



Bougainville Women's Federation

*Citizen Election Observation of the  
2022 PNG National General Election in the  
Autonomous Region of Bougainville*

**Report**



October 2022

## About the Bougainville Women’s Federation

The Bougainville Women’s Federation (BWF) is a statutory office that advocates for women’s empowerment in post-conflict Bougainville. BWF chapters cover the region’s 13 districts. The organization is also represented at the Council of Elders, the Community Government, and ward levels. BWF engages in advocacy to ensure legislation, policies and programs developed and amended by the Autonomous Region of Bougainville are inclusive and responsive to the needs and priorities of women in Bougainville. To monitor the 2022 General Election, BWF drew on its experience and built on findings from observations of the 2015 AROB election, the 2019 Bougainville Referendum, 2020 AROB general elections, and 2021 by-election for the PNG National Parliament.

## Acknowledgements

First, a big thank you goes to the local election observers in Bougainville, without whose commitment and hard work this election observation would not have been possible. The BWF project team, long-term observers (LTOs) and short-term observers (STOs) overcame numerous logistical challenges to ensure the observation went ahead as planned, provided critical translation and insights, worked tirelessly and were always engaged.

BWF would like to also acknowledge all election stakeholders for their contributions to the success of this project. We are grateful to the Papua New Guinea Election Commission officials and, in particular, the Bougainville Election Manager, for their information sharing and commitment to the continuous improvement of the election process. They have also offered important perspectives on how BWF’s work team could be strengthened, supported, and sustained into the future, and we are looking forward to our continued collaboration. We are also grateful to the election candidates, scrutineers, community leaders, and BWF members across Bougainville who made time to meet and openly share their election-related experiences with the observers.

Finally, thanks go to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Ancuta Hansen, NDI Senior Director for the Pacific Islands, who provided valuable perspectives on election observation. The project was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The collected data, findings, and recommendations included in this report are sole responsibility of the Bougainville Women’s Federation and do not necessarily reflect the views of agencies and organisations that supported the project.

## List of Acronyms

AROB	Autonomous Region of Bougainville
BWF	Bougainville Women’s Federation
PNGEC	Papua New Guinea Election Commission
PO	Presiding Officer
RO	Returning Officer
ARO	Assistant Returning Officer

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## Executive Summary

BWF conducted an impartial, independent, and objective assessment of the 2022 Papua New Guinea (PNG) General Election in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB). The organization engaged its extensive network of volunteers in the region's mainland 11 districts. The election campaign period and the vote counting were monitored by three long-term-observers (LTOs) stationed in each region (North, Central, and South Bougainville), while 26 men and women served as short-term observers (STOs) to gather quantitative and qualitative data at and around polling stations. The observation aimed to assess the polling environment, the preparedness of the election management bodies, voting participation, and the counting environment, and to promote a process that is free from all forms of violence, including violence against women in elections (VAW-E). This project built on past experience in citizen election observation, of the 2015 AROB election, the 2019 Bougainville Referendum, 2020 AROB general elections, and 2021 by-election for the PNG National Parliament.

BWF's LTOs reported that, overall, political parties and candidates mobilized freely across the AROB, and no restrictions or hindrances were reported at election campaign stations and candidate rallies. BWF noted a heightened interest from political parties to contest the election, and that the activities of the candidates supported by political parties were more visible than those of independent candidates. The women candidates' campaigns were overall more discreet than those of the male candidates. While campaign events were largely peaceful and gender balanced, in some cases voters showed modest enthusiasm for the election, which may indicate disenchantment with the overall performance of the political class.

A host of issues—including the late arrival of the electoral material from Port Moresby and prolonged negotiations with service providers in the South and Central electorates regarding outstanding payments for past election cycles—led to a deferral of the start of the polling in AROB and last-minute changes of polling locations and venues. In some instances, limited awareness about the polling date and place might have hindered voter participation.

In Bougainville, the polling process was largely smooth, with most polling teams making efforts to deliver the election as well as they were able to with what was available to them. Polling officials' attendance rates were high, and police were present at 100 percent of the monitored polling places. The officials largely understood their roles and responsibilities, and proved resourceful in identifying and furnishing polling venues, managing logistics, dealing with missing names on the electoral rolls, and giving awareness speeches throughout the election day in *tok pisin* or local languages as needed.

The voting process was calm and orderly, and no instances of violence, intimidation, or block voting were reported in the polling booths monitored by BWF observers. However, due to a small number of polling places, voters in remote areas had to walk long distances—some up to two-three hours—to cast their votes. As there were no accommodations for non-transportable voters—such as elderly or disabled—they missed out on exercising their right to vote. The secrecy of the vote was largely respected in the monitored

polling booths (86 percent), despite a few voters not folding their ballots properly or polling compartments not being set up in a way to provide complete privacy.

All voters whose names were on the roll were allowed to vote in the polling booths monitored by BWF. Some polling officials complained that the font type of the roll was very small and difficult to read. In a number of polling booths, observers reported that voters did not find their names on the common roll, although they said they had registered. In Bougainville, electors were only allowed to vote in the ward they were registered in.

BWF would like to emphasize that while deficiencies were present in the election administration and voting procedures, the polling was overall peaceful and inclusive. However, to consolidate citizens' trust in the democratic process and avoid disincantivising voters, BWF calls on the PNG Election Commission to exert efforts to learn from the shortcomings of the 2022 election administration process and improve its planning and organization to meet basic standards of transparency and integrity.

In this regard, BWF recommends that the PNG Election Commission conduct a thorough and inclusive analysis on the delivery of the current election, to assess:

- The causes of the delays and shortcomings in preparing and delivering the election. The Election Commission should publish its 2022 detailed budget and expenditure so that civil society, academia, and citizens are able to assess the allowability, efficiency, and effectiveness of all public spending.
- The legality of limiting voting only to polling booths within the ward where the voter's name appears on the common roll instead of allowing voters to vote in any polling booth within the electorate; and
- The quality of the common roll, including by conducting an audit of the roll update. The Election Commission should publish the total number of voters in each ward who could not find their names on the roll. The analysis should also assess how many voters were not allowed to vote because they were registered in other wards within the same electorate.

To improve the electoral system and future elections and demonstrate political will to consolidate a democratic system, BWF calls on the PNG Election Commission and other stakeholders to:

- Publicly display the common roll in advance of the polling. Issue clear and consistent instructions on how to address problems such as missing names on the common roll, and make them public in real time;
- Strengthen the management and communication of the Election Commission and its provincial offices;
- Strengthen the training of the polling officials to better understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as those of scrutineers and observers;
- Strengthen the training of scrutineers and observers to gain a deeper understanding of the legal framework and technical aspects of the polling process;
- Use schools as more adequate venues for polling because of their sufficient space and shelter from the elements; and
- Organize an inclusive debate on the role of media and social media during elections, and adopt clear regulations for mass media, and especially the state-owned media.

# 1. Methodology

## 1.1. Observation approach

Building on past experience in citizen election observation, BWF conducted an impartial, independent, and objective assessment of the 2022 Papua New Guinea (PNG) General Election in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB). The organization engaged its extensive network of volunteers in the region's mainland 11 districts; Nissan and the Atolls were excluded. As per the PNG legislation, BWF requested official accreditation to monitor the election campaign, the voting, and the counting processes. The election campaign period and the vote counting were monitored by three long-term-observers (LTOs) stationed in each region (North, Central, and South Bougainville), while 26 men and women served as short-term observers (STOs) to gather quantitative and qualitative data at and around polling stations. In addition to observing the stakeholders' preparedness to deliver a credible election, the BWF election observation mission aimed to monitor instances of violence against women in elections and the observance of COVID-19 guidelines.

BWF assessed the overall campaign environment and preparedness for elections in line with Papua New Guinea's legislation and electoral best practices. In addition, BWF examined key aspects of the campaign environment, including voter inclusion and participation and peaceful campaigning. As part of this effort, BWF has met with electoral stakeholders, including representatives of the electoral management body, candidates, civil society organizations, and voters to learn about the political environment, legal framework, and voter participation.



*BWF observers share insights during a two-day debrief in Arawa*

From 6 to 12 July, 2022, a number of 26 short-term observers were deployed to 123 polling places across AROB. BWF determined that due to logistic considerations it was not feasible to include the Atolls and Nissan districts in this observation. At the polling places, BWF volunteers observed the entire polling process, from the opening of polling booths to voting and closing of polling. BWF observers monitored 39 polling booths in 8 local-level governments (LLGs) in the North; 36 polling booths situated in 7 LLGs in the Central; and 48 polling booths in 9 LLGs in the South electorate. From 19 July to 28 July, 2022, BWF monitored the vote counting at the three centers in Arawa, Buin, and Buka.

The LTOs and STOs were provided with extensive training on the fundamentals of citizen election observation, recognizing instances of violence against women in politics and elections, conducting interviews with stakeholders, using checklists, and reporting on collected data. Additionally, at the end of the polling, BWF reconvened the observers to reflect on their observations, compare findings, and collect additional insights about the electoral process.

The present report follows a series of preliminary statements on the campaign environment and the polling period. BWF will continue to disseminate the findings and recommendations drawn from its election observation mission to election stakeholders and advocate for a more effective and inclusive process.

## 1.2. Observation Limitations

BWF made efforts to design a deployment plan that took into consideration the size of the population in each district, and planned to cover a proportionate number of rural and urban polling places. Nevertheless, a host of issues led to a deferral of the start of the polling and last-minute changes of polling locations and venues.

Initially, polling in AROB was scheduled to take place from 4 to 8 July, 2022. The late arrival of the electoral material from Port Moresby and prolonged negotiations with service providers in the South and Central electorates regarding outstanding payments for past election cycles saw polling deferred to 6 July. Voting ended on 12 July in the vast majority of Bougainville's districts. As an exception, in the South Bougainville electorate, three teams extended polling to 13 July, due to deaths in the communities and a vehicle breakdown, respectively. Polling in Nissan and the Atolls was conducted between 20 and 22 of July.

The findings presented in this report are representative only for the monitored polling booths and they should not be extrapolated to the entire region. Furthermore, in some instances the observers were not allowed inside the booth, which affected the quality or the extent of their direct observation and ability to record data.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1. Election Campaign Observation

BWF's LTOs reported that, overall, political parties and candidates mobilized freely across the AROB, and no restrictions or hindrances were reported at campaign stations and candidate rallies. BWF noted a heightened interest from political parties to contest the election, and that the activities of the candidates supported by political parties were more visible than those of independent candidates.

The women candidates' campaigns were overall more discrete than those of the male candidates. While campaign events were largely peaceful and gender balanced, in some cases voters showed modest enthusiasm for the election, which may indicate disenchantment with the performance of the political class.



*Women attend a campaign rally in Halia, North Bougainville*

Apart from a few candidate posters being defaced, voters' frustration was more prominent on social media, where a number of personal attacks and allegations of corruption have been recorded. Finally, BWF noted an increased public awareness regarding vote buying and the secrecy of the vote, which is an indicator that the Region's citizens are becoming savvier with each electoral cycle.



However, a series of shortcomings ahead of the polling period impacted the quality of the election administration, leading candidates, experts, and independent observers across the country to question the ability of the PNG Election Commission to deliver a free and fair election.

First, the election preparations took place against a backdrop of campaign-related violence in several PNG provinces. Then, the passing of Deputy Prime Minister Sam Basil and continued discussions about a lack of funding for election security and operations maintained a sense of uncertainty about the election calendar. These factors contributed to significant delays in gazetting the polling schedule—published just a few days before the polling.

At the end of the campaign, BWF called on all election stakeholders to uphold the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates—including refraining from promising money or other financial gains in exchange for votes—and continue to campaign peacefully. BWF also called on all media, online publications, and the voters to refrain from publishing defamatory articles, especially those spreading gender-based disinformation, as these can have a devastating impact on the efforts to achieve women political inclusion. Finally, BWF called on the PNG Election Commission to swiftly ensure that all the conditions of electoral legislation were followed to create a smooth and peaceful polling period. In particular, BWF advocated that the Commission widely published the polling schedule to reach the most remote communities of AROB and made efforts to solve the issues surrounding the Election Offices in Bougainville South and Central to ensure that the election officials and sensitive material were safe and ready for the polling.



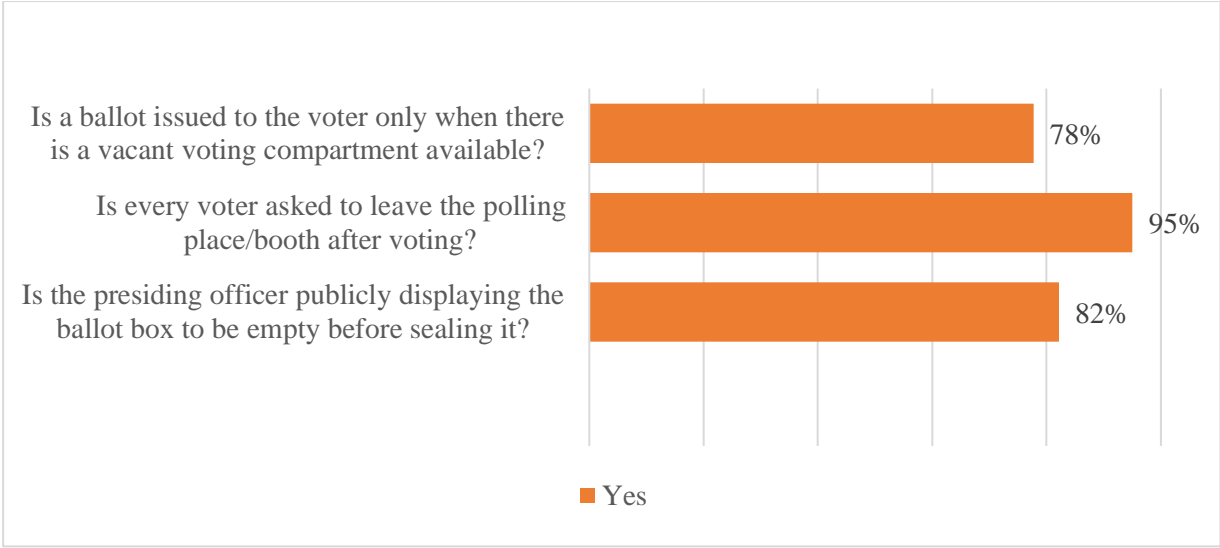
*BWF observer discusses with a voter during a campaign rally in North Bougainville*

## 2.2. Polling Observation

### 2.2.1. The Polling Process

In Bougainville, the polling process was largely smooth, with most polling teams making efforts to deliver the election as well as they were able with what was available to them. Polling officials' attendance rates were high, and police were present at all of the monitored polling places.

The officials largely understood their roles and responsibilities and proved resourceful in identifying and furnishing polling venues, managing logistics, dealing with missing names on the electoral rolls, and giving awareness speeches throughout the day in *tok pisin* or local languages as needed. In fact, polling officials and community police often reported making efforts to get the word out to remote communities about the updated polling dates to ensure more voters had the opportunity to exercise their constitutional rights.



*Quantitative analysis on polling process data collected from 123 polling booths in Bougainville*

All BWF observers reported that polling materials, such as ballot papers, boxes, and compartments, pens, ink, and separate voter rolls for men and women were present and sufficient. In a few instances, the polling teams used a second set of ballot boxes which were not labelled with the official pink and blue stickers for open and regional seats, respectively, and had to improvise so that voters understood where to insert each ballot. In a couple of instances, polling teams in the Central and South electorates used plastic instead of metal seals for the outer slots on the second set of ballot boxes.



*Polling team in South Naisioj, Central Bougainville moves to a new location during the election day*

In 62 percent of the monitored stations, the polling did not take place at the date mentioned in the polling schedule. A few polling teams moved to different locations during the day to facilitate voters’ access to polling (11% of the monitored polling places). In one particular community in the Central Bougainville electorate, due to a non-election related dispute between two groups, some voters were reluctant to walk to the official polling place; therefore, at the end of the day the

polling team walked to their area to enable voting. In other cases, it was justified due to limited awareness of the polling schedule.

Observers reported that some polling officials did not wear badges, making it difficult to assess if any unauthorized persons were handling sensitive election material or assisted voters. In some cases, it was reported that officials (Presiding Officer and Assistant Presiding Officer, in particular) swapped roles during the polling, or failed to execute their duties properly due to insufficient training.

There were a few reports of officials failing to ensure voters inked their fingers, placed their ballots in the appropriate boxes, or maintained social distance. BWF also noted discrepancies among polling teams on interpreting polling procedures and using PNG Standard Time (PST) vs Bougainville Standard Time (BST) for opening and closing of stations.

These issues led some voters to question the selection process and training of polling officials. In the absence of public data on recruitment and a list of contracted polling officials, it is difficult to assess the specifics or the extent of the problem.

The number of the polling teams assigned to the 2022 PNG General Election (a total of 128 in AROB) was smaller than the number of teams used in past AROB elections, meaning that there were fewer polling places compared to regional elections and polling teams had to cover longer distances—often on rugged terrain—to pick up polling staff and store materials at secure locations overnight. This sometimes led to delays in opening the polling; the latest poll opening monitored by BWF observers was at 12:00 pm PST, four hours after the official opening time.

Also, many polling stations closed early, around 5:00 pm PST or even earlier—more than one hour before the official closing time—as it was impractical to continue processing voters after dark. There were no significant weather-related challenges, with just a few observers reporting that voting was briefly interrupted by heavy rain; in these cases, voting resumed as soon as it was sensible to do so.

Overall, the polling booths were set up to allow social distancing (89 percent); a few monitored polling booths had hand sanitiser available (17 percent), but no masks were required.

### 2.2.2. Voter Participation

The voting process was calm and orderly, and no instances of violence, intimidation, or block voting were reported in the polling booths monitored by BWF observers. Voter turnout was overall lower than the last regional and local government elections.

Due to a limited number of polling places, voters in remote areas had to walk long distances, some up to two to three hours, to cast their votes. In some instances, limited awareness about the polling date and place might have hindered voter participation. As there were no accommodations for non-transportable voters—such as elderly or disabled—they missed out on exercising their right to vote.

The secrecy of the vote was largely respected in the monitored polling booths (86 percent), despite a few voters not folding their ballots properly or polling compartments not being set up in a way to provide

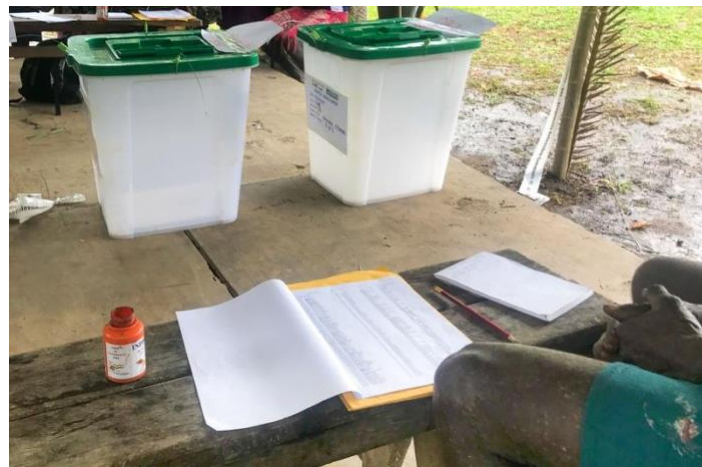


*Voters mark their ballots at a polling place in Buka, North Bougainville*

complete privacy. In all monitored polling venues, BWF observers reported voters asking for assistance to fill their ballots. Overall, more women than men were provided assistance to cast their vote, due to disability or illiteracy. All voters whose names were on the roll were allowed to vote in the monitored polling booths. Some polling officials complained that the font type of the roll was very small and difficult to read. In a number of polling booths, observers reported that voters did not find their names on the common roll, although they said they had registered. While some male voters' names were eventually found on the women's rolls and vice versa, some were not found at all.

Whereas some presiding officers noted the names of unregistered voters in their journal but did not allow them to vote, in other cases individuals whose names were not on the roll were eventually permitted to cast their votes after filling *Form 11*, *Form 54*, or no form at all. To the extent that the observers were able to see, these ballots were not placed in envelopes before being inserted into ballot boxes.

In Bougainville, electors were only allowed to vote in the ward they were registered in. The Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections (1997), in its article 132, specifies where electors may vote stating, "subject to this section, an elector is entitled to vote at any prescribed polling place for the electorate for which he is enrolled while that polling place is open" adding that the Electoral Commission may, by notice in the National Gazette, require an elector in an electorate or a part of an electorate to vote only in the part of



*Polling booth setup in Orami, Central Bougainville*

of the electorate where his name appears on the Roll. BWF was not able to obtain a copy of the gazetted Election Commission decision at the time of drafting this report.

### 2.2.3. Gender Inclusion

Among the 43 polling teams monitored, just a few had women Presiding Officers. In 12 instances, the Assisting Presiding Officers were women, and approximately half had one or more women on the teams, but not in leadership positions. One polling team monitored by BWF observers had no women members at all.



*Women wait in line to vote in Ioro, Pangua District*

The gender-segregated lines were generally respected (84 percent of the monitored booths) and allowed improved flow and swifter processing of voters. In a few instances, polling officials reported keeping the voting compartments gender mixed for practical reasons. The BWF observers also reported that, in the monitored polling booths, women participation was on par with men's or higher. No acts of

violence against women voters, polling officials, observers or scrutineers were recorded by BWF observers at the monitored polling booths.

### 2.2.4. Observers and Scrutineers' Accesses

Candidates, especially larger parties, deployed a significant number of scrutineers across the region. BWF observers reported that scrutineers were present at all the monitored polling booths. In the North, there were significantly more scrutineers—including women—than in the rest of the region.

However, because some individuals did not wear their official badges, it is difficult to assess exactly how many of them were accredited by the Election Commission. In most monitored polling booths, scrutineers were allowed to sign in the presiding officer's journal and inspect ballot box seals, but a few were not. As an exception to the overall positive engagement between polling teams, observers, and scrutineers, a few polling teams (mainly in the South) refused to provide access to the booth or even talk to scrutineers or observers, explaining that they had received instructions from their Assistant Returning Officer that all information regarding the polling process was confidential.

Women scrutineers, although fewer than men, were present in almost all monitored polling places and were more numerous in the North. In addition to BWF, Transparency International PNG and the Australian National University deployed teams of local observers in AROB. A limited number of international observers from the High Commissions of Australia and New Zealand, as well as the Commonwealth, were also present in the region during polling.

In most monitored instances, scrutineers and local observers were stationed outside polling booths. In some cases, the polling venues—often elevated structures, such as stages, or community sheds, also known as *haus win*—were rather small and could only accommodate the polling teams and a limited number of voters; in other cases, even if the polling was conducted outdoors, the scrutineers were allowed to stand only outside the demarcated perimeter of the booths or in specially designated areas.

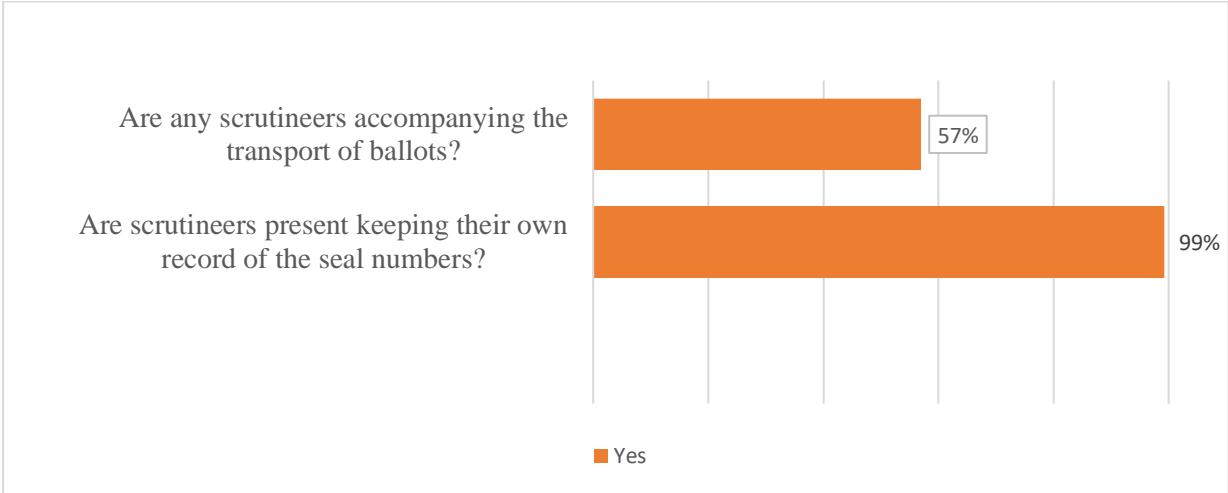


Figure 2: Quantitative analysis on observation data from 123 polling booths in Bougainville

In most polling places monitored, the presiding officers routinely called out the ballot box seal numbers, the voter tally, cases of spoiled ballots and other relevant issues in real time, for scrutineers’ and observers’ awareness. Due to a fair distance from the polling documents, however, some specific procedures such as crossing each name off the voter roll or signing the back of each ballot paper were sometimes difficult to examine visually for the entirety of the polling.



Observers and scrutineers stand outside the polling booth, Buka

There have been several reports of scrutineers and voters wearing insignia of political parties or candidates, including T-shirts and hats in or around polling booths. Some scrutineers, instead of displaying official badges, had placed small cards with the candidate's picture, name, and box number in their badge holders; others were seen distributing such

cards around polling places. In one instance, in the South, an observer reported that some locals offered their votes to candidates for small amounts of money (20 Kina).

### 2.3. Vote Counting Observation

From 19 to 28 July, 2022, BWF monitored the vote counting process at the three centers—Buka, Arawa and Buin. The three LTOs deployed were able to monitor the process at and around counting centers, and the observers had access to monitor the process and freedom to move around in the counting centers. In Arawa and Buin, the counting was initially announced to start the day after the voting was completed. However, the issue of outstanding payments for service providers and slow preparations led to a few days' delay.

In Buka, there was some confusion about when counting would start, as two issues affected the initial counting schedule. First, preparations for the funeral of sitting member and winning candidate, William Nakin, who passed away during the polling, and, second, the delay in completing polling in the districts of Atolls and Nissan. The Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections, Section 151(1)(a) provides that counting “shall commence as soon as voting in the electorate is completed”. Nevertheless, vote counting for the regional seat, in Central and South Bougainville, started before all voting in the Bougainville electorate was completed.

In Central and South electorates, after a slow start and interruptions due to officials learning the process and putting systems in place, reconciling discrepancies, and changing shifts, the counting teams gradually increased pace, as they were becoming more in handling the election material and equipment. In the North, BWF noted that most delays were due in particular to discrepancies in counting and power outages. BWF also noted a slight change of the counting compartments setup, as two separate tables—one for the



*Vote counting setup at the North Bougainville Counting Center shows two compartments—one for the Open and the other one for the Regional Electorates—working in parallel*

open and the other for the regional seat—were organized. The parallel counting not only demonstrated commitment to transparency and inclusion procedures, but it also shortened the duration of the process, compared to previous elections.

Overall, election officials understood their functions and responsibilities and made efforts to ensure the transparency of the process, by routinely calling out ballot boxes details, such as polling team and booth numbers, polling places, and inner and outer seal

numbers affixed to the counted ballot boxes. Informal votes were diligently recorded and removed, straight from the sorting area. There were no violent incidents reported. However, across all three counting centers, BWF observed that overall scrutineers did not wear their accreditation badges making it difficult to identify them. Despite the mentioned shortfalls, the vote counting process and the declaration ceremonies for winning candidates were largely peaceful.

### 3. Recommendations

BWF would like to note that while a host of deficiencies marked the election administration and polling procedures, in AROB the election was overall peaceful and inclusive. To consolidate citizens' trust in the democratic process and avoid disincantising voters, BWF calls on the PNG Election Commission to exert efforts to learn from the shortcomings of the current election administration process and improve its planning and organization to meet basic standards of transparency and integrity.

In this regard, BWF recommends that the PNG Election Commission conduct a thorough and inclusive analysis on the delivery of the current election, to assess:

- The causes of the delays and shortcomings in preparing and delivering the election. For the civil society, academia, and citizens to be able to assess the allowability, efficiency, and effectiveness of all public spending, the Election Commission should publish its 2022 detailed budget and expenditure.
- The legality and opportunity of limiting voting only to polling booths within the ward where the voter's name appears on the common roll, instead of allowing voters to vote in any polling booth within the electorate; and
- The quality of the common roll, including by conducting an audit of the roll update. The Election Commission should publish the total number of voters in each ward who could not find their names on the roll. The analysis should also assess how many voters were not allowed to vote because they were registered in other wards within the same electorate.

To improve the electoral system and future elections, and demonstrate political will to consolidate a democratic system, BWF calls on the PNG Election Commission and other stakeholders to:

- Publicly display the common roll in advance of the polling. Issue clear and consistent instructions on how to address problems such as missing names on the common roll, and make them public in real time;
- Strengthen the management and communication of the Election Commission and its provincial offices;
- Strengthen the training of the polling officials to better understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as those of scrutineers and observers;
- Strengthen the training of scrutineers and observers to gain a deeper understanding of the legal framework and technical aspects of the polling process;
- Use schools as more adequate venues for polling due to sufficient space, sheltered from the elements; and
- Organize an inclusive debate on the role of media and social media during elections, and adopt clear regulations for mass media, and especially the state-owned media.