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# SPOTLIGHT

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2022 NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION OBSERVATIONS IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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### Key Points

- The 2022 National General Elections were affected by many late changes to the schedules and dates.
- Alliances by political parties, candidates, supporters and tribal groups were visible and had some effects on the outcomes of the elections.
- Key issues like common roll updates, double and multiple voting, block voting, sharing and distributive voting, and unfair distribution of ballot papers remained problematic.
- There were integrity issues of unsigned, double signed and different signatures on ballot papers.
- Elections issues can be managed through proper preparations, prudent logistics management, properly-trained officials and use of proper common roll and improved identification system for future elections.

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## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2022 NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION OBSERVATIONS IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By **Jeremy Goro**

**A**s an Independent Nation, Papua New Guinea (PNG) has conducted National General Elections every five years since 1977. The 10th National General Election was to be held from 12 May to 29 July 2022. The Constitution of Papua New Guinea entrusts the PNG Electoral Commission to administer elections in the safest, fair and free environment. Section 50 of the Constitution and Section 52 of the Organic Law on National and Local Level General Elections (OLNLLGE, 1997) further specify the rights of citizens over the age of 18 who have been living in an electorate for more than six months to vote their leaders. The democratic principles of 'One Person, One Vote' and free, fair and safe elections are also clearly captured in the electoral laws. The OLNLLGE and the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPAC, 2003) specify and set the criteria for elections, voting and political parties to promote free, fair and safe elections.

### Background

The Papua New Guinea National Research Institute (PNGNRI), which is mandated to conduct applied social and economic research on a wide range of public policies issues, has been observing many elections. In 2022, the institute changed its observation approach to ethnographical by recruiting local observers to observe elections in six open electorates in the Highlands Region, including one Provincial Seat. The local observers were recruited and trained to observe the elections and use a template for reporting. The open electorates are Daulo in Eastern Highlands, Karimui-Nomane in Simbu, North Waghi in Jiwaka, Tambul-Nebliyer in Western Highlands, Ialibu-Pangia in Southern Highlands, and Wapenamanda in Enga.

The observations were based on campaign strategies used by candidates, how polling was conducted and how counting and declarations were done.

### Key campaign strategies

In terms of campaign strategies, it was observed that campaign started well ahead prior to official nomination as awareness and lobbying for support before nomination. The common campaign strategies observed were:

- **Alliances:** Professional and political party alliances and tribal alliances or alliances along segregated areas of the electorates where candidates aligned themselves with other

candidates to share their second and third preferences of votes. The tribes also aligned with each other to form a strong alliance to support their candidates. This led to collaboration between candidates to maximise their chances of winning, considering the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) System that was being used.

- **Feasting through invitations and visitations:** Food and drinks were distributed at all campaign gatherings by candidates and their supporters. This is common in all the electorates in the Highlands. Invited candidates gave money to the coordinators of campaign houses of the host candidates for the upkeep of the campaign houses. Family visitation programs were initiated by individual candidates' campaign managers for the candidate to visit and to secure votes. Candidates effectively used family kinships and ties through clan coordinators to collect votes during election.
- **Public rallies and merchandise used by political parties:** Public rallies were hosted by both candidates and political parties as a common campaign strategy to convince undecided voters for their support through the use of posters, banners, billboards, stickers on vehicles, T-shirts, and caps. Candidates attended and spoke at rallies organised by other candidates. People came in groups performing traditional dances expressing moral and numerical support for the candidate. Political parties also hosted public rallies in main towns such as Goroka, Kundiawa, Mt. Hagen, Mendi and Wabag. Merchandise was common with different political parties wearing their colours. Candidates used convoy of vehicles with full load of supporters to show their numbers and strengths. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp have also provided a good medium for political parties, candidates and supporters to use as a source of information-sharing platform.
- **Campaign houses, use of money as a buying power:** Candidates organised campaign houses to entertain people. Candidates were competing to put up campaign houses along the roads and public areas to show their territories. Feasts and social activities were organised as part of the entertainment in the campaign houses. The ideology behind campaign houses fits well with the second point of the use of money or power of money ("Money

Power”) as the influential factor to secure votes during campaign. It was evident during the campaign period as candidates who have money used it to gain more support through the “Nere-Tere ” or “Give and Take” as a factor for voters to make decision. Supporters used all kinds of songs and chants to drive the messages and praise their candidates.

- Pre-polling intimidation and threats: High powered riffles were carried around openly by supporters and clan members of candidates. This was deliberately done to show their power of weapons to scare neighbouring communities to vote for their candidates.

### Key findings from polling observations

There were new trends of voting observed in 2022 compared to the previous common voting practices reported in the previous election observation by National Research Institute of the 2007 National General Election (May et al., 2011), Transparency International PNG (TIPNG, 2022) and Australia National University (ANU, 2018) reports. The common issues of polling in the Highlands of PNG reported by such studies included common roll, double and multiple voting, under-age voting and the ‘Tanim Box ’ voting. These reports also highlighted unfair distribution of ballot papers where certain council wards got more ballot papers than the number of eligible voters while others got less ballot papers than the number of eligible voters.

In 2022, the PNG NRI observation teams all reported the similar patterns of voting right across the the Highlands Region.

- Common Roll issues continue to be the most disappointing part of polling when voters did not find their names on the Common Roll (Defective Roll). As a result of the defective common roll, community leaders took control of the voting.
- Control, block and distributive voting was seen as a strategy for convenience and to settle tensions (cooperative voting). A few people marked ballot papers on behalf of everyone. This goes against the democratic principle of “one person, one vote” although it may be convenient for the tribe and perhaps the candidates. In other areas, it was observed that there was control, block and distributive voting that is putting the ballots of several wards to one spot where votes were distributed in bundles to candidates according to their preferences (community choice). The extra ballot papers were shared (sharing of ballot preferences) among certain candidates
- Compromising of voting materials where the allocated with serial numbers ballot papers for specified polling locations were not delivered to those locations. It was also observed that most polling stations did not use the indelible ink (non-use of the indelible ink), polling

officials did not mark names off the common roll which led to double and multiple voting and disruption of voting and destruction of polling booths at several polling places. It was also observed that people voted for their family members in absentia and even voting on behalf of deceased family members.

- Lack of security for polling officials: Most polling places lacked security presence and officials had to flee for their safety when voters controlled polling, leaving the people to mark the ballot papers in their absence. The absence of security forces led to coercion, threats and intimidation. Some polling areas were highly volatile as supporters of candidates were trying to exert their power to get votes from the voters.

### Scrutiny or counting and declaration

The scrutiny of ballot is also known as the counting of ballots and happens at places known as ‘Counting Centres’ appointed by the Returning Officer and gazetted. The Scrutiny process is critical as elected members are declared at the conclusion of the counting. People who are involved in the scrutiny are casual counting officials appointed by Electoral Commissioner and the Scrutineers who are appointed under Section 150 of the OLNLLGE through the recommendation by the candidates. The Scrutineers’ roles are to make sure that ballot votes are properly allocated to their candidates. Our observers observed a number of anomalies in the scrutiny of the ballots as follows:

- Counting delays: There were delays in counting due to disputes over the status of the tempered boxes. There was also delay in payment for Counting Officials and counting was suspended unnecessarily which prolonged counting.
- Names and numbers not matching: Some of the marked ballot papers had candidate’s numbers and names not corresponding. For example, Peter Joseph was written on the ballot but the candidate number was 21 which belonged to Thomas Darius.
- Double infringements issues such as ballots marked elsewhere outside of polling station by a few persons were admitted to the counting centre but ordered to put aside. It was also noted that during quality checks many ballot papers did not have the same signature of the Presiding Officer (PO) at the back of the ballot paper (common errors with informal ballot papers). Instead, they had two or more different signatures. It was also noted that there was discrepancy between the number of votes and number of eligible voters per common roll for some wards.
- Evidence of block voting (BV) where candidates from certain wards collected all the primary votes. It was further observed that when a candidate from a certain village/tribe got eliminated, his second preferences were

distributed to a candidate from his area due to block voting. There was further evidence of voting along LLGs where candidates scored well in their LLG but not many votes from the other LLGs, particularly for primary votes and the second and third preferences. In some situations, swapping of preferences (SOPs) was visible. Where there were two candidates contesting from the same area, the villagers agreed on sharing of the initial primary votes and swap the second preference (swapping preference in block voting).

- Time constraints: Due to time limitations, Returning Officers were instructed not to entertain scrutineers' objections and disputes on the ballots boxes. Therefore, the scrutineers' rights and freedom to express their opinion were denied. Some of the security personnel physically and verbally assaulted scrutineers who tried to raise issues regarding the the counting.

Having said the above, there were some positives observed during the scrutiny and counting of the ballots. The gate was well manned by the security forces in all counting venues and media personnels and observers were allowed into counting venues. It was also observed that most counting officials were teachers and public servants which made counting easier.

## Recommendations

- Election planning and logistics must be prepared in advance and implemented accordingly without late changes.
- A new way of Common Roll Update needs to be introduced by integrating Ward Record System with National NID Project to be rolled out at the ward level and verified by Village Court Officials, Councilors and pastors with penalty for default, in order to ensure integrity of the Common Roll. There must be use of proper and legal names for villages, streets, clans and tribes (under the Names Act), to avoid hijacking and rigging of ballot papers.
- Voting must be free, fair and safe, where every eligible voter must be allowed to vote freely, fairly and safely in the secret booths to ensure that the outcome of the election is legitimate and credible.
- Security operations must start with the campaign and end with the declaration. It must be more effective and efficient. This should be considered for future elections.
- Need for at least three to five Electoral Commissioners through a change in the law so that decisions are made by the Chief Electoral Commissioner with the Commissioners, which will be more informed than having one person make the decisions.

## Conclusion

This Spotlight paper is written from the main NRI Observation Study Report of the seven Electorates in the Highlands Region. The paper looks into the main problems of the electoral process from campaign to declaration. The key issues have not changed from the previous election observation reports, particularly around the issues of election administration and legal and integrity of the electoral process such as the use of outdated common roll, block voting, double and multiple voting and also new trends such as control and distributive voting by only few community leaders. The study concludes by suggesting several recommendations to improve the electoral process including finding a new way to update common roll and proper election planning and administration with inclusion of two or more commissioners to assist the work of the Chief Electoral Commissioner.

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