakeholders including political actors that women should be included as equal participants in all aspects of the electoral process, free from the fear of violence. BWF presents in this report the key findings of its observation and recommendations to facilitate active and meaningful participation of women in building a peaceful and democratic Bougainville.

BWF will continue to promote the importance of monitoring violence against women in elections and incorporating gender-aware initiatives to empower women in the Bougainville political process. For this purpose, BWF will work with election stakeholders including civil society organizations (CSOs) across Bougainville to advocate for strategies to mitigate violence and improve inclusion in future elections.

INTRODUCTION

Seen as a step closer to nationhood, the AROB 2020 general elections were largely viewed as equally, if not more, important than last year's referendum for independence. In 2019, large swaths of locals headed to the polls to vote in a non-binding referendum for the region's independence, following a ten-year conflict between the Bougainville Region and Papua New Guinea's (PNG) central government. The exploitation of the Panguna mine, once the largest open-pit gold mine in the world, became the main source of contention between the local population and the country's political elite based in the capital, due to differences about revenue sharing and a devastating environmental impact. The peace process that followed provisioned that a referendum would be conducted to gauge the local population's views about the political future of the region. Conducted in November 2019, the non-binding referendum showed a clear choice: more than 98% voted for separation from PNG.



Photo: Voter line in Buka

For the 2020 general elections, the Office of Bougainville Election Commission (OBEC) set up a total of 618,000 polling booths throughout the region. OBEC's voter registration efforts included a door-to-door campaign and using the Look-In System¹. With support from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), OBEC provided training for polling officials, many of whom, including a number of women, were new. The recruitment process was generally transparent, however engaging women as Returning Officers and Presiding Officers remained a challenge.

The elections were held over a three-week period, from 12 August to 1 September. Additionally, a three-day extension was provided to Bougainvillians In Bougainville (BIB) and Bougainvillians outside of Bougainville (BOB) to cast their vote at specially designated voting centers. Sorting of the ballot paper began on 2 September 2020 and ended on 5 September 2020. Formal counting began on 7 September and ended on 23 September with the last declaration announced. The

¹ An electronic roll look-up system that was deployed to the polling centres for "Bougainvilleans inside Bougainville" where voters who were outside of the constituency in which they were registered could vote.

return of writs was delayed from the original deadline of 15 September 2020 to 24 September 2020, due to the voting arrangements for BIB and BOB. In advance of the polling, the Office of the Electoral Commission (OBEC) announced publicly the polling schedules for each community, both on its website and through public displays accessible for women and the marginalized groups inclusive of people living with disabilities. OBEC also convened separate orientation sessions with scrutinneres and election observers. OBEC registered 222,333 voters in the 13 districts in AROB and in five centres in PNG. The overall voter turnout was 64%, which is lower than the turnout for the 2019 Referendum.

Due to COVID-19, polling was not conducted outside of PNG. The elections were organized under a set of restrictions imposed as part of the government's response to the pandemic. The PNG government adopted a series of measures to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, including the Emergency Act² in April 2020 and the Pandemic Act in June 2020³. Consequently, OBEC protocols provisioned that polling officers wear personal protective equipment, officials sanitize their hands before every exchange, and polling stations are set up to allow social distancing.

Despite difficulties related to travel restrictions and concerns about COVID-19, a total of 444 candidates ran for office in the 2020 general elections, contesting 40 seats in the Bougainville House of Representatives. The election included races for the Bougainville President, "open" seats for geographic constituency representatives (33 seats), reserved seats for women (three seats) and seats for former combatants (three seats).

The number of women candidates has increased compared to the 2015 elections when 35 women ran for office. In the 2020 elections, two women ran for president, 16 women ran for the open seats, and 27 contested the seats reserved for women. Similar to the 2015 elections, one woman candidate won a seat in the open race. After the elections, two of the women were nominated as ministers in the AROB Executive. BWF acknowledges and appreciates the efforts of all the pioneer women leaders who have been instrumental in the peace process and contested in this year's election. They are an inspiration for other women to take more leadership roles in Bougainville.

These achievements are particularly notable in a region with one of lowest levels of women's political participation. Structural barriers and cultural or traditional norms hinder women's political participation, including their rights to vote and choose their leaders. Historically, women have been forced to vote for candidates preferred by their husbands or village chiefs and prevented from running for office or serving as election administrators. In areas of AROB dominated by patriarchal systems, women's roles are confined to the home, unlike matriarchal communities where women hold value due to the ability of owning land and having the right to voice their issues.

However, men still play a major role in making decisions for the sister or aunty in the matriarchal districts when it comes to traditional obligations as a protector of the clan. Women are leaders by birthright and the empowered ones are the ones that advocate and speak up on issues affecting them and their communities.

2 Emergency Act 2020, http://www.parliament.gov.pg/uploads/acts/Emergency_%28General_Provisions%29%28COVID_19%29_Act_2020_%28No._2_of_2020%29.pdf

3 National Pandemic Act 2020, http://www.parliament.gov.pg/uploads/acts/20A_08.pdf

Moreover, the Pacific region has one of the highest levels of gender-based violence in the world. In PNG, where gender-based violence has been an issue for generations, it is taboo to speak of violence happening in the family, community, and the nation as a whole. Gender-based violence often happens in private and is difficult to prove or demonstrate with evidence. Offenses often go unreported for fear of repercussions, which serves to perpetuate the issue. Violence also impacts women's participation in politics and elections. Violence against women in elections (VAW-E) is defined as any act of gendered violence that is directed primarily at women simply because they are women who have aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities (for example, working as election officials or attending campaign rallies) or because they have made a commitment to vote. Any use or threat of force to harm persons or property with the intention of influencing the electoral process that has a disproportionate or different impact on women because of their marginalized and vulnerable status in society is also considered as violence against women in elections. In AROB, family or clan voting is a norm; when a woman does not vote for a relative who runs for office, intimidation, hate speech, threats, and sexist language are used as a form of intimidation. Women's character, integrity or moral principles can be put in question by gossip about personal and marital issues, which is a perfidious form of violence as other women are co-opted to practice it against women raising their status by contesting in elections.



Photo: BWF election observers 2020

While violence is not the only barrier women face as they seek full and equal political rights, evidence from around the world shows the extent of the threat it poses to women's safety and a country's democratic values. Issues of election-related violence and gender-based violence (particularly domestic violence) are increasingly subject to examination, discussion and action in Bougainville, however, research on VAW-E in Bougainville and in the Pacific region is limited. In addition, while the pandemic has compounded gender inequalities and exacerbated the conditions for gender-based violence, data on the gendered impact of COVID-19 remains scarce. BWF aims to fill the information gap on these issues by monitoring transparency and inclusivity of elections which provides an opportunity to assess and gather data on barriers to women's political participation.

This report offers key findings from BWF’s observation of the general election and offers broad recommendations to strengthen women’s participation in elections and address VAW-E. It is important to note that BWF’s findings outlined in this report may be indicative of a larger and broader problem of violence against women in politics, beyond the limited scope of this initiative. BWF strongly encourages stakeholders to continue exploring the issue of VAW-E in the context of Bougainville and develop strategies to address this important issue.

METHODOLOGY

With support from the National Democratic Institute, building on its experience monitoring the 2019 referendum for independence, the Bougainville Women’s Federation (BWF) used a mixed-method approach to monitor the 2020 elections. The organization trained and deployed 26 non-partisan citizen observers to 127 of the 618 total polling stations across AROB. BWF’s observers used checklists designed to collect data throughout the main phases of the voting process: opening of polling stations, voting, closing of polling stations, recording critical incidents, and vote counting. Observers also conducted 181 key informant interviews with community leaders, candidates, and election officials to gauge their views on the overall electoral process and collected data on incidents of violence against women, as well as on the implementation of government guidelines on COVID-19 and their impact on women’s electoral participation. In addition to assessing the electoral environment, the project aims to raise awareness of gender and COVID-19 related issues and advocate for changes in the next electoral cycles. By observing and reporting on the 2020 general elections, BWF continues aiming to fill the knowledge gap on the issue of violence against women in elections.

To inform the design of the project, before the elections, BWF hosted a stakeholder roundtable to discuss the issue of and explore ways to mitigate and prevent violence against women in elections in Bougainville. After the elections, BWF conducted a series of presentations for local officials, CSOs, women candidates, and representatives of international organizations, and organized a debriefing with observers to draw lessons for future election observation projects.

The BWF observers were able to observe all polling places according to the deployment plan. Bad weather conditions, including heavy rain cutting access to polling places, and locals’ suspicion toward strangers due to COVID-19 required some contingency planning. BWF would like to express appreciation for the support that polling officials and security forces provided to observers throughout the process.

KEY FINDINGS OF INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS

A sense of making history generates excitement. Viewing it as a historic moment, key informants acknowledged the elections as a high-stake event not to be taken for granted since the newly-elected body is expected to “lead the region into the future”. Many appreciated that the electoral process was overall inclusive, accessible, and safe. In particular, many interview participants responded positively to the fact that women choose to run for office, including for the presidency.

“The upcoming election is more important compared to the referendum. The upcoming election talks about negotiation, consultation and final ratification”—male, Siwai, chief

“It is a very important and crucial election as we need young and visionary leaders for good governance. Referendum was bringing us to the door and this holds the key to the door to Independence”—female, Buka, women’s representative

“This election gives me a feeling of content and achievement. It’s a sign of progress. Referendum was only yesterday and now we go into voting to elect who leads us into Independence. So impressed with the elections so far.”—male, Nissan, teacher

Election administration deficiencies lead to some frustration. Comparing this election to last year’s referendum, many noted some uncertainty and confusion about the electoral process. Some participants complained about electoral roll issues and did not understand why the referendum roll was not used for these elections.⁴ Some were not happy that polling places were moved or found the setup inconvenient, which led to frustration. In some participants’ view, people with disabilities and mothers might not have been able to participate as voters due to these logistical issues. Additionally, interviewees noted that there were insufficient numbers of polling stations and polling officers, and limited enforcement of COVID-19-related policies. These issues were mainly seen as a result of inadequate planning and resources allocated to the elections. Nevertheless, these “hiccups” did not seem to have affected the voters’ motivation, their “vigorous involvement,” and the sense that they were participating in a historic event.

“There is a positive feeling everywhere. Everyone is so eager to hear the results as it is a culmination of what the referendum lighted up and what it meant to the people. The planning, processes and the execution of the referendum was by far the best compared to the current election. Time constraints marred the voting in an attempt to squeeze polling and counting into a very limited timeframe. Distance of polling places due to limited resources and understrength manpower led to the real voting population numbers not captured.”—female, Bana, teacher

⁴ The electoral roll was based on the roll used for the 2019 referendum which was updated for the general elections to remove voters who were eligible for the referendum but not for the general elections and to register youth who reached voting age since the referendum. See IFES, Elections in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, 2020 General Elections, Frequently Asked Questions, https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_bougainville_papua_new_guinea_2020_general_elections_july_2020.pdf

“There was more awareness of the referendum than the current election. The electoral roll used during the referendum election should have been used in this current election, as many people who voted during the referendum election were surprised they did not have their names on the current electoral roll.”—female, Torokina, candidate

“These elections have more restrictions in the polling places. Distance to polling places was a major hindrance to people with disabilities and mothers. Election officials were not uniformed and COVID-19 rules were not practiced in many polling places.”—male, Bana, scrutineer

“There is a feeling of uncertainty. (...) The referendum elections were better funded and organized compared to this one. Inconvenience was written all over this election. The execution failed in many aspects like the electoral roll and the voter access especially; polling stations were so inconveniently located. Many disadvantaged people missed out on voting.”—female, Torokina, ward representative

The environment is more conducive for an increased participation of women, but barriers persist.

Largely, participants noted that women’s political participation had increased and hoped that the recent elections were a platform for greater participation and inclusion of women in the process for independence. While participants in key informant interviews viewed women’s participation in the voter registration process as free and equal, some thought that access to reviewing voter rolls was not as easy due to illiteracy and location of the centers which meant traveling long distances and taking time away from household responsibilities. In these circumstances, understanding the voting process or candidates’ campaign platforms remained for the privileged or the more educated.

“In my opinion women had equal access to voter registration because they had the opportunity in their respective wards to be visited by their respective ward recorders. However in terms of public review process, I don’t think women had access to view the electoral rolls that were displayed due to locations and accessibility (only centre locations) and not enough time for the electoral rolls to be displayed as well.”—male, Torokina, police officer

“Women’s involvement in political events and activities was the highlight of this election in Nissan. They turned up in numbers during campaigns, rallies, and electoral awareness [sessions] and yes, women can equally participate without intimidation.”—male, Nissan, teacher

“So far in Bougainville political participation for women in the community was good, because men in the village respected them and made it safe for them to equally participate in political events and activities. I’ve seen that the Bougainville crisis has changed everyone’s mindset.”—male, Torokina, head teacher

Some interviewees shared that barriers to women’s political participation may be cultural, with families, especially husbands, impeding women’s political participation as politics is seen as the males’ realm wherein women vote for the husband’s preferred candidate or along kinship lines. The informants noted that these practices undermined women’s self-confidence and motivation to take on new social roles. They highlighted that vocal support of some male leaders for modernization may be paving the way for changes in social norms and that “taboos” were being left behind, providing an opening for women’s increased role in public life.

“Cultural norms were some barriers experienced. Marital problems, as well as men expecting their wives to vote their choices. Otherwise these were minor barriers as women played a key role in the electoral participation in Bougainville.”—female, Buin, lecturer

“Husbands Influence [is a barrier to women’s participation] but a very small percentage of that is an issue. Traditional or cultural norms. For example, women must take care of the house chores etc., otherwise these were not a major issue as women played a major role in the electoral participation.”—female, Buin, police officer

“Men believing that they are above women makes women think that they can not be leaders. Another [barrier] is family.”—female, Torokina, midwife

“Inferiority. Men contested many seats compared to women. Criticism against women as not being powerful was heard in elections. Polling places disadvantaged women especially to cast their votes. Women are the bosses of homes. Leaving homes would mean the family is unattended to. Some people walked for days just to exercise their voting rights.”—female Torokina, chairlady

“Traditional taboos where women are the backbones of a home thus being inferior to men when it comes to politics etc. were barriers I don’t believe in. Fear of the repercussions from their husbands is the underlying barrier that can be broken if men are taught to respect women rights. Lack of education to comprehend such issues is the main issue. More than 50 percent of Bougainvilleans are undereducated, thus barriers are imminent.”—female, Taonita Tinputz, police officer

“There are no barriers [to women’s participation]. I do not believe in taboos, as we progress with the modern world. Distances and polling processes were a joke. We must reach out to voters, and funding is important to hold elections. Funding is very important.”—male, Taonita Tinputz, security officer

“Taboos...I am a clan leader and I despise these beliefs. Men should start respecting women and eradicate such mentality in our communities. Voter illiteracy is another factor. Undereducated population is deemed to experience such.”—male, Wakunai, chief

“In our community you could hardly see women participating in politics, because they always underestimate themselves too much thinking that they are nothing compared to men.”—female, Torokina, ward official

“For a woman candidate it is always a struggle when contesting at the constituency or presidential seats against men. Many times they are being bullied which is not good. For the voters is like sometimes women don’t vote for a woman candidate which can change when women vote for women as men do. In such a way culture is the main hindrance for instance, women are for the kitchen which deprives them in decision making and taking part in election processes.”—female, Kieta, women’s leader

“Culture perpetuates the perception that women have limited capacity relative to their male counterparts, which in turn undermines their confidence and participation. The cultural framework of values and religious beliefs, have played a part in confining women to the private spheres of activity and excluding them from active participation in public life/women’s electoral participation.”—male, Buin, manager

Money was also seen as a barrier for women taking political leadership roles, and political parties remain largely male-dominated. Participants noted that running campaigns requires significant funding, but resources were not usually available for women who want to get involved beyond voting in elections.

“For the women candidates, money hinders them from challenging men in the elections and they end up losing.”—female, Buka, women’s leader

Some stakeholders opined that there were no barriers to women’s participation and pointed the finger at women themselves, saying that their lack of engagement equalled low interest in the process.

“Women are barriers themselves. For so long, women have hid behind men and inferior perceptions to justify their lack of participation. This has led to nothing but ignorance/laziness/don’t care attitude and blamed men for it. Women in other parts of Bougainville have shown that they can rise above men and here we are still stuck in our little world.”—female, Laruma, Ward representative

“Many times men do not raise women issues that is why women representatives are there to speak for or on behalf of them (...) Due to gender equality, women should take part in politics not like before, it is the women that stand behind men in North Nasioi, but today women have the right to stand out.”—female, Kieta, vice chairlady

Elections were largely peaceful, but in part clouded by campaign tactics and women’s intimidation. Participants largely reported violence-free elections and an overall safe and peaceful environment. Some participants also noted the intellectual quality of the candidates, while others appreciated that youth and women put their candidacies forward. Participants felt that it was their responsibility to participate peacefully and select the best men and women to lead consultations and negotiate Bougainville’s independence.

“Vigorous campaigning by all candidates as mirrored in this election shows the importance of this election. It is the most important election ever and a boil over from the very successful Referendum voting ”—male, Buka, youth leader

Unlike the referendum, these general elections provided a plethora of options to choose from, which added a level of complexity and tension. Seen as political theatrics by some, the contentious campaign tactics employed by some candidates and their supporters caused concern among some voters. Inflammatory statements, accusations, hate speech, and “throwing mud” made the public feel nervous about a potential electoral violence breakout, especially around the presidential and the former combatant races.

“The nature of the two elections has the referendum as the more friendly one and very predictable. It was less tense compared to the current elections where we are really witnessing a contest.”—female, Siwai, sub-parish chairlady

“One language was spoken during the referendum elections... Independence. Now there are so many languages with many candidates with countless policies, aspirations, dreams, and platforms. It confuses many undereducated populations thus making this election more complicated than the former. It’s exciting though. Polling processes are hard to bear with. Setups are inconvenient thus not capturing the real voter population.”—female, Tonsu, civil society leader

“It’s risky as many ex combatants are contesting... losing could be disastrous compared to the Referendum where the winners were the voters.”—male, Wakunai, candidate

“I’m excited but sceptical. There must be optimism as we await results. I am scared as I envisage trouble if declarations are made as people with different agendas and interests contest vigorously to win seats. The referendum elections were peaceful as we had one agenda...it’s different now.”—female, Selau, public official

Male and female participants alike noted that most women voters did not experience any election violence in public. However, it is crucial to point out that threats and intimidation of women voters happen mostly in private and usually go unreported. The concern remains that husbands or clan leaders try to impose their electoral choice on women, thereby corrupting the process. Additionally, the concern persists that more conservative elements of the community might use intimidation to dissuade women from voting at all, as they consider political affairs an area reserved to men.

“There were no threats whatsoever made against women in the community or election related threats. The community was free from violence and threats against especially women.”—female, Buin, teacher

“Yes, [violence against women] was mainly [perpetrated by] husbands forcing their wives to vote their candidates. Some wives were threatened to vote the husband’s candidate choice or pack up and leave”—female, Siwai, nurse

“There were no threats in the community, but unfortunately the chiefs of our community have told the people to block-vote for a particular candidate.”—female. Torokina, health sector employee

“The education level of a female candidate can be critiqued by voters making comments such as: “she has no skills”/education enough to run the government. This type of critique surrounding women’s education is especially harmful and demoralizes women.”—female, Makapana, health sector employee

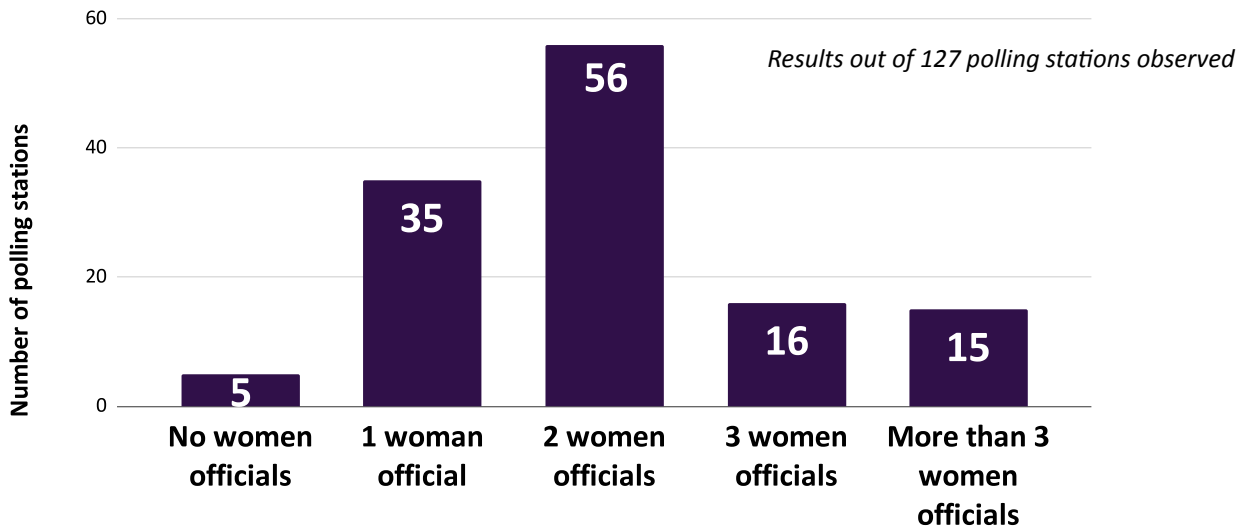
“Gossip against female candidates; marriage and family life are common topics to attack the candidate and tarnish her character.”—male, Kuhala, manager

ELECTION-DAY OBSERVATION

OPENING OF POLLING STATIONS:

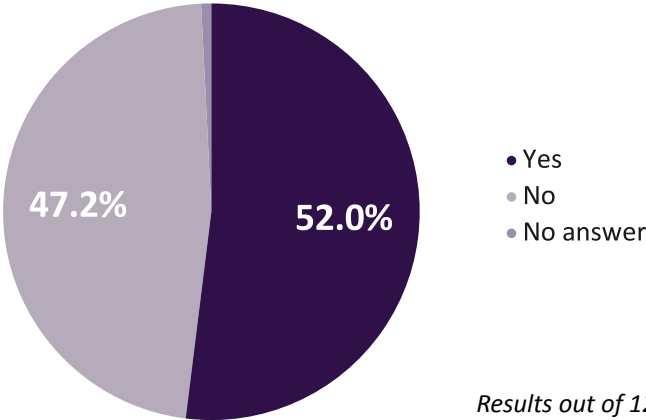
BWF observed the opening of 127 polling stations. At 91% of polling stations observed, observers reported that voting took place according to the stated polling schedule. Similarly, 95% of observers reported that voting took place at the location designated in the stated polling schedule. Police were present at 100% of the opening of polling stations observed to provide security. At 96% of polling stations observed, at least one polling official was a woman. However, only 12% of these polling stations had more than three women as polling officials and only 17.3% of polling stations had women serving as presiding officers.

How many election officials are women?



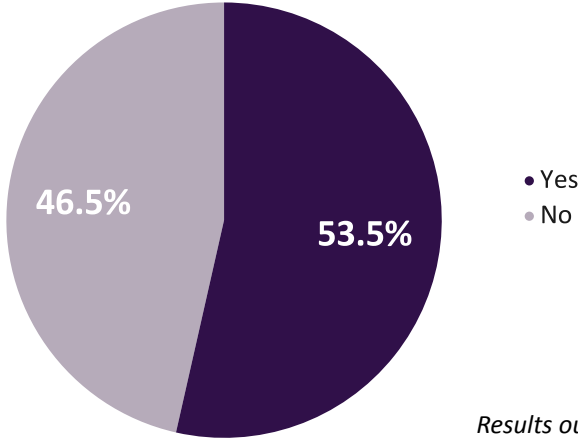
At 99% of polling stations observed, observers reported that there were sufficient quantities of election-day materials, such as ballot papers, ink, pens, etc. At 98% of polling stations observed, observers reported that the voting compartment was set-up in a way that allowed for ballots to be marked in secret. At the opening of polling stations, observers reported that social distance (1 metre) was maintained in 52% out of 127 stations between all persons in the voting line. In 54% of 127 polling stations observed, polling station officials, scrutineers, and voters wore masks in the polling place.

Was social distancing (1 metre) maintained between all persons in the set up for the polling line?



Results out of 122 polling stations observed

Were polling officials, observers, scrutineers and voters required to wear masks in the polling place?

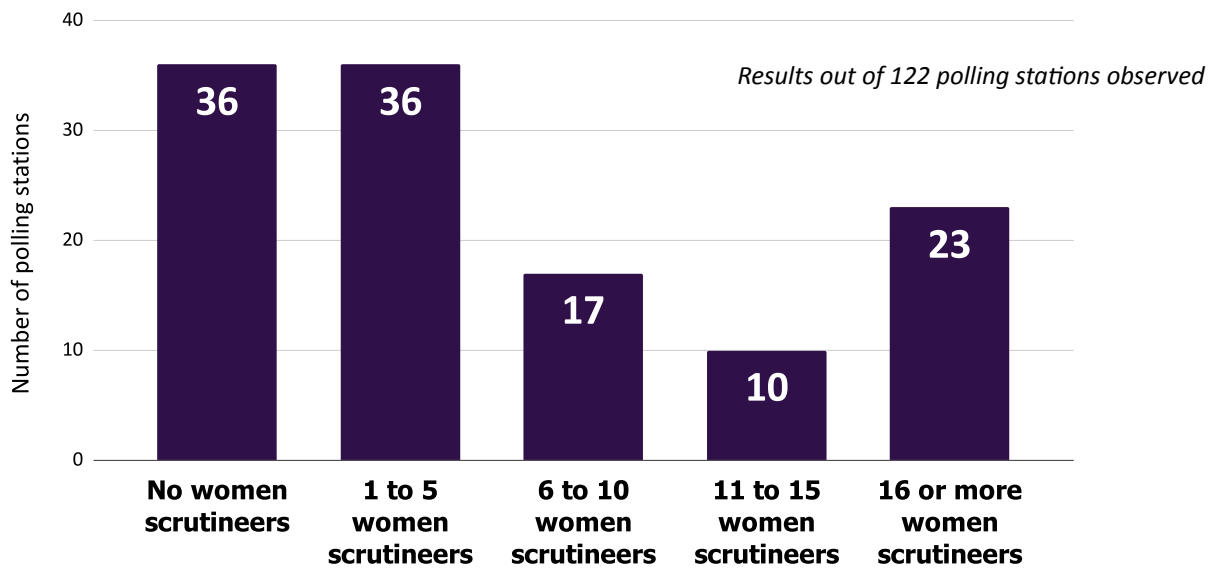


Results out of 127 polling stations observed

THE VOTING PROCESS:

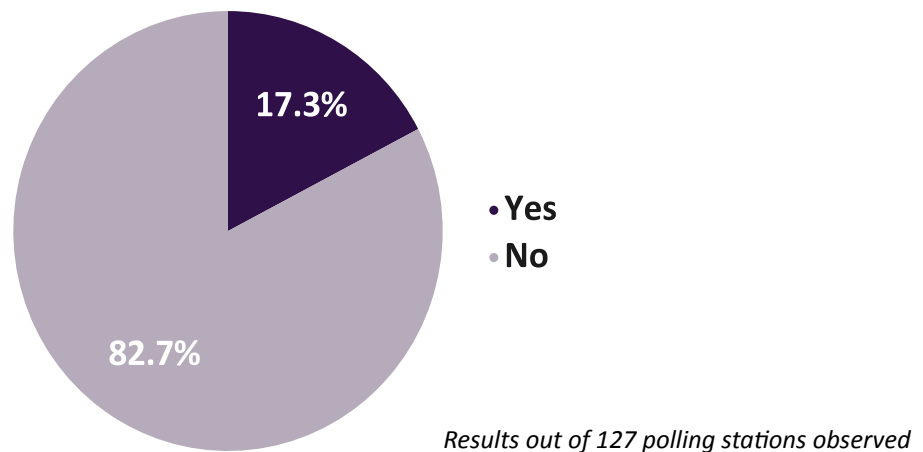
During the voting, police were present at the polling station in 100% of the 122 polling stations where voting was observed. During their time at the polling stations, observers did not witness any intimidation, harassment, or assault of potential voters at the polling place, violence against women, nor harassment of women at the polling place.

How many scrutineers are women?



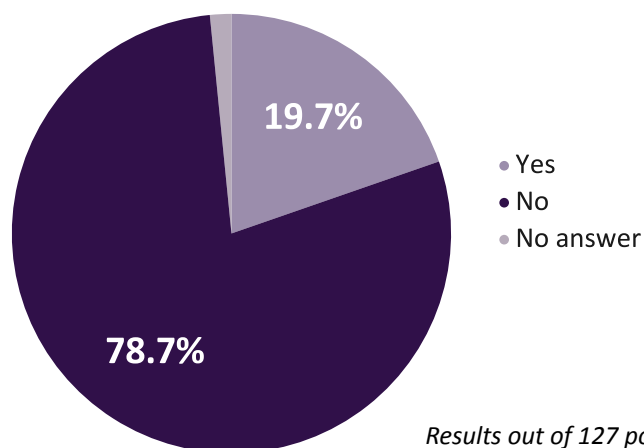
Scrutineers were present in 100% of 122 polling stations observed. In approximately 30% of polling stations observed, observers reported no women scrutineers. In those polling stations observers reported stations to have at least 1 woman scrutineer, and most reported observing up to 1 to 5 women scrutineers.

Is the presiding officer a woman?



In approximately 77% of 111 polling stations observed, there were no other domestic or international observers present. In the polling stations with other observers (26), over half reported only male observers. The Hako Collective and the Bougainville Transitional and Dialogue organizations were among the few domestic organizations that deployed observers to the monitored polling stations. In most of the 122 polling stations observed, polling officials appeared to understand official procedures (approximately 93%).

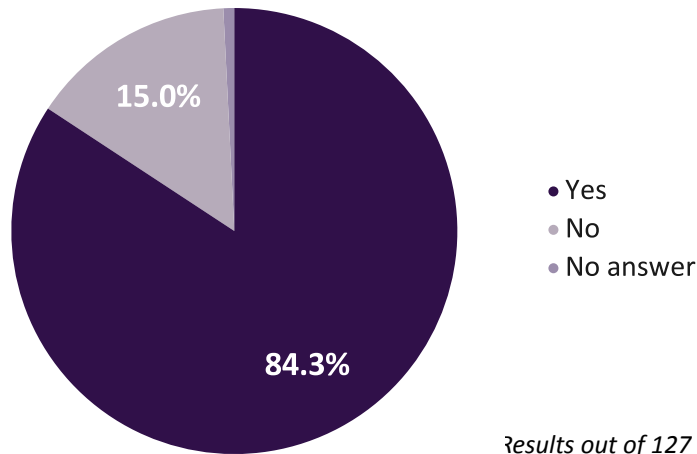
Aside from BWF observers, are other domestic and /or international observers present?



In approximately 72% of 122 polling stations observed, all voters present on the electoral roll were allowed to vote. Similarly, in approximately 58% of 117 polling stations observed, at least one person was unable to vote because they could not establish their identity through the electoral roll. In 51% of polling stations observed, observers noted at least one and at most 10 persons being turned away and/or not allowed to vote. In the majority of polling station observed, voter's names were crossed off the electoral roll (approximately 90%), voter's fingers were checked for ink, oil, grease or other substance (approximately 97%), each voter was inked and being directed to an officer to receive a ballot paper (approximately 99%), and the back of the ballot paper was initialled by the presiding officer before being issued to the voter (approximately 99%). Additionally, in the majority of 122 polling stations observed, voters folded each ballot in half in the voting compartment before putting their ballot in the appropriate ballot box (approximately 97%), voters put in their own ballot into the box independently (approximately 91%), and each voter was asked to leave the polling place/booth after voting (approximately 95%).

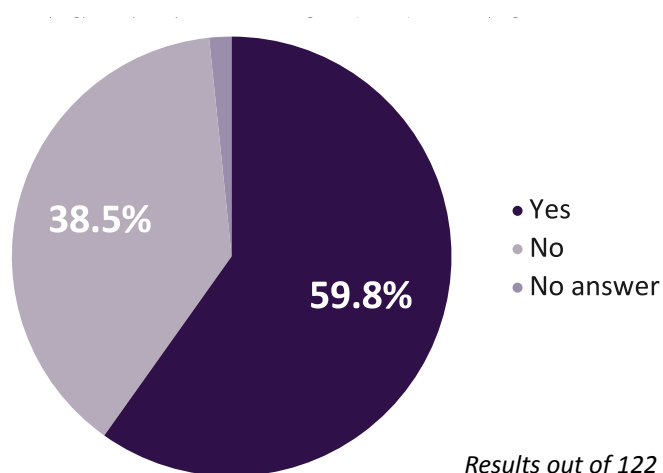
Observers reported on some COVID-19 safety measures taken into account. In all 122 polling stations observed during the voting process, officials had some type of personal protective equipment. Of these, 118 out of 122 polling stations had sanitizer and hand washing supplies for polling officials. In about 60% of 122 polling stations observed, the polling place was set up to allow for social distancing (1 metre) of people inside the station.

Did the polling place have handwashing or sanitization set-up?



Results out of 127 polling stations observed

Was the polling place set up in a way to allow for social distancing of voters, observers, scrutineers and polling officials?



Results out of 122 polling stations observed

CLOSING OF POLLING STATIONS:

At the closing of polling stations, in all (126) stations observed, police were present. Similarly, in 100% of closing reports scrutineers were present, however, 31% of polling stations had no women scrutineers. In most polling stations (75%), there were no other domestic or international observers present at closing. Observers, scrutineers, and polling officials did not uphold social distancing during closing in 60% of polling stations observed, and were not required to wear masks during closing in 58% of polling stations.

In all polling stations observed, the presiding officer publicly locked the flaps/slots of the ballot boxes. Scrutineers signed the Bougainville Electoral (BE) Form 64 in 62% of polling stations observed. The BE 59-62 Ballot Paper Account was accomplished in about 87% of polling stations observed. In most polling stations observed (approximately 83%), the total number of voters recorded on form BE to have voted on that day was between 101 and 500. In about 58% of polling stations observed, scrutineers accompanied the transport of ballots.

BWF observers recorded 61 incidents ranging from late opening of polling stations due to bad weather or missing materials to brief interruptions of voting or disenfranchisement of voters. For instance, in one polling station in Wakunai the polling station opened after 10:00 am due to heavy rain, and in another station in the same province the ballot box was full and the officials suspended the voting process until they sourced a second box. In Siwai, an illiterate female voter was escorted by a male to assist her to cast her vote. Eventually, the male marked the candidates at his own wish, instead of following the woman's preference, which led to her expressing her dissatisfaction publicly. Additionally, in two stations in Kieta and Buka, scrutineers wearing candidate symbols were requested to leave the polling areas. Finally, a station in Buka closed early, at 3:00 pm, after scrutineers of different candidates engaged in a heated exchange determining the polling officials to close the polling, in the presence of the police, to avoid violent escalation.

This election observation effort was part of BWF's continuous efforts to advocate to stakeholders including political actors that women should be included as equal and active participants in all aspects of the electoral process, free from fear, violence or the threat of reprisal. BWF will continue to promote the importance of monitoring VAW-E and incorporating gender-aware initiatives to empower women in the Bougainville political process. For this purpose, it will work with election stakeholders including CSOs across Bougainville to advocate for strategies to mitigate violence and improve inclusion in future elections. As part of this continuing effort, BWF presents the following recommendations to facilitate equal and active participation of women in building a peaceful and democratic Bougainville.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE OFFICE OF THE BOUGAINVILLE ELECTORAL COMMISSION (OBEC):

- The OBEC clarify who is eligible to use/fill the declaration forms
- The LOOK-IN system is placed in all polling booths to stop double voting
- BIB have a proper term of reference for voters
- The OBEC continue consultations with CSOs and technical experts to better understand and develop measures to address the issue of violence against women in elections
- Recruitment of polling officials are done in a transparent manner, with an equal and fair representation of men and women and on merit
- Continue to support adequate training for polling officials. Trainings incorporate workshops on efforts to address barriers to women's participation and mitigation efforts to prevent violence against women
- Promote the participation of women as observers and scrutineers throughout the accreditation process
- Voting sites and election offices are located in areas deemed safe by and accessible to women
- Electoral rolls are posted in a location deemed safe by women, preferably in a location already frequented by women (such as markets or churches)
- Election officials consider instituting separate lines or queues for male and female voters at polling places and give priority to people with disabilities, mothers nursing infants, and elderly women. Accessibility of offices for women are considered. Efforts like postal voting may maximize accessibility and mitigate some forms of violence against women in elections

FOR THE AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENT OF BOUGAINVILLE:

- The government support CSOs to run awareness on elections and training for women to participate in the electoral process, as poll workers, ward recorders
- Collaborate with CSOs and OBEC to combat the use of sexist and derogatory language in political discourse through codes of conduct, open community dialogue, and voter education
- The government work jointly with CSOs and community governments to ensure women have access to services after an incident of violence should they need it. Awareness of these services is also a critical component for collaboration

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS:

- CSOs continue to implement and support programmes to strengthen women's involvement in political processes, including elections. This includes, but is not limited to, training observers and scrutineers on VAW-E and barriers to women's political participation
- CSOs coordinate with the ABG and OBEC to share information on elections and be systematically disseminated through existing networks and structures across the autonomous region
- Referral mapping is done and known to all stakeholders so that incidents of violence against women in elections can be dealt with accordingly and that survivors of VAW-E are able to seek proper help