



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: The Autonomous Region of Bougainville

General Elections

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Asia-Pacific

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Election Snapshot

- Election Day: September 4, 2025
- Registered voters: 238,625 people (49 percent women)
- Candidates: 408 (including 21 women)
- Polling stations: 544
- Seats: 38 single-member constituency seats, three seats for women representatives, and three seats for former combatants for the Bougainville House of Representative and one presidential seat (45 seats in total).
- Campaign expenditures: There are no limits to campaign expenditures in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville's general elections.
- Election observers: Two types of observers may observe these elections: those appointed by a candidate – called “scrutineers” – and those representing international organizations and civil society.

When is Election Day?

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville will hold general elections on September 4, 2025. Voters will cast their ballots to elect the president, three women's representatives, three representatives of former combatants, and 38 single-member constituencies, who together will form the Bougainville House of Representatives.

Why are these elections important?

The 2025 general elections come six years after a non-binding referendum for independence from Papua New Guinea (PNG), in which 98.3 percent of valid votes were for independence. Consultations between the two governments are ongoing, and these elections will serve as a critical benchmark of public opinion as incumbent President Ishmael Toroama's 2027 deadline for the referendum's ratification by the PNG Parliament approaches.

What is the government and electoral system? What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville is a representative democracy. The 45-member Bougainville House of Representatives (BHoR) is made up of 38 open constituencies. The BHoR has a president and reserves three regional seats for women and three for former combatants of the Bougainville civil war (Bougainville Crisis).¹

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

Article 106 of the Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville establishes the position of electoral commissioner, tasks the commissioner with conducting elections in accordance with the applicable electoral laws², and establishes the commissioner's independence.³ The Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner (OBEC) comprises the secretariat. Neither the commissioner nor the

¹ Article 55 of the [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#).

² [Bougainville Elections Act 2007](#).

³ Article 106 of the [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#).

OBEC has the power to issue regulations. This power is retained by the Bougainville Executive Council, which comprises the president and ministers.⁴ The budget for OBEC and funding for each electoral event is allocated by the Autonomous Bougainville Government.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Eligibility requirements for candidates are set out in the Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.⁵

Candidates for president must:

- Be at least 40 years old;
- Be eligible to vote in elections for the Bougainville House of Representatives (BHoR)
- Be Bougainvillean (i.e., belong to a clan lineage);
- Not have served two terms as president already;
- Not be contesting another seat in the BHoR;
- Not have had the right to vote removed by a court;
- Not be sentenced to death or incarceration for more than three months; and
- Not have been declared bankrupt.

Candidates for seats in the BHoR must:

- Be at least 25 years old;
- Be Bougainvillean (i.e., belong to a clan lineage);
- Belong to a clan lineage that holds land within the constituency for which they are contesting;
- Have been born in the constituency for which they are contesting; and
- Have resided continuously in the constituency for which they are contesting for at least five years immediately preceding their nomination.

Those running for the seats reserved for women must be women. Any candidate running for a seat reserved for former combatants must have been a combatant with either the Bougainville Resistance Force, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, or the Me'ekamui Defense Force during the Bougainville Crisis. Prospective candidates contesting for house seats reserved for former combatants must submit 20 signatures from their own former combatant group and 10 signatures from another former combatant group.

The Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner appointed a Registrar of Political Parties (RPP) in early May 2025. Parties had from May 7 to June 7 to submit documents to the RPP to confirm that they are, as per the Political Parties (Registration) Act, in good standing. Three parties were registered in this period, with a fourth party granted an extension to finalize its paperwork by the Issue of Writ on July 7. In the 2020 Autonomous Bougainville Government elections, six parties competed.

The four parties contesting are:

- Bougainville People's Alliance Party;
- New Bougainville Party;
- United Bougainville Front Party; and
- Bougainville People's Congress Party.

⁴ Article 233 of the Bougainville Elections Act 2007.

⁵ Articles 91 (for the Presidency) and 56 (for members of the House of Representatives) of the [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#).

What is the process for nominating candidates and the campaign timeline?

Nominations were open for three days following the Issue of Writs on July 7 and were submitted to the returning officers. Bougainvillean law does not limit the number of candidates a political party may endorse to compete in a particular constituency.

Nomination forms are available from returning and assistant returning officers. The nomination form must be fully completed and signed by both the candidate and a witness who personally knows the candidate.

Each candidate is asked to complete a candidate information form when he or she is nominated. Returning officers should also complete the Nomination Checklist to ensure that they have taken all the necessary steps.

Once the returning officer is satisfied that all the necessary information has been submitted, including a nomination deposit, the nomination is received and recorded on Form BE 13, Declaration of Nominations.

What are campaign expenditure and donation limits?

There are no limits to campaign expenditures or donations under Bougainvillean law. Political parties are required to disclose sources of funding, but candidates are not.

What is the level of women's representation?

In addition to the three seats in the Bougainville House of Representatives that are reserved for women – one for each of Bougainville's three regions – at present two women were elected to represent the open constituencies of Mahari and Ioro. In this election, although the total number of candidates standing for election has declined from 446 to 408, and the total number of candidates standing for open constituencies has declined from 351 to 338, the number of women standing for open constituencies has increased from 14 to 21.

Although many factors may account for this increase, it is notable that, since 2021, 45 out of Bougainville's 47 community governments have been chaired by women.

Who can vote in these elections?

To be eligible to vote in these elections, a person must be:

- At least 18 years of age;
- A Bougainvillean, defined in the Constitution⁶ as someone who is a member of a Bougainvillean clan by birth or adoption, married to a member of a Bougainvillean clan, or a child of a member of a Bougainvillean clan;
- A citizen of Papua New Guinea;
- A person whose right to vote has not been removed by a court⁷; and
- A resident in the ward for at least six months prior to the day of polling.

⁶ Article 7 of the [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#).

⁷ This restriction may affect persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. It does not comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Eligible voters are required by law to enroll on the Certified List of Voters.⁸ On Election Day, poll clerks search for voters' names on the roll and will turn away persons who are not found.

How are voters registered and how many registered voters are there?

Ward recorders, who maintain local records, are tasked with conducting door-to-door voter enrollment, ensuring that all eligible individuals are enrolled and that updated voter rolls are accessible for public verification. These records are then added to the voter roll. Additionally, The Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner appoints ward recorders to serve as poll clerks, further strengthening accountability and building community trust in the electoral process. This collaboration has contributed to Bougainville having the most accurate voter roll in Papua New Guinea. There are currently 238,625 individuals registered on the 2025 Bougainville general elections voter roll, making it the largest and most inclusive roll to date.

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups?

Three seats are reserved for women – one for each of Bougainville's three regions. There are also three seats reserved for former combatants in the Bougainville Crisis – one from each of the three regions.

If a voter requires assistance to vote due to disability status, age, or other factors, the presiding officer of the polling station will permit a person chosen by the voter to assist them. The law provides for a penalty of 200 kina (approximately \$47 USD) or a three-month jail sentence if the assistant discloses how the voter voted or attempts to influence the voter in any way.⁹

Are there provisions for voters living in other parts of Papua New Guinea or abroad, or working away from their home area?

In addition to Bougainville, polling will take place in five locations around Papua New Guinea: Goroka, Lae, Mount Hagen, Port Moresby, and Rabaul. Eligible voters may vote in any of those locations.

Eligible voters who are in Bougainville but outside of the constituency where they are registered to vote will also be able to vote for their home constituencies at special polling locations set up in each of Bougainville's three regional capitals.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get their accreditation?

Two types of observers may observe these elections: those appointed by a candidate – called "scrutineers" – and those representing international organizations and civil society. Each candidate may deploy one scrutineer at a time to each polling booth, and the law details sanctions against scrutineers who attempt to influence voters. By law, the presiding officer can order the removal of any scrutineers from the polling booth if they interfere with or attempt to influence a voter.

⁸ Article 110 of [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#).

⁹ Article 115 of the [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#).

Scrutineers are selected by their candidate, and their details are submitted to the returning officer for accreditation.¹⁰

The Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner (OBEC) accredits observation organizations and registers individuals in a Register of Observers and issues them individually numbered badges.

Each electoral observer group is responsible for all arrangements and costs related to their observing duties, such as transport, communications, and lodging. Furthermore, to preclude any perception of a conflict of interest, no electoral observer group or representative of such group may utilize any OBEC resources, such as facilities or motor vehicles.

Candidates are present during polling and counting (along with members of the public) and thus have the opportunity to raise issues with polling officials as they see them.

Who is managing security on Election Day?

The Bougainville Police Service will deploy officers and Community Auxiliary Police around Bougainville to secure polling and counting venues.

What are considered election offenses under the legal framework?

The Election Act of 2007 lists 16 electoral offenses and their sanctions. They are primarily concerned with voter impersonation and fraud during polling. The legal framework also sets out sanctions related to offenses of defamation of candidates, disrupting other candidates' campaigns, and impersonating another candidate. Penalties range from 200 kina (approximately \$57 USD) to six months of jail time.¹¹

How are votes counted and tabulated?

Votes will be counted in the regional centers of Arawa, Buin, and Buka. All the presidential votes will be counted in Buka. By law, counting must be completed in 14 days. It is scheduled to commence on September 8 and to be completed by September 22.

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville uses the limited preferential vote system, by which each voter ranks his or her three preferred candidates on the ballot paper.

Counting – called “scrutiny” in Bougainville – has two distinct phases: the primary count and the elimination phase. In the primary count, ballots are sorted by the first preference and then counted. If a candidate receives at least 50 percent of the votes plus one in this phase, he or she is declared the winner and counting ends. If no candidate receives at least that number, counting proceeds to the elimination phase.

In the first elimination round, votes for the candidate who received the fewest first-preference votes are redistributed according to the second preferences listed on the ballots, and that candidate is thereby eliminated. Then, if no candidate receives at least 50 percent of votes plus one, the votes for the candidate who received the second-fewest first-preference ballots are redistributed according to the

¹⁰ Articles 103 and 124 of the [Bougainville Elections Act 2007](#).

¹¹ The list of offenses can be found at http://www.abg.gov.pg/uploads/acts/Act_2007-2-Bougainville_Elections.compressed.pdf.

second preference, and so on until a candidate has received at least 50 percent of votes plus one. If a voter's second preference has already been eliminated, the vote is counted toward the voter's third preference. If all of a voter's preferences have been eliminated, the ballot is deemed to be "exhausted," and the vote is henceforth excluded.¹²

When will official results be announced?

Final results are released when the returning officer returns the writs to the electoral commissioner. Each writ shows the winning candidate for each election, along with other information.¹³ Writs will be formally returned by the Electoral Commissioner on September 22.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Aggrieved parties can file for a review of an election within 14 days of the announcement of provisional results. The review must then be conducted within 60 days. Reviews are conducted by the electoral commissioner, who for this purpose has the powers of a returning officer to, for example, recount ballots. The commissioner also has the power to question anyone who he or she suspects has knowledge of the matter. Refusal to answer the commissioner's questions may result in a fine of 2,000 kina (approximately \$470 USD) or six months' imprisonment.

Resources

- [Bougainville Elections Act 2007](#)
- [Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville](#)
- [Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea](#)
- [Bougainville Peace Agreement 2001](#)

About IFES in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea

Since 2011, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has worked with electoral management bodies in Papua New Guinea (PNG), including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, providing expertise on international best practices on good governance and election administration. IFES also partners with PNG youth, women, persons with disabilities, and faith-based organizations to promote civic education and increased participation in political and civic processes.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Bougainville elections authorities as of August 20, 2025, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations. It is made possible by the generous support of the governments of Australia and New Zealand.

¹² Part XV of the Bougainville Elections Act 2007.

¹³ Part XVII of the Bougainville Elections Act 2007.