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# **Elections in Papua New Guinea**

## *2017 National Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

When are the 2017 national elections? .....	1
How were polling places determined? How many polling places are set up? .....	1
Who are citizens voting for in the election? .....	1
When will official results be announced? .....	1
What is the structure of the government? .....	1
What electoral system is used? .....	2
What is the election management body? What are its powers? .....	2
Who is eligible to vote in the election? .....	2
How many registered voters are there? .....	2
How was the electoral roll prepared? .....	3
Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate pool?.....	3
How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?.....	3
How will election results be counted?.....	3
What integrity measures are being used to prevent fraud during the election?.....	4
Are there any codes of conduct? .....	5
How will election disputes be adjudicated? .....	5
Who will be managing electoral security? .....	5
Will the election management body use a media center? .....	6
Who can observe during election? How can they get accreditation? .....	6
Resources .....	7

*Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Papua New Guinea elections authorities as of June 19, 2017, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## **When are the 2017 national elections?**

The 2017 National Parliament general election will start June 24 and end July 8. It is a multiday election period covering 14 days in which voters will elect 111 members of the National Parliament (MPs).

## **How were polling places determined? How many polling places are set up?**

The Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission appoints as many polling places for each electorate as it deems necessary. There is no population threshold or quota. No polling place can be abolished after the issue of the writ and before the time appointed for its return.

For the 2017 national election, approximately 10,800 polling places are established. At each polling place, voters will wait in gender divided lines, either male or female, outside a polling booth. Inside the polling booth, voters will mark their ballots at a voting compartment before placing the ballots into the respective ballot boxes.

## **Who are citizens voting for in the election?**

Voters will directly elect 111 members (MPs) to serve in the National Parliament. Eighty-nine MPs will represent districts, also known as open electorates, and 22 will represent provinces. The 22 MPs representing provinces will also serve as provincial governors. To elect both types of MPs, each voter will cast two ballots: an open electorate ballot and a provincial electorate ballot.

The 111 MPs will be selected from among 3,340 candidates, which include representatives of 45 political parties and 2,006 independent candidates. Of the 45 political parties running candidates, 19 are incumbents.

## **When will official results be announced?**

The official results will be announced by July 24, 2017, the date by which the writs for the 2017 national election must be returned to the governor-general of Papua New Guinea.

## **What is the structure of the government?**

Papua New Guinea is a unicameral parliamentary democracy. The current National Parliament has 111 seats. Members are directly elected in single-member constituencies to serve five-year terms with eligibility for re-election.

The prime minister is the head of government.

The British monarch is the ceremonial head of the executive branch and appoints a ceremonial governor-general as the royal representative.

## **What electoral system is used?**

Since 2007, all national elections use the limited preferential voting (LPV) system. In the LPV system, voters rank their top three candidates from one to three on the ballot. To win, a candidate must have the support of an absolute majority of the electorate, or 50 percent plus one of all formal ballots.<sup>1</sup> In the LPV system, it is impossible for a single candidate to not win 50 percent plus one in a specific constituency.

The prime minister is elected by Parliament following legislative elections. Typically, the leader of the majority party or coalition is selected as prime minister.

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers?**

The Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) is mandated by the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, the Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections and the Electoral Law (National Elections) Regulation to prepare for, conduct and safeguard the 2017 national election. The PNGEC consists of one electoral commissioner who is appointed by the governor-general. The PNGEC is currently led by Electoral Commissioner Patilias Gamato.

## **Who is eligible to vote in the election?**

The constitution and Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections state that a person is eligible to vote if he or she is:

- A citizen of Papua New Guinea;
- At least 18 years of age or older; and
- On the electoral roll.

## **How many registered voters are there?**

In 2013, there were 4,776,096 registered voters in Papua New Guinea. Following vigorous voter registration efforts, including an electoral roll update campaign, approximately five million voters will be registered for the 2017 national election.

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<sup>1</sup> In Papua New Guinea, “formal” denotes valid votes and “informal” denotes invalid votes.

## **How was the electoral roll prepared?**

The 2017 electoral roll is the result of an extensive process of updating and cleansing the voter registry following the 2012 national election and 2013 local-level government (LLG) election. The latest lists are based on the 2012 national election and 2013 LLG election voter rolls. This voter roll was then analyzed by the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) to identify and eliminate duplicates, underage voters, “ghost voters”<sup>2</sup> and other anomalies. The update was completed in March 2016 and this list became the basis for the 2017 preliminary electoral roll. From late February to April 20, 2017, the PNGEC displayed the preliminary roll in 22 provinces on a rolling basis to address corrections and cases of misplaced voters or wards.

## **Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate pool?**

Papua New Guinea does not have a quota or reserved seat system. As of May 1, 2017, three women serve as representatives in the National Parliament. Of the 3,340 candidates, 167 are women, which is five percent of the contesting candidates. In 2012, approximately four percent of the candidates were women.

## **How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?**

If a voter requires assistance to cast their ballots, they may bring a person of their choosing to aid them in the voting process. If no such person is appointed by the voter, the presiding officer or assistant presiding officer will assist them to write their choices and place the ballots in the ballot boxes.

Sections 140 and 143 of the Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections outline the protocol to assist voters who have a physical disability, are blind, have low vision or are illiterate.

## **How will election results be counted?**

Once polling closes, polling teams transport the ballots in sealed ballot boxes to counting centers where they will be counted sequentially in the presence of scrutineers. Each constituency is assigned a specific counting center within the electoral district or province where voting took place; in the Highlands region, for example, all counting centers are centralized in the provincial capital. At the counting centers, votes will be sorted, counted and tabulated under the supervision of the returning officer and assistant returning officer and with support from sorters, counters, runners, tally men and recorders. Candidates may appoint one scrutineer to observe counting in their place and raise objections when necessary.

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<sup>2</sup> “Ghost voters” are deceased, ineligible, or invented names on a voter registry due to neglect or fraud, and which create the potential for individuals to have more than one vote or for ineligible voters to vote.

Under Papua New Guinea's limited preferential voting system, the counting process comprises two phases. The first phase is known as the first preference count. In this phase, the officials sort and count the votes of each ballot box for each constituency according to the voter's indicated first preference. During counting, officials also determine whether each ballot represents a formal/valid or informal/invalid vote; only formal votes are allocated to candidates. After the counting of all ballot boxes, the officials determine whether a candidate received an absolute majority of the votes. If no candidate receives an absolute majority, the counting process will proceed to the second phase known as the distribution of preferences.

At this stage, the officials will exclude the candidate who received the lowest number of votes and then distribute this candidate's votes to the remaining candidates based on the next preference marked on the ballots. This exclusion process continues until a candidate receives an absolute majority. Once a winning candidate is identified, the returning officer submits a request to the provincial election manager for authorization to declare the results. Upon approval of the request, the returning officer officially declares the results of the election by signing and returning the writ.

The candidate with the second highest vote total may request a recount prior to the announcement of results, but only if the margin of votes between the candidates does not exceed 0.25 percent.

The results of the first preference count and distribution of preferences are recorded and certified in forms 66A and 66B.

While these are manual processes, data processing officers will use tablets to electronically record results and images of the forms throughout the counting process. The captured data and images will be automatically transmitted to the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) so that results can be efficiently aggregated, verified and announced to the public through the PNGEC's media center and website.

## **What integrity measures are being used to prevent fraud during the election?**

The Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission will employ the following integrity measures to deter fraud during the 2017 national election:

- Ballots with security features, such as unique serial numbers and holograms, will be used for voting.
- Serial-numbered, tamper-evident seals will be used to prevent tampering with ballot boxes.
- Indelible ink will be applied to the small finger of voters' left hands to prevent multiple voting.
- Polling and counting will be witnessed by international and domestic observers and scrutineers appointed by candidates.
- Counted ballots will be kept in sealed bags and placed into sealed ballot boxes during the counting process.

- Progressive results will be captured into a database that cross-references relevant polling data and identifies any discrepancies in the number of ballots counted, number of ballots cast and number of voters.

## **Are there any codes of conduct?**

Yes; there is the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Candidates and Party Scrutineers and Supporters During the 2017 National Election. This has been designed as an agreement between the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) and political stakeholders to uphold the electoral laws of the country. The aim of the Code of Conduct is to ensure the integrity of the electoral process, foster a peaceful campaign environment and promote the orderly conduct of elections. The Code of Conduct is posted on the PNGEC website ([www.pngec.gov.pg](http://www.pngec.gov.pg)).

## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

As described in Part 18 of the Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections, the National Court will adjudicate disputes relating to the validity of an election or return of writ. To dispute an election or return, a voter or candidate in the disputed constituency must file a signed petition with the National Court or a court house in the relevant provincial capital headquarters within 40 days of the declaration of the election results. To be considered by the Court, the petition must “set out the facts relied on to invalidate the election or return” and “be attested by two witnesses whose occupations and addresses are stated.”<sup>3</sup> The petitioner must also pay a filing fee of PGK 5,000 (approximately USD \$1,612.90).

The decision of the Court is final and therefore cannot be appealed. Disputes relating to the electoral roll will be addressed by the relevant district courts.

## **Who will be managing electoral security?**

The police commissioner is working alongside the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) to provide security for electoral officers carrying out election-related activities. Security personnel, such as police, correctional services or defense force officers, are responsible for ensuring that officials are safe and polling and counting are peaceful. At polling places, the presiding officers are responsible for liaising with security personnel, while returning officers are charged with this responsibility at counting centers.

At the provincial level, the PNGEC has implemented a weekly incident reporting system under the office of the electoral commissioner to support greater security awareness in the lead-up to polling.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Section 208 of the Organic Law on the National and Local-level Government Elections.

## **Will the election management body use a media center?**

Yes, the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) will host a media center for media personnel and other accredited stakeholders at its headquarters during the polling and counting process. In addition, the PNGEC will post all media releases and official results on its website ([www.pngec.gov.pg](http://www.pngec.gov.pg)).

## **Who can observe during election? How can they get accreditation?**

International and domestic observer groups and scrutineers appointed by candidates can observe the polling and counting process. Responding to a request from the electoral commissioner, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will [coordinate international observers](#) from more than 12 groups including the Commonwealth, the Melanesian Spearhead Group, Australian National University, and the Australian High Commission and other diplomatic missions. Based on the receipt and review of accreditation applications, the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission will issue accreditation badges to observers.

## Resources

- [Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Candidates and Party Scrutineers and Supporters](#)
- [Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea](#)
- [Electoral Law for National Elections](#)
- [Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections](#)
- [Limited Preferential Voting System extended guide](#)