

Pawa Blong Meri: Women Candidates in the 2015 Bougainville Election



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The 2015 Bougainville election was a milestone for women's political representation. The largest-ever cohort of women candidates contested; one candidate, Josephine Getsi in Peit constituency, became the first women elected to the House of Representatives in an open seat. She joins the three women members elected in reserved seats in a House that now has 10 per cent women's representation, although the number of women in Cabinet remains the same as in previous terms, at one. For many women candidates, however, the results of the election were disappointing, mirroring recent elections elsewhere in Melanesia, which has one of the lowest rates of women's political representation in the world.

While Josephine Getsi's win is a notable individual achievement, it would appear that the vast majority of women candidates still face significant barriers to election. This Discussion Paper examines the question of how women contest and win elections in Bougainville, through an analysis of the campaign experiences of successful, near-successful and less successful women candidates.¹ It adds to the empirical literature on women's political representation in the region through an in-depth study of women candidates in the 2015 Bougainville election: their profiles, motivations and campaign strategies. Furthermore, it analyses the impacts of three issues that emerged as common themes in discussions around women's participation in political decision-making in Bougainville: the electoral system, money politics and matrilineal traditions.

Background

The Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) was established after the Bougainville Peace Agreement was signed in 2001. The peace agreement marked the conclusion of the decade-

long Bougainville conflict, and set out a road map to an eventual referendum on independence from Papua New Guinea (see Regan 2010). The referendum was scheduled to be held after three ABG elections had taken place. The first ABG election was in 2005, and the second in 2010; the 2015 election, therefore, marked the beginning of the five-year window in which the referendum is to take place.

According to the 2004 Bougainville constitution, the Bougainville House of Representatives is made up of 33 'single-member' or open constituencies,² three seats reserved for women and three seats reserved for ex-combatants.³ The reserved seats are elected from regional constituencies, the boundaries of which align with the national electorates of North Bougainville, Central Bougainville and South Bougainville. The President of Bougainville, who is elected from a whole-of-region constituency, also sits in the House. In an ABG election, each voter has four ballots: one for the open constituency, one each for the regional women's and ex-combatants' representatives, and one for the presidency.

A first-past-the-post (FPP) electoral system was used in the 2005 election, but following Papua New Guinea's shift to a limited preferential voting (LPV) system prior to the 2007 national election, the 2010 and 2015 ABG elections also used LPV. In an LPV system, voters are required to rank their preferred three candidates in order on the ballot. Ballots with less than or more than three preferences listed are invalid.⁴

In the 2015 ABG election, 35 women candidates contested, a significant increase from previous elections, although women still made up just 10 per cent of candidates. In 2005, 25 women ran in the elections (8.5 per cent of total candidates), all for reserved



seats. The following ABG election, in 2010, the number of women candidates dropped slightly to 23 (7.8 per cent), although of those candidates only 17 contested the reserved seats; 5 contested open constituencies and 1 contested the presidency. In 2015, 23 women contested the reserved seats and 12 ran against male candidates in the open constituencies.

Bougainville also elects four members to the Papua New Guinea parliament — one provincial member and three open members for North Bougainville, Central Bougainville and South Bougainville. The boundaries for the three open seats correspond to the boundaries for the regional women's and ex-combatants' constituencies for the Bougainville House of Representatives. In the 1997 and 2007 national elections, there was one women candidate only; in 2002 there were none; and in 2012, five women contested (7.2 per cent of total Bougainville candidates), although none were elected.

In the lead-up to the 2015 ABG election, the Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF), assisted by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives and the International Women's Development Agency, held workshops in each of the three regions for women candidates and their campaign managers. The workshops were held in December 2014 and January 2015. At these workshops, women were explicitly encouraged to consider standing in the open seats rather than the reserved seats. Aspiring candidates were also encouraged to consider contesting the presidency.⁵ Following on from the workshops, in February 2015 the BWF held leadership training in Buka for women candidates, and two mock parliaments — one in the House of Representatives, and one in central Buka for the general public to view.

Women Candidates in the 2015 Election

In 2015, 23 women nominated to contest the three regional women's reserved seats. The largest field was in North, where 10 women contested; in South, there were seven candidates; and six in Central. All three sitting regional women's members were recontesting their seats — Elizabeth Burain in North, Joan Jerome in Central and Rose Pihei in South. Another former regional women's member,

Francesca Semoso, who was in the ABG from 2005 to 2010, was also contesting her former seat of North. Of the 23 women contesting the reserved seats, only nine had contested ABG elections previously.⁶ While one first-time candidate, Isabel Peta, won in South, the other two winners in the regional seats — Francesca Semoso and Marcelline Kokiai — had contested both previous ABG elections, once in the regional seats and once in open seats.

Twelve women candidates contested open seats in the 2015 election (Table 1). The largest number of women candidates in an open constituency was two in Konnou; all other women candidates in the open seats were contesting only against male opponents. The majority of women candidates in the open seats were contesting in constituencies in the northern region. In the southern region there were three women candidates in open seats, and in the central region there was just one.

In 2010, five women contested open seats. Of these five, only one — Mary Mamatau in Konnou — recontested in an open seat in 2015. Seven of the 12 women contesting in the open seats in 2015 were first-time candidates. In addition to Mamatau, four others — Hona Holan, Cecily Kiots Kekun, Agnes Titus and Rachael Vau Tsien — had previously contested a reserved seat.

While Getsi was the only women candidate to win in an open seat in 2015, several others performed well. In South Nasioi, Ismenia Ketsin came second. In the seat of Haku, which had the highest number of candidates of any constituency with 24, Hona Holan placed ahead of 19 male candidates at fifth. Rita Pearson, the former chairwoman of the Council of Elders in the constituency of Taonita Teop, placed in the middle of the candidate pack at fifth out of 11 candidates.

For the majority of women candidates in the open seats, however, the results at counting were disappointing. Most placed either last or second-to-last. This is in keeping with the results for women candidates in other recent elections in Melanesia. Forty per cent of women candidates in the 2014 Solomon Islands election placed in the bottom two, and almost 65 per cent of the women candidates in the 2012 Papua New Guinea national election won less than 1 per cent of first preference votes.⁷

Profiles of Women Candidates

Successful and near-successful women candidates tended to have a history of work where they had a lot of interaction with the public, or where they had a high public profile. For instance, both Josephine Getsi and Ismenia Ketsin had backgrounds of work in public-facing positions, as a teacher and bank officer respectively. Both emphasised their occupational backgrounds as important groundwork for the future political campaigns. Francesca Semoso is a prominent figure known for her work as a radio presenter for the National Broadcasting Corporation,⁸ and for her acting work, notably her role in the feature film *Tukana*. Hona Holan is well known in Haku constituency as the founder of the Haku Women's Collective and, more widely, as the founding president of the Bougainville Women's Federation.

Nine out of the 12 women candidates in the open seats were married at the time of the 2015 election. One, Scholastica Miriori in Tsitalato, was contesting alongside her husband, Martin Miriori, a former presidential candidate who was contesting in Ioro constituency where he came third. Many candidates characterised their husbands as supportive but 'different' to other men:

My husband was very supportive ... the whole idea of me standing, you know, I had to ask him first. It was okay with him ... maybe because he's got an Australian father, that's why he's very supportive.

Several candidates, when talking about their backgrounds, attributed their early marriages to family pressure. They described dropping out of school or being forced to leave employment when they got married. Marriage was seen by some to be a potential constraint on leadership, made easier by having a supportive husband:

I'm a *meri* [wife] to a man and sometimes it's very hard. But as for me, my husband is very supportive, he's understanding.

Those candidates who were not married saw both benefits and drawbacks to their single status, reflecting changing attitudes to marriage among other educated women in Papua New Guinea (see Macintyre 2011; Spark 2011). One saw it as allowing greater freedom:

I'm single, I'm free ... When I'm married, I have to stay under my husband. I have to do my obligations as a mother, as a wife. When I'm single, I'm free to move around, I can go anywhere ... I'm always free.

Table 1: Women candidates in open seats, 2015 Autonomous Bougainville Government election

Candidate	Constituency	% First preference votes	Placing
Josephine Getsi	Peit	13.7	1st of 12
Ismenia Ketsin	South Nasioi	19.3	2nd of 9
Rita Pearson	Taonita Teop	9.4	5th of 11
Regina Tsikoa	Hagogohe	7.9	4th of 5
Hona Holan	Haku	6.7	5th of 24
Joan Nenoari	Bolave	6.7	7th of 8
Agnes Titus	Nissan	5.0	5th of 6
Miriam Labanue	Konnou	3.1	7th of 8
Rachael Vau Tsien	Mahari	2.5	8th of 8
Cecily Kiots Kekun	Tonsu	2.2	11th of 13
Scholastica Miriori	Tsitalato	1.3	6th of 7
Mary Mamatau	Konnou	1.2	8th of 8

Sources: Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner website (www.obec.gov.pg); additional data supplied by Anthony Regan, October 2015.

For others, not having a husband meant added financial pressure as a political candidate. Two candidates in the open seats noted that an important factor in their decision to not run for a reserved seat was the added cost in contesting the regional constituencies, which would be possible with financial support from a husband but was not feasible as a widowed or separated woman. Of course, not all women running in the regional seats were married, and not all who were married were receiving significant financial support from their spouse; all those interviewed, however, agreed that personal financial resources were necessary to be competitive, particularly in the large North constituency.

There were a number of candidates in the 2015 election who had dependent children. Women candidates did not see this as having a significant influence on their competitiveness. Some high-performing candidates have no children, while some had adult children and speculated that this made a political career easier:

I think I'm in politics at the right time, because all my children are independent.

There were, however, examples such as Ketsin who has a large family including three school-age children, and who did not view having young children as a disadvantage in the campaign.

Many women candidates were heavily involved in community work, either within a constituency or at a district or regional level. The most common types of community work were involvement with women's organisations and church groups. Leadership positions within these groups could give a candidate a high profile, particularly in the case of larger organisations. To a lesser extent, candidates were members of school boards. While this was less common than other types of community work, high-performing candidates such as Josephine Getsi and Ismenia Ketsin either had connections to local schools or were active members of school boards. Schools often provide the focal point for local communities; for open constituency candidates, school board membership could be an effective platform for building networks within the community and demonstrating leadership capabilities.

Most of the women candidates in the open seats (seven out of 12) were first-time ABG candidates, including Getsi and Ketsin. Several of these new candidates, including Ketsin, had local-level government experience as members of Councils of Elders.⁹ In the reserved seats, again most candidates were contesting an election for the first time in 2015. Two of the winners in the reserved seats, however, had contested both previous ABG elections. Kokiai and Semoso were both candidates in the reserved seats in 2005, with Semoso winning in North and Kokiai losing to Magdalene Toroansi in Central. In 2010, both contested open constituencies. They were the highest-performing female candidates in open seats in 2010 — Semoso coming second in Tsalato with over 20 per cent of first preferences, and Kokiai coming third on first preferences in Eivo/Torau with 14 per cent.¹⁰

Deciding to Run

When interviewed, the reasons given for deciding to contest the election differed between candidates in the open and reserved seats. This indicated a different focus for the two types of candidates, which is understandable given the different roles and priorities of open and regional members. Open seat candidates spoke of issues relating to the particular geography and political context of their constituencies. Some referred to the specific needs of their local village assemblies and Councils of Elders, while others highlighted the lack of healthcare infrastructure in their communities. For regional candidates, motivations were less geographically specific and focused on women, or groups of women, more generally. Examples of reasons given include the need for laws to give greater protection to women's interests, and issues regarding equality in regional representation, for groups such as rural women and, in North, women living outside Buka Island.

As seen elsewhere in the Pacific islands, women candidates in Bougainville were concerned about broader issues relating to women's political representation as well as their own individual campaigns (see Corbett 2015). Many candidates talked about promoting women's leadership through their campaigns, and encouraging other

women to contest local, regional and national level elections.

I contest because I see it's not about winning, but it's about preparing something for the future ... I break through so that ones coming up ... they can one day win that position.

I was really happy that I made a breakthrough, you know, for other women. They now see that ... the women too can play for this seat in the next election.

Contesting an open seat was seen as a way to supplement the existing level of women's representation, rather than replace another women member:

I'd like to add to the voice. Many men, they thought that I would play for the reserved seat ... but I want to add on. I wanted more voices in our parliament.

Open seats tend to be less expensive to campaign in than the regional seats. While it must be noted that some open seats present significant geographical challenges, and they vary greatly in size and population (from 2151 registered voters in Atolls to 9180 in North Nasioi), in general those interviewed estimated the budget for a competitive campaign in a regional seat to be around five times that of an open seat campaign.

It was easier to contest the constituency seat because the seat for women, it's a big area. So it would be hard for some of us, financially, because we have to have big money to cover that whole area.

For aspiring women candidates, choosing to stand against a male relative can be difficult. One of the regional members elected in 2010 attributed her decision to stand in the reserved seat to the fact that a close family member was running in her open constituency:

I could have done it but I respected him ... I didn't want to run against a [relative].

In 2015, Semoso decided to contest in the regional seat that she had won in 2005, rather than in the Tsitalato open seat in which she had placed second in 2010. This decision may have been

linked to the nomination of her brother, Fidelis Semoso, in Tsitalato. Fidelis was a member of the national parliament in the Bougainville Provincial seat from 2007 to 2012, and went on to be elected to the ABG as the member for Tsitalato in 2015.

The difficulties faced by women candidates contesting in open seats was another reason given for standing for the reserved seats. One former regional member, asked about her decision to run for the reserved seat, stated frankly:

I had a better chance of winning that [seat] than running for the other seats.

Kokiai, who like Semoso contested an open seat in 2010 before switching to, and winning, a reserved seat in 2015, also assessed that she had a stronger chance in the regional seat in the 2015 election.

Preparations

Josephine Getsi and other well-performing candidates started preparations for their candidacy at the beginning of 2014, around 18 months prior to the election. Preparations at that early stage involved consultations with the community to canvass support, and early fundraising. There were exceptions, with some candidates starting much later. For example, Joan Nenoari in Bolave constituency decided to run after the incumbent member passed away in February 2015. Hellen Siumana, who came second in the North regional women's seat (and won over 20 per cent of the first preference vote), decided to contest the election only four days before the writs opened. In general, however, that decision was made at least a year before the election, and those who began preparations later reflected afterwards that more time would have been useful.

Many candidates participated in candidate training run by the BWF and international organisations. There were mostly positive evaluations of candidate training, especially in regard to assistance with campaign planning and public speaking. What could be improved would be the development of Bougainville-specific resources, and a longer-term approach so that training is available at all stages of the campaign preparation process.

In most cases, candidates had a core team of two or three people who travelled with them, including their campaign manager. Some candidates had between 10 and 20 campaign team members travelling with them at a time, but this was unusual. In addition to the core team, candidates also had *komitis*, campaign workers at the village level. The recruitment of *komitis*, paid or unpaid, is a common campaign strategy in Bougainville and elsewhere in Papua New Guinea. *Komitis* are tasked with ascertaining and shoring up the level of support for their candidate in their local communities, and assisting with the logistics of candidate visits during the campaign (Dalgaard 2013). Local *komitis* covering different areas are an effective method of political organising, especially in large constituencies. The use and management of *komitis*, however, was an issue for some women candidates. Payment of allowances to *komitis* was an added expense:

It's very expensive to have so many *komitis*. So for myself, I'd rather have just a few.

I stood alone. The sole reason there [was] because if I had to go around with them I had to pay them. I had no money at all.

Some candidates kept their campaign teams very small to avoid dealing with demands from *komitis*. Monitoring the behaviour of *komitis* was also difficult. Several candidates reported problems managing rogue *komitis* whose behaviour was affecting their reputations.

For the costs of the campaign, personal financial resources and money from family members were used. The most notable exception to this was in the case of Agnes Titus, standing in Nissan, for whom an internet fundraising page was set up to raise money for the campaign. The fundraiser was created in March 2015 by an Australian friend of Titus and was targeted at an Australian audience. He wrote on the page: 'No woman has ever been elected to an open seat in Bougainville before but, because of Agnes' outstanding reputation as a peace and women's rights activist, she's in with a fighting chance. All she needs is a little bit of your help to run her campaign' (Evenhuis 2015).

Altogether it raised AU\$2625, made up of individual donations of AU\$250 or less. While Titus still primarily used her own money for the campaign, she described the fundraiser as a helpful boost:

I saved some money, and then I got friends in Australia to just top [it] up.

For regional seat winners between 2005 and 2015 who disclosed their spending in interviews, between K15,000 and K50,000 was spent. In 2015, a viable campaign by an independent candidate would most likely reach the high end of that scale, especially in the large North regional seat. Party candidates, however, could benefit from party-funded transportation, either as an individual candidate or by joining a group that was campaigning with the party's presidential candidate — incumbent John Momis for the New Bougainville Party (NBP), Sam Akoitai for the Bougainville Islands Unity Party (BIUP) or Nick Peniai for the Bougainville Labour Party (BLP). For the most part, however, the financial burden of campaigning fell to the individual candidate.

Well-performing candidates in the regional seats tended to have significant personal financial resources to draw on. This was especially true in North — where the geographical challenges were more acute — with the region encompassing Buka Island and the northern part of Bougainville Island, in addition to many populated smaller islands and the distant areas of Atolls and Nissan. In Central and South it appeared to be easier to run a competitive campaign on a smaller budget.

Campaign costs, though lower than in the regional seats, were also significant for open seat candidates. Travel and mobile phone credit were listed as the two biggest campaign expenses. The actual campaign costs for open seat candidates depended in large part on the geography of the constituency. Constituencies that required boat travel were usually the most expensive to campaign in. Owning resources such as a boat, a car, or a computer and printer were useful but by no means necessary to a successful campaign.

There were nine independent women candidates in the open seats, and three party endorsed or affiliated. Two of these were NBP candidates, Josephine Getsi in Peit and Mary

Mamatau in Konnou, although the difference in party support between the two was significant. In both constituencies the NBP endorsed or supported multiple candidates. In Konnou there were five endorsed NBP candidates in total, including the eventual winner, and Mamatau received little support from the party. In Peit, Getsi nominated as an independent, but received extensive support from the NBP, who had also endorsed another candidate in the constituency. The NBP fielded more than 64 candidates, including at least nine women, mostly in the reserved seats. Exact figures are difficult to estimate because many candidates were in a position similar to Getsi, as de facto endorsed candidates. The BIUP supported one woman, Rachael Vau Tsien, in the open seats. Similarly to Getsi, Tsien nominated as an independent but received some support from the party.

Of the independent candidates in the open seats, most emphasised their freedom from party policy as an advantage over endorsed candidates:

[If] I go into a party ... I won't be free, really free to do all I plan to do in my community. Whatever I want to do in the community, if the party policy says you won't do it, I won't do it.

We the women, we don't want to be manipulated in party politics ... we stand as independents and we work with everybody who goes into power.

There were two independent candidates, however, who had wanted to stand for parties but decided not to when they learned the parties had already endorsed other candidates in those seats. The practice of endorsing or supporting multiple candidates was used in many constituencies by both the NBP and the BIUP. The NBP, for example, fielded multiple candidates in both the North and South regional women's seats. The two other registered parties, the BIUP and the BLP, also fielded endorsed or affiliated candidates in the regional seats. Financial support for some transport costs was offered by these parties, and was a crucial advantage for some of the reserved seat candidates. Party support was highly advantageous in some

cases, but the benefits were not consistent or universal, even within the same party.

The Campaign

Being well known in the constituency prior to the campaign period was a huge advantage for some open seat candidates. Most women standing stressed their strong connections to their constituencies:

I was born there, and I grew there in my constituency, and that's where I live now.

I come from there, I already know the people ... you just go back to your local knowledge of what it's like in your community.

This support base was essential to successful and near-successful campaigns. Kinship networks were also very important. One unsuccessful open seat candidate in 2010 attributed her loss to the size of her constituency. She had the support of her community, but they were a minority in the seat, and members of a larger group voted for another candidate because of community ties:

He's their *wantok*, so that comes first.

As previously stated, networks built from a candidate's occupation are important, especially if that occupation gives the candidate a high profile in the community, such as teaching. Women's groups and church groups were the two most commonly utilised networks for women candidates during the campaign. They can be used effectively — for example, Josephine Getsi used her networks within the BWF and the Catholic Women's Association in her campaign, and Hona Holan utilised her connections through the Haku Women's Collective to organise her campaign. The support of these women's and church organisations, however, did not always translate into widespread support, especially if the majority of voters belonged to a different denomination, or if an association with women's groups led to a perception that the candidate was a 'women's candidate' and limited her appeal to male voters.

The importance of harnessing the 'women and youth vote' was a common refrain from women candidates in both the open and regional seats, but those who espoused this strategy ultimately

performed poorly. It is true that these two groups make up well over 50 per cent of the potential voting population. Nevertheless, such a strategy perhaps underestimates the impact of factors such as low turnout and the dynamics within families and communities that influence voting. Community gatekeepers — chiefs and politically active people who help to shape political thinking — also tend to be older men. Focusing on the ‘women and youth vote’ at the expense of other societal groups seemed to have a negative impact.

In the open seats, emphasising a point of difference between women and men, or between female and male leadership styles, was common. Examples of such rhetoric included:

It’s time to change — men didn’t deliver so let’s give women a try.

We have not seen anything in the last 10 years with two men representing us. So now it’s time for women.

This technique worked where a clear link could be made between (real or perceived) deficiencies in current representation and the benefits of a new style of leadership. In Peit, Getsi and her team labelled it as the ‘most corrupt constituency’ in Bougainville, and criticised the records of previous members. They characterised women’s leadership as a different style of politics and a break from the corrupt practices of the past. In this way, emphasising the difference between female and male leadership worked in Peit while in many other constituencies such rhetoric did not appear to connect with voters.

Women candidates used posters and campaign events with several speeches, including by the candidate and campaign manager. A few also had banners and used door-to-door campaigning. With the door-to-door technique, some issues with monitoring the teams that were sent out were reported, a problem that links to the broader issue of monitoring *komitis*. Bigger campaign events were more popular, usually involving three to four speakers. Some women candidates exclusively campaigned during the day, when turnout is lower, citing safety concerns.

An offer of donor support to produce campaign posters for women candidates was made prior

to the election. The process of producing the posters had significant delays, however, with some candidates not receiving theirs until the final days of the campaign. Candidates expressed their frustration at these circumstances, feeling that the promise of posters had disadvantaged them, as otherwise they would have organised their own posters. Given the financial costs of campaigning, material support for women candidates can be of great benefit. Any such assistance, however, should be confirmed well in advance of an election period and any logistical challenges, such as transferring funds between countries and accessing printing services in remote locations, taken into account.

There were both formalised (party-based) and informal coalitions between candidates in the 2015 election. Women candidates endorsed by parties, particularly the BLP and the BIUP, campaigned with other male party candidates who were standing in the open, regional ex-combatants’ and presidential races. While open seat party-endorsed candidates campaigned with their party counterparts in the regional women’s seats, they emphasised that they were open to campaigning with any regional women’s seat candidates. In regard to informal coalitions, the most obvious example is perhaps Rose Pihei’s support of two open seat candidates, Miriam Labanue and Joan Nenoari, in South Bougainville. Pihei was the incumbent South Bougainville women’s member and a candidate in 2015. Labanue and Nenoari had worked for Pihei when she was a minister, and Pihei had encouraged them to stand in open seats in 2015. All three contested as independent candidates. Pihei campaigned with both Labanue and Nenoari (and with Mary Mamatau, who was contesting Konnou along with Labanue), as well as providing them with some financial and technical support.

Most women open seat candidates reported facing a backlash from voters and other candidates. Generally, this was expressed in one of three ways. Firstly, they were challenged on their right to stand in the constituencies. There seems to be a persistent belief that open seats are just for men, and that women should only stand in the reserved seats.

It was very hard, because men would think ‘You’re not supposed to be standing here.’

You're supposed to be playing the women's reserved seat. This is the wrong seat.'

Campaigning for a constituency seat is harder, because you are wrestling with the men. And men ... are saying, 'Oh don't you vote for her, she's a woman, what's she going to do? This [seat] is for men.'

When challenged directly, candidates were forced to defend their right to stand:

The male candidates and their supporters ... [said] 'Oh, you should have run for the women's seat, then we would really, fully support you.' And I explained to them there is not one bit of law in the ABG constitution that says open constituencies are for men only to contest. So I made them understand that.

[Male voters] argued with me that I shouldn't stand for this seat, I should be contesting the women's seat. But I told them 'If you want me to help you with the constituency, I need to stand for the constituency. If I stand for the women's seat, I won't be ... available for you, because if I stand for the women's seat I would be looking after the four districts.'

Two candidates also reported vandalism of their campaign materials which they thought were acts provoked by opposition to women candidates.

Secondly, women candidates were confronted with the attitude that the 2015 election was a 'crucial' election and thus it was not the right time for greater women's representation.

[Male voters] were saying 'Why is a lady standing to contest this seat in a very critical time?' Yeah, because they are seeing this election as a critical election, and they were saying that only males are supposed to contest the seat.

Where it might be conceded that women had the legal right to stand for open seats, it was asserted that, given the upcoming referendum and the role the members of the House of Representatives would play in that process, electing a woman in an open seat was too great a risk.

Thirdly, there was a perception of women candidates as 'women's candidates' that proved to be a significant obstacle. One candidate, for example, reported that male voters would not attend her campaign events, as they thought only women voters should go to listen to women candidates. Other candidates in open seats told anecdotes from the campaign trail that, while framed as positive, underscored this attitude:

They respect their leaders so much that what he says, they will do ... We already knew that [the village chief] was supporting another candidate ... [but] when we finished talking, he went around talking to women, encouraging them to vote for me.

The men, after our campaign, during the time for comments, they would tell the women 'Women, she is your candidate ... You support her and give her all the ones [first preferences].'

These quotes suggest a view of women candidates as serious candidates for women voters only. While prominent men in the community might publicly encourage women to vote for women candidates, they often stopped short of promising their own votes. After the election, some unsuccessful women candidates expressed the view that their loss was the fault of women voters who failed to vote for women; yet as discussed above, a strategy that focuses exclusively on women voters is unlikely to be successful.

In the reserved seats, the attitudes outlined above appeared to be less of a problem for women candidates, most likely due to the nature of the seats. As the reserved seats are spaces explicitly set aside for women representatives, candidates do not have to spend the time justifying their decision to stand as women in the open seats must. Rather, women candidates in the reserved seats saw geography as their biggest challenge. Candidates must cover huge distances during the campaign, especially in the large North regional seat.

You have the atolls, you have the mountains, you have the islands here, and you cover Buka ... I believe that maybe it should be downsized.

Once elected, regional members in the women's and ex-combatants' reserved seats are given the same amount in constituency development funds as other members, despite the much larger constituencies they cover. Past regional members have noted the difficulty they face in serving voters:

It's a very big problem trying to please everybody, but we don't have the money ... [In the next election] people will probably vote me out.

North, the largest regional seat, covers 14 open constituencies and has over 69,000 registered voters. Even the smallest regional seat, Central, still encompasses eight open seats and over 47,000 voters. Turnover in the regional seats in the 2015 election was 100 per cent, compared to 57.6 per cent in the open seats. This is perhaps indicative of the particularly large challenge faced by the regional members in demonstrating service to their constituents.

Impact of Limited Preferential Voting

Papua New Guinea's electoral system changed from first-past-the-post (FPP) to limited preferential voting (LPV) prior to the 2007 national election.¹¹ Subsequently, the 2010 and 2015 Bougainville elections used LPV, whereas the 2005 election had used FPP. Under the FPP system, voters had to vote for a single candidate; the candidate with the most votes won. Under LPV, voters have to rank three candidates in order of preference. A candidate must get a majority of votes to win; if after an initial count no candidate has won a majority of the total allowable ballot papers,¹² the candidate with the lowest number of votes is excluded from the count and their ballots reallocated to the second-preferred candidate. Reallocated ballots carry equal weight to first preference ballots. This process continues until one candidate has a majority.

Some argued that LPV would benefit women candidates (see May et al. 2013). In a political context where voter intimidation and bloc voting were commonplace, voters — especially women voters — often faced pressure from their family or community to vote for a certain candidate. It was hypothesised that under LPV, voters would have more freedom to allocate their second and third

preferences, and that this would be advantageous to women candidates (May et al. 2013).

On the question of whether LPV advantages women candidates, May et al. (2013:201) note that for the 2007 election the 'data is inconclusive'. The new LPV system seemed to have no impact on the number of women MPs elected. The sole female winner, incumbent Carol Kidu in Port Moresby South Open constituency, led on first preferences, suggesting that she would have won the election had it taken place under the former FPP electoral system. While she did eventually win the seat, her initial lead was significantly reduced as she won fewer second and third preference votes than male challenger Justin Tkatchenko (May et al. 2013).

In the 2012 election, the second national election held under LPV, the number of women MPs rose from one to three. All three were new MPs — Julie Soso in the Eastern Highlands Provincial seat, Delilah Gore in Sohe Open, and Loujaya Kouza in Lae Open.¹³ Of the three, only Gore led in her constituency on first preferences; Kouza and Soso won their seats on the strength of their second and third preference votes. All three candidates won less than 10 per cent of first preference votes.

In the first Bougainville election under LPV, in 2010, no women were elected in the open seats. The highest-polling, Francesca Semoso in Tsalatalo, came second on first preferences; her position did not change on any of the six exclusion counts. Marcelline Kokiai came third on first preferences, but her position dropped to fourth on the final count. The results indicate that LPV did not have a notable positive effect on vote share for these women candidates. Neither received a significant enough share of second or third preferences to improve their first preference ranking. Although Semoso did win more preferences than her opponent Cosmas Sohia, the differential was small and the latter's first preference lead was enough to eventually win him the seat. In the case of Kokiai, her ranking actually declined after preference allocation.

In 2015, LPV did appear to have an impact, albeit small, on women's representation. Josephine Getsi won the seat of Peit after trailing in third place on first preferences. Second and third

preferences, therefore, were of importance for women candidates in the election. Where candidates in open seats ran campaigns focused on emphasising second and third preferences, however, their results were disappointing. The distribution of preferences also had an impact on the winners of the reserved women's seats. In the North seat, Francesca Semoso placed fourth on first preferences but received enough second and third preferences to win the seat.

The outcomes from elections in Bougainville and Papua New Guinea show that a strong first preference vote is still a key determinant of success. Provisional results from the 2007 national election show that almost 80 per cent of successful candidates were leading after the first preference count (May et al. 2013). In the 2010 Bougainville election, just three of the 40 successful candidates (7.5 per cent) were not leading on first preference count; all three polled second at that stage of counting. In 2015, there were only five constituencies (12.5 per cent) in which the eventual winner did not lead on first preferences.¹⁴

The size of the candidate pool can certainly affect preference distribution and therefore outcome. The number of candidates standing in open constituencies in 2015 ranged from two in Kongara to 24 in Haku; the average number of candidates was 8.6. In the four instances where women candidates placed in the top half of the candidate pool in open seats, they were running in constituencies with a higher than average number of candidates, between nine and 24. Women candidates who placed last or second-to-last, on the other hand, were running in constituencies with eight or less candidates.

The four constituencies where women candidates placed in the top 50 per cent — Peit, South Nasioi, Haku and Taonita Teop — were all only declared after the maximum number of exclusions had taken place, meaning the winning candidate only gained a majority after all but two candidates were eliminated. All these seats had an incumbent member recontesting; all four of the incumbent members lost in 2015. In Haku, a seat which has consistently had the highest number of candidates in ABG elections, 24 candidates ran in 2015 and the winning candidate won with just

a 23 per cent share of the initial allowable ballots, with almost 60 per cent of ballots exhausted.¹⁵

Peit, where Josephine Getsi won in 2015, was declared after the first preference count in 2010 when political veteran Alexis Sarei won 56.3 per cent of the vote. Sarei resigned due to ill health part-way through his term, and Jerome Sawa won the 2013 by-election. In 2015, there were 12 candidates in Peit, a larger field than in any previous ABG election or by-election. It included three candidates who had previously contested in both 2010 and 2013 along with several first-time candidates, including Getsi.

Evidence from elections in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville since the shift to LPV shows that the preferential system has not had a hugely significant effect on women's representation. That is not to say, however, that it has had no impact; in certain cases, including in Peit constituency in 2015, women candidates have won under LPV who might have otherwise missed out under FPP. In Peit, a large number of candidates and a reasonably open field meant that Getsi could convert second and third preferences, along with a respectable first preference tally, to victory. In other open constituencies in Bougainville, women candidates tended to do better where there was a large candidate pool and a field of several strong candidates without a clear frontrunner.

Impact of Money Politics

One commonly cited justification for increased women's representation is that a higher level of women's participation in political decision-making is linked to lower levels of corruption (see Dollar et al. 1999; Swamy et al. 2001). The prevalent argument that increased women's representation would lead to good governance and less corruption has been critiqued by scholars including Sung (2003) and Goetz (2007). The latter says many such claims are 'based upon essentialist notions of women's higher moral nature and their propensity to bring their finer moral sensibilities to bear on public life, and particularly on the conduct of politics' (Goetz 2007:90).

The perceived link between good governance and increased women's representation has been challenged, but the perception remains. In

Bougainville and the wider Melanesian context, there is an emphasis on clean campaigning as something women do. In Bougainville, some noted it as the point of difference between female and male candidates: ‘men don’t do clean campaigning’. Clean campaigning was defined by women candidates as not getting involved in money politics or gifting, and not attacking other candidates.

Money politics is a significant aspect of politicking in Papua New Guinea, although the extent to which the distribution of cash and gifts plays a role in elections varies across the country (Haley and Zubrinich 2013). Observation of the 2012 national election showed that the Islands region,¹⁶ which includes Bougainville, had fewer voters reporting having participated in money politics than in the Highlands or Southern regions, and those who did report receiving money were given far less on average than voters in any of the other three regions (Haley and Zubrinich 2013). Money politics, nevertheless, was a noted feature of the campaign period in all regions.

Reports from the 2007 election suggested that the shift to LPV had increased the prevalence of vote-buying, with voters able to elicit cash in exchange for votes from up to three candidates in a constituency whereas before they could only vote for one candidate (Haley and Dierikx 2013). Gift-giving and vote-buying were commonplace in the 2012 election, with candidates who participated in these activities in general performing better than other candidates (Haley and Zubrinich 2013).

In Bougainville politics, money politics is a factor despite voters and candidates alike being quick to contrast Bougainville with parts of Papua New Guinea where it is more prevalent, such as the Highlands. Nevertheless, in the 2015 election allegations of money politics were often made although rarely backed up with evidence. The multiplication of rumours on the topic was indicative of widespread suspicions of corruption. These rumours feed into a political environment where money politics, though widely condemned, is considered to be an influential part of the election process.

Women candidates articulated a pressure they felt to participate in money politics as candidates and as elected members. During the campaign

period, they described being asked by community groups for donations, acquiescing to which they felt contravened their anti-corruption messaging. One candidate noted the impulse to campaign with money:

I would have easily fallen into temptation and lured [voters] with my money ... but I had no money.

A former member noted that money politics is not solely an issue during the campaigning period, but must also be dealt with once elected:

After I first became a member ... I was doing my work but you also had to take care of the other aspect and how do you do that? You cannot without going corrupt. You have to be corrupt to cater for the needs of your voters who want material things.

Women candidates drew a link between money politics and poverty, and acknowledged the appeal of gifting and vote-buying to the more vulnerable populations within their constituencies.

I kept telling them ‘Money is just for now, we need quality leaders’ ... [but] some people find it very hard, money-wise. And then when there’s a group that comes round with easy cash, who wouldn’t want that?

That’s where poverty comes in ... once we do that [improve quality of life], people will not be attracted to that businessperson just so he will give them a packet of rice ... they are poor, they have no money, they want to feed themselves.

There is a pervasive idea that women behave differently from men as candidates and members, and that only men play money politics.

Only men do that, campaign with money and bags of rice.

Vote-buying and gifting are difficult issues in Melanesian politics. Such practices can easily be construed as corrupt, yet they are also, in many places, an accepted — and expected — component of contemporary politics (see Allen and Hasnain 2010; Haley and Dierikx 2013; Standish 2007). The perception of women candidates as ‘clean’ candidates who do not engage in money

politics, which was reinforced and perpetuated by women in the 2015 campaign, can be a double-edged sword. Getsi campaigned on a strong anti-corruption platform that connected with her constituents and helped to distinguish her from her male opponents. For other female candidates, however, anti-corruption messaging resonated less in their communities and the idea that women are 'clean' candidates — and may not deliver for constituents if elected in the way members are expected to — could have worked against them. It should be noted, however, that if a women candidate did choose to engage in money politics, she might also be punished according to this perception, for transgressing against the expectations of how women candidates should act.

Impact of Matriliney

The land tenure systems of Bougainville are, for the most part, matrilineal. As land is inherited through the female lineage, women derive authority within their communities through customary systems of land ownership (O'Callaghan 2002; Sirivi and Havini 2004). While these matrilineal traditions in most parts of Bougainville continue today, it is not a matriarchal society, and the idea that women are the traditional owners of the land is contested. In matrilineal areas of Bougainville men are also landowners along with their female relatives, and historically men have been the primary actors in political decision-making (Australian Government 1999). Where women had input into political decisions, their views were often expressed via a male proxy (Garasu 2002).

It has been claimed that women's traditional influence on decision-making was eroded during the colonial period (Havini 1999), with a marked shift in gender roles resulting from the growing influence of Christianity (Hermkens 2007) and colonial economic development policies that focused exclusively on male labour (Wesley-Smith and Ogan 1992). The economic and social changes caused by the mining boom from the 1960s further entrenched these new gender divisions (ibid.).

In the debate over the introduction of reserved seats in Bougainville, women's political representation was characterised as an extension of Bougainville's matrilineal society

structure. Guaranteed women's representation in politics was portrayed as a facet of customary leadership, wherein women had a role to play in decision-making. The report of the Bougainville Constitutional Commission (2004:159) suggests this argument was convincing:

Bougainvillean society — whether matrilineal or patrilineal — places great importance on the role of women in our decision making processes. There is a sense of partnership in decision-making that flows through our history. The BCC felt that it was essential that the importance of the customary role of women be reflected in the arrangements for the Bougainville legislature.

In spite of this invocation of custom to justify guaranteed women's representation, there was a widespread conviction that without the reserved seats, women would have no representation in the legislature due to the difficulties they would face competing against men in the open constituencies:

There was a concern expressed that if no seats were set aside for women it could be likely that they would not succeed in contests for a single member constituency at the election, and that as a result there might be no female members in the legislature. (BCC 2004:159)

Within the campaign for women's reserved seats was this apparent contradiction between the argument that traditional matrilineal societal structures highlighted the importance of women's voices in political decision-making, and the claim that women would not be elected except in reserved seats.

The claim that matriliney makes a stronger case for women's political representation in Bougainville than in other, patrilineal, parts of Melanesia, evident in the reserved seats campaign, was also invoked by women candidates in the 2015 election. The Bougainville political environment was portrayed as different from other parts of Papua New Guinea:

Bougainville men accept women. They allow women to flourish.

This point of difference was often attributed to matrilineal traditions. Women candidates in matrilineal areas commonly viewed these

customary traditions as valuable in providing a platform for women's leadership. Matrilineal land ownership traditions also underscore women's connection to their home communities even after marriage, which may assist women candidates in maintaining a support base for an eventual political campaign.

Traditions of matriliney and female authority, so often evoked in discussions on women's participation in politics, seemed to have little impact on the presence of women candidates in the 2015 election. Central Bougainville, which has the strongest traditions of female authority of any region, had a lower number of women candidates contesting in both the reserved and open seats than either the northern or southern regions, while multiple women candidates contested in the patrilineal area of Konnou. In areas with weaker traditions of female authority, women candidates had different views on how their campaign prospects were affected. One candidate, who was running in an area where the custom was for a woman to leave her village for her husband's village after marriage, argued that this tradition 'adds value' to her political campaign, in that she had established strong familial connections in two villages in her constituency. On the other hand, a candidate for a different seat did not have a positive view about the impact of patrilineal traditions in her constituency:

Because in our culture we come out of a patrilineal society, the men, they say they are above the women, so it's their custom [that] men will take the leadership.

In terms of the practicalities of the campaign, the argument that traditions of matriliney and female authority in Bougainville support women's candidacies can be contested. Given that the overall results of women candidates in the 2015 election are similar to those of recent elections in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, it seems that it is as hard to be elected as a woman in Bougainville as in patrilineal parts of Melanesia.

Bougainville's matrilineal traditions are a point of pride for many women candidates and a key distinguishing factor from other parts of Papua New Guinea. Matriliney has often been cited in the context of debates around women's

political representation in Bougainville, and drawn on as a resource to justify the presence of women in politics. This was most prominent in the campaign for reserved seats, where activists used these matrilineal traditions to enable the inclusion of guaranteed women's representation in the new political institutions that were being established. Yet although debates on women's political representation commonly make reference to matriliney, this link should not be taken for granted. With regard to women candidates in 2015, matriliney was an idea often evoked in discussion but that seemed to have a very limited impact on the performance of women candidates.

Conclusion

The 2015 Bougainville election saw a record number of women candidates, and a record number of women were elected. While one in three open constituencies had at least one woman candidate, overall the results for most women in the open seats were disappointing. Within the generally low levels of vote share, which were consistent with outcomes for women candidates elsewhere in Melanesia, there were several near-successes and the election of Josephine Getsi in Peit. Getsi's win was a significant individual achievement, but together with the results of other high-placing women candidates it can also contribute to knowledge of how women can achieve political success in Melanesian political contexts. To this end, empirical data on elections and by-elections, and the stories of individual women candidates, are important.

In the discussions undertaken as part of fieldwork for this project, three key themes emerged: the impact of the shift to an LPV electoral system on political campaigning and the election of women; the effect of money politics, or the vote-buying and gift-giving practices that are commonly associated with elections in Papua New Guinea; and the influence of Bougainville's matrilineal land ownership traditions on the campaigns and results of women candidates. This paper has explored these three themes in the context of the 2015 Bougainville election, and through comparisons with recent national elections, but these issues are not exclusive to either Bougainville or Papua New Guinea. The impacts of electoral system reform on women's

representation has long been a topic of research in the Pacific context (see Fraenkel 2006), and remains salient in political debates in the region today.

While LPV has resulted in the election of women in some circumstances, it is by no means a panacea for women's political under-representation. Similarly, the effects of money politics and the intersections between traditional custom and modern politics — highlighted in this paper in the discussion of the role of matriliney in campaigning — are components of larger political debates in Melanesia. Future research on women's political representation could explore these three themes further in relation to other political events in Papua New Guinea and the wider Melanesian region.

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Author Notes

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Endnotes

- 1 Research for this Discussion Paper was carried out in April and May 2015 during the campaign, polling and counting periods of the 2015 Bougainville election. It involved participant observation and interviews with 19 women candidates and 7 campaign managers. It also draws on past research carried out in 2013 on women's political representation in Bougainville. All indented quotes are from interview participants unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 The term 'single-member' constituency refers to the fact that only one member is elected from these constituencies, in contrast to the regional constituencies, from which one woman and one ex-combatant are elected. (It must be noted that the regional members are elected from separate pools of candidates, and thus are not 'multi-member' constituencies under the most common definition of that term, where two or more members are elected from the same pool of candidates.) The term 'open' constituency is used in this Discussion Paper to distinguish these constituencies from the reserved seats for women and ex-combatants, in which certain criteria (either being a woman or a veteran of the conflict) must be met by candidates.
- 3 Reserved seats for women and for ex-combatants were adopted in the 2004 constitution. The latter were intended to be temporary and are due to be phased out following the referendum on independence.
- 4 The exception to this rule is in a situation where there are three or less candidates on the ballot. If there are three candidates, ballots which have only two preferences marked are considered valid as the unpreferred candidate can be presumed to be the third preference. If there are two candidates, ballots marked with either one or two preferences are considered valid.
- 5 Ultimately, no women ran for the presidency in 2015.
- 6 One candidate, Lynette Ona, had previously contested two Papua New Guinea national elections but was a first-time candidate in the ABG elections. Two others, Francesca Semoso and Elizabeth Burain, were former ABG members who had also previously contested in Papua New Guinea national elections.
- 7 Seventy-seven of the 120 women candidates in the Papua New Guinea election who were running in constituencies for which data is available won less than 1 per cent of first preference votes; at least a further 15 women contested but data is not available for those constituencies. Data supplied by Terence Wood, July 2015.
- 8 A former National Broadcasting Corporation colleague, Julie Soso, was elected to the national parliament in the Eastern Highlands Provincial seat in 2012.
- 9 Councils of Elders are the local-level government structures in Bougainville. Councils of Elders can be made up of elected or appointed members (or a combination of both) and can include an appointed women's representative.

- 10 Kokiai placed fourth on the final count.
- 11 The legislation to change the electoral system was passed by the Morauta government of 1999–2002, but LPV was not used for the 2002 general election. Ten national by-elections held between 2003 and 2006 in Papua New Guinea used LPV (May and Anere 2013). The move to an LPV electoral system was intended to encourage the election of candidates with a wider support base than in past elections (Reilly 2006). In the 2002 national election, only one member of parliament (MP) was elected with an outright majority of votes, and most successful candidates won less than one in five votes in their constituencies (Reilly 2006); 20 per cent of MPs won less than one in 10 votes (May et al. 2013). It was also suggested that a preferential electoral system would result in less violence during election periods and greater cooperation between candidates, due to the need to appeal to the broadest range of voters possible and win preferences from supporters of other candidates in order to win (Reilly 2006).
- 12 A majority being 50 per cent + 1 of total allowable (i.e. not informal) ballot papers. For example, if there are 1000 allowable ballot papers, the number of ballots needed to win is 501.
- 13 Kouza contested the election as Loujaya Toni, but shortly after reverted to her maiden name.
- 14 Data on Bougainville elections supplied by Anthony Regan.
- 15 An exhausted ballot is one in which the first, second, and third preferenced candidates have all been excluded.
- 16 Papua New Guinea can be divided into four large regions — Highlands, Momase, Southern and Islands.

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