



THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**SUBMISSION TO SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON 2022
GENERAL ELECTIONS**

*HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND KEY OBSERVATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NRI'S NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION
OBSERVATIONS*

SUBMITTED

BY

PAPUA NEW GUINEA NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PNG ELECTIONS

The need to carry out open, transparent, and orderly elections using legitimised guidelines on a timely manner is critical to any democracy, and Papua New Guinea (PNG) is no exception. Since the first General Elections in 1977 (after independence in 1975), PNG continues to face ongoing challenges with the administration and implementation of its National General Elections (NGEs). These challenges have been documented extensively on numerous election studies (e.g. NRI, 2009; Australia National University, 2017; European Union, 2017; and PNG Transparency International, 2017) and they continue to pose a threat to the credibility and integrity of the elections. Overall, democracy in PNG risks being undermined by the continuation of election-related problems if they are not correctly addressed.

In general, PNG is often said to have a vibrant democracy—judged in terms of the successive democratically-elected governments in office since independence in 1975—with several enabling legislations for carrying out democratically held elections. The ***Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections (OLNLLGE)*** and the ***Organic Law on Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC)*** are two examples that seek to build a strong foundation for the conduct of democratic and orderly elections. Despite this, it can be argued that PNG's past elections continue to fall short of the expected standards of electioneering as would be expected of any vibrant democracy.

In July 2022, PNG went to the polls to elect the new members of its 11th Parliament. The pre-election hiccups faced by the PNG Electoral Commission (PNGEC) had showed signs that the 2022 NGE was likely to face similar challenges to those encountered in the previous NGEs. While there were anecdotal signs of the problems, the extent of the challenges encountered in the 2022 NGE was not yet known at that time. Now that the elections have been completed, various election observation reports have recorded what transpired.

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PNGNRI's ROLE

PNGNRI's primary role is to carry out independent research and analysis on a wide range of public policy issues and then offer policy prescriptions on how public policy might be developed and carried out in response to different policy challenges. PNGNRI's work on elections are carried out under the ambit of this role.

An ongoing concern for which PNGNRI is concerned with, pertains to how democracy and good governance can be enhanced in PNG, and in this case, the importance of strong institutions and democratic elections as key enablers for a vibrant democracy and good governance.

As part of its ongoing work on strengthening democracy and good governance and in preparing for the 2022 NGE, the NRI Council had approved two projects to be carried out by the Institute in 2022. The **first project** was the political parties' seminar series whose aims were to: (a) strengthen political parties' capacity to formulate their policies in preparation of the 2022 NGE; and (b) to bring all the political parties together to engage with the PNG populace and showcase their party policies in preparation for the 2022 elections. This was successfully carried out and had culminated in the publication and dissemination of the participating political parties' policies.

The **second project** (approved by the NRI Council), was the 2022 election research and observation study aimed at looking at what has transpired in the 2022 NGE and make relevant recommendations for electoral reforms.

The rest of the Submission summarises the election observation study background, key findings and key recommendations.

2022 ELECTION OBSERVATION BACKGROUND

The PNGNRI Election Observation Study is driven by four related objectives:

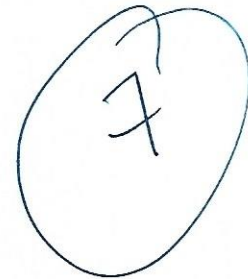
- To provide an **observational account** of how the 2022 NGE was carried out;
- To **determine the anomalies**, if any, undermining the conduct of the 2022 NGE. Data from this would assist to determine the extent in which the 2022 NGE has met the expectations of a successful election in terms of campaign, polling and counting. The aim is to determine whether the overall conduct of the election has subscribed to the ideals of a democratically held election of being

free and fair, devoid of undue influence and conforming to the legitimate guidelines for conducting elections;

- To provide a **complementary data source** for different societal actors, including the NRI, to collectively use and engage in the discussions on strengthening elections in PNG; and
- To use the data to explore **possible areas of future research** on specific areas pertaining to elections and the enabling systems that support the elections.

The Study was carried out in the months of July to August, just at the end of the campaign period through to the end of the polling and counting periods. A total of seven electorates in the upper and lower Highlands region were covered in the study. Those electorates were:

- Daulo Open (Eastern Highlands);
- Karimui-Salt-Nomane Open (Simbu);
- North-Waghi Open (Jiwaka);
- Tambul-Nebilyer Open (Western Highlands);
- Ialibu-Pangia Open (Southern Highlands);
- Wapenamanda Open (Enga), and
- Eastern Highlands Provincial Open (Eastern Highlands).



The study used a targeted and convenient sampling technique to select the electorates. The selection of the seven provinces was aimed at gaining more insights into the election issues in the Highlands region, given the region's recurrent volatility in the elections. In addition, the electorates in the provinces were selected based on convenience and the availability of observers willing to carry out each study.

THE OBSERVATIONS

Field data was recorded on an approved recording template. Three main areas were the subject of data collection:

- Campaign observation data,
- Polling observation data, and
- Counting and declaration observation data.

Based on the template and framework, the main findings of the study with regards to the three areas are as follows.

KEY OBSERVATIONS ON CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES EMPLOYED

- **Alliances:** Professional and political party alliances and network were

common. Alliances were also observed in the form of tribal alliances or alliances along segregated areas of the Electorates especially in light of the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) System. That is, candidates align themselves with other candidates to share their second and third preferences of votes.

- **Collaboration of candidates:** Candidates were collaborating with other candidates from other villages, tribes and areas to maximize their chances of winning, considering the LPV System.
- **Feasting:** Food and drinks were seen to be distributed at all the campaign gatherings.
- **Invitations:** Invited candidates gave money to the coordinators of the host candidates' (campaign houses) for the upkeep of their campaign houses.
- **Merchandise:** Posters, banners, billboards, stickers on vehicles, T-shirts and caps were used by candidates and their parties.
- **Public rallies:** hosting rallies was a common campaign strategy. Candidates attended to speak at rallies organised by their candidates or generally as an avenue for public dissemination of their policies. Different rival candidates hosted gatherings or rallies entertaining huge crowds. People came in groups performing traditional dances expressing moral and numerical support for the candidate
- **Social Media:** Social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were actively used during campaign. This was expected considering the rollout of ICT infrastructure particularly by Digicel.
- **Party Politics:** It was observed that the campaigning was dominated by the two heavy weights PANGU and PNC, leaving little room for other political parties.
- **Political Party Colours:** Colours were a common campaign strategy to instil a sense of belonging or support to a particular party or candidate. For example, PNC party was recognised by red coloured merchandise while PANGU was recognised by green colour.
- **Money power:** During campaigns, money power was evident. Generally, it was observed that candidates with more money were becoming more popular and powerful than those who had less money.
- **Campaign Houses:** Candidates organised campaign houses to

entertain people. Feasts and social activities were organised as part of the entertainment. Candidates were competing to put up campaign houses along the roads and public areas to show that this was their territory and that they have votes.

- **Hausman turned into campaign Houses:** A Hausman is a big house specifically designed to accommodate only males belonging to a particular clan but in the election, they served as the house of meetings for candidates and their supporters.
- **Nere-Tere (Take and Give):** Nere-Tere or *Kaikai na Givim* (Tok Pisin) and "Take and Give" is a factor for voters.
- **Pre-polling Intimidation and threats:** High powered rifles were carried around openly by supporters and clan members of candidates.
- **Vehicle campaign:** Candidates used convoy of vehicles with full load of supporters to show their numbers.
- **Visitation to families:** Family to family visit programs were initiated by individual candidates' campaign managers for the candidate to visit each family with a small delegation to secure votes.
- **Clan Coordinators:** Most candidates appointed individuals from each clan as clan coordinators.
- **Use of campaign period to settle obligations:** Often, campaign period was also used to settle traditional obligations such as bride price as well as for reconciliation.
- **Use of songs and chants:** Songs and chants were common during the campaign period to drive the message for candidates and parties.

KEY OBSERVATIONS ON POLLING

- **Block voting:** Block voting for convenience and to settle tensions (cooperative voting) was evident. A few people marked ballot papers on behalf of a group, which clearly goes against the democratic principle of "one person one vote" although it may be convenient for the tribe and perhaps the candidates.
- **Common Roll issues:** perhaps the most disappointing part of polling was when voters did not find their names on the Common Roll, that is a defective Common Roll. Because of the defective Common Roll, community Leaders took control of the voting. This brings into question the role of PNGEC in updating the Common Roll.
- **Compromising of voting material:** Allocated or serialised ballot papers for specified polling locations was not delivered to those

locations.

- **Control, block and distributive voting:** In one of the LLGs in one of the electorates, the ballots from Wards 2, 3 and 4 were all taken to one spot where votes were distributed to candidates accordingly.
- **Disruption of voting:** Disagreements over voting arrangements led to destruction of polling booths at several polling places.
- **Distributive voting (DV):** Ballot papers were distributed to the candidates.
- **Double voting:** Double voting occurs when one person votes more than once. People voted on behalf of other family members in absentia. This practice was evident.
- **Duplication of names:** in some instances, there was duplication of names on the common roll.
- **Lack of impartiality by polling officials:** In one instance, the Presiding Officer made a speech to convince people to vote for an incumbent MP (where the presiding officers are supposed to be neutral persons).
- **Lack of security for polling officials:** Polling officials had to flee for their safety, leaving the people to mark the ballot papers in their absence. This brings into question adequacy of the security logistics.
- **Late and slow polling:** Polling generally started late and progressed slowly in most areas. This was due to polling officials not been on time.
- **No marking of names on common roll and non-use of indelible ink:** In many instances, polling officials did not mark names off the common roll, nor used the indelible ink.
- **Security issues:** in most polling stations, there was coercion and intimidation to which the security personnel had little control over.
- **Sharing of extra ballot papers:** Extra ballot papers were shared amongst certain candidates to finish all the ballot papers.
- **Threats and intimidation:** In certain instances, groups of youths threatened the people and marked the ballot papers. In other instances, the polling area was highly volatile as supporters of candidates were trying to exert their power to get votes from the voters.
- **Two lines for voting:** following the new directions from PNG Electoral Commission, there two lines for voting, one for male and another female. This was a positive observation. However, whether voters

followed these lines is another matter

KEY OBSERVATIONS ON COUNTING AND DECLARATION

- **Control by security forces:** The gate control by security forces was evident in all counting venues, which a positive observation. On the other hand, some scrutineers were denied access.
- **Counting delays:** There were delays in counting due to disputes over the status of the tempered boxes.
- **Counting Officials:** Most polling and counting officials were teachers and counting was easier.
- **Delay in payment for Counting Officials:** counting was suspended unnecessarily because of the delayed or non-payment of the counting officials which prolonged counting.
- **Discrepancy between number of votes and number of eligible voters per common roll:** There were more ballot papers than the numbers on the common roll.
- **Double infringements issues:** such as ballots marked elsewhere outside of polling station and by few persons and not eligible voters, were admitted.
- **Evidence of block voting (BV):** When a candidate from a certain village/tribe got eliminated, his second preferences were distributed to a candidate from his area (vote by popularity), which is evidence of block voting.
- **Evidence of voting along LLGs:** candidates scored well in their LLG but not many votes from the other LLGs, particularly for primary votes.
- **Media and observers allowed into counting venues:** The media personnel and election observers (both domestic and international) were allowed to go in and observe the counting, which is a positive observation.
- **Names and numbers not matching:** Some of the marked ballot papers had numbers and names not corresponding.
- **Quality Check (common errors with Informal ballot papers):** Many ballot papers did not have the signature of the Presiding Officer at the back of the ballot papers.
- **Representation of Counting Officials:** Tensions were caused when certain LLGs were not represented as counting officials.
- **Swapping of preferences (SOP):** Where there were two candidates

contesting from the same area, the villagers agreed on sharing of the initial primary votes and swap the second preference (Swapping Preference in Block Voting).

- **Time constraints:** Due to time limitations, Returning Officers and the PNGEC were forced not to entertain scrutineers' objections and disputes on the ballots boxes. Therefore, the scrutineers' rights and freedom to express their opinion were denied.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Common Roll must be updated and verified by NID or verification by Village Court Officials, councillors, pastors and Village Recorders with penalty for default**, in order to ensure integrity of the Common Roll.
2. **There is a need for political party endorsed candidates at all levels of Government**, to strengthen the political party system.
3. **State assets should not be used to entice voters**, to ensure a level playing field for all candidates contesting.
4. **Address inducements and threats from other provinces**, to avoid a situation where certain issues happening in other electorates impact on the conduct of elections in other provinces.
5. **Dates and schedules must not be changed unnecessarily**, to avoid creating chaos for election planning and operations.
6. **Ensure accountability of election officials by engaging only permanent public servants to serve as election officials**, which will make it easier to hold election officials accountable under the public service rules and regulations.
7. **Need for use of proper and legal names for villages, streets, clans and tribes (under the Names Act)**, to avoid hijacking and rigging of ballot papers, when names are confusing and illegitimate.
8. **Voting must be free, fair and safe**, where every eligible voter must be allowed to vote freely, fairly and safely in the secret booths to ensure that the outcome of the election is legitimate and credible.
9. **Counting/scrutiny of ballots should be localised in Districts**, where votes are counted at each polling station with data transmitted to the tally room in the District and central tally room at PNGEC headquarters on the same day via electronic means. This will cut out illegal play in transport of ballot boxes.

10. **Security operations must be more effective and efficient**, where security outcomes are achieved on time and on budget.

11. **Need for review of the qualification of candidates**, to ensure that members are qualified (skilled) and with integrity as leaders when they are voted in.

12. **Need for at least 3-5 Electoral Commissioners**, through a change in law so that decisions are made by the Chief Electoral Commissioner with the Commissioners, which will be more informed than having on person make the decisions.

13. **Introduction of the Electronic Electoral System (EES)**, through introduction and implementation of electronic roll (e-roll) and e-voting with the use of e-identity to reduce election irregularities.

14. **Strengthen the Ward Record System (WRS)**, whereby the population information can be used to verify the Common Roll and eliminate ghost names for each polling station.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NRI DISCUSSION PAPER NO.107 MADE IN 2009

Anere, R. and Wheen, K (2009). *Priorities for A Free and Fair Election: An NRI Issues Analysis*.

The recommendations were made to be essential for free and fair elections in 2012.

These recommendations are limited to a small number of high-priority proposals that are considered to be essential for free and fair elections in 2012.

1. Implement a new system of voter registration and voter identification for the 2012 Elections.

This system should be supported by:

- an immediate pilot study on the feasibility of a biometric system, informed by the experience of such systems elsewhere in the world; and
- an implementation plan for voter registration, to be in place by the beginning of 2010.

2. Make a 'Single, Safe and Secret Ballot' the central theme for the 2012 Elections.

This central theme should be:

- uniform across all official election messages and all forms of

public awareness; and

- coordinated under the leadership of the Interdepartmental Elections Committee to ensure this theme guides the 2012 operational plans of all relevant agencies and stakeholders.

3. Develop a National Security Framework for the 2012 Elections. This framework should encompass:

- an Elections Security Tool Kit, which would include a national set of standards for the conduct of security forces in relation to election offences, examples of best practice, and examples of successful contingency plans;
- a nationally consistent training program; and
- operational strategies that scope the potential security needs of each electorate and determine the levels of deployment. Flexible solutions could then combine the use of mobile polling teams, mixing of local authorities and external security personnel in areas that are particularly vulnerable to threat.

4. Formalise electronic counting and electronic data entry as an additional check on electoral integrity.

This priority should be supported by:

- legislative changes to the Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections (OLNLLGE) to direct the use of electronic counting in certain predefined instances; and
- the pilot usage of a digital data entry system for the manual count. This is to provide greater safeguards for the manual count, and would require relevant training of counting and data entry officials.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of an election is to elect credible persons to be members of parliament. This is to be done through an Election System with its processes guided by relevant laws and regulations. In order for an election to be free, fair and transparent, all stakeholders (voters, candidates, election administrators/officials, and supporting entities) must follow the established laws and regulations.

In the 2022 NGE, the constant shifting of dates and delay in preparing common roll, polling stations and polling dates casts doubts on the integrity of the elections even if they are conducted properly. It is good

for the country that elections must be conducted as required by law and on time instead of creating doubts on the integrity of the election process in PNG.

This submission provided a brief historical context of PNG Elections; key observations from 7 electorates in 2022 NGE by NRI-engaged observers in the highlands region; and recommendations with wider national implications for the Special Parliamentary Committee to consider.

It also highlighted NRI recommendations made in 2009, which are still relevant today.

In conclusion, it is also recommended that NRI be made a permanent member of any Interagency Election Oversight Body that the Parliamentary Committee will establish to provide research-based information for informed decision making.