

Violence Against Women in Elections in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville: An IFES Assessment



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Lead Author:

Alison Dyer

Contributing Authors:

Dr. Gabrielle Bardall

Terry Ann Rogers





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International Foundation for Electoral Systems
2011 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202
Email: editor@ifes.org
Fax: 202.350.6701

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Preface

For over three decades, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has worked to advance good governance and support all citizens' rights to participate in credible elections around the globe. We recognize that violence against women in politics is a substantial threat to the integrity of the electoral process – it can affect women's participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists and political party leaders, and it undermines free, fair and inclusive democratic processes.

IFES works to document, prevent and end violence against women in politics through our projects on four continents and through our cutting-edge research. We share this commitment across the world, and both men and women at IFES work to increase awareness about the issue and to instigate action to address it.

This report demonstrates our commitment to combat violence against women in politics. It identifies the many forms of violence against women in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) and understand how this violence – be it physical, verbal, economic or psychological – contributes to the unequal representation of Bougainvillean women in politics and in the larger electoral process. While recent legal changes, including the transformation of the local government system to require gender parity, and electoral victories, including the election of the first woman to a non-reserved seat, have demonstrated progress, women still face significant challenges as they seek to participate in the electoral process as voters, candidates, electoral officials and elected representatives. Readers will learn about these and the many routes national and international partners can take to support Bougainvillean women and reduce the obstacles they face to participate freely and fairly in their elections. Through our work on gender inclusiveness in Bougainville and around the world, IFES prioritizes the empowerment of women and girls as a crucial component of healthy and resilient democracies.

With this publication, we invite you to join IFES in ending violence against women in politics and in all spheres of life.



Michael Svetlik, Vice President, Programs, IFES

Executive Summary

Women in Bougainville, an autonomous region within Papua New Guinea (PNG), have greater access to politics than their counterparts in mainland PNG due to specific provisions in the regional government's structure that guarantee women's representation at the local and regional levels. Additionally, most of Bougainville has the distinction of having matrilineal land rights, which somewhat elevates the position of women in decision-making. Colonialism and conflict, however, have eroded this system and its positive effects. A decadelong civil war ending in 2001 upended the traditional social order and is thought to have contributed to high rates of domestic violence, breakdown in government services and support networks, and increased prevalence of substance abuse throughout Bougainville, all of which impact the participation of women in political and public life.

The post-conflict environment, high rate of domestic violence and deeply entrenched gender roles, which relegate women to work in the home, gardens and market, create an environment in which

Despite positive shifts, a large portion of women at IFES' leadership training agreed that "women are not able to take care of their family and hold a leadership position at the same time."

women are subordinate to men. Still, members of local civil society organizations (CSOs) assert that they have seen a recent shift in the engagement and acceptance of women in leadership positions, most notably in church and community leadership. Attitudes toward women in politics have also improved, with the recently changed community government structure requiring gender parity in the number

of male and female representatives and the election of Josephine Getsi in 2015, the first woman to win an open seat against male candidates in the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) Parliament.¹ These advances, however, are underscored by the continued conflict between women's new leadership responsibilities and traditional caretaking roles.

Overall, violence against women in elections (VAWE) in Bougainville manifests in two main ways: physical, often in the form of domestic violence stemming from conflict over the election or other political pressures, and socio-psychological, in the form of gossip, harassment and threats. Women who seek to engage in electoral processes as voters, candidates and election officials still face distinct challenges to their free and fair participation.

Female voters experience pressure from family and clan leadership about for whom to vote and may face physical violence if they do not toe the family line. Female candidates must contend with deeply entrenched attitudes about women's roles in politics, and cultural perceptions that denigrate women's leadership abilities, as well as intense

Female candidates in 2017 were told to "straighten your home before you go into politics" and "no, you are not a good woman" while campaigning.

¹ K. Baker and T. Oppermann. *The Election of Josephine Getsi – Making Political History in Bougainville*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia. Australian National University (ANU). 2015

scrutiny and gossip about their personal lives while campaigning. Additionally, lack of access to adequate financial backing creates a high barrier to entry for female candidates who wish to contest elections. Like their male counterparts, female election workers face physical violence and verbal harassment from disgruntled candidates and supporters.

Responses to VAWE in Bougainville have been limited to date – due in part to a severe lack of concrete data, which muddles the scope and root causes of the problem – and have primarily centered on CSO-led candidate and awareness trainings. There is ample opportunity to improve the engagement of the Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner (OBEC) to address VAWE and create better coordination with existing support networks for survivors of domestic violence to help mitigate the prevalence of physical violence in elections and make elections safer for women in Bougainville.

Summary of Findings

VAWE Assessment Findings		
Factor	Windows of Vulnerability	Windows of Opportunity and Responses
Status of Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically, traditional matriarchal land rights afforded women power in decision-making, but the disruption of this system, possibly by colonialism and Christianity, contributed to the erosion of women’s authority today. High rates of domestic violence, linked to lasting impact from the conflict, include psychological factors like substance abuse, emotional abuse and neglect in childhood. Domestic violence is often unreported or handled informally rather than through the formal legal system, making prevalence challenging to determine and limiting survivors’ access to resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family violence was outlawed and enforcing regulations were established in 2017, providing an avenue for survivors to seek legal protection and support. Since the conflict, CSOs and churches have been key providers of resources as government support remains limited. In some cases, there have been changing attitudes toward women in leadership positions, including in churches where women are now permitted in some leadership positions. Interviewees noted a relaxing of strict gender roles in political, religious and community spaces with increased awareness and education. Women played a key role in negotiating the peace process and have taken on key roles in providing services, conducting advocacy work, and taking on leadership roles in their communities in the post-conflict period.
Women’s Access to the Electoral Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion over women’s eligibility for “open” seats, financial barriers of campaigns, and the perception that women are unable to win elections remain key challenges for female candidates. The underlying belief that women are unable to be strong leaders and negotiators hinders women’s ability to take on strong roles in the referendum negotiation and in government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former candidates have noted attitudes toward female candidates have improved. Reserved seats for women have been established at the subnational level, and the first woman was elected to a non-reserved seat in 2017. In 2018, the local government law changed to mandate gender parity in local government. There is a good gender balance between women and men as polling officials and women actively serve and participate as scrutineers.
VAWE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family and clan voting is enforced through threats or acts of domestic violence and stems in part from lack of secrecy of the ballot for women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passage and enforcement of the Family Protection Act (FPA) can assist in preventing domestic violence surrounding elections.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female candidates face verbal violence, harassment and threats including character attacks and attacks on family life. • Female election workers report direct verbal violence and harassment by supporters and scrutineers including the use of gendered language. In the case of physical threats brought to the attention of IFES, they reported quick response by law enforcement. • There is a lack of awareness among voters and candidates to report gender-based violence in elections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bougainville has notably lower rates of overt physical VAWE and higher participation of women as electoral officials and scrutineers.
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What is VAWE?

Political violence occurs in highly distinct patterns (forms, locations, victims, perpetrators, frequencies) according to the victim’s gender identity.² Gender-motivated political violence is “harm that violates an individual’s or group’s political rights on the basis of their gender-identity and is motivated by a desire to repress, deter, control or otherwise coerce the political rights of the victims because of the victim’s gender.”³

These forms of VAWE are a threat to the integrity of the electoral process affecting women’s participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists and political party leaders, and undermining free, fair and inclusive democratic processes. Through increased attention to women’s participation and women’s voices in democracy assistance, examples of violence against women in elections in their homes, political arenas and public spaces have become more visible. Common understandings of electoral violence originate in definitional frameworks that often emphasize public acts of physical violence and violence between public stakeholders.⁴ These definitions reflect male experiences of political violence and tend to overlook personal relationships between perpetrators and survivors, the variation in spaces where violence occurs and nuances within types of potential violence –

² G. Bardall. *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence*. IFES. 2011.

³ G. Bardall. “Violence, Politics, and Gender.” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. 2018.

⁴ IFES defines electoral violence as: “any harm or threat of harm to persons or property involved in the electoral process, or the process itself.” This includes physical and psychological harm, as well as property damage. In 2009, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Guide to Elections and Conflict Prevention* defined electoral violence primarily as “acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition....” The United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) 2010 *Electoral Security Framework* concludes that “electoral violence refers to physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or to an announced electoral result.” The IFES definition was developed as part of IFES’ Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) programs around the world. Further discussion of the evolution of the definition and the EVER methodology can be found in Lisa Kammerud, *Managing Election Violence: The IFES EVER Program* (IFES October 2009) and online at www.ifes.org.

all of which are essential for understanding the distinct nature of election violence experienced by women.⁵ IFES defines VAWE as:

Any harm or threat of harm committed against women with the intent and/or impact of interfering with their free and equal participation in the electoral process during the electoral period. It includes harassment, intimidation, physical harm or coercion, threats and financial pressures, and it may be committed in the home or other private spaces, or in public spaces. These acts may be directed at women in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g., voters, media, political actors, state actors, community leaders, electoral officials).⁶

Methodology

To document the nature and impact of VAWE in Bougainville, this study establishes the historical context for violence and women’s political participation and defines the cultural and socio-political norms that impact the status of women in society as well as their participation in the electoral process. The study also looks at community and institutional responses to the issue. The analysis is organized around three key factors⁷ that influence the incidence and impact of VAWE:

Assessment Factors	
Status of Women	Addresses broad concerns related to the status of women in their local and national communities; helps identify root causes of violence against women in general and in elections specifically.
Women's Access to Election Processes	Examines gender dynamics specifically related to political and electoral processes, as well as democracy, rights and governance issues more broadly. Categories of this analysis explore the gender dynamics related to the electoral legal framework, election administration, voter registration, women’s political participation as voters and activists and the role of political parties.
VAWE	Identifies incidents and trends of violence against women that occur within the context of the electoral cycle (pre-election, election and post-election period between elections); examines triggers for gender-based VAWE.

This report presents the findings of an IFES-led initial, field-based VAWE assessment⁸ in order to understand the potential challenges that were created and exacerbated by violence against women following the 2017 PNG national elections and 2018 Bougainville Community Government elections.

⁵ For more details on the development of the VAWE typology, see <http://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections>, page 12.

⁶ IFES, *Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring and Response*, 2016, <http://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections>, page 2.

⁷ These assessment factors are inspired by CARE’s Gender Assessment Framework, IFES’ Gender and Elections Analysis tool, and USAID’s Electoral Security Framework and Best Practices in Electoral Security.

⁸ The assessment in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville was conducted with support from Abt Associates.

One IFES headquarters staff member and one senior gender expert consultant conducted fieldwork from June 24 through July 21, 2018, with remote support from IFES' Gender Team.⁹ The team conducted key informant interviews with 56 government and elected officials, representatives from civil society and women's organizations and other political actors from all three regions of Bougainville. A complete list of respondents' organizations can be found in the Annex, although individual names are not provided to protect participants' privacy.

IFES conducted a review of existing peer-reviewed literature on the topic and monitored trends through its presence in Bougainville from 2015 to present. It is important to note that a major impediment to this assessment was the severe lack of data and statistics available in Bougainville in general, and specifically on the topic of gender and election violence. In view of the consistent concerns raised by individual women impacted by violence in the electoral process, as well as by national and international organizations, the issue is significant. The lack of systematic baseline data on violence against women in politics and elections is a global issue, recognized by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Its Consequences (see [report A/73/301](#)), and without appropriate data, it is difficult to confirm trends, identify populations impacted and their unique needs and plot a course for resolute action. This report recognizes the barrier of lacking data and aims to contribute to filling this gap.

⁹ Fieldwork was conducted by Alison Dyer and IFES Senior Gender Expert Terry Ann Rogers and supported in country by Aileen Sagolo, Paul Rowland and Oliver Green and remotely by Gabrielle Bardall and Gina Chirillo.

Political Context

Bougainville is an autonomous region within PNG consisting of several islands in the Solomon Sea. Bougainville received autonomous status as part of the Bougainville Peace Agreement signed on August 30, 2001, between the ABG and the Government of PNG (GoPNG) following a decade of conflict. As part of this agreement, a referendum on the region's future political status, independence or autonomy, is slated to be held in mid-2019.¹⁰ Like the remainder of PNG, Bougainville is governed by a parliamentary system and characterized by tribal politics. On the whole, Bougainville's elections are less marred by physical violence than those in PNG, however, the Bougainville conflict has had a lasting impact on governance and opportunities for women's participation in the region.

The Bougainville Conflict, Peace Process and the Role of Women

The Bougainville conflict lasted from 1989 to 1999 and transformed Bougainville from the most productive province in PNG to the least, with dramatic social and political implications to this day.¹¹ It was a multifaceted conflict initially fought between the secessionist Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), the GoPNG and the Resistance Forces, auxiliary groups supporting the GoPNG. In the later years, the conflict shifted to be primarily Bougainvillean versus Bougainvillean.¹² The conflict began over the lack of compensation provided to Bougainvilleans for the adverse social and ecological effects of the Panguna Mine, operated by an Australian-owned mining company in partnership with the GoPNG, which forced the relocation of people and villages, disrupted traditional community structures and caused ecological damage in the surrounding area.¹³ A group of armed Bougainvilleans shut down the mine in 1988, leading the GoPNG to send its army to reopen the mine and reignite simmering secessionist sentiments. In 1989, the BRA was established and called for complete independence of Bougainville, starting a decade of conflict between the GoPNG, BRA and Resistance Forces factions in the largest conflict in Oceania since World War II.¹⁴ Fighting became highly localized with overlapping "private" conflicts between and within these groups – with individual Bougainvillean units commonly switching sides – leading to further complication and escalation into a civil war.¹⁵ Bougainville's total population at the time was less than 200,000, and it is estimated that more than 60,000 Bougainvilleans (30 percent of the total population) were displaced and between 10,000 and 15,000 (between 5 and 7.5 percent of the total population) died during the conflict, the majority due to the GoPNG-enforced blockade that severely limited the flow of supplies and medicine to the region.¹⁶ Fighting led to a disruption in health

¹⁰ K. Scott, A. Morrison and J. Rawson. [First General Election for the Autonomous Bougainville Government Report of the International Election Observer Team](#). 2005.

¹¹ R. Eves. [Do No Harm Research – Bougainville](#). ANU. 2018.

¹² V. Boege. [Bougainville Report: Addressing legitimacy issues in fragile post-conflict situations to advance conflict transformation and peace-building](#). University of Queensland. 2013.

¹³ M. O'Callaghan. "The Origins of the Conflict." Weaving Consensus: The Papua New Guinea-Bougainville peace process. Conciliation Resources. 2002. Chapter 1.

¹⁴ [V. Boege. 2013.](#)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ International Women's Development Agency. "[Why women's roles in ending conflict may not be over in Bougainville.](#)" October 13, 2016.

services and education across Bougainville and those children who grew up during the conflict have been coined the “lost generation.”¹⁷ Today, much of this cohort still lacks the necessary job skills, education and economic opportunities to become gainfully employed and suffers from higher rates of substance abuse than their parents.¹⁸

The women of Bougainville played a key role in the peace process. During the peace process, women served as mediators between warring factions and frequently lobbied men to put down their arms during the war. In the end, female leaders were involved in arranging the negotiations between the leaders of Bougainville and the GoPNG to bring about the formal cease-fire in 1998.¹⁹

The Bougainville Peace Agreement was signed in 2001 with provisions that 1) established the AROB within PNG, and 2) mandated a formal referendum on its future political status within 10 to 15 years after the establishment of a government.²⁰ The Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI) is tasked with fulfilling the agreement’s mandates, including preparation for the referendum and continuing peacebuilding efforts. Reflective of women’s role in the initial peace process, two of DPAI’s eight senior leadership positions are occupied by women.²¹ Though the presence of two women in this department is encouraging, women are still two positions shy from gender parity in the body. The strong participation of women in the peace process contributed to the policies protecting the representation of women in the AROB, however changing gender relations in the post-conflict environment have resulted in new challenges to women’s political participation.²²

Legal Rights of Women

Following the conflict, the Constitution of the AROB took concrete steps to ensure the representation of women in government, which are seen as a result of women’s role in the peace process through an established quota system and policies that continually promote women’s representation.²³

The Constitution includes quota systems of three reserved seats for women in the Bougainville House of Representatives and one reserved presidential cabinet position for a woman.²⁴ As of 2016, Community Governments are required to have equal representation of men and women as ward representatives and alternate the gender of the chair and deputy chair, a positive shift from the previous male-dominated Council of Elders system of local government.²⁵ In addition to political representation, the

¹⁷ Autonomous Bougainville Government. “[Proposed Education System for ‘Lost Generation.’](#)” November 9, 2016.

¹⁸ Donna Leigh Holden Development Consulting. *Bougainville Youth Initiative Independent Review and Design: Review Report*. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. December 2, 2017.

¹⁹ United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), [Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: combined initial, 2nd and 3rd periodic report of States parties : Papua New Guinea](#). 2009.

²⁰ [V. Boege. 2013.](#)

²¹ Department of Community Government. “Organisation Chart.” 2018.

²² [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Autonomous Bougainville Government. [Bougainville Community Government Act 2016](#). 2016.

ABG established the Division of Women, Religion and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in 2007 to act as a representative body for women, encourage participation in economic activities, and unite and strengthen women's organizations.²⁶ This division has since evolved into the Office of Gender Equality within the Department of Community Development, which includes community development, women, churches, NGOs, youth, sports and recreation and culture and arts,²⁷ with one aim to implement the Bougainville Policy on Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality and Peace and Security through the integration of gender equality across ABG departments and policies.²⁸ The policy, developed in 2016, calls for a holistic approach to supporting gender equality through focused analysis of the challenges men and women face and integration of gender perspectives throughout all policy development processes.²⁹ It represents the first of its kind in the Pacific region, though the efficacy of its implementation is unclear. Similarly, IFES assessment interviewees noted that the Office of Gender Equality has been largely ineffective since its creation.

Aside from the established quota systems, challenges in effective implementation of the Policy on Women's Empowerment seems to have dampened the policy's effect and while the quota policies may grant Bougainvillean women greater autonomy and access to politics than their counterparts in PNG, particularly as candidates and elected officials, social and cultural norms about women's status and gender roles and lapses in implementation inhibit their full participation.

On the international level, Bougainville is subject to the same international obligations as PNG due to its status as an autonomous region,³⁰ including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1995), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2008), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2008),³¹ Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality and the Beijing Platform for Action.³² Despite this, there is no legislation pertaining to discrimination on the basis of sex.³³ Domestic violence was not criminalized until the 2013 passage of the FPA and enforcement only began in 2017.³⁴

²⁶ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

²⁷ Autonomous Bougainville Government. "[Department of Community Development.](#)" 2018.

²⁸ A. Kirkham, S. Close and Z. Yousuf. *Gender in political transition: Bougainville's peace process*. Conciliation Resources. Political Settlements Research Programme. United Kingdom Department for International Development. February 2018.

²⁹ Autonomous Bougainville Government. *Bougainville Policy on Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security*. 2016.

³⁰ All dates listed reflect PNG's ratification date.

³¹ UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. "[Ratification Status for Papua New Guinea.](#)" 2018.

³² [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

³³ UN Women. "[Global Database on Violence against Women – Papua New Guinea.](#)" 2018.

Discriminatory Practices Act of 1963 prohibits discrimination on basis of "colour, race or ethnic, tribal or national origin" only

³⁴ Human Rights Watch. "[Country Summary – Papua New Guinea.](#)" *World Report 2018*. January 2018.

VAWE in Bougainville

Factor 1. Status of Women

The traditional system of matrilineal land rights in most of Bougainville affords women a slightly higher status in society than in most of PNG and is thought to be one reason they were able to effectively intervene during the conflict. In Bougainville, with the exception of Buin and other regions in the south, land rights are matrilineal, a distinction that affords women some independent status – though women in Bougainville still face high rates of gender-based violence. These matrilineal traditions and women’s role in the peace process have today afforded Bougainvillean women a higher status than their counterparts in the rest of PNG. Men relocate to their wife’s village following marriage and children belong to the woman’s clan.³⁵ Despite this, rates of violence against women remain high and were seen to increase following the conflict.³⁶

Strict gender roles govern daily life for men and women in Bougainville. Interviewees noted, however, that gender roles are becoming more relaxed as education and awareness of gender equality increase. Access to health services is low, and literacy rates remain around 75 percent for women and 78 percent for men for all age groups.³⁷ Traditionally, women are expected to raise the children, manage the home and work in the garden³⁸ while husbands are decision-makers, though some couples report joint decision-making on household and family matters.³⁹ Women have varying levels of economic independence – 57 percent of Bougainvillean men report perpetrating and 55 percent of women report experiencing economic abuse, including the withholding of income and limiting of income-generating activities, in their lifetime.⁴⁰ Violence against women, including economic abuse, remains high, while the availability of support networks and resources for survivors varies dramatically throughout Bougainville.

The high rate of violence against women, due in part to cultural norms limiting women’s access to decision-making and promoting unequal power dynamics within the home and between men and women, creates barriers for women to participate in political processes in a free and fair manner.

Gender-Based Violence in Bougainville

Prior to the conflict, rates of violence against women in Bougainville were thought to be relatively low compared with the rest of PNG.⁴¹ Incidents of violence against women and broader community violence

³⁵ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Department for Community Development. *Policy for Women’s Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security*. Autonomous Bougainville Government, 2016.

³⁸ IFES VAWE Assessment Interview. July 2018.

³⁹ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

⁴⁰ E. Fulu et al. [Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it? Quantitative findings from the United Nations multi-country study on men and violence in Asia and the Pacific](#). UNDP, UN Population Fund, UN Women and UN Volunteers. 2013.

⁴¹ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

increased over the course of the war.⁴² The culture of violence that emerged over the decadelong civil war is linked with the escalation in violence against women and cases of domestic violence in AROB.⁴³ A 2005 study by the National Research Institute on crime prevalence in Buka and Arawa found that domestic violence was the second most common crime in both towns after drug- and alcohol-related incidents.⁴⁴ It is estimated that as of 2013, 62 percent of men and 52 percent of women had committed or experienced physical partner violence in their lifetime.⁴⁵

Half of men surveyed in 2013 witnessed someone beaten or seriously injured, and approximately 66 percent witnessed the rape of or sexual violence toward a man or woman during the conflict.⁴⁶

Cultural practices that are thought to contribute to gender-based violence in mainland PNG, including bride price, a traditional form of dowry payment, and polygamy, are less common in AROB. Researchers from the Australian National University (ANU) found that bride price was only paid in 22 percent of surveyed marriages in Bougainville, in contrast to 87 percent in the Highlands, and that there are much lower rates of polygamy.⁴⁷ In PNG, bride price is at times directly invoked to justify suppression of women's participation. Polygamy, however, has been replaced by what some call "serial monogamy,"⁴⁸ where men leaves their wives and remarry, as the matrilineal nature of society means children will be taken care of by their mother's clan, and men will not have to bring children to their next marriages.

There is a high correlation between alcohol consumption and domestic violence.⁴⁹ Researchers conducting the ANU "Do No Harm" assessment in 2018 noted that this correlation stems from two factors: violence for unclear reasons when the husband is drunk and violence over the drain of resources from the household due to alcohol consumption. The latter case was seen to arise when women question their husbands' spending on alcohol or refuse to give their husbands money to spend on alcohol.⁵⁰

It is hypothesized that intimate partner violence was most closely linked to enduring impacts of the conflict, including psychological factors as well as substance abuse, and emotional abuse and neglect in childhood, while traditional gender norms are a larger factor in nonpartner rape and violence.⁵¹

⁴²D. Tierney et al. [The mental health and psychosocial impact of the Bougainville Crisis: a synthesis of available information](#). International Journal of Mental Health Systems. 2016.

⁴³ [V. Boege. 2013.](#)

⁴⁴ National Research Institute. *Bougainville Community Crime Trends: A Survey of Crime in Arawa and Buin*. Prepared for the Government of Papua New Guinea's Law and Justice Sector's National Coordinating Mechanism. 2005.

⁴⁵ E. Fulu et al. 2013

⁴⁶ R. Jewkes, E. Fulu and Y. Sikweyiya. *Family, Health and Safety Study- Autonomous Region of Bougainville – Summary Report*. Partners for Prevention. 2013.

⁴⁷ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

⁴⁸ IFES VAWE Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁴⁹ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ [R. Jewkes et al. 2013.](#)

Bougainville has a culture of reciprocity, which in some cases manifests in both using rape as a form of punishment and a reason to seek revenge. In a 2013 United Nations (UN) survey on violence against women in Asia and the Pacific in Bougainville, 76 percent of perpetrators of rape reported receiving punishment from their family or friends, threats from a supporter of the survivor or violence from someone seeking revenge and 51 percent reported that the rape was initially undertaken as revenge against the woman personally or her clan.⁵² This reciprocity can make survivors reluctant to report domestic violence to the police and judicial system due to personal shame and, in some cases, fear for their husbands due to the possible retaliation by her clan for his behavior.⁵³

These factors contribute to a high rate of violence against women throughout Bougainville, which in turn reinforces the lower status of women and complicates their ability to fully and freely engage in political processes.

Resources for Survivors and Government Response

Despite the high rate of violence against women, the government response has been limited, and the bulk of support for survivors has come from civil society. Lack of large-scale government support both undermines the importance of the issue and allows perpetrators to act without serious consequences. Violence against women is viewed as a cultural norm, enforcing the lower socio-economic status of women and limiting their ability to actively participate in politics and decision-making.

Though the FPA was only implemented in 2017, Bougainville has had a network of support providers for survivors of domestic violence since the conflict. During the conflict access to government services collapsed and domestic CSOs grew rapidly to advocate for and provide services to women and survivors of violence. Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (Leitana Nehan), the Sisters of Nazareth and other domestic CSOs focused on improving the lives of women in Bougainville played key roles in providing and advocating for women following the conflict, and the Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF) was established in 2005 to provide services and serve as a representative body for women. Leitana Nehan,⁵⁴ BWF,⁵⁵ Sisters of Nazareth,⁵⁶ Family Support Centres (FSCs) and other partners provide safe houses and counseling resources to survivors, including medical care and child welfare services, and support interfacing with local law enforcement. Advocacy by Leitana and other CSOs following the conflict also eventually led to the rebuilding of the judiciary system, which had been severely disrupted, leaving women vulnerable to violence as police were unable to enforce the rule of law.⁵⁷ Within communities, volunteer human rights defenders trained by CSOs act as community advocates and champions for survivors of violence and resources to connect survivors with needed assistance. Human rights defenders also raise awareness about violence against women, lobby decision-makers and have

⁵² [R. Jewkes et al. 2013.](#)

⁵³ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

⁵⁴ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

⁵⁵ Pacific Women. *Bougainville Performance Report 2017-2018*. Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2018.

⁵⁶ Department for Community Development. 2013.

⁵⁷ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

reportedly collaborated productively with local police on family and domestic violence cases.⁵⁸ Within the legal system, women represent approximately 20 to 25 percent of the community auxiliary police force in Bougainville,⁵⁹ and there are 43 female village court magistrates on Buka Island, including three chairs and two deputy chairs.⁶⁰

Approximately 73 percent of FSC patients in Buka between 2013 and 2016 were women and cases seen included physical and sexual violence and psychological abuse and trauma.⁶¹ The ABG reported that since the passing of the FPA in 2013, there has been an increase in the numbers of women reporting acts of violence and accessing support services, though this increase is credited in part to greater public awareness of these issues and services available.⁶² However, a 2013 ABG report and VAWE interviewees noted that domestic violence in Bougainville is associated with a strong sense of shame, and it is common for survivors to hide the violence from their communities and fail to report.⁶³ Support providers interviewed also noted that many women are scared they will be beaten when they return home if they file formal reports, although some women choose to get interim protection orders (IPOs) to protect themselves.

In Buka, the ABG established a family help desk in the city courthouse to facilitate the consolidation of NGO, police and government assistance to survivors. The desk additionally liaises with the courts to offer support in granting IPOs for survivors 24 hours per day.⁶⁴ The FPA expands the power to grant IPOs to village courts and is believed to have increased the access to IPOs.⁶⁵ Precise data on the number of IPOs granted is not available, however anecdotally requests have increased as awareness of the law increases and that IPOs have been effective in preventing further violence. Support providers and local police have been integral in informing women about the IPOs and promoting their use.

The majority of the population of Bougainville resides in rural areas and due to the use of both informal and formal legal mechanisms, accurate estimates for overall domestic violence reporting rates are not available. Those interviewed for the assessment reported that many domestic violence cases are settled at the village level by the chief, who mediates between husband and wife.⁶⁶ In most situations, a case will not reach the formal legal system unless mediation by the chief has failed. For these cases, village courts and community auxiliary police are the most commonly used legal mechanisms.⁶⁷ When

⁵⁸ Pacific Women. "[Women human rights defenders and male advocates making a difference in Bougainville.](#)" Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. May 23, 2018.

^e IFES VAWE Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁶⁰ Department for Community Development. 2013.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

⁶⁴ Department for Community Development. 2013.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ IFES VAWE Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁶⁷ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

compared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region in a 2013 UN report,⁶⁸ Bougainville was found to have the highest rates of arrest, jailing and punishment, including traditional community detentions, of rape perpetrators for cases reported. Yet the report also found that 35 percent of surveyed perpetrators in Bougainville faced no legal ramifications as a consequence of the rape and only 52 percent were jailed.⁶⁹

While women's access to legal and support mechanisms for domestic violence is growing, this growth is not uniform throughout Bougainville. It also does not address the underlying cultural factors that perpetuate the lower status of women in society and preclude them from many leadership positions.

Women's Role in Decision-Making

Women's limited autonomy in political and electoral processes is reflective of the nature of women's influence and participation in domestic and community decision-making. Women's influence has traditionally been greater in private, while men represent the family during face-to-face political activities. It has been hypothesized that this developed during land disputes to protect women from physical attacks in the case of escalating conflict, thus preventing further conflict over the custodianship of that land in the event of her death.⁷⁰ This has traditionally manifested itself in a system in which men are the public leaders in the communities, while women are often consulted during the decision-making process when land, resources and children are being discussed, as these belong to the woman and her clan.⁷¹ This arrangement reflects a complementary power-sharing dynamic between men and women, allowing for partnership and consultation in decision-making,⁷² rather than an outright matriarchal society.⁷³ However, the elevated status of women that led to the development of this complementarity is thought by some to have been disrupted by colonialism, as colonial partners encouraged the appointment of male leaders in communities and public spaces, and conflicts over natural resource extraction and its economic benefits, as in the case of the Paguna mine.⁷⁴

Today, this system and complementarity in household decision-making varies widely. The aforementioned UN report found that the majority of surveyed men, from North, Central and South Bougainville, believe that domestic decision-making should be equal between partners – though 62 percent of male respondents agreed that men should have the final say in family decisions.⁷⁵ The meaning of joint decision-making varies greatly between households. Some follow a true joint model with gender parity, while in others, the wife's opinion is used only to "rubber stamp" that of her

⁶⁸ Surveyed countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, PNG (Bougainville) and Sri Lanka; [E. Fulu et al. 2013.](#)

⁶⁹ [E. Fulu et al. 2013.](#)

⁷⁰ Department for Community Development. 2013.

⁷¹ R. Eves and I. Koredong. [Bougainville Young Women's Leadership Research](#). International Women's Development Agency. ANU. Netherlands Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs. September 2015.

⁷² A. Kirkham, S. Close and Z. Yousuf. February 2018.

⁷³ R. Saovana-Spriggs. [Gender and Peace: Bougainvillean Women, Matriliney and the Peace Process](#) (Doctorate of Philosophy thesis). ANU. May 2007.

⁷⁴ Department for Community Development. 2013.

⁷⁵ [E. Fulu et al. 2013.](#)

husband or she may be given no role in the process at all.⁷⁶ Overall, however, the UN survey concluded that there is very little correlation between women's involvement in decision-making and the rate of violence in the home.⁷⁷

In recent years, perceptions and attitudes toward women in leadership positions and their roles in the community are changing. Trainings and awareness events about human rights and gender equality at the village level are credited with increased acceptance of women's role in decision-making and as leaders.⁷⁸ Churches in particular have become integral in the campaign for gender equality, elevating women in recent years to lead congregations and even serve as Eucharistic ministers, while male church leaders engage positively with local CSOs to become educated on gender issues.⁷⁹ When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "a married women's decision should have her husband's approval," participants at a recent IFES "She Leads" women's leadership program workshop said that while this has traditionally been the case, attitudes are beginning to change, and women are gaining greater autonomy in their decision-making. In politics, the creation of reserved seats at independence has demonstrated that women have the capacity to be leaders, and the recent shift from the Council of Elders system to the Community Government system requiring gender parity has the potential to continue improving attitudes toward women. However, a large portion of the women surveyed at a second IFES workshop agreed with the statement, "women are not able to take care of their family and hold a leadership position at the same time," suggesting continued conflict between traditional gender roles and changing expectations for women.

Current Status of Women in Bougainvillean Society

Women in Bougainville hold higher status relative to their counterparts in PNG – granted to them by their role in the peace process and Bougainville's matrilineal culture, though since eroded by conflict and colonialism – yet still face high rates of domestic violence and restrictive gender roles. Progress in recent years is moving toward greater equality between men and women. However, improvements in enforcement of the FPA and accountability of the police are needed. Clearer and more coordinated responses by the government and support providers are needed as well as greater awareness among women of the resources available to them. The rates of domestic violence – and the challenges of reporting such violence – continue to complicate women's participation in political processes.

⁷⁶ [R. Eves. 2018.](#)

⁷⁷ [E. Fulu et al. 2013.](#)

⁷⁸ IFES VAWE Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Factor 2. Women's Access to the Electoral Process

Women in Bougainville have relatively greater access to the political process, particularly as candidates, than their counterparts in mainland PNG due to the reserved seats and somewhat higher cultural status of Bougainvillean women. This is most prominently demonstrated in comparing the current four female members out of 39 members in the Bougainville Parliament, one of whom was elected to a non-quota seat, to the zero seats currently held by women in the 111-seat PNG Parliament. Due in part to their role during peace negotiations, women were granted reserved seats and have been actively involved in Bougainvillean elections and political spaces.

Access for women in different electoral roles varies. Women interviewed asserted that women are interested in participating in the electoral process and represent half or more of voters in Bougainvillean elections. Community leaders allegedly encourage women to vote, though some elected officials interviewed expressed the view that there has been a general decline in interest in voting in recent elections among both men and women.

Similarly, women's involvement in elections as polling officials and scrutineers, candidate election observers, has been increasing in recent years. Observer reports in the 2005 and 2010 ABG elections and comments from observers of the 2015 ABG and 2017 national elections noted a "good gender balance" between male and female polling officials.⁸⁰ OBEC has focused on recruiting female polling officials through targeted recruiting efforts, and it was reported that in Central Bougainville women represented approximately half of the poll workers in the 2018 Urban Community Government elections and 2017 national elections. Interviewees noted that it appears the number of female poll workers has increased with each election. However, within OBEC, no women are currently represented among senior leadership.⁸¹ Dorcas Ausasi, former OBEC corporate services manager, was the sole woman in OBEC senior leadership from 2015 until her death in 2018.

Candidates first engaged female scrutineers in the 2015 elections, and female scrutineers were also present in the 2017 elections. By one interviewee's estimate, as high as 40 percent of all scrutineers in Central Bougainville may have been women, though official data is not available. Interviewees reported that female scrutineers actively participated, disputed and interjected throughout the process and advocated well on behalf of their candidates. A former returning officer noted that female scrutineers play a valuable role in the process as they assist in calming down male scrutineers when they become aggressive. Candidates and political parties select scrutineers, and it is unclear if the OBEC or CSOs encouraged the selection of women for these roles.

Bougainvillean women have made numerous gains in their participation in elections as scrutineers, polling officials, candidates and voters since the 2005 elections. However, barriers to access exist and persist for women in all roles in the electoral process, especially in leadership roles, due to electoral and

⁸⁰M. Tete et al. *Report of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat's Election Observer Team to the 2010 Elections for the Offices of President and Members of the House of Representatives of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville*. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2010.

⁸¹ OBEC. "Organisation Chart." 2018.

political structures, underlying cultural beliefs and traditional gender norms that undermine women's perceived political and leadership abilities.

Barriers to Entry for Female Candidates for Open and Reserved Seats

The constitutional mandate for three reserved seats for women in the Bougainville House of Representatives and one woman in the president's cabinet is a safeguard for women's representation in government. However, the low representation of women beyond the three reserved seats has generated concerns that these measures placed a ceiling on women's representation.

The eligibility of women to contest open seats has been a source of confusion throughout Bougainville, as many men and women believed that the three reserved seats were the "women's seats," and the open seats were "men's seats," a confusion that was reinforced when no women contested open seats in the 2005 ABG House of Representatives elections.⁸² Following the 2010 elections, in which female candidates stood for open seats but none were elected, researchers from ANU interviewed female candidates in an effort to determine why their bids were unsuccessful. The researchers determined two primary factors impacting women's desire to contest open seats: the misconception that women are not permitted to run for open seats, and family pressure resulting from close family members contesting local open seats.⁸³ To address this first factor, prior to the 2015 elections, BWF conducted targeted candidate trainings to explicitly encourage women to contest open seats.⁸⁴ The percentage of female candidates contesting open seats increased from 22 percent (five standing for open seats out of 23 female candidates)⁸⁵ in 2010 to 34 percent (12 standing for open seats out of 35 female candidates) in 2015, when Getsi became the first woman to win an open seat (for a total of four seats held by women in the 2015-20 ABG Parliament).⁸⁶ There is hope that Getsi's success will help to clarify women's eligibility for open seats and encourage more women to contest open seats in future elections.⁸⁷

Female candidates for both reserved and open seats face unique challenges in contesting elections in Bougainville. Discussion sessions with female candidates following the 2015 ABG House of Representatives elections and interviews with current elected officials indicate that financial resources remain a limiting factor for female candidates, particularly in large constituencies.⁸⁸ Money politics and vote buying are commonplace in Bougainvillean elections. Candidates are expected to provide food and gifts for their supporters and pay bribes to clan leaders using their personal funds, for which female candidates often lack the resources.⁸⁹ Male and female candidates lean on their families and clans to

⁸² IFES VAW Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁸³ K. Baker. *Women's Representation and the Use of Reserved Seats in Bougainville*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia. ANU. 2014

⁸⁴ K. Baker and T. Oppermann. *The Election of Josephine Getsi – Making Political History in Bougainville*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia. ANU. 2015

⁸⁵ K. Baker. [Pawa Blong Meri: Women Candidates in the 2015 Bougainville Election](#). State, Society and Governance in Melanesia. ANU. 2015.

⁸⁶ K. Baker and T. Oppermann. 2015

⁸⁷ IFES VAW Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁸⁸ [K. Baker. 2015.](#)

⁸⁹ IFES VAW Assessment Interview. July 2018.

provide resources during the campaign, yet if a man and a woman are contesting the same seat, interviewees noted that the male candidate is likely to receive greater support.⁹⁰ Research into the financial support offered by political parties to candidates was inconclusive – endorsement or support by political parties does not seem to have a large effect on the elections, possibly due in part to Bougainvilleans’ wariness of political parties in general. Prior to the 2005 election, activists sought to have political parties banned, fearing they would create animosity in an election that was centered on unification. Parties were eventually permitted to form but maintained a very low profile throughout the electoral period,⁹¹ though this profile has reportedly increased in subsequent elections.⁹² In 2015, Getsi ran as an independent but did receive some party assistance, both financial and advisory,⁹³ and it seems the majority of successful House of Representatives candidates operate in this fashion.⁹⁴ Some female candidates who sought to engage with parties in the 2015 ABG elections were successful in receiving some funding, though participants were not clear as to whether equal funding is given to male and female candidates. During the field assessment, participants reported that political parties are involved in the national and ABG elections but do not participate in Community Government elections.

These barriers – including financial barriers and confusion over eligibility – create a difficult environment for women who seek to enter politics in Bougainville. They are further limited by underlying perceptions as to the capacity of women as leaders and underlying traditional gender norms within their communities.

Impact of Perceived Limitations of Women and Gender Norms

The strict traditional gender norms throughout Bougainville hinder the ability of female voters to fully participate in the political process and female candidates and elected officials to effectively engage with and lead their communities. These limitations perpetuate the perception that women have limited capacity relative to their male counterparts, which in turn undermines their confidence and participation.

Despite the majority of voters in Bougainville reportedly being female, marginalized women still face societal or cultural limitations to participation at the polls. Single motherhood is stigmatized, and single mothers have faced shame and gossip when they go to vote. The stereotype of these women as uneducated additionally leads some women to feel they are too uneducated to make a good decision and too likely to make mistakes to truly vote with confidence, discouraging them from casting their ballots and thus suppressing their participation.

Female candidates and leaders are similarly limited by negative perception of their ability and acceptability, particularly for those in Southern Bougainville. Despite their increase in access to the political process and general shifts in perception toward women in leadership positions, women reported enforcement of traditional gender roles that is in conflict with the present roles of women in

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ K. Scott, A. Morrison and J. Rawson. 2005.

⁹² IFES VAWE Assessment Interview. July 2018.

⁹³ [K. Baker. 2015.](#)

⁹⁴ K. Baker. 2014.

community leadership. A group from Buka Island reported that before the shift to the Community Government system, which requires a one-to-one male-to-female ratio, four women had been elected to the Council of Elders in their community and were initially denied access to council meetings because they were held in the “men’s house,” which women were not permitted to enter. Another woman interviewed who was elected to be the chair of her Community Government reported that she had to forgo the traditional office located on the second floor of her building for one on the ground floor because culturally women are not permitted to be physically above men. Women at the Community Government level reported that their male colleagues supported their engagement in leading the community, however incidents such as these undermine women’s ability to lead.

Elected women interviewed following the 2015 election said that the greatest challenge for female candidates was that Bougainvilleans do not believe women are capable of winning elections and being effective leaders once elected. This attitude and traditional cultural beliefs surrounding women’s place in politics has led to low confidence of some female candidates and fears that they will be unable to win. CSOs are working to combat this through targeted candidate trainings that seek to provide women with the tools and confidence they need to be successful candidates and elected officials.

This doubt in women’s leadership abilities was extremely prevalent in the 2015 and 2017 elections, as many voters reported a lack of confidence in female leaders to effectively handle the upcoming referendum vote and subsequent negotiation process with the PNG government. This perception stands in stark contrast to the role that women played in bringing an end to the conflict. Women were instrumental in initially engaging with combatants, encouraging them to put down their weapons, maintaining constructive dialogue between the different factions and laying the groundwork for the negotiation process between the Bougainvilleans and the GoPNG.⁹⁵ Despite their domestically and internationally recognized role in bringing about the cease-fire and negotiations, women were largely excluded from the peace process itself and disarmament and weapons disposal plans.⁹⁶

This exclusion may be one factor in the persistent doubt in their negotiation abilities today.

A common refrain of voters reported by candidates in 2015 and 2017 was that the 2015 elections are too important to risk expanding women’s representation, as the five-year term would contain the referendum vote. One female candidate for an open seat reported male voters asking, “why is a lady standing to contest this seat in a very critical time?”⁹⁷ while others interviewed for this assessment heard similar queries emanating from the belief that women would not be able to negotiate on behalf of Bougainvilleans or manage the outcome of the referendum vote effectively.

One woman who campaigned on behalf of a female candidate in 2015 reported being asked, “what will [the candidate] do? She can’t do disposal of arms or reconciliation. A woman cannot work with ex-combatants.”

⁹⁵ CEDAW. 2008.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ [K. Baker. 2015.](#)

Interestingly, despite these concerns reported by many voters, Getsi became the first women to win an open seat in Bougainville in the 2015 election, placing four women in ABG Parliament for the referendum vote and negotiations.

Responses to Barriers to Access

Women face a number of barriers to entering politics, which include access to finances, which are limited due to traditional gender roles that impact economic opportunities, a lack of civic education or understanding of election processes, and cultural beliefs about the role of women. These barriers create a political environment that discourages women's full and meaningful participation. Throughout the assessment, no respondents reported work being conducted with political parties to improve access of female candidates to funding. CSOs did speak of candidate trainings that are improving women's understanding of the campaign process. While some initiatives are responding to women's individual barriers to political participation, little work is currently being done to respond to these structural and institutional challenges. There is hope that the election of Getsi to an open seat will raise awareness regarding eligibility and the CSO community can continue to raise awareness in women's leadership potential. However, larger cultural change surrounding women's leadership abilities is needed.

Factor 3. VAWE

Elections in Bougainville are traditionally more peaceful than those in the rest of PNG, and elections have been used as a peacebuilding tool since the end of the Bougainville conflict in 2001. Still, women face public and private physical violence and intimidation in the lead-up to and aftermath of the polls with alarming regularity.⁹⁸ In contrast, violence against candidates and elected officials is usually nonphysical and nuanced, consisting predominantly of gossip, threats and other forms of verbal violence. An overarching problem in addressing the scope and root causes of VAWE in Bougainville remains the lack of accurate data available on both the issue and responses to it.

Physical Violence, Intimidation and Threats in Public and Domestic Spaces

In line with research findings from other parts of the world, the use of physical violence against women in public spaces during the electoral process was reported to be rare – rather this violence occurs in private spaces and is intertwined with the day-to-day domestic violence at the household level. The perceived normalization of domestic violence in Bougainville manifests itself in the electoral process in the use of physical violence or the threat of physical violence as a means for men to control how women vote and whether they participate in the electoral process. A few cases of overt physical violence were reported during the electoral period; however, from conversations with interviewees it appears that these do not represent general trends.

Only one interviewee reported experiencing direct physical violence in a public space during the electoral period, when she was serving as an electoral official in Central Bougainville and a candidate's male supporter slapped her during the counting period. Police immediately intervened, and steps were taken to calm tensions and protect the official in question including a delay and relocation of counting. It was anecdotally noted that the campaign posters of female candidates in one constituency were torn and spat on prior to the polls, though this seems like a rare occurrence based on interviews conducted.

When pressed as to whether women would report domestic violence, as election-related or otherwise, one respondent noted that "this is normal; it's a one-hour event," after which the family and community move on.

In contrast, interviewees openly and commonly discussed violence in private spaces. Domestic violence during the electoral period is linked in part to the practice of vote buying, which is becoming increasingly common in Bougainville. There is an expectation that voters who pledge support to a certain candidate will receive financial benefits or greater services from the

government following that candidate's election to Parliament or local government. This culture of kickbacks creates incentive for clans and families to ally their votes and exercise control over each voter's choice to ensure victory for their chosen candidate and the benefits that accompany it. Many interviewees reported that while they do not perceive an increase in domestic violence around elections, if a husband finds out that his wife voted in a manner differently than he had instructed, there would be violence. Other interviewees noted that there is an understanding among women that

⁹⁸ IFES VAWE interviews.

violence triggered by a wife's vote is fairly common around national and ABG elections and is a form of domestic violence, yet they do not report these incidents to police, OBEC representatives or support providers. Two support providers interviewed noted that while they are aware that these incidents are problematic, survivors do not bring cases directly to support providers. Instead cases come through word of mouth, and thus support providers are unable to take action to help survivors.

These problems surrounding the ability of women to vote for candidates they choose stems in part from a lack of secrecy of the ballot for women, which appears to vary dramatically throughout Bougainville. Those in more urban and matrilineal areas tended to agree that women have secrecy of the ballot, while others assert that the design of the voting booths is not adequate, permitting men to stand and watch how women mark their ballots. Many noted that in cases where women are illiterate, their husbands instead of election officials would assist women in the polling booth. Even when the voting booth guaranteed secrecy, voters would gossip about their votes following the polls, and husbands would hear about the content of these discussions. Overall, the prevalence of husbands disciplining their wives for their votes following the election suggests a concerning lack of secrecy of the ballot for female voters.

Domestic violence perpetrated by male family members as a means to control women's votes represents the most common form of physical election violence against women found in this assessment. Lack of resources, awareness and cultural pressures to mitigate these issues through the informal legal system contribute to the low reporting rates of incidents of domestic violence, which in turn renders it difficult for the OBEC, police and support providers to accurately determine the scope of the problem and develop means to mitigate it. Responses thus far to private and domestic physical violence in elections remain muted and seemingly ineffective.

Verbal Violence and Its Impact on Female Candidates and Election Workers

Verbal violence in elections in Bougainville occurs in public and private spaces by a variety of actors – including voters, supporters and candidates – against female candidates and election workers. Interviewees did not discuss online violence and the use of social media for violence as a major issue in Bougainville elections.

Female candidates are most often faced with verbal violence including gossip, harassment and intense scrutiny during the campaign period. Many former candidates and elected officials interviewed for the assessment reported that women are “hyper-scrutinized” during the process and that a female candidate can regularly expect that her personal life will be examined to a different degree than her male counterparts. Female candidates' marriage and family life were common topics of gossip within the community and among other candidates as means to attack her character. Former candidates interviewed quoted critiques from voters like, “your marriage isn't stable,” “straighten your home first before going into politics,” or being told, “no, you are not a good woman, you broke your first marriage.” In contrast, the private lives of male candidates were rarely discussed or if they were, were not the same make-or-break factors as they often are for women. These types of critiques – surrounding women's home and family life – are especially harmful for women candidates and are not used in the same way to attack male candidates because of deeply ingrained gender ideals that blame women for issues with marriage, family life and child care and not men. Shifting these gender norms is one way to

decrease these types of attacks and to make them less harmful for women in political leadership. Many women cited verbal attacks as one of the greatest problems faced by female candidates, along with the higher standard to which they are held relative to men. These make it increasingly difficult for them to win in open elections.

Female election workers face direct verbal violence in the form of threats and harassment. One female election official interviewed reported expletives being hurled by supporters and scrutineers at officials ranging from the generic “fuck” to the highly gendered “cunt.” This sort of verbal abuse by losing candidates and their supporters was also directed at male officials, with some threats by losing candidates reported following the declaration of results in the most recent Community Government elections. However, interviewees noted that these were made by inebriated individuals and did not result in physical violence. It should be noted that the number of female election workers has reportedly grown with each subsequent election. Significantly, more women participate as polling officials in Bougainville than mainland PNG.

Verbal violence and threats, while not dissuading all women from engaging in the electoral process, do render it more difficult for them to successfully campaign and work on a level playing field as their male counterparts, and may discourage some from participating at all.

Responses to Verbal and Physical Violence in Elections

The different forms of physical and verbal violence that women experience in Bougainvillean elections hinder women’s ability to fully and freely participate in the electoral process as voters, candidates and election officials. These two distinct streams of violence require different responses from CSOs, officials and law enforcement to protect women’s autonomy. One key challenge seems to be the lack of awareness of the various channels of reporting violence related to elections, as well as the resources available to survivors. While responses to overt physical violence, for example the violence faced by the female electoral official in Central Bougainville, have been effective in mitigating immediate damage from specific incidents, responses to physical violence in private spaces surrounding elections and public verbal violence have been limited to date. Future responses to VAWE must address the full scope of the problem and its component parts through engagement of electoral officials, law enforcement, CSOs and service providers. To decrease violence against women during elections, law enforcement and judicial actors must provide safe, reliable channels to report violence and must pursue justice for these crimes in good faith, including arrests, prosecutions and sentencing; women must be provided with education on their rights and available resources; restrictive gender roles must be addressed; men must understand the importance of gender equality and the unacceptability of violence as a norm; and current laws must be more effectively enforced.

Recommendations

Addressing the challenges faced by women in the electoral process relies on tackling the many barriers noted above at their root causes and promoting women's leadership in Bougainville. In light of these findings, and in consultation with the interviewees in this assessment, the following recommendations are offered to stakeholders engaged in promoting women's political participation and ending VAWE at all levels of civic engagement and enhancing women's access to the electoral process and overall political participation:

1. Increase enforcement of the current laws, including the Family Protection Act (FPA) and election laws prohibiting bribery, undue influence and candidate defamation.

Absent enforcement of current legal mechanisms, including the FPA and Electoral Act of 2007,⁹⁹ perpetrators of domestic violence both within and outside of electoral periods and election violations do not face consequences for their actions. Clear and consistent enforcement of the FPA and regulations on candidate defamation, bribery and undue influence can provide support for women facing pressure from family voting and candidates faced with gossip and harassment. The Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner (OBEC), police and formal court system must work together to support enforcement, and support must be provided to nongovernmental actors who support this process through support to survivors, advocacy and legal aid to ensure adequate resources are provided.

2. Enhance voter information campaigns regarding resources available to voters to report electoral violations – including undue influence and bribery – and educate voters on reporting mechanisms in the event that they experience electoral violence or election-related domestic violence.

Many women interviewed for this assessment noted that they were unaware of the process to report election violations and the resources available to them. To support adequate enforcement of electoral legal mechanisms, voters must be informed about the laws and their rights. The OBEC should establish a communication strategy in collaboration with the police and women's advocacy groups to run an effective voter awareness campaign that targets populations who are most susceptible to election violence. In addition, OBEC should work with domestic violence support centers to appropriately respond to reports of election-related domestic violence.

3. Make the recruitment process for election officials more inclusive, and actively seek to recruit and promote women, young people and persons with disabilities.

While the OBEC has been effective in engaging female poll workers, increased efforts are required to achieve gender parity at the polls. Efforts should include targeted recruiting and engagement with local women's groups. Enhanced visibility of women in leadership roles in the electoral process can help create election policies and procedures that take women's needs into consideration and raise awareness about the specific needs of women to participate as electors. Among permanent OBEC staff, the lack of women in senior leadership is concerning. The OBEC must evaluate its

⁹⁹ Autonomous Bougainville Government. [Bougainville Elections Act 2007](#). June 25, 2007.

recruitment policies to ensure that it is an equal opportunity employer and its internal policies to ensure that women are supported and evaluated for promotion in the same manner as their male counterparts. Once the OBEC's Gender Equity and Social Inclusion policy is finalized, support should be provided to ensure that it is properly implemented.

4. Expand voter education and awareness campaigns to focus on what makes a good candidate or elected leader to combat vote buying and block voting and educate voters on women's role in the peace process.

To educate voters about effective candidates and leaders, the OBEC should partner with civil society and the media to develop a communication strategy and voter education campaign about good leadership. The campaign should be gender-sensitive and show different types of people in leadership roles. This campaign can also be used to address the perception that women are incapable as leaders through education on women's significant role in the peace process. One option could be a civic education program integrated into the school curriculum, as resources permit.

5. Mandate that political parties provide the same degree of funding and training support to female and male candidates, including women who are contesting open seats.

Financial support was consistently cited as the greatest challenge for female candidates. Political parties can support female candidates by providing them with financial support during the campaign period, thus lessening the burden on their families and encouraging more equitable campaigns. The OBEC, in collaboration with the political parties and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) Parliament, can begin these discussions and explore the possibility of an amendment to the Political Parties (Registration) Act of 2006.

6. Identify key allies, including male allies, who can be trained to act as catalysts for change to reduce the factors that lead to VAW through legal reform, awareness and education campaigns, and programming.

Identification, education and engagement of key allies can enable the creation of policies, campaigns and activities that effectively address the root causes of VAW and promote positive change. To accomplish this, the OBEC and civil society must identify key male allies in the House of Representatives, Community Government, government ministries, police and others who are engaged in the electoral process and support them as they develop policies, campaigns, awareness activities and legal reform initiatives to address VAW. This can also build on the Digicel Foundation's "Men of Honor" program, which engages male allies in communities across PNG and provides training on gender relations, gender-based violence and advocacy, and the work of Leitana in engaging male allies and advocates in Bougainville.

7. Provide female candidates and elected officials with adequate training and resources.

Female candidates often lack the knowledge on how to run a successful campaign and, once elected, how to effectively work in Community Government and Parliament. This lack of knowledge

impacts their ability to run effective campaigns and engage effectively as leaders. Civic and candidate education campaigns conducted by the Department of Community Government (DCG), OBEC, political parties and civil society are needed to support female candidates to be competitive. As part of this training, the OBEC and DCG should collaborate to ensure that female candidates are aware of the resources available to them if they experience incidences of VAWE, including physical, verbal and online threats and harassment.

8. Conduct voter education and awareness campaigns surrounding the referendum targeted at women, and educate women on what independence will mean for them.

Greater awareness for all voters is needed ahead of the 2019 referendum, and specific voter awareness campaigns targeting women that discuss the impact of the referendum for women and their needs are especially critical. The DPAI can begin drafting a communication strategy in collaboration with the Bougainville Referendum Commission, OBEC and ABG, and civil society organizations (CSOs) and Community Government representatives should be engaged to support the dissemination of information.

9. Improve enforcement of the secrecy of the ballot and train election officials to provide assistance to illiterate voters.

The lack of secrecy of the ballot, particularly for female voters, negatively impacts women's ability to vote freely and without fear of repercussions as a woman voting differently than instructed by her husband or male clan member is a catalyst for domestic violence. While it was reported that some polling stations did ensure voter privacy, the lack of consistency across AROB is concerning. Additionally, it was frequently reported by interviewees that illiterate women are assisted in the polling booth by their husbands or male family members rather than polling officials. To ensure the secrecy of the ballot is protected, an evaluation of polling stations by the OBEC to assess their ability to protect voter privacy is needed, as well as increased training to polling officials to ensure they understand how to assist illiterate or elderly voters or voters with disabilities and why family members must not be allowed in the polling booth with voters.

10. Conduct voter and candidate awareness on the impact of shaming and verbal abuse on female candidates and the resources available to combat it.

Female candidates face shaming and verbal harassment during the campaign process, which both damage their ability to mount successful campaigns and can discourage other women from contesting. The OBEC should come together with CSOs and ABG to discuss ways to address verbal abuse of female candidates through voter outreach, candidate trainings and enforceable codes of conduct for candidates that specifically address this issue.

Annex

Representatives of the following organizations were contacted for this assessment:

1. Office of the Bougainville Election Commissioner
2. Department of Peace Agreement Implementation
3. Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency
4. Bougainville Women's Federation
5. Bougainville Community Governments – North, South and Central Bougainville
6. Autonomous Region of Bougainville Parliament
7. Haku Women's Collective
8. Family Support Centre
9. Family Sexual Violence Centre – Bougainville
10. New Zealand Police
11. Catholic Diocese Women's Organization
12. Former candidates for community government and ABG Parliament
13. Key persons of note in the Bougainville community and area of women's empowerment and political engagement

Peer review was provided by [Dr. Kerry Baker](#) from the Australian National University's State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program.



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