

Violence Against Women in Elections in Papua New Guinea: An IFES Assessment



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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 Papua New Guinea (PNG) and understand how this violence – be it physical, verbal, economic or psychological – contributes to the lack of representation of Papua New Guinean women in politics and in the larger electoral process. Readers will gain insight into the challenges faced by women as they seek to participate as voters, candidates, electoral officials and elected representatives, and the many routes national and international partners can take to support Papua New Guinean women and reduce the obstacles they face to participate freely and fairly in their elections. Through our work on gender inclusiveness in PNG 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Svetlik". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Svetlik" clearly distinguishable.

Michael Svetlik, Vice President, Programs, IFES

Executive Summary

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has among the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world¹ and an estimated 66 percent of women in PNG are survivors of domestic violence.² Perpetuated in part by cultural norms that marginalize women in the public sphere, women are largely limited in their ability to take active roles in decision-making and politics in their communities. Today, PNG is one of four countries globally with zero women representatives in the national legislature.³ Elections in PNG are characterized by violence and tribal politics that contributes to a high prevalence of violence against women in elections (VAWE), including verbal and physical violence in public and private spaces, as they seek to participate as voters, candidates and election officials. This report assesses VAWE in PNG, drawing on fieldwork, research and IFES' experiences operating in PNG, and presents recommendations for mitigating and preventing such violence in the future.

VAWE in PNG is expressed through acute physical and verbal violence and is rooted in deep structural inequality and gendered violence. It is based in cultural norms and strict gender roles that condone, tolerate and are enforced through gendered violence against women. This context – coupled with a broader culture of violence, intense tribal politics and gaps in the legal framework and enforcement to protect women – creates an environment that is hostile to women's free and fair participation in the electoral and political process.

VAWE occurs throughout PNG with regional variation but is most prevalent throughout the Highlands region, where elections are notably more violent and entrenched cultural norms reinforce the highly patriarchal society. In this region, VAWE occurs in both the public and private spheres with female voters facing direct threats of violence at the polls and threats and acts of domestic violence, including threats of divorce and abandonment, used to reinforce family voting, while female candidates face intense gossip, scrutiny into their personal lives and sexual histories and direct threats to themselves and their families.⁴ Electoral officials and observers report witnessing violence at the polls, family voting, intimidation of female voters and frequent threats and harassment. In the coastal regions, VAWE is subtler in nature and occurs more in the private sphere through verbal and domestic violence rather than public physical violence.⁵ Female candidates from these regions who were interviewed for this assessment noted that they receive the support of their families to run, though some face resistance from their communities. Interviewees from both the Highlands and coastal regions did note, however, that there tends to be less resistance to female candidates at the local level than the national level. Once elected, former female parliamentarians reported immense scrutiny during their time in office with their gender viewed as a handicap by their constituents. Some reported sexual harassment by

¹ 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*](#). Page 27.

² Human Rights Watch. [*Bashed Up: Family Violence in Papua New Guinea*](#). 2015.

³ International Parliamentary Union. "Women in National Parliaments." 2018.

⁴ IFES VAWE Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

⁵ Ibid.

fellow members of Parliament (MPs), with one former MP stating that women were treated like “sex objects,” and not receiving recognition for work they were able to do, hurting their chances for reelection.

Responses to VAWE in PNG have been limited or absent to date, and a lack of enforcement of the current laws and policies, including those against bribery, undue influence, domestic violence and separate polling lines, exacerbates the issue. This can be partially credited to a lack of resources and understanding of the scope of the issue. To properly address VAWE, government, civil society, political parties, police and politicians must come together to improve enforcement of current laws, raise awareness and take concrete steps to make elections in PNG safer for women.

Summary of Findings

VAWE Assessment Findings		
Factor	Windows of Vulnerability	Windows of Opportunity and Responses
Status of Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is estimated that 66 percent of PNG women are survivors of domestic violence. Women are largely relegated to the informal sector and expected to be subservient to their husbands. The lower status of women is thought to be partially rooted in Christianity and a deeply patriarchal society. Payment of bride price, accusations of sorcery and prevalence of polygamy are used to reinforce women’s low status. The handling of family violence cases by police and the legal system is under scrutiny and there is inadequate support for survivors. 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. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and churches have and continue to provide resources to survivors when and where the government is unable to do so. 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. Some regions of PNG, including Bougainville, have more equal gender dynamics and have made strides toward acceptance of women in leadership positions.
Women’s Access to the Electoral Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family voting is a serious problem, with women having free access to the polls but being intimidated into voting for particular candidates through acts or threats of domestic violence. Reserved seats for women have been established at the local level, though compliance is low. Women are underrepresented as scrutineers and polling officials, with interviewees citing security concerns. Lack of support, including financial, from political parties places female candidates on an unequal playing field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proportion of female candidates at the national level is low but growing slowly, and women stand as candidates more frequently at the local level. Former candidates have noted attitudes toward female candidates have improved. Reserved seats for women at the national level have been proposed, most recently in 2011, though not enacted. The PNG Electoral Commission (PNGEC) permanent staff has greater gender equality than among polling officials. The Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPPC) encourages political parties

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cultural status of women is a barrier for female candidates. 	to have women represent more than 10 percent of endorsed candidates.
VAWE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and clan voting is enforced through threats or acts of domestic violence. • Women are often unable to vote without interference, particularly in the Highlands. • Female candidates face verbal violence, harassment, threats and online violence. • Female scrutineers and electoral workers are in some areas threatened. • Female MPs experience harassment from male colleagues in Parliament, reinforcing unequal gender dynamics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage and enforcement of the Family Violence Act can assist in preventing domestic violence surrounding elections. • Bougainville has notably lower rates of overt physical VAW and higher participation of women as electoral officials and scrutineers.

What is VAW?

Political violence occurs in highly distinct patterns (i.e., forms, locations, victims, perpetrators, frequencies) according to the victim's gender identity.⁶ 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."⁷

The various forms of VAW are a threat to the integrity of the electoral process affecting women's participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists and political party members and leaders and undermine free, fair and inclusive democratic processes. Through increased attention to women's participation and women's voices in democracy assistance, narratives of VAW in their homes, political arenas and public spaces have become more visible. Common understandings of electoral violence originate in definitional frameworks that often privilege public acts of physical violence and violence between public stakeholders.⁸ 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 – all of which are essential for understanding the distinct nature of election violence experienced by women.⁹ IFES defines VAW 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

⁶ G. Bardall. *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence*. IFES. 2011.

⁷ G. Bardall. "Violence, Politics, and Gender." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. 2018.

⁸ 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.

⁹ For more details on the development of the VAW typology, see <http://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections>, page 12.

women in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g., voters, media, political actors, state actors, community leaders, electoral officials).¹⁰

Methodology

To document the nature and impact of VAWE in PNG, this study reviews 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 into three key factors that influence the incidence and impact of VAWE:¹¹

Assessment Factors	Description of 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 a field-based VAWE assessment¹² to understand the potential challenges that were created and exacerbated by violence against women following the 2017 national elections. Fieldwork was conducted by one IFES headquarters staff member and one senior gender expert from June 24 through July 21, 2018 with remote support from IFES' Gender Team.¹³ The team consulted 78 government officials, representatives from civil society and women's organizations and other political actors from across the country for key informant interviews. A complete list of

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ These assessment factors are inspired by CARE's Gender Assessment Framework (available at <http://gendertoolkit.care.org/Pages/Gender%20Areas%20of%20Inquiry.aspx>), IFES' Gender and Elections Analysis tool and the United States Agency for International Development's Electoral Security Framework and Best Practices in Electoral Security.

¹² The VAWE Assessment in PNG was conducted with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¹³ Fieldwork was conducted by Alison Dyer and Senior Gender Expert Terry Rogers and supported in Papua New Guinea by Aileen Sagolo, Wilhemina Beki, Paul Rowland and Oliver Green and remotely by Gabrielle Bardall and Gina Chirillo.

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 country from 2011 to the present. Notably, a major impediment to this assessment was the severe lack of high-quality data and statistics available in PNG in general, and specifically on the topic of gender and election violence. The issue is significant 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 through assessments and reports. The lack of systematic baseline data on violence against women in politics and elections is a global issue, recognized by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences (SRVAW) (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.

Political Context

PNG became fully independent from Australia in 1975 following nearly a century of oversight by Germany, Britain and Australia and was established as a parliamentary democracy.¹⁴ PNG consists of 22 provinces within four major regions – the Highlands, Momase, New Guinea Islands and Southern regions – each with its own unique cultures and challenges. The country's mountainous geographic terrain and strong regional identities have resulted in a political system that is intensely tribal and characterized by fluid coalitions at the national level. High numbers of candidates contest elections, with 3,340 individuals competing for 111 seats in the 2017 national elections,¹⁵ and there are high turnover rates among representatives.¹⁶

PNG elections have been historically characterized as violent and corrupt by international observer groups, particularly in the volatile Highlands regions. The 2002 election was called "chaotic and violent" with voting irregularities, manipulation, intimidation and violence between candidates, supporters and polling officials.¹⁷ The transition to the limited preferential voting (LPV) system in 2007 from the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system was intended to elect MPs who had received greater percentages of the popular vote, reduce electoral violence and potentially increase the likelihood of successful female candidates.¹⁸ The results of this change have been mixed. While the 2007 and subsequent national elections campaign and polling periods were viewed by electoral practitioners as generally more

¹⁴ The Commonwealth. (2018). "[Papua New Guinea: History](#)."

¹⁵ Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission. *Report to the Tenth National Parliament on the 2017 National Election*. November 2017.

¹⁶ The Commonwealth. "[Papua New Guinea: Constitution and politics](#)." 2018.

¹⁷ The Commonwealth Observer Group. [Papua New Guinea National Election: June-July 2017](#). The Commonwealth. 2017.

¹⁸ K. Baker. *Women's Representation and Electoral System Reform in Papua New Guinea: The Limitations of Limited Preferential Voting*. Asia & The Pacific Policy Studies. Australian National University (ANU). 2018.

peaceful than in 2002, heightened electoral violence still occurred during the counting stage throughout the 2007, 2012 and 2017 national elections,¹⁹ and the Australian National University (ANU) observation report of the 2017 process found 204 deaths occurred over the electoral period, double the amount that occurred in 2002.²⁰ Additionally, rather than reduce the impact of money politics and bolster women's electoral chances, electoral analysts have argued that the LPV system creates greater opportunities for bribery and vote buying, which actually damages the opportunity for female candidates to win seats.²¹

As of 2018, PNG is one of four countries in the world without any elected female representatives in Parliament.²² In the 2017 national elections, approximately 167 women stood as candidates – roughly 5 percent of overall contestants according to the official count²³ – yet all, including the three female incumbents, failed to secure a seat.²⁴ This is the first Parliament in 25 years with no female representatives. Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) creating 22 reserved seats for women have been recommended by the international community and gained traction in the National Parliament in 2011, resulting in an amendment to the Constitution, but the failure of amendments to the Organic Law to pass in Parliament resulted in it not becoming law.²⁵ There was some hope among civil society that this would be revisited following the 2017 election results, though this remains to be seen.

Reserved seats for women are established at the subnational level in local-level governments (LLG) and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) Parliament and Community Governments. The PNG Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Governments calls for one representative of women's organizations in every urban LLG and two in every rural LLG,²⁶ though problems with implementation are widespread and the number of LLGs in compliance with the law is unknown. The Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) Parliament governs the province of Bougainville, which gained autonomous status in 2001 following a decadelong civil war, and has had three reserved seats for women since its inception.²⁷ The creation of these seats has been credited to women's role in the peace process during the conflict and the traditional matrilineal nature of Bougainville society.²⁸ In the 2015 ABG election the first woman was elected to a non-reserved seat, bringing the total number of women

¹⁹ [The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017.](#)

²⁰ J. Chandler. "[Unprecedented violence and fraud 'hijacked' 2017 PNG election – report.](#)" The Guardian. October 29, 2018.

²¹ N. Haley and K Zubrinich. *Assessing the shift to limited preferential voting in Papua New Guinea: money politics.* State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program. ANU. 2015.

²² International Parliamentary Union. 2018. Apart from Yemen, PNG is the largest state by a significant margin to have one or zero women in Parliament. Other states with one or zero women in Parliament include Vanuatu, Micronesia, Oman and the Solomon Islands.

²³ PNGEC. 2017.

²⁴ Pacific Women in Politics. "[Country Profiles: Papua New Guinea.](#)" Pacific Women. 2018.

²⁵ UN Women. [Temporary Special Measures to Increase Women's Political Participation in the Pacific: Case Studies of Implementation in the Region.](#) UNDP. 2016.

²⁶ Independent State of Papua New Guinea. *Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments.*

²⁷ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

²⁸ [Ibid.](#)

in ABG Parliament to four, or approximately 10 percent of representatives.²⁹ Additionally, the local government system was transformed in 2016 from the male-dominated Council of Elders to the Community Government system, which requires gender parity among representatives and alternates the chair and deputy chair position between genders.³⁰

Women have historically faced challenges in representation and access to the political process, despite efforts from civil society and legislation designed to promote their participation. The contrast between the problems implementing reserved seat policies in LLG with the relative success of implementation in Bougainville highlight the challenges in promoting women's representation at all levels of government.

National Legal Framework and International Commitments

The PNG government is characterized by a consistent lack of representation of women in politics, partially due to cultural factors that elevate men in society over women. Though the government has made commitments through national and international instruments to support women's engagement and representation, it has done little in practice.

The Preamble of the Constitution of PNG states that citizens are guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms regardless of "their race, tribe, places of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex."³¹ The high rates of violence against women and lack of female political representatives, however, indicate these values are not well-enforced. PNG has ratified a number of international treaties and conventions relating to violence against women, 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);³² Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality;³³ and the Beijing Platform for Action.³⁴ The Government of PNG has a gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) policy, which it applies to the personnel management and operation of the National Public Service; however, the policy only applies to government employees.³⁵ The government's medium-term development plan (MTDP) 2011-15 acknowledges the challenges faced by women in PNG, stating that "tension and conflict seem to pervade gender relations and are often manifested in physical violence, most significantly between spouses. The high incidence of rape and other forms of sexual violence also stems from gender relations and how women are valued in society."³⁶ Unfortunately, gender was dropped as a cross-cutting theme in the MTDP 2016-17 for undetermined reasons. Some women interviewed for the VAWE assessment

²⁹ K. Baker and T. Oppermann. *The Election of Josephine Getsi – Making Political History in Bougainville*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia. ANU. 2015

³⁰ ABG. [Bougainville Community Government Act 2016](#). 2016.

³¹ Independent State of Papua New Guinea. "Preamble." [Constitution of Papua New Guinea](#). 1975.

³² UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. ["Ratification Status for Papua New Guinea."](#) 2018.

³³ [CEDAW. 2009](#).

³⁴ [CEDAW. 2009](#).

³⁵ Department of Personnel Management. *National Public Service Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Policy*. Government of Papua New Guinea. 2012.

³⁶ Department of National Planning and Monitoring. *Papua New Guinea Medium Term Development Plan 2011-2015*. Government of Papua New Guinea. 2011. Page 95.

noted that policy developments encouraging women's participation and publicizing national and organizational GESI policies are helping to shift some attitudes toward women's equality in the workplace; however, more progress is needed.

Despite the extremely high prevalence of gender-based violence throughout the country, there is no legislation pertaining to discrimination on the basis of sex³⁷ and domestic violence was not criminalized until the 2013 passage of the Family Protection Act (FPA) and not enforced until its implementation in 2017.³⁸ Organizations providing support to victims of gender-based violence in Bougainville have reported an increase in awareness of the act since its implementation in 2017 and stated anecdotally that they are receiving increased requests for support. This recent progress in the area of women's legal protections is notable and may help increase access to elections for women. However, there are still long-standing challenges to women's status in society that will need to be addressed for there to be true, sustainable equality and progress.

VAWE in PNG

Factor 1. Status of Women

PNG is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world and it is estimated that over 800 unique languages are spoken.³⁹ It is a diverse yet underdeveloped country, where 85 percent of the population lives in rural areas and only 7 percent has access to piped water supplies and the electric grid.⁴⁰ It is estimated to be between 97 and 99 percent of people identify as Christian, and early missionaries played a role in codifying preexisting gender norms and behaviors in their efforts to convert local tribes, including promoting men as leaders in the community and encouraging women to emulate the virtues of obedience and submission.⁴¹

The societal structures throughout PNG are characterized by strong tribal and clan affiliations.⁴² While some areas, most notably the AROB, are matrilineal in structure though not matriarchal, the majority of PNG has a highly patriarchal societal structure in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres, which contributes to a high prevalence of gender inequality.⁴³ PNG has among the highest rates of violence against women in the world,⁴⁴ with intimate partner violence as its most common form, and researchers estimate that approximately 66 percent of women are survivors of domestic violence.⁴⁵ The

³⁷ Discriminatory Practices Act of 1963 prohibits discrimination on the basis of "colour, race or ethnic, tribal or national origin" only.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch. *World Report 2018: Papua New Guinea*. 2018.

³⁹ [Human Rights Watch. 2015.](#)

⁴⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *The Future We Want: Voices from the People of Papua New Guinea - Post-2015 Development Agenda: Country Consultations*. May 2013.

⁴¹ R. Eves. *Christianity, Masculinity and Gender Violence in Papua New Guinea*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program. ANU. 2012.

⁴² [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

⁴³ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

⁴⁴ [CEDAW. 2009.](#) Page 27.

⁴⁵ [Human Rights Watch.](#) 2015.

prevalence of this highly gendered violence plays a role in suppressing women's ability to fully and freely participate in decision-making and take on leadership roles in their homes, communities and politics.

In many PNG societies, men primarily act as the head of household and key decision-makers, while women are primarily caretakers in clearly defined and socially enforced gender roles. Interviewees noted that women who do not ascribe to these roles are often subject to domestic violence, a sort of discipline that is accepted by the community and not viewed as necessitating outside intervention. Women, particularly rural and poor women, are most often employed in the informal sector and many face difficulties maintaining control over their income due to inequity in gender relations and because in some communities patrilineal land rights⁴⁶ are seen as providing control over all income generated using this land.⁴⁷ Lack of personal safety in public areas impacts women's economic participation and limits their ability to generate income, while men do not face the same security threats.⁴⁸ The PNG government acknowledged these challenges in the MTDP 2011-15, stating that "PNG's gender culture...places women in a disadvantaged position,"⁴⁹ yet activists and international organizations have argued that the government has not done enough to combat underlying cultural practices that are detrimental to women and provide resources for survivors of gender-based violence.

The inequality and the challenges women face are due in part to entrenched gender norms and are exacerbated by specific cultural practices and a lack of government action to address the issue.

Bride Price, Sorcery and Polygamy

Deeply entrenched cultural practices, including payment of bride price, a traditional form of dowry payment, accusations of sorcery and cases of polygamy, further perpetuate traditional gender roles and the cycle of domestic and family violence throughout PNG. These practices in turn create challenges for women to engage in the political sphere and take an active role in decision-making in their communities.

One of the most prevalent practices throughout the country is the payment of bride price. Upon marriage, the groom's clan pays the bride's family a bride price as part of the marriage ritual, and she leaves her familial village to move in with her husband and his family. The 2018 ANU report about gender relations in PNG found that the traditional significance of bride price has morphed into a "simple property transaction" in which the woman is no more than a commodity.⁵⁰ This reinforces the lowly status of women and, as noted in the 2012 UN SRVAW report, "the practice of bride-price was identified by many stakeholders as an important trigger of domestic violence, as men commonly feel entitled to control and even abuse their wives as a result of having paid the bride price."⁵¹ The Catholic Church has

⁴⁶ In some areas, such as the AROB, customary land and resource rights are matrilineal.

⁴⁷ R. Eves, et al. *Do No Harm Research: Papua New Guinea*. ANU. 2018.

⁴⁸ World Bank, "Gender and Economic Choice: Papua New Guinea Country Work." *Rapid Qualitative Assessment to Inform the World Development (WDR 2012) on Gender*. 2012.

⁴⁹ Department of National Planning and Monitoring. [Papua New Guinea Medium Term Development Plan 2011-2015](#). Government of Papua New Guinea. 2010.

⁵⁰ R. Eves, et al. 2018. Page 24.

⁵¹ R. Manjoo. "[Special Rapporteur on Violence against women finalizes country mission to Papua New Guinea](#)." UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Press Release. March 26, 2012.

spoken against the use of bride price to justify wife beating and as of 2006 all parishes were to develop initiatives and “protective action strategies in situations of domestic violence,” though it is unclear how successful this has been.⁵² If women leave their husbands, there is an expectation that the bride price will be repaid by her family, even if the woman left over incidences of family violence, and many families are unable to make these payments, creating additional obstacles to ending the marriage. The control husbands exert over their wives often extends beyond the domestic sphere. A 2007 election observer in the Highlands reported a group of men chanting “we do not support women’s rights to vote separately from men as we have already paid the bride price of pigs and money, they are ours,”⁵³ in response to awareness efforts about separate polling lines for women. This anecdote in which bride price was directly invoked to justify suppression of women’s participation is illustrative of how these attitudes can manifest themselves during the electoral process and demonstrates how these prevailing cultural traditions impact the status of women.

The high prevalence of polygamy, particularly in the Highlands and remote areas of the country, creates an additional strain for women. Despite being outlawed in 2014, polygamy remains common in PNG and having multiple wives is considered a symbol of status and wealth.⁵⁴ The government faces challenges enforcing the law, particularly in rural and remote areas, as many marriages are never formalized or registered and determinations of polygamy are therefore dependent on village courts’ recognition of informal marriages.⁵⁵ Polygamy has been found to be one of the primary causes of family violence by ANU and Human Rights Watch studies due to the increased strain it places on the existing marriage and familial relationships. It is not uncommon for the husband to effectively abandon his first wife when taking a second and declining to take responsibility for the house or children from his first marriage. Due to the limited participation of women in the formal sector, this abandonment places immense hardship on the women as they try to support their children alone. The ANU “Do No Harm” research team found high rates of violence in polygamous marriages between husbands, wives and co-wives, with several cases of wives joining the husband in beating another wife.⁵⁶ Precise data on the prevalence of violence between co-wives is not available. This practice and the resulting abandonment of women and children further entrenches their lower status in society and renders it difficult for some women to advance beyond subsistence level and fully engage politically in their communities.

In communities throughout PNG, a widespread belief in sorcery is still prevalent and is an element of the electoral process that has yet to be examined. This belief in sorcery is most distressingly seen in witch hunts that follow unexplained illnesses or deaths in villages and often result in the torture or death of those accused. Oxfam estimated in 2010 that women were six times as likely to be accused of sorcery as

⁵² [R. Eves. 2012. Page 4.](#)

⁵³ N. Haley and B. Dierikx. “[20. Guns, Money and Sex: Assessing the Impact of Electoral System Reform on Political Culture in Southern Highlands Province.](#)” Election 2007. PNG National Research Institute and the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program. ANU. 2011.

⁵⁴ [Human Rights Watch](#). 2015.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ R. Eves, et al. 2018

their male counterparts,⁵⁷ and the UN SRVAW noted in 2013 that there is a growing concern that these accusations may be economically or personally motivated and used to repossess the wealth or resources of the accused.⁵⁸ The majority of women accused have no male kin nearby to protect them and are typically widows or those who moved from ancestral villages after marriage.⁵⁹ The 1971 Sorcery Act, which was seen by the international community as legitimizing these witch hunts, was repealed in 2013, yet attacks have continued with several well-publicized accounts in 2017.⁶⁰ In the 2017 electoral process, several candidates alleged that witchcraft had compromised the ballot boxes by adding or removing ballots supporting specific candidates and forced recounts in two constituencies. One former female candidate reported that her campaign team believed that a rival candidate had cast a spell on her when she became ill during the electoral period, and she was advised to utilize a counter-sorcerer to combat it. Accusations of sorcery during elections affect both male and female candidates and have been used to undermine the integrity of the electoral process and disrupt electoral practices.⁶¹

These and other cultural practices serve to reinforce the patriarchal elements of PNG culture, while also suppressing women's ability to fully participate in decision-making, politics and government.

Legal Recourse for Domestic Violence and Resources for Survivors

Despite the extreme prevalence of domestic violence in PNG, very few family violence cases result in prosecution of any kind. Of 600 cases of alleged family violence handled in 2014 by one Family and Sexual Violence Unit in the Highlands, 30 were prosecuted and 15 sentenced to serve jail time.⁶² Prior to the passing of the FPA in 2013, family violence cases were resolved almost exclusively through mediation and compensation in the village court system. Village courts represent the primary justice system in rural areas and have a limited legal mandate that excludes any criminal cases, including domestic and sexual violence cases.⁶³ Further, the Village Courts Act specifically encourages the use of "peaceful customary mediation and conflict resolution processes, wherever possible, before resorting to Village Court proceedings."⁶⁴ To pursue legal recourse, survivors must take their case to district court, which presents significant financial and often geographic barriers to access. There is limited access to affordable legal services, particularly in rural areas, and women are often forced to represent themselves or return to village court. District courts can grant permanent protection orders and prosecute perpetrators, though most are sent home following counseling.

The handling of family violence cases by both the police and legal system has been under scrutiny in PNG for decades. Low public confidence in the police and lack of rule of law, particularly in rural areas,

⁵⁷ M. Kopi, R. Hinton and S. Robinson. [Violence and Insecurity in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea](#). Oxfam New Zealand. 2010.

⁵⁸ R. Manjoo. [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo](#). UN Human Rights Council. UN General Assembly. 2013.

⁵⁹ M. Kopi, R. Hinton and S. Robinson. 2010.

⁶⁰ H. Clark. ["Sorcery and Sexism in Papua New Guinea"](#). The Diplomat. June 2, 2015.

⁶¹ A. Coleman. ["'Sorcery' delays Papua New Guinea election count."](#) BBC News. July 21, 2017.

⁶² [Human Rights Watch](#). 2015.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Papua New Guinea Parliament. [Village Courts \(Amendment\) Act 2014](#). Government of Papua New Guinea. 2014.

has dampened the effectiveness of government response to violence against women and is thought to contribute to the low reporting rates of incidences.⁶⁵ Police have historically tended toward an “anti-arrest” mentality and released perpetrators of family violence on bail, even in cases of attempted murder, while providing little assistance to the survivors.⁶⁶ The UN SRVAW reported “numerous accounts of police officers ignoring complaints, dismissing women from the police stations, encouraging women to drop charges, not enforcing [interim protection orders], or receiving bribes from perpetrators to ignore a case.”⁶⁷ In some cases, the legal system may send mixed signals to perpetrators and survivors. A female district court magistrate in Hagen in March 2019 fined a man for beating his wife for drinking homebrew with her uncle without his explicit permission, yet in the decision also chastised the survivor, saying “don’t take advantage of the [FPA] and drink homebrew,” adding that women should respect their husbands.⁶⁸ The case was reported in national newspapers under the headline “Women warned not to take advantage of law,” a framing of the case that could have discouraged other women who seek protection under the FPA.

Referral networks connecting police to hospitals, safe houses and other resources for survivors are inadequate in much of PNG, largely leaving women to fend for themselves or return to their abuser. Family Support Centres (FSCs) providing medical care and connecting survivors with law enforcement are present in some provincial hospitals, and even though they are operated by the Department of Health, they are primarily funded by international donors.⁶⁹ FSC resources are often stretched to capacity, such as the FSC in Lae’s primary hospital, which received 11,500 cases of family and sexual violence from 2009-14.⁷⁰ Activists often comment that what resources are available are predominantly centered in provincial capitals and do not reach rural communities.⁷¹ Safe houses are primarily located in urban centers like Port Moresby and Lae with few resources available in rural areas. The passage of the FPA led to the installation of 17 special Family and Sexual Violence Units in police stations across the country, which activists have argued is an improvement but does not meet the need, particularly in rural areas.⁷²

Churches and CSOs play key roles in providing resources to survivors of family violence where the legal system and government have not. As of 2015, there were no government-operated safe houses for survivors, and all safe houses in Port Moresby were operated instead by faith-based groups.⁷³ In

⁶⁵ S. Dinnen. “[Internal Security in Papua New Guinea: Trends and Prospects](#).” *Papua New Guinea: Seven Snapshots of a Nation*. Lowy Institute. 2017.

⁶⁶ [Human Rights Watch](#). 2015.

⁶⁷ R. Manjoo. *Report* 2013.

⁶⁸ J. Gumuno. “[Women warned not to take advantage of law](#).” *The National PNG*. March 27, 2019.

⁶⁹ [CEDAW](#). 2009.

⁷⁰ A. Betteridge and K. Lokuge. *Combating the family and sexual violence epidemic in Papua New Guinea: A submission to the inquiry of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Joint Standing Committee into the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region*. ANU. 2014.

⁷¹ Medecins Sans Frontieres. *Return to Abuser: Gaps in Services and a Failure to Protect Survivors of Family and Sexual Violence in Papua New Guinea*. 2016.

⁷² [Human Rights Watch](#). 2015.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

Bougainville, churches were frequently referenced by interviewees as places where women could report violence and receive counseling services, and the Sisters of Nazareth manage two safe houses in the region.⁷⁴ Some churches will take disciplinary action against their members who commit acts of domestic violence and suspend them from the church until they attend counseling or publicly repent.⁷⁵ However, the churches' support for women's empowerment is often contradictory and highly varied geographically. A born-again Christian man from New Ireland province interviewed for an ANU report noted explained that "the church has forbidden [public domestic violence] – you cannot beat your wife in front of others. True, you can beat her inside of the house,"⁷⁶ demonstrating an emphasis on public perception rather than the violence itself in addressing this issue. The Catholic Church preaches against domestic and family violence yet discourages separation even in cases of abuse and advocates for women to accept their circumstances, with some researchers finding that emphasis is placed on the woman's behavior due to beliefs that the abuse stems from her not behaving as a good Christian wife.⁷⁷ Churches similarly vary on their views on women's equality and leadership opportunities for women. The role of husbands and fathers as the head of the household to whom others in the family, particularly women, should be subservient is often reinforced using religious scripture selectively. Interviewees in Bougainville noted that women are permitted to take leadership roles in the church, even serving as Eucharistic ministers,⁷⁸ while the New Ireland Pentecostal church permits women to preach but excludes them from key leadership positions.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The high prevalence of domestic violence, entrenched gender roles and cultural practices that reinforce the patriarchal nature of PNG society, combined with a lack of government or judicial action on the issue, condemn women to a lower status than men and contribute to the continued oppression of women. Consequently, these attributes and other compounding cultural factors limit their access to decision-making and leadership positions in the social, political and electoral spheres and harms their ability to fully and freely participate in democratic processes.

Factor 2. Women's Access to the Electoral Process

PNG's patriarchal culture and the challenges faced by women in the domestic sphere create barriers to women's political participation and engagement, both as voters and candidates. These stem from the highly patriarchal culture and status of women as subordinate to men, which is reinforced through the high prevalence of domestic violence throughout the country. Female voters face family and clan pressure to vote for certain candidates, limiting their ability to participate freely and by their own volition. Women who seek to contest elections as candidates face financial and cultural barriers to

⁷⁴ IFES VAWE Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

⁷⁵ [R. Eves. 2012.](#)

⁷⁶ [Ibid. Page 8.](#)

⁷⁷ R. Eves. 2012.

⁷⁸ IFES VAWE Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

⁷⁹ R. Eves. 2012

entry, which continue once they are elected to public office. Social, cultural and financial barriers create distinct challenges for women seeking to participate in the electoral process.

Family Pressure and Women's Choices at the Polls

Women are well-represented on PNG's electoral roll and face no legal barriers in registering and casting their ballots. In fact, interviewees anecdotally noted that women participate more often in elections than men. However, all who seek to vote in PNG elections face logistical barriers including challenges with voter registration, confusion over polling dates and times and the need to travel from remote areas to vote.⁸⁰

PNG women face obstacles in their ability to vote how they desire. Family voting is a serious problem in PNG elections, with men instructing women in their family whom to vote for.⁸¹ The LPV system was introduced nationwide in the 2007 national elections to reduce electoral violence and reduce the impact of money politics, which in turn was thought to give female voters greater freedom to vote as they choose without family or clan influence.⁸² It is unclear if this has been successful. The European Union Observer report for the 2017 national elections noted that "a large number of women in the country does [sic] not exercise control of their own vote."⁸³

In some cases, women and men may not be able to access the ballot at all. In some villages in the Highlands, supporters of a single candidate have physically taken control over the ballots and marked them instead of allowing constituents to vote, as reported during the 2017 national elections⁸⁴ and noted anecdotally during interviews about prior elections. Whether this impacted men and women equally varied by district. In some areas, men were permitted to vote while women's ballots were filled out for them, and in others, all ballots were captured and marked by supporters of a powerful candidate usurping the process. Polling officials have reportedly not interfered in these cases due in part to fear for their personal safety.

Barriers to Entry for Female Candidates

In PNG elections, any individual who meets the residency requirement, has not committed a criminal offense, is a citizen and over 25 years of age is eligible to contest elections.⁸⁵ The proportion of female candidates at the national level, however, is low but growing slowly, representing 2.6 percent of total

⁸⁰ PNGEC. 2017.

⁸¹ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

⁸² T. Meki. [An Overview of Women Candidate Performance in Papua New Guinea Elections](#). State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program. ANU. 2015.

⁸³ European Union. *Election Expert Mission to Papua New Guinea: May – August 2017*. September 2017. Page 39.

⁸⁴ Transparency International – Papua New Guinea. [TIPNG Observation Report: 10th National Parliamentary Elections](#). Transparency International. 2017.

⁸⁵ Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission. ["Form 29: Candidate Information."](#) Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections, Section 125. Government of PNG. 1997.

candidates in 2002, 3.7 percent in 2007, 4 percent in 2012 and 5 percent in 2017.⁸⁶ Regardless, only seven women have been elected to PNG's Parliament since independence in 1975. Former candidates noted that attitudes toward women contesting have improved and men are increasingly accepting of women in politics, as more have stood as candidates. Nevertheless, women still face significant challenges, including lack of financial resources and support from political parties⁸⁷ and difficulties in gaining the support of tribal leaders to be competitive.⁸⁸

Reserved seats for women have been established for LLGs, though compliance is low and the seats are appointed, not elected.⁸⁹ The Organic Law on Provincial and Local-Level Governments mandates that one representative of "women's organizations" must be appointed to the local-level assembly and two in rural areas.⁹⁰ Women stand as candidates more frequently at the local level and in 2013, 17 percent of candidates for ward council seats and 5 percent of candidates for council president were female.⁹¹ In 2013, 89 women won council seats, representing 1.4 percent of total seats contested, and one was elected as LLG assembly president of 29 seats.⁹²

As of 2017, no women have been appointed as district and provincial administrators, likely because these positions are seen as more politically influential.⁹³ The PNG government introduced District Service Improvement Programs (DSIP) and Provincial Service Improvement Programs (PSIP) in 2008 to distribute electoral development funds to each member of Parliament for service and infrastructure development within their provinces.⁹⁴ The DSIP and PSIP programs have increasingly decentralized power to the LLG, as LLG councils select proposals and district and provincial administrators play key roles in the implementation of and reporting on the projects,⁹⁵ rendering these positions more politically powerful.

Men and women interviewed by IFES cited financial barriers as the greatest difficulty faced by female candidates. Money politics remain a systemic problem in PNG elections, with reports of vote buying and

⁸⁶ C. Kidu. "Session: Violence Against Women in Elections: Developing a Framework for Action". Commonwealth Women's Forum. Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting. London, United Kingdom. April 16, 2018.

⁸⁷ J. Bukikun, Rev. *Equality and participation in public decision making in PNG: the experience of women candidates in the 2012 election*. Pacific Women. 2013.

⁸⁸ UNDP. "Time for PNG to reflect as no women elected to parliament." August 3, 2017. Press Release.

⁸⁹ Pacific Women. "[Papua New Guinea](#)." 2018.

⁹⁰ Independent State of Papua New Guinea. "Section 29: Composition of Local-level Governments" *Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments*. 1998.

⁹¹ Cardno Emerging Markets. [PNG Domestic Election Observation Study: Observations on the Conduct of the 2013 LLG Elections](#). Report prepared for Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission. October 2013.

⁹² Commonwealth Local Government Forum. *Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2017/18*. "Papua New Guinea: Country Profile 2017-2018 – The Local Government System of Papua New Guinea" April 2018.

⁹³ B. Kama. "[Papua New Guinea's Political Condition and Trends through 2025](#)." *Papua New Guinea: Seven Snapshots of a Nation*. Lowy Institute. 2017.

⁹⁴ B. Kama. 2017.

⁹⁵ Department of Implementation and Rural Development. "[District Service Improvement Program Trust Guidelines](#)." Government of Papua New Guinea. February 27, 2008.

bribing of election officials.⁹⁶ This undermines the integrity of the whole electoral process and is particularly harmful for female candidates whose access to campaign finance is restricted by their lower socio-economic status. Candidates rely on personal, family or political party funds to begin their campaigns, all of whom can be reluctant to support women, whom they view as less likely to be successful. Some researchers have argued that the shift from a FPTP to an LPV electoral system has worsened the effect of money politics as voters are effectively able to sell three votes instead of one.⁹⁷ This has increased the cost of elections and further priced out female candidates who often lack the resources to participate in vote buying at the same levels as men.⁹⁸

The IPPCC encourages political parties to have women represent 10 percent of their endorsed candidates; however, there is no enforcement mechanism for the recommendations and no legally required candidate quota. No parties reached the 10 percent threshold in the 2017 national elections⁹⁹ and in the 2007 and 2012 national elections, approximately 60 percent of female candidates ran as independents without party endorsement.¹⁰⁰ In national elections, political party support is beneficial for candidates' chances due to the financial burden campaigning places on the candidate and his or her family, and well-resourced campaigns tend to be more successful. However, party support is not essential for their success¹⁰¹ and approximately 13 percent of candidates elected in 2017 and 14 percent of those elected in 2012 were independents.¹⁰² Interviewees noted that while the attitudes of political parties toward female candidates are changing, many parties still doubt that women are able to be competitive and win. Participants reported that some parties offer less support to the female candidates they endorse, and in some cases, revoke their endorsement entirely just before polling to back a male candidate.¹⁰³ Female candidates in the 2017 election also reported that promised funds and resources from political parties often failed to materialize, damaging their candidacies.¹⁰⁴ These practices further limit the access of female candidates to the electoral process and are detrimental to the ability of women to be elected.

Female candidates also face cultural barriers to their participation that impact voters' perceptions of their candidacies and ability to be competitive. According to Rufina Peter, a female candidate in the 2017 national elections, the "Big Man" culture in leadership and politics creates the "perception [among] many Papua New Guineans that politics is a man's world and women are ill-equipped to be political leaders."¹⁰⁵ This perception draws from the cultural association that equates masculinity and

⁹⁶ K. Baker. [Experiences of Female Candidates in the 2017 Papua New Guinea General Election](#). State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program. ANU. 2017.

⁹⁷ N. Haley and K Zubrinich. 2015.

⁹⁸ K. Baker. 2018.

⁹⁹ IFES VAW Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

¹⁰⁰ T. Meki. 2015.

¹⁰¹ K. Baker. 2017.

¹⁰² Z. Meers and K. Yi Dionne. ["We finally know the results of Papua New Guinea's elections."](#) The Washington Post. October 25, 2017.

¹⁰³ IFES VAW Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

¹⁰⁴ [K. Baker. 2017.](#)

¹⁰⁵ UNDP. August 3, 2017.

physical strength with power and wealth, as derived from the traditional clan and tribal systems. This cultural association plays a defining role in PNG politics because of its engrained nature and is prevalent throughout PNG, most notably in the Highlands region.¹⁰⁶ Women who actively engage in politics are perceived as disrespectful to men and as threats.¹⁰⁷

Gender Norms and Participation of Women as Elected Officials

Given the deep-seated nature of exclusion and violence in PNG, there are multiple and major obstacles to women becoming elected to office, as reflected in the paucity of female elected officials historically. The lack of a structural or legal mechanism creating reserved seats for women at the provincial or national levels, except in the AROB, renders it difficult for women to overcome the cultural and societal barriers during their foray into politics. The Equality and Participation Act was passed in 2011 and established one reserved seat for women per province, expanding the National Parliament by 22 seats. However, the bill that authorized the implementation of the act failed to pass. Since the 2017 national elections, there have been repeated calls by civil society and international organizations for TSMs and to revisit the Equality and Participation Act. Prime Minister Peter O'Neill expressed his disappointment in the lack of female MPs and stated his desire to revisit women's representation in the next Parliament.¹⁰⁸

The strict gender norms that exist throughout PNG society are prevalent in the halls of Parliament. One former female MP reported noting that female colleagues were treated

One former female MP reported that female colleagues were treated "like sex objects" by male MPs.

"like sex objects," with male MPs making comments about their appearance and in

some cases making inappropriate advances. She stated that some male MPs seemed "uncomfortable" with women expressing strong public opinions and women MPs were more effective by operating behind the scenes and working indirectly through male allies. This approach translated into difficulties for women receiving public credit for their accomplishments, which in turn, can create the perception of ineffective leadership. In one example, a former female MP who described herself as the lead on the development of and campaigning for a bill said that when the bill was passed, articles in the media discussed the men who had supported it, while she was a mere footnote.

Interviewees noted that female leaders are judged more harshly than men. A former female MP noted that for women serving in Parliament, "any failure is deemed because of your gender, not because of other circumstances." This view implies that gender is a handicap and puts undue weight on the performance of female MPs to demonstrate to voters that women can be effective. One interviewee noted that she heard voters ask, "why should we vote women in, [the three past female MPs] didn't perform well as parliament members," despite the programs the women brought to their constituencies. Multiple women interviewed also noted the perception that female MPs are unable to bring money and projects to their districts, despite past female MPs accomplishing this, and

¹⁰⁶ [CEDAW. 2009.](#)

¹⁰⁷ IFES VAWE Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

¹⁰⁸ G. Kero. "[Women's seats on card.](#)" The National. August 18, 2017.

hypothesized this may be because female MPs engage in illegal handouts less frequently than male MPs. During the campaign period, rival candidates' supporters will say things like "she's bright and she knows what to say on the floor of Parliament...but she won't be able to bring that kind of money." Interviewees noted that when female MPs do not perform or participate in handouts, their constituents will assume it is because they are women and become reluctant to vote for more female candidates. This attitude further perpetuates the cycle of unequal representation and power dynamics.

Gender Equity in Polling Officials, Scrutineers and Electoral Administrators

The unequal access to the electoral process is also present among those involved in the administration and conduct of elections. While some of this may be systemic, much of this inequality may be due to external security concerns which impede access rather than discriminatory policies. Women have historically made up low percentages of polling officials and scrutineers, which may be partially due to the security concerns at polling stations and during the counting process.

As anticipated, the 2012 elections were notably violent, with polling officials assaulted at 14 percent of polling stations. The majority of these incidents occurred in the Highlands.¹⁰⁹ Incidents also occurred in other regions, including polling officials in the Momase region who reported having "stones thrown at them" and being "threatened and assaulted."¹¹⁰ In the 2017 elections there was significant intimidation of voters at the polls, while post-election violence during the counting period dramatically increased¹¹¹ and the total deaths over the election period was the highest since the 2002 election.¹¹² These security threats very likely impact the willingness of women to work at the polls due to the threat to their personal safety. In the 2012 LLG elections, women made up just over 20 percent of polling officials hired by the PNGEC,¹¹³ averaging 14 percent of officials in the Highlands and 22 percent in the remaining regions.¹¹⁴ Despite targeted recruiting efforts by the PNGEC, women's representation fell overall in the 2017 national elections to 16 percent of the total poll workers, with 12 percent in the Highlands, despite representing 26 percent and 24 percent of polling officials in the New Guinea Islands and Southern regions, respectively.¹¹⁵ Counting teams, meanwhile, average 25-50 percent women, a contrast that some observers say is due to the possibility of violence at the polls. It was also noted that when counting teams began instituting night counting, many of the women dropped out.¹¹⁶ The increased risk of electoral violence in the Highlands may contribute to women's reluctance to participate as polling officials in this region and the violence in 2012 could be partially responsible for the decline in

¹⁰⁹ Cardno Emerging Markets. October 2013

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Page 17.

¹¹¹ Transparency International. 2017.

¹¹² [J. Chandler. October 29, 2018.](#)

¹¹³ Cardno Emerging Markets. October 2013.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ PNGEC. "Report." November 2017.

¹¹⁶ N. Haley and K. Zubrinich. "2017 Papua New Guinea General Elections: Election Observation Report." Australian National University. Department of Pacific Affairs. November 2018.

participation rates from 2012-17. The PNGEC has indicated that it will aim for greater gender parity among election workers in the next LLG elections.

Women have also been underrepresented as scrutineers in the electoral process. Scrutineers are appointed by the candidates, not the electoral commissions, and it is unclear what role the PNGEC can play in promoting increased engagement of women. In the 2012¹¹⁷ and 2017¹¹⁸ elections, women represented approximately 6 percent of scrutineers and in 2017 observers reported only two female scrutineers in the Highlands. As scrutineers are present during the polling and counting processes, historically the most violent and contested aspects of the electoral process, it is possible that female scrutineers are dissuaded by the threat of electoral violence or that candidates do not select women because of the contentious and violent environment they must work in. Meanwhile, in the AROB, which historically has lower rates of election violence than the Highlands and greater equality in gender relations and decision-making, one interviewee estimated that in Central Bougainville women represented as high as 40 percent of all scrutineers in the 2017 elections.¹¹⁹ An electoral official in Bougainville noted that rates of female scrutineers in the region have been increasing and that women play a valuable role in calming down male scrutineers when they become aggressive, possibly preventing incidences of violence.¹²⁰

Within the PNGEC permanent staff, there is greater gender equality than is present at the polling stations. As of 2018, three of the electoral commission's nine senior leadership positions are filled by women, and women are well-represented in headquarters. Even though the electoral commissioner and two deputy commissioners are male, three of six branch directors are female. In the provincial electoral offices, women make up 15 percent (three out of 20) of current election managers and 73 percent (11 out of 15)¹²¹ current assistant election managers.¹²² In the 2017 campaign period, the PNGEC waded into controversy by justifying the replacement of a female returning officer (RO) in the Highlands with a male provincial RO late in the cycle by commenting, "Jiwaka needed a male officer to coordinate and support Pandihau, who is a female [election manager]."¹²³ The comment drew backlash in the media due to the emphasis on the gender of the two employees, with some commenters asking, "is [the Electoral Commissioner] indirectly stating that the position is solely for males and not females?"¹²⁴ Despite the controversy, since 2015 international partners working with the PNGEC have noted an increase in women taking leadership roles in the PNGEC and engaging actively in their roles.¹²⁵ Employees

¹¹⁷ Cardno Emerging Markets. October 2013

¹¹⁸ Transparency International. 2017.

¹¹⁹ IFES VAW Assessment Interviews. July 2018.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ As of November 1, 2018, there are two election manager vacancies and seven assistant election manager vacancies. Percentages reflect filled positions.

¹²² IFES "Post-2017 National Election Evaluation Series: Gender and Elections Session." Presented at the first PNGEC regional evaluation workshop, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea. 2017.

¹²³ N. Haley and K. Zubrinich. 2018.

¹²⁴ EMTV Online "Jiwakans claim Gamato's explanation on Jiwaka PRO status unsatisfactory." EMTV. Accessed April 1, 2019.

¹²⁵ IFES "Electoral Systems Strengthening Program: Annual Report (October 2017-September 2018)." Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2018.

interviewed noted that the PNGEC has actively encouraged women to take on more leadership roles, when the security situations and nature of the work make it safe for them to do so, and that this change is largely driven by senior leadership. This improvement in the engagement of female officials has the potential to help increase access for women in all aspects of the electoral cycle through the increased acceptance and visibility of female officials in leadership roles.

Conclusion

While women's access to the electoral process is provided by law, the cultural and systemic barriers women face render it difficult for them to fully engage. Family pressure, sometimes enforced through domestic violence, continues to repress the voices of female voters, while financial barriers, including lack of access to funding early in the campaign, and security concerns limit the ability of female candidates and electoral officials to fully engage in the process on a level playing field. Strict gender norms, which discount women's capacity for leadership, undermine the ability of female voters, candidates, elected officials and electoral professionals to enjoy free political participation.

Factor 3. VAWE in PNG

Electoral events in PNG have been historically characterized by violence, particularly in the Highlands region. Violence typically occurs between the supporters of rival candidates and has been used to intimidate voters and candidates from freely participating. Corruption and vote buying have been frequently observed throughout PNG, and the influx of money during elections can cause violence. The PNGEC has been working to combat the violence in subsequent elections with moderate success based on anecdotal observer reports.¹²⁶ Regardless, all representatives interviewed for this assessment noted that electoral violence remains a serious problem in PNG.

This culture of electoral violence, combined with high rates of domestic and gender-based violence, creates a high prevalence of VAWE throughout PNG, including physical acts of violence, intimidation and threats in both public and private spaces and verbal violence including gossip, shaming and harassment. VAWE impacts women as they participate in all aspects of the electoral process – as voters, candidates, campaign workers and scrutineers – and a lack of awareness of the resources available to survivors severely undercuts the efficacy of current responses.

Physical Violence, Intimidation and Threats in Public and Domestic Spaces

As previously noted, women face barriers and sometimes violence for freely casting their ballots due to the high prevalence of family voting and pressure to vote following the instructions of the family or clan.

¹²⁶ The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017. The European Union. 2017.

This is an endemic problem in PNG and observer groups in the 2007,¹²⁷ 2012¹²⁸ and 2017¹²⁹ national elections noted that women's votes are more frequently interfered with than men's at the polls. Family voting is a notable issue in PNG and women are typically instructed by husbands or fathers to vote for certain candidates despite the prohibition of undue influence, bribery and violation of the secrecy of the ballot in the Criminal Code¹³⁰ and Organic Law on National and LLG Elections.¹³¹

Husbands tell their wives, "I'm going to leave you" or "I'm going to divorce you" if they threaten to vote differently than instructed.

Women interviewed for IFES' VAWE assessment asserted that coercive influencing of women's votes occurs predominantly in the home, typically through husbands instructing wives how to vote. They recounted stories of women who were "bashed up,"¹³² cast out of the family and in one case, formally divorced for voting

differently than instructed. Some men say things like, "I'm going to leave you" or "I'm going to divorce you" to their wives if they threaten to vote other than instructed. In some cases, husbands who wish to end their marriage accused their wives of voting other than as instructed and used this as an excuse to cast out their wives, claiming that she "did not support the family" regardless of how she actually voted. The use of voting as a marker for family loyalty is prevalent and can cause conflict in a woman's life if a member of her and her husband's family is contesting. If she votes against her relative, she may be disowned by her own family. Interviewees also reported that those who vote against their family face gossip and shaming on social media from other members of the community. Using threats or acts of violence to influence women's votes in these ways is most common in the Highlands region. In the 2007 national election, 49 percent of 200 female voters interviewed after the poll in Southern Highlands Province reported some form of intimidation when casting their ballots.¹³³ Interviewees reported that many women do not report this type of violence, as it is seen as a family affair, and if it does get reported it is typically handled within the community rather than through the formal legal system. In the 2017 election, observers with the ANU team reported assaults and intimidation of women took place in the Highlands, National Capital District and Lae.¹³⁴ Two incidents were reported in which the husband found that his wife voted for a different candidate than he had instructed – in one case, the husband speared his wife and in the other he attacked her with a bow and arrow – and both incidents sparked

¹²⁷ N. Haley and B. Dierikx. 2011.

¹²⁸ Transparency International Papua New Guinea. *TIPNG Observation Report: The 2012 National Parliamentary Elections*. Transparency International. December 5, 2012.

¹²⁹ [The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017.](#)

¹³⁰ Independent State of Papua New Guinea. "(b) Section 103: Bribery." [Criminal Code Act of 1974](#).

¹³¹ Independent State of Papua New Guinea. "Section 215: Voiding Election for Illegal Practices." [Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections](#). 1997.

¹³² "Bashed up" is used colloquially to refer to domestic violence throughout PNG.

¹³³ N. Haley and B. Dierikx. 2011.

¹³⁴ N. Haley and K. Zubrinich. "2017 Papua New Guinea General Elections: Election Observation Report." Australian National University. Department of Pacific Affairs. November 2018.

larger conflicts and resulted in the temporary suspension or closing of polling. It is unclear if the women sought police assistance or if action was taken against their attackers.¹³⁵

Across PNG and especially in the Highlands region and Bougainville, secrecy of the ballot at the polling station remains an issue. Transparency International-PNG (TI-PNG) reported that 38 percent of voters surveyed in the 2017 elections indicated that secrecy of the vote was not always guaranteed.¹³⁶ This lack of secrecy enables greater interference at the polls and especially impacts female voters. In the Highlands region, interviewees attested that at some polling stations groups of men, typically supporters of a single candidate or party, would often mark ballots for all voters at the polling station or check to ensure that community members were voting for their candidate. Whether this impacted all voters at the polling station or female voters exclusively seemed to vary by district. Several reported that the police seemed to do little to prevent intimidation of women at the polls and in some cases participated themselves. To combat this in 2017, the PNGEC introduced provisions for separate lines and compartments for men and women at polling stations. Election observer groups noted that while this is effective in some areas when implemented, implementation and efficacy was

Forget about having a place or polling booth for women” -Female Voter, Chimbu

inconsistent from province to province.¹³⁷ One woman from the Highlands highlighted how ineffective this reform could be under these circumstances, saying, “There’s no need [for separate polling booths for women], because when you block vote the boys just get the ballot papers and mark them. No-one would dare getting a paper then hide and vote... If someone wanted to go against the boys and vote for another they would just bring trouble on themselves.”¹³⁸

Overall, female voters faced high levels of intimidation throughout PNG. The ANU observation report found that nationally only two in five women surveyed reported that they were able to vote freely and less than half of male and female voters reported that they voted freely in the 2017 process.¹³⁹ TI-PNG¹⁴⁰ and the Commonwealth Observer Group¹⁴¹ noted in their reports that the highest levels of interference of female voters occurred in the Highlands region, an observation that was echoed by interviewees. TI-PNG found that approximately 49 percent of observers reported observing that women in the Highlands were “sometimes or never” able to vote without interference, far above the national average of 20 percent.¹⁴² This interference was not limited to the Highlands, however. One group of observers in the Momase region noted an incident where two brothers fought for custody of their elderly mother in order to cast her ballot for the candidate of his choice, and it is unclear if she would have been able to

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ [Transparency International – PNG. 2017.](#)

¹³⁷ [The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017.](#)

¹³⁸ N. Haley and K. Zubrinich. 2018. Page 86.

¹³⁹ J. Chandler. 2018.

¹⁴⁰ [Transparency International – PNG. 2017.](#)

¹⁴¹ [The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017.](#) Page 26.

¹⁴² [Transparency International – PNG. 2017.](#)

vote unassisted given the option.¹⁴³ The Commonwealth report also noted that women were assisted in “significantly higher numbers than their male counterparts” in Bougainville.¹⁴⁴ While this could be partially due to low literacy rates requiring assistance, interviewees in Bougainville noted that it was common for women’s husbands rather than polling officials to accompany them into the booth to provide assistance. Observer reports asserted that across PNG, with the exception of a few public incidents, female voters were less affected by election-related violence than by family voting and intimidation when casting their ballot, though with low reporting rates and limited observer capacity it can be difficult to discern the true prevalence.

To increase the security of female voters, interviewees recommended that the PNGEC ensure that there are separate polling compartments as well as lines for men and women with some distance between them to ensure that women have secrecy of the ballot and are not influenced at the polling stations. Given that the main source of electoral violence experienced by female voters occurs in the home as opposed to at the polling stations, the larger problems at the polls are the lack of secrecy for both men and women. The lack of secrecy allows for intimidation at the polls as well as enabling family members to confirm how others have voted, perpetuating the practice of family voting and its interplay with domestic violence.

Women Candidates and the Culture of Political Violence

Once women have decided to run for office, they enter the notably violent process of PNG elections. Research demonstrated that physical and verbal violence are commonplace during PNG elections, particularly in the Highlands region, and are committed against both male and female candidates. This culture of violence and aggression, which is typically associated with the Highlands region, may be spreading. Interviewees in Bougainville noted that the last two elections – 2015 ABG and 2017 national – were notable for the influx of money, vote buying and aggression in the electoral processes. This violence, and particularly verbal violence, has a greater impact on women than men.

In addition to the verbal violence experienced, female candidates in the 2017 national elections acknowledged the physical dangers faced during the campaign. These included physical attacks by rival candidates’ supporters and threats of property damage and physical violence.¹⁴⁵ One candidate in 2017 reported that she was attacked by a rival candidate’s supporters. Overall, former candidates interviewed for IFES’ assessment noted that while female candidates face increased threats of physical violence, these rarely seemed to materialize into direct physical attacks against the candidates themselves. Due to these threats, however, female candidates are more limited in their movements while campaigning and spend a larger portion of their funds on security costs than male candidates.

Women who contest elections are in some cases seen as breaking traditional gender roles and face increased degrees of vicious gossip, harassment and scrutiny than their male counterparts. Verbal attacks on female candidates’ personal lives and relationships are quite common in national and

¹⁴³ N. Haley and K. Zubrinich. 2018.

¹⁴⁴ [The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017.](#) Page 26.

¹⁴⁵ [K. Baker. 2017.](#)

subnational elections. Female candidates will be questioned about their marital status and sexual history, or accused of becoming politicians to have affairs with male MPs while, as one interviewee noted, “male candidates can have three wives” without questions being asked. Some female candidates who receive financial support from men during the campaign period are said to have “plenty men,” implying that they are in a romantic or sexual relationship with their sponsors. Online violence was mentioned in the context of verbal violence experienced by women, and interviewees reported rumors about female candidates circulating on social media. The media scrutiny for women is higher and nastier. Several interviewees cited the story of one female elected official who was reported to have made a rude comment, something which male MPs “do all the time,” which was then shared widely on social media and was cited by interviewees as contributing to the failure of her reelection campaign.

The experience of female candidates in national and LLG elections vary widely. One former national election candidate noted that the provincial seat, particularly those in the Highlands, in the national elections is the most difficult seat for women to contest, as it is more expensive, covers a significantly wider area and standing for these seats is considered by some to be “unacceptable” for women and not a “woman’s place.” Former female candidates during LLG elections stated that they believe women are more accepted at the LLG level because there is less money involved than in contests for Parliament and thus less violent. LLG elections are more localized, and the familiarity between the candidates and voters may also contribute to greater acceptance of women and lower incidences of violence, however fewer women than men still contest and win.

Challenges During the Campaign Period

The campaign period creates dangers for those participating campaigns as supporters and others seeking to benefit from the campaign process in addition to the candidates themselves. Female campaign workers are threatened by the culture of violence endemic to PNG elections, and campaign

Those who campaign on behalf of female candidates face more direct physical danger than the candidates themselves.

practices encouraging illicit activities play a disruptive role in neighboring communities.

Voice for Change, a nongovernmental organization focusing on combating violence against women in the Highlands, reported that supporters of female candidates face threats,

physical violence and property damage by supporters of rival candidates. One woman was physically abused by men in her community who claimed she was “passing on a bad message to their wives” by supporting a female candidate.¹⁴⁶ These security threats, as well as the general volatility at the counting centers, may be partially responsible for the low levels of female scrutineers throughout PNG. It was reported that a female scrutineer in Port Moresby had pebbles and water bottles thrown at her at the counting station while people shouted that she wasn’t supposed to be there, saying only men can be

¹⁴⁶ International Women’s Development Agency. [“Why were zero women elected to Papua New Guinea’s Parliament?”](#) October 17, 2017.

scrutineers.¹⁴⁷ In contrast, in Bougainville it was estimated that approximately half of the scrutineers in the last elections were women and that the female scrutineers played a critical role in keeping the peace at counting stations by calming their male counterparts.¹⁴⁸

Candidates in PNG elections are expected to provide a “campaign haus” [house] for their supporters offering food and shelter on the campaign trail. Traditionally this practice has been restricted to the Highlands region, though since 2007 it has spread throughout PNG. In some areas there is now an expectation that alcohol, drugs, cash handouts and occasionally prostitutes will also be provided at these venues in addition to food and shelter.¹⁴⁹ Women, reportedly ranging in age from 13 to 29, called “coffee ladies” will moonlight as sex workers in campaign houses during the electoral period in exchange for money or food and in some cases, families will encourage young girls to participate to earn money for the household.¹⁵⁰ Observers in 2017 felt that for younger women, their involvement was either “forced or coerced” and that the provision of sexual services in exchange for votes was implicit.¹⁵¹ The alcohol provided at the campaign houses is additionally thought to play a role in domestic violence during the electoral period, as men return drunk without money or food for the family, leading to altercations between spouses, as recounted by several IFES interviewees. Additionally, past reports have indicated an increase in cases of HIV around the electoral period as there is an influx of money and risky behavior from supporters who travel with their candidate.¹⁵² In IFES’ discussions with assessment participants, none indicated that these houses are regulated or policed during the electoral period.

These campaign practices create a dangerous operating space for both male and female candidates and their supporters. Lack of security can particularly dampen support and enthusiasm for female candidates as they fear violence during the campaign through the counting period.

Legal Recourse to Electoral Violence

Despite the high prevalence of violence in PNG elections, there is little recourse for reporting electoral violence to the PNGEC. For electoral fraud or malpractice, PNG has a robust culture of electoral petitions. For the 111 seats in the Parliament, 105 and 79 petitions were filed with the PNGEC in 2012 and 2017, respectively, by candidates contesting the outcome of the elections.¹⁵³ While candidates have a clear legal path, legal recourse for other electoral stakeholders is either unavailable or underutilized.

The PNGEC reported that of electoral petitions filed in the 2017 election, 52 percent involved claims of illegal practices, 48 percent bribery and 23 percent undue influence.¹⁵⁴ Little data historical is available on the number of petitions filed for undue influence, bribery or other electoral integrity violations. Electoral officials interviewed for IFES’ VAWE assessment noted that if a voter were to experience

¹⁴⁷ IFES VAWE Interviews. July 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ N. Haley and K. Zubrinich. 2018.

¹⁵² J. Blades. “[HIV remains critical threat in Papua New Guinea](#).” Radio New Zealand. March 17, 2017.

¹⁵³ Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission. “Report.” 2017. Page 29.

¹⁵⁴ K. Vaname. “Legal and Regulatory Framework for Improving Elections” PNG Electoral Commission: Stakeholders Dialogue. Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission. Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. November 15, 2017.

election interference, he or she could report it to the polling official or police if it is in the public sphere. In cases of domestic violence used to intimidate or influence votes, however, the matter would not be handled by the PNGEC.

Interviewees seemed unclear as to where they should report electoral violations. Many noted that candidates bribing the police, as in the Highlands, to simply not secure the polling and counting stations, as in Bougainville, was common practice. The generally constrained or limited levels of security during the electoral process has been considered by interviewees to contribute to the low participation of women as polling officials as women are concerned about their physical safety. This lack of clarity on the process to report electoral violations and lack of faith in the police to provide adequate security during polling and counting represents a large gap in protection for women in the electoral process.

Conclusion

The prevalence of violence in PNG elections is reflective of the high levels of violence that have been noted against women and the dangers posed to women who seek to participate in the electoral process. The dangers faced by female candidates, voters, electoral officials and campaign staff marginalize women throughout the process and render it difficult for them to fully and freely participate. Electoral violence experienced by women takes place both at the family level, as intimidation to vote for their husband's, father's or clan's candidates, and at the public level, as vicious gossip or harassment of female candidates, and threats to their physical safety and that of their supporters. These challenges are further compounded by a lack of security in the electoral process and lack of clear reporting mechanisms for those who experience electoral violence.

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 Papua New Guinea (PNG). In light of the findings, and in consultation with the interviewees in this assessment, the following recommendations are offered to stakeholders engaged in supporting women's political participation and ending violence against women in elections (VAWE) at all levels of civic engagement and enhancing women's access to the electoral process and overall political participation:

- 1. Improve enhancement and enforcement of existing laws through advocacy and education on laws and reporting mechanisms.**

Absent enforcement of the current legal mechanisms including the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments provision mandating women's representation, Family Protection Act (FPA), Organic Law on National and Local-Level Government Elections, and Criminal Code, perpetrators of domestic violence both within and outside the electoral process and electoral violations do not face consequences for their actions. Clear and consistent enforcement of the FPA and regulations on bribery and undue influence in the Organic Law on elections, as well as evaluation and improvement of existing reporting mechanisms, can provide support for women facing pressure from family voting while enforcement of the Organic Law on governments will ensure women's representation at the provincial and local levels.

- 2. Enhance gender-sensitive electoral security to all voters so that they, regardless of sex, are able to participate in elections as voters, officials, candidates, party agents, media personnel and observers in a safe and credible manner.**

IFES recommends that institutions responsible for electoral security such as the PNG Electoral Commission (PNGEC), provincial governments and police develop strategies in close collaboration informed by civil society, particularly women's organizations, and other key stakeholders to prevent electoral violence, including VAWE. To launch such initiatives newly or substantially improved existing initiatives, study and training are often required. Electoral security training has been cited as the most effective tool in preventing election violence by a United States Institute of Peace study: "A well-trained and disciplined security sector, coupled with an institutionalized, legitimate and effective electoral administration body, tends to create the largest reductions in election related violence."¹⁵⁵

- 3. Strengthen civic and voter education curricula nationwide so that electors understand their rights and responsibilities as voters, equality and nondiscrimination, especially to address family and clan voting and election violation reporting mechanisms.**

Many women interviewed noted that they were unaware of the resources available to them to report electoral violations. To educate voters about the electoral law and their rights and

¹⁵⁵ J. Claes. "[Electing Peace: What Works in Preventing Election Violence](#)." United States Institute of Peace. March 14, 2016.

responsibilities as voters, the PNGEC should partner with civil society and the media to develop a communication strategy and voter education informing voters about the negative impact of bribery, undue influence and family voting and educating them on the resources available to them if they experience electoral violations, including domestic violence related to the electoral process. Additionally, the PNGEC should open a conversation on integrating a civic education program into school curricula.

4. Establish separate polling booths for women at all polling locations and increase security at the polls to mitigate possible intimidation of female voters at polling stations.

Lack of secrecy of the ballot, particularly for female voters, is concerning throughout PNG and feeds into the culture of family voting and interference with women's votes. While the PNGEC attempted to have separate polling lines nationally in 2017, implementation rarely occurred.¹⁵⁶ Going forward, the PNGEC should ensure national implementation of separate polling lines for women as well as take steps to increase security, prevent bribery of officials at the polls, and mandate that only officials assist voters to mitigate undue influence of women at polling stations. This would help to ensure female and male voters are guaranteed secrecy of the ballot, thus giving women greater autonomy to vote as they choose.

5. Identify key allies, including male allies in Parliament, political parties, government ministries, and others, 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 PNGEC, Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPPCC) and civil society must identify key male allies in Parliament, political parties, government ministries, provincial governments, 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.

6. Support advocacy and development efforts for enforceable Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) at the national level.

The design of a TSM, such as a gender quota, for PNG has been the source of much contention and debate. IFES recommends a convening of key actors, including specialists on electoral system design, to review the options and build consensus and support around a specific approach. The options most frequently considered are in two broad families: reserved seats and legislated candidate quotas.

The creation of reserved seats for women in Parliament would ensure a minimum representation. TSMs, such as quotas, boost women's voices to help ensure that their views are heard in government and during lawmaking and potentially help overcome the negative

¹⁵⁶ [The Commonwealth Observer Group. 2017.](#) The European Union. 2017.

perceptions of women in leadership and decision-making positions. Reserved seats for women have had some success in Bougainville, where the first woman was elected to a non-reserved seat in 2015. Domestic civil society and the international community have frequently recommended reserved seats, and a proposal for 22 reserved seats, spearheaded by MP Dame Carol Kidu and civil society groups, was put to a vote in 2011 but failed to pass Parliament.¹⁵⁷ Following the result of the 2017 national election, there was some discussion from Prime Minister Peter O'Neill that Parliament would revisit this proposal, a position he reiterated on International Women's Day 2019.¹⁵⁸ O'Neill announced in March 2019 that he would be putting forth a proposal for four regional seats reserved for women to which the best-performing female candidate from that region would be appointed or nominated.¹⁶⁰ Under this proposal, which has not yet been put to Parliament as of writing, women would still be eligible to compete for provincial and district-level seats, and if a woman is awarded one of these seats, the next-best performing woman would be appointed to the regional seat.¹⁶¹ O'Neill has stated that he wants to add these seats as soon as the 2022 elections.¹⁶²

The other option, legislated candidate quotas, has not been successful in the past but could be revamped with a better technical design. In the 2017 national elections, all political parties failed to meet the threshold of female candidates representing 10 percent of party-endorsed candidates. In interviews, it was frequently noted that political parties engage female candidates at lower rates and provide less funding to female than male candidates. To combat this, the IPPCC is currently working to legislate an enforceable gender quota mandating that female candidates represent 20 percent of supported candidates for each political party, with noncompliance penalized with a fine. As currently articulated, the draft law would be bolstered by legislated campaign finance allocations, which would require parties to contribute a fixed amount to all endorsed candidates' campaigns, thereby ensuring female candidates access to resources and enabling women to engage in competitive campaigns on par with their male counterparts and enhancing their chance of success. IPPCC is currently spearheading this proposal, and, as it will require changes to the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates, it is expected to be presented to the public later in 2019.

Furthermore, the primary challenge with the creation of any form of TSM has been the lack of political will to implement the proposals, especially reserved seat proposals, which require constitutional amendment. **IFES recommends increased advocacy and support to civil society groups engaging Parliament to inform MPs on the merits of the proposal and lobby them for support. Additionally, IFES recommends further advocacy efforts around TSM proposals,**

¹⁵⁷ Y. Kep. "[Call to Revisit Reserved Seats for Women](#)." Post-Courier. August 16, 2017.

¹⁵⁸ G. Kero. "[Women's seats on card](#)." The National. August 18, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Chanel News Asia. "[Papua New Guinea's men-only parliament eyes seats for women](#)." March 8, 2019.

¹⁶⁰ G. Kenneth. "[House Considers Reserving Four Seats For Women](#)." Post-Courier. March 11, 2019.

¹⁶¹ The National. "[O'Neill wants to see more women in parlt](#)." The National. March 11, 2019.

¹⁶² H. Tarawa. "O'Neill backs move for women's seats in parlt." The National. March 26, 2019.

including dialogues with the PNGEC, political parties, voters and other key stakeholders, and the engagement of electoral experts to assist with the design of the respective proposals.

7. Collaboration between the IPPCC, CSO community, PNGEC and Parliament to develop enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with TSMs and support effective implementation.

For both of the aforementioned TSM proposals, effective implementation and enforcement to ensure compliance will be significant challenges. This will require continued engagement by the political parties and CSO community with Parliament, the IPPCC and PNGEC, including regular reviews of quota implementation and impacts, compliance levels and efficacy of enforcement mechanisms.

Previous candidate quota efforts have historically not been respected. In light of this, **IFES recommends collaboration between the IPPCC, CSO community and Parliament to support advocacy efforts to educate electoral stakeholders, including voters, political parties and candidates, on the proposal and to develop enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance.**

IFES urges public consultation, communication and information by the IPPCC throughout the process, by notably ensuring communication with and between political parties, women's civil society and the public surrounding the need for the quota and how it will be enforced.

Compliance mechanisms to be considered through this process may draw upon international practices that have been demonstrated to be effective, such as penalizing noncompliance by restricting access to public funding or linking parties' access to the Central Fund with compliance and rejecting noncompliant candidate lists or suspending party registration.

8. Provide training to aspiring female candidates to ensure they are prepared to run campaigns and assist them to engage men in their campaigns and build coalitions among their supporters.

Female candidates often lack the knowledge on how to run a campaign and, once elected, how to effectively work with Parliament and local governments. This lack of knowledge impacts their ability to run effective campaigns and engage effectively as leaders. As part of this training the PNGEC should collaborate with the IPPCC 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.

9. Implement programs to reduce hate speech and online VAWE and include female candidates and their supporters.

To the extent possible, work with social media platforms, traditional media and civil society to reduce VAWE and support women who are harassed and intimidated online. This program can target female candidates, supporters of female candidates and female voters who may be harassed or intimidated for their opinions.

Annex

IFES met with representatives of the following organizations in drafting this assessment:

1. [United Nations Women](#)
2. [National Council of Women](#)
3. [National Young Women's Christian Association](#)
4. [Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission](#)
5. PNG Family and Sexual Violence Unit
6. [Transparency International PNG](#)
7. [PNG National Parliament](#)
8. [Pacific Women](#)
9. [Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission](#)
10. Former Ministers of Parliament
11. Eastern Highlands Women in Agriculture
12. Gipaheka Women's Group
13. Lamisi Klomens Group
14. Lumapaka Women's Group
15. [PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons](#)
16. [Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council](#)
17. [Office of the Bougainville Election Commissioner](#)
18. [Department of Peace Agreement Implementation \(Bougainville\)](#)
19. [Leitana Nehan Women's Development Association](#)
20. [Bougainville Women's Federation](#)
21. [Bougainville Community Governments](#) – North, South and Central Bougainville
22. [Autonomous Region of Bougainville Parliament](#)
23. [Hako Women's Collective](#)
24. Family Support Centre (Bougainville)
25. Family Sexual Violence Centre – Bougainville
26. [New Zealand Police](#)
27. Catholic Diocese Women's Organization
28. Former candidates for Papua New Guinea National Parliament, Papua New Guinea local-level and provincial governments, Bougainville Community Government and Autonomous Bougainville Government Parliament
29. Key persons of note in the Papua New Guinean and Bougainville communities in the areas of women's empowerment and political engagement

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



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