



Australian  
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Strength Matters:  
Voter Behaviours and Attitudes  
Towards Women Candidates  
in Papua New Guinea

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
The Australian National University

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## **Declaration**

1. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.
2. This thesis is fewer than 100, 000 words in length, exclusive of Figures, tables, images and abbreviations.

Eileen Gobu Bobone

October 2025

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates as a missing piece of the puzzle in the story of women's participation in elections in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Since self-government in 1972, only ten women have sat in the national parliament. Of 743 women candidates in national general elections, only 33 women candidates have ranked among the top five at their eliminations. Of these 33 women candidates, an important pattern can be identified in their regions of origin: 17 have come from the Southern Region, eight from Momase, six from New Guinea Islands and two from the Highlands. This regional pattern extends to those 10 women candidates who were elected: five were from the Southern Region, two each were from Momase and New Guinea Islands and one was from the Highlands. While these numbers are very low, the data show that the majority of the best performing candidates come from the Southern Region of PNG.

Previous research has focussed on examining the electoral experience of women candidates and the barriers that prevent them from entering parliament. Missing from these valuable analyses are investigations into why voters from certain regions of PNG are more likely to elect women candidates. I am particularly interested in why women candidates in the Southern Region poll better in national general elections in PNG than in the other regions. I investigate this question through a mixed methods research design, combining a quantitative analysis of election results with a qualitative approach to understanding indigenous cultural values and norms that inform the social and political behaviours of voters. I conduct this second element of my analysis using focus groups and interviews. The key contribution of this thesis lies in its presentation of a new measure of strength, namely the extent to which women candidates attract a number of votes above the average for the electorate. I suggest that women candidates who do not win in the National general elections can use this measure more accurately to understand their placing, and the attitudes of their electorate towards the viability of women candidates.



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## List of Abbreviations

|           |                                                       |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| AIDS      | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome                    |
| AROB      | Autonomous Region of Bougainville                     |
| CPC       | Constitutional Planning Committee                     |
| FPTP      | First - Past – the – Post                             |
| HIV       | Human Immunodeficiency Virus                          |
| JDP & BPC | Joint District Planning and Budget Priority Committee |
| LLGs      | Local Level Governments                               |
| LNG       | Liquefied Natural Gas                                 |
| LPV       | Limited Preferential Voting                           |
| MA        | Melanesian Alliance                                   |
| MP        | Members of Parliament                                 |
| NCD       | National Capital District                             |
| NGEs      | National General Elections                            |
| NGI       | New Guinea Islands                                    |
| OPV       | Optional Preference Voting                            |
| PIF       | Pacific Island Forum                                  |
| PNG       | Papua New Guinea                                      |





## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Understanding women's participation in electoral politics in the Pacific

Women have never reached the international benchmark of 30 per cent representation in the national parliaments of Pacific Island countries (excluding Australia, New Zealand, and the territories of United States of America and French respectively in the region). As of March 2024, only 55 women out of 614 Members of Parliament (MPs) (less than nine per cent) sit in these national parliaments (see Table 1). Despite variations and the implications that some countries do better than others, in terms of women's representation in parliaments the trend remains the same: there are hardly any women legislators in national politics across the region. The highest numbers of women in parliament in 2024 were found in Samoa, Fiji and Cook Islands, with six women legislators in each, but as demonstrated in the 'Difference' column, change has been very minimal over the past decade.

**Table 1: Number of women in the national parliaments of Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries, 2024**

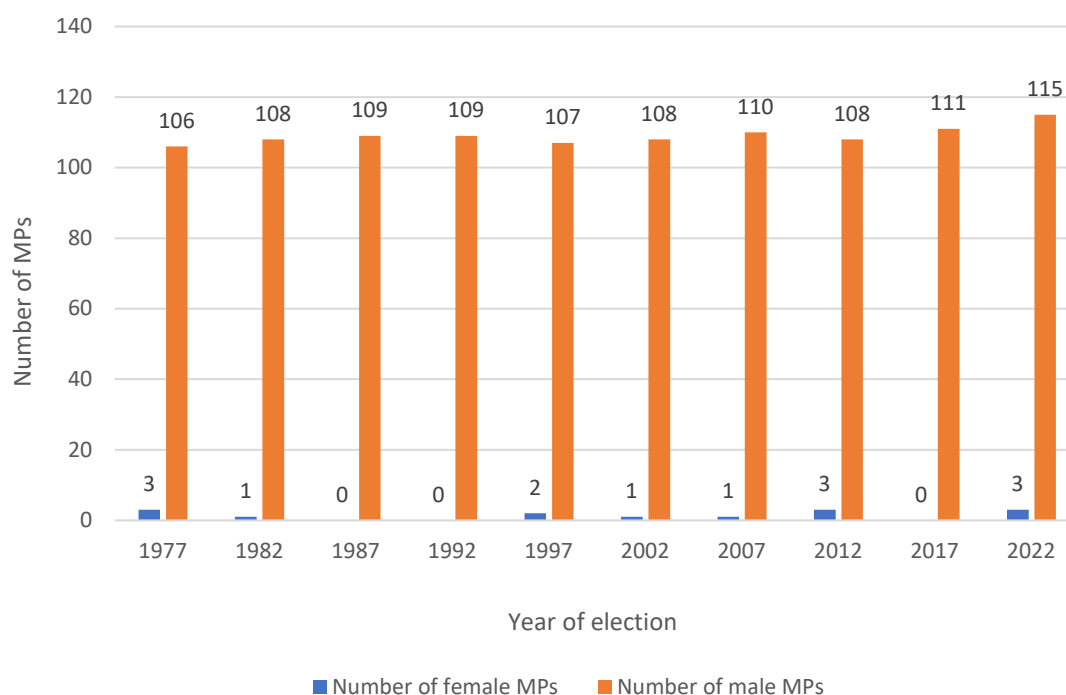
| Countries                               | Total MPs  | Women MPs |           |           | Difference |
|-----------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
|                                         |            | 2015      | 2020      | 2024      |            |
| Papua New Guinea                        | 118        | 3         | 0         | 3         | 0          |
| Samoa                                   | 53         | 3         | 5         | 6         | 1          |
| Vanuatu                                 | 52         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1          |
| Fiji                                    | 51         | 8         | 10        | 6         | -2         |
| Solomon Islands                         | 50         | 1         | 3         | 4         | 1          |
| Kiribati                                | 46         | 4         | 3         | 4         | 0          |
| Autonomous Region of Bougainville (PNG) | 44         | 4         | 3         | 5         | 2          |
| Marshall Islands                        | 33         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 0          |
| Palau                                   | 29         | 0         | 4         | 2         | 2          |
| Tonga                                   | 26         | 0         | 3         | 3         | 0          |
| Cook Islands                            | 24         | 4         | 6         | 6         | 2          |
| Tokelau                                 | 20         | 3         | 4         | 4         | 0          |
| Niue                                    | 20         | 3         | 5         | 5         | 0          |
| Nauru                                   | 19         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 1          |
| Tuvalu                                  | 15         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0          |
| Federated States of Micronesia          | 14         | 0         | 0         | 2         | 2          |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>614</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>55</b> |            |

Source: Table compiled and adapted by author from the following sources: Baker, 2015, p. 2; Pacific Women in Politics, 2024.

## 1.2 Understanding women's participation in electoral politics in PNG

This story resonates in PNG. Since the early 1960s (that is, pre-independence), only 12 women have sat in the legislature. From 1961 to 1963, two women sat in the fifth Legislative Council: Roma Bates was an Australian of Madang (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1962/1963, p. 76 ) and the widow of the late Charles Bates, a popular district commissioner. The other woman politician was Alice Wedega, a Papuan, who had been very active in all matters connected with the advancement of women, especially in the Milne Bay District of Papua (Tudor, 1961, p. 18). These two women were appointees. After 1972, the total number of women MPs increased to ten. No more than three women have been elected at an election since independence; in the 1987, 1992 and 2017 National General Elections (NGE) no women were elected at all (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Women members of parliament in PNG: 1977–2022**



Source: Sepoe, 2002, pp. 26–27.

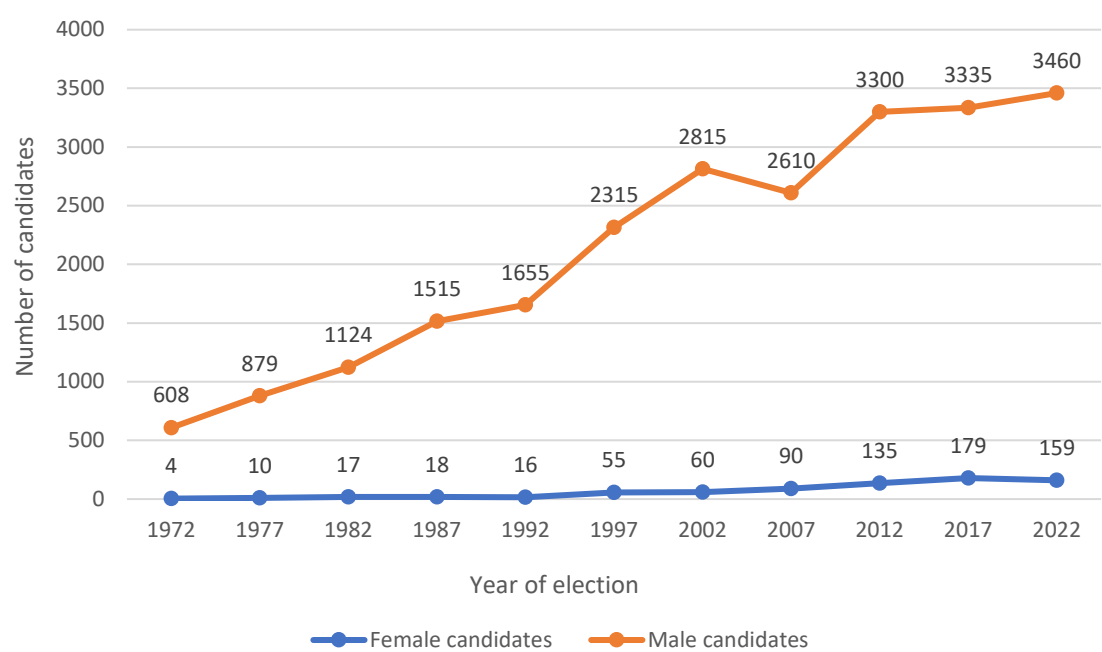
### 1.2.1 Elections and number of seats in parliament

From 1972 to 1977, the House of Assembly of PNG included 107 members; one hundred of these were elected from 82 open and 18 regional electorates. From 1977 to 2007, this increased

to 109 seats in parliament. In 2007, the number of seats rose to 111 and in 2022, it rose again to 118. These number of electorates has increased after six more were approved by parliament in July 2025, bringing the total number to 124, comprised of 102 open electorates and 22 regional electorates.

Since 1977, PNG has conducted its NGEs every five years. At every election, more men than women contest seats. While women’s participation in national politics as candidates is slowly increasing, their entry into parliament as legislators is stagnant (see Figure 2). Despite the overwhelming numerical imbalance in candidacy, electoral data from 1972 to 2022 show that some women outperform many of their male counterparts, placing them in the top five of candidates at their elimination, with ten polling so well that they have won electorate seats in parliament. Five of these women were from the Southern Region, two were from Momase, two were from the New Guinea Islands and one was from the Highlands region. This regional diversity is a key consideration of this thesis.

**Figure 2: Gender of candidates who have contested PNG national elections since 1972**



Source: Sepoe, 1996, p. 109.

### 1.3 Understanding electoral politics and culture in Papua New Guinea

PNG has four regions, 22 provinces including the National Capital District (NCD) and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB), 96 open electorates and 364 Local-Level

Governments (LLGs). This is broken down further by region: the Highlands has seven provinces, 36 open electorates and 114 LLGs; New Guinea Islands has five provinces, 13 open electorates and 85 LLGs; Momase has four provinces, 26 open electorates and 96 LLGs; and the Southern Region has six provinces, 21 open electorates and 69 LLGs. The Highlands region has the highest number of electorates in parliament, followed by Momase, then Southern and finally New Guinea Islands (see Table 2).

To elect their representatives, voters cast two ballots: one for the open electorate and one for the provincial electorate, the former being the immediate geographical area within the latter (Turner, 1990, p. 110). The candidates who win provincial seats become provincial governors in the National Parliament (Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute, 1998) and the candidates who win open seats become open MPs. An open electorate is also known as a district.

**Table 2: Distribution of electorates by region**

| Regions            | Number of provinces (%) | Number of open electorates (%) | Total number of seats in parliament (%) |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Highlands          | 31.8                    | 37.5                           | 36.4                                    |
| Southern Region    | 27.3                    | 21.9                           | 22.9                                    |
| New Guinea Islands | 22.7                    | 13.5                           | 15.3                                    |
| Momase             | 18.2                    | 27.1                           | 25.4                                    |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>100</b>              | <b>100</b>                     | <b>100</b>                              |

Source: Information adapted by author from Wood, 2019.

### **1.3.1 British Papua and German New Guinea**

Prior to World War I, PNG was administered in two regions. Papua was formally British Papua and New Guinea was German New Guinea, two separate political units. As Waiko (2007, pp. 29, 45) explains,

from 1884 to 1906...under British colonial rule Papua was divided into four divisions; the western division was based in Daru (today Western Province); Central was based at Port Moresby with administration agents in Rigo and Mekeo (today Central province while Rigo and Mekeo are open electorates); Eastern was based in Samarai (Milne bay Province), with an assistant resident magistrate at Tamata on the Mamba River (Northern Province) near the border with German and the south-eastern division

controlling the islands also had resident magistrates on Sudest, Misima and Nivani in the Louisiade Archipelago (Milne Bay Province).

In German New Guinea, in 1899, the Germans had two colonial stations: one in Madang to cover the mainland and one in Kokopo to administer the Gazelle Peninsula and the islands (East New Britain province). Other stations were established in Kavieng, Namatanai (today New Ireland Province), Kieta (today AROB), and Rabaul (today East New Britain Province). Between 1906 and 1914, stations were also established in Aitape (West Sepik Province), Angoram (East Sepik Province), Lae (Morobe Province) and at Manus in the Admiralty Islands (Manus Province). During this time very little attempt was made to explore the mountainous inland, as such very little was known about the highlands of PNG.

### **1.3.2 *Papua and New Guinea under Australian administration***

In 1905 the Commonwealth of Australia accepted responsibility for the British Protectorate under the Papuan Act, which came into effect in 1906. In so doing, Australia renamed the territory Papua (Waiko, 2007, p. 57). Australia did not change the administration system greatly, only adding village councils, which were established in 1920.

Australia managed Papua through a body known as the Staff Conference, established in 1945. Administered as a committee system, the Conference provided advice to the Australian Government on 'matters of local concern and carried out decisions of the administration at the local level' (Waiko, 2007, pp. 141). This system was eventually replaced with a Legislative Council 'comprising the administrator, sixteen officials or administration members, and twelve non-official members...drawn from a pool of missionaries and businessmen' (Waiko, 2007, pp. 141).

This system was not seen to empower Papua New Guineans in determining the affairs of their own country. In 1961, former Governor-General of PNG John Guise said to an Australian Broadcasting interviewer,

I sat in the new Legislative Council and in the administrator's Council since they were founded, and I can tell you that important matters still don't originate with us. Most of them originate in Canberra with the Ministers and the Department of Territories. (Waiko, 2007, p. 178)

### **1.3.3 *The Constitutional Planning Committee on decentralisation***

Attempts to drive self-governance and self-determination can be seen in the establishment of the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) in June 1972. The CPC was created to advise on the constitution for self-governance, with the intention of breaking up a colonial administrative system that was seen as ‘centralised, hierarchical and less participatory’ (Ghai and Regan, 1992, p. 6). The two main advocates for decentralisation were John Momis from Bougainville and John Kaputin from East New Britain. In both districts there had been opposition to the colonial administration’s policies on the establishment of a massive foreign-owned copper mine in Bougainville, and the alienation of land to foreign-owned plantations in the land-short Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The CPC argued that decentralisation would create unity and emphasise rural development and pluralism. It argued that the redistribution of power would lead to a more pluralist system, enhance political freedoms and diminish the dangers of authoritarian rule, and that decentralisation would increase the flow of resources to the rural areas. After much deliberation, a revised fourth draft of the constitution was introduced into the National Constituent Assembly on 29 May 1975. This draft:

Established the principle of provincial government [and] set out the [foundations] of the structure of provincial governments, provincial finances, intergovernmental relations, the suspension of provincial governments and local governments. [However, it did not specify which tier of government] would have jurisdiction over the local governments. It also made provisions for an organic law to set out most details on the subject...However, on 30 July 1975, the government successfully deleted the part of the draft constitution that dealt with provincial government in a vote of 40 to 19 in the National Constituent Assembly. (Ghai & Regan, 1992, p. 10)

Officials were concerned that these divisions would create political competition between provinces and threaten national unity that provincial governments would be expansive and would create economic disparities between developed and underdeveloped provinces. This outcome caused the representatives of the Bougainville Interim Provincial Government to boycott the decision and declare, on 1 September 1975, its unilateral independence and secession from PNG (Ghai & Regan, 1988, pp. 11–18). In return for North Solomons (Bougainville) giving up secession, the national government agreed to reinstate the constitutional provisions on provincial government and to discuss the details of the system. As

early as 1974, under the Preparatory Arrangements Act, East New Britain, Eastern Highlands, Central, East Sepik and Bougainville had provincial governments. In February 1977, another seven were established. New Ireland, Simbu and Oro were operational governments with their own constituting regulations under the act, while Manus, Madang, Southern Highlands and Western were only constituent assemblies in the process of preparing provincial constituents. The other seven provinces were Gulf, Milne Bay, Enga, Western Highlands, Morobe, Sandaun and West New Britain. Most of them had also established constituent assemblies under the Preparatory Arrangements Act guidelines but were not far enough advanced in the establishment process to warrant legal recognition. On 17 May 2012, Jiwaka and Hela province were established. Unlike the other provinces, the National Capital District was not originally organised as a decentralised administration with a Premier; however, since 1995 it has been headed by a Governor, albeit one with limited powers (National Capital District, Papua New Guinea, 2025).

This discussion serves to illustrate the way in which districts and provinces have colonial heritages that PNG inherited. As PNG continues to create more electorates, existing electoral problems continue to complicate the political landscape.

### **1.3.4 *Patrilineal and matrilineal societies in PNG***

In PNG, societies are commonly described as either patrilineal or matrilineal: the patrilineal system implies descent through the father, while the matrilineal system implies descent through the mother. It is estimated that three quarters of the country practices patrilineal descent, while the matrilineal system is largely confined to the coastal provinces of Bougainville, East New Britain and Milne Bay. In patrilineal societies, men are understood as the legitimate heads of decision-making processes. While women and children may contribute to discussions, men have the final say. By contrast, in matrilineal societies women take the leading role in decision-making, assuming land and property ownership (Lahui-Ako, 2001; Flaherty cited in Prideaux, 2008, p. 5).

According to Prideaux (2006), the traditional Highlanders practise big-man methods to develop leaders and to preserve the passage of leadership from father to son, family to family or clan to clan. Leadership is based on an individual's status in the community in terms of wealth and money. As Prideaux (2006, pp. 6–7) explains,

Highlanders are an aggressive people, and leadership positions are taken through violence and killings, with the gun replacing the traditional spear. For example, during elections supporters of candidates can resort to physical assault, even killing rival supporters.

Interestingly, in some regions a spectrum of power exists between patrilineality and matrilineality. In the Momase region, leadership is based on respect, trust and the integrity of the individual regardless of whether they are a man or a woman. The onus is on the elders to appoint community leaders. To be considered for community leadership, candidates must be reputable and have community standing. Leadership appointments are reached through general consensus as opposed to inheritance (Prideaux, 2006, p. 7). By contrast, in East New Britain, in the New Guinea Islands region, the Tolai women assume traditional leadership roles and are vested with land ownership rights. This does not preclude men from assuming leadership responsibilities, however, with most decisions made by the men in consultation with women. Importantly, the onus for discussion remains with women, who provide wisdom and knowledge. In another variation, Milne Province in the Southern Region practises a variety of the chiefly or big-man leadership. The first-born son inherits the leadership role from the father, which passes from generation to generation. However, like the Tolai people, women are recognised in leadership roles, retaining the right over land titles, and automatically assume the traditional leadership role. Women play an influential role in discussion and decision-making in the communities, and the rest of the Papuan provinces practise chiefly or big-man leadership. While sons generally inherit traditional leadership, younger generations from different clan groups are assuming contemporary leadership roles. Women, especially older women, nevertheless hold equal status with men, participate equally in the decision-making process and generally take on greater responsibilities in their communities and families than men (Prideaux, 2006, pp. 5–7).

### **1.3.5 A ‘kind of’ Westminster parliamentary democracy**

PNG inherited a Westminster-style parliament and democratic institutions, although PNG’s political system has been seen to evolve ‘its own mores and distinctive practices’ (Dorney, 1990, p. 53). This is particularly evident in the way in which the parliament determines confidence in its leaders, with a frequent use of motions of no confidence. This has led some to suggest that ‘parliamentarians in PNG regard themselves more as leaders of their people than

as their representatives' (Dorney, 1990, p. 59), with elections vital 'in determining leadership [and] who is available to be lobbied...if necessary' (May et al., 1997, p. 2; see also Kama, 2017). More broadly, political instability has become part of the new political culture, defining the actions of MPs, especially those in the opposition, who became overtly preoccupied with using Section 145 of the Constitution – dealing with motions of no confidence in the prime minister or ministry – to change the government. In almost every parliamentary sitting since the 1977 election, a motion of no-confidence in the government has been either mooted or moved. This practice has resulted in the emergence of a new parliamentary culture, characterised by the Prime Minister being forced to make cabinet reshuffles, MPs being paid to join either the government or the opposition, and MPs leaving their parties any time they wish, usually by saying that their electorates want them to be either in the government or in the opposition, depending on the circumstances. A party can be left without any members through the desertion of its members. Many candidates prefer to run as independents and later join whichever parties seem likely to form government, thus increasing their chances of being in power.

There are other significant variations to the Westminster model, for example, according to Dorney (1990, p. 60), parties are relatively weakly organised. Since the emergence of PNG's political parties, scholars have written about their characteristics and the nature of the party system in the country. As Woolford (cited in Gelu, 2005, p. 84) argues, parties struggled to maintain tight unity, and members of a party would often hold conflicting views about what the country needed. Also cited in Gelu (2005, p. 84), Hegarty argues that the parties formed in the 1960s and early 1970s remained weak and undeveloped, both ideologically and organisationally. The parties remained parliamentary factions and had no coherent programs for change. Saffu (1992, p.5) argues that 'despite the existence of political parties, no linkages can as yet be found between parties, voting and governance, particularly with respect to policy outcomes'. According to Reilly, (again cited in Gelu, 2005, p. 84), most broad indicators of party numbers and cohesion suggest steady decline in the strength and importance of political parties in PNG since the introduction of self-government in 1973. May, also cited in Gelu (2005, p. 84) observed that,

despite some early predictions to the contrary, PNG has not developed a strong party system. While a few parties have maintained continuity, most still tend to come and go between elections, and those which have survived generally lack a mass base, an

organisational structure, a coherent ideology, and firm party discipline...With parties not sharply differentiated ideologically, almost every party has been aligned, at some time, with every other. Individual attachment to parties is generally weak, with MPs commonly switching party allegiance in return for political rewards – a pattern of behaviour known elsewhere as ‘party-hopping’ but increasingly referred to in Papua New Guinea as ‘yo-yo politics’.

Standish (cited in Gelu, 2005, p. 84) argues that PNG’s parties are now personalised vehicles for gaining and sharing power, with minimal policy differences. They remain essentially factions within the national parliament, centred upon a leader, even leaders who may have lost their seats like the wealthy founders of two parties, former Prime Ministers Sir Julius Chan (People’s Progress Party, whose term ended in 1997) and Pias Wingti (who was out of parliament between 1997 and 2002).

In addition, MPs have been known to nominate ‘friendly’ candidates to split a powerful opponent’s votes, demonstrating a stronger commitment to the immediate electorate than the party (Dorney, 1990, pp. 59–61). In this context, Dorney suggests that ‘ideology is a luxury marginal members cannot afford... [as such, being an MP] becomes a case of delivering the “goods” – a pragmatic approach’ (Dorney, 1990, p. 61). PNG politics are therefore often described as regionalist and tribally based.

#### **1.4 Researching the features of strong women’s candidacies in PNG**

Scholars have attributed the enduring underrepresentation of women in politics in the region to a multitude of factors. According to ‘most notably culture, the pervasiveness of masculine political cultures, a view that politics is men’s work, the view that electoral systems are not gender neutral and the absence of a level playing field with respect to campaign financing’ (Haley & Zubrinich, 2015, p. 1). This assessment resonates in Melanesia. While ‘candidates face intense local competition ... [f]or women, getting elected has proven particularly difficult [because] there are numerous institutional, cultural, attitudinal and financial barriers which women candidates must necessarily overcome’ (Tavola, 2014, p. 1)

In PNG, more specifically, Sepoe, Clark and Winn (2022) and Haley and Zubrinich (2015) suggest that the combination of ‘money politics’, election violence, bribery, vote rigging, stolen or destroyed ballot papers and manipulation at counting centres are added obstacles that make it even harder for women to get elected. As Haley and Zubrinich (2015) note in this context,

[Regardless of] sustained activism and development partner support, women remain grossly under-represented as candidates and typically perform poorly in elections.

These significant barriers notwithstanding, I am interested in understanding how we might define the *strengths* of women candidates when they contest elections in PNG. The research questions of this thesis are:

1. Given norms of masculine political leadership and ‘big man’ politics in PNG, can the concept of ‘strength’ explain the support of voters for women candidates?
2. How can strength be measured in the cultural and political context of PNG elections?
3. In which parts of PNG is it more evident that strong women matter?

Just under 750 women have participated in electoral politics in NGEs as candidates in PNG since 1972. In this thesis, I discuss the candidacy of 33 women who I describe as ‘strong’ (see Table 3). I define these women as ‘strong’ in that they were placed in the top five of candidates or won elections and became legislators.

**Table 3: Strong women candidates since 1972**

| Name of candidate     | Election contested (and won)          | Electorate(s) contested                                                        |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Josephine Abaijah     | 1972, 1977, 1982, 1992, 1997 and 2002 | Central Provincial, National Capital District Provincial, Milne Bay Provincial |
| Patricia Wilson       | 1972                                  | Gulf Regional                                                                  |
| Nellie Exon Lawrance  | 1972                                  | Kokopo Open                                                                    |
| Waliyato Clowes       | 1977                                  | Middle Fly Open                                                                |
| Rosa Tokiel           | 1977                                  | East New Britain Regional                                                      |
| Nahau Rooney          | 1977, 1982                            | Manus Open                                                                     |
| Grace Pokana          | 1977                                  | Bulolo Open                                                                    |
| Pilicapio Matilda May | 1977, 1982                            | Alotau Open                                                                    |
| Fide Bale             | 1982                                  | National Capital Regional                                                      |
| Dec Tasip             | 1982                                  | Lae Open                                                                       |
| Laura Martin          | 1982, 1992                            | Wewak Open                                                                     |
| Margaret Loko         | 1992                                  | National Capital Regional                                                      |
| Carol Kidu            | 1997, 2002, 2007                      | Moresby South                                                                  |
| Delilah Gore          | 2012, 2017, 2022                      | Sohe Open                                                                      |
| Loujaya Toni          | 2012                                  | Lae Open                                                                       |
| Julie Soso            | 2012, 2017                            | Eastern Highlands Regional                                                     |
| Anna Skate            | 2017                                  | Moresby South                                                                  |
| Rufina Peter          | 2017, 2022                            | Central Regional                                                               |
| Jean Eparo Parkop     | 2017, 2022                            | Oro Regional                                                                   |

|                    |            |                   |                                   |
|--------------------|------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Dulciana Brash     | Somare     | 2017, <b>2022</b> | East Sepik Regional, Angoram Open |
| Rubie Kerepa       | Wanariu    | 2017              | Kavieng Open                      |
| Kessy Sawang       |            | 2017, <b>2022</b> | Rai Coast Open                    |
| Lina Apnanji       | Kundinahai | 2017              | Ambunti – Dreikekia Open          |
| Selin Leo Lohia    |            | 2022              | Kairuku Open                      |
| Vikki Gara Mosin   |            | 2022              | Rigo Open                         |
| Dianne Unagi Koiam |            | 2022              | Moresby Northeast Open            |
| Michel Hau'ofa     |            | 2022              | Moresby South                     |
| Joyce Grant        |            | 2022              | Kiriwina-Goodenough               |
| Jennifer Rudd      |            | 2022              | Milne Bay Regional                |
| Jenny Luke         |            | 2022              | Kandep Open                       |
| Lynne Ozane Ronnie |            | 2022              | Monus Regional                    |
| Jennifer Baing     |            | 2022              | Morobe Regional                   |
| Francesca Semoso   |            | <b>2023</b>       | North Bougainville Open           |

Source: Table compiled from the following sources: Rooney, 1985, pp. 47–48; Sepoe, 1996; Sepoe et al., 2022; Wood, 2019.

Note: bold type denotes elections that were won.

There has been an interesting development in the past two elections (2017 and 2022) in terms of an increasing proportion of candidates running as independents. In 2017, 119 of 179 women candidates who contested the NGEs ran as independent candidates and in 2022, this figure increased to 169 women running as independents. Several of the women I classify as ‘strong’ ran as independents in 2022 (see Table 4). Having previously been endorsed by a political party, Dulciana Somare Brash, Jean Eparo Parkop and Matilda Korma all ran (again) in 2022 as independents. Having lost her bid for re-election in 2017 under the banner of the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Party, Loujaya Toni did not contest again in 2022.

This trend notwithstanding, major political parties that have been most supportive of endorsing women candidates include PANGU Pati, People’s National Congress, People’s Party, Social Democratic Party, and National Alliance. As Table 4 demonstrates, women have not always recontested for the same party (e.g. Kessy Sawang and Rufina Peter).

**Table 4: Women candidates as party members and independents: 2017 and 2022**

| <b>‘Strong’<br/>women candidates</b> | <b>2017</b>                              | <b>2022</b>                |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Delilah Gore                         | People's National Congress               | People's National Congress |
| Julie Soso                           | People's National Congress               | National Alliance          |
| Loujaya Toni                         | Triumph<br>Heritage<br>Empowerment Party | <i>Did not contest</i>     |

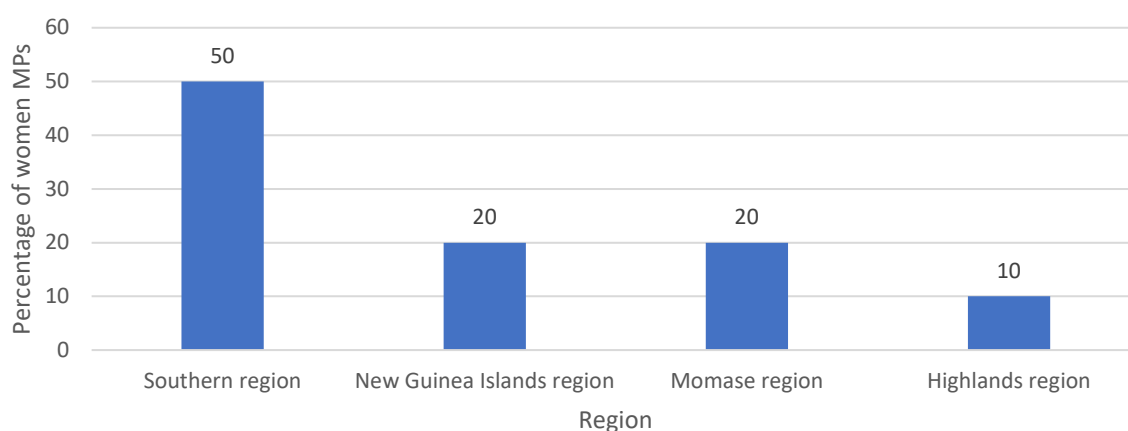
|                       |                         |                              |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Dulciana Brash Somare | PANGU Pati              | Independent                  |
| Jean Eparo Parkop     | Social Democratic Party | Independent                  |
| Kessy Sawang          | PNG National Party      | People's First Party         |
| Matilda Koma          | Social Democratic Party | Independent                  |
| Rufina Peter          | Trust PNG Party         | People's National Congress   |
| Seline Leo Lohia      | <i>Did not contest</i>  | Indigenous Liberation Party  |
| Joyce Grant           | <i>Did not contest</i>  | National Alliance            |
| Lyn Ozzane Ronnie     | <i>Did not contest</i>  | Independent                  |
| Iammo Gapi Launa      | Independent             | <i>Did not contest</i>       |
| Vavine Kila Nades     | Independent             | <i>Did not contest</i>       |
| Vikki Mossin          | <i>Did not contest</i>  | Future of PNG Party          |
| Michelle Hau'ofa      | <i>Did not contest</i>  | People's Party               |
| Jennifer Baing        | <i>Did not contest</i>  | People's Movement for Change |
| Dianne Unagi          | <i>Did not contest</i>  | United Labour Party          |
| Jennifer Rudd         | <i>Did not contest</i>  | PANGU Pati                   |
| Jenny Luke            | <i>Did not contest</i>  | Model Nation Party           |

Source: Haley, 2019; Registry of Political Parties and Candidates Commission 2022.

#### 1.4.1 Strength from the region

Region is a clear factor in determining the strength of women candidates in PNG. Women contenders ran across all provinces in PNG except for West New Britain Province. From the total of winning female candidates, by region, the Southern Region has produced five MPs, two respectively for Momase and New Guinea Islands, and one from the Highlands (see Figure 3 below).

**Figure 3: Percentage of women members of parliament: 1972–2023**



Source: Information adapted by author from Wood, 2019 and Sepoe, 2022.

In 2017, 60 of the 179 (or 36 per cent) women contesting the election were from the Southern Region. Given estimates suggest the population of the Southern Region equates to about a fifth of the country's total population (McMurray and Lavu, 2020) the proportion of women candidates from this region is clearly an overrepresentation of potential candidates.

Within the Southern Region, Rigo electorate had the highest percentage of women candidates in 2017, followed by Gulf provincial, another Southern Region province (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Electorates in which more than 10% of candidates were women: 2017**

| Region             | Electorate          | Total candidates | Female candidates | % candidates | Female |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------|
| Southern           | Rigo Open           | 39               | 8                 | 20.5%        |        |
| Southern           | Gulf Provincial     | 51               | 9                 | 17.6%        |        |
| Momase             | East Sepik Province | 26               | 4                 | 15.3%        |        |
| Southern           | Moresby Northeast   | 51               | 7                 | 13.7%        |        |
| New Guinea Islands | Kavieng Open        | 22               | 3                 | 13.6%        |        |
| Momase             | Wewak Open          | 30               | 4                 | 13.3%        |        |
| Highlands          | Goroka Open         | 30               | 4                 | 13.3%        |        |
| Momase             | Telefomin Open      | 16               | 2                 | 12.5%        |        |
| New Guinea Islands | Manus Open          | 34               | 4                 | 11.8%        |        |
| New Guinea Islands | Manus Provincial    | 26               | 3                 | 11.5%        |        |
| Southern           | Central Provincial  | 27               | 3                 | 11.1%        |        |
| Momase             | Rai Coast Open      | 37               | 4                 | 10.8%        |        |
| Highlands          | North Waghi Open    | 29               | 3                 | 10.3%        |        |
| Southern           | Middle Fly Open     | 29               | 3                 | 10.3%        |        |

Source: Haley, 2019.

With regards to first preference votes received by female candidates, the highest primary vote shares to women candidates were found in Rigo Open and Central Provincial, and Kavieng Open electorates, which were all above 10 per cent (see Table 5). In Kavieng Open, a matrilineal society in the New Guinea Islands (NGI) region, 13 per cent of primary vote share was given to three women candidates out of 22 contenders. In Rigo Open electorate, a patrilineal society, the eight women candidates who contested alongside 31 men candidates received 10 per cent of the primary vote share. As aggregates with reference to provincial performances, the women candidates in Rigo Open and Central Provincial performed better at the polls than Wewak Open and East Sepik Provincial, Kikori Open and Gulf Provincial, Manus

Open and Manus Provincial and Moresby Northeast and National Capital District Regional (see Table 6).

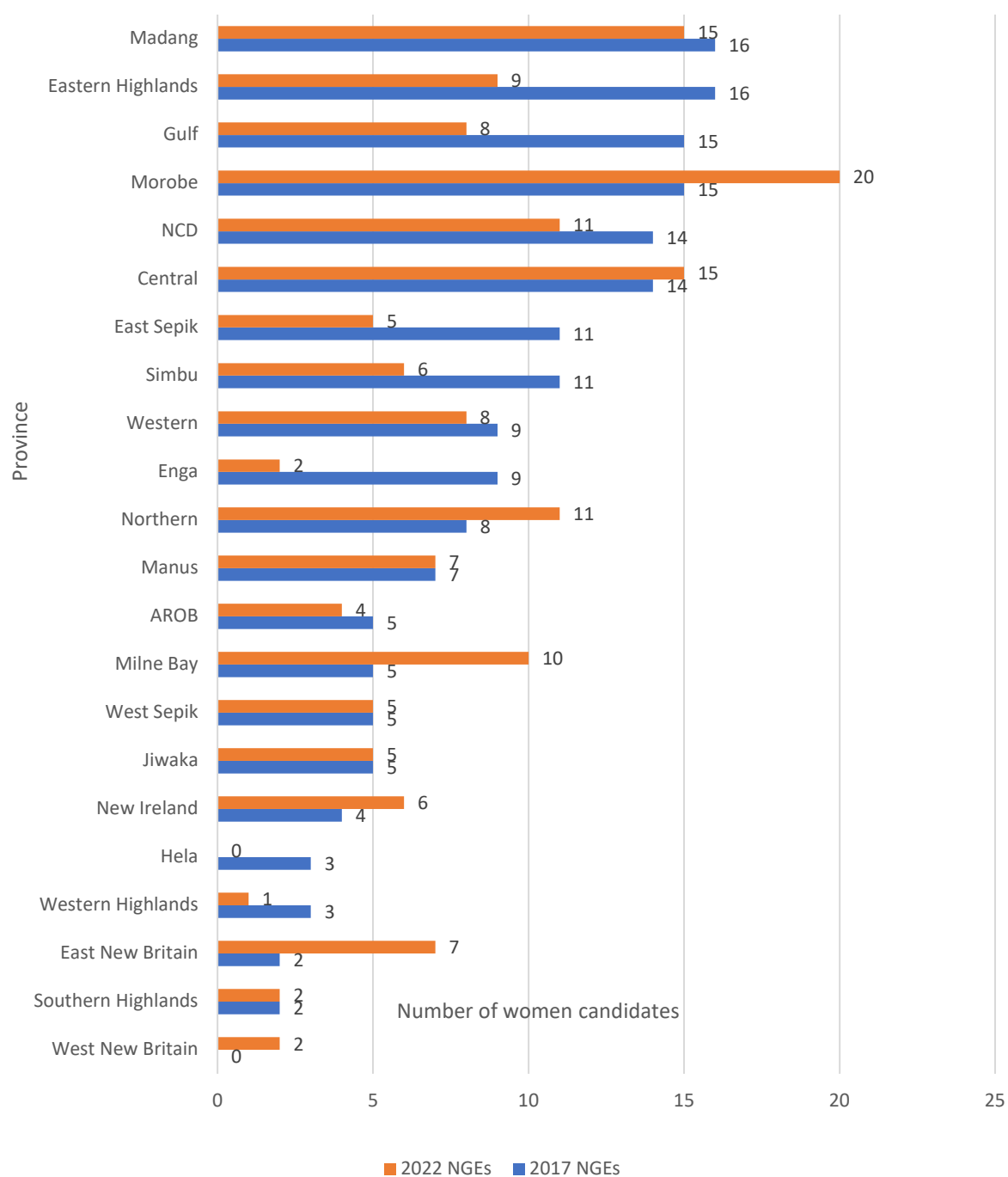
**Table 6: Highest primary vote share given to women candidates in 12 electorates: 2017**

| <b>Electorate</b>                  | <b>Total allowable ballots</b> | <b>1st preference received by female candidates</b> | <b>votes Primary vote share for female candidates</b> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Central Provincial                 | 139,089                        | 22,315                                              | 16.0%                                                 |
| Rigo Open & Central Provincial     | 170,831                        | 25,653                                              | 15.0%                                                 |
| Kavieng Open                       | 23,434                         | 3,159                                               | 13.5%                                                 |
| Rigo Open                          | 31,742                         | 3,338                                               | 10.5%                                                 |
| East Sepik Province                | 216,194                        | 14,760                                              | 6.8%                                                  |
| Gulf Provincial                    | 66,110                         | 4,217                                               | 6.4%                                                  |
| Wewak Open & East Sepik Provincial | 250,114                        | 15,499                                              | 6.2%                                                  |
| Manus Open                         | 23,259                         | 1,316                                               | 5.7%                                                  |
| Kikori Open & Provincial           | Gulf 89,060                    | 4,717                                               | 5.3%                                                  |
| Manus Open & Provincial            | Manus 46,550                   | 2,198                                               | 4.7%                                                  |
| Manus Provincial                   | 23,291                         | 882                                                 | 3.8%                                                  |
| Moresby Northeast                  | 68,773                         | 1,831                                               | 2.7%                                                  |
| Wewak Open                         | 33,920                         | 739                                                 | 2.2%                                                  |
| Kikori Open                        | 22,950                         | 500                                                 | 2.2%                                                  |
| Moresby Northeast & NCD Regional   | 210,412                        | 3,730                                               | 1.8%                                                  |
| NCD Regional                       | 141,639                        | 1,899                                               | 1.3%                                                  |
| New Ireland Provincial             | 57,552                         | 446                                                 | 0.8%                                                  |

Source: Haley, 2019.

In 2022, Morobe province had the highest number of women contestants, Central and Madang followed with 15 females each and then Northern and NCD. All the other provinces had less than 10 female candidates. In 2022, West New Britain had two female candidates (see Figure 4). In 2017 and 2022, Central province was among the six provinces that had more than ten women contesting the NGEs.

**Figure 4: Women candidates per province in 2017 and 2022 NGEs**



Source: Figure compiled from data recorded by the PNG Electoral Commission (pngec.gov.au).

## **1.5 My approach to the research question**

I began my PhD journey in October 2017. In December of that year, in my first meeting with the primary supervisor and chair of my supervisory panel, I mentioned that I wanted to look at the eight women candidates who had contested the Rigo Open electorate in the 2017 NGEs. When my panel asked if I had voted for any of them, I said that I had not because I did not know them. Two of those eight women – Vavine Kila Nades and Iammo Launa Gapi – had been in a top ten position at the time of their elimination, performing better than most of the men who contested the same electorate as them.

Earlier that year, I had been part of a research project funded by the National Democratic Institute of PNG looking at election violence against women in the 2012 NGEs. When the project team leader handed over the data we had collected, we were told that the male responses were not going to be used because the focus of the research was women and the abuse, they had encountered during the 2012 NGEs. I thought this was an interesting case because the semi-structured questions had asked an array of questions covering a myriad of topics and yet the men's views were brushed aside. This response provided me with a research pathway; that is, I was determined to look beyond the eight women candidates and instead consider their candidacy through the lens of the citizens who elected them – both men and women. In particular, I became curious about the motivations of voters in casting votes for men and women candidates in NGEs. This led me to ask why certain women candidates poll so well compared with male candidates given men dominate elections overall.

As in the rest of PNG society, culture is central to people's social and political behaviour towards women candidates in national elections. As such, it is important to ask why this behaviour, and approach has not been reflected in NGE polling results in some parts of PNG. Are these election results an indication that PNG has a 'strong women' concept, with clearer manifestations in the Southern Region than in Momase, Highlands and New Guinea Islands region? I investigate this question through a mixed methods research approach using focus group discussions and electoral data. This thesis analyses possible explanations for where the highest number of elected female MPs occur in electorates, and why the highest primary vote has been given to women in the Southern Region. However, because of the complexity of defining the issues involved in the possible explanations, and the diversity of the regions, my focus will be on two specific issues: the reasons for the comparatively high number of female

candidates in Rigo District in 2017 (10.5 per cent), and the occurrence of one of the highest percentages of primary vote shares (16 per cent) among female candidates in Central province.

## 1.6 Positionality

My great grandfather was Kauri Iovi, and his wife was Kilai Mare. His father was Iovi Kone, the chief of Veghofi Clan, and her father was Mare Seva, the chief of Geresina in Iruagaro, which later became Kwalimurubu village. Kauri Iovi called the harvest every new year, and when people celebrated the new food from their gardens around the ‘rubu’ (traditional church), he retreated to his house. Kauri Iovi’s family were ‘*goyobu tarimari*’ (harvest people), and this means that the head of the family decided when the village would have the feast of the first harvest. Before my great-great-grandfather died, he gifted my great grandmother, Kilai Mare, his only daughter, land who took this piece of land to my great-grandfather, Kauri Iovi. With my relationship to the Rigo electorate, I believe that I am in a strong position to write about voter behaviour and attitudes towards women candidates in Rigo electorate.

In conducting my fieldwork in Rigo electorate in 2019, although I saw myself as an insider, I was not always received with open arms. This was because I was interacting with people in a space that extended beyond the political boundaries of my own village, and I was therefore to some extent an outsider. In the coastal villages of Rigo, where I went to conduct focus group discussions, some citizens treated me with suspicion because then sitting member Lekwa Gure was from Babaka village in Rigo Coast Rural LLG. The participants in this LLG thought that I was preparing for the 2022 NGEs. Some women were openly hostile because I was seen as representing a group of women living outside of Rigo electorate, and they also feared that should I succeed in the election, I would turn my back on them and forget their many plights, such as dysfunctional health services, deteriorating feeder roads that connect them to markets and goods and services in Port Moresby and Kwikila, Rigo electorate’s administrative headquarters, and water shortages during droughts. As such, their responses were minimal, and they treated me with disdain. Surprisingly, their menfolk were a lot more sympathetic and accommodating in their responses to me. This made me wonder why there is such a difference between men and women, and whether there is a cultural nuance for competitive influence among women. I have also become very curious about whether men can become feminists.

Suffice to say, every course of action is value driven. As such, culture acts as an unwritten constitution, informing practitioners’ social, political and economic behaviour. Narakobi (1980,

p. 4) notes that ‘Melanesian life is not intended to be syllogistically logical or consistent; it is meant to be reflective of human life which is experience filled with inconsistencies, contradictions, emotions, reason and intellect’. During my fieldwork in 2019 in Rigo Central LLG, in Sabuia village, two dogs started growling next to me as soon as I started talking with the female focus group, and when I went to talk to the male group, the female dog left, and the male dog followed me and continued its growling. In the men’s group, an old man had sat in, and every time he responded he pointed a finger at me. The message was nuanced but I got the meaning, that they, the people, were angry with me. This was because two weeks prior to my visit, a delegation from this village had gone to the open member, Honorable Lekwa Gure’s office in Port Moresby to put in a proposal for a water pump, and a representative from the minister’s office had told them that they only ‘looked at’ bigger villages’ requests. When I went a week later to conduct my focus group discussions, the people were prepared for my visit because they saw me as a representative of the Rigo Open member. When I commented on the growling dog during our discussion, all the men laughed and told me the dog was ‘*tau kwaivana*’ (a male dog). When I went home that evening, I fell ill, because, 1. I had sat among men who most probably carried on their persons some form of magic charm for protection on them; and 2. in sitting with the men I had broken a custom of Rigo where I had sat and talked about matters concerning women with men who were not related to me by blood.

In Gomore village in Rigo Central LLG, I conducted an in-depth interview with another old man. This man mentioned that he used to be known as ‘One’. He explained that sorcerers work in bands, but he worked alone, thus the name ‘One’. After my discussions with him, I fell ill that night.

When I went to Saroakeina village, an old man accompanied me and my brothers. He had said, ‘*Auna touraghe gana o iagoni be wagu, au maki bana rakakau*’ (You are going to my platform, so, my niece, I must walk with you). Unknown to me, when I was with my female focus group, he sat with the male group and told the participants that I was their woman, and when I went to talk to the men’s group, he went to the women’s group to tell them I was their woman. I was unaware that he was campaigning for me for the 2022 national general election. When I went home that night, I fell ill again.

In all three instances, I had to return to those villages to apologise. I had unintentionally given villagers the impression that I intended to stand for election in 2022. I had sat with men at ‘their table’ and had engaged directly with them. In those discussions I had made them discuss

‘woman and her sexuality’. At Sabuia, I went and left food, in Gomore, I gave money, and in Saroakeina my father apologized on my behalf and the village councilor made a public announcement in the village that I was conducting research.

To avoid further mistakes, I returned with my father and my mother, and my father apologized on my behalf. When I went to speak to village councilors of my impending visit to conduct focus group discussions in January 2019, my brothers spoke to the village councilors on my behalf and I only approached them if one of my brothers told me, ‘*Mani vau gemu ura no kiravaraya*’ (Now you can tell him what you want). This approach put me in a good position because the councilors saw that I was observing the customs that suggest that men are the heads of the community, and I can only speak if I am given permission to speak. Showing respect enabled me to have access to people because the councilors made sure that when I arrived in their villages to conduct my focus group discussion, I had participants waiting for me.

When I sat with the men, my brothers sat with me, and when I sat with the women, my brothers took their leave. In Geresi village in Rigo Central LLG, I was criticised for an hour by the male participants, one man telling me that if I had gone into their village during ‘colonial times’ I would have returned to my village in a coffin, and in Toule, the women from Bagubara village in Rigo North LLG scolded me, asking what I was going to do for them. This group of women thought that I was preparing for the 2022 elections, and they told me that they were tired of being lied to by candidates and politicians. When participants sat on the ground, I also sat on the ground with them and I wore my mother’s skirts on all my visits, which meant two elastic skirts that went right down to my ankles, because covering my body very well would project an image of respect to the men and older women and make me appear as a woman worthy of their time because I was coming as an equal, a woman like any other village woman.

I do not claim the status of anthropologist because I do not write about the people of Rigo nor did I need to learn their language to do a study of them. Instead, I write with them about our truths because their stories are my stories, and their values are my values (Nade, 2013). This is not a quest to romanticise a group of people, but it is a mission to unmask the feminist element in patrilineal Papua through Rigo electorate; the people spoke, and their values concerning women were translated into the ballots on election days. I hope our story will shed light on Papuan citizens’ behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates in the Southern Region of PNG.

Barbara and Haley state that ‘success for women candidates should not be judged solely based on electoral victory’. They go on to say that electoral success may involve increasing the vote share of women candidates, a narrowing of the success gap and an increasing number of credible women candidates running for office. These, they say, are ‘important steps to long-term political visibility, influence, and success’, suggesting that ‘identifying the metrics of success of victorious male and female candidates and developing selection criteria and processes to recruit women candidates who possess these attributes is one way to securing successful campaigns during NGEs’ (Barbara & Haley, 2016, pp. 1–2). Thus, the way to increase the success rate of female candidates involves better understanding of the interplay between relationships in society and the norms that society constructs to determine who gets to occupy a place in the public domain and who does not.

## **1.7 Thesis overview**

This thesis has seven chapters, including this **Introduction**. This chapter gives a situational background to PNG’s political landscape, identifying the women candidates who were appointed and elected to parliament and then discusses the make-up of the institution, focusing on the number and types of electorates as a background to where and how the electorate seats fit into the structure of the parliament. It outlines the research question and discusses my approach to the research problem. I have described my positionality in this chapter as a way of justifying my suitability to exploring voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates and their electoral behaviours using culture as my framework.

**Literature review:** Chapter two looks at two main themes as a guide to reviewing research that has been done on women’s representation at the national level in PNG. I find that so much focus has been on women candidates and the barriers preventing them from being voted into parliament, voters have not been considered, especially those who cast votes for women on polling days during NGEs in PNG. I also draw on the literature that discusses the pre-colonial social, political and economic activities of the people to analyse the cultural motivations behind people’s choices for and against voting for women candidates.

**Research design:** Chapter three discusses the mixed methods approach to my research and provides a justification for why this approach was suited to my project. I used focus group discussions and interviews to collect qualitative data concerning the laws that inform political behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates alongside election results from NGEs as

quantitative data to triangulate my findings on the hypothesis that PNG has a strong woman concept.

**Defining strong women candidates:** Chapter four discusses the ‘strong women’ candidates who placed in the top five in the elections contested from 1972 to 2022, and the four variables I use to quantify strength: how many got elected to parliament, their placing regarding electorate averages, their ranking among the top five candidates, and their final vote share. It also discusses the barriers candidates, especially women candidates, contend with during elections, focussing on the formal and informal rules in the election processes of PNG: the patrilineal and matrilineal systems of regions and the electoral system.

**Strong women as those elected:** Chapter five discusses the ten women candidates who were elected to parliament. Despite the barriers stacked against women candidates, these ten women – Dame Josephine Abaijah, Waliyato Clowes, Nahau Rooney, Dame Carol Kidu, Julie Soso, Loujaya Toni, Delilah Gore, Rufina Peter, Kessy Sawang and Francesca Semoso – became legislators when voters placed their trust in them. It also considers their achievements and the controversies in which they were embroiled while serving their terms in parliament as a reflection of their electoral strength.

**Strong women candidates as those valued by voters:** Chapter six presents culture as the key framework to look at voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates, with Rigo electorate as a case study. In the context of traditional PNG societies, it is difficult to generalise about the political role of women. Given its diversity, one can only speak of a number of models (Sepoe, 1996). As such, I investigate Rigo electorate to understand voter behaviours and attitudes towards male and female candidates in that area, especially in the 2017 national elections, with the hope of explaining why women candidates from Papua, also known as the Southern Region, generally perform better than women candidates from other parts of PNG. The chapter discusses the important roles women played in pre-colonial times and how these values and principles regarding women informed voter attitudes towards women candidates during NGEs in Rigo electorate, with the hope that it will provide insights into voters’ political behaviours in the Southern Region.

**Discussion and conclusion:** The final chapter (chapter 7) summarises the whole thesis in an attempt to tie together its various threads. It also discusses the importance and relevance of having women working alongside men in the policy making space at the national level and how the findings that emerge from the study of Rigo could better women’s chances for election to

parliament. This discussion leads me to revisit the idea of Temporary Special Measures and the 2012 proposal to establish twenty-two reserved seats for women in PNG.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Women's relative exclusion from the parliaments of the Pacific is well documented (see Baker, 2019; Huffer, 2006; McLeod, 2015, p. 6). While PNG compares unfavourably with many of its Pacific neighbours, women political leaders fare better in Cook Islands, Samoa and Fiji (Pacific Women in Politics, 2024). PNG, like the rest of the region, has enabling laws that promote women's political participation in local, sub-national or national elections (Huffer, 2006; McLeod, 2015, p.6). However, since 1972, only ten women have been elected to parliament. They are Josephine Abaijah, Waliyato Clowes, Nahau Rooney, Carol Kidu, Loujaya Toni, Julie Soso, Delilah Gore, Rufina Peter, Kessy Sawang and Francesca Semoso. Five out of the ten women MPs are from the Southern Region, while two are from Momase and New Guinea Islands respectively, and one is from the Highlands region.

Previous research has focused on women who contested NGEs – and the systemic barriers that prevent them from getting elected – rather than on the considerations of voters in deciding whether or not to vote for them. This approach leaves open an opportunity to consider why those voters who choose to support women candidates do so, and the regional and cultural factors that enable them to make these decisions. This literature review considers two major themes that constantly emerge in studies of women's political representation in the public domain in PNG: the barriers that prevent women from being elected to parliament and the influence of culture on the electoral behaviours of voters.

### **2.2 Understanding women's entry into parliament**

Studies on women's lack of political representation at the national level in PNG show that there are significant barriers to women's election. Commonly cited barriers include money politics, patriarchal constructs such as the big-man concept and other notions of masculinity, and the broader culture. In this chapter, I will discuss these barriers thematically, using culture as the framework to synthesise these discussions. An underlying theme in this literature is that the lack of women's presence in parliament is attributable to the cultural practices of voters and the patriarchal systems they observe. I argue that understanding the cultural practices of voters is important to understanding their electoral behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates

because, in the final analysis, voters decide, with or without coercion, which candidate will get a vote from them and which ones will not.

### **2.2.1 Culture as an explanatory framework**

Finlayson (2015, p. 126) notes that,

[Cultural Studies] encourages us to see our subject in a much wider societal and cultural context ... it enables us to address important questions about the relationship between politics, culture, and individual experience ... [urging] us to see culture as constitutive of political situations. ... inseparable from the clash of political identity and interest groups. From this perspective our challenge is not that of establishing how culture informs politics or how politics informs culture but that of making sense of the conditions under which (and the ways in which) culture becomes a vitally important location of individual and collective political action, struggle, and contest.

He goes on to say that ‘culture is ordinary, and it is made by ordinary people as they react to and address extraordinary experiences ... Those extraordinary experiences inform specific behaviours towards certain aspects of life’ (Finlayson, 2015, p. 114). For example, before European contact, in Kwalimurubu village in Rigo electorate, parents forbade their children from playing under the rubu because the village people saw that dogs died after they walked under it. One dead dog would have been a coincidence, but several dead dogs was not, and so parents concluded that if their children played under that ‘church’ their children would also die.

The rubu was a platform where the affairs of the village were discussed, where only men sat, and which only certain women known to be ‘*rogea foro*’<sup>1</sup> could approach. When there were feasts for ‘*mamura gabirosi*’<sup>2</sup> (new harvest), as a security measure both for the men who sat on it and the village, markers were put around the platform preventing villagers from going beyond it. Finlayson goes on to say that,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘*Vavine*’ is the general term for women. ‘*Rogea*’ is synonym for lady. A ‘*rogea foro*’ is a lady of social standing in the community. It is usually an earned title. Traditionally, she was a woman who produced the biggest and the best yams, she was courteous, soft spoken and hard-working. These attributes usually commanded the respect of the menfolk. A ‘*foro*’ is the longest feather on the tail of the cockerel. Usually, these feathers were the centrepiece of a men’s head-dress.

<sup>2</sup> ‘*Mamura gabirosi*’ is a feast that the people of Rigo still observe. It happens around February, where women bring the first harvest from their new gardens to be blessed. Today, that responsibility lies with the village pastor.

in order to understand a political situation fully one had to ... study not only the stuff of traditional political studies (the processes of government, the personalities in power, the segments of the electorate) and the concerns of traditional political economy (economic development, trade union organization, class domination) but also cultural artefacts and practices of many kinds, all of which have a role in the production and maintenance of forms of identity or experience and in attempts to challenge it. (Finlayson, 2015, p. 115)

### **2.2.2 Indigenous knowledge**

According to Brigg et al.,

Indigenous conceptions and practices of inter-polity relations pre-date contemporary international affairs by hundreds or thousands of years ... the historical and anthropological records, as well as the accounts and continuing practices of Indigenous peoples, are [clear]: Indigenous groups practised and continue to practise trade, diplomacy, regulation of transit and a wide range of other inter-polity relations that deserve the designation 'international'. These modes of inter-polity relations tend to be enabled and supported by sophisticated ways of knowing and constructing political order that are inflected through place and embed knowers and knowledge within the communities that sustain them. (Brigg et al., 2022, p. 891)

And Beier notes that,

withholding recognition of other forms of political community is perhaps the easier to grapple with conceptually because its political aims are transparently clear. It implies having found other social arrangements for the provision of order to be functioning and viable but responding to this with some contrivance toward their exclusion from the realm of political possibility. We see this in the conscious advancement of colonial projects, historic and ongoing, that have entailed the purposeful and oftentimes violent erasure of lifeways, organisational structures, and philosophical traditions of Indigenous peoples. Among other things, this involves the rejection of Indigenous knowledge as knowledge (often by reducing it to myth or superstition) and of Indigenous ways of knowing (dismissing bases of authority over knowledge and practices of knowledge production by way of appeals to culturally specific, Euro-derived epistemological standards). (Beier, 2023, pp. 671–2)

The two quotes above are noteworthy because they recognise that there are ways of knowing, making known and existing other than those promoted in the western Enlightenment tradition of the colonial era. These epistemologies inform, influence and direct people's actions and reactions towards each other and others, and towards their environment. They are contextualised and cannot be reduced to myths and legends just because they are subjective and abstract.

When it comes to women and their political representation at the national level, in as much as holding accountable the cultural practice of voters as the principal perpetrator impeding women's political advancement at the national level, a substantial body of evidence convincingly demonstrates that certain legacies of colonialism must be analysed because through some of its exclusionary practices, it institutionalised and gendered the new order.

### **2.2.3 *Barriers introduced by 'others'***

O'Collins et al. (1985) mention two barriers, one being external influences and the other being internal constraints. Externally, the colonial administration, believing that establishing formal organised groups and clubs for women would increase their influence, went about sponsoring these entities. However, the policy had adverse impacts on the people; it isolated women from the men in the village and internally, these organisations alienated those western-educated, urban women from their rural counterparts (O'Collins et al., 1985, pp. 2–3). If there were already social demarcations in existence in villages between males and females, these organisations further reinforced those divides and created two classes between women; those who lived in towns and were western-educated and those who lived in villages. In traditional societies the only difference between women was age in that the older the woman, the more powers she had.

Offering a different perspective on the gender of power in traditional societies, Josephides (1985, p. 13) discusses the social, political and economic relationships between the genders in Kewa village in the Southern Highlands of PNG, noting that women could veto their husbands' social and economic actions by virtue of their being in charge of the production of food crops and the rearing of pigs (also identified by Lederman (2015, p. 569). This was an effect of men being dominant in wealth exchange and women being the mainstay of horticulture and pig production. Josephides (1985, p. 15) notes that,

upon contact, these dynamics changed when men became the recipients of education in the economics of cash cropping and the production for a market economy, political education and, in the church, gender roles were reinforced. Modern economic, political and social developments pushed women further into the house and under the tutelage of their husbands.

Focusing on the role of gifts, Stewart and Strathern (1998, p. 133) state that,

the predominant paradigm of the Central Highlands societies, regardless of variations in their systems of kinship and locality, has been that they are based on the ideology and practice of gift-exchange, out of which 'big-man' patterns of leadership emerged, and that women gained recognition and respect through their work in the gift-exchange network.

Looking at yet another context, Dickson-Waiko (2013, p. 178) alludes to the impact missionary teaching and training had on some women. She states that they were domesticated in the ways of servanthood, noting that,

the women who experienced colonialism in PNG did so mainly on mission stations, where Victorian notions of domesticity were imparted...The lives of schooled Indigenous female converts were thus channelled into service for the greater community's welfare...For the small number of Indigenous women who engaged directly with the colonial state, their experience was distinctively gendered.

As a result of these colonial and missionary teachings in the private domain, careers and jobs in the public domain were gendered, with women engaged more in nursing and teaching careers in the public domain.

Of the Tubetube women in Milne Bay Province, Macintyre (1985, pp. 20–23) notes that,

the fundamental political unit was the matrilineage or susu (breast or breastmilk: Austronesian/Tok Pisin word). Within the susu all members of the senior generation had authority over younger lineage members, [overseeing] pottery production...Clay pottery manufacture played an important part in the economy, for pots were the major export item...On Tubetube, as in other coastal and island societies in this region, a women's skirt was a powerful symbol of her potency...Simply un[tying] her skirt...was sufficient enough to quell [a] conflict...In the case of Tubetube, where women could traditionally own land and represent their own interests (or those of their

lineages)...their absence from the modern arena of politics cannot be explained with reference to a historical subordination and silence...Tubetube women were not subsumed by male politicking until the period of European intervention.

Scholars such as Hukula, Tararia and Lawrence assert that women in PNG communities were not subdued by patriarchy. Hukula (2018, p. 196) argues that,

Leadership by men in the public sphere does not silence women's voices. Women were very vocal at community meetings, at church related activities and at dispute resolution meetings. For example, while attending a community meeting in July 2010, I witnessed a number of mothers speak very strongly and passionately about the need for all houses in the community to be connected to the city's water supply. In this case, women were the ones interested in raising this issue since they are the ones (together with their children) who carry water for household consumption.

While Tararia notes in her thesis (2022, p. 51) that in New Ireland Province, among the people of Lele, in custom courts women do not preside, but when matters concerning land and inheritance arise, 'women and men collaborate because questions of genealogies and matriliney are women's forte, in doing so, both women and men exercise leadership'.

These studies clearly show that women in PNG occupy places of importance and that they have had agency in the societies they live in.

At first contact, the 'white' people who came to the shores of PNG were undeniably men. As such, they interacted with indigenous men more than they did with indigenous women. Had the reverse been true, where white women had been in the business of spreading the word of God, seeking glory and gold for their mother country, indigenous women would have gone out to meet them on their shores because that is their rule for engagement: men engage with men and women engage with women.

Papua New Guineans were already interacting with people outside their own spheres of influence through activities like trade. In the Southern Region, there are three documented trade systems: the Hiri trade, the Kula ring and the Mailu system; between Momase Region and New Britain was the Vitiaz system; and in the Highlands were the Tee and the Moka networks. As Urwin et al. (2019) explain, in the Hiri trade between the Motuans in Central province and the people of Gulf Province each year,

Motu women would spend months making thousands of earthenware pots. Meanwhile the men built large trading ships, called la[g]atoi, by lashing together several dugout hulls... In October and November, Motu men would load the pots into the ships and sail west towards the rainforest swamplands of the Gulf of Papua... When the men arrived – having sailed up to 400 kilometres along the coast – the Motu were in foreign lands. People living in the Gulf of Papua spoke different languages and had different cultural practices. In exchange for their pots, the Motu were given rainforest hardwood logs from which to make new canoes, and tonnes of sago starch... The Motu would stay in Gulf villages for months, waiting for the wind to change to carry them back home.

Image 1 shows the Hiri trade route between the Motuan people of Central Province and the Kerema people of Gulf Province, Image 2 shows the picture of clay-pots, an earthenware that women specialised in making, indicating that women were also an integral part of the economic life of the village. This product is known to have been exported to the Gulf of Papua by sea on double hulled canoes called a lagatoi (see Image 3).

### Image 1: Hiri trade route



The region termed the 'Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere' where archaeology is gradually uncovering evidence of ancient interconnections. Author provided

## Image 2: Earthenware produced by women



Rows of Motu pots ready for shipment to the Gulf of Papua. The pots are arranged on a beach situated in today's Port Moresby region. Taken by Reverend William G Lawes in 1881-1891. Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA

## Image 3: Lagatoi



A Motu trading ship with its characteristic crab claw shaped sails. Taken in the period 1903-1904. Trustees of The British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA

Source of images and captions: Urwin et al., 2019.

In the Louisiade Archipelago and the D'Entrecasteaux Island existed the Kula ring, a 'trans local, long distance exchange network connecting islands off the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea' (Damon, 2012, p. 139) (see map below). According to Irwin, Shaw and Mcalister (2019, p. 3), 'arm shells [moved] in an anticlockwise direction and necklaces clockwise'

between trade partners. Clay pots, canoe timber, pigs and obsidians were also commoditised for trade. Lawrance (2018, p. 97) pays tribute to this trade network, describing ‘a long history of peoples whose creativity and resilience enabled them to survive and thrive...complex rituals surrounding death, and a systematised approach to social order, to belonging, and to difference, that is contained within the structures that emerge from a descent system based on matriliney’.

**Image 4: The Kula Ring**



Source: Damon, 2015, p. 139.

The external influences of the environment created gendered spaces: the external or the public domain where international interaction and exchange took place (Beier, 2023, p. 670) with men heavily engaged in it, and the domestic sphere where women supported the exchange system from the security of the private domain. Evidently, gendered spaces created out of necessity were reinforced by colonialism. When colonisation arrived on the shores of PNG, men held positions of leadership, and at the death of a father, an eldest son automatically inherited his father's position if he came from a chiefly line. Boys were given the rites to passage through initiation processes. He was never deemed worthy until he fulfilled the rigorous teachings and

trainings of leaders in secluded places. On the other hand, girls were also being initiated. While a son inherited his father's possessions: his land, his magic and his name, a daughter was also inheriting her mother's knowledge to heal, her skills, her magic charms and chants to call food, sometimes men and other times children if the mother possessed such knowledge. However, by design, a woman never held office; she never entered a 'haus boi' a 'haus man' or sat on the platform of the chief or in places where men sat and congregated. If she was of matrilineal descent, then she owned land and made decisions pertaining to it and lineage (see Tararia 2022, p. 40). When colonisation came, there appeared to be no central government except for what appeared to be a 'simple' political and social order, where women were invisible. To the eyes of those outside the cosmologies of indigenous peoples, women's invisibility implied social and political exclusivity. Colonization, looking for a foothold in these foreign lands and these institutions used men's visibility to their advantage to pacify, emancipate and christianise indigenous peoples (see O'Collins, 1985, p. 38; Josephides, 1985, pp. 38–39; Dickson-Waiko 2013, p. 39). Lawrence (2018, p. 97) notes that,

[t]he past that the white people write about is analysed, interpreted and portrayed through a lens of whiteness, [assuming] that whiteness is both singular and universal and hence is the model to which all humankind should aspire. Often, and probably despite the intentions of some of the authors, this limited perspective manifests and contributes to the white...logic that majority world peoples are lacking until such time as Europeans arrive to transform their existence.

Out of a thousand tribes emerged a parliament in 1975 but before that,

cleavages between the Australian colony of Papua and the Trust Territory of New Guinea, between highland and coastal tribes and between mainlanders and islanders, were emphasised often with frightening clarity by angry exchanges among members [in the colonial House of Assembly] ... Antagonisms are deep rooted in ethnic, cultural and environmental differences. (White, 1965, p. 205)

These scholars agree that having a turbulent political environment pre- and post-independence was counterproductive to women's inclusion in the political domain. Eventually, however, two women from the Southern Region; namely, Josephine Abaijah (1972 and 1977) and Waliyato Clowes (1977), and one woman from the New Guinea Islands Region, namely, Nahau Rooney (1977), were made legislators by their voters. Unfortunately, women remain underrepresented in national politics in PNG, and it is one of the aims of this thesis to identify those aspects of

‘strong’ women candidates that have allowed some women to rank highly, or even succeed, in PNG elections since then.

## **2.3 Institutional barriers**

### **2.3.1 Electoral systems**

PNG has changed its electoral system three times; from an Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) system (in elections from 1964 to 1972) to a First Past-The-Post system – (FPTP) (in elections from 1977 to 2002) then to a Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) system since then. Despite these reforms, women continue to be underrepresented at the national level, leading researchers in development studies to focus on women candidates and the barriers that prevent them from being elected to parliament by the voters in their electorates.

Fraenkel (2006, p. 2) states that ‘gender inequality in Pacific parliaments [including PNG]...is not simply a reflection of women’s performance in education or their position in the top echelons of the civil service [but]...an indication that problems exist on the supply-side and in the design of electoral institutions’, the supply-side being the very low numbers of women standing as candidates (Fraenkel, 2006, p. 2) and the design of electoral institutions being ‘the formal and informal rules governing the electoral process’ (Krook & Schwindt-Bayer, 2013, p. 554). Fraenkel (2006, p. 2) infers that the electoral system types in operation create shortages in the supply of women candidates running for office, while Baker (2018) notes that the reforms in voting systems from first past the post in 2002 to limited preferential voting failed to bring about the anticipated increases in women’s representation, and Haley and Zubrinich (2018) conclude that this demonstrates that electoral systems are not gender neutral.

#### **2.3.1.1 A different look at electoral system changes in PNG**

Under the optional preferential voting system operating in 1964, 1968 and 1972, electors expressed a first preference (defined as number 1) for a candidate and then were given an option of marking as many further preferences (2, 3, 4, etc) for other candidates as they chose. In practice, Reilly (2002, p. 24) has suggested that ‘very low literacy rates meant that many electors were not capable of independently numbering preferences themselves’. This gave rise to the trend of a ‘whispering ballot’ whereby electors mentioned their preferences to a polling officer, who would then mark the ballot paper for them. Okole (2003) notes that ‘in theory, the

optional preferential system tried to ensure that a candidate won with more than 50 per cent of the votes' (Okole, 2003, p. 2). Under this electoral system, on the eve of independence, one woman was voted into the colonial House of Assembly.

In 1977, when PNG shifted to a FPTP electoral system, this was, as Reilly (2002, p. 247) explains, 'on the grounds that the optional preferential system was excessively complicated and... introduced by the Australian administration, it was a colonial institution unsuited to the new country's needs and conditions'. As Reilly (2002, p. 247) further notes, critics argued that due to 'the potentially lengthy time to achieve results under OPV rules, there was increased tension and disputation'. According to Fraenkel (2006, p. 9), the first-past-the-post system requires a single vote for a single member, meaning the candidate with the largest number of votes wins, with this being the least favourable system for women candidates. Following the 1977 elections, academics and government officials claimed that the FPTP system had the tendency to encourage zero-sum campaigning and clan block voting (Reilly, 2002, p. 247). However, it was not until the 1982 elections that serious consideration of the reintroduction of preferential voting began, with the new Somare government attempting to re-introduce it. The proposed change was defeated in a backbench revolt in a demonstration of the weakness of the PNG political party system. In 1986, the Minister for Justice, Warren Dutton, made another attempt. Again, it was unsuccessful (Reilly, 2002, p. 147). A further attempt at reintroducing preferential voting was made before the 1997 general elections as well. Again, there was backbench resistance. Under the FPTP system, 176 women contested the NGEs and four were made MPs.

In 2007 change finally did occur, with PNG adopting the limited preferential voting system with the claim that the FPTP system was not contributing to creating a national attitude and candidates could win by only a slim plurality (Reilly, 2002, p. 251). The preferential voting system sought to broaden a candidate's representativeness. Indeed, the majority of politicians in the first past the post electoral system won their seats by a margin of victory of less than 6 per cent over the runner-up (Okole, 2001). Under the limited preferential voting system, about 563 women have contested the NGEs and only six have been elected as representatives of the electorates they contested.

In this thesis I examine a group of candidates I classify as strong women candidates, and in so doing I include both those women who became MPs as well as those who ranked in the top five candidates in their seats. I include the latter group because gaps exist in the electoral data for

all elections except for the 2017 and 2022 NGEs, and as these top five candidates are identifiable by gender, this makes tracking easier (see Table 7). It is clear that the electoral system has had an impact on the ability of women to place in the top five. Under optional preferential voting, more women were able to secure significantly more votes (25 per cent of all candidates could be described as strong). Conversely, women comprised only up to six per cent of all candidates who might be described as strong under the first-past-the-post system. While these figures remain very low, they are significant because they are indications that while women are not getting into parliament in large numbers, voters are casting enough ballots for them to either win an electorate seat or place in the top five at their elimination in the final counts. Women have performed as stronger candidates under limited preferential voting, and this group appears to be increasing by election.

**Table 7: Election systems and strong women candidates: 1964–2022**

| <b>Election year</b>                | <b>Number of seats</b> | <b>Percentage of strong women candidates</b> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Optional preferential voting</b> |                        |                                              |
| 1964                                | 54                     | --                                           |
| 1968                                | 84                     | --                                           |
| 1972                                | 100                    | 25                                           |
| <b>First-past-the-post voting</b>   |                        |                                              |
| 1977                                | 109                    | 33                                           |
| 1982                                | 109                    | 6                                            |
| 1987                                | 109                    | 0                                            |
| 1992                                | 109                    | 0                                            |
| 1997                                | 109                    | 4                                            |
| 2002                                | 109                    | 2                                            |
| <b>Limited preferential voting</b>  |                        |                                              |
| 2007                                | 111                    | 1                                            |
| 2012                                | 111                    | 2                                            |
| 2017                                | 111                    | 5                                            |
| 2022                                | 118                    | 7                                            |

Source: Information adapted by author from Sepoe, 1996; Fairio 2014; Haley & Zubrinich, 2018.

Given very few women compared to men contest NGEs every five years in PNG, and fewer women than men are made MPs by their constituencies, there is validity in the analyses offered by Fraenkel (2006), Baker (2018) and Haley and Zubrinich (2018). However, an analysis of the data presented in Table 6 shows that since 1972, the number of women MPs has increased, and the number of women candidates who make it into the top five is also increasing.

### **2.3.2 *Voting along a network of social relationships***

The other barrier that is commonly discussed in the literature looking at women's political representation at the national level in PNG is the practice of voting along a network of social relationships (Baker, 2025, p. 14; Ketan, 2007, cited in Meki, 2021, p. 3), because voting for a known party is beneficial to both parties (Wood, 2016, p. 35). According to Kurer (2007, p. 41), 'that in the PNG context include benefits for clans, such as government contracts, as well as for individuals, such as money for feasts, bride prices, tickets for people to travel, jobs in the public service, or credit for personal use or business ventures', and Standish (2007, pp. 140–41) notes that 'patron–client politics is played with state resources across the country...Local issues and identities are extremely important, far more so than party membership, policies or even money'. While this practice is disadvantageous for women, the participation of many candidates in elections also means a candidate may need only a small vote share to win election (Fraenkel, 2004, p.123, cited in Kurer, 2007, p. 40).

However, within the limited preferential voting system, a voter in PNG has three preferences. As such, voters also make rational choices. As Scott (2000, pp. 127–128) explains, 'rational choice theories [see] individuals [being] motivated by the wants or goals that express their preferences...Rational choice theories hold that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them' based on their social and economic circumstances. For example, if free education or subsidised tuition fees is a policy platform for a political party, a candidate who campaigns under that party would be a rational choice for parents who cannot afford to pay their children's school fees.

### **2.3.3 *The big-man and money politics***

Baker and Opperman (2015) note that the political environment in Melanesia remains hostile for women candidates, with studies showing that the big-man and money politics are also factors contributing to the unfavourable environment (see also Baker, 2015, p. 14; Baker, 2018; Huffer, 2006; Meki, 2012; Meki, 2020, p. 25; Pollard, 2003; Whittington et al., 2006; Wiltshire et al., 2020; Wood, 2016).

The term 'big-man' is the Anglicisation of the descriptive phrase 'bikpela man' used to refer to 'male leaders whose political influence is achieved by means of public oratory, informal

persuasion, and the skilful conduct of both private and public wealth exchanges' (Lederman, 2015, p. 567). As Wyeth (2017) notes,

the Big Man is not a hereditary position, but one earned through a power of persuasion, empathy, and an ability to secure resources and distribute them fairly within the tribe or Wantok...The Big Man's position is constantly challenged by other men who seek to gather resources and prove themselves more capable than the current Big Man. This traditional culture has transmitted itself onto the country's modern-day politics, where allegiance to the Wantok is deemed more valuable than any wider national vision.

Making a similar point about the role of oratory, resource management and charisma in the big-man concept, Langenheimer (2012, p. 1) states that 'electability [in PNG] is not predicated on creeds, but on the power and charisma of the individual, his clan affiliations, his political allegiances and his ability to satisfy the immediate interests of his supporters'.

Making a related point, Stewart and Strathern (1998, p. 132) note that,

Papua New Guinea's Westminster-style democracy has provided avenues for such emergent leaders to enter into politics, and the emphasis on wealth and its distribution as a means of attaining and legitimizing political power has given a particular cast to the activities of politicians generally, who need wealth both to gain votes and to reward supporters. Such local imperatives have driven the national political machine to provide sectoral funds for direct distribution by politicians in their electorates, bypassing the public service channels. Democracy has thus been diverted into patronage, and strong policy-based political parties have not emerged.

Haley and Zubrinich (2015, p. 1) state that money politics is now evident in parts of PNG where there is no 'big man and where cultures of competitive exchange are largely absent'. This observation is verified by Scaglione (1996, p. 8), who, in earlier work, spells out the many chiefdoms relevant to the electoral process:

A non-exhaustive list of additional Austronesian-speaking Melanesian chiefdoms would include the Roro, Motu, Nara, Kabadi, Sinaugoro and Hula of [the Southern Region] (Seligman 1910; Davis 1981; Groves 1963), the Trobriands [of the Southern Region] (Malinowski 1922; Powell 1960; Weiner 1976; Mosko 1985: 209-33), the Kalauna [of West Papua (Young 1971; 1983; nd), the Wogeo [from East Sepik Province in Momase Region] (Hogbin 1960), the Baluan of Manus (Otto, n.d.). ... A number of

non-Austronesian-speaking chiefdoms have also been described, however, including the Purari, the Toaripi and the Elema of the Papuan Gulf (William 1940) and the Koita of Southeast Papua [all from the Southern Region] (Seligmann 1910).

For the Sinaugoro and Hula speakers of Rigo District, the terms used for chief are ‘*vere*’ and ‘*velekou*’. Here,

the right to occupy such offices is limited to certain people in the society, typically those within a certain kin group or special family. To varying degrees, “chiefs” have authority over certain resources and can allocate or redistribute them. Their activities and duties may extend to many spheres, including the economic (collect tribute, redistribute goods), ideological (sponsor ceremonies, guard public morals), administrative (appoint officials, organize labour), and judicial (adjudicate disputes, punish wrongdoers). (Scaglione, 1996, p. 8)

For women wanting to contest NGEs in PNG, the task is mammoth because of the lack of financial means to aid their electoral campaigns, causing them to either shy away from running in elections (Haley and Zubrinich, 2015; Huffer, 2006; Pollard, 2003; Whittington et al., 2006) or run but are unsuccessful because of their inability to buy votes through money, goods and favour.

### **2.3.4 Masculinity and politics**

Another barrier discussed in the literature on women’s political representation at the national level is the notion of masculinity. Shvedova (2005, p. 34) argues that men largely dominate the political arena ‘[by] formulating the rules of the political game ... [organising] it according to male norms and values, where ideas of winners and losers, competition and confrontation rather than systemic collaboration and consensus [prevail], especially across party lines’, while McDermott (McDermott, 2016, p. 83) describes masculine traits in PNG as being competitive, domineering, and defensive of one’s own beliefs. Likewise, Fife (1995, p. 278) gives a contextual definition of masculinity in PNG, stating that

some of the better-known roles can be glossed as political leader, peace maker, feast giver, warrior, ritual expert, master artisan, trader, or influential man, forming the opinion that all these ideal roles have one common denominator; a personal forcefulness

defined as the ability to interject oneself into events and affect their outcome in a certain way.

Mirroring many of these points, Haley and Zubrinich (2015, p. 31) note that ‘the pervasiveness of masculine political cultures and a view that politics is man’s work’ contribute to the lack of women MPs, while Baker (2015) says that rigid gender roles, supporting a tradition of male dominated public debate, prevent women from being elected by voters, and Sepoe (1996) similarly describes big-man politics in PNG as a masculine construct. Baker and Opperman (2015, p. 49) also note that the political environment in PNG remains hostile for women candidates. Studies have shown that masculine political cultures also contribute to women’s lack of participation at the national level in PNG.

In all the four regions of PNG, the platforms of the chief (Southern), the ‘*hausboi*’ (New Guinea Islands) and the ‘*hausman*’ (Highlands and Momase) are institutions with principles governing their operations. While the *hausboi* and the *hausman* are structures with walls, the chief’s platform is an open structure, all built exclusively for men. However, accessibility to these ‘private’ domains is granted to certain women.

The following responses were prompted by a question I asked in a WhatsApp group about the *hausboi* and *hausman* in the Highlands, New Guinea Islands and Momase regions. Allan Bird, current Governor for East Sepik noted:

Not sure about the ‘*hausman*’ in other parts of PNG ... My experience of *hausman* is a little different. For instance, Sepik River uses skin cutting. This gives you the right to sit in the *hausman*. In fact, the Sepik River *hausman* can also admit certain women based on status (Bird, personal communication, 2024).

The late Bap Korup, a social media activist who administered a web page on Manus issues from Manus Province (2024) said,

one must be initiated to become part of the *hausboi*...Circumcision is done on early teenage boys to initiate them into manhood so that they can reside or live with adult men in the *hausboi*. Our female in-laws are not allowed at all near or into the *hausboi*. Only sisters and aunties have restricted access (Korup, personal communication, 2024).

PNG societies are communal, therefore, wherever there is a gathering of the people, irrespective of gender and age, the space is public. However, when places become defined and segregation occurs, the domain assumes a private status. As such, in this thesis, I identify the *hausboi* and

the hausman of Momase, Highlands and the New Guinea Islands regions as private institutions, because enclosures and the usage of gendered nouns emulate privacy, implying that the space is like an exclusive club, giving access to only certain members of society while excluding others. The Southern Region platform of the chief, and the Lamalilo of the Nakanai open electorate of West New Britain Province, on the other hand, are constructions without walls, indicating that these institutions, while sacred for men, are to some extent accessible to all in society because of the openness of their constructions.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

PNG is a country with great heterogeneity created by its 840 languages and cultures. Some have argued that a gendered culture contributes to women's lack of agency propagates the notion that a lack of voice equates to a lack of political representation in the public domain and reinforces women's subjugation. This approach is unhelpful, however, because it disregards traditional practices that recognise and accord women a place in spaces of influence to co-author change and broker security. Studies on women's political representation show that there are many barriers to women's entry into national politics in PNG, with culture being the principal cause. However, there are two gaps in these studies. Firstly, with so much focus placed on the female candidates, voters and their perspectives are overlooked in the dynamics. There is evidence that voters do vote for some women candidates in high enough numbers that they perform better than many male candidates, in some cases placing them in the top five. Secondly, some women perform well enough above group averages that they have won their electorates. With Southern Region women candidates doing better at the polls than the other women candidates, Rigo Open electorate presents the opportunity to provide a possible explanation. In the next chapter, I will discuss other barriers to women's political advancement, noting that, despite these barriers, women continue to perform well at the polls, but face more barriers than enablers to political participation at the national level today.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research approach, methods (both quantitative and qualitative), and research sites used to answer the primary questions of this thesis: given norms of masculine political leadership and ‘big man’ politics in PNG, can the concept of women’s ‘strength’ explain the support of voters for women candidates? How can strength be measured in the cultural and political context of PNG elections? In which parts of PNG is it more evident that strong women matter?

I chose to do my field work in Rigo Open electorate because eight women contested the open electorate and two of these were in the top ten candidates of their electorates. This compares favourably with the Central Regional electorate where three women contested and only one finished in the top five. According to national electoral data, women candidates from the Southern Region poll better than women candidates from other parts of PNG. Furthermore, out of the ten women MPs since 1972, five were from Southern, two from the Momase and New Guinea Islands regions and one from the Highlands region. While these numbers are not high, I am interested in what lies behind the numbers, and the social drivers behind voters’ behaviours in choosing their representatives, including women. Because of the fragmented nature of PNG in terms of culture, language and topography, I looked at the voters of Rigo Open electorate as a case study to seek explanations.

I begin this discussion by relating my own experiences as a female researcher in Rigo as a way of illustrating the difficulties candidates face while campaigning in Rigo. Of the 25 villages in which I conducted focus group discussions, seven were in Rigo Central Rural LLG, four use feeder roads and three are located on the Magi Highway. Of the fourteen villages located in Rigo Central Rural LLG, nine are inaccessible during the rainy season, including the four villages in Rigo East Rural LLG.

Before I began my fieldwork in 2019, I first identified the candidates who had been in the top five for the Rigo Open electorate in the 2017 national elections. Next, focusing on the eight women who contested, I mapped out their vote bases. Seeing that all the highest performing candidates were from Rigo Coast Rural LLG, I decided to spread my fieldwork across the electorate to avoid biases. I paid attention mostly to those villages that use access roads. After

identifying the villages where I proposed to conduct focus group discussions, I began looking for a vehicle to hire. Because of the locations I was going visit, vehicle owners I approached said that they did not want to put their trucks at risk. However, there was one owner who said he could help me, but his rates were K500 per day (just over AU\$190). In the end, I paid him a total of K5000 (a little over AU\$2000) for the use of his vehicle, being mindful that the rains could arrive in March or April.

After securing a vehicle, I started paying visits to the 25 chosen villages. I chose LLG councillors as my middlemen because they are the gatekeepers to the village on matters concerning the secular world, the other gatekeeper being the village Pastor and the congregation chairperson who address matters concerning the religious activities in the village. Anything associated with the government is dealt with by the village councillor because he is the face of the government. I was unable to go to four villages; two because the feeder roads leading to them were under water and the other two because there was a death in one and I had organised to visit these two villages on the same day. I paid every councillor K50 (AU\$25) for them to arrange participants for the focus group discussions I was going to conduct. I used the month of February to make these arrangements.

In March, I started visiting the villages. Initially I had budgeted to pay K20 each to eight participants per village. For most villages however, the participant numbers exceeded my anticipated budget. After the fifth group, I decided to take food to the remaining villages. My expenses included food for the participants, stipends for the driver and the team of men who accompanied me, and lunch and breakfast for them because our days started at 6:30 am and finished at 5:30 pm every day. In four villages I was scolded by the participants because they thought I was a representative of the sitting member for Rigo Open, Lekwa Gure. They told me that the government only went to their doorsteps on election days and they did not want me to waste their time.

While this thesis is about strong women candidates, I include my experience as a female researcher to give insights into potentially similar complexities candidates faces during elections. Candidates who run for an open electorate contest an immediate area that is a subdivision of a provincial electorate. This subdivision is a collective of wards also known as villages in rural areas. A provincial electorate on the other hand is the primary administrative division accommodating several open electorates. Just as my research project was costly, running election campaigns is an expensive exercise. In canvassing voters, candidates, whether

women or men, must consider the financial implications of such an operation. Disbursements may include transportation, payments to individuals on campaign committees, food, drinks, and election merchandise for possible voters. Those who contest an open electorate have a smaller area to campaign in compared to a candidate who contests a regional electorate. In the political context of PNG, where people living in villages often depend on outsiders to support living costs, conducting research has also become an exercise in disbursement. Women candidates have less financial support, so these costs are harder to meet than for men.

### **3.2 Research approach**

In making my argument, I use both culture and region as an analytical framework and method of interpretation. In this section, I present a cultural understanding of PNG's regions by way of explaining the research approach of the thesis. Sepoe (1992, p. 106) states that

in the context of traditional PNG societies, it is difficult to generalise about the political role of women. Given its diversity, one can only speak of several models. The predominantly patrilineal societies in PNG were male dominated in decision making...However, it appears that in the few matrilineal societies in pre-colonial PNG, women had a more elevated role in politics.

For Sepoe, generalisations misunderstand the role of patrilineal and matrilineal systems in political socialisation. The specific nature of relationships between men and women is in part dependent on regions. As stated in a 1998 World Bank study:

It is often assumed that women have always had a lower status to men in Papua New Guinean society. This is not the case as history of different provinces within PNG reveals. The matrilineal nature of provinces, such as Milne Bay, has contributed to a very different social and cultural environment for women than other more traditionally patriarchal regions, such as the Highlands. (Brouwer, Harris & Tanaka, 1998, p. 1)

It is only through close investigation of the values and norms of practitioners of a certain cultural background that one can understand the meaning of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours concerning women. While an outsider may see the lack of women in parliament as evidence of suppression, oppression, and lack of agency for women, the lived experiences of the practitioners may point to issues and dynamics other than gender inequalities.

In addition, the regional variation in the election of women parliamentarians in PNG (five from the Southern Region, two from Momase, two from the New Guinea Islands Region and one from the Highlands region), means there is also a need to consider cultural variation by region.

### **3.2.1 Southern Region**

The Southern Region is made up of the Western, Gulf, Central, Milne Bay and Oro provinces, all being predominantly patrilineal except for Milne Bay. Even in Milne Bay, however, the Samarais practice a variation of chiefly or big-man leadership. The first-born son inherits the leadership role from the father, which passes from generation to generation. However, like the Tolai people, women also possess a leadership role, retaining the right over land titles and automatically assume a traditional leadership role. Women play an influential role in discussion and decision-making in the communities (Prideaux, 2006, p. 7). As noted above, sons inherit traditional leadership. However, younger generations from different clan groups are assuming contemporary leadership roles without necessarily holding chiefly status. Women, nevertheless, participate in the decision-making process, even if they do not say much and generally take on greater responsibilities in their communities and families than the men (Prideaux 2006, p. 7). The Southern Region has produced five women politicians to date, namely Josephine Abaijah, Carol Kidu, Waliyato Clowes, Delilah Gore and Rufina Peter.

### **3.2.2 New Guinea Islands**

The New Guinea Islands region consists of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and the provinces of East New Britain, West New Britain, Manus and New Ireland. The region is predominantly matrilineal except for Manus province. As Rimoldi and Rimoldi (1992, p. 156) explain, in matrilineal societies, a woman's children 'belong to her matriclan. Status and rights to land [are] inherited through mothers and sisters'. Because women own the land, they are responsible for land decisions in their clan, and this gives women a relatively higher status in their communities.

#### **3.2.2.1 The Autonomous Region of Bougainville**

There are some variations across matrilineal societies in the New Guinea Islands region. What has become known as the Autonomous Region of Bougainville has a particular approach to women's roles in decision-making:

In Bougainville, a woman's decisions are conveyed through a brother or an uncle who speaks on her behalf and is trusted to convey her decisions at meetings attended by men only. The women decide the ownership and the usage of land...land is passed down to her daughters who pass it down to their daughters and so on ...Over the course of their lives, they have studied their land and come to understand its value well. In this sense they maintain the longest relationship with the land, as they become one with it. This gives these women more power as they do not have to move to make a new life like their sisters in patrilineal societies. (Koian, 2010, p. 28)

The province has produced one woman MP – Francesca Semoso – who is the sitting member for North Bougainville Open electorate.

### 3.2.2.2 East and West New Britain provinces

Both East and West New Britain provinces are also matrilineal societies. The Tolai women of East New Britain Province assume traditional leadership roles and are vested with land ownership rights. However, men may also assume leadership responsibilities, with most decisions made by the men in consultation with women. Still, the onus for discussion remains with the women, who provide wisdom and knowledge to the men (Prideaux, 2006, p. 7). Even though women have power in East and West New Britain Provinces, no women from these two matrilineal provinces of New Guinea Islands region have become MPs.

### 3.2.2.3 Manus province

Manus province is considered an enigma: while patrilineal, it has matrilineal underpinnings. For example, Carrier and Carrier (1983), in an article that is 42 years old, claims that Ponam in Manus province:

has a system of double unilineal descent. There are 14 patrilans... and they are the central social units in Ponam ideology. The society also has nine matrilineal units, with no known focal ancestors and with genealogies shallower than those found in patrilans. These are totemic groups which do not affect the ownership of productive resources (Carrier & Carrier, 1983, p. 135).

Just like the rest of the region, prior to first contact, the inhabitants of the Manus archipelago were interacting with each other to obtain food, materials for building houses, and access to

specialised products such as obsidian, clay pots, and wooden bowls. And in order to protect monopolies of these trade routes and the alliances between trading partners, inter-island conflicts were rife. Products in the exchange system included ‘clay, sago swamps, and obsidian’. Division between islands were easy because political units were smaller and there was internal competition for status because strength and prowess determined leadership and as such, it was easy to divide smaller political units (Dalsgaard & Otto, 2020, p. 505). This province elected two-woman members of parliament, the late Nahau Rooney in 1977, 1982 and 1987, and Francisca Semoso was elected by voters of North Bougainville as their representative in a by-election in 2023.

### **3.2.3 Highlands region**

The Highlands region is made up of seven provinces: Hela, Enga, Western Highlands, Jiwaka, Southern Highlands, Simbu, and Eastern Highlands. The societies are predominantly patrilineal. Gitlow (1974, p. 35) states that:

In many parts of the PNG Highlands, those who dominated exchange networks became leaders of groups, coalitions and factions. Such individuals were identified by anthropologists as “big men”, on the basis of certain attributes – principally entrepreneurial skills in surplus production, the manipulation of wealth and pre-eminence in ceremonial exchange, oratorical abilities and forceful personalities... Men of the upper class were described as chiefs, who passed on the power to their eldest sons and comprised about six per cent of the total male population.

Feil (1987) claims that men alone were members of the Moka ceremonial exchange community and controlled the large pearl shells, the most prestigious and power-concentrating items of value in the precolonial Highlands (cited in Ketan, 2000, p. 6). Ketan goes on to say that the fundamental motivation behind the competitions for prestige, power and influence is the idea that a person’s name who is connected to a group must not go down (Ketan, 2000, p. 7), and the name is always connected to the father’s line. To date, only one-woman candidate in this very masculine region has been elected to the PNG national parliament: Julie Soso, in 2012.

### **3.2.4 Momase region**

The Momase region is made up of Morobe, Madang and West and East Sepik provinces. In Sepik, initiations are indicators that young people are metamorphosing from a child to an adult.

It is only at the successful completion of the process that they are deemed adults (Prideaux, 2006, p. 4). The Yatmul people of the Sepik River, for example, practice the ‘skin cutting custom’, requiring selected men to enter a ‘*haus tambaran*’ (men’s house) for between six and eight months (Prideaux, 2006, p. 4). Each village has a *haus tambaran* (a house for the spirit in Malanesian Pidgin; called ‘*rumons*’ in the Kapriman) which only initiate adult males. Only men can approach and enter these houses for men. Men are said to have dominated leadership and preserved the right to disregard women (Prideaux, 2006, p. 7). According to Kumagai (1998), the Kapriman, comprising six villages live in the Black Water River basin of the Sepik River, consists of several exogamous patrilineal clans. These are also the units for claiming land and waters (Prideaux, 2006, p. 7).

#### 3.2.4.1 Madang province

In Madang province in the Rai Coast District, the Mindre men are described by Kuo (2020) as being responsible for interaction with gods, spirits and totems. These sorts of interactions became a body of knowledge regarding the emergence of the cosmos and the control of human–cosmos relations. Men’s engagement in the rituals not only maintained human–environmental relations but also became a way for certain men to achieve leadership and, as such, the monopoly ownership of the knowledge of ritual in combination with warfare, agriculture and exchanges with other villages (Kuo, 2020, p. 450). Morauta (1974, p. 12) states that:

One of the most important items of personal property was knowledge of magic spells. Children did not automatically inherit anything except rights in land. A man only handed on his possessions to a son who acted like a son. If none of his own children satisfied him, he would give his knowledge and property to the man who was most obedient and helpful to him and most solicitous of his welfare.

There was a men’s cult that was centred on cult houses (‘*barag darem*’ in Kamba language, *haus tambaran* today in Pidgin). Women and children were always excluded from the cult house (Morauta, 1974, p. 12).

#### 3.2.4.2 Morobe province

In Morobe province, Martin (1998, cited in Kinch, 2006, p. 10) describes the people of Lababia in the Huon District as ‘traditionally matrilineal’. However, it appears nowadays that there is an increasing emphasis on the principle of patrilineal descent due to economic factors. A study

shows that individuals within sub-clans can and do claim descent on the basis of both matrilineal and patrilineal connections (Kinch, 2006, p. 10). In the Markham River Valley, Schwoerer (2022) describes consent to matters concerning land as being established through anything ranging from an informal discussion between two or three brothers to semi-formal meetings between two dozen or more influential men related in their patrilineal line through a common great-great-grandfather. There are no institutionalised positions of leadership within a lineage. Still, there are usually a few prominent middle-aged men (with adult children) that act as spokespersons of the lineage in dealing with outsiders and other lineages, and a certain degree of respect is usually paid to the first-born son of a first-born son and to the eldest men of each generation (Schwoerer, 2022, p. 43). This region has elected two women politicians, namely Loujaya Toni from Morobe in 2012 and Kessy Sawang from Madang in 2022.

### **3.3 Research methods**

In this research project I used a mixed methods methodology. The motivation behind this choice of research methods lies in the fact that I planned to use the cultural analysis framework in investigating voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates. Voters' political and social behaviours are motivated by the ideologies to which they subscribe. These philosophies in turn shape their value systems, customs and traditions. Indigenous cultural values and the norms informing their social and political behaviour and epistemology are difficult to quantify. Because of their subjective nature, they fall into the category of mental constructions, often lacking concrete evidence. Furthermore, understanding indigenous people's attachments and connections to spiritual and physical elements that influence their interactions with each other and with others can be difficult to understand for someone outside their 'cosmological womb' (Winduo, 2012, p. 31).

Therefore, a qualitative research methodology alone would not have been suitable for investigating the topic of this study. Qualitative data could not have proven, for example, a link between the votes cast by men and women in national elections and the gendered nature of PNG culture as a significant barrier to women's political representation. Qualitative data alone could not have proven that Rigo Open electorate has a big-woman concept. I was of the view that a purely qualitative study would have raised questions about the credibility, dependability and confirmability (Hannes, 2011, p. 4) of my findings.

Thus, I used a mixed methods research approach to investigate the key issues raised by this thesis: voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates; and whether Rigo electorate has a strong woman concept. In doing so, I utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods. As I explain in more detail below, I began my study with a quantitative exploration of election results since 1972. I supplemented these data with focus group discussions with citizens using semi-structured questions, interviews with a female candidate and with campaign managers who all participated in the 2017 national elections, and observations. The mixed method research approach enables the testing and triangulation of findings. The data collected in this study show that what participants said and what they did on polling days differed, exposing a dichotomy between theory and practice (Botha, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

### **3.3.1 Electoral data analysis**

In this analysis I use datasets from the PNG Election Database from the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University (see <https://devpolicy.org/pngelections/data-explorer/>) and data from the Electoral Commission for the 2017 and 2022 elections including 66B forms. Here I use only the data relating to those women candidates that I identify as ‘strong’, going back as far as the 1972 national general elections. The purpose is to compare the support for strong women candidates with support for male candidates to generate a more nuanced understanding of women candidates’ ‘electoral strength’ beyond just an outright electoral win. For each woman candidate (including ten who have won elections) I present their first preference votes and calculate the average vote as a means to compare and contrast her electoral performance in relation to other candidates who contested the same electorate and the number of candidates contesting the election, including other women. I use bar graphs and, where necessary, compounded graphs to show how relevant the second and third preference votes for the women candidates of interest were in the elections involving the limited preferential voting system. These second and third preference votes are, of course, significant because they contribute towards a candidate’s voting total. While citizens may not be voting for women candidates in hordes, it is evident that relatively strong numbers of citizens do consider women candidates, particularly in the Southern Region.

### **3.3.2 Focus group discussions**

Along with election data, a second method used in this research is focus group discussions. Soderstrom (2010, p. 4) gives two ontological reasons for using focus group discussions: ‘the depth of human opinion and the autonomy of human opinion’. In her view, focus group discussions allow a multitude of perspectives to be aired, and allow individuals to exercise agency to express themselves in those discussions. This is important for three reasons, according to Soderstrom (2010, pp. 4–5). Firstly, she argues that the explicitness of the data gathered in focus group discussions increases as respondents interact, leading them to compare their experiences and their opinions with each other. Secondly, she argues that in instances where the focus group respondents are part of a marginalised group, it is problematic to have them air their views to an outsider. However, she says that lengthy participant observation could be useful as the silence of the respondents could be used as catalysts to draw participants out of their comfort zones to discuss openly their thoughts. According to Soderstrom, focus group discussions are an effective tool when dealing with marginalised people who may have stories that are similar but may have slight variations. Peoples lived experiences are not always mirrored in the experiences of others. Thirdly, she points out that even though the opinions of focus group respondents may be exposed to a social desirability bias via group dynamics, the social filtering process within which their stories are generated can reveal a great deal about ‘norms’ and perceived ‘correct’ answers, thereby offering a particularly accurate picture of their social reality.

Taking on board Soderstrom’s arguments (including on the role of gender in this filtering process), I used male-only groups and female-only groups, as well as mixed composition groups as control groups to observe any differences in how women and men tend to act when together. Then I made sure that I had as many focus groups as possible so that the stories of the respondents could shed light on their social realities in a more accurate way. While individual interviews and surveys could have been conducted for this phase of the research, I chose not to use these methods. Soderstrom offers two reasons to disqualify these methods of data collection. Firstly, she says that individual interviews and surveys assume all individuals have an opinion regarding all questions, and as a result people may feel obliged to offer an opinion because it is expected of them. She claims that when this happens it is difficult to ascertain whether responses represent the respondents genuinely held opinion or is instead a response of necessity. This she calls a question of the depth of human opinion. In addition, there is no

guarantee that the respondent's response is their own belief. Conversely, there is the question of whether the respondent's opinions are predetermined by his or her environment. This Soderstrom calls a question of the autonomy of human opinion. Given these issues, Soderstrom argues that focus group discussions are a better instrument to use in research on opinions because 'human opinion tends to be created in social contexts' (Soderstrom, 2010, pp. 4 – 5).

To determine which villages to select to conduct focus group discussions, I analysed the 66B forms for the 2017 national elections for Rigo Open and Central Provincial electorates. This allowed me to analyse the performances of the top five male candidates and the 11 female candidates (eight of whom contested the Rigo Open electorate and three the Central Regional electorate) at each elimination to establish the number of votes they gained, and thereby to determine their voter bases. The voter bases for most of the candidates were in Rigo Coast Rural LLG. As the purpose of my research was to investigate voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates in Rigo electorate as a whole, I selected villages across the electorate to include Rigo Central Rural and Rigo Inland Rural.

To collect the required data, I used open-ended semi-structured questions in my focus groups. All focus groups were conducted in Sinaughoro and Motu languages, and audio recordings and notes were taken of all discussions. To maintain consistency and reliability, I was the only researcher who conducted the focus group discussions. In the male-only groups, my male relatives sat in to facilitate peaceful discussions between me and the male participants, because I was metaphorically sitting on a platform where only men are supposed to sit. At the end of every day, I debriefed with the male relatives who sat in with me in the discussions to get their feedback and impressions. The same questions were asked in all focus groups. Only those of voting age were invited and eligible to participate.

To ensure I had the relevant approvals to engage with communities, I visited the Rigo Administrative headquarters at Kwikila to seek the district Administrator's permission to interview people in that district. I was told that I needed a letter from the institution that I was studying at explaining my reasons for conducting research in the district. I was also told that alternatively I could go straight to village councilors and proceed through them. I chose the second path and went straight to village councilors and worked through them to access their ward members. I got respondents' verbal consent before I engaged with them in focus groups and before I audio-recorded all discussions.

The focus group sample consisted of men and women of voting age, and comprised a total of 406 participants, with 201 men and 205 women. The respondents came from across the three LLGs in Rigo electorate; Rigo Central Rural, Rigo Coastal Rural and Rigo Inland Rural. The focus group sizes varied, the lowest being eight respondents per group, the highest being 24 respondents per group. Focus group members were aged 20 and above. In total, I conducted 40 focus groups: 15 female groups, 15 male groups and 10 mixed groups (both males and females). The mixed groups acted as control groups to allow me to investigate gender dynamics, specifically the extent to which women participate in village meetings when men are present. I anticipated that in the mixed groups, male participants would speak more than their female counterparts. However, the outcomes were contrary to preconceived ideas; women were generally as talkative as men. It is difficult to say whether having a female researcher present may have influenced the behaviour of the women participants, but gender relations and other relations did emerge in how and where they placed themselves in the gatherings. It was evident that there are social norms regarding public interactions between men and women. This manifested clearly in some groups and was more subtle in others. The villages in which I ran focus groups are presented below, along with some of the social dynamics evident in the groups.

In Ghaunomu village, women and children sat together. A husband and wife stood close together, but men and women who came without their partners stood apart. This difference indicated that familial relations are an important factor in how closely people stand to each other (see images 5 and 6).

**Image 5: Ghaunomu village (1)**



**Image 6: Ghaunomu village (2)**



In Kware village, the younger men sat on one side, away from the rest of the group. The unmarried women and those who did not come with a male relative sat just outside the

assembly. These participants did not speak as they were considered young people who did not participate in ‘big’ people’s discussions (see images 7 and 8).

**Image 7: Young men**



**Image 8: Young women**



In Girabu, the women who came also sat at the periphery of the circle. Older women who came with their husbands sat beside them, but they sat outside the circle that I made (see image 9 and 10). When I asked the elderly woman who sat behind me to sit next to me, she said, ‘No you sit in front, I will sit behind you’ (see image 10). While these women joined the focus groups, they did not speak, letting their husbands do the talking for them.

**Image 9: Elderly women in the circle**



**Image 10: Women outside the circle**



In Bend-Down Market, located along the Magi Highway, participants stood around together but were clustered by gender (see image 11). Children sat or stood next to their mothers. In the marketplace, even though the boundaries shifted where men and women were standing close together, the demarcations were still evident, they stood and sat in clusters of men and women.

**Image 11: Bend-down market, Rigo Inland**



In Kwalimurubu, Kemaea, and Gomore villages, participants sat in separate clusters of males and females. In the former, the arrangement was that of inside a church. I sat in front, and the participants flanked me on the left, the right and middle, but they sat in separate clusters of males and females as well. In Gomore and Kemaea, the participants sat in a circle but, again, they sat separately as men and women. Large gaps were left in the places where the circle was meant to join and therefore there were spaces between the male and female groups. Again, in these three villages, people were adhering to societal norms that specify that unless those present are husband and wife or immediate family members, they should keep their distance from each other. To do otherwise is unacceptable.

In Bagubara, people sat in family groups. In this group, men and women had come down the Oman River on rafts made of banana trunks to sell timber to a buyer from Port Moresby. Their travel arrangements provide an example of the access difficulties candidates face in remote parts of Rigo Open electorate. A male participant said that they were from Bagubara and where we were was Toule Primary School. He said that they had brought their wives along with them as support. He mentioned that if the '*tufe*' (raft) got stuck, the women would help them free the rafts and, while they slept, the women would cook. A female participant said that because the river had 'gone small', coming down had been difficult. She said that they slept 'in the middle of the river' in the night and 'came out' in the morning. The participants said that they had transported timber from their village to meet their customer at Toule. If the buyer from Port Moresby came to get his timber, then they would return to their village that day, but if he failed to turn up, they were going to spend the night in the open by Oman River. A male participant

said that they were going to walk for some six to seven hours to arrive at their village. However, because it was midday, they planned to sleep on the way and resume their journey the next day. One woman participant said that they had come with their husbands because they were very supportive of them in all their undertakings, indicating that all activities are communal and reciprocal; families pool their resources and strength together to accomplish activities because only through unity can they accomplish much (see images 12 and 13).

**Image12: Participants seated in family groups**



**Image 13: Families transporting timber down the Oman River**



In Goada, we met under a participant's house. Again, the participants arranged themselves into male and female groups. The women sat on the '*touraghe*' (platform), and the men sat on the ground, except for the owner of the house, who sat on the touraghe with his wife and the other women participants.

The way the participants sat and stood indicates that while people do congregate and consort, they adhere to a set of rules that govern social interactions between male and female, and older and younger, actors in the community. These behaviours imply that there is an implicit relational structure that dictates the interactions between people in the private and public domain.

The dilemma that arises from these other interactions is the tiered social structure (see Figure 35). What role does this hierarchical set-up play in the affinities between the different factions of people regarding gender? Is one more salient and efficacious than the other when it comes to interpreting the political behaviours of the people of Rigo towards women candidates? In this structure, authority is vertical: the higher up individuals are in the structure, and the more power they hold in the grand scheme of things in society, the more incontrovertible are their

words. This structure is political, and those who occupy the top of the structure are the elite group made up of chiefs and elders. In precolonial times, this group comprised only certain men, and they were feared. Beneath them were other men. Boys followed, and beneath them came women, girls, and young children. Where the chiefs and elders sat, other men could go and sit. Societal rules prohibited women from sitting in this space because this domain was exclusive to men.

Women did not sit on the platform that men sat on because their presence was seen as bad for the custom objects men had in their possession. Female menstruation and sexuality were considered a counteragent to manhood. As a male participant from Sabuia said:

Long time ago, men were powerful [but] once a woman walked out to stop that warrior...the war stopped. The answer is like this. They [men] had on them things... Okay let me say it. In those days women wore grass-skirts. It is very hard for you to take this skirt off...When the woman showed herself...Maski if you were big enemy, if she said no, we put our weapons down. Before it was like that. Women still had power. (Male participant, 2019)

Trying to get male participants to explain why Rigo men saw women as powerful was difficult because, as a rule, men do not talk about women, their menstruation and their sexuality to another woman. I believed that understanding this was vital because it seemed the most important explanation for why values and principles in Rigo prohibited women from sitting on the chief's platform. The participants said that during pre-colonial times men planned wars, and hunting and fishing expeditions, on the '*Vere's fata*' chief's platform.

Tribal wars were political affairs just as other activities such as '*mutu gabu*' (burning of grass) were. The latter required negotiating with all landowners who shared land boundaries involving prime hunting grounds. When men 'burnt grass' it meant that they hunted together. Hunting and fishing were political activities because those who caught more game redistributed it to those that did not catch as much, thereby earning favour. It also meant sharing with others in the clan, especially widows and with those whose men did not go on the expedition. All sharing was reciprocal; giving 'today' was an investment in receiving gifts tomorrow. In this way, the clan and the extended family were institutions that provided a social security network. These activities called for the pooling of physical strength among other things. As a result, security and negotiating were disciplines men specialised in.

As one male participant said:

In our tradition, wars were big things, and so women did not have a part in those wars. During our old people's time, her role was to support the man, kitchen, and the lineage. We Sinauthoro people were brought up in that thought...We just continued with that attitude; women will care for us, look after our kitchen, and nurture the lineage. We saw them as wives and mothers. (Male participant, 2019)

When game and land became scarce in the area of a particular village, usually because of population growth, this meant sitting down and discussing the breaking away of particular groups from the larger group. For example, Imuaghoru, Kwalmurubu, Girobara, Kemaea, Babaga, Gomore and Saroakeina used to be one village. However, this group of people, who migrated out from the mountains in the Owen-Stanley ridges, broke up at Kwikila. Indeed, the name Kwikila used to be Kuikira. 'Kuiveru' is the name given to whirlwinds and 'kuikira' means to 'agitate and break up'. Again, this was considered men's responsibility because it meant exploring the surrounding areas. If an area was already occupied, engaging in war over territory would be inevitable.

When a person built a house, this required speaking with the elders of the community concerned. Where was the person going to build his house? If he was not a resource owner, from where and whom would he get timber and bamboo? If there was a death, men sat and decided where to bury the person. If the dead person was an outsider, and if the relatives came and said, '*ghema turigha be gho (plural you) vinima*' (our bones, so you give them to us), men sat and talked the matter over. If the deceased was a woman whose bride price had not been paid, then her family members could demand her bones. This act is called '*dagu*'. Its literal meaning is to 'kick back', and its metaphorical meaning is to make demands, either to demand bride price or to demand her body to be buried in her family cemetery. Negotiations, and reaching amicable agreements, were men's responsibility. Even when men consulted women, they did not sit where the men sat, but remained in the background, seen yet unseen, speaking and influencing, yet from within the boundaries of the private domain.

While these ways of doing things excluded women from being active participants in the public space, women did not generally resent their men. They understood that politics was men's job because of the nature of engagement. However, on matters concerning the ownership of land, land boundaries, and lineage and kinship ties, women were consulted because they kept the knowledge. Women understood that their function in society was different, but also that the

roles they played were as important as those played by men. Women were the mainstay of the community, as one participant in Saroakeina said:

The men who [were] ‘stepped on’ by a woman never brought anything home, so that is why woman stayed away from that space. (Male participant, 2019)

Respondents explained that ‘stepped on’ could mean several things. A woman did not sweep the place after her husband went hunting or fishing. Doing so was seen as disrespecting her husband and disregarding societal rules. In addition to being seen as disrespectful to her husband, it was believed that when a woman swept her yard after her husband and the other men had gone to hunt, she was sweeping away the wallabies and the wild pigs from the hunters’ way and so her husband and the other men would not kill any protein, effectively returning home empty handed. Societal norms held that having sex with one’s wife before war, hunting or fishing made a man weak and distracted, and this was likened to a woman stepping on her husband. Sex was a private engagement, but before any expedition, self-denial was the rule of law observed by both men and women. If something bad happened to one of the men, this would result in public humiliation. One participant from Londairi village explained:

In the past, if our men went hunting and someone’s husband was gored by a wild boar, that man’s wife will meet the returning men and rubbish them and say, ‘ah, you were thinking of your wife’s private parts, so my husband got hurt!’ She will dance and even remove her grass-skirt to show her body to us to ridicule us. (Male participant, 2019)

Being stepped on also meant having a domineering, disrespectful wife. Male respondents explained that when a wife constantly nagged and criticised her husband in their home, her husband left his home distracted and this brought him bad luck. The male respondents said that if these things happened in the home, a man became a liability to the rest of the men because he became lethargic and careless during tribal wars or on hunting and fishing trips. They said that when women and men did not observe such rules, trouble was inevitable. Women understood that they were their husband’s strong arm while men were women’s fortress. Men and women were therefore meant to complement each other rather than compete against each other. In Gourubu village, male respondents admitted that the women in their village were the backbone of the church and the village. In their view, given the risk of accidents and mishaps, and the knowledge that security is not guaranteed, safety is a communal concern. During post-colonial times, men took precautionary measures in relation to risk by sleeping in the rubu before they went to hunt or war.

Clan chiefs and elders still exist today in the villages in Rigo district, just as the old ways of doing things still exist. However, heredity is no longer the only criterion that qualifies individuals to fill in the higher echelons of society. Other factors such as youth, money, education and a career can also elevate a person's status. A woman might be held in high esteem in her family because she is the eldest in the family, or she might be the wife of the eldest son or is elderly. In the village, her validation comes from men and older women. When she has earned their respect, it means they have given her approval to participate in the public domain as well, but with matters of leadership in the public domain, men are still regarded as being better choices than women.

### **3.3.3 *Informal interviews with women leaders***

While this thesis identifies 33 strong women candidates who contested NGEs between 1972 and 2022, I was only able to interview nine of these women candidates: Josephine Abaijah, Delilah Gore, Joyce Grant, Carol Kidu, Seline Leo Lohia, Jean Eparo Parkop, Rufina Peter, Kessy Sawang, Julie Soso, and Dianne Unagi Koiam. In 2025, I travelled to Balimo to North Fly Open electorate to interview Waliyato Clowes, but on my way, I found out that she had passed away in 2019, so I interviewed her campaign manager. While I was there, one man passed on a message to me through her daughter, Ruth Clowes saying, 'Tell Eileen, all of us men here in Gogodala, we voted for her [Waliyato Clowes]'.

## **3.4 Conclusion**

Given individuals' ways of life are social constructions in that they are creations of their lived experiences as shaped by broader social contexts, these elements are usually difficult to quantify. As such, I believed that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods would complement each other and to some extent allow me to validate one set of data against the other. I used semi-structured questions to gather data from forty focus groups alongside electoral data drawn from the PNG Electoral Commission. Groups consisted of females only, males only and mixed groups made up of both males and females, based in 25 villages in total. The mixed groups were interesting to observe because seating arrangements indicated the importance of relationships based on gender, age, marital status and relationships and family membership, with demarcations very obvious in the way participants sat and stood during the focus group discussions.

When I investigated culture, I looked at the patrilineal and matrilineal systems as the basis of my investigation of voters' polling behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates. This was because the patrilineal system is one of the barriers highlighted by scholars as a factor contributing to the lack of women's representation in national politics in PNG.

## **Chapter 4: Defining strong women candidates**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The pathway leading to the PNG parliament has been consistently narrow for women wanting to enter national politics. While both men and women candidates face many of the same obstacles during national elections, studies on women's political participation at the national level, and polling outcomes of PNG elections show that fewer women than men run successful campaigns placing them in the top 5 ranks at their elimination in the electorates that they contest. This suggests that there are additional barriers for women beyond those faced by men.

In this chapter, I analyse voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates since 1972, by presenting women candidates' placings relative to the average number of votes received. I suggest this is a more accurate measure of their strength at the polls than their placings at exclusion. For women who contest multiple times, this reflects not only their resilience but also provides a way to visualize their standing relative to the group average. This insight can support informed decisions about whether to recontest and, if so, whether to restructure their election campaigns for the next national election.

I analyse the candidacies of women who were placed in the top five in the 2017 and 2022 NGEs. I find that despite finishing within the top five, many of these women candidates' overall performance at the polls was below average, and this impacts voters' perceptions of their 'strength'. Having presented the distribution of votes for strong women candidates, I show that there are more disablers than enablers in women's experience at the polls by discussing some of the critical factors that enable and disable women candidates' participation in national elections.

### **4.2 Strong women candidates: 1972–2022**

In total, about 743 women have contested NGEs in PNG. This figure is based on data collected from various sources which do not provide a regional breakdown in the elections from 1987 to 2012 (Wood, 2019). Only ten of these candidates served terms as legislators, with three serving more than once: Josephine Abaijah (1972–1982, 1997–2002), Carol Kidu (1997–2012) and Nahau Rooney (1977–1987).

There has been an increase in the number of women candidates contesting elections in PNG. Between 1972 and 1982, the number of women candidates rose from four to 17, with 31 women contesting electorates throughout the country. Thirteen women contested electorates in the Southern Region, eight in the Highlands, seven in New Guinea Islands Region and three in electorates across the Momase Region.

For elections held between 1987 and 2012, there are no available data identifying the gender of candidates. While European names are easy to identify by gender, Papua New Guinean names are not, making it difficult to determine with certainty the gender of candidates. We do know, however, that in 2012 three women candidates – namely Julie Soso, Delilah Gore and Loujaya Toni – were elected to parliament.

Notwithstanding these challenges in accessing and interpreting data, I suggest that strength of candidacy can be determined as more than the election of women. As shown in Table 8 below, in each region, in addition to the women who were elected, some women candidates received vote tallies above the average. This is particularly the case in the Southern Region, where in each election held between 1972 and 2022, the women candidates who ran placed above the average. While women were elected in seven of those elections, other female candidates also performed well, placing above average in most of these elections. Notably in 2022, seven of the 63 women candidates who ran in the Southern Region had above average vote shares.

This finding is replicated to a lesser extent in other regions. In the Highlands region, while Julie Soso was elected only in 2012, she also received an above average share of votes in the subsequent elections (2017 and 2022). In Momase Region, women candidates received above average placings in four elections, in addition to the election in which a woman candidate won (in 2012). In New Guinea Islands region, in addition to the three elections in which women won, women candidates placed above average in another two elections (2017 and 2022) (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Candidacy strength as more than election, by region: 1972–2022**

| Year of election       | Total number of candidates | Total number of women candidates | Number of women elected | Number of women <u>known to</u> place above average |
|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Southern Region</b> |                            |                                  |                         |                                                     |
| 1972                   | 100                        | 3                                | 1                       | 2                                                   |
| 1977                   | 135                        | 5                                | 2                       | 2                                                   |
| 1982                   | 251                        | 5                                | 0                       | 1                                                   |
| 1987                   | 338                        | n/d                              | 0                       | 0                                                   |

|                           |       |     |     |     |
|---------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| 1992                      | 505   | 9   | 0   | 1   |
| 1997                      | 607   | n/d | 2   | 2   |
| 2002                      | 718   | n/d | 1   | 2   |
| 2007                      | n/d   | n/d | 1   | 2   |
| 2012                      | 760   | n/d | 1   | 1   |
| 2017                      | n/d   | 65  | 0   | 3   |
| 2022                      | n/d   | 63  | 1   | 7   |
| <b>Highlands</b>          |       |     |     |     |
| 1972                      | 254   | 0   | 0   | 0   |
| 1977                      | 392   | 1   | 0   | 0   |
| 1982                      | 529   | 7   | 0   | 0   |
| 1987                      | 679   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 1992                      | 775   | 5   | 0   | 0   |
| 1997                      | 957   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2002                      | 976   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2007                      | n/d   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2012                      | 1,332 | n/d | 1   | 1   |
| 2017                      | n/d   | 48  | 0   | 1   |
| 2022                      | n/d   | 25  | 0   | 1   |
| <b>Momase</b>             |       |     |     |     |
| 1972                      | 174   | 0   | 0   | 0   |
| 1977                      | 192   | 1   | 0   | 1   |
| 1982                      | 222   | 2   | 0   | 1   |
| 1987                      | 302   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 1992                      | 391   | 2   | 0   | 0   |
| 1997                      | 620   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2002                      | 862   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2007                      | n/d   | n/d | n/d | n/d |
| 2012                      | 756   | n/d | 1   | 1   |
| 2017                      | n/d   | 47  | 0   | 1   |
| 2022                      | n/d   | 45  | 1   | 2   |
| <b>New Guinea Islands</b> |       |     |     |     |
| 1972                      | 67    | 1   | 0   | 0   |
| 1977                      | 107   | 3   | 1   | 1   |
| 1982                      | 114   | 3   | 1   | 1   |
| 1987                      | 123   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 1992                      | 95    | 0   | 0   | 0   |
| 1997                      | 179   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2002                      | 221   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2007                      | n/d   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2012                      | 315   | n/d | 0   | n/d |
| 2017                      | n/d   | 18  | 0   | 1   |
| 2022                      | n/d   | 26  | 1   | 2   |
| 2023*                     | n/d   | n/d | 1   | 1   |

Source: Table compiled from the following sources: Haley, 2019 (personal communication); O'Collins et al., 1985; Sepoe, 1996, p. 110; Wood, 2019.

Notes: n/d denotes no data; \* denotes by-election.

Strength is also evident in the final vote share received by (women) candidates (see Table 9). Placing in the top five candidates does not always equate to a high vote share, particularly in

the case of placing fourth and fifth (see for example Pilicapio Matilda May, who ran in the Southern Region in the 1977 election, and Michelle Hau’ofa, who ran in 2022). Better election outcomes are evident when women are in the top two or three and attract final vote shares above 20 per cent (see for example Rufina Peter in 2017). An exception here is Delilah Gore, who ran in 2012 with a final vote share of 16.7 per cent. In this election, she still won the electorate she contested, indicating that ballots were distributed fairly among candidates with her being the strongest candidate. The final vote shares below 10 per cent accrued by women are an indication that there were outliers with huge gaps between the candidates running in first and second places (see Table 9 below).

**Table 9: Candidacy strength in final vote share for women candidates by region: 1972–2022**

| <b>Candidate name</b>  | <b>Election contested</b> | <b>Rank (1–5)</b> | <b>Final vote share (%)</b> |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Southern Region</b> |                           |                   |                             |
| Josephine Abaijah      | 1972                      | 1                 | 49                          |
| Patricia Wilson        | 1972                      | 2                 | 27                          |
| Josephine Abaijah      | 1977                      | 1                 | 49.8                        |
| Waliyato Clowes        | 1977                      | 1                 | 31.3                        |
| Pilicapio Matilda May  | 1977                      | 4                 | 9.2                         |
| Pilicapio Matilda May  | 1982                      | 5                 | 12.2                        |
| Josephine Abaijah      | 1982                      | 2                 | 15.8                        |
| Fide Bale              | 1982                      | 4                 | 7.1                         |
| Carol Kidu             | 1997                      | 1                 | 21.8                        |
| Carol Kidu             | 2002                      | 1                 | 23.5                        |
| Carol Kidu             | 2007                      | 1                 | 43.4                        |
| Delilah Gore           | 2012                      | 1                 | 16.7                        |
| Delilah Gore           | 2017                      | 2                 | 19.8                        |
| Anna Skate             | 2017                      | 3                 | 11.8                        |
| Rufina Peter           | 2017                      | 3                 | 23.9                        |
| Jean Eparo Parkop      | 2017                      | 2                 | 10.6                        |
| Rufina Peter           | 2022                      | 1                 | 25.1                        |
| Jean Eparo Parkop      | 2022                      | 2                 | 15.8                        |
| Seline Leo Lohia       | 2022                      | 5                 | unknown                     |
| Vikki Gara Mossin      | 2022                      | 3                 | 9.6                         |
| Dianne Unagi Koiam     | 2022                      | 3                 | 9.9                         |
| Michelle Hau’ofa       | 2022                      | 4                 | 3.8                         |
| Joyce Grant            | 2022                      | 5                 | 8.5                         |
| Jennifer Rudd          | 2022                      | 5                 | unknown                     |
| <b>Highlands</b>       |                           |                   |                             |
| Julie Soso             | 2012                      | 1                 | 28.3                        |
| Julie Soso             | 2017                      | 5                 | 11.4                        |
| Jenny Luke             | 2022                      | 4                 | unknown                     |
| <b>Momase</b>          |                           |                   |                             |
| Grace Pokana           | 1977                      | 3                 | 11.4                        |

|                           |       |   |         |
|---------------------------|-------|---|---------|
| Laura Martin              | 1982  | 3 | 10.6    |
| Dec Tasip                 | 1982  | 5 | 5.1     |
| Laura Martin              | 1992  | 3 | 7.7     |
| Loujaya Toni              | 2012  | 1 | 29      |
| Kessy Sawang              | 2017  | 3 | 16.3    |
| Lina Kundinahai Apnanji   | 2017  | 5 | 10.9    |
| Dulcian Somare - Brash    | 2017  | 4 | 9.9     |
| Kessy Sawang              | 2022  | 1 | unknown |
| Jennifer Baing            | 2022  | 3 | 8.7     |
| <b>New Guinea Islands</b> |       |   |         |
| Nellie Exon Lawrance      | 1972  | 5 | 5.3     |
| Rosa Tokiel               | 1977  | 4 | 7.2     |
| Nahau Kambuou Rooney      | 1977  | 1 | 24.9    |
| Nahau Kambuou Rooney      | 1982* | 1 | unknown |
| Rubie Wanari Kerepa       | 2017  | 4 | 10.5    |
| Lynne Ozane Ronnie        | 2022  | 3 | unknown |
| Francesca Semoso          | 2023  | 1 | unknown |

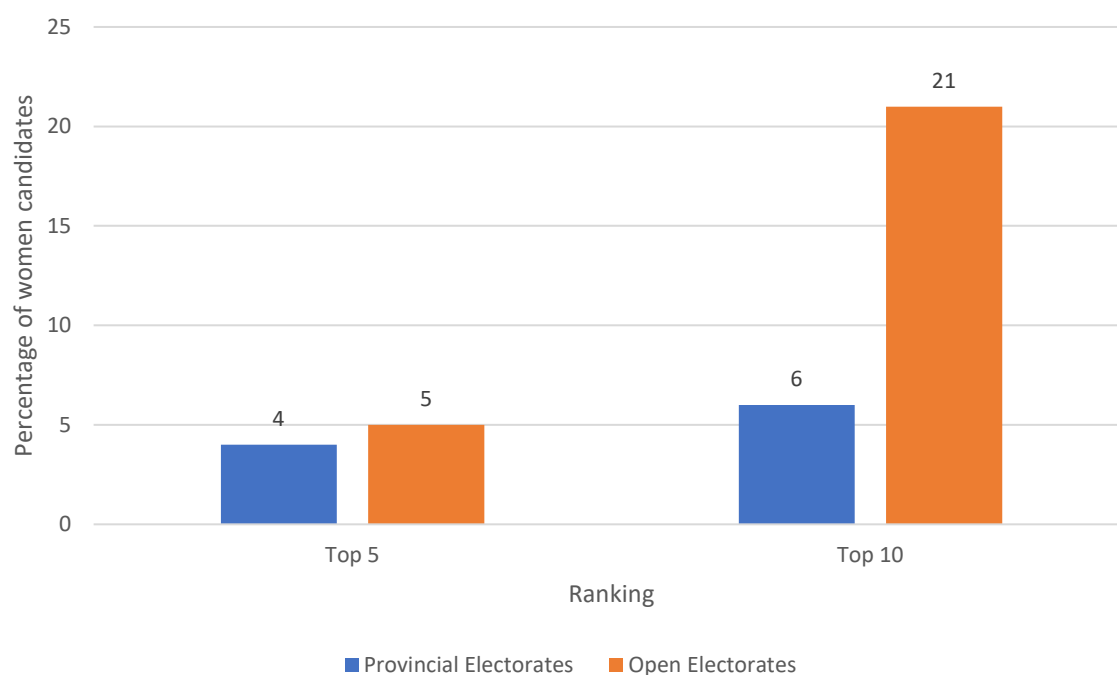
Source: Table compiled from the following sources: Haley, 2019 (personal communication); O'Collins et al., 1985; Sepoe, 1996, p. 110; Wood, 2019.

Notes: \* denotes election results that went to the court of disputed returns.

### 4.3 A closer look at strong women candidates in 2017

The 2017 election provides a useful example of how vote shares above average can illustrate women candidates' strength. In this election, 179 women candidates contested 111 electorates in PNG; nine were placed in the top five and 27 were placed in the top ten, with 26 contesting open electorates and 10 contesting provincial electorates (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: The ranking of women candidates at their elimination in 2017 NGEs**



Source: Information adapted from Haley, 2019.

Of the nine women candidates who placed among the top five in their districts, four ran in the provincial electorates. All the women candidates polled well in their second and third preferences, and in the open electorates, Sawang and Gore polled well in their second and third preferences. Those whose final vote shares were below 10 per cent were Somare and Apnanji. More women contested the open electorates than the much bigger provincial electorates. While most women gained preferences, Skate did not receive any votes after the first preference counts, and Kerepa also polled poorly. Peter was the only woman candidate who polled above 20 per cent in her final vote share, followed closely by Delilah Gore with 19.8 per cent final vote share. The next best performing candidate was Kessy Sawang with a vote share of 16.3 per cent (see Table 10 below). As in other elections there was a regional effect. In 2017, four of the nine strong women candidates were from the Southern Region; two were from Highlands and Momase and one from New Guinea Islands.

Table 10: Top performing women candidates by region: 2017

| Candidate                 | Final count | Final vote share (%) | Final ranking |
|---------------------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------|
| <b>Southern Region</b>    |             |                      |               |
| Rufina Peter              | 33,221      | 23.9                 | 3             |
| Delilah Gore              | 7,524       | 19.8                 | 2             |
| Anna Skate                | 4,444       | 11.8                 | 3             |
| Jean Eparo Parkop         | 3,772       | 10.6                 | 2             |
| <b>Highlands</b>          |             |                      |               |
| Julie Soso Akeke          | 53,024      | 11.4                 | 5             |
| <b>Momase</b>             |             |                      |               |
| Kessy Sawang              | 40,924      | 16.3                 | 3             |
| Lina Kundinahai Apnanji   | 3,772       | 10.9                 | 5             |
| Dulciana Somare-Brash     | 21,486      | 9.9                  | 4             |
| <b>New Guinea Islands</b> |             |                      |               |
| Rubie Wanari Kerepa       | 2,468       | 10.5                 | 4             |

Source: Information adapted from Haley, 2019.

#### 4.4 A closer look at strong women candidates in 2022

In 2022, 159 women contested the NGEs. Of the nine women candidates who ranked in the top five in 2017, seven recontested – namely, Rufina Peter, Jean Eparo Parkop, Dulciana Somare-Brash, Julie Soso, Kessy Sawang, Delilah Gore and Rubie Waneru Kerepa. With the exception of Somare, all ran for the same electorates they had contested in 2017. While Somare had previously contested the East Sepik Provincial electorate, in 2022 she contested Angoram Open electorate (see Table 11 below). Of the 26 women candidates who made it into the top 10 in 2017, Daisy Ondokoi, Fiona Baim Veisame, Philomena Kassman, Matilda Koma, Lucy Siki Aiya and Jenny Luke recontested. In 2022, Rufina Peter, Jean Eparo Parkop, Dulciana Somare-Brash, Julie Soso, Kessy Sawang, and Delilah Gore again placed in the top five, while Somare-Brash lost ground on her previous election's vote share.

Table 11: Top performing women candidates by region: 2022

| Name                   | Number of elections contested | Difference between winner and candidate | Final vote share % | Above average? |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| <b>Southern Region</b> |                               |                                         |                    |                |
| Rufina Peter*          | 2                             | Winner                                  | 25.1               | Yes            |
| Jean E. Parkop*        | 3                             | 4,294                                   | 15.8               | Yes            |
| Delilah Gore**         | 3                             | 2,811                                   | 12.4               | Yes            |
| Dianne Unagi-Koiam**   | 1                             | 2,651                                   | 9.9                | Yes            |
| Vikki G. Mosin**       | 1                             | 2,382                                   | 9.6                | Yes            |
| Lynne Ozzane Ronnie    | 2                             | 5,212                                   | ***                | ***            |
| Joyce Grant**          | 1                             | 7,063                                   | ***                | ***            |

|                           |     |         |      |     |
|---------------------------|-----|---------|------|-----|
| Seline L. Lohia **        | *** | 8,467   | ***  | *** |
| Jennifer Rudd             | 1   | 25,663  | ***  | *** |
| <b>Highlands</b>          |     |         |      |     |
| Jenny Luke**              | 2   | 8,228   | ***  | *** |
| Julie Soso*               | 6   | 167,696 | 4.1  | Yes |
| <b>New Guinea Islands</b> |     |         |      |     |
| Rubie Kerepa**            | 2   | 9,758   | 11.1 | Yes |
| Michelle Hau'ofa**        | 1   | 26,329  | 3.8  | No  |
| <b>Momase</b>             |     |         |      |     |
| Kessy Sawang **           | 2   | Winner  | ***  | Yes |
| Jennifer Baing*           | 3   | 43,429  | 8.7  | Yes |

Source: Table compiled from data recorded by the PNG Electoral Commission (pngec.gov.au).  
Notes: \*denotes regional electorates; \*\* denotes open electorates; \*\*\* denotes no data.

In relation to vote averages, in the Southern Region, at the final vote share, all women polled above their group averages except Michelle Hau'ofa. While Hau'ofa finished among the top four, she polled well below average and her final vote share was only 3.8 per cent, indicating a large gap between her and the first-place candidate. In the New Guinea Islands region, Rubie Kerepa and Lynne Ozzane Ronnie both performed above average at the polls. The same was true for the two women candidates from the Momase region, Kessy Sawang and Jennifer Baing. In 2022, Diane Unagi-Koiam was among 76 candidates who contested the Moresby North-East electorate in the National Capital District. At the final count, Dianne Unagi Koiam moved from seventh place to the third place with a final vote share of 9.9 per cent (see Table 11), outperforming her male rivals in second and third preferences.

Dianne Koiam Unagi is a daughter of David Unagi, who was the member of parliament for Moresby Northeast Open electorate for two terms: 1987–1997. While Moresby South and Moresby Northeast are in the National Capital District and are both in the Southern Region, I place Moresby South in the Southern Region because it has a predominantly Papuan population, while Moresby Northeast is moot because while it has residents from all over PNG, an analysis of certain events indicates that it has a Highlands voter base. Dianne Unagi Koiam holds a master's degree in human rights from the United Kingdom and is a lawyer by profession. Having a very prominent father and a being married to a man from Jiwaka Province assured her visibility among voters in the electorate. Her husband Daniel Koiam is from Jiwaka Province.

In 2022, Michelle Hau'ofa contested the Moresby South Open seat, as a People's Party candidate. In the distribution of the first preferences, Hau'ofa gained 1,780 votes, placing her

in a top five position. Despite being ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, she was a weak contender because her performance at the polls was below average (see Figures 5 and 6). Her vote share at exclusion was 3.8 per cent.

In Moresby South, while the population is mixed, it is predominantly Papuan, consisting of four Papuan villages and migrant settlers of mainly Gulf, Goilala, Wanigela and Hula origins in the Southern Region. In 2017, Anna Bill Skate contested the Moresby South electorate and was ranked in the top five. She is a daughter of Bill Skate. In 2022, Michelle Hau'ofa contested this same seat, and prior to this the seat was contested by Carol Kidu. Since the 1977 NGEs, all who were made ministers for the Moresby South Open electorate were Papuans except Justine Tkachenko. Tkachenko won on a majority of 60 per cent first preference votes.

A study of Moresby South and Moresby Northeast in Port Moresby confirms that the sources of support for a candidate may not only be 'kin and clan' but

can also include those factors that are related to ethnic, tribal and regional origins on the one hand and secondary sources on the other hand which are likely to be ethnically mixed drawing their boundaries from economic, political and neighbourhood criteria unrelated to one's ancestry or origin. (Premdas & Steeves, 1978, pp. 47–48)

The strongest women candidates' margins between themselves and the winning candidate were between 2,000 and 4,300 votes. This meant they polled well above average, and those women candidates with margins between themselves and the winning candidates of between 4,000 and 9,000 votes were moderate performers, still polling above average. Those whose margins of loss ranged between five and six figures were average performers because they contested against outliers, that is, candidates who had polled very strongly (see Table 11, p68 & 69). This analysis suggests that women's placement in a top five position is not a sufficiently sensitive tool to measure the strength of women's candidacy. This is because it may give women candidates false hope – these placings alone do not provide the necessary information for women candidates to improve their outcomes in subsequent electoral contests. Rather, information about their place relative to other candidates based on the group averages is a more reliable measure to use because it more accurately indicates just how competitive they were in relation to the winner.

Having considered the candidacy of women in PNG since 1972 through an exploration of the votes received and their placement at elimination, I now discuss a range of other factors that

help us to understand women's performance, including the influence of the region in which they run, the increasing number of candidates running in elections in PNG, and the effect of this on vote splitting, electoral irregularities and election violence.

#### **4.4.1 Regional differences**

As the data show, the experience of women candidates differs by region. Electoral data are indicative of the fact that some women poll strongly and outperform many of their male rivals at the polls. However, this is more evident in the Southern Region than other parts of PNG, with a higher number of women MPs and strong women candidates participating in national politics (see Table 12). The data show that women candidates in the Southern Region receive more support from voters in the electorates they are contesting, than their counterparts from other parts of PNG, therefore suggesting that there is more social equality among the genders in this region.

**Table 12: Strong women candidates: NGEs**

| Regions            | National elections    |                                |                                |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                    | Women MPs (1972–2022) | Strong women candidates (2017) | Strong women candidates (2022) |
| Southern Region    | 5                     | 12                             | 9                              |
| Highlands          | 1                     | 9                              | 2                              |
| New Guinea Islands | 2                     | 10                             | 2                              |
| Momase             | 2                     | 5                              | 2                              |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>10</b>             | <b>36</b>                      | <b>15</b>                      |

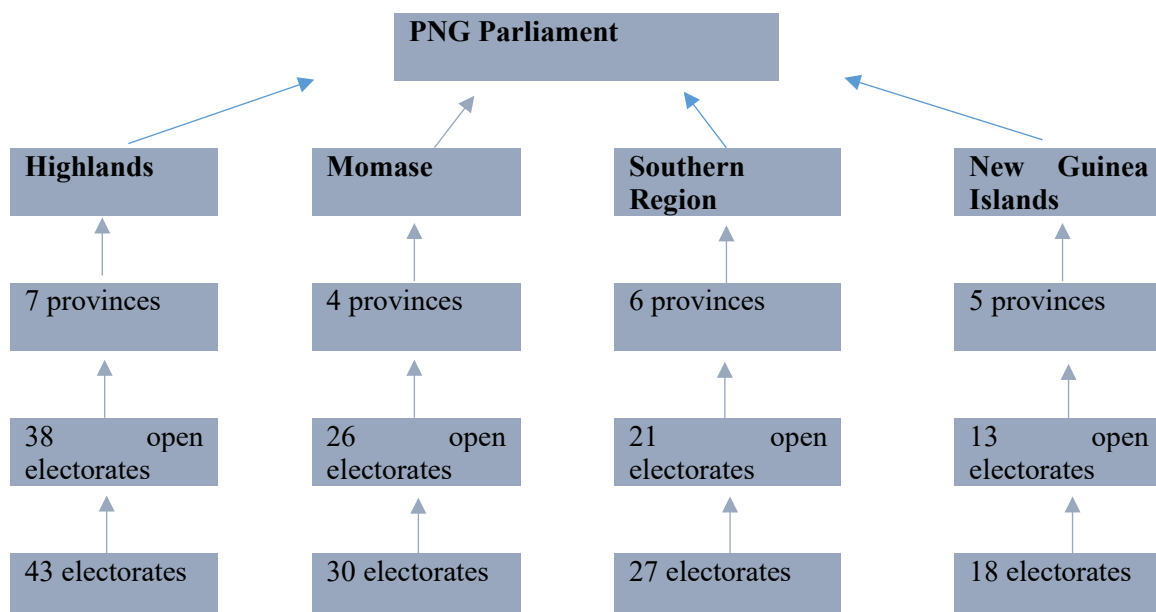
Source: Table compiled from data recorded by the PNG Electoral Commission (pngec.gov.au).

Meki (2021) states that factors with which women candidates must contend include widespread voter fraud and the proliferation of money politics (Meki, 2021, p. 3). She also notes that in a predominantly patriarchal society, leadership is widely seen as tied to the male heads of families and as a result male candidates are more likely than female candidates to receive and maintain the support of kin and clan. Focusing on changes in support over time, Sepoe (2007), on the other hand, states that 'in contemporary PNG, women's status has diminished...in the past...[t]hey were recognized as playing a crucial role'.

As in Highlands and Momase, all the provinces in the Southern Region are patrilineal societies, except for Milne Bay Province, which is matrilineal, while in the New Guinea Islands region, all the provinces except Manus are matrilineal societies. While patriarchal values are an obstacle to women's political participation as candidates and legislators at the national level, electoral data show that some women performed very well at the national elections, either by winning an electorate or by being placed in the top five or 10. This raises questions about the role of patriarchal values as a barrier to women's representation in PNG, given some women candidates are out-performing their male counterparts at the polls.

In addition to cultural explanations, differences by region are also attributable to the number of electorates spread across the country. The Highlands region is the largest political entity in that it has 43 electorates (consisting of 36 open electorates and seven provinces). Highlands is followed by Momase, which has 30 electorates consisting of 26 open electorates and four provinces. The third region in terms of its political size is Southern Region, with 27 electorates consisting of 21 open electorates and six provinces, including the National Capital District. Finally, the smallest political entity in terms of the number of seats it occupies in parliament is New Guinea Islands, with 18 electorates consisting of 13 open electorates and five provinces, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. This means that there are unequal opportunities for women to contest elections across the country (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Distribution of electoral power by region**



Source: Adapted by author from data collected at <https://www.parliament.gov.pg/><sup>3</sup>

According to Reilly (2000, p. 168), ‘the primary reason for PNG’s democratic success is the sheer diversity of its ethnic structure, which virtually guarantees that no one group is able to single-handedly monopolize political power’. However, I am compelled to ask a range of questions here as to what Reilly means by democratic success. We see a people united by western ideas of governance, but do we see the manifestation of that vibrant democracy that scholars allude to being translated in electoral politics? What is democracy to a people who ‘acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional wisdoms of [their] people – which have come to [them] from generation to generation?’ (PNG Constitution, 1975, pp. 1–2). What does it mean to a people who among them speak eight hundred and forty languages, who adhere to different cultures and traditions that create their own political systems (Pramesh, 2017, p. 9), have had differing colonial intercourse with the outside world in their diversity (Pye, 1991), and of whom more than 80 per cent live in rural areas, are mostly isolated and remain isolated due to the difficult geographical terrain of the country? (Pramesh, 2017, p. 16).

Heywood (2004, p. 226) states that ‘The “democratic” element in liberal democracy is the idea of popular consent, expressed in practice through the act of voting’. If PNG goes to the polls every five years, does that mean it is democratic? When Heywood (2004, p. 124) discusses power, authority and legitimacy, he poses several questions. Of power he asks,

is it distributed widely and evenly dispersed, or is it concentrated in the hands of a few, a ‘power elite’ or ‘ruling class’? Is it essentially benign, enabling people to achieve their collective goals, or is it a form of oppression or domination?

One male participant in the male only focus groups in Sivitatana village stated that,

The reason why we don’t vote for women is because they can’t bang the top of a table and so, poor things, that is the reason why we think lowly of woman. Look at Carol Kidu for instance... she had a voice; she was not afraid. We want to vote for women, but the thing is, Rigo has no powers. On what strength can Rigo stand and make a noise? No oil, no gold, no silver no nothing.

In this response, the male participant covered two points. He stated that voters were not giving any of their preferences to women because they were not assertive, using Carol Kidu as the

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<sup>3</sup> In June of 2025, 6 more open electorates were created. By region; 2 in the Highlands, 1 in Momase, 2 in Southern and 1 in New Guinea Islands

measuring stick. Tangentially, he also mentioned that being able to contribute to the national coffers was also another means of having a voice in parliament. Putting those two ideas together, the argument he was making is this; a man is forceful and even if his district is not contributing to the public purse, he can use his voice to bring goods and services to his electorate, something he believed a woman MP would not be able to do.

Here, one must ask the question, why did male participants in Rigo District perceive Carol Kidu to have power? As the quote above indicates, some men felt she had a voice and was not afraid to use it. What were her sources of power? Was there power in the colour of her skin (as she was a white woman of Australian origin), in her knowledge of the system of governance, or in the knowledge that she knew what her job was? When I spoke with her in 2022, among many other things she said that a male MP had once told her that they did not mind her being in parliament. His issue was with aspiring Papua New Guinean women politicians (Kidu, 2022, personal communication).

#### **4.4.2 Party affiliation and independence from parties**

Finding a political party to be affiliated with is daunting for aspiring politicians because PNG politics is a numbers game, and political parties naturally want to invest in winners. In 2017, forty-seven women candidates ranked in the top 10 and, in 2022, 15 ranked in the top six. Of the 62 women who polled well at the 2017 and 2022 NGEs, 43 (69.3 per cent) were endorsed by a political party, while 19 (30.7 per cent) ran as independent candidates. This indicates that political parties do support women candidates, and that those who get the backing of these entities perform well at the polls during NGEs (see Table 13).

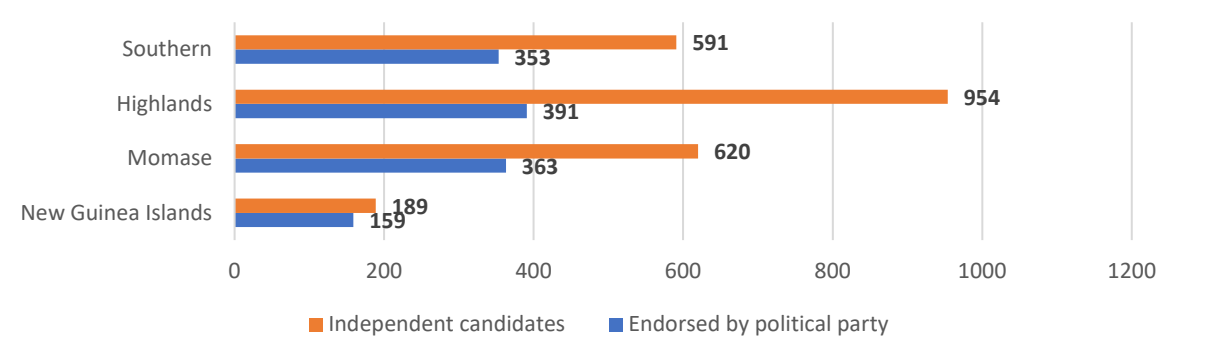
**Table 13: Independent and party-endorsed women candidates: 2017 and 2022 NGEs**

| Placing         | Total | Endorsed by political party | Ran as independent |
|-----------------|-------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Top five (2017) | 9     | 8                           | 1                  |
| Top 10 (2017)   | 38    | 23                          | 15                 |
| Top six (2022)  | 15    | 12                          | 3                  |
| Total           | 62    | 43                          | 19                 |

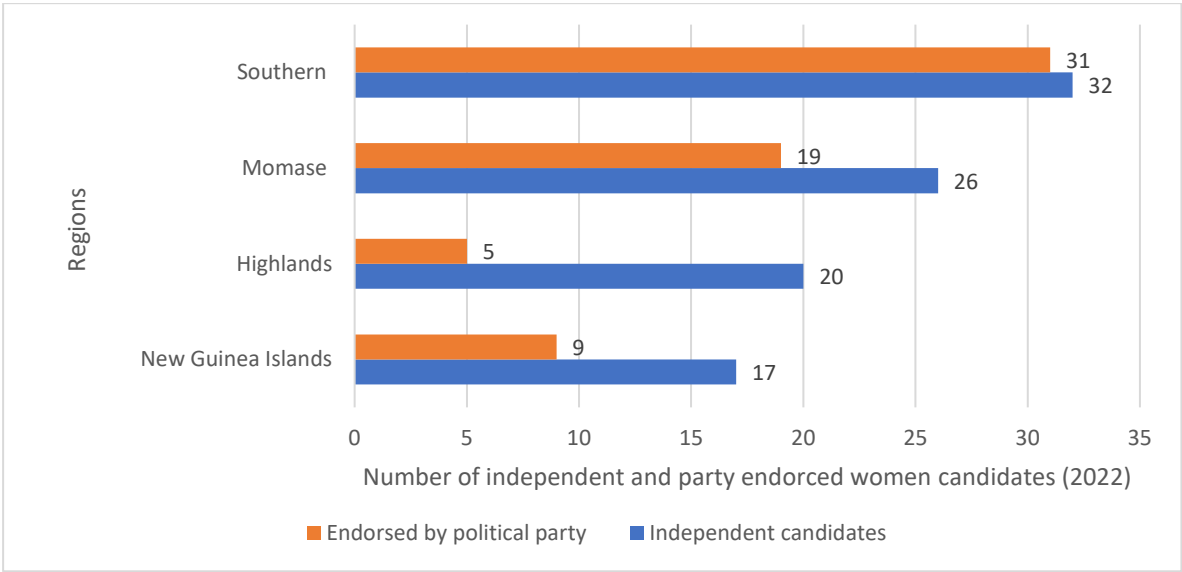
Source: Table compiled by author from data recorded by the PNG Electoral Commission (pngec.gov.au).

In 2022, the Registry of Political Parties and Candidates Commission registered 54 political parties, and 3,620 candidates contested various electorates, of which 2,354 ran as independents. The region that had the highest number of independent candidates was Highlands, followed by Momase, then Southern Region and finally New Guinea Islands (see Figure 7). The 2022 national elections also saw more women contenders running as independent candidates than as members of a political party (see Figure 8). In the Southern region there were equal number of independent, and party endorsed women candidates, in Momase and New Guinea Islands, more than half of the women who contested were endorsed by a political party. The region that did poorly was the Highland with more than half of its women candidates running as independent candidates.

**Figure 1: Party-endorsed and independent candidates by region: 2022 NGEs**



**Figure 7: Party-endorsed and independent women candidates by region: 2022 NGEs**



Source: Adapted by author from the Registry of Political Parties and Candidates Commission, 2022.

In 2022, Albertina Ehari contested the Kerema open electorate against 50 rivals, four of those being from her mother's village and four from her father's village. Of the 50 other candidates, 20 were endorsed by a political party and 30 were independent. Ehari was endorsed by People's Action Party, saying that,

the Party gave me K25,000...finance was not my issue...We were split because there were four candidates from my father's village and four candidates from my mother's village. (Female candidate, 2023)

Referring to different set of circumstances, another female candidate said:

Three political parties were supporting me. (Female candidate, 2023)

Jennifer Baing contested the Morobe regional electorate, placing in the top five. She did not have any trouble securing party backing, and her support from three parties suggests that parties are prepared to support a strong candidate.

Another female candidate explained her experience of party backing in this way:

When the Prime Minister walked me up to the stage, I found out that I had Tari families, and they came with their demands.

By this, the candidate meant that an introduction from the leader of a political party – here, the Prime Minister – immediately garnered support for her as a female candidate but also came with voter expectations in the form of 'demands'.

Lucille Paru contested the National Capital District regional seat, being a candidate for the PANGU party, in doing so challenging her father in-law, Powes Parkop, the incumbent. However, she did not do as well as the other female candidate, Sylvia Pascoe, who had been endorsed by Peter Apatas's People's party.

Some women candidates noted that those who had received funding from political parties had performed well in the elections, ranking in the top 10. However, they also mentioned that some women who had party backing received no executive representation from their parties at campaign rallies. Others mentioned that they had accrued campaign debts and at the end of the elections they had outstanding debts. These women candidates mentioned that when the parties

that had endorsed them had been late in releasing funds to finance their campaigns, they had gone ahead and borrowed money to pay fund their campaigns.

According to Reilly (1999, p. 3), political parties form the cornerstone of ‘representative democratic’ societies, ‘organizing voters, aggregating and articulating interests, crafting policy alternatives and providing the basis of coordinated electoral and legislative activity’. Their functions include ‘representing political constituencies and interests, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, setting policy-making agendas, integrating disparate groups and individuals into the democratic process, and forming the basis of stable political coalitions and hence governments...Collectively...political parties are one of the primary channels for building accountable and responsive government’ (Reilly 1999, see notes on page 6 and 7 on political parties). However, political parties in PNG fall short of these characteristics because, as Reilly (1999, p. 229) describes, the ‘PNG party system’ is ‘unstable, fragmented, highly personalized, and increasingly irrelevant’. An example of this can be found in the impending vote of no confidence in May 2024 against Prime Minister James Marape. Kuku (2022) reported that ‘The ruling Pangu Pati has 56 members in parliament, including current Deputy Opposition leader James Nomone who is yet to resign from the party...The Registrar Emmanuel Pok said the registry has received notice from some MPs that they were resigning from the government but had not officially resigned from their respective parties’ In 10 parliaments between 1977 and 2022, PNG has had nine Prime Ministers (PMs) and only two have completed their terms in office, namely Sir Michael Somare (2002–2007) and Peter O’Neill (2012–2017). Somare was replaced by Peter O’Neill in 2011 on the disputed grounds of ill-health. Three PMs have been replaced through votes of no confidence: Somare by Julius Chan in 1980, Somare by Wingti in 1986, and Wingti by Rabbie Namaliu in 1988. Three others resigned to avoid a vote of no confidence: Wingti in 1993, Skate in 1998 and O’Neill in 2019 (Kabuni 2020, p. 1).

In 2022, 54 political parties contested the PNG NGEs. What were their aspirations and motivations? Were they just like the high number of independent candidates who contest national elections, tools to engineer election results in favour of certain individuals and political parties, a strategy to pool power? There are minor parties and major parties; where do the party leaders and founders come from? If there is an answer, then we are where we started; what is democracy?

### 4.4.3 Increasing numbers of candidates

While the numbers of women contesting national elections are not growing exponentially, small increases are evident (see Figures 2 and 14). This slow pace of change may be an effect of the tough political climate in PNG, tough because,

the role of money and guns [in some parts of PNG] has increased...creating a hostile environment for all involved in the election, including women candidates, scrutineers, and voters...Poor management and limited technical capacity of the PNG Election Commission...[have led] to ineffective and untimely implementation of electoral activities and a spread of violence to regions that have traditionally been peaceful...[and] also, a higher level of vote control by candidates...and community leaders [in recent elections]. (National Democratic Institute, 2022)

In the Highlands region, a total of 1,345 candidates contested 43 electorates' seats in parliament, 983 being for 30 seats in Momase, 944 for 27 seats in Southern Region and only 348 seats in New Guinea Islands, with many of them running as independent candidates. With these exorbitant numbers, can women win an election? Should there be a vetting system for candidates and should laws state that only those who are members of a political party may run in the NGEs, so that the playing field is levelled?

Women's experience of candidacy is also impacted by the sheer number of male candidates. In numerical terms alone, the likelihood that a woman will win a seat when she is competing with so many men is low. Table 14 shows that the ratio of men candidates to women candidates is disproportionately high; men candidates far outnumber women candidates in every election held in PNG although the ratio has decreased considerably since 1972 when it was at an all-time high of 152 male candidates to every one female candidate. By 2022, this had reduced to 22 male candidates to every female candidate.

**Table 14: Ratios of male to female candidates in PNG elections (1972–2022)**

| <b>Election</b> | <b>Male candidates</b> | <b>Female candidates</b> | <b>Ratio</b> |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 1972            | 604                    | 4                        | 151:1        |
| 1977            | 869                    | 10                       | 87:1         |
| 1982            | 1107                   | 17                       | 65:1         |
| 1987            | 1497                   | 18                       | 83:1         |

|      |       |     |       |
|------|-------|-----|-------|
| 1992 | 1639  | 16  | 103:1 |
| 1997 | 2,315 | 55  | 42:1  |
| 2002 | 2,815 | 60  | 47:1  |
| 2007 | 2,610 | 90  | 29:1  |
| 2012 | 3,300 | 135 | 24:1  |
| 2017 | 3,335 | 179 | 19:1  |
| 2022 | 3,460 | 159 | 22:1  |

Source: Information compiled by author from Fairio, 2014, p. 56; Sepoe, 1996, p. 109; and Sepoe, 2022, p. 1.

Table 15 details the ratios at play for the fifteen strong women candidates running in 2022. Two, Rufina Peter and Kessy Sawang, won the electorates they contested. While both had contested multiple times, others, such as Julie Soso and Delilah Gore, had also contested multiple times but were again not successful in 2022. Given the high number of candidates contesting their electorates, however, this may have had more of an impact on their electability than ratios.

**Table 15: Ratios of male to female candidates: 2022 election**

| Electorate                   | Candidate              | Placing | # of candidates |        | Ratio |
|------------------------------|------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|-------|
|                              |                        |         | Male            | Female |       |
| Central Provincial           | Rufina Peter           | 1       | 22              | 3      | 7:1   |
| Rigo Open                    | Vikki Gara Mosin       | 4       | 42              | 3      | 14:1  |
| Kairuku Open                 | Seline Leo Lohia       | 5       | 43              | 7      | 6:1   |
| Sohe Open                    | Delilah Gore           | 3       | 44              | 3      | 15:1  |
| Northern Provincial          | Jean E. Parkop         | 2       | 46              | 5      | 9:1   |
| Milne Bay Provincial         | Jennifer Rudd          | 5       | 19              | 2      | 10:1  |
| Kiriwina/<br>Goodenough Open | Joyce Grant            | 5       | 18              | 1      | 18:1  |
| Moresby South                | Michelle Hau'ofa       | 4       | 8               | 1      | 8:1   |
| Moresby Northeast            | Diane Unagi Koiam      | 3       | 76              | 4      | 19:1  |
| Kandep Open                  | Jenny Luke             | 5       | 50              | 2      | 25:1  |
| Eastern<br>Provincial        | Highland<br>Julie Soso | 6       | 63              | 2      | 32:1  |
| Kavieng Open                 | Rubie W. Kerepa        | 3       | 17              | 4      | 4:1   |
| Manus Open                   | Lynn Ozanne Ronnie     | 3       | 36              | 6      | 6:1   |
| Rai Coast Open               | Kessy Sawang           | 1       | 54              | 3      | 18:1  |
| Morobe Provincial            | Jennifer Baing         | 5       | 37              | 4      | 9:1   |

Source: Papua New Guinea Today, 2022.

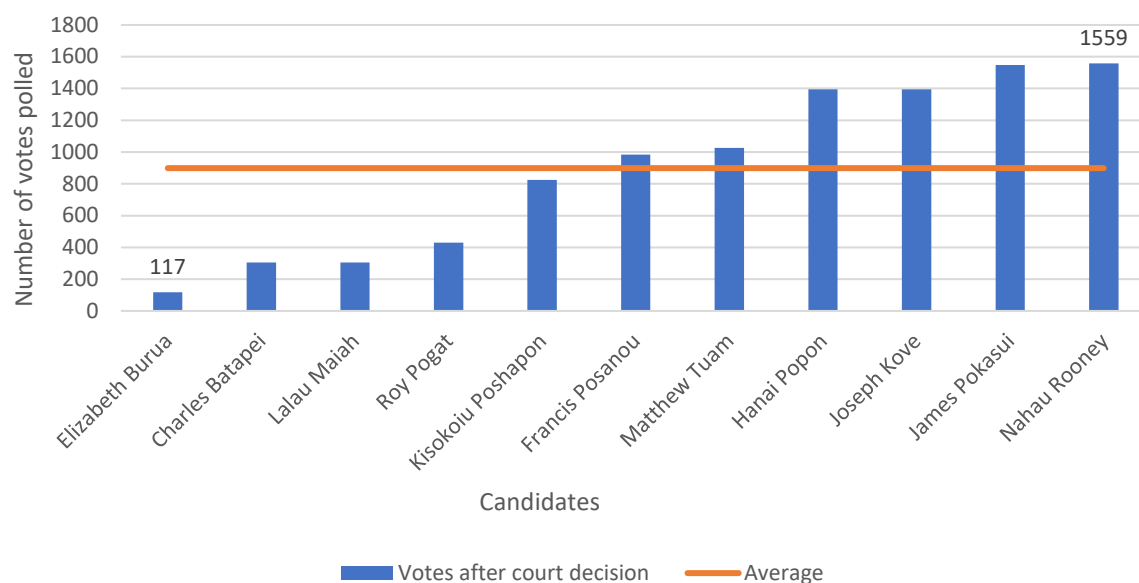
#### **4.4.4 *Vote collaborating and vote splitting***

Women's experience of candidacy is also uniquely characterised by both vote collaboration and vote splitting. While women compete against each other as they do against male counterparts, we see cases that indicate that women candidates also collaborate with other candidates. The case involving Philomena Kassman and Rufina Peter in the 2017 and 2022 elections for Central Regional electorate is illustrative. Upon elimination in each election, Kassman's second and third preferences went to Peter. In 2017, Peter gained 1,912 votes while Robert Agarobe, who won the seat, gained 1,140 second and third preferences from Kassman's 7,842 votes. In 2022, while Peter gained 1,560 votes from Kassman's 5,855 votes, the incumbent male candidate only collected 669 votes from her.

In 2017, Kessy Sawang credited part of her strong election campaign to the male candidates that she was competing against. She said that she had told the male candidates to ask their voters to give her their second and third preferences as a form of vote collaboration. However, in 2022, they were not so accommodating because they saw that she had almost won the seat in 2017. Subsequently, she had to amend her strategy for the 2022 election campaign (Kessy Sawang: 2022 interview).

More commonly than vote collaboration, however, we see instances of vote splitting. Not only do high turnovers in party-endorsed candidates and independents work against women candidates, but it is thought that some candidates contest only to split another candidate's vote, also acting as a brake on women's performance at the polls. It is difficult to prove that women or men are pitched against each other in NGEs in PNG. However, Pokawin (1989, p. 249) alludes to this possibility in the 1982 elections for the Manus Open seat, mentioning that Elizabeth Burua was pitched against Nahau Rooney with the hope of diverting some of the votes cast by women that would otherwise go to Rooney. Burua did not ultimately split women's votes, and Rooney won, but only after going to the Court of Disputes for a recount (see Figure 8, showing the polling performances of Burua and Rooney).

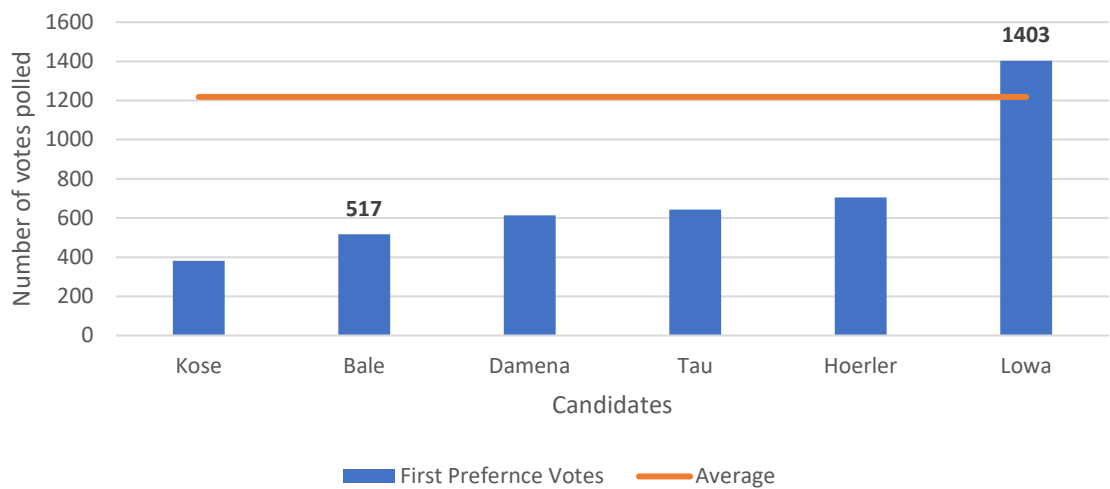
**Figure 8: Elizabeth Burua versus Nahau Rooney: Manus Open, 1982**



Source: Adapted by author from data in Pokawin, 1982, p. 273.

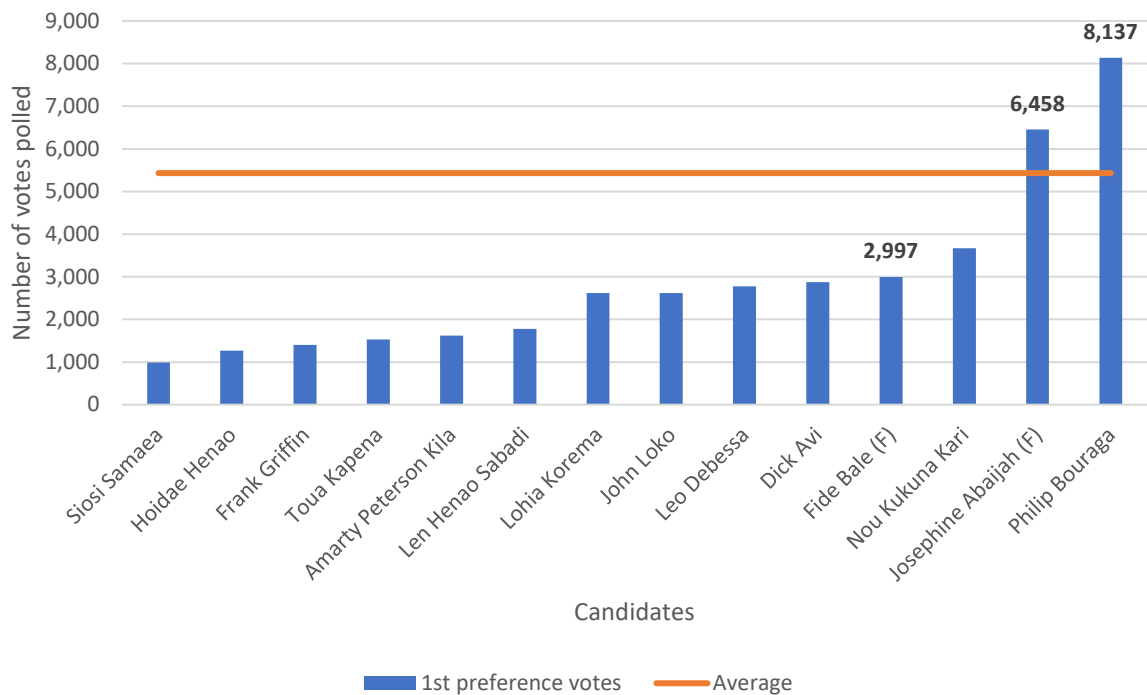
The second case is Abaijah versus Bale. In 1982, Fide Bale's electoral participation in the NCD regional election, which Josephine Abaijah was also contesting, raises questions as to whether Bale contested the NCD regional electorate to split Josephine Abaijah's votes because in 1977 she contested the Moresby Northeast electorate, and although she was a weak candidate in that smaller open electorate, she nevertheless recontested the regional electorate in 1982. Also in that same year, Abaijah ran for the NCD regional electorate as incumbent in that election, but she lost to Philip Bouraga. Abaijah polled 6,458 ballots and Bale polled 2,997, and Bouraga won with 8,137 ballots. Abaijah was short 1,679 ballots. In 1987, instead of recontesting the regional seat, Fide Bale returned to the Moresby Northeast Open electorate to contest there, but while she polled just above the average, she was still a very weak candidate (see Figures 9, 10 and 11).

**Figure 9: Bale’s performance in Moresby Northeast, 1977**



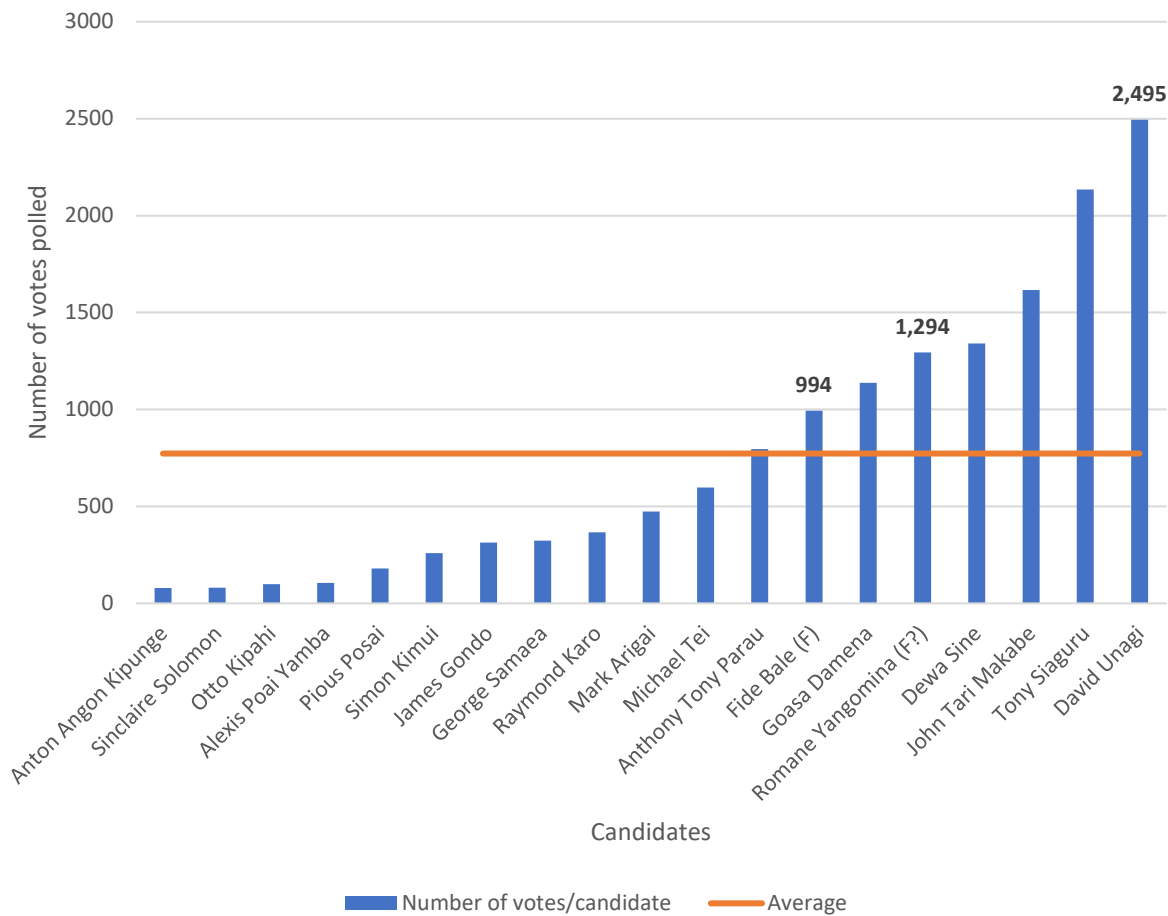
Source: Figure compiled from data recorded by Wood, 2019.

**Figure 10: Abaijah’s performance in NCD, 1982**



Source: Figure compiled from data recorded by Wood (2019)

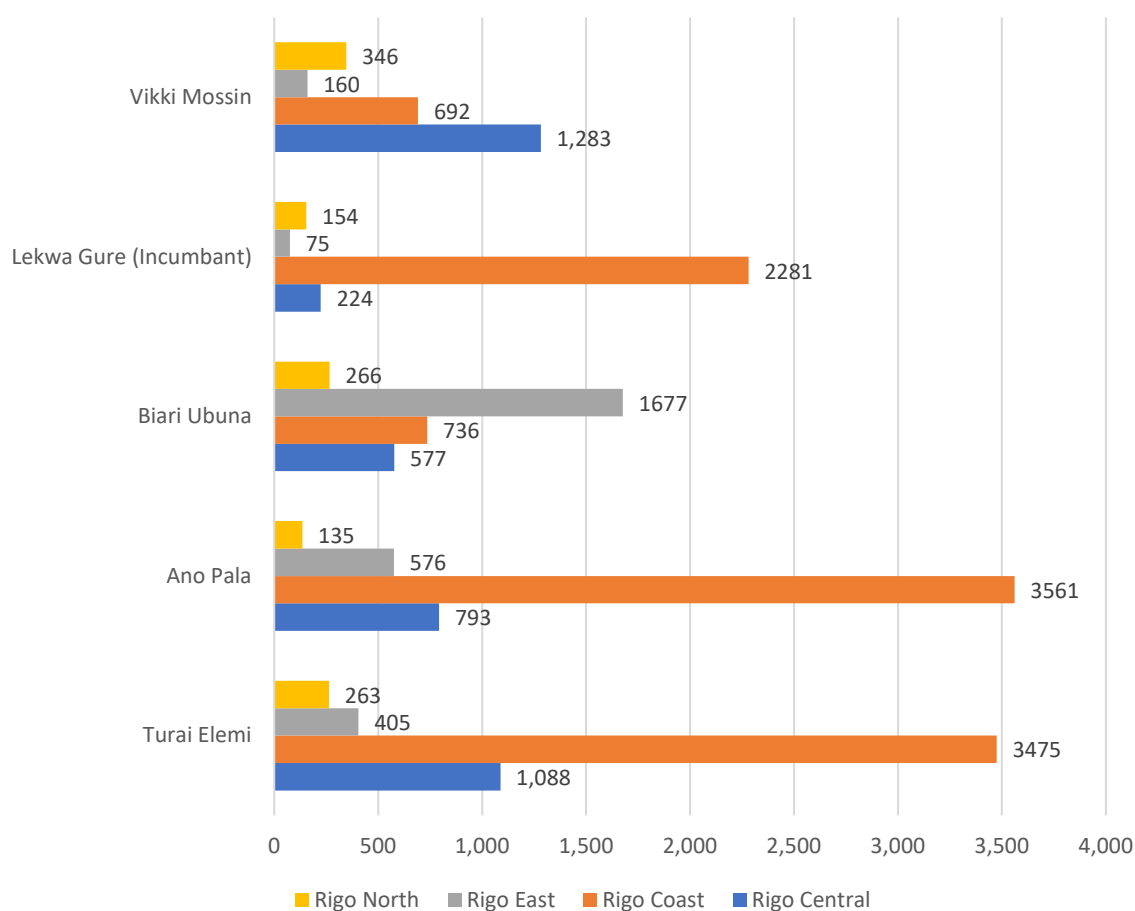
Figure 11: Bale’s performance in Moresby Northeast, 1987



Source: Source: Figure compiled from data recorded by Wood, 2019.

Another woman candidate I consider is Vikki Mosin. In 2022, Mosin was among 42 candidates contesting Rigo Open electorate, challenging seasoned candidates Turai Elemi and Ano Pala who have contested since 2014. In 2022, Pala and Elemi recontested the Rigo Open electorate. The three candidates performed well in Rigo Central LLG, however, Elemi performed better than Gure (incumbent) and Pala, sharing votes with Vikki Mossine, who did not perform well in the other LLGs (see Figure 12).

**Figure12: Vikki Mosin versus Turai Elemi: Rigo Open, 2022**



Source: Adapted by author from data collected from National Electoral Commission: 2022

Elemi and Mosin shared first preference votes in Rigo Central and Rigo North LLGs. In the distribution of the second and third preferences, Mosin gained 3,014 votes and Elemi gained 3,513 votes (see Table 16). Was Mosin, a female candidate from Rigo Central LLG, pitched against Elemi? Initially Pangu had endorsed a male candidate from Rigo Central, then Mosin's Future of PNG party had adopted the candidate. Then, at the eleventh hour, Mosin told the male candidate that she was going to run instead, removing her support for his run. What was her role in the race for the Rigo Open electorate seat in 2022? The candidate in third place was an independent. Had he contributed to the win of the Pangu candidate, Ano Pala? While second and third preferences are very good votes because they augment the quality of the overall performance of a candidate, first preferences are most desirable because they are the impetus

for stronger campaigns. As one male participant from my focus group discussions in Sivitatana village said,

Many of these candidates that come, they come with their qualification; I am a law graduand, I am an economist. I came from Oxford University in England, from America, I can do this, I can do that...these candidates fail miserably because they do not know the needs of the people. Stupid people are standing for elections. There are some people who are not qualified sitting in there; they want to be overnight millionaires. When 20 people come in, Rigo is split. (Male participant: 2019)

**Table 16: Distribution of second and third preferences in Rigo Open electorate: 2022**

| Candidate   | Primary count | Elimination count | Votes gained |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Ano Pala    | 5,065         | 9,142             | 4,077        |
| Turai Elemi | 5,231         | 8,744             | 3,513        |
| Biari Ubuna | 3,257         | 6,008             | 2,751        |
| Vikki Mosin | 2,481         | 5,495             | 3,014        |

Source: PNG Electoral Commission 66B forms, 2022.

In 2022, Mosin contested the Rigo Open electorate seat with 42 other candidates. The average vote was 1, 364, with 32 candidates polling below average. All gained less than 1,000 votes except two candidates: one polled 1,275 votes and the other polled 1,203 votes. Nine polled below 100 votes.

Also in 2022, Seline Leo Lohia, a strong woman candidate for the Kairuku Open electorate, was among 33 candidates, being one of six women candidates. In Manus, 36 candidates ran for the Manus Open electorate, with Lynne Ozzane Ronnie, a strong woman candidate, among six women candidates vying for the seat, as was Noelyn Daniel Sabumei.

In 2022, in Moresby Northeast Open electorate, Dianne Unagi Koiam was one of 76 candidates contesting the seat, and one of six female candidates. The average votes polled was 2,039, with 69 candidates polling below the average. Of those, 51 candidates polled below 1,000. Some candidates polled as low as zero second and third preferences (50 out of 76 candidates). The candidates who polled strongly were from the Highlands region.

In Morobe Province, 37 candidates contested the Morobe regional electorate, of whom four were women. In Northern Province, Jean Eparo Parkop competed against 46 candidates, of whom five were women. In Sohe, Delilah Gore had to contend with 44 candidates, two being women. In Eastern Highlands regional electorate, Julie Soso was up against 63, of whom three were female candidates.

#### **4.4.5 Voting irregularities**

All stakeholders continue to grapple with the issue of questionable election results. Reports produce data, information and facts every election year, but problems with electoral politics persist in PNG, with little or no improvement over time. In 2022, some citizens in Rigo district did not cast their votes because their names were not on the electoral roll. When Rigo Inland was divided into two LLGs on the eve of the elections, villages were relocated either to Rigo North, Rigo East or Rigo Central, and many voters could not find their names on electoral rolls. Their right to vote were taken away because they were displaced by a national institution. One returning officer commented that all the problems they had not seen before in elections but had heard of occurring in other parts of PNG, had occurred in the district. In one village there was underage voting. The councillor who is the current Rigo Open member's supporter is also the councillor of that village and conducted the elections. In this village I was told by one male observer (2022), '*Asi bono toretore, fikisa asi bono ghabi korana gabu e ghareva gharevani bene.*' (Don't write, don't take pictures, because the place is moving.) In this instance, everyone was witnessing the village councillor hijacking the electoral process and it was beginning to cause a stir among the scrutineers of other candidates. These informal electoral processes are barriers that women candidates must contend with during elections.

In this same village, one individual was seen to escort voters in, assist them in voting and then escort them out again. In another village, there were reports of one female candidate's supporter giving out money to voters on the line, while one supporter posed as a police officer; he was armed and was seen to be escorting ballot boxes. Were there elements of truth in these accounts? The woman candidate who came fourth in the Rigo Open election had kitchens in almost every village along the Magi Highway in Rigo Central, starting from Sabuia. Do such incidents hinder PNG citizens' political aspirations?

#### 4.4.6 Election violence

In July 2022, ABC correspondent Natalie Whiting reported that Annaisha Max, a 22-year-old female, was shot dead when tensions flared. Whiting wrote that the deceased was among hundreds of people voting at the ATS Settlement in Port Moresby (Whiting, 2022). Of the same incident, Finkeo (2022) reported in the *Post-Courier* that ‘A young woman in her 20s was allegedly shot dead when police fired gun shots to disperse the crowd who reacted to ballot boxes arriving late at ATS block outside 7-Mile in Port Moresby’. This electorate was Moresby Northeast, and Diane Unagi, one of the strong candidates, had contested this electorate.

Covering a further violent incident, on 26 July, *The National* newspaper (2022) reported that ‘counting for the Moresby North-East electorate resumed at the Sir John Guise Stadium from where...trouble [had] erupted on Sunday and escalated into a running knife-wielding battle’. Of the same news, another news source, *Loop* (2022), reported that a dispute over the boxes among scrutineers escalated that afternoon into a full-scale fight that spilled into the John Guise and Waigani Drive roads. Ravu Frank, the City Manager, was reported to have called on the police to identify machete-wielding youths who were slashing fellow residents without second thought. This aggressive behaviour during elections is characteristic of one part of PNG.

**Image 14: Tanks on the streets in Port Moresby: Elections 2022**



Source: *The National*, 2022.

Jennifer Baing was a strong contender for the Morobe regional electorate in 2022, but reports were made that ballot papers from Markham Open (her voter base as her father Andrew Baing is from this electorate) and Kabwum Open electorate were destroyed. *Post-Courier* daily newspaper (Kising, 2022) also reported the returning officer saying that ‘they had counted four ballot boxes for Kabwum Open and four for Morobe regional for each LLG of Yus, Deyamos, Komba and Selepet’ but the National Electoral Commission’s website indicates there are no data for those areas. There are 10 open electorates in Morobe Province. While all the other open electorates’ records on that website state first preference distributions for all candidates, in the regional electorate none are shown for Markham Open and Kabwum Open electorates. In 2022, Electoral Commissioner Simon Sinai clarified that the declarations that he had made for Markham and Kabwum had been done under the Special Circumstances provision of the Organic Law (Inside PNG, 2022). He went on to say that the destruction of ballot papers and counting centres had been pre-planned to sabotage the electoral process by disgruntled candidates and their supports. Given Luther Wenge was declared Governor of Morobe Province with 130,363 votes and Jennifer Baing polled 43,498 votes, would the ballot papers from Kabwum and Markham open electorates have made a difference for her? Maybe not, but the essence of democracy – citizens’ right to vote and participate in a political activity, both male and female, from these two open electorates – was denied. Pacific News (Ligaiula, 2022) reported that ‘about 30 plus boxes were destroyed with four more boxes left to be counted’.

**Image 15: The destruction of ballot papers in Markham: Elections 2022**



Source: *Papua New Guinea Today*, 2022.

Of Jennifer Baing, Jean Eparo Parkop said,

We saw it in Morobe too. Jennifer Baing did really well. For sure if those Markham boxes had not been destroyed, she would have done even better. Maybe even have won.

(Opperman et al., 2025)

In 2022, Josephine Abaijah said that money politics was a ‘foreign’ concept in her time. She said that when she first succeeded in being elected, candidates would go and talk, and the people would listen, and then they went on their way. She said that they did not feed voters or give them money.

In a workshop held at the Gateway Hotel on 3 and 4 November 2022, hosted by the National Democratic Institute, some female candidates who contested the 2022 elections mentioned that the results were pre-empted. They explained that the elections had been rigged in such a way that certain candidates from certain political parties were expected to win. A secretary from one political party mentioned that another political party had ‘beat them in their own game’. She said that one strategy her party used was to act as patrons to candidates that could split votes for an opposing candidate. This information raises the question as to whether Mosin, who contested the Rigo Open electorate, was a proxy for Ano Pala, a Pangu candidate. Could the high number of candidates be a reason why some of the same people win again and again? (See pages 10 - 13 on political parties.) This is a strategy employed by political parties and individuals to foil the performance of other equally strong candidates. As a woman candidate I interviewed said,

I was told they were going to fund me as an independent candidate but not as an endorsed one. They endorsed a Pangu candidate who was not a greens member.

Another candidate said,

There were no party candidates for Pangu but pro candidates.

In this quote, the woman candidate alluded to there being candidates who were not endorsed by Pangu Party, but they were supporters of the Party. These candidates were those who contested as independents but had financial backings from Pangu Party.

The party with the highest number of winning candidates is invited to form the government. Usually, a winning party does not win by absolute majority, consequently coalitions are formed. If the nature of PNG politics is numbers, is the high turnover of candidates at every NGE a means to an end?

## 4.5 Conclusion

PNG is predominantly patrilineal, but electoral data show that PNG national elections have produced some strong women candidates who have polled better than many male contesters; either winning or placing above the average number of votes received in their districts. While women benefit from instances of vote collaboration or party endorsement, their losing in elections is a result of a range of other factors, including the election system, the very high numbers of candidates running as independent candidates, some of whom are used as proxies to split votes, and the high number of political parties, which may be subsidiaries of major political parties and may also be used as tools to rig election results. For example, in one isolated case, a female candidate mentioned that she had had the backing of three political parties in the 2022 elections. Then there are voting irregularities, where names of voters – sometimes whole villages or households – are excluded from the electoral roll. Missing names is always fuel for election violence against state institutions and people. The number of electorates per region is also a concern because it gives rise to the issue of regionalism, indicating that politics in PNG is played in a certain way, favouring the big-man style where the big-man ‘cuts up the pork’ and distributes it to lesser men in the group to maintain loyalties and create dependencies. When this is the nature of politics, competition and rivalry between big men is rife, and is not able support women’s participation because the inclusion of women in the political arena is thought to weaken the essence of the traditional hausman.

Where there are inequalities in advantage and power, democracy is lacking. The big-man style of politics rules out the more egalitarian approach to social equality that is found in the Southern Region. Suffice to say PNG has a big-woman concept, because of the strong women that NGEs have produced. However, this notion is more evident in the Southern Region where the concept is manifested in the production of five women MPs and the highest number of strong women candidates in 2017 and 2022 NGEs. Despite these positive trends, analysis of the ballot indicate that barriers outnumber enablers to women’s election, making it difficult for women to run successful election campaigns.

## **Chapter 5: Strong women candidates as those elected**

‘Go throw a spear like a man, hit the tabletop like a man, but don’t forget you are a woman!’  
(Male focus group participant from Kalo village, 2019)

### **5.1 Introduction**

The Pacific region ranks very low in the world in terms of women legislators in its national parliaments. In the Pacific region, PNG currently has only three women MPs out of 118 MPs sitting in legislature, making it one of the Pacific Island Forum member countries with the lowest representation of women. While PNG has conducted NGEs since 1972, only ten women have been elected: Josephine Abaijah, Waliyato Clowes, Carol Kidu, Delilah Gore and Rufina Peter from the Southern Region; Loujaya Toni and Kessy Sawang from the Momase; Julie Soso from the Highlands; and Nahau Rooney and Francesca Semoso from the New Guinea Islands. During their terms as MPs, all women have made significant contributions to PNG politics, but despite this their re-election is not guaranteed because PNG electoral politics have become anarchic. While women MPs, like their male counterparts, are representatives of their constituencies, voters’ judgement of them is harsher, premised on the argument that they are mothers and women, therefore any action deemed contrary to those titles creates controversies.

In this chapter, I discuss the 10 strong women candidates who became MPs through the ballot, with the purpose of verifying the claim made above that the hausboi, the hausman and the chief’s platform are all built exclusively for men, but that accessibility to this ‘private’ domain is granted to certain women. If these 10 women were given mandates by their constituencies to fill seats that are supposedly filled only by men in an institution that is deemed a hausman – the national parliament – what allowed them to qualify? In a country that is predominantly patrilineal, what factors influenced voter behaviours and attitudes towards these women candidates such that they were able to win the electorates they contested? Do the outcomes of these elections indicate that PNG cultures value strength in an individual, even if that is a woman? Moreover, do the data imply that some parts of the country are more egalitarian than others?

Of the ten women MPs, Abaijah, Rooney and Kidu served more than a term in parliament, Clowes, Toni, Soso and Gore served one term only and Peter, Sawang and Semoso are currently in their first terms. Here, I discuss the elected women within the context of patrilineal and matrilineal systems as the basis on which to highlight in the subsequent chapters the prejudices

and dichotomies of voter behaviours and attitudes that supposedly promote gender inequalities. If only three out of seven women have been returned as incumbents in national politics, I ask, what are the factors that shape the choices of voters? I also consider their individual performances at the polls and as legislators after their wins, and the commonalities that enabled their wins and losses at the elections. I present some of the controversies in which they were embroiled and, where relevant, the outcomes of the decisions they made as members of parliament. The purpose of this strategy is to present a case stating that all these factors contributed to their elections and re-elections. I also argue that while the mandate given to them is to represent both male and female constituencies, their allegiances to the female populations of their constituencies is paramount because women voters may sway election outcomes in their favour.

This chapter depends mostly on secondary analysis of polling data collected from the PNG Electoral Commission, supplemented by several additional sources of data (e.g., Wood, 2022). I present these women's vote counts, their overall placing in relation to average number of votes received by candidates in the constituency, the number of candidates that contested the electorate and the number of times they contested. I use averages to give a general idea of how a women candidate performed in comparison to her male opponents to measure her strength at the polls. I also use interview data collected and analysed by other scholars to supplement this primarily quantitative analysis.

## **5.2 Women MPs from the Southern Region**

The Southern Region consists of Western, Gulf, Central, Milne Bay and Oro provinces and 21 open electorates, the biggest province being Central with five districts and the smallest being Gulf with only two electorates (see Table 17). All provinces have elected women MPs except Gulf, with Central province electing two women. All are based in patrilineal systems except Milne Bay Province, which is matrilineal.

**Table 17: Provinces and open electorates of the Southern Region**

| Province                        | Open electorates |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Western                         | 4                |
| Gulf                            | 2                |
| Central                         | 5                |
| National Capital District (NCD) | 3                |
| Milne Bay                       | 4                |
| Oro                             | 3                |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>21</b>        |

Source: Wood, 2019.

Josephine Abaijah, the first woman to be elected to PNG's third House of Assembly during self-governance, contested the Central Regional electorate (1972), the NCD regional electorate (1977 and 1982) and Milne Bay regional electorate (1992, 1997 and 2002). Waliyato Clowes ran for the Middle Fly Open electorate in Western Province (1977 and 1982), Carol Kidu for Moresby South Open electorate in the NCD (1997, 2002 and 2007), Delilah Gore contested Sohe Open electorate in Oro province (2012, 2017 and 2022), and Rufina Peter also contested the Central provincial regional electorate (2017 and 2022). Table 18 below compares these women's performance at the polls during national elections. Of the six elections Abaijah contested, she won four. Her best elections were in 1972, polling 16,011 first preference votes in Central province. In 1982, she contested the NCD regional seat and lost, competing against 14 other candidates. Clowes contested twice and won once, polling 3,360 votes in 1977. She was one of five candidates contesting the North Fly Open electorate. Carol Kidu contested three times, and won all three, with her best performance at the polls in 2007 where she received 9,475 first preference votes. The highest number of competitors she competed against was 26 in 1997. Delilah Gore contested three times and won only once. The highest number of votes she received was in 2017 for the election that she won. The highest number of candidates she competed against was 22, and this was in 2022. Finally, Rufina Peter contested twice and won once. She won in 2022 with 30,944 first preference votes, and the highest number of candidates she competed against was 27 (in 2017). All five women were strong women candidates because they all polled above average in all the elections they contested. The electoral performances of each of these women from the Southern Region are presented below (Table 18).

**Table 18: Electoral performance of strong women MPs from the Southern Region**

|                   | <b>Elections<br/>contested<br/>(number)</b> | <b>Elections<br/>won<br/>(number)</b> | <b>Highest<br/>number<br/>of<br/>electoral<br/>competitors<br/>(year)</b> | <b>Highest<br/>number<br/>of<br/>votes<br/>received<br/>(year)</b> | <b>Elections<br/>over<br/>the<br/>average</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Josephine Abaijah | 6                                           | 3                                     | 14 (1982)                                                                 | 16,011 (1972)                                                      | 5                                             |
| Waliyato Clowes   | 1                                           | 1                                     | 5 (1977)                                                                  | 3,360 (1977)                                                       | 1                                             |
| Carol Kidu        | 3                                           | 3                                     | 26 (1997)                                                                 | 9,475 (2007)                                                       | 3                                             |
| Delilah Gore      | 3                                           | 1                                     | 44 (2022)                                                                 | 5,258 (2017)                                                       | 3                                             |
| Rufina Peter      | 2                                           | 1                                     | 27 (2017)                                                                 | 30,944 (2022)                                                      | 2                                             |

Source: Table compiled from data recorded by the PNG Electoral Commission (pngec.gov.au).

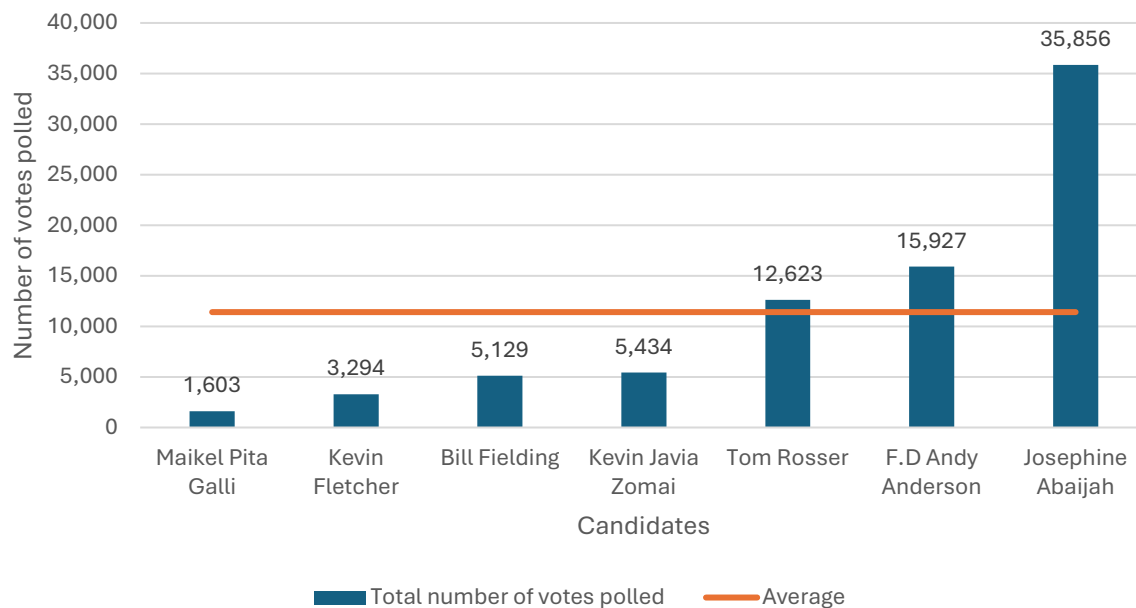
### **5.2.1 Josephine Abaijah**

In 1972, Josephine Abaijah, a Milne Bay woman, won by a landslide victory (see Figure 13). In an interview with Abaijah, Kemish (2015) asked her what the reaction was like when she won. She responded:

During the counting...I think the Australians who were holding on the what [pause] could not believe, you know, because...fancy a woman winning in the election...so they made declarations for the others...Abau seat, Kairuku/Hiri and all that...but for Central...they have to recount two or three times to make sure whether it is true...

Revisiting the argument here that patrilineal systems and cultural norms in PNG are some of the factors that prevent women's political participation at the national level is moot because the quote above is an indication that there are other sets of rules governing indigenous people concerning women and leadership titles: Abaijah's landslide win in 1972 showed that despite patriarchal systems in Central Province in general, and Rigo Open electorate in particular, voters, both males and females had voted for Abaijah – the question was, why? She was a woman, but she had won. Abaijah's resounding win in Central provincial electorate allows us to surmise that certain women are given access to the chief's platform.

**Figure 13: Abaijah's performance in Central, 1972**



Source: Adapted from Wood, 2019.

In 1977, Abaijah contested again. However, this time she was contesting for the NCD provincial seat. Explaining her shift in my interview with her at her home in Two-Mile in Port Moresby in 2022, she recalled:

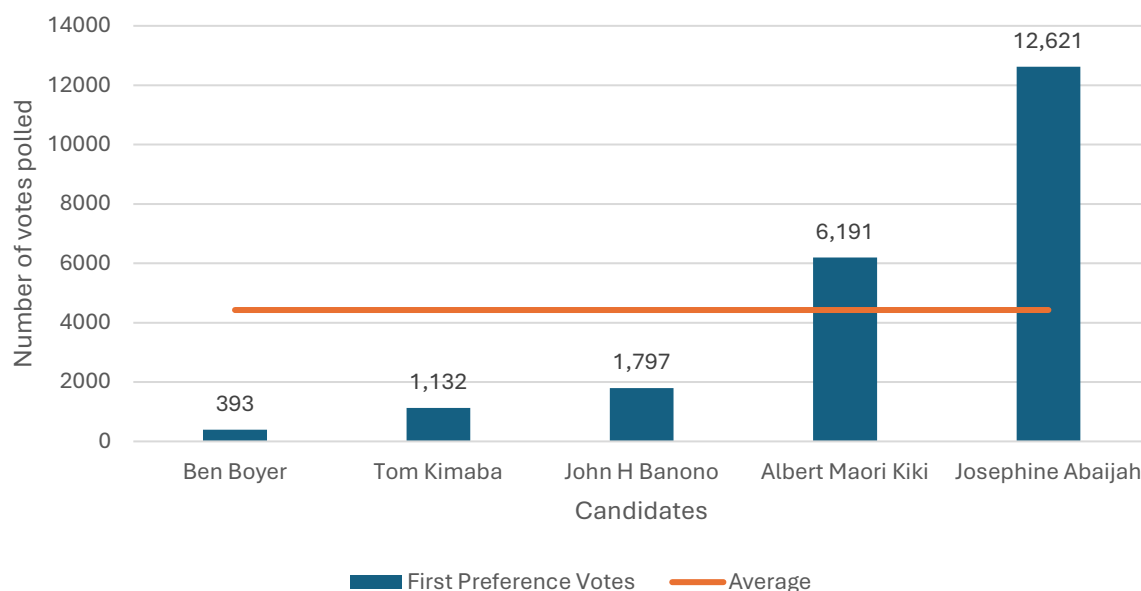
You know politics, the two people at that time...there's Somare and there's Kiki. Somare is a New Guinean, Kiki is a Papuan, and who's going to become the first prime minister? So, each one of them has to work, but I was always fighting with Sir Maori Kiki, I don't know why he didn't like me...but Somare was smart so he, uh, made sure that I come from Central province to stand here against Kiki. Well, not knowing that, I just came because they were the bosses and so what could I choose...No, he didn't approach me, he didn't approach me but...he...told other people to come and tell me.

Abaijah's move from Central province to the NCD suggests she was weaponised in a power play between two men – Michael Somare and Sir Albert Maori Kiki – and Abaijah, being a conformist to the unwritten laws of society where the voice of a man is law, left her vote base. When Somare took her away from her vote base in Central province, it was a calculated move as she was a campaigner against a united Papua and New Guinea and the NCD still had a Papuan base. However, it looked like a risk worth taking. It was a risk because Kiki, a Papuan too, could defeat Abaijah because Port Moresby was a catchment for Papuans and New Guineans, the majority being of Papuan descent. With Kiki's electoral loss, Somare could still

win the most coveted seat in a brand-new country soon and with his position he could suppress a Papuan uprising. This notwithstanding, Abaijah would come to regret this move, noting in her 2022 interview, ‘I regret coming and running here. I should have stayed in Central province.’

In 1977, she was one of five contenders who contested the NCD regional electorate, and she won in a landslide victory, polling 12,621 votes (see Figure 14). Her runner up, Albert Maori Kiki, polled less than half her total of first preference votes, with 6,191 votes. Abaijah’s performance at the polls transcended those of all her male opponents, and she was the only candidate to poll well above the average.

**Figure14: Abaijah’s performance in NCD, 1977**



Source: Adapted from Wood, 2019.

At the time, the contest in this constituency was described as ‘one of the most suspenseful electoral conflicts during the 1977 general elections’ (Premdas & Steeves, 1978, p. 132). As the acknowledged leader of the secessionist Papua Besena movement, Abaijah had been able to defeat a deputy prime minister, a key figure in the Pangu Pati (Maori Kiki) with over 57 per cent of the votes. Other aspects of this historical analysis focused on the validity of the votes. For Premdas and Steeves (1978), for example, the 3,197 invalid ballots suggested that there was also widespread disaffection. Where voters had considered Abaijah an ‘archenemy’ (Premdas & Steeves 1978, p. 132), it was difficult to see how they could have voted for her. Reports from researchers at the polling booths in Taurama and Murray Barracks seemed to

suggest that ‘a large number of soldiers simply decided not to vote’ (Premdas & Steeves 1978, p. 133). Despite these issues, Abaijah proceeded to amass support from voters in NCD. She knew her role in the wider PNG electoral context, reflecting in her interview:

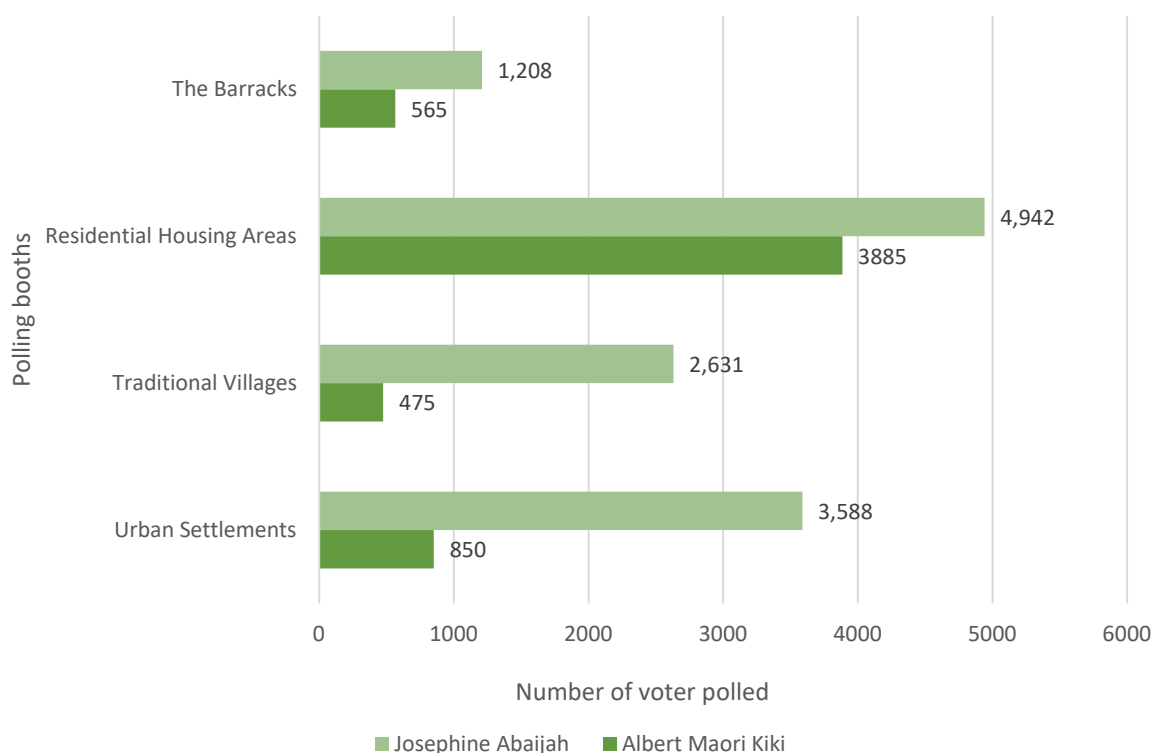
I came over here and stood but, in the meantime, I didn’t know that [Somare] already done this talk to the Sepiks living here, [saying] ‘hey, you vote for this woman, don’t vote for Kiki” (laughs)...72, mind you, 72! They were already planning that. 77 I came here ... you are so innocent when you go in there, not knowing that this type of things...but those people who know what they want, they’ll get...he wants to be the first prime minister, so he made sure I was the appropriate one to stand so the man who is going to contest against him loses, and it happened.

While Abaijah credited Somare for her win, she forgot that she was a very visible woman. Others, however, gave her more credit. Galeva Kwarara (a former MP of Rigo Open from 1977 to 1987, speaking in a personal interview in his home at Five-Mile in Port Moresby, 2019) remembers:

In those days, culture was very strong. When any war between any two tribes, they always cling onto their leader, and Papua became a tribe on its own. It wasn’t a question of male or female. Men failed; Sir Albert Maori Kiki, Ebia Olewale, Christine Arek, John Guise, all those big guns, Hoerler Rarua Rarua. They all failed, and this woman beat them all hands down. Why, because she spoke the truth.

In 1977, the NCD was still the seat of the Papuan populace. As such, Abaijah still had a voter base. There were Papuans residing in residential housing areas, traditional villages, and the urban settlements in the district. Figure 15 compares Abaijah and Kiki’s performances in the polling booths in NCD in 1977. When Premdas and Steeves (1978) did an analysis of Abaijah and Kiki’s performances at the polls in 1977, they divided the polling booth areas into four groups: urban settlements, traditional villages, residential housing areas and barracks. However, many residents from surrounding areas came to cast their votes there in the polling booths at Taurama and Murray Barracks (Premdas & Steeves, 1978, p. 133). Abaijah performed well at the polling booths in traditional villages and urban settlements. She was ahead of Kiki by 1,057 votes and in the barracks, she led Kiki by 643 votes (see Figure 15).

**Figure15: Abaijah versus Kiki by polling booth area, 1977**

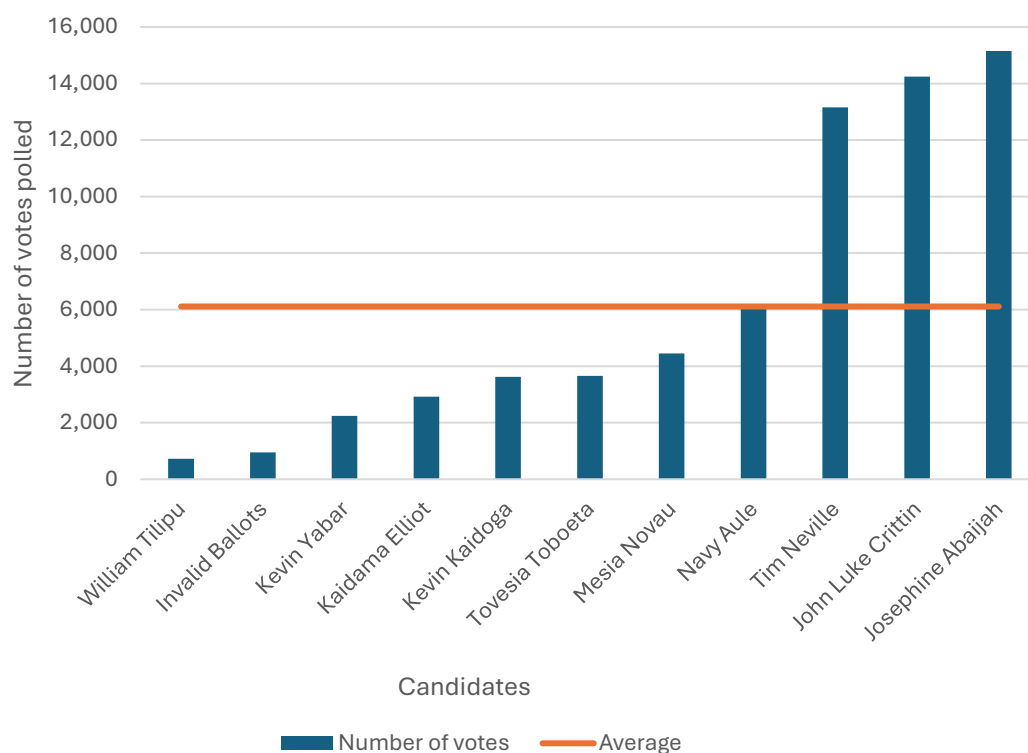


Source: Adapted from Premdas & Steeves, 1978, pp. 131–133.

Abaijah's victory in 1977 rode on the back of her 1972 election campaign. With high unemployment rates and uncontrolled migration from other parts of the new country, the separatist movement Papua Besena grew in popularity among the Papuan people. Abaijah was a populist, targeting the small people by meeting them in their communities, meeting community leaders, engaging the assistance of university students, and seeking the support of civil servants and wage earners who were dissatisfied with their employment conditions.

Abaijah did not win the next election she contested in the NCD (in 1982). After that loss, she next ran for the Milne Bay provincial seat in 1992, 1997 and 2022. Her first attempt in Milne Bay was unsuccessful. Not discouraged, Abaijah returned in 1997, challenging Tim Neville, among ten candidates, and winning with a vote share of 22.5 per cent. Although Tim Neville had won the Milne Bay provincial seat in 1992 in a landslide victory, the race was harder in 1997. Neville finished in third place at the end of count with 13,160 votes, defeated by Abaijah with 15,145 votes (see Figure 16). Abaijah was not as strong a candidate as she had been in Central and NCD, however, where she had won over 57 per cent of the vote in 1977, and in 1997 her final vote share was just 22.5 per cent.

**Figure16: Abaijah’s performance in Milne Bay, 1997**



Source: Adapted from Wood, 2019.

In total, Abaijah contested six NGEs; Central Regional once (1972), NCD Regional twice (1977 and 1982) and Milne Bay Regional three times (1992, 1997 and 2002). Her story is one of perseverance – over time and place. Although a woman candidate, citizens cast their votes for her. Perhaps surprisingly, her electoral campaigns in her home province did not match those of her campaigns in Central province (1972) and NDC Regional (1977) where she won landslide victories, mainly because she was the voice of the Papuan people heading a micro nationalist movement.

#### *5.2.1.1 Abaijah’s achievements and controversies in office*

Abaijah’s involvement in contesting in NGEs since 1972 was always motivated by her desire to protect the lives, land and future of the Papuan people because she believed they had been treated unfairly by Australia and then by a new indigenous government.

### *5.2.1.2 Founder of the Papuan Movement*

As a member of parliament, Josephine Abaijah was considered a radical. She described herself as a Papuan Nationalist and formed a secessionist movement, Papua Besena. She was an outspoken critic of Australian colonisation, famously ‘unilaterally declaring’ Papuan independence from Australia. She produced replicas of the gifts Australia had given the traditional clan leaders in 1884 when Papua was annexed – a hunting knife, a piece of pink figured calico, two sticks of tobacco, three ship's biscuits, and an axe – calling on them to take the items back in a declaration of Papuan freedom (Premdas, 1977, p. 265). Of this action she wrote:

My declaration of independence for Papua was to expose the lie that Papua willingly gave up its rights or its political independence...[t]he counter to the artifice. It gave to Papua an alternative history...I felt cleaner now...but a price would be extracted for my ‘unpardonable crime’ (Abaijah & Wright, 1991, p. 377).

In Anne Dickson-Waiko’s (2013, p. 191) estimation, Abaijah’s was a ‘remarkable political achievement’, not only in PNG, but around the world, given how few anticolonial movements have been founded by women globally.

### *5.2.1.3 On women and family*

Abaijah was also concerned about poverty in PNG. In 1972, she presented evidence before a Minimum Wages Board arguing that the cost of living meant families living on \$8 to \$12 a week would be deprived, and potentially starving (Post-Courier, 1972). In 1974, women fought for the wages of their husbands who were civil servants and wage earners, and Abaijah recalls them ending up in jail (Abaijah, personal communication, 2019). Of the protest marches that were prompted by these issues, Margaret Loko, a human rights advocate who had contested the Moresby South and NCD regional electorate several times recalled:

The recent protest marches by the Port Moresby women showed determination and must be seen as one sign of what women can achieve. The aim of the protest was one against inflation (rising cost of goods versus wages). However, the aim itself and the concern of those women who organised and participated were swept under the mat when those observers, critics, find outsiders viewed the protest march as solely an individual political motivation rather than a group concern. The protest got out of hand – several

women were arrested and there were other mishaps. This was not an indication of individual bad management. The blame rests on the shoulders of the young “educated” women like myself who did not march or support those who participated.

#### *5.2.1.4 Abaijah loses the support of people*

Abaijah’s support waned, however, over time. While she had been very popular as a campaigner of self-determination in the lead-up to independence, she was seen to lose political favour in Port Moresby and Central province. As the member for Milne Bay Regional electorate from 1997–2002, the perception that she was ‘constantly fighting’ resulted in a vote of no confidence against her. When Titus Philemon defeated her in his second attempt on the floor of the Provincial Assembly, he set a precedent for the successful no-confidence vote against a governor (Post-Courier, 2017). The no-confidence motion was not necessarily a surprise for Abaijah, but it did not diminish her fighting spirit. She would later reflect:

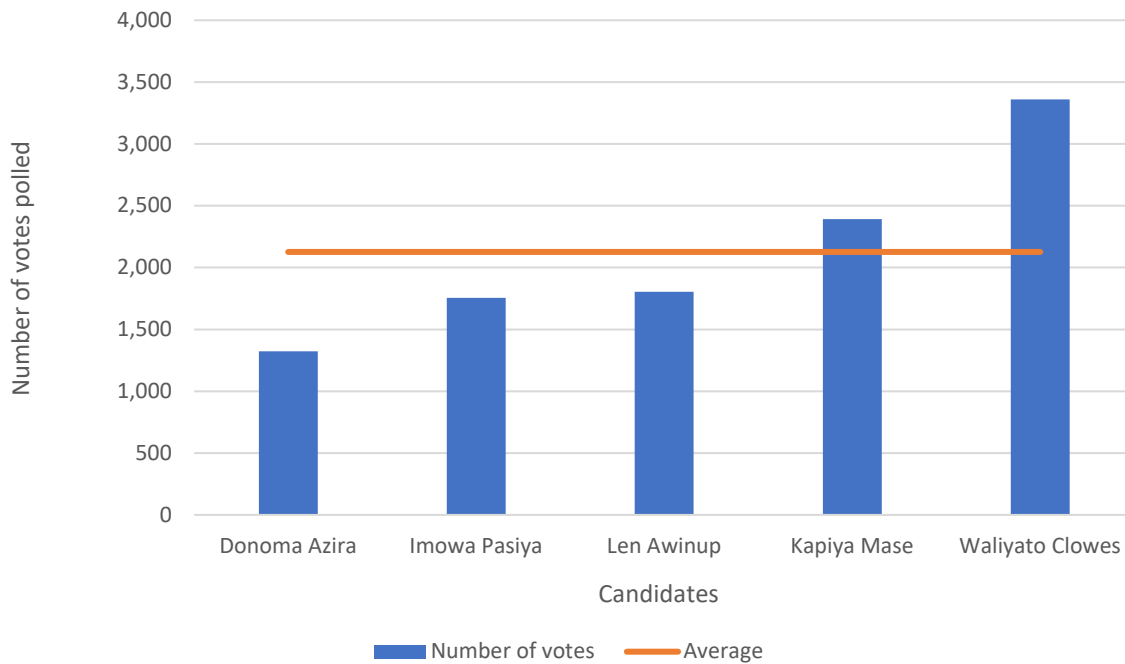
For forty years, I said this was going to happen to Papuan people and this is what’s happening now. We cannot be pushed around like this whenever someone comes looking for land to buy. I will fight till [I] go to my grave, and I challenge and encourage you all to stand united with me in this fight against our homeland (Kora, 2017).

Her fight for Papuan identity in Milne Bay province was moot. People no longer supported a Papuan Movement and being in the southern tip of PNG, the people of this province did not believe they were in danger of minorities moving into their land. This was grounds enough to move a vote of no-confidence against her.

#### **5.2.2 Waliyato Clowes**

Waliyato Clowes contested Middle Fly Open seat in the Western Province in 1977 and was also elected from the Southern Region. Rooney (1985, p. 42) claimed that she was a ‘one-term wonder’. She was one of five contestants in her electorate, winning with 3,360 votes. Her closest rival, Kapiya Mase, trailed behind her with 968 votes (see Figure 17). In her first and only electoral contest in 1977, she was one of five contestants, leading her closest rival by 968 votes, with a winning vote share of 31.3 per cent.

**Figure17: Clowes’s performance in Middle Fly Open, 1977**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

#### *5.2.2.1 Clowes’s achievements and controversies in office*

Clowes was a primary school teacher before she retired to run for the 1977 elections, contesting the newly created Middle Fly Open electorate. She ran as an independent candidate with the intention of representing women and press for village development (Post-Courier, 1977).

After being elected, Clowes joined the United Party to back Sir John Guise’s nomination and election for the prime minister’s post, with the other contender being Michael Somare. At the end of 1977, she and two other MPs formed the People’s United Front which later became the National Party. In 1979, she aligned herself with Papua Besena at the request of the National Party leader, Iambaki Okuk, and the leader of the Besena Parliamentary wing, Galeva Kwarara who was the Rigo Open electorate member, to obtain a closer working relationship ‘between the two groups which later went on to form the Opposition. This move was in line with the desire of the National Party to become the regional party representing the Highlands area and rid the party of all non-Highlands members’ (Patrick, 1980, p. 4). Clowes justified her move with the argument that Papua Besena was a political entity that was striving for economic, political and social improvement in Papua.

On April 16, 1980, Post-Courier reported her forming the Papuan National Alliance Party (Panal), endorsing the Deputy Prime Minister, Iambaki Palma Okuk, as its leader and successfully removing Tei Abal from office as the opposition leader (Post-Courier, 2024), stating that her 'party would represent Western, Southern Highlands, Gulf, Milne Bay, Northern Provinces and the inland areas of Central Province', further stating that Panal would be 'a neutral party group but [it would] fight for greater development of the Papuan provinces [focusing] on the Papuan inland and highlands region', and emphasising that her party was not a 'a radical separatist movement' (Post-Courier, 1980, p. 1).

Clowes not only joined political parties and movements, but she also formed them led by her convictions. These decisions got her accused of political prostitution; the then Minister for Labour and Employment, Jacob Lemeki stated that many people were 'disgusted with her politicking [to] get a ministry'. He claimed that ministers were selected based on their potential abilities and not merely because of their political campaigning (Lemeki, 1980. p. 9).

#### *5.2.2.2 Participation on the floor of parliament*

In a democracy, every decision that is made must be defensible on the floor of parliament. However, after questioning some decisions that the Prime Minister, Julius Chan, had made, Clowes was threatened with a defamation of character lawsuit, particularly concerning her questions about his purchase of a Grumman executive aircraft. She was quoted in the Post-Courier (1980, p. 2) as saying the following:

There have been many occasions in the past, but more so in the present Government, where Ministers of state have used public funds to feed their own egos. But never has one man been allowed to spend K6 million to satisfy his own personal desire...Not only can the Grumman not land at 95 per cent of PNG airports, but very shortly it will not be able to operate anywhere in the world. The people of our nation have been ripped off of K2 million and in two years' time, this amount will be more like K5 million as the Grumman will be completely useless except to fly the Prime Minister between Port Moresby and his home in Rabaul. I find it very disturbing that a man who is a self-confessed successful businessman can allow his nation to be ripped off by a second-rate aeroplane salesman.

The then opposition leader, Michael Somare came to her defence on air, stating that,

the freedoms and rules written down in our National Constitution are being steadily eroded by the Prime Minister and his Government...The freedom to speak out against the Government, and the duty of every MP to criticise Government decisions with which they do not agree, are among the most basic foundations of any democratic System. Yet the Prime Minister is putting those rights under a cloud. (1980. p. 3)

Ebia Olewale said of the same threat against Clowes:

For the first time, an Opposition Member of our National Parliament has been threatened by a Prime Minister. When a Prime Minister is prepared to threaten legal action against a political opponent simply for making a political point then the principle of democracy in our society has been badly eroded. The Prime Minister has spent most of his youth overseas. [He] has never led a village life like most people and can't understand how the rural people feel about his spending K15 million on what appears to be two personal jet aircraft (Post-Courier, 1980).

#### *5.2.2.3 Issues concerning women and youth*

Clowes also spoke on issues concerning youth and women, stating that 'discriminatory practices against women workers [were] contributing to the breakdown of the family', and supporting a submission presented to Prime Minister Julius Chan by two senior women public servants; Miss Margaret Loko and Miss Mary Tabo-Kani, who were calling for an end to discriminatory practices against women in the PNG workforce. Supporting their submission, Clowes said that 'the conditions of women workers in both the public service and the private sector blatantly violated the Constitution of PNG' (Post-Courier, 1980, p. 14). Clowes considered that this practice was a relic of the colonial days, stating further that the 'Chan Government [was] pursuing, like its predecessor, policies of discrimination at home while condemning such practices at the United Nations and overseas. Almost half of the public service was made up of women, yet less than five per cent of senior positions were held by them' (Post-Courier, 1980, p. 14). She went on,

generally speaking, women enter the public service with equal qualifications to the men, but are denied training, career development services and promotion by the male-dominated selection process.

Her stance on youth issues resulted in some backlash from her constituency. One Post-Courier letter to the editor, criticised Clowes as being too preoccupied with government accountability rather than defending her own constituency:

I refer to (Post- Courier, Oct. 22) where the Panel Leader, Mrs Waliyato Clowes suggested that Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Levi, find himself a new travel agent for his overseas trips. Mrs Clowes, you are not fighting for development for the Middle Fly people! It seems that you are just wasting your time criticising Government Ministers. We elected you into the National Parliament to represent us, the Middle Fly people, and to fight for our needs. We haven't heard any word from you in the National Parliament saying that you are fighting for development of Gogodala people. The only news we hear is that you only fight for Youth Development in the National Capital District. Did Youth Development elect you in the National Parliament to fight for their problems or did we elect you to the National Parliament to represent the Middle Fly people? (Dede, 1980, p. 4)

#### *5.2.2.4 Championing the Papuan cause*

Clowes also spoke out against discrimination against Papuan people in the public service. In a public service reshuffle, of the seven departmental heads were dropped, four were Papuans: Kipling Uiari, Jacob Kairi, Charles Lepani and Brian Amini. According to Clowes, they were experts in their respective fields and had played a big role in the development of PNG. As she put it,

I find it hard to believe that men who have satisfied their superiors for many years could suddenly become so bad that they [must] be dropped. What the Prime Minister has done is to take the right men out of the right jobs. The whole show smells very strongly political to me. (Post-Courier, 1980, p. 2)

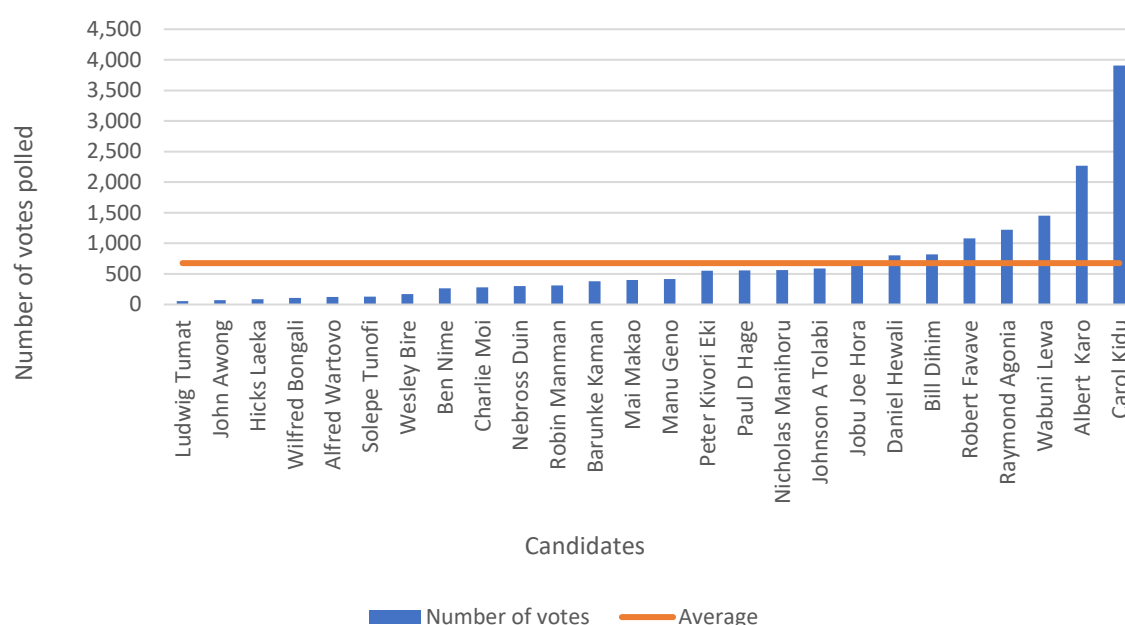
As these events suggest, Clowes was an active member of the PNG national parliament. In 1982, she recontested the Middle Fly Open electorate but lost to Kamena Pilisa, placing fifth among five candidates with only 495 votes. Her constant criticism of the government made the people of her electorate lose confidence in her. Her entry into parliament was made possible by the Gogodala people living in Port Moresby who had asked her to contest the newly created Middle Fly Open electorate. Prior to her nomination and election, she had been teaching at Tokara Primary School in Port Moresby while her Australian husband worked as a Manager

with Burns Philip Limited. Not knowing that Waliyato Clowes had passed on in 2019, on January 6, 2025, I travelled to Balimo to interview her for the Dictionary of Biographies for Nation Makers in Papua New Guinea for the 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary project. In an interview with her people the men said that Clowes had had the support of all the Gogodala men in Middle Fly Open.

### 5.2.3 Carol Kidu

In 1997, three years after her husband's death, Carol Kidu contested the Moresby South Open electorate in NCD, winning against 25 other candidates, with a winning vote share of 21.8 per cent (see Figure 18).

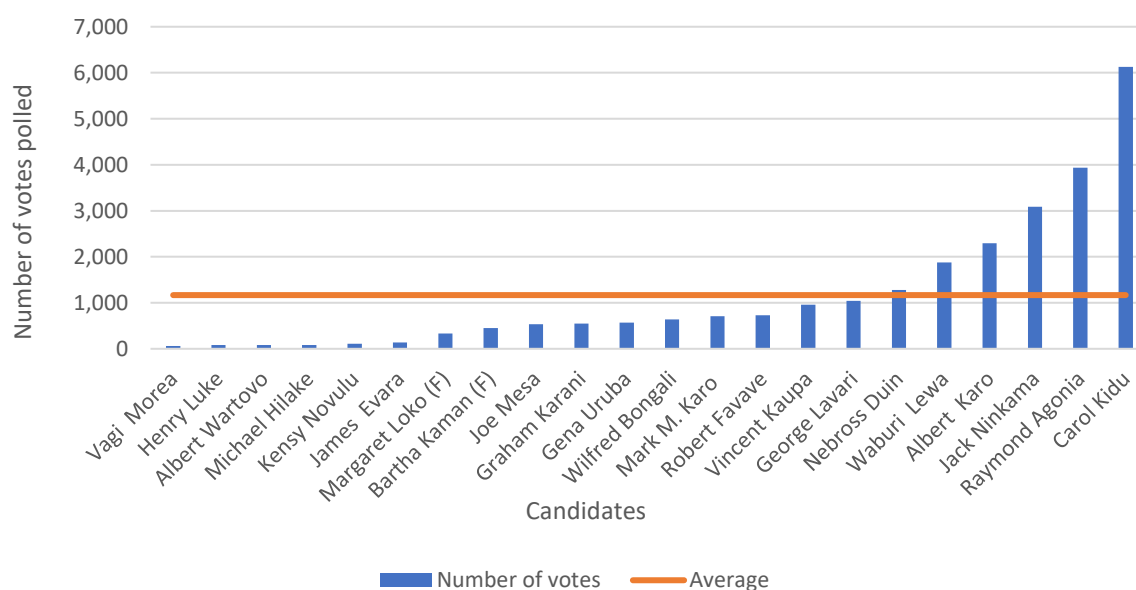
**Figure18: Kidu's performance in Moresby South Open, 1997**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

Kidu contested again in 2002 and 2007 as the incumbent, winning both elections. Her winning vote shares in the final counts were 23.5 per cent and 43.4 per cent respectively. In all elections she polled above average, serving three terms in parliament as the member for Moresby South Open electorate. In 2002, there were 22 candidates, and she was one of three female candidates, the others being Margaret Loko and Bartha Kaman. Kidu was among those candidates who polled above average (see Figure 19).

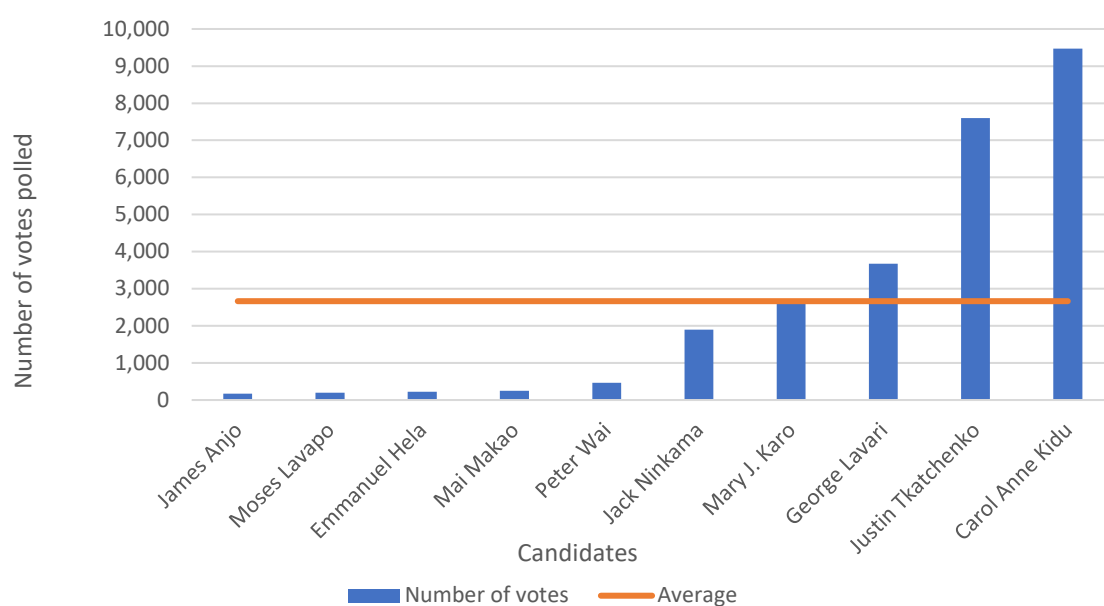
**Figure19: Kidu's performance in Moresby South Open, 2002**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

When defending her seat in 2007, fewer candidates competed against her, one being a female, Mary Karo, a woman of Papuan origin. Both women did well, polling above the average (see Figure 20). It is important to note that Moresby South electorate includes settlements and villages with Papuan origin. Her popularity increased with the number of terms she served as MP.

**Figure 20: Kidu's performance in Moresby South Open, 2007**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

#### *5.2.3.1 Kidu's achievements and controversies in office*

In an interview with Radio New Zealand in 2011, Kidu explained that her decision to run for elections had been motivated by husband's death.

It was Buri's death that put me into politics. I had the sympathy vote. Buri had his contract as chief justice not renewed in 1993, they brought in a new [person], and that's a cabinet decision in Papua New Guinea, so a new chief justice was appointed so Buri was no longer chief justice. He was starting to plan his life after politics, people were putting pressure on him, you must stand; his life after judiciary, I mean. People were coming to the house and dancing and things; Barramundi dancers came, the Kiwai people, not just people of our own tribal group, but particularly people of the Papuan region, the southern coast, asking him to stand for politics. He'd say, he often said to me 'I don't know if I really want to do this'. He was getting things in place to go into private legal practice. I actually said to him, 'Look I don't think you have much choice, there's so much pressure from the people for you to stand'. Then he suddenly died in 1994, and the next election was June 1997. Really, it's his death that pushed me in that direction. Once he died, I thought, 'the buggers'. We were blaming the politics of the day for his death. Without his sympathy vote, I don't think – and of course I was so well known amongst the Motuans that I was a Motu woman. I then concentrated on going into the settlements of the people that had moved from the rural areas and villages. I worked very hard, but without the sympathy vote, no...Love and anger and all sorts of things at what had happened to him. Anger at injustices that we were seeing around us. It was an act of love but, I thought, if Buri can't do it, the bastards, I'll do it. When I campaigned, I said 'I cannot be Buri'. I campaigned with his name very much, but I used to say, 'I cannot be Buri but maybe I can contribute in some way'. (Johnstone, 2011)

And when she won the Moresby South electorate in 1997, Kidu recalled that she had offered her first act of defiance.

I have never been conscious of my gender. I had married a man who was very proud of his Melanesian heritage but also a liberated man who had been educated in Australia in

the era of the women's liberation movement. I did not anticipate the welcome I would receive when I entered the caucus room. The Opposition Leader acknowledged me with the comment: 'People in this House wear pants not skirts'. He was a friend of my late husband but uncomfortable about my presence in the sacred modern men's house where there had not been a woman for 10 years before 1997. I smiled and sat down. The next day, I dressed in a trouser suit and made sure that most men were already present before I entered the caucus room. With a cheeky smile, I stood to attract their attention then kicked one leg in the air to display my trousers. 'Am I welcome now?' I joked with the leader. My point was made. A small act of defiance but delivered with a smile – I knew that direct confrontation with my male colleagues would be counterproductive, a waste of energy. I had to learn how to operate in an environment that was uncomfortable about female participation (Kidu, 2015).

As a member of parliament, Kidu saw various bills concerning women and children being passed as laws on the floor of parliament.

#### *5.2.3.2 On children and community development*

Kidu saw to the certifying of the Lukautim Pikinini Act of 2007. After a wrong draft was certified, she took it back to the floor of parliament, had it repealed, had the correct version re-enacted by parliament and then certified. The Act protected and promoted the rights and well-being of all children regardless of race, nationality or sex, and repealed the Child Welfare Act (Chapter 276 [1961]) Lukautim Pikinini (Child) Act 2007).

She also promoted community learning and development centres with the rationale that there were children from settlements that were either not getting into schools or were dropping out of them for one reason or another. To solve formal schooling's low retention rates of settlement children, Kidu employed a holistic development approach where communities worked in partnership with non-governmental organisations and churches.

#### *5.2.3.3 On women*

Kidu's empathy for victims of domestic violence and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) led her to establish the District Aids Committee in her electorate that worked with the provincial and national AIDS committees and United Nations (UN) AIDS. She also initiated the establishment of the national HIV and AIDS

Parliamentary Advocacy Committee in 2003. On 9 October 2007, she presented an anti-violence petition to parliament, supported by women from all walks of life, also championing the call for more involvement of women in decision-making. In addition, in 2004 she presented a submission for the nomination of three women appointees to the national parliament of PNG, beginning in 2009, and also lobbied for the reservation of 22 seats for women in parliament.

On 13 February 2009, Kidu was awarded France's highest honour, the Legion d'Honneur, in recognition of 'her tireless efforts in the fight for human rights, especially for women and children' and 'her dedication to helping women, young girls, children, the physically and mentally impaired and her commitment to fighting discrimination' (see Kaiku 2012).

Kidu had a voter base in Moresby South, demonstrated by the significant number of votes cast for her at each election she contested, and the margins of her victory.

In a 2011 interview with Johnstone on Radio New Zealand, Kidu said

I was brought up in a working-class Australian family with a very strong social conscience...The ethos that I was brought up in was about social justice...It perhaps made my mind ready for what was ahead of me...I think for a woman it is a little bit different. I based my whole campaign always on the basis of society relationships. I was a teacher, I was involved with YWCA, and getting the preschool going through the YWCA, so I was doing things, but never from a political perspective. I was never part of the Council of Women or the political lobby by women, no. I was involved with organisations. Before Buri died, I established the professional women's club of Port Moresby, and established the girls' scholarship scheme, and things of that nature. I was I guess facilitating organisations. (Kidu, 2015)

The quote above explains Kidu's stance on social equality and justice for all people, irrespective of gender, race and class. She was also a stickler for process and procedure. She was a courageous female MP who was not afraid to uphold truth and justice in the face of opposition. For example, on 28 March 2012, parliament passed the Judicial Conduct Bill, and had it certified even though it was known that an administrative error had been made. Kidu reminded parliament that if something like this should happen, as legislators, the normal process was to either amend the act of parliament or repeal it, then have the correct version re-enacted and certified. Because this had not happened, there were now two Judicial Conduct acts, a 30 March version and a 3 April version. In another instance, in a motion to oust the nine-year-old Somare

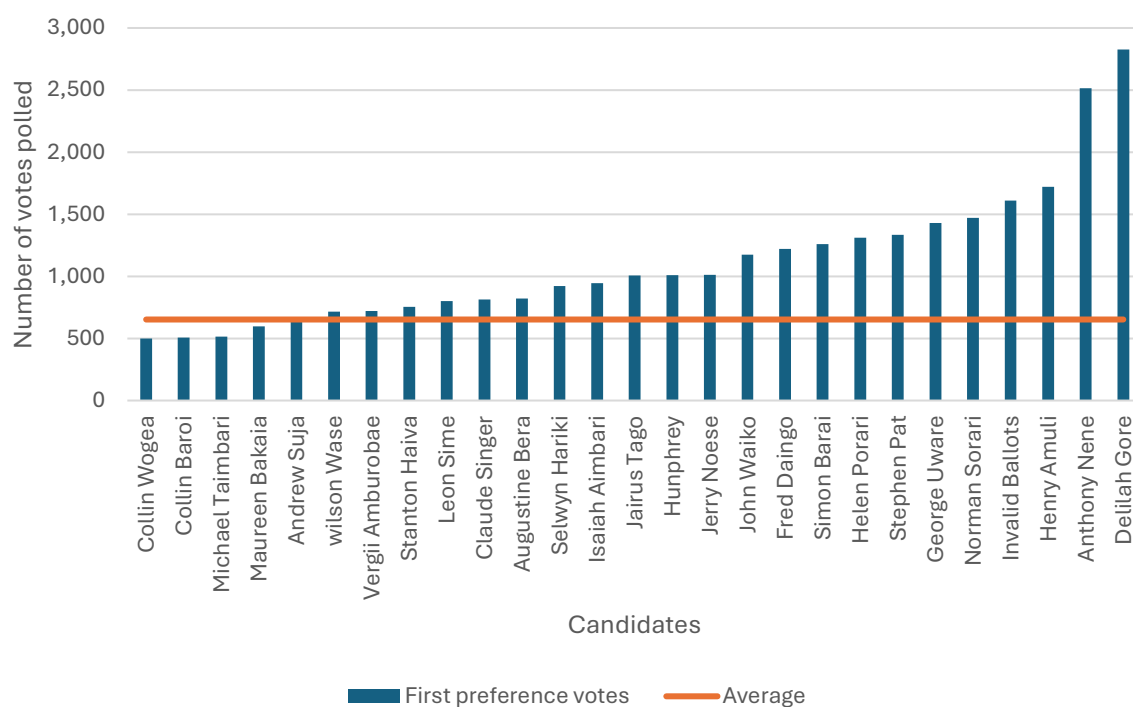
government in August 2011, Kidu boldly moved across the floor of parliament to take a seat on the opposition side, openly declaring her support for and loyalty to the Somare government. This move saw her become the first female to be the leader of the opposition, and its only member while male MPs who claimed loyalty to Somare judiciously took to the non-aligned middle benches.

#### 5.2.4 Delilah Gore

Delilah Gore contested the Sohe Open electorate in 2012, 2017 and 2022, but succeeded only once. In 2012, competing against 56 candidates, her first preference vote share was 2,826 and her final winning vote share was 16.7 per cent (see Figure 21, below).

In 2017, Gore recontested Sohe Open electorate as the incumbent and lost. However, she was in the top five at the time of her elimination. In 2022, she ran again and lost to Henry Amuli, but his win was disputed through a court of disputed return, which declared his win null and void, resulting in a by-election. In the by-election, Gore finished in eighth place. In both elections, she ranked in the top five, placing her above the electorate average. Gore was a strong woman candidate.

**Figure 21: Gore's performance in Sohe Open, 2012**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

#### *5.2.4.1 Gore's achievements and controversies in office*

As a member of parliament from 2012 to 2017, under the prime ministership of Peter O'Neill, Gore served as Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology, replacing David Arore in a 'mini' ministerial reshuffle. She later became Minister for Religion, Youth and Community Development when Loujaya Toni was stripped of that ministerial portfolio. Under Gore's leadership, the parliament passed the Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015; and the National Executive Council approved the amendments to the Marriage Act, and the Matrimonial Causes Act were approved by the National Executive Council and were awaiting the parliament's deliberation. Solomon also noted that under the Gore's leadership the Department also launched the Child Protection Policy, the Gender-Based Violence Strategy 2016–2015, and the National Disability Policy, while the decision for approval of the Social Protection Policy was pending. While the Secretary for the Department of Religion, Youth and Community Development, Anna Solomon, acknowledged Gore's role in these achievements, credit must also be accorded to her predecessor, Carol Kidu, for the debate and work she put in when she had been the Minister for Religion, Youth and Community Development.

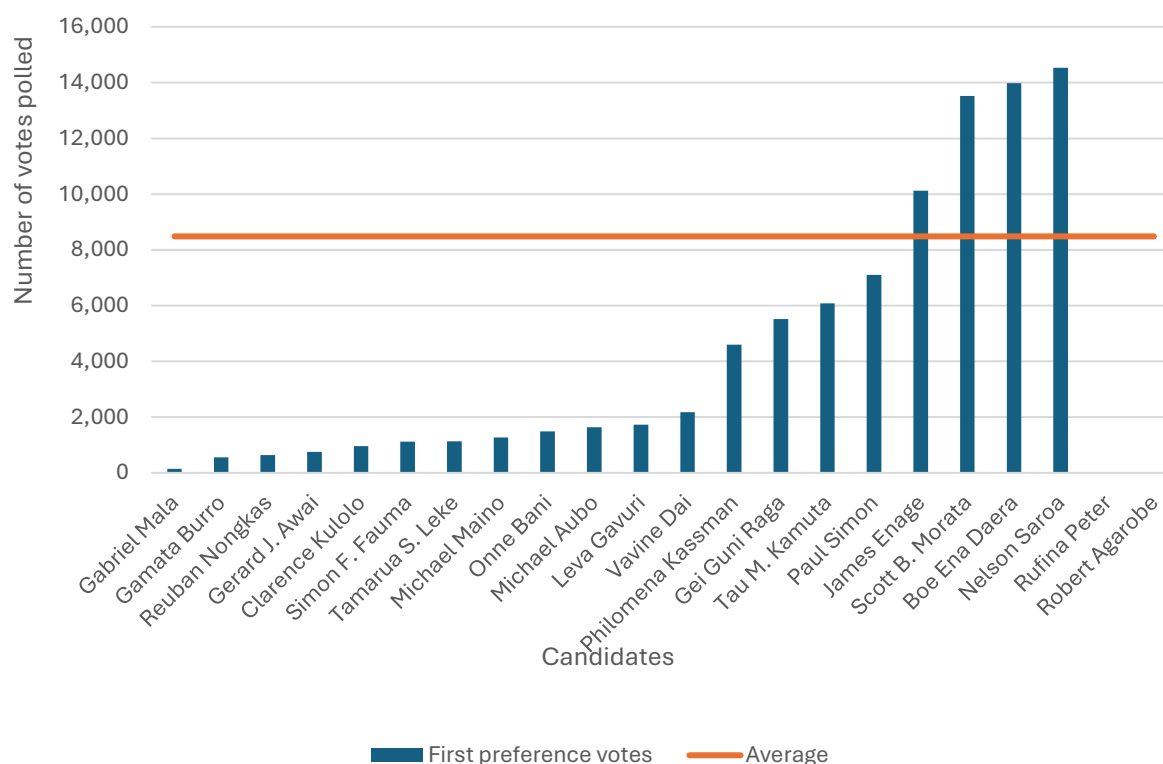
Solomon also mentioned that in Gore's term the department had gone through a restructure to reflect these government policies and legislative amendments. She said that the new sections in the department included Informal Economy, Office of Religion, Elderly section, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion section and the Media section. Irrespective of Solomon's personal stance towards Loujaya Toni, it remains fact that the department had been embroiled in a leadership tussle over the secretary's position when Toni had taken over as Minister (EMTV, 2013).

In 2015, The National reported that, Delilah Gore had been found guilty by a leadership tribunal for official misconduct under the leadership code for shouting at an air stewardess on an Air Niugini flight from Popondetta to Port Moresby (Bira, 2015). Gore lost her seat in the 2017 election (as did the two other women elected in 2012). In an interview I conducted with her in 2022, I asked her if the incident in an Air Niugini flight had had any bearing on her loss in 2017. To this she had simply responded that not all of Sohe was on Facebook.

### 5.2.5 Rufina Peter

Rufina Peter contested the Central regional electorate in 2017 and 2022. In both elections she ranked in the top five, winning in 2022 (see Figure 22). In the first preference count, Peter polled 30,994 votes, Robert Agarobe polled 39,108 and the candidate in third place, Nelson Saroa, polled 14,529. In the exclusions, Peter polled 62,361, Agarobe polled 58,917 and Saroa polled 25,551. Peter and Agarobe do not appear in Figure 22 below because they led the other candidates with a very high margin of about 25, 000 ballots. Figure 23 below shows only the top eight candidates, showing that Rufina Peter was a strong candidate polling ballots at every elimination giving her the push to be able to get past Robert Agarobe at the 18<sup>th</sup> count after the elimination of Scott Morata at the 17<sup>th</sup> count.

**Figure22: Peter’s performance in Central, 2022**



Source: Adapted by author from PNG Electoral Commission 66B forms, 2022.

#### 5.2.5.1 Peter’s achievements and controversies in office

Rufina Peter is currently serving in PNG’s 12<sup>th</sup> parliament. Just like her predecessors Josephine Abaijah and Waliyato Clowes, Peter’s stance has also been to protect the Papuan people from encroachment by outsiders on their land and their way of life. In June 2023, LOOP reported

that Peter had raised concerns about the Connect PNG Program. She stated that, as the governor for Central province, she had concerns relating to connecting the Highlands provinces to Central province, saying,

when it is connected, the social impacts on the Southern Region and especially Central is going to be significant. Within Central province, we are not ready for the social impacts, negative social impacts.

In March 2025, the concern resurfaced in the wake of the kidnapping, gang raping and mutilation of a young Papuan girl in Baruni, Port Moresby. *The National* (2025) reported her saying,

I am issuing an urgent call to the Prime Minister (James Marape), the National Executive Council, and all the members of Parliament to immediately suspend the Connect PNG Programme for the next 50 years until proper border security mechanisms are put in place to protect the Papuan region from escalating security threats. Without proper security measures, these roads are fast-tracking lawlessness, illegal migration, and land grabs, placing enormous strain on provincial law enforcement, public services, and local communities...This is not just an infrastructure issue – it is a serious national security threat that must be prioritised now.

#### 5.2.5.2 On community development

Peter has engaged heavily in the development of certain LLGs in Central province. In June 2023, the Central Provincial Government officially launch the Mona Highway rehabilitation and maintenance of roads and the rebuilding of the bridges Kuni LLG in Goilala. Under Peter's administration the Central Province Government awarded a sustainable piggery project worth K5 million, at the Manugoro village in Rigo district under a pilot project initiated by Wewak Agro Industries Limited. In Motumotu village in Vanapa Brown LLG, Peter supplied water tanks and visited the portion of land – known as 1220 – which begins just after Adventure Park at 15-Mile in Central Province. She has noted that NCD is illegally extending its borders into Central Province land and intends to take legal action against this encroachment. In September 2023, 16 LLGs in Central province were each given K20,000 for the year's independence celebrations. These funds were additional to the K200,000 each president had received earlier in the month to advance development from the Central Provincial Government's 2023 revised

budget (Peter, 2023). Peter continues to reach out to the unreached of the Central province electorate, and the stories of her achievements are still being written.

#### 5.2.5.3 Resource management

In August 2023, LOOP reported her questioning the Minister for Petroleum and Energy, Kerenga Kua, on whether the gas reserve volume from the ELK/Antelope fields had been fixed and confirmed for future revenue. She was reported saying,

It is very important to all stakeholders in the Papua Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) Gas Project including the independent state of PNG and its entities that affirm gas reserve volume is determined for future revenue, planning and budgetary purposes.

Her statement came on the back of the claim that Papua LNG had lodged an application for a petroleum development licence to the Department for Petroleum and Energy ahead of its final investment decision. She appealed to Minister Kua to determine the gas reserve volume with the project developers. She also wanted to know who the owners and beneficiaries of ELK/Antelope field were.

### 5.3 Women MPs from New Guinea Islands region

The New Guinea Islands region consists of Manus, New Ireland, East and West New Britain provinces and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB), plus 13 open electorates, the biggest provinces being East New Britain and AROB, with four open electorates each, and the smallest being Manus with one open electorate (see Table 19). Only Manus and AROB have elected women MPs. All observe the matrilineal system except Manus province, which is both matrilineal and patrilineal.

**Table 19: Provinces and open electorates of New Guinea Islands region**

| Province         | Open electorates |
|------------------|------------------|
| Manus            | 1                |
| New Ireland      | 2                |
| East New Britain | 4                |
| West New Britain | 3                |
| AROB             | 3                |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>13</b>        |

Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

The New Guinea Islands region has elected two women MPs, Nahau Rooney as member for Manus open (1977 and 1982) and Francesca Semoso, the sitting member for North Bougainville open (2023 by-elections). Table 20 shows how Rooney performed at the polls. She won two of the three elections she contested for Manus open electorate. Her best electoral performance was in 1987, when she polled 2,208 first preference votes in a contest against 13 competitors. Although her best election, she did not secure the seat. In all three elections she contested, she was a strong candidate polling above average.

Semoso, on the other hand, has only contested one national general election. She was one of four women candidates contesting the North Bougainville open electorate in a by-election in 2023, after the passing of William Nakin before his declarations in 2022.

**Table 20: Electoral performance of strong women MPs from the New Guinea Islands region**

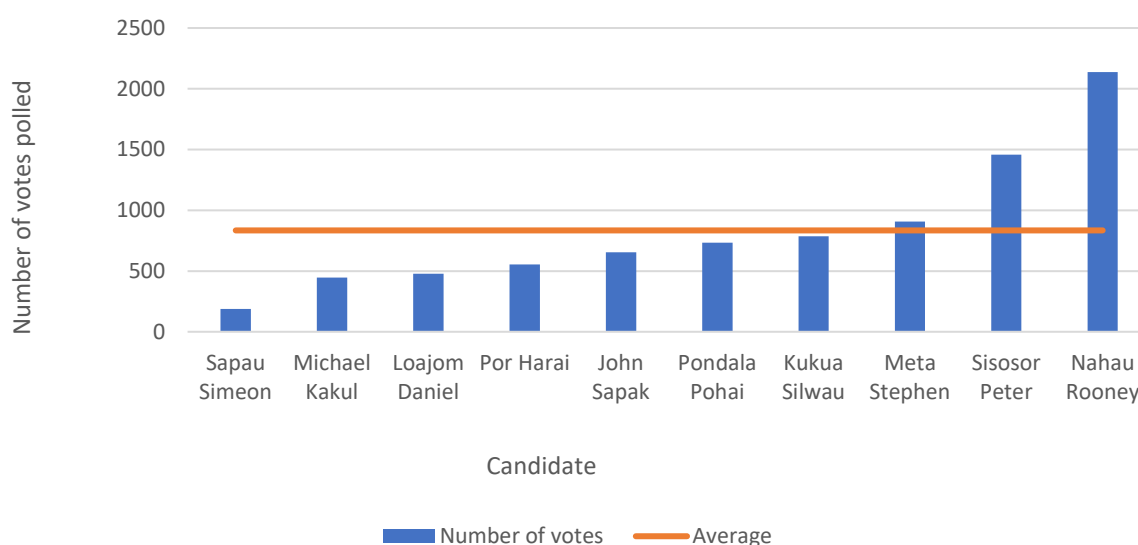
|                  | Elections<br>contested<br>(number) | Elections<br>won<br>(number) | Highest<br>number<br>of<br>electoral<br>competitors<br>(year) | Highest<br>number<br>of<br>votes received<br>(year) | Elections<br>over the<br>average |
|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Nahau Rooney     | 3                                  | 2                            | 13 (1987)                                                     | 2,208 (1987)                                        | 3                                |
| Francesca Semoso | 1                                  | 1                            | 17 (2023<br>by-elections)                                     | 14,851 (2023)                                       | 1                                |

Source: Adapted by author from Wood, 2019; New Dawn FM News 2023.

### 5.3.1 Nahau Rooney

In 1977, Rooney was one of ten candidates contesting the Manus Open electorate, securing a final vote share of 24.9 per cent. With Rooney polling 2,137 ballots, her runner-up trailed her by 680 votes. The race was a close one. However, she was still a strong candidate polling well above the electorate average, enabling her to win the electorate (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Rooney's performance in Manus Open, 1977**



Source: Wood, 2019.

Rooney recontested the Manus open seat as the incumbent in 1982 with eleven other candidates including one woman, Elizabeth Buarra. According to Pokawin (1989, p. 249),

For all practical purposes, Elizabeth Buarra was set up to split the women's votes which it was thought would otherwise go to Rooney. She was the only woman to contest the election besides Rooney. Elizabeth Buarra was, until she was nominated by the Melanesian Alliance Party Branch, an insignificant personality. The functionaries of the MA (Melanesian Alliance) were determined to put up another woman against the incumbent Mrs Rooney, but their attempt to recruit prominent women leaders including Mrs Kimat and Mrs Paliau failed. In desperation the party branch put up Buarra, even though it had already endorsed Charles Batapei as the official candidate for the Open electorate. Her candidacy was a set-up; [her] chance of winning was negligible, but it was assumed that her candidacy would not affect Batapei's votes. It would prevent Rooney from getting the women's votes.

Rooney did not do as well in 1982 as she had in 1977. The results from this election were disputed and counted twice (see Table 18). Rooney struggled because she was sharing votes with five other strong candidates, all men. The other woman candidate, Elizabeth Buara failed to poll strongly. Because Rooney and Pokasui each polled 1,537 votes, there was a recount (Pokawin, 1989, p. 257) (see Table 18). In the second round, Rooney dropped to second place,

while Pokasui gained four more votes and won the electorate. Elizabeth Buarra was still in the last position with the same 110 votes.

Rooney took her loss to the Court of Disputed Returns claiming that, since she was defeated by only one vote, mistakes could be consequential and another count should be ordered to put an end to any doubts (Pokawin, 1987, p. 275). However, her wish for review was unsuccessful, and Pokasui was confirmed as the winner. According to Pokawin (1989), Rooney's supporters then produced information suggesting that several votes were wrongly invalidated by electoral officials because they felt they were improperly marked despite being valid. She named three respondents in her petition:

the Electoral Commission for invalidating several votes she claimed were valid; Pokasui for improperly influencing Defence Force personnel at Lombrum to vote for himself; and Lalau Maiah for being an underaged candidate. However, [w]hen the Court of Disputed Returns sat to consider the petition, Mrs Rooney decided to call only the first respondent – the Electoral Commission. After the initial hearing the presiding judge ruled that the recount be held. (Pokawin, 1989, p. 275)

As a result of the court's decision, Rooney moved into first place with 1,559 votes; she had gained 19 more votes. Now running second was Pokasui with 1,548 votes, having gained only eight votes in the third count. In all three counts, Rooney remained in the top tiers of the race. She had been a strong candidate all along and still last was Elizabeth Buarra, though she was also credited seven more votes (see Table 21). However, Table 22 below, showing the vote share final for all candidates, indicates that Rooney was not an exceptional candidate, winning the Manus open electorate in 1982 at a low 15.8 per cent.

**Table 21: Rooney's performance at first, second and third counts, 1982**

| Candidate         | First count  | Second count | Total votes after the court's count |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Nahau Rooney      | 1,537        | 1,540 (+3)   | 1,559 (19)                          |
| James Pokasui     | 1,537        | 1,541 (+4)   | 1,548 (+7)                          |
| Hanai Popon       | 1,466        | 1,467 (+ 1)  | 1,394 (- 73)                        |
| Joseph Kove       | 1,380        | 1,380 (+ 0)  | 1,380 (+ 0)                         |
| Mathew Tuam       | 1,013        | 1,014 (+ 1)  | 1,027 (+ 13)                        |
| Francis Posanou   | 977          | 977 (+ 0)    | 983 (+ 6)                           |
| Kisokoiu Pochapon | 815          | 822 (+7)     | 825 (+ 3)                           |
| Roy Pogat         | 424          | 424 (+ 0)    | 429 (+ 5)                           |
| Lalau Maiah       | 380          | 368 (- 12)   | 305 (- 63)                          |
| Charles Batapei   | 288          | 310 (+22)    | 305 (+4)                            |
| Elizabeth Burua   | 110          | 110 (+0)     | 117 (+7)                            |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>9,927</b> | <b>9,944</b> | <b>9,872</b>                        |

Source: Adapted by author from Pokawin, 1989, p. 273.

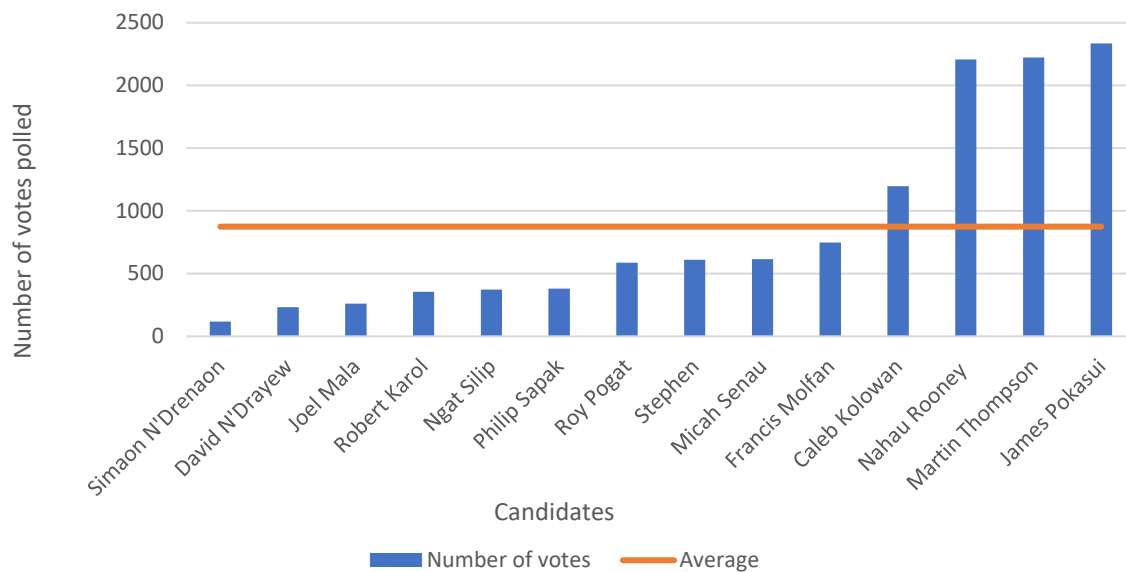
**Table 22: Rooney's vote share as a percentage, 1982**

| Candidate         | First count (%) | Second count (%) | Vote share after the court's count (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Nahau Rooney      | 15.5            | 15.5             | 15.8                                   |
| James Pokasui     | 15.5            | 15.5             | 15.7                                   |
| Hanai Popon       | 14.8            | 14.8             | 14.1                                   |
| Joseph Kove       | 13.9            | 13.9             | 14.0                                   |
| Mathew Tuam       | 10.2            | 10.2             | 10.4                                   |
| Francis Posanou   | 9.8             | 9.8              | 10.0                                   |
| Kisokoiu Pochapon | 8.2             | 8.3              | 8.4                                    |
| Roy Pogat         | 4.3             | 4.3              | 4.3                                    |
| Lalau Maiah       | 3.8             | 3.7              | 3.1                                    |
| Charles Batapei   | 2.9             | 3.0              | 3.1                                    |
| Elizabeth Buarra  | 1.1             | 1.1              | 1.2                                    |

Source: Adapted by the author from Pokawin, 1989, p. 273.

In 1987, again as the incumbent, Rooney was one of 14 candidates who contested the Manus Open seat. Although she lost the seat to James Pokasui, she was a very strong contender, performing above average. However, her competitors, James Pokasui and Martin Thompson, were as strong as she was as candidates (see Figure 24). In that year, no woman was pitched against her. Two conclusions may be drawn from this, firstly, women thought they were not good enough to run, or they did not want to split Rooney's vote, indicating their support for her representation of the women of Manus Open electorate.

**Figure 24: Rooney's performance in Manus Open, 1987**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

#### 5.3.1.1 Rooney's achievements and controversies in office

In her term as member for Manus Open between 1977 and 1987, Nahau Rooney was the first woman to be given a ministerial position and the only woman member of parliament to hold several portfolios.

#### 5.3.1.2 Ministerial portfolios

In 1977, 'the appointment of Rooney as a Somare Government Minister' was applauded by the MP for Middle Fly, Mrs Waliyato Clowes, stating that the appointment was going to 'give PNG women confidence in the Prime minister and his government' (Post-Courier, 1977, p. 3). In a keynote address delivered at the Australian National University, Canberra, in 2015, Rooney is on record as saying:

After 3 or 4 months being a Minister, [maybe] 8 months, I went back to my late husband and said ... 'darling, take note, that there's a lot of things going to be done. I'm going to do this, I'm going to learn what goes on in the men's house and I'm going to play the game and I will want to win the game so if in the event that you hear any stories about what Nahau is doing, ... just take note, that is the game men are playing and I'm going to play that game because it's all to do with power'. (Rooney, 2015)

In 1979, as then Justice Minister, Rooney was given three contempt of court charges. The first charge concerned her letter to the Chief Justice, Sir William Prentice, regarding the Premdas Affair<sup>4</sup>, and the other two charges involved the publication and circulation of a statement or a series of statements on 20 July by NBC news editor Mark Auhova, which scandalised the judiciary. In an interview with Angela Gilliam on 9 September 1986, Rooney commented that,

what really annoyed me then and what prompted me to write a letter to the Chief Justice was that the court gave him four weeks to stay in the country in order to lodge an appeal to the Review Committee...If in fact the man was an undesirable, four weeks was time enough for him to do anything...the purpose for having a deportation act is for any given country to be able to protect the sovereign state and integrity of that government...if...they feel that any visitor from any country is a threat...then it is right to say, 'Sorry, we cannot tolerate that kind of person in the country'.

Of Rooney, Premdas (1980, p. 96) states that 'most observers seem to agree that the left-wing group constituted of such educated and articulate persons as Fr. John Momis, John Kaputin, Pius Wingti, Nahau Rooney and Tony Ila had more influence than the other Pangu group. It is widely believed that this left-wing faction, taking full advantage of a weakened Somare, seized control of the inner cabinet and were practically running PNG'. Notably for the time and context, Premdas classified Rooney with the male MPs, identifying her as being educated, articulate and influential.

#### *5.3.1.3 On natural resources*

Rooney was against the president of the Salriku Agricultural and Forestry Company of Japan, Yutara Aokia's, intention to log timber in Manus province, saying that the company had failed to conduct consultations with relevant authorities to log timber in Kali Bay. She claimed that the benefits would be short-term and the motivation behind the project was personal.

During her time in office, Rooney learnt about what went on in 'the men's house' and 'played the game', but playing like a man was ultimately untenable. In 1987, she lost the Manus Open electorate to James Pokasui, whose winning vote share was 19.1 per cent. She came third in

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<sup>4</sup> On May 31, 1979, Dr Ralph Premdas, chairman of the University of PNG Political Science Department had his entry permit revoked. On June 28 the decision to revoke his work permit and the order to leave the country by June 4 was upheld. However, the National Court suspended the government's deportation order.

that race with 2,208 votes, Pokasui winning over the second placing candidate, Martin Thompson, by a margin of just 127 votes. The race was very close, but the voters spoke, and they replaced Rooney with Pokasui through the ballot.

### *5.3.2 Francesca Semoso*

Prior to becoming the first female representative from Bougainville to serve in the national parliament, Francesca Semoso served as deputy speaker of the Bougainville House of Representatives and Women's Representative from 2005 to 2010 and 2015 to 2020. As one of the only four women MPs in the 40-member legislature, Semoso was known as 'an ardent supporter' of temporary special measures (TSMs) to increase the number of women in the parliament (PACADMIN, 2022. p. 1). Semoso decided to transition from the Bougainville parliament to the national parliament after the sudden death of William Nakin in July 2022. Semoso was elected as the member for North Bougainville Open electorate in the 2023 by-elections (Radio New Zealand, 2023).

#### *5.3.2.1 Semoso's achievements and controversies in office*

When Semoso won the North Bougainville Open electorate in 2023, she said that her two priorities were development and achieving independence from PNG for the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Kora, 2023). While Semoso's political story as a national leader of the North Bougainville Open electorate is still being written, it is imperative to make two points. Firstly, she won the 2023 by-election through the ballot. This is a clear indication that voters saw in her the qualities of a leader and considered her the best candidate to represent them on the floor of parliament. Secondly, Semoso has always championed TSMs idea because she is a beneficiary of the system.

#### *5.3.2.2 On land and women issues*

As reported by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) PNG (2023), when she was given the opportunity to speak in parliament, Semoso said, 'there are only three women members of the National Parliament, so when we speak, give us preference to speak'. NBC further reported that 'her first question without notice was on land matters, an issue close to the heart of North Bougainville'. Writing for the Post-Courier newspaper (2024), Kassas made note of what she said on the floor of parliament on 4 June. She was quoted as saying,

I spoke as a mother, grandmother, woman of Bougainville and I feel for my people. I haven't recovered my grandparents yet and I don't know where they are now as I spoke [I felt] a pain in my heart...The unforgiveable sin that this country did to its people in Bougainville is sending its soldiers to kill them, how could you do that... You (PNG government) telling me to wait and that's fine, but what are you keeping me for? If you gave me [the] whole day to tell the stories of my people of what they have been through, you won't believe it but gave me independence it is because of the way my sisters were treated, of the way my women were treated.

Semoso was also a very strong women candidate, having established a comfortable lead to reach the absolute majority of 14,168 votes, winning with 14,851 ballots.

## 5.4 Women MPs from the Highlands region

The Highlands region consists of Simbu, Eastern Highlands, Enga, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, Hela and Jiwaka provinces and 36 open electorates, the biggest political unit being Eastern Highlands with eight open electorates and the smallest being Jiwaka with three open electorates (see Table 23). All provinces have patrilineal systems.

**Table 23: Provinces and open electorates of Highlands region**

| Province           | Open electorates |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Simbu              | 6                |
| Eastern Highlands  | 8                |
| Enga               | 6                |
| Hela               | 4                |
| Jiwaka             | 3                |
| Southern Highlands | 5                |
| Western Highlands  | 4                |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>36</b>        |

Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

In the Highlands region, only Eastern Highlands province has elected a woman MP, namely Julie Soso. Soso won in 2012, having contested the Eastern Highlands regional electorate multiple times, running in 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022. As presented in Table 24, her highest vote count was in 2012 election, when 37,267 voters gave her their first preference

vote. In the six elections she contested, she polled above the average, the exception being in 1997. In the 2022 election, Soso ran against her highest number of electoral competitors (63).

**Table 24: Soso's performance in Eastern Highlands, 1997–2022**

|            | <b>Elections<br/>contested<br/>(number)</b> | <b>Elections<br/>won<br/>(number)</b> | <b>Highest number<br/>of electoral<br/>competitors<br/>(year)</b> | <b>Highest<br/>number of votes<br/>received (year)</b> | <b>Elections<br/>over the<br/>average</b> |
|------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Julie Soso | 6                                           | 1                                     | 63 (2022)                                                         | 37,267 (2012)                                          | 5                                         |

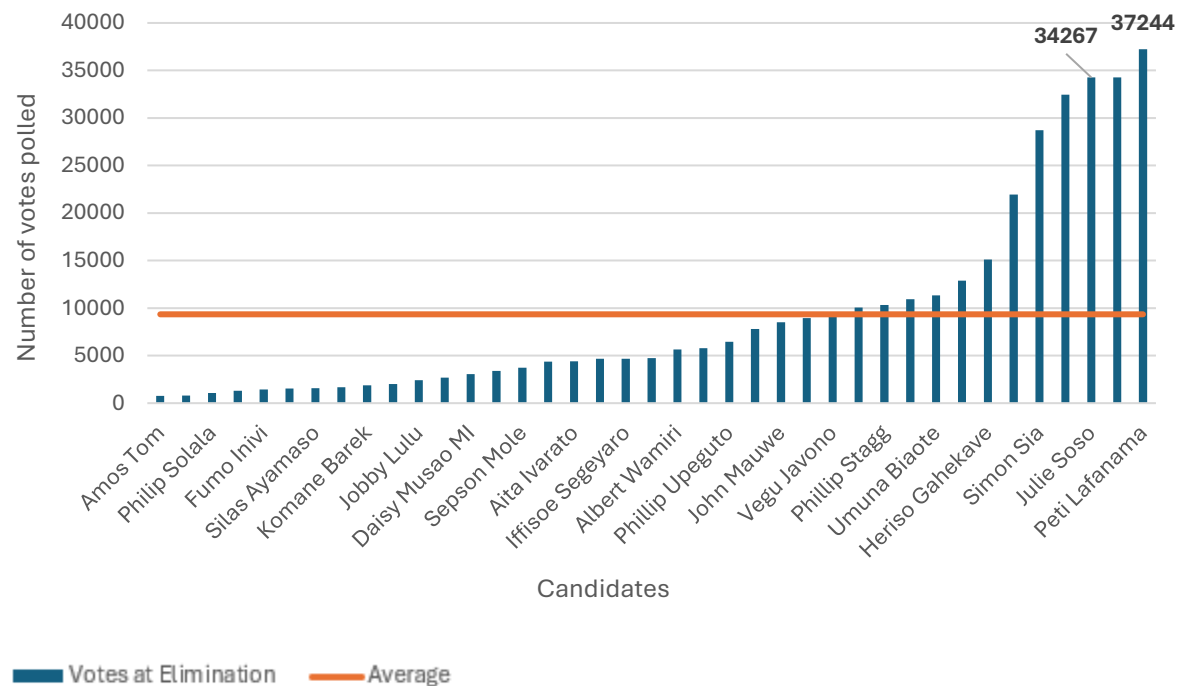
Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019

#### **5.4.1 Julie Soso**

In 1997, after the Eastern Highlands provincial government rejected a petition from the Eastern Highland women to ban alcohol and poker machines, Julie Soso decided to contest the Eastern Highlands regional electorate. Two factors motivated her run; to prove to men that women could compete and that men had to listen to women's concerns; and because she wanted to unseat the governor, Peti Lafanama, for rejecting the women's petition (Soso, 2012). In 2002, Soso recontested the Eastern Highlands seat because a male MP had said that women would not be given reserved seats in parliament but had to go into parliament the way men had gone in. These comments had been made in response to the ultimately unsuccessful bill to reserve 22 seats for women. She ran in order to prove that women could run and execute successful election campaigns (Soso, 2012).

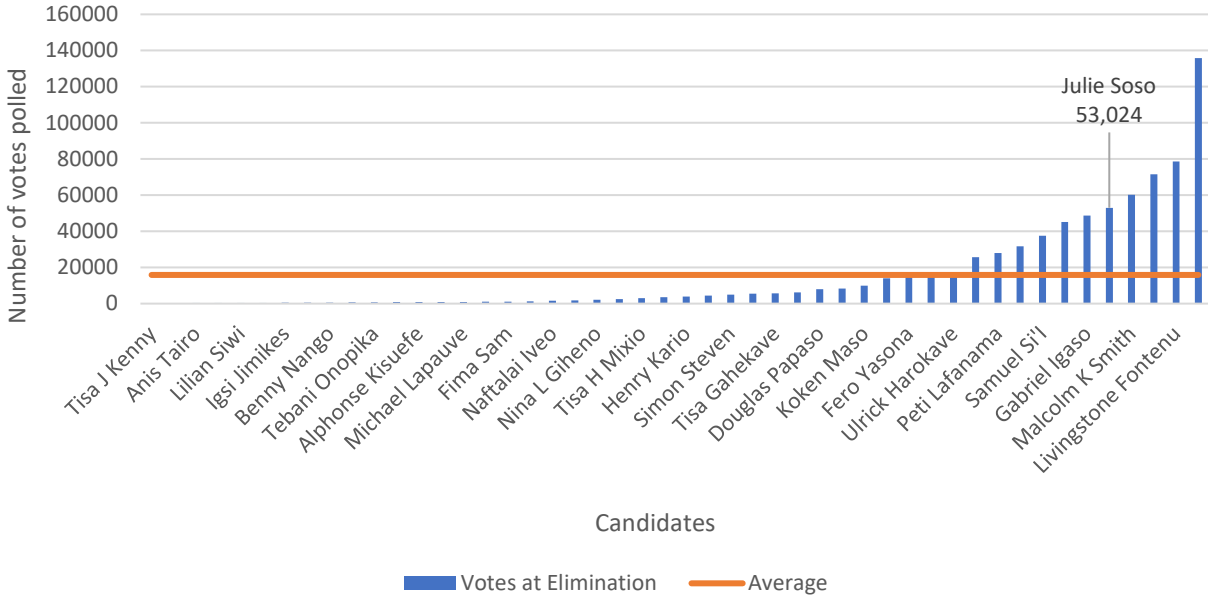
Soso returned in 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022, winning in 2012 (see Figures 25, 26 and 27). 2002 and 2007 were not Soso's best elections because she was an average candidate. In these elections, the gaps between her and the leading candidate were very significant, while in 2012, the gap between her and the leading candidate was narrow, giving her second and third preference votes to strengthen her first preference votes. In 2017 and 2022, Soso polled well above average, however, the gaps between her and the leading candidate in each case were once again very high, decreasing her chance of winning the elections.

Figure 25: Soso’s performance in Eastern Highlands, 2012



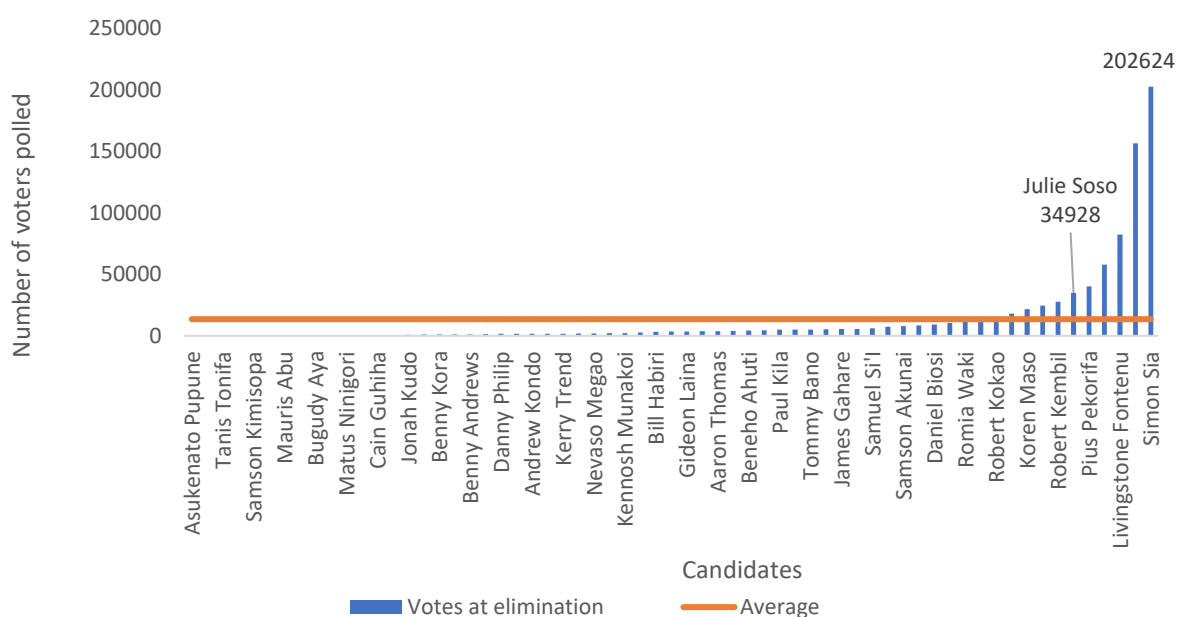
Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

Figure 26: Soso’s performance in Eastern Highlands, 2017



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

**Figure 27: Soso's performance in Eastern Highlands, 2022**



Source: Adapted by the author from National Electoral Commission, 2022.

#### 5.4.1.1 Achievements and controversies in the office

Julie Soso was the governor of Eastern Highlands province from 2012 to 2017, when she was replaced by Peter Numu through the ballot in the NGEs in 2017. Below I discuss some of her achievements and controversies she was in while she was in Parliament.

#### 5.4.1.2 On election violence

When Soso took office in 2012, she extended the ban on alcohol consumption in the province as a measure to counter any post-election related violence. This was an indication that she feared that her win could trigger violence in the province, further indicating that there were electorates, LLGs and wards within the province that did not support her.

#### 5.4.1.3 Bill on 22 reserved seats

In November 2012, she and the other two female ministers, Delilah Gore and Loujaya Toni, threatened to move across to the opposition if the bill on 22 reserved seats for women was brought up in Parliament. Prior to 2012, women from all walks of life had lobbied for the creation of 22 reserved seats for women in Parliament, with Carol Kidu, the Minister for Community Development, at the helm of the campaign to push for TSMs, but this failed,

subsequently forcing her to push for the reservation of 22 seats. She succeeded in getting the Equality and Participation Act passed on the floor of parliament, but the amending bill to redraft the Organic Law on National and Local Level Government Elections failed to attract supporters.

#### *5.4.1.4 On family welfare and security*

In December 2012, Soso proposed introducing a ban on polygamy. In 2014, she raised concerns about the need to increase the number of cancer treatment facilities because, according to a report by the Medical Research Institute based in Eastern Highlands, cervical cancer was killing 1,500 women a year in PNG, a rate among the highest in the world (EMTV, 2014). In an interview (Wakpi, 2013), Soso stated:

At the age of 35 I left the NBC in August 1996 and was voted president of the Eastern Highlands Provincial Council of Women in October of the same year...I was very active at that time – mobilising and organising the women to demonstrate and petition the then Governor Hon[ourable] Aita Ivarato on issues concerning alcohol, domestic violence and gambling which was destroying marriages and creating instability in homes. The flippant manner in which the petition was received then ignored provoked me to contest the elections for the first time in 1997. I was incensed and realised that if we women did not get into politics we would always be marginalised and treated as second class citizens and our voices, our needs and issues would never be heard by the policy makers of this nation.

#### *5.4.1.5 On governance*

In that same interview (Wakpi, 2013), Soso stated that she wanted to stem the systemic corruption that was endemic in the Papua New Guinean bureaucracy, and that she was working on policies with her advisors to deal with this. Secondly, she wanted to make sure that services reached the grassroots, especially in infrastructure, water supply and rural electrification, and thirdly she wanted to make quality education and health to be accessible and available to all Eastern Highlanders. She also planned to reduce child and maternal mortality rates and achieve the development goals of our national government in relation to these sectors.

On April 7, 2016, *The National* reported:

The appointment of a permanent provincial administrator for Eastern Highlands has been a contentious issue for the province's leaders and people for more than two years. They have waited for most of 2014 for the National Executive Council to choose the right person for the job of administering the province's public service machinery...the NEC made its long-awaited decision on Nov 26, 2014, and elevated a former Eastern Highlands deputy administrator, Solomon Tato, to the top job...[Soso] rejected the appointment and asked for a re-advertisement, reveal[ing that] the new provincial administrator was being investigated for some allegations made against him while serving in his previous position...[the NEC had not accepted the Provincial Executive Council's recommendation]...Governor Soso is held in high esteem by her people and her move to the Opposition in 2014 was welcomed by many. As a newcomer to the political arena, Soso has quickly learnt to manoeuvre her way around the corridors of power in Waigani. However, her move to the Opposition was quite surprising at the time and distanced her from the ruling coalition, especially Prime Minister Peter O'Neil, which is evident in the current impasse over the appointment of a permanent provincial administrator.

Soso lost the Eastern Highlands provincial electorate to Peter Numu in 2017. The question is, were the votes given to her in 2012 sympathy votes because she had been contesting since 1997 or was her win simply a stroke of luck, given she lost her seat in 2017 serving only one term.

## **5.5 Women MPs from the Momase region**

The Momase region consists of Morobe, Madang, East and West Sepik provinces and 26 open electorates. The biggest political unit is Morobe Province with 10 open electorates, and the smallest is West Sepik (Sandaun), with four open electorates (see Table 25). All provinces have patrilineal systems.

**Table 25: Provinces and open electorates of Momase region**

| Province             | Open electorates |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Morobe               | 10               |
| Madang               | 6                |
| East Sepik           | 6                |
| West Sepik (Sandaun) | 4                |
| Total                | 26               |

Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

The Momase region has elected two women MPs: Loujaya Toni from Morobe province and Kessy Sawang from Madang province. Toni ran in 2007, 2012 and 2017, winning only one election (2012). The highest number of candidates competing with her for the Lae Open electorate was 14, in 2017. Out of the three elections she contested, the highest she polled was in 2012 with 1,859 votes and a winning vote share of 29 per cent. Her win in 2012 was enabled by her second and third preference ballots, and this was the only election that she polled above average (see Table 26). Sawang ran in two elections for the Rai Coast Open electorate, winning one. Her best election was in 2022, when she polled 5,209 first preference votes. This was the year she faced the highest number of competitors, with 54 other candidates. In both elections she polled above average (see Table 26).

**Table 26: The electoral performance of strong women MPs from the Momase region**

|              | Elections contested (number) | Elections won (number) | Highest number of electoral competitors (year) | Highest number of votes received (year) | Elections over the average |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Loujaya Toni | 3                            | 1                      | 14 (2017)                                      | 1,859 (2012)                            | 1                          |
| Kessy Sawang | 2                            | 1                      | 54 (2022)                                      | 5,209 (2022)                            | 2                          |

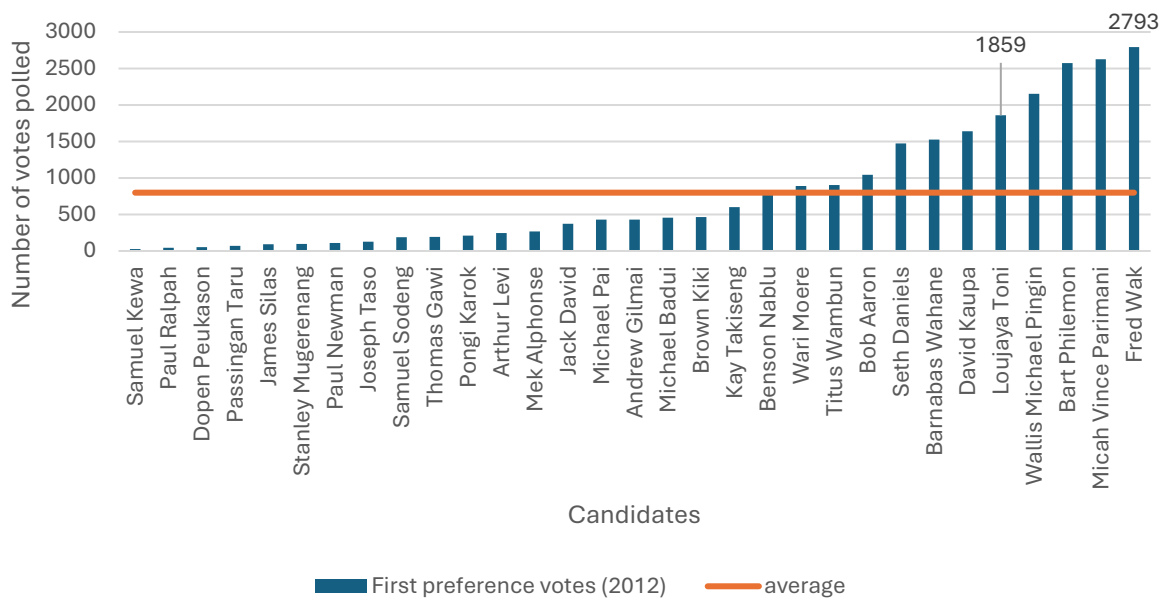
Source: Adapted by the author from National Electoral Commission, 2017 & 2022.

### **5.5.1 Loujaya Toni**

Toni displayed strength at the polls in 2012 in that her performance was above average. Being in the top five was helpful to her overall performance because her second and third preferences were able to give her the edge she needed to win the electorate in the NGE (see Figure 28).

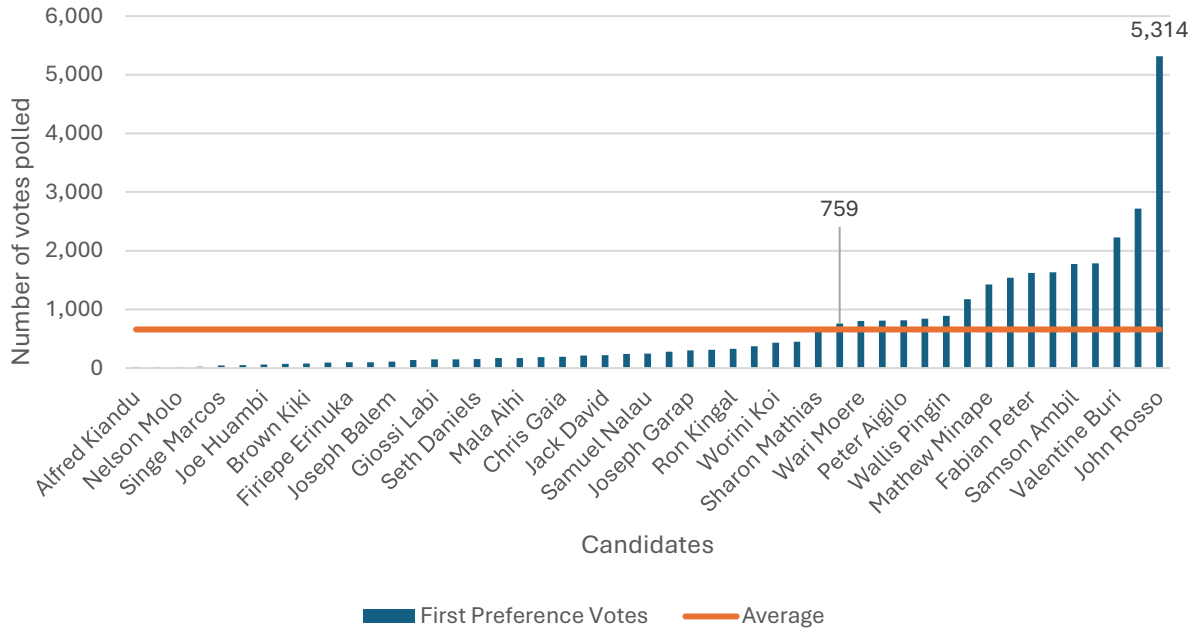
However, she was not as fortunate in 2017 because her average performance in first preference votes failed to give her the advantage she needed to win back the Lae open electorate (see Figure 29).

**Figure 28: Toni’s performance in Lae Open, 2012**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

**Figure 29: Loujaya Toni, Lae Open electorate, 2017**



Source: Adapted by the author from Wood, 2019.

#### *5.5.1.1 Toni's achievements and controversies in office*

When Toni won the Lae Open electorate seat in 2012, many women were happy because it meant seeing the type of changes that the previous MP had shown no interest in. By February 2013, journalist for EMTV John Eggins described Toni as having had a difficult start to her term,

Only a few months in office as Member and Minister, the start couldn't be any worse. Her electorate has been the scene of ethnic violence, her department is embroiled in leadership tussle over the secretary's position, and she's had to take out a restraining order against her husband. It doesn't stop there. (EMTV, 2013)

Below are some of the issues she championed and some of the controversies she was embroiled in while being the member for Lae Open.

#### *5.5.1.2 On 22 reserved seats for women*

Concerning the 22 reserved seats for women bill, Toni (and the other two women MPs) had not supported it, arguing that any woman wanting to become an MP had to become one through the ballot. Responding to her stance, Dorothy Tekwie, the leader of the PNG Greens party, called for Toni, Minister for Community Development, Religion and Family Affairs, to be relieved of her ministerial post. She stated that her call for Toni's removal was a vote of no confidence, and that Toni's failure to support the call for greater women's political representation at the national level was counter to her being the minister responsible for gender issues, labelling her as arrogant, irresponsible and unprofessional (Radio New Zealand, 2012).

In 2013, when parliament finally passed the National Council of Women's bill, giving women greater access to representation in all levels of government, Toni said that it was a 'win-win situation for all' as it allowed women to take part 'in the development of the nation' (The National, 2013), this response was an indication of her reconsideration of her opinions about women's political participation.

#### *5.5.1.3 On women and family issues*

On entry to parliament, Toni was seen as being deeply religious and preserving of culture. In 2013, she supported the Speaker, Theodore Zurenuoc, a devout Christian, when he tried to

remove ‘ungodly images and idols’ around the building. According to Eves and Haley (2014), Toni was a particularly strong supporter of the Speaker’s Christian vision.

In 2013, based on a link Toni had drawn between prison breaks and sexual assaults, she proposed that some prisoners be released on bail to have sex with their wives to reduce sex crimes (Fox, 2013). On 27 May 2013, Radio New Zealand reported Toni announcing that she was presenting a Family Protection Bill to parliament, hoping that it would address the high rate of child sex abuse. She said that the bill was a response to the national ‘Haus Krai’ protest. However, the government had not presented it in parliament (Radio New Zealand, 2013). It was not until September 2013 that the National Executive Council endorsed a Family Protection Bill, which made ‘domestic violence a criminal offence and strengthened family protection orders’ (The National, 2013).

#### *5.5.1.4 On security and ethnicity*

In July 2013, Toni supported the government’s decision on the Asylum Deal, saying ‘it would greatly improve the lives of Manus people and surrounding island communities’ (Business Pacific, 2013). Toni described the Asylum Deal (also known in Australia as ‘the Pacific Solution’) as being ‘designed to keep unwanted asylum seekers out of Australia by paying another country – in this case Nauru and PNG – to accommodate and process them’ (EMTV Online, 2013). In this interview, while drawing attention to the social implications, she also drew attention to its economic benefits.

In 2014, EMTV reported that Toni strongly supported the rolling out of a biometric registration system because she believed that it would ‘curb law and order and vagrancy issues in Lae city’ (EMTV Online, 2014). However, this proposal generated much opposition, with some arguing that it would not solve Lae’s growing problems but would contribute towards regionalism and other significant problems (EMTV, 2014). The governor for Morobe province, Kelly Naru, said,

I as deputy chairman of the Lae District Joint District Planning and Budget Priority Committees (JDP&BPC) was not consulted, and to date over K5 million has been spent on this rollout with no tangible results to show for such a large amount of public money. (One PNG, 2014)

#### 5.5.1.5 On governance

In August 2014, Toni resigned from the government to serve as interim chair of the Lae City Authority (Radio New Zealand, 2014), but in July 2015 she told *The National* that she was stepping down from that role because of the lack of government support. The government said that she was bound by law to remain chairperson of the Lae City Authority (PNG Facts, 2015). She was reported as saying,

Basically, I want to step down because I've been given the raw end of the deal since last August. When they gave me the job, they took the position of Community Development Minister from me. I've been out in the cold, no resources, no secretariat, and no office. (Nalu, 2015)

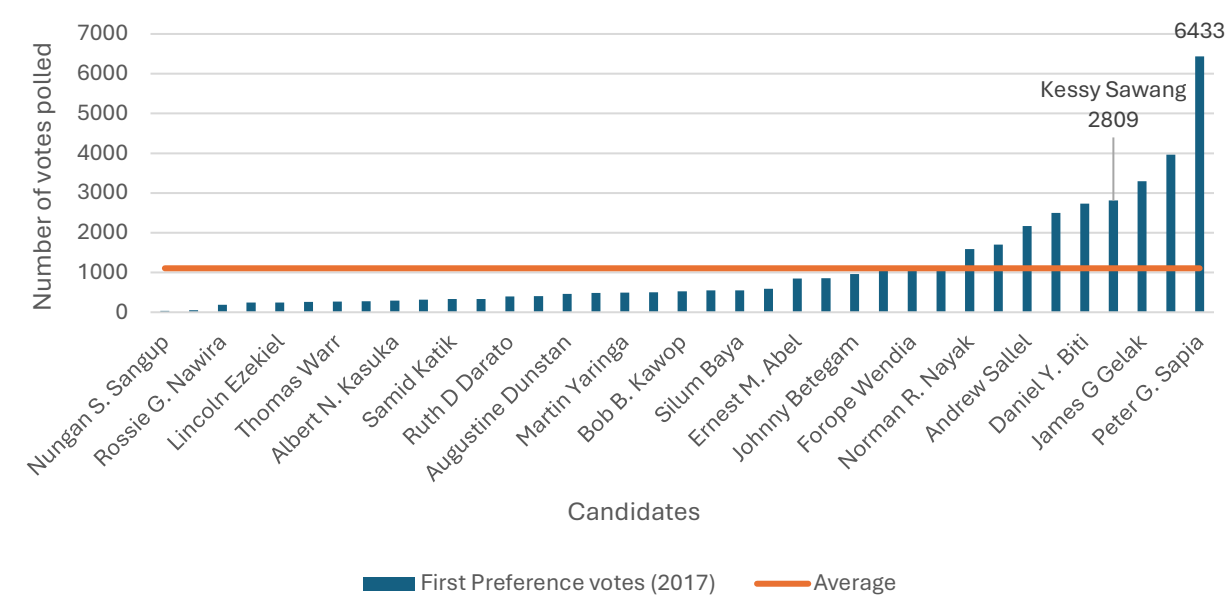
In November 2015, Toni joined the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Party. In 2016, Toni raised a concern about the incomplete police housing project at the Bumbu Police Barracks. She stated that a building contractor who had been fully paid had left the project and disappeared. The Prime Minister responded that he was not familiar with the issue and would get the Police Minister, Robert Atiyafa, to make a detailed response to Toni (Post-Courier, 2017).

In 2017, Toni lost Lae electorate to John Rosso, the Deputy Prime Minister of PNG. His first preference vote was 5,314 and his vote share was 16 per cent, while Toni's first preference vote was only 7.5 per cent. Toni had more strikes against her than for her; they ranged from her personal life to her political performance, and her arbitrators were mainly women.

#### 5.5.2 Kessy Sawang

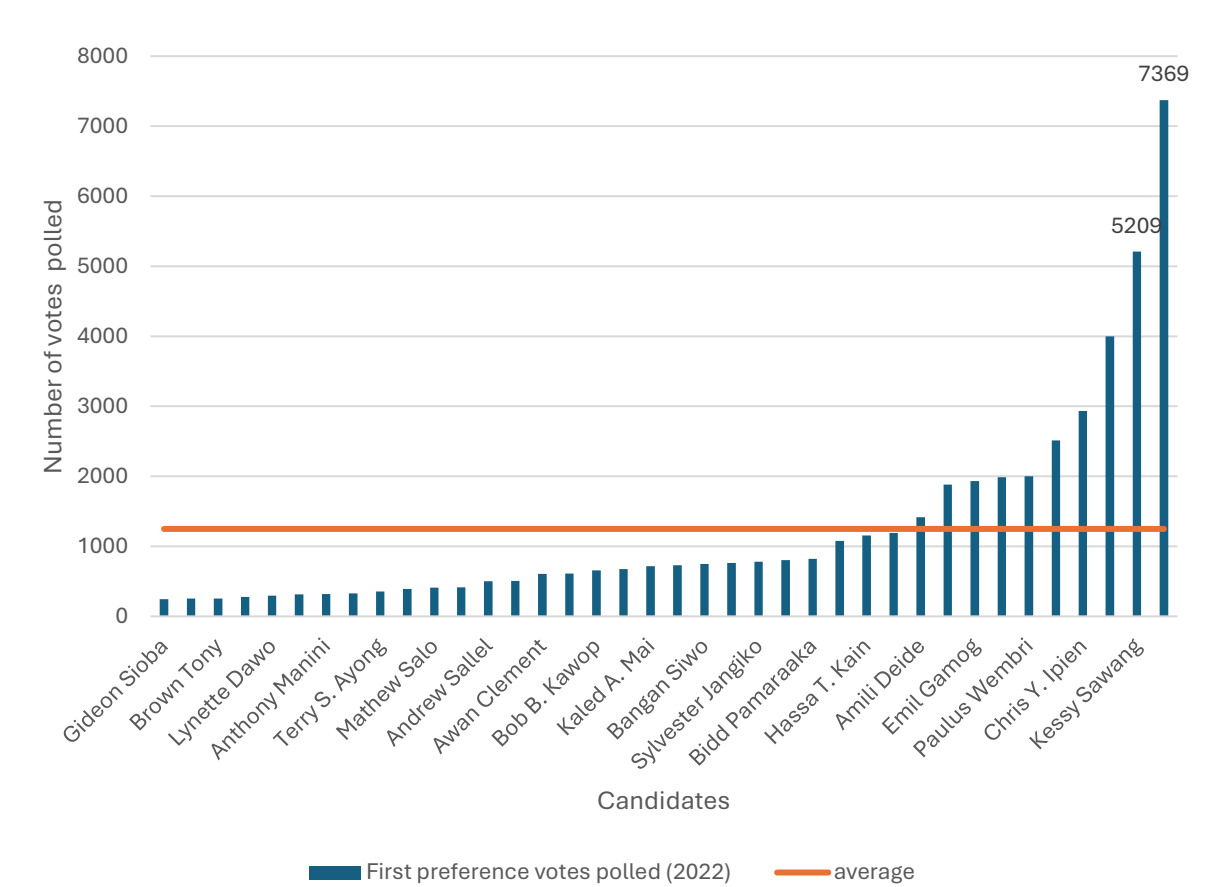
Kessy Sawang contested the Rai Coast Open electorate in Madang province in 2017 and 2022. In both elections she was a very strong contender because while she was in the top five with a first preference vote share of less than ten per cent in both elections, she placed well above average, (see Figures 30 and 31. Placing above the group average was important in the overall campaign because that meant that her second and third preferences would give her the much needed step up to remain in the top rank of the race.

Figure 30: Sawang’s performance in Rai Coast Open electorate, 2017



Source: Adapted by author from Wood (2019).

Figure 31: Sawang’s performance in Rai Coast Open electorate, 2022



Source: Adapted by author from Wood, 2019.

#### *5.5.2.1 Sawang's achievements and controversies in office*

Kessy Sawang won the Rai Coast Open electorate in the 2022 NGEs and is currently in her second year of her first term. She has served as vice minister for international trade and investment and is currently the minister for labour and employment under the Marape-Rosso cabinet. In 2024 after the exodus of some ministers from the government side, the Prime Minister, James Marape allocated additional portfolios to five cabinet ministers following the de-commissioning of ministers who defected to the opposition, including Kessy Sawang. She is currently also looking after the housing portfolio.

As an MP, Kessy Sawang has been vocal on a number of issues including security in the Rai Coast district, the equitable distribution of oil and gas across PNG, and the quality of water, sanitation and hygiene. She has also been invited to speak on trade and investment (PNG Business News, 2022).

## **5.6 Discussion**

Ten women in PNG have served their electorates as MPs since 1972: namely Josephine Abaijah, Waliyato Clowes, Nahau Rooney, Carol Kidu, Loujaya Toni, Julie Soso, Delilah Gore, Rufina Peter, Kessy Sawang and Francisca Semoso. Three ran for regional electorates and seven ran for open electorates.

### **5.6.1 Demonstrating and explaining women candidates' strength**

By the definition presented in this thesis, each can be described as 'strong' women candidates because they polled above the average in most of the elections they contested (including the elections they lost). Abaijah contested six elections and performed below average in one, Soso ran in six elections, and polled above average in all except one, Clowes contested twice and performed above average in one and below average in the other, while Kidu and Gore performed above average in all three of their campaigns, Peter and Sawang contested two elections and placed average in both their campaigns, Rooney contested three times and placed above average in all, Toni contested three times and placed above average only once and, finally, Semoso's one election saw her performing well above average.

Almost all women contested multiple times, both Abaijah and Soso contesting the highest number of times (six each), followed by Kidu, Gore, Toni and Rooney (three times each), Clowes, Sawang and Peter (twice) and Semoso (once). This suggests that these women share a strong sense of perseverance and commitment to political leadership. Indeed, many of these women were not deterred by an electoral defeat, some even going to the courts to dispute election outcomes that were not in their favour.

There is considerable variability across the electorates these women contested. While some seats were contested by an extraordinary number of candidates – for example, Julie Soso’s seat of Eastern Highlands regional seat, which had 64 candidates in 2022, and Kessy Sawang’s Rai Coast Open electorate, with 54 candidates in 2022 – others, such as Waliyato Clowes, competed against very few other candidates (in Clowes’ case five in Middle Fly Open in 1977). There is also a significant difference in the number of votes received by these women. Those who contested regional seats polled above 30,000 except for Abaijah in 1977, while for the open electorates Kidu polled the highest with 9,475 votes in 2007.

There are a number of possible explanations for these variabilities, and I will discuss three key ones here. Firstly, regional electorates or provinces as they are commonly known in PNG are the highest level of administrative division, housing several open electorates (also known as districts), which in turn are compositions of one or more LLG areas (wards/villages). Consequently, there are more voters voting for a regional seat than an open electorate seat. Secondly, voter turnouts are higher in some parts of the country than others, due to violence associated with elections in some areas and the size of the electorate in terms of population, and finally, missing names from electoral rolls may be another contributing factor. Regarding the number of candidates running per electorate, only one explanation is plausible; given the highly competitive nature of the elections in PNG, incumbents or patrons may encourage high numbers of candidates. Incumbents bank on the likelihood of higher candidate numbers resulting in vote splitting, that ultimately result in preferences to them.

Of the ten women MPs, Southern Region has produced the highest number, while the New Guinea Islands and Momase have produced two each and the Highlands region only one. All the provinces in the Southern region have patrilineal systems except Milne Bay. In the New Guinea Islands region all the provinces are matrilineal except Manus Province, while Momase and Highlands regions are patrilineal societies (see Table 27).

**Table 27: Ten women MPs' performances at the polls**

|                           | <b>Elections<br/>contested<br/>(number)</b> | <b>Elections<br/>won<br/>(number)</b> | <b>Highest<br/>number<br/>of<br/>electoral<br/>competitors<br/>(year)</b> | <b>Highest<br/>number<br/>of<br/>votes received<br/>(year)</b> | <b>Elections<br/>over<br/>the<br/>average</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Southern Region</b>    |                                             |                                       |                                                                           |                                                                |                                               |
| Josephine Abaijah         | 6                                           | 3                                     | 14 (1982)                                                                 | 16,011 (1972)                                                  | 5                                             |
| Waliyato Clowes           | 2                                           | 1                                     | 5 (1977)                                                                  | 3,360 (1977)                                                   | 1                                             |
| Carol Kidu                | 3                                           | 3                                     | 26 (1997)                                                                 | 9,475 (2007)                                                   | 3                                             |
| Delilah Gore              | 3                                           | 1                                     | 44 (2022)                                                                 | 5,258 (2017)                                                   | 3                                             |
| Rufina Peter              | 2                                           | 1                                     | 27 (2017)                                                                 | 30,944 (2022)                                                  | 2                                             |
| <b>New Guinea Islands</b> |                                             |                                       |                                                                           |                                                                |                                               |
| Nahau Rooney              | 3                                           | 2                                     | 13 (1987)                                                                 | 2,208 (1987)                                                   | 3                                             |
| Francesca Semoso          | 1                                           | 1                                     | No Data                                                                   | 14,851 (2023)                                                  | 1                                             |
| <b>Highlands</b>          |                                             |                                       |                                                                           |                                                                |                                               |
| Julie Soso                | 6                                           | 1                                     | 63 (2022)                                                                 | 37,267 (2012)                                                  | 5                                             |
| <b>Momase</b>             |                                             |                                       |                                                                           |                                                                |                                               |
| Loujaya Toni              | 3                                           | 1                                     | 14 (2017)                                                                 | 1,859 (2012)                                                   | 1                                             |
| Kessy Sawang              | 2                                           | 1                                     | 54 (2022)                                                                 | 5,209 (2022)                                                   | 2                                             |

Source: Adapted by author from Wood (2019).

While diverse, a common attribute can be found in the four regions of PNG concerning leadership, which is that men are still key to these roles. Voters across PNG maintain this belief through their voting behaviours towards female candidates. However, Abaijah, Rooney, Clowes, Kidu, Soso, Gore, Toni, Peter, Sawang and Semoso all survived a prejudiced system. While five of them are women from the Southern Region, it is imperative that I reiterate that Abaijah and Peter contested the Central regional seat, giving Rigo Open electorate voters a place within the political boundary of Central province. Representing the remaining parts of the country are Soso from the Highlands, Toni and Sawang from Momase and Rooney and Semoso from the New Guinea Islands region. What strategies did they use to win against male and female contenders? In this section, I present two explanations for the successful candidacies of these ten women: namely, their visibility in their own right, and their connections to visible men and/or women in their constituency.

### **5.6.2 Visibility of women MPs**

Wagner (2015) states that ideas and one-to-one interactions are key to candidates achieving four main goals: improving their public visibility, creating a favourable public image, informing voters about their policy ideas, and soliciting votes. In essence, candidates use direct contact to

draw voters' attention to their candidacy and their platforms. The way candidates conduct themselves during this conversation can 'create a favourable impression with voters, some of whom might cast a ballot in their favour' (Wagner, 2015, p. 198).

Waliyato Clowes, Nahau Rooney, Josephine Abaijah and Carol Kidu were all teachers. Loujaya Toni also worked in formal education but at the tertiary level as a part-time tutor at the University of Technology in Lae, Morobe province. She had been a singer, songwriter and journalist before her stint in parliament. Being teachers meant the women were not only in constant contact with students, but they were also in contact with their parents and the people of their community because they lived amongst them.

Rufina Peter's father had also been a teacher, but she was visible in her own right because she had worked with the World Bank and had overseen projects funded by the institution in some parts of Central province. For Josephine Abaijah, being a health educator meant she patrolled the entire Central province raising health awareness. Although such patrols were not politically motivated, they allowed her to meet with village people. Being an artist meant Loujaya Toni had already made her debut into society well before her entry onto the political stage. When she became a university tutor later, it meant she was now in contact with many of the young adults who were eligible to cast votes in the 2012 national election in Morobe. In this instance, one would expect a 'snowballing effect'. The more schools these women taught in, the wider their sphere of influence grew.

As Pokawin (1982) said of Nahau Rooney, 'with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Papua New Guinea and a working experience in the centre of power during the early 1970s she also had proven ability in the eyes of Manus people during her term with the department of Manus' (Pokawin, 1982, p. 250). She had been employed as a research officer for Prime Minister Somare (Rooney, 1983, p. 279).

Similarly, Julie Soso was a radio broadcaster. This meant she was constantly in the homes of the public that listened in to the radio. Being a women's rights advocate, and the president of the Provincial Women's Council, she also had contact with women. A deputy chair of the Eastern Highlands AIDS Council, she was also reaching out to the marginalised and minorities of society.

Delilah Gore worked as a public servant with the Department of Finance, as a District Treasurer in Oro province. She was also a devout member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which

provided contact with the church-going community and meant she was well-respected by the people in Sohe district (Jackson, 2012).

Rufina Peter and Kessy Sawang were also visible women because they had contested elections in 2017 and 2022. In an interview in 2022 prior to the NGEs, Sawang, the member for Rai Coast Open, said that she had walked the length and breadth of Rai Coast Open to run awareness campaigns while Peter (also highly visible after her 2022 victory) said that in her campaigns she had visited villages and other places she had never been to before.

Francesca Semoso has always been a very visible woman in her own right too. In the Bougainville House of Representatives, she occupied the position of Deputy Speaker. Prior to that she was an actress and a radio broadcaster with the National Broadcasting Commission and the private radio station Umi FM. In relation to her election, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville's President, Ishmael Toroama, said of her,

Semoso is not new to the political scene. She is a seasoned politician in Bougainville having been elected the Women Representative for North Bougainville twice in the Bougainville House of Representatives; first in the inaugural First House and she served her second term in the Third House...Semoso is a strong advocate of social issues and progressive development and an even stauncher advocate of Bougainville's desire for political independence from Papua New Guinea. She will champion Bougainville's Independence aspirations on the floor of the National Parliament to the best of her ability. (Radio New Zealand, 2023)

All the elected women were very vocal, and their previous public records of using their voices gave them presence and stature; being unapologetic about their convictions set them apart for voters who could then consider them as legitimate alternatives to male representatives. Finally, they had all run multiple times in NGEs in PNG.

### *5.6.3 Connection to visible men*

The ten women MPs also were connected to visible men and women in the community when elected. Clowes was married to an Australian businessman. Being married to a white man made her stand out in her community, giving her visibility. Unfortunately, being associated with a white man was a novelty in a country filled with indigenous people in the 1960s and 1970s. However, her father had also been a well-known man in the Gogodala area of North Fly open electorate. Rooney was also married to a white man, an Australian who was teaching in PNG,

giving her visibility in the community. In 1972, she joined the Pangu Party, which had been established in 1967. An affiliation to the Pangu Party meant Rooney rubbed shoulders with publicly visible men such as Michael Somare, Paul Lapun and Sir Pita Lus (Stephen, 1972, p. 89). In 1973, she was elected to the Port Moresby City Council (Dickson-Waiko, 2013, p. 183). In 1977 and 1982, she was a member of parliament under the banner of the Pangu Party. In 1987, she and other discontented members of the Pangu Party defected and founded the People's Democratic Movement. The party leader was Paias Wingti, another very visible man (Stephen, 1972). Rooney was also the daughter of the late Sir Paliau Maloat. Maloat was a political and religious leader (Otto, 2021). Josephine Abaijah was associated with Eric Wright, another white man. While their association may have not directly gotten her elected, his mentoring may have given her the leverage she needed to speak to the fears of the people of Central province. In two of the texts below, Fitzpatrick and Abaijah each allude to Eric Wright's mentoring. As Fitzpatrick puts it,

Was Josephine Abaijah in thrall to the late, left-wing activist Dr Eric Wright, her advisor and mentor? The answer is patently in the affirmative and is reiterated constantly throughout the book. (Fitzpatrick, 2011)

In her book entitled *A thousand coloured dreams*, Abaijah, who had just won the 1972 election, recalled a conversation she had with 'Dina', a pseudonym for one of her mentors or advisors:

Sitting on this log, I turned to Dina. 'I don't know what lies ahead of us. Before, we were private and secure, now we seem to be public property. I hope things go all right...what do you think? You know all the answers'. 'I don't know about this one', said Dina. 'I knew something about having you elected to parliament but very little about what comes now'. 'I'll have to work out where I stand politically', I said. 'Both of the main parties have offered me a ministry if I'll join them'. 'That's the numbers game', said Dina. 'Parties don't seem to mean much. It seems to be one group of individuals against another. Money is the real strength. Whoever controls the money controls the country'. (Abaijah, 2011, p. 231)

She further writes about a meeting with another supporter,

Mrs DC continued along the familiar path of her own fury. 'What we need in this country are women who are not afraid to speak their minds. Until we get them, the native women will be underdogs, and they'll be treated worse than village pigs'. I started

to speak slowly with controlled words and mind. I thought I sounded like Dina, but I wanted to sound like myself. 'Why do you keep talking about being afraid? I'm not frightened of anything that hasn't got a gun or poison fangs and, especially, I am not afraid of you'. Dina always said attack the argument not the person, but then, Dina was not a woman. (Abaijah, 2011, p. 244)

'Dina' was left wing, Abaijah's political stance was 'a fair go for Papua and Papua for Papuans' (Premdas, 1977, p. 268). The support of the people of Central province like 'Dina' and 'Mrs DC' were the mainstay of Abaijah's political boldness.

Carol Kidu was a white woman whose husband, Sir Buri Kidu, was a prominent Papua New Guinean man. In 1980, the government led by Prime Minister Julius Chan made him chief justice. He was also a very well-respected man in Pari village. At the time Carol ran for office, she was the widow of Buri Kidu.

In the case of Toni, she had pre-existing connections in politics as she was related to Bart Philemon, who occupied several senior roles in the PNG government including Minister for Public Service and Minister for Finance. He was widely respected as an economic reformer, and a key figure in the Lae Open electorate for 20 years until 2012. Her husband James Toni was a well-known man among the grassroots people in Lae Open electorate in Morobe province.

Delilah Gore and Julie Soso were party candidates of the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Party in 2012 (Radio New Zealand, 2012). The party founder was Don Pomb Polye, the Kandep MP. They both later defected to the People's National Congress Party (Yapumi, 2017). Julie Soso's father was a prominent man in the township of Goroka.

In 2022, Rufina Peter contested the election under the banner of the People's National Congress, which was connected to Peter O'Neill but, more importantly, she had the endorsement of the chiefs of Goilala Open electorate and the nod from former governor of Central province, Alphonse Moroi. Moroi was also from Goilala electorate. In 2002, his winning vote share was 28 per cent and in 2007, 39 per cent. However, in 2012 he was unseated by Jack Genia, a man from Abau Open electorate, whose winning voter share was 26.9 per cent and, in 2017, when Peter had come third, Moroi had been in 10<sup>th</sup> place.

Kessy Sawang on the other hand, was a member of the People's First Party and was connected to the member for Yangoru Saussia, Richard Maru. Francesca Semoso was a candidate for the Pangu Party and therefore connected to the Prime Minister of PNG, James Marape.

What are voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates who contested elections as incumbents? While Rigo electorate is yet to vote for women in sufficient numbers to elect them as politicians, it has contributed to producing two at the regional level, namely Abaijah and Peter, who were members for the Central province regional electorate. Can lessons be learned by other women, whether aspiring or sitting MPs, from their predecessors Abaijah, Rooney, Clowes, Soso, Toni and Gore, or from the current sitting members Sawang, Peter and Semoso? This chapter has argued that all ten women were visible in their own right but were also connected to men and women who were visible in their own networks of relationships, and therefore through association, they gained validation, reinforcing their own visibility.

Each woman brought into parliament her own style of politicking. Abaijah fought for Papuan independence, but she was a threat to a united Papua and New Guinea and so lost the NCD regional electorate to a male Papuan candidate who had Pangu backing, and in Milne Bay regional, the question of Papuan independence was moot in the 1990s. Clowes started a party but two incidents saw her lose support from within parliament and from voters: firstly, she became accommodating to MPs from the Highlands region, and secondly, she began to sympathise with the Papua Besena agenda. Her voters expected to see her bring services to her electorate, not debate and make laws on the floor of parliament, which raised the ire of her voters and thus diminished their support. Like Rooney, Gore and Soso, Clowes played politics by defecting to other political parties. Politicians who move from one party to another are known as yoyo politicians. Standish (2007) states that,

Until OLIPPAC, it was easy for Opposition members or government backbenchers to swap parties and overthrow a prime minister or increase their chances of a ministry or other additional lucrative appointment carrying ministerial privileges. Hence, there is usually a drift by MPs towards government parties, until the last few months before a vote of no confidence became possible. Such party-hopping, known as “yo-yo politics”, is what OLIPPAC was intended to prevent. In theory, the law makes it impossible for individual MPs to swap parties. (Standish, 2007, p. 146)

Sometimes, even if one had the support of her voters, systems created with formal institutions worked against women incumbents. Kidu served Moresby South for three terms and then retired

from national politics. She debated on the floor of parliament, proposed laws and saw that they came to fruition, and common good and social justice was always at the heart of her discussions. She was a champion for women and children plus disability and the people at the grassroots. Toni was unapologetic and confrontational, traits that did not sit well with her voters, about the plight of women, being their political representation in parliament, her, Soso and Gore were unsympathetic. Sawang, Semoso and Peter all have the best interests of their electorates at heart but are not immune to the workings of the political system, which often hampers women's participation.

While it is unfair that women politicians are judged harshly compared to their male counterparts, the fact remains that the few women who become politicians are representatives of all women. A general feeling that a woman politician is a mother and will therefore do better than her male counterparts is the permit given to her, but being placed on a pedestal comes with a price. Everything she says and does is scrutinised in its entirety and at the end of her term as MP, her performance as a woman and mother determines her fate and that of other women candidates at the polls.

## 5.7 Conclusion

While Highlands, New Guinea Islands and Momase regions have no connection to my case study area – Rigo Open electorate in the Southern Region – they share a common denominator: all regions have produced women MPs. This points to the PNG concept that translates to 'strong' woman highlighted in this thesis. However, the Southern Region has produced the highest number of women MPs. While Western, NCD, Oro and Milne Bay provinces have produced one women MP each, Central province has produced two governors. Rigo Open electorate, being in the Central province, offers an illuminating example of voter behaviours and attitude towards women candidates as they also contributed through the ballot in the election of two women MPs, namely Josephine Abaijah in 1972, two years prior to PNG independence, and Rufina Peter in 2022. While five is too small a number it is still a phenomenon worth acknowledging because the region, like the rest of PNG, is predominantly patrilineal; finding the highest number of women MPs is from this region suggests the Southern Region is politically more egalitarian than elsewhere.

This chapter has presented the electoral performance of ten 'strong' women candidates in PNG since 1972, women who, because of their strength at the polls, won the electorates they contested and became MPs. All ten women had two common denominators: all were visible

women in their own right through their careers, most being employed in professions that are classified as noble, and all were connected to prominent men and women who were themselves visible. While they represented cultures that subscribed to the patrilineal system, voters gave them preferences in an indication that they recognised them as strong women who could be accorded the role of a leader, thereby placing them above their group averages. That said, the Southern Region presents an outlier: five out of the ten strong women candidates came from this region. While there is an indication that there is a ‘big-woman concept’ in PNG, it is more evident in the Southern region.

## **Chapter 6: Strong women candidates as those valued by voters**

### **6.1 Introduction**

While institutional barriers to improved political participation by women are increasingly well understood, the reasons why, and conditions under which, individual voters, both male and female, vote for a woman candidate – are less well understood. Little research has examined voter behaviours and attitudes in relation to women candidates in PNG, particularly in contexts where voters are presented with the option to vote for strong women candidates. Like Blaikie (2010), I begin my investigation in the social world of the social actors I am interested in. I wish to understand what Blaikie (2010, p. 19) calls ‘their constructions of reality, their way of conceptualizing and giving meaning to their social world’ because such an approach may give an insight into why voters, both male and female, gave their votes to a female candidate. It is hoped that by understanding voter behaviours and attitudes towards candidates in a given electorate and province, strategies for women’s electoral success might be improved despite the restrictions that institutions, culture, and money politics pose to women candidates, while providing a possible lens through which we can understand why certain women perform well at the polls in NGEs.

In this chapter, I analyse voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates in Rigo Open electorate during NGEs. I investigate voters’ cultural practices, aiming to establish a relationship between these cultural practices and voters’ political behaviours. As I have presented in previous chapters, the electoral data show that voters from this region have produced ‘strong’ women candidates and have contributed to electing women governors. Through a descriptive narration of the social, political and economic organisation of their societies, I aspire to establish how these factors inform voters’ electoral behaviours, particularly in the electorates where strong women have contested. In this chapter I use predominantly qualitative data, collected through interviews and focus group discussions.

More specifically, I asked communities across Rigo a number of questions:

- during elections, what are voters looking for in a candidate when they cast their votes?
- what are the factors that inform voters’ choices and why are these issues important to voters?

- how much do voters know about their preferred candidates? For example, did they know the type of electorate the candidate was running in (open or regional seat); how many were men and how many were women?
- did voters know the policy platforms of these contenders?

In this chapter, I find that voters use the same criteria when considering women and male candidates, including when they distribute their three preferences among candidates. This application of the same criteria runs counter to the ‘culture argument’ that women belong in the house. In Rigo, women and men contenders are judged in the same way. However, in instances where voters are coerced, societal values like reciprocity, having a safety net and an investment for a rainy day become commodities that can be bought and sold because the ‘little finger’ (the inked proof of one’s vote) now has a price-tag on it.

## 6.2 Strong women defined in culture: Queens, village councillors and candidates

Sepoe (2002, pp. 26–27) states that the ‘belief that power, influence and public office are chattels of the patriarch is a system of thinking approved and legitimized by the non-material cultures of the predominantly patrilineal societies in PNG’. Alan, a male participant from Tauruba village in Rigo Coast LLG affirmed this claim in one of my focus groups when he said:

Man was the decision maker. Long ago men were the only ones who gave orders. Women were not allowed in public. Like you are sitting here, among us, you should not be sitting with us...Really, you will be in the kitchen sending down food for us to eat. (Alan, male focus group participant, 2019)

Likewise, in the view of Iavana, a male participant from Saroakeina village in Rigo Central LLG,

In our custom, woman sits, and man sits here...woman is for the kitchen, her work is different! Man’s work is different! (Iavana, male focus group participant, 2019)

According to these sentiments, men and women in PNG have clearly defined spaces in their communities. It is commonly argued that a woman’s place is not in parliament. However, election results for Rigo district show otherwise, and written documents of colonial missionaries allude to the notion that some women in PNG at least were respected as public figures. Documents from Central province show that women had personal property and there were instances where they could publicly shame their husband if they wanted to. After their

death and burial, these women's houses and yards became symbolic graveyards, places of silence (Chalmers, 1895, pp. 41, 112, 150). Women having personal property and being able to berate their husbands in the public space meant they had agency and voice.

Other entries and reports made by colonial administrators also recorded women rulers, such as Queen Koloka Naime of Nara and an unnamed queen on Yule Island villages in Kairuku open electorate (see Dancey, 1913, p. 73; Unwin, 1912; Murray, 1912). The former, having no brothers, ascended to the position of Queen when her father, the chief of Nara, died. Her right to great power included the head of every pig that was slaughtered in the village, and putting the first thatch of grass on every public building. Her husband, Boi Vagi, represented her in these events, indicating recognition and affirmation of her headship of the village.

Despite Bettison, Hughes and Van der Veur's predictions in 1964, when giving an overview of the 1964 elections, that it would take PNG a long time to have women MPs, three women had been elected as councillors. This was not the same as being an MP but is nevertheless an example of women holding public office. All three women were from the Central province: two were from Kairuku Open electorate and one was from Rigo Open electorate. Indeed, in less than ten years from their predictions, in 1972, Josephine Abaijah was voted into parliament by the Central provincial electorate.

### 6.3 Locating my study site: Rigo in Central province

The case of Rigo offers an example that allows us to explore the enablers and barriers to women's political participation at the national level in PNG. Women have contested each of the past four NGEs in Rigo, and in 2017, there was a significant increase in the number of women candidates (see Table 28). However, in 2022, the number dropped again from eight to three. The number of women candidates contesting the regional electorate, however, has remained constant at between two and three candidates in each election.

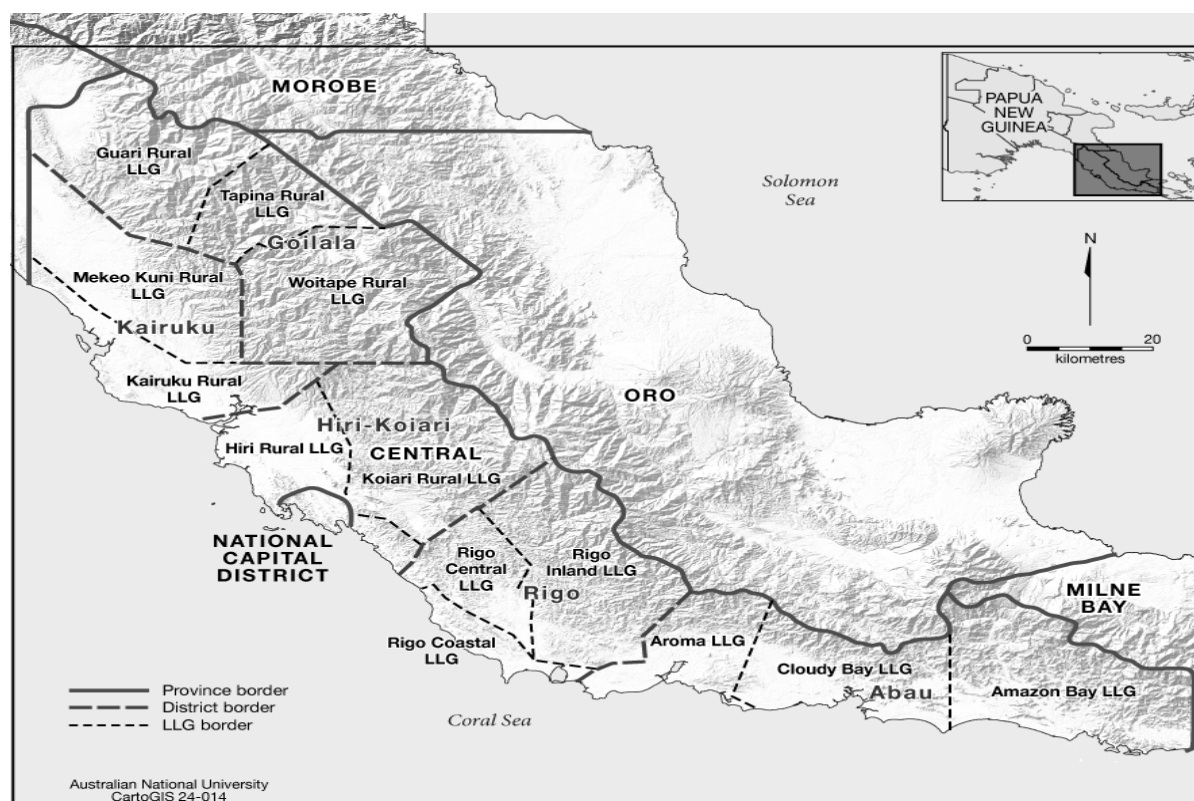
**Table 28: Women candidates for Rigo Open and Central provincial seat: 2017–2022**

| Electorate         | 2022  |        | 2017  |        | 2012  |        | 2007  |        |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
|                    | Total | Female | Total | Female | Total | Female | Total | Female |
| Rigo Open          | 42    | 3      | 39    | 8      | 36    | 2      | 33    | 1      |
| Central Provincial | 22    | 2      | 27    | 3      | 20    | 2      | 18    | 2      |

Source: Haley and Zubrinich, 2018.

Central province electorate, like the rest of PNG, is highly fragmented. It is made up of five open electorates: Hiri-Koiari, Kairuku, Goilala, Abau and Rigo, with each having three LLGs except Rigo Open, which has four (see Figure 33), and more than one hundred villages and wards. During the election campaign period, candidates visit villages, also known as wards, within each LLG. Because of its diversity, canvassing voters is an expansive exercise.

**Figure 32: Map of Central province**



Source: Australian National University, CartoGIS, 24–014.

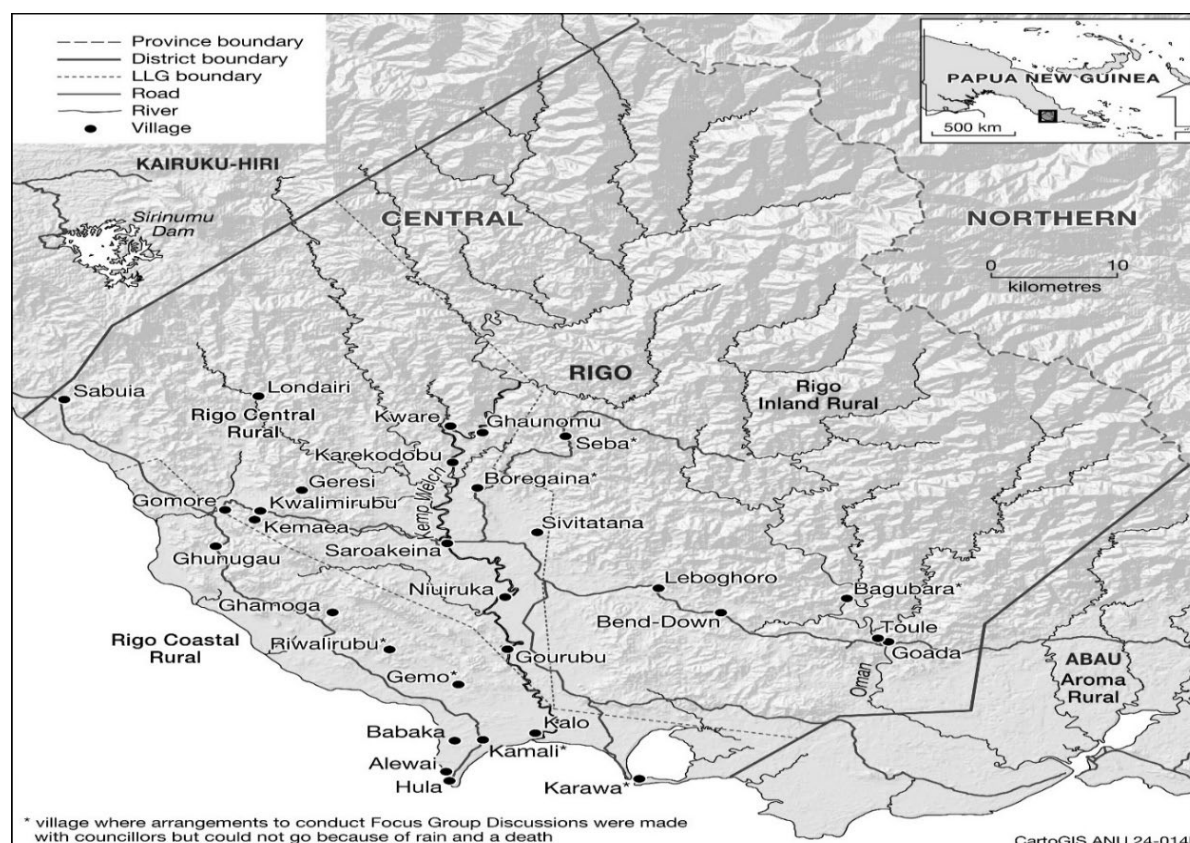
### 6.3.1 Rigo Open electorate

The Rigo Open electorate, like Central province, is topographically and demographically diverse. With its rugged terrain and limited road system, the further north and northeast one travels, the more sparsely populated the electorate becomes and the inaccessibility of wards and voters worsens. The Magi Highway runs through the electorate, connecting it to the capital city Port Moresby. Those villages that are on the outskirts of the major highway are connected to it through feeder roads. However, because they are in poor condition, many villages are cut off from the main highway during the wet season, while other citizens whose villages do not have feeder roads must walk for hours on bush tracks and catch PMVs (privately owned transport

minivans) on the main highway when they wish to travel to Kwikila District Administrative Centre or Port Moresby to sell their garden produces, buy household items or access basic services like aid posts, clinics and schools.

The electorate has four LLGs (see Figure 33): Rigo Central Rural, Rigo Coast Rural, Rigo East Rural and Rigo North Rural; and 88 wards, also known as villages. Each of these Wards is a union of clans with members originating from a common descendant (Seeland, 2006, p. 60). It is within this sphere of influence that a woman candidate must establish a voter base. If a candidate has good public relations in the clan, and is an active participant in the community, these networks of relationships are the medium through which the candidate becomes visible. In such areas actions speak louder than words because voters do not read candidates' posters, but they listen to other people's stories about the candidate, and good and bad reports are passed on by word of mouth. Figure 33 below presents the names of the 24 villages in which I conducted focus group discussions.

**Figure 33: Map of Rigo electorate in Central province**



Source: Australian National University, CartoGIS, 24-014.

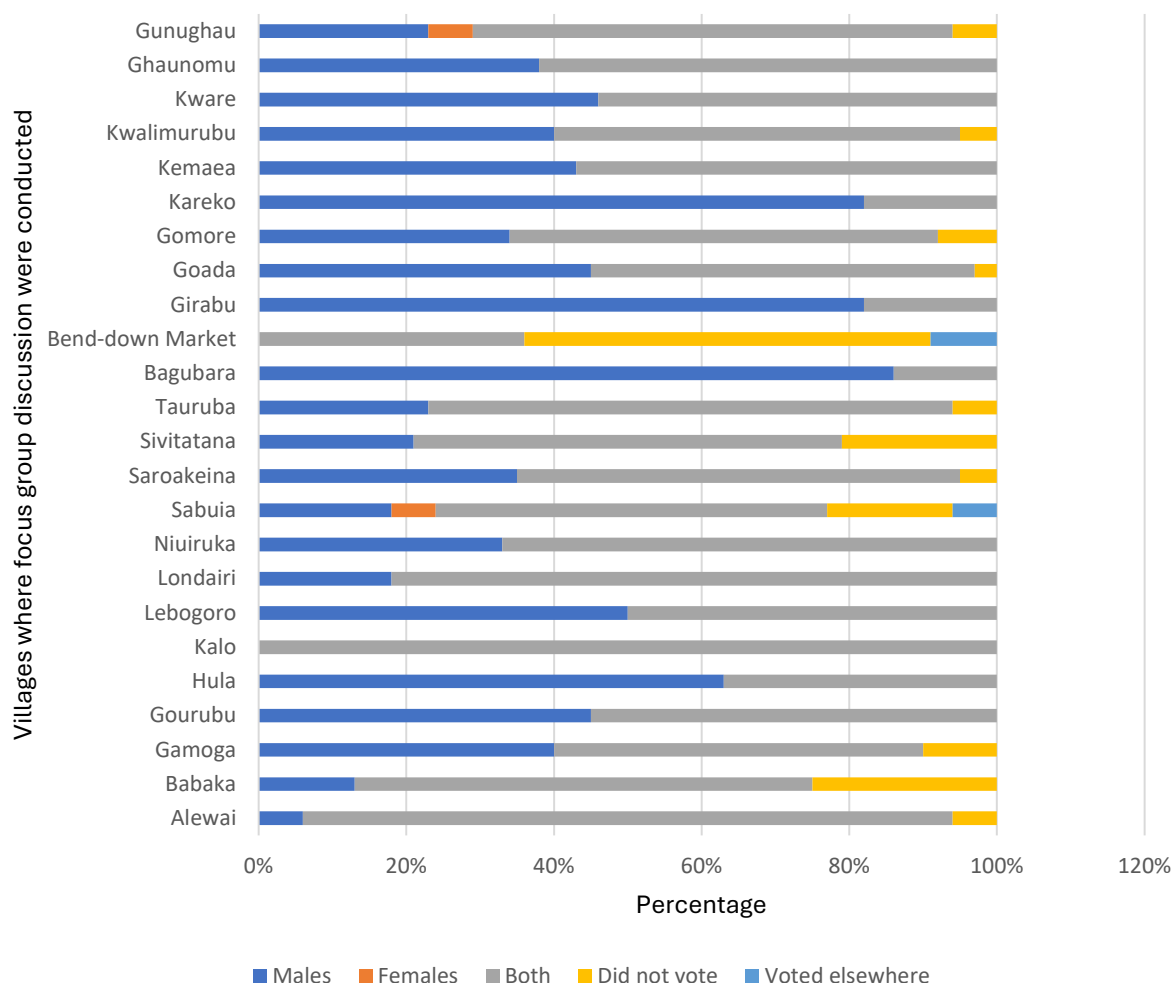
### **6.3.2 Population distribution**

In 2011, Rigo district had a total population of 56,509 people. Rigo Central stood at 15, 422, Rigo Coastal Rural at 25,966, and Rigo Inland (Rigo North and Rigo East) had 15,121 people. The most densely populated areas in the electorate are in Rigo Coast Rural, with several moderately large village clusters in Rigo Central LLG Rural, and small villages grouped along ridge tops or in river valleys in Rigo North Rural and Rigo East Rural. Smaller villages have seen drops in population as residents move to Port Moresby through a range of push and pull factors, whereas the larger, more readily accessible, coastal and lowland villages have high growth rates. In this case, a key pull factor is inward movement from Port Moresby, as many public servants and their school children live in their villages and commute to Port Moresby.

### **6.4 ‘Good’ women candidates in Rigo**

When asked about the 2017 NGE, 53 per cent of the focus group participants said they voted for both male and female candidates, while 40 per cent said they voted for male candidates only, and less than one per cent said that they voted for women candidates only. Only in two villages out of 24, Ghunughau and Sabuia, did a few of the participants cast their votes to women candidates only. In Kareko, Girabu and Bagubara, almost 50 per cent of the participants voted for both male and female candidates, (see Figure 34).

**Figure 34: Preferences given to women candidates**



Source: Focus group discussions, 2019.

An elderly man in one of my focus groups had this to say when I asked him whether he voted for a woman candidate:

*Ghai gema kastom ai vavinetu asi e ve gorikauni. Custom tu manigea e tanuni, bena manigamogo etanuni. Tau mogho bene veghorikau, vavine asigina! Tau ghereghana tu vere, vavine tu asisigina. Monana veghatana e yaghomato mo toma. Vavine asi e ve ghorikauto ghoi korana gita ghera ghauka tu e vetaritogoi. Vavine ghena goada, tau ghena goda bita vagha egeregereani tu asi begeve ira irani. Giatu kastom maguriri ghutuma tau ghesi dainai benamo tau mogho veghorikau, tau mogho begene ve tari. Vetari nighanai vavine tu asigina. Veghauna tu veghauna veghatana. O veghorikauto asigina. Ghai nego tu vavine asi e ve gorikauto ghoi. Vavine asighina, mogha asi e senisito.*

In our custom, a woman does not lead. Custom is there, it is living, and that is all, it is living! Only men must lead, not women. Only man is chief, not woman. From there until it came to now, women did not lead because our old people went to war. If we compare a woman's strength to a man's strength, they are not the same. We have many custom things with men that is why only men led. Only men went to war! Oh, we could give away things like land to a woman, but a woman never led...That did not change! (Magistrate, male focus group participant, 2019)

This comment indicates that, at least for some people, there is a contradiction between traditional ideas of women's leadership and their past and present success in being elected to parliament and their participation as candidates in national elections.

The people of Rigo district are yet to give the Rigo Open electorate to a women candidate, however, as the records of the Central regional seat show, two women have been elected there, namely Josephine Abaijah and Rufina Peter (current). In 2019, in an in-depth interview that I conducted with him, Mr. Galeva Kwarara, a former MP for Rigo open commented on Josephine Abaijah's electoral success saying,

In those days culture was very strong. When any war [erupted] between any two tribes, they always cling onto their leader, and Papua became a tribe on its own. It wasn't a question of male or female. Man failed; Sir Albert Maori Kiki, Ebia Olewale, Christine Arek, John Guise, all those big guns, Hoerler Rarua Rarua. They all failed, and this woman beat them all hands down. Why, because she spoke the truth.

In the quote above, all the names that Mr. Kwarara mentioned were male, and they had all been MPs from Papua at one time.

In the 2022 NGEs, Peter did not win on her first preference votes. While those votes gave her a head start in the race, it was the second and third preferences that made her victor at the end of the race. What is also significant is the fact that another female candidate's Philomena Kassman second and third preference votes were given to her, in an indication that people were willing to give votes to a woman candidate in the Southern Region (see Table 29).

**Table 29: Candidates whose voters gave preferences to Rufina Peter**

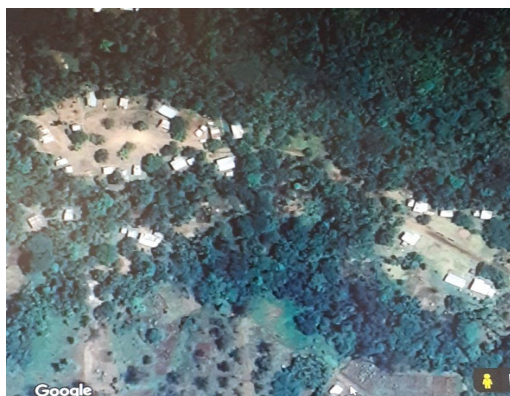
| <b>Candidate</b>  | <b>Eliminated at</b>   | <b>Votes gained</b> | <b>Peter</b> | <b>Votes gained</b> | <b>Agarobe</b> |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Clarence Kulolo   | 5 <sup>th</sup> count  | 533                 |              | 98                  |                |
| Michael Maino     | 8 <sup>th</sup> count  | 519                 |              | 177                 |                |
| Philomena Kassman | 13 <sup>th</sup> count | 1,560               |              | 472                 |                |
| Gei Raga          | 14 <sup>th</sup> Count | 1,447               |              | 775                 |                |
| Tau Kamuta        | 15 <sup>th</sup> count | 1,446               |              | 922                 |                |
| Paul Simon        | 16 <sup>th</sup> Count | 2,066               |              | 880                 |                |
| James Enage       | 17 <sup>th</sup> count | 3,406               |              | 1,417               |                |
| Boe Daera         | 18 <sup>th</sup> count | 6,833               |              | 1,640               |                |
| Nelson Saroa      | 19 <sup>th</sup> count | 4,999               |              | 3,444               |                |
| Vavine Dai        | 11 <sup>th</sup> count | 341                 |              | 356                 |                |

Source: Table compiled from data recorded by the PNG Electoral Commission (pngec.gov.au).

## **6.5 Relationships in Rigo: Power, authority and legitimacy**

In principle, societies in Rigo are egalitarian. This is indicated in the way houses are laid out in the villages. A visitor will find it difficult to identify the house of the most important person in the village or the clan when they walk into it because there are no symbols and styles indicating that the owner of that house holds a position of prestige. In the past, the environment determined how houses were laid out; the topography, rivers and roads and security from enemies were all contributing factors. Houses are clustered in families by clans. The pattern of how villagers placed their houses could be either linear, oval or a horseshoe shape. There is always a clearing in the middle of the village for social or political intercourse (see images 16 and 17).

**Image 16: Geresi village**



**Image 17: Kwalimurubu village**



Source: Google Maps (accessed August 12, 2019).

The style of the houses is significant because it has implications for social status in the community. If there are no symbols or signs indicating a person's status in the community, then everyone must be comparatively equal. This is important because this interpretation creates pathways for women to contest national elections. There is evidence of power and authority being shared because a vocabulary exists pertaining to high status, including words such as '*vere*' (chief), '*tau barana e ma vavine barana*' (big-man and big-woman), '*roghea/rhoghea foro/roghea gadiba*' (lady of importance), '*ghora verena*' (chief of sorcery) and '*tano ghoromerona/ghuiato*' (boy/girl of land and mountains). When it comes to NGEs, this system of authority and power-sharing has been shown to garner popular consent where the clan and village institutions become bases from which female candidates can build support for her candidacy and accrue votes.

However, to the people of Rigo electorate, culture still defines who qualifies as a leader. The participants in my focus groups raised the idea that politics is a war of sorts, and the national parliament is the theatre where those battles are fought, also alluding to the notion that the modern-day parliament is symbolic of the chief and village elders' platform. Therefore, the conclusion drawn is that national elections in PNG are wars, hence, only men can run for, and fill, a seat in parliament effectively. In the past, the reasoning goes, only men engaged in politics because they could throw a spear or a punch, wield a club and/or wrestle (both metaphorically or otherwise) with an enemy in confrontations. Negotiations and peace-talks, and celebrations only happened if there was victory. When Vavine Kila Nades, a woman candidate, danced with supporters in Kwalimurubu village in 2017 during her campaign rally, she caused a stir. The quote below is a record of what one man told me when he heard that I was researching voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates. He said,

Vavine Kila brought music into the village! They danced here. When you go to war, you don't dance – taboo! You squeeze out victory, then you dance! (Rabia, 2019)

Lasswell (cited in Barbour, 2017, p. 3) defines politics as 'who gets what, when and how'. He states that 'the study of politics is the study of influence and the influential...the influential [being] those who get the most of what is there to get'. He suggests three values that govern politics: deference, income and safety but notes that these are merely representative, not exclusive. He goes on to say that 'the distribution of deference is relatively clear in a formal hierarchy...and the pyramids, in form and in fact, are steep'. He also notes that 'fighting skill is plainly one of the most direct ways by which men have come to the top... [along with] skill in handling persons through oration, argument and/or manipulation' (Lasswell, 1936, p. 297). While the quote above is out of date, it serves a purpose in this section because when focus group participants describe the kind of leaders they would like to have, they allude to strength. Lasswell's definition of politics and the comments above by one male participant comparing elections in PNG to wars, convey the idea that politics and elections; a vital principle of democracy, are contentious quests. The 'how' in Lasswell's definition, and the missing 'why', lead to whether or not the 'what' and the 'when' are defensible on the floor of parliament. If politics and elections are institutors of conflict, the most suitable candidates for a post in parliament are seen as men. As one of my focus group participants said:

If there is a parliament session, will she talk? If she talks, her colleagues might tell her to sit down. So, we say, let's send a man in so he can go and fight on our behalf. (Male focus group participant: 2019)

If women do run as well, only those considered strong by the electorate qualify for the post of MP. This assessment of strength then governs the support given to them in the number of ballots that they accrue at the polls.

## 6.6 Social structures and cultural practices

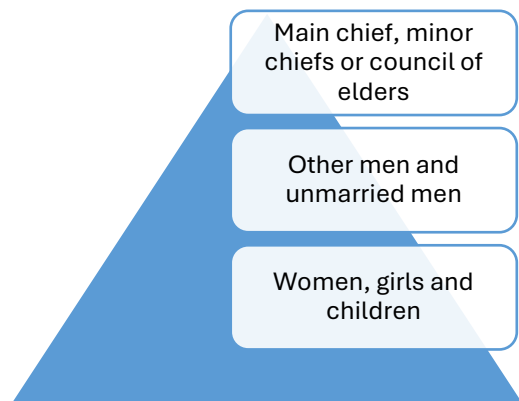
While the organisation of houses in villages indicates that societies in Rigo Open electorate are egalitarian, how do males and females relate to each other? Are relationships hierarchical or are they flat? Who is head of the establishment, if anyone? Social structures are supported by the norms, beliefs and values of a people, ordering their behaviours and attitudes towards each other, creating institutions and structures (Bernardi & Requena, 2007, p. 163; Crothers, 2012, p. 20; Redcliff-Brown, 1940). If these ideologies in turn create the roles each person plays and

the places they occupy in the upkeep and longevity of the institution, we may then ask what the ideologies that influence rank and position between males and females in Rigo Open electorate are, and how they in turn inform voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates.

Societies in Rigo electorate are patrilineal. Children belong to their father's line and clan, but a female child loses her father's name and her membership to his clan when she marries. If she comes from a family that owns land, she can settle on her father's land after seeking permission to do so from her father or brothers. Unless the land has been gifted to her, her sons and husband do not inherit that land when she dies. This is because she was only given user rights, not ownership rights. All brothers are considered fathers to their brother's children, and so their wives are addressed as mothers by the children in the clan. They are either big father and big mother or small father and small mother, depending on whether they are older or younger than their brother. In this relationship, the father's sisters are very important females. They are called '*yah yah*' (aunts). In the maternal family, all sisters of a mother, whether biological or otherwise, are also called mothers, and their husbands are addressed as fathers by the sister's children. Again, they are big mother and big father or small mother and small father, depending on whether they are older or younger than their sister. In this side of the family, the mother's brothers are called '*wah*' (uncles), and they are the most important relatives in the family. Nephews and nieces are described as the muscle on the mother's brother's thigh.

In Figure 35, I offer a possible representation of the social structures in the electorate. The structure shows that men of status occupy the top echelons of the pyramid, particularly as chiefs and elders, and other men feature below these men of stature, with young men following below them. Women, girls, and children occupy the base of the social structure.

**Figure 35: Political and social structure in Rigo electorate**



### **6.6.1 The role of men**

According to Spark (2011, p. 166), ‘one of the privileges associated with power is the capacity to define roles to serve one’s own interests’. She goes on to say that ‘in urban PNG, men have little to gain from supporting greater equality between men and women, at least in the short-term’. She also argues that men can ‘defend their own interests and negate the potential power of educated and employed women by vilifying them as traitors to their sex and, simultaneously, “traditional culture”’. The questions I raise in relation to these claims are, if men are defending their own interests, including their power and honour, how beneficial is that to the maintenance of the family unit? Today, the cost of living in Papua New Guinea has increased over time to a degree that it is now in the best interests of the family as a social unit to have both males and females in paid work. The more authority attached to a certain role, the more buying power for the family. If, for the preservation of culture, women are prevented from working, this has implications on social, political and economic security. Spark may lay the blame at the door of the village, but there are broader questions to ask: where did the subjects of her study grow up; to what extent do they understand the cultures and traditions they claim to represent? Papua New Guinea is fragmented in so many ways than one. As such, I wonder whether it is fair to generalise about the rest of the country based on the reports of a few.

One of my male focus group participants said this about female and male candidates,

If you say you are going to run, ask yourself these questions: is my house door open? Is my car door open? Is my hand open? If your answer is no to all those questions, don’t waste your time. When you say you are going to run, you are putting your hands up to

being everyone's father, mother, brother, sister, husband and wife. (Male participant: 2019)

In the quote above, the participant does not discriminate; there are no gender tags, except for the use of first and second person pronouns, and nouns that denote familial relationships.

Another male who heard about my research sought me out to tell me,

You women are very powerful. Do you know why? In the house, you are holding fire and so night and day, you are heating your hands. That is why our villages are full of widows. It is easy to kill a man, not a woman! I was told by someone who knows! (An interested male by-stander: 2019)

The two quotes from two males from Kwalimurubu village, are contrary to what the participants in Spark's study were saying.

However, an analysis of Spark's study, the hierarchical structure presented in Figure 36, and the two quotes above, we can see contradictions. While the male interested party from Kwalimurubu says, 'you women are powerful', structurally, women occupy the base of the social-political structure. As Spark argues, men can cancel educated and employed women's capacity to protect the powers given to them by the systems and institutions cultural practices endorse.

Men and women have defined roles within the structures PNG society constructs. Men occupy the prestigious positions at the top of the hierarchy, and women and children occupy the base of that structure. The public domain is generally an exclusive space where only men sit on the chief's platform. As one participant explains,

Our law...taboo, woman...Where a man sat, a woman did not sit. When men were talking about hunting, spearing, she did not sit out there. The reason why women did not sit on the men's platform was because men were making plans. Men sat and talked about the security of the village, they talked about what they would do in the village, it was our cultural practice... She was not permitted to hear those things because she knows how to give and how to share, she might end up talking about something she was not supposed to repeat, and she would end up causing trouble...that is why [women] were never allowed into that space where important things were discussed. (Male focus group participant: 2019)

Knowledge is passed on from father to son, and from mother to daughter, or father to daughter and so on. Some knowledge is even passed through sorcery and black magic. However, today, it is possible to buy these arts for a fee. Some men carry certain leaves, tree bark and stones for protection and good luck. Some of these charms are for calling fish from the deep, and game from the land and from the skies. Some are for good harvests, while others can be used against other people's prosperity and for attracting a partner. Because of the charms some men carry around with them, there is a clear demarcation between where women can tread and where they cannot. This means the platform of the chief of the clan is not a place for a woman to sit. Kila, a male participant, had this to say to explain why it is taboo for a woman to sit on the chief's platform: 'Every time, sick moon (menstruation) is seeing her. That already is magic!' (Kila, male focus group participant: 2019).

Hard physical work is also considered men's forte. One man from Saroakeina noted:

Her name is woman; she only stayed in the kitchen! She can't do the work men is doing. Work is like making a new garden, making a clearing around the garden, chopping down trees, hunting, and spearing, bringing meat back to the house. She cannot do this. So only men sat together and talked about these things. You see, men sat and planned and put their strength together, then they went to the place they chose. A man who was "stepped on" didn't bring anything home and he didn't find anything. (Male focus group participant: 2019)

A man does what a man does, and a woman does what is expected of her. Division of labour, and related demarcation of domains, mean structure and order in the society. Yet in PNG elections we see another dynamic at play, where certain women poll very well, outperforming their male rivals.

### **6.6.2 The role of women**

In the hierarchical structure identified in this thesis (see Figure 36), women occupy the base. With this kind of an arrangement, it is easy to misread, and therefore misinterpret, the dynamics of the relationships in Rigo settings. While women's position may seem insignificant, it is important to realise that the base supports the whole edifice. Therefore, the top can only be as strong and as stable, or weak and unstable, as the base that supports it. A Rigo woman maintains the longevity and survival of her father-in-law's name. While it may seem that a man preserves his father's line, he needs a woman to produce offspring. She must carry his child to term and

nurture the male child until he is old enough to follow his father. Discipline and education in the ways of society are shared responsibilities. A father stops disciplining his daughter as soon as she starts menstruating, when her schooling becomes the sole responsibility of her mother. A female respondent said,

When a girl becomes a young woman, her father stops scolding her because if he continues to do so, people will ask [whether] he wants to marry her [and] that's why he is hitting her, and regarding domestic violence, he didn't make his wife cry in the night for fear of what people will say. Oh, they will say that he wants to have sex, but she doesn't want so he is hitting her (Female in-depth interview: 2019)

### **6.6.3 Power derived from public and private spaces**

In Rigo, the boundaries between the private and the public domain are indistinct or unstable. While the home is a private sphere where a woman and man share power, the boundaries become blurry when the father of the house conducts meetings in the home. Because the meetings are for men, women and children retreat from that space so that the men can talk business. There are usually two types of agendas; issues concerning the whole village are discussed in the public domain and are open to the public, while sensitive issues concerning individuals are discussed in the private domain. In both spaces, older women and married women sit in but do not talk.

Feasts of all kinds take place in the public domain, but the distribution of the food happens in the private domain, where men and women are seen to be sharing power. It is said that with great power and influence comes responsibilities.

Likewise, men and women have separate bathing places in streams, creeks and rivers. Men always bathe upstream, but if women are already bathing, men stay away until the women are done and have gone away. A woman never has her bath upstream, and she never bathes naked, because it is believed that streams and rivers have spirits. There is the belief that a woman can become the bride of the water spirits, especially, if her fathers do not own the land where the water is. If she is menstruating, she must avoid washing in the river or the stream for fear of becoming a bride of the spirits of the land. As one elderly woman explains,

The owners of the land will not possess you for nothing. If the moon is seeing you, then if you walk into the water and wash, it is there that they will marry you. (Female participant in an in-depth interview: 2019)

For Rigo societies to flourish and function, respect is a fundamental social value. The same respect people accord their cultural practices is accorded the environment around them as well.

#### **6.6.4 Bride price**

On the one hand, researchers debate whether bride price, among other issues turns a woman into a commodity, is weaponised, legitimises domestic violence, creates a debt trap for couples because women will naturally help their husbands repay the bride price, and limits her autonomy and agency (Adjei & Mpiani, 2018; Mujuzi, 2010; Sykes & Jourdan, 2020). On the other hand, in the Rigo Open electorate context, bride price is an instrument used to display the value of the partnership. A bride price payment in Rigo is usually reciprocal because there is always a '*vagha voi*' (repayment: . In this case, the bride's side repays the bride price. As a rule, the bride's family never out-gives the gift given by the groom and his people. If her family has land, she is gifted a piece of it as dowry, and she is also given yam seeds. The rationale behind this reciprocal giving is security for the daughter, ensuring she is not mistreated in her new home. Bride price also ensures that the children are secure. If her husband dies, and she remarries, her children will belong to her late husband and anything he owned will belong to them.

In the past, if a woman's husband died and was buried, the space under the house was boarded up and she stayed there covered in ash. Shells and seeds gathered from trees were strung together and hung around her neck, wrists and legs. This practice has died out, but a widow still stays in the house for a week before emerging from her mourning. Her '*rabu*' (referring to her female in-laws), bathing her and removing her mourning clothes are symbolic of her coming out of her mourning. She then washes her hands in the presence of the public, and some of the departed's belongings are burnt in the ceremony as well. With this, the mourning period is officially over. If she is a young woman, her in-laws give her permission to remarry. This ritual is also applicable to men. Again, this is an indication that there is equality between women and men in Rigo Open electorate.

Unlike societies in some other parts of PNG, women in Rigo plant and harvest their own yams. They decide when they can or cannot go into their yam gardens because, when women are menstruating, they are taboo and therefore stay out of their gardens. No bride price or feasting

in Rigo is complete without women's yams. Other examples of women's power and influence include a woman's ability to stop a conflict by stripping herself naked, her right to receive land from her father on marrying, her capacity, if she is more assertive than her brother, to receive instruction from her father in the art of black magic (although it was understood she was only a keeper of the art until a worthier man from her father's line came along). She also became the archive of family stories on lineage and land matters, because society believed men had shorter lifespans. As one male focus group participant explained,

Do you know why our villages are full of widows? It is because men are easier to kill. It is difficult to kill a woman. You women are powerful because, night and day, you are heating your hand on the fire.

These gender norms and dynamics are enablers; factors that inform the political behaviour of citizens in Rigo district towards women candidates. These practices connote social equality, while simultaneously limiting women's participation in discussion and debate with men in both public and private domains.

## **6.7 Voters' cultural preference for male leaders**

When it comes to NGEs in Rigo Open electorate, how do these cultural practices manifest in voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates? In the focus group discussions I conducted in 2019, the most commonly recurring theme in the discussions alluded to culture being the main contributing factor to women's lack of presence in the PNG national parliament.

### **6.7.1 Culture says so**

Male participants often said that culture disqualified women from holding elected public office. As two participants noted,

Our tradition and our norms, one of the laws, was if men were sitting down, women did not go there. When men [were] talking about hunting and spearing, woman did not go and sit in there. Man sat by himself and talked about hunting and spearing. Me too, I did not vote for woman because my thought was how will they go and talk? She is going to be aggressive or what, to stand for Rigo? We cannot spoil the barriers custom put in place. The platform that men [sit] on, he alone must sit there. The chief's platform is

only for the men. Woman can't go there, even baby, only men will sit there. (Male participant of a focus group discussion: 2019)

I voted for three men. I didn't vote for a woman. Highlanders and us, we are different people. We central people are like lamb, while the highlanders are rough. We got Christianised first so we know how to respect, we know how to appreciate women, and we know what women's roles are. They move under the men. Also, we maintain our culture. In our culture, woman is under the man and man is right. So, voting also go along those lines. We see it in culture and so we vote only for men...Our culture disqualifies women; men is the head, and he is the leader – man. Woman will come and campaign, but in the end she will not win. No matter how well she speaks, she will still not win because our culture disqualifies her. Our culture says man is man. (Male participant of a focus group discussion: 2019)

This view is grounded in the idea that teachings stipulate that men are the head of social, cultural and religious institutions, and that these positions informed voters' electoral choices during elections. First preferences therefore always went to men; second or third preferences could then go to women. This acknowledgement that preferences could be given to women shows, however, that male participants were inclined to give one of their votes to women, just not the first preference because that choice was reserved for a male candidate. They said that as far as leadership in Rigo was concerned, men were the priority. One male participant said,

Further mentioning that the parliament was symbolic of the platform of the chief in the village, therefore, only men sat on that rostrum and spoke with other chiefs. (Male participant of a focus group discussion: 2019)

Women in my focus group discussions often conceded to this rationale, stating that tradition did not give positions to women, therefore, this informed voter choices.

#### **6.7.2 Strength: A qualifier for both men and women**

In all the focus group discussions, participants referred to physical strength as another reason why citizens in Rigo vote for men. Gender stereotypes were strong, with participants asserting that men are strong and brave, implying that women are weak and therefore lack the ability to hold elected public office. These stereotypical distinctions between men and women are used to keep women out of politics. As one male participant said,

The reason why our assessment of women is not good is because she becomes a man when she runs, and if she can survive a village then yes, we can vote her. If she is a woman who is not like a man, then what is her reason for not wanting to be like a man? She must know how to talk. Okay yes, people say that women are also good leaders...When you go into parliament, all kinds of things happen to both men and women. If you are strong, that's good, you bring back development to the people. (Male participant of a focus group discussion: 2019)

Participants said they voted for men because it was appropriate that men speak aggressively in parliament and be persistent in going after the things their electorates needed, arguing that most male MPs were physically strong. They wondered whether women could do that. They also said that often women were afraid to speak out, and this worked against them in terms of being elected. One woman participant asked:

We see some women doing work that is thought to be men's job only, but in parliament, can they go and hit the tabletop?

Participants acknowledged that there were women leaders in the world, but they said that it was not the same in PNG. Being strong meant a man could stand the pressures of public life, while a woman could not. Men, they said, had resources such as money and vehicles, also indicators of strength, which enabled them to travel to seek voter support. Men were not afraid of throwing money away and women should do the same. They said that women members of parliament such as Josephine Abaijah, Nahau Rooney and Carol Kidu were very 'aggressive women'. This assertiveness signalled strength so that even male voters were willing to entrust them with the responsibility to represent them. As one male participant said:

When you compare Josephine and Nahau Rooney, they were very aggressive ladies. They walk out and they speak out for the people. They were not scared. When you come to look at Kidu, she won first. The second time she never campaigned, she never campaigned! Post-Courier and National went and interviewed her, and this is what she said, "I go in and work with the people, inside the settlement, outside the settlement, and I go from group to group". She never campaigned, and she won. She was [an] aggressive type of woman where she walks in, she walks out with the people. Those are the type of people! You must be very strong to stand up and fight. (Male participant of a focus group discussion: 2019)

Participants made clear that Carol Kidu's skin colour had nothing to do with the support she got from her electorate. The respondents also said that a man was a man, therefore, if he told a woman to sit down, she would listen to him because she was a woman.

### **6.7.3 Male preferences derived from customary practices and beliefs**

While participants voted for women as well as for men, their preference for male candidates was stronger than their preference for women candidates, and these choices were influenced by their customs and traditions that disqualify women from sitting on the platform of the chief. These structures were destroyed after missionaries told the village people to tear them down because they were symbols of paganism. On this platform, men stored their leaves, tree bark and stones to make them powerful. Many of them carried these things in little pouches and bags.

These artefacts fell under the category of black power and sorcery and were believed to enhance men's performance and protect them in wars and in hunting expeditions. The focus group participants explained that the '*rubu*' was where they made these possessions powerful and where they got their powers. Some male participants said that women stayed away from this space because they were 'seen by the moon' (menstruated), and so were seen as adversaries to the spells, charms and magic. When they discussed the condition of the women, they did not say; '*vavine tu ma mirona*' (woman was dirty) they said, '*mo tu tovogha*' (that is magic). They explained that women bled, and that their scent could weaken their powers; the blood from her womanhood sapped the essence of their strength. When men lost their 'strength', they became a liability to the other men on the battlefield. As such, not only did women stay away from the spaces men occupied, but there were also laws that men had to observe too to ensure safety for himself and others. As one participant explained, '*Tau e gena veyagha to ghoi, e tanu veyaghatogoi bona e ghani veyaghato ghoi*' (man slept holy, stayed holy and ate holy – fasted). (Male participants in focus group discussion: 2019). This meant that a man abstained from sexual intercourse, did not carry his child, nor did he eat certain food prior to any expedition, whether it was war, hunting or gathering. Denying themselves certain pleasures was a law to which they adhered. Heekeran (2008, p. 22) stated that,

Traditionally waka (fasting) aimed to develop a relationship with the ancestral spirits – to gain their favour, and protection against malevolent forces. The more difficult the task to be undertaken the more intense must be the waka. In the case of warfare, there

is a sense in which the battle is fought by invisible forces as well as visible ones. Certain types of hunting and fishing are approached in the same way. Battles undertaken by war chiefs required an intense waka which also included social restrictions such as periods of seclusion, and the chewing of powerful gingers. To be in breach of these requirements was to invite death.

Despite the conflicting responses received from the participants in the focus groups I conducted in Rigo Open in 2019 regarding women and elected office, the distribution of Rigo voter preferences (see Figure 35) indicates that their support for women candidates is influenced by the cultural values they place on women. In the past, hard physical work required physical strength, and so men were seen to be more qualified to do this strenuous work than women. Matters of security, hunting and fishing game required physical strength as well, and so men qualified again for the work. Intervillage conflicts regarding resources, for example, were believed to require the prowess of men. All such activities were traditionally discussed on the platform where the clan chiefs and elders sat. Peace negotiations between clans were brokered, and the fate of law breakers determined, in this space as well between men, by men. While the white coloniser's security was guaranteed by his revolver, native men kept on their person tree bark, special leaves, and pebbles covered in black art for security purposes. His life was governed by abstinence. While a Rigo man needed artefacts to keep himself safe from harm on the battlefield, during hunting and fishing and from other men, his real security was believed to be provided by his women, because her body fluid, the blood that came from her womanhood, had the power to strip him of his powers. A man's physical strength was enhanced by black power, which came from outside him, but the power of a women came from inside herself.

**Image 18: The Rubu in modern day Kwalimurubu village in Rigo Central LLG**



Source: Anthropology Museum, University of Queensland.

#### **6.7.4 Preference for men expressed as ridicule of women**

Mockery of women candidates was a factor that stopped women from voting for female candidates. In one mixed focus group, the men participants scolded the women for voting for men candidates, but the women participants told the men not to lie. One woman said

We hear our men saying to each other, ‘Oi...your “girlfriend” arrived. What is she here to talk about again?’ These men in here must not lie, that is what they were saying, so us too, we stop. So, we say... ‘*Moghoni... ghai vavine be asi gwadama!*’ (True...we are woman, so we have no strength). (Female participant in a focus group discussion: 2019)

In this quote a female participant was alluding to the jokes that their husbands made when a women candidate campaigned in their village.

Participants in one female group said that the women candidates who went to their village during the campaign period did not look like they would speak up in parliament. They also mentioned that their husbands discouraged them from voting for women candidates. One woman said:

Our husbands tell us, ‘Eh, that woman is not going to think of you. As soon as she sees men, she will forget you’. They make us afraid...but when you look at it, both men and women are the same. You see, men have many wives, then men say, if she goes in, she will have a lot of boyfriends, but the men have many girlfriends, you, see? A man wins because he has five, six wives. A woman doesn’t! Men make a lot of mistakes, but we still excuse him. (Female participant of a focus group discussion: 2019)

## **6.8 Voters’ expectations of leadership**

Question two, sub-section three of the semi-structured questions used in the focus groups (see appendix) asked participants, ‘What kind of person do you think a leader for the people should be?’ While candidates take a gamble and spend fortunes in elections with the hope of winning the most coveted Rigo Open electorate, what are their voters looking for in them? What are the factors that influence who they give their little finger to and who they ‘throw their votes away’ to? Participants gave various answers, but the underlying themes were the same: values and principles.

### **6.8.1 *The churchgoer***

Focus group participants said that a good leader feared God and was grounded in His word. They said that if leaders were Christians, then they would be afraid to commit adultery and steal. However, one participant said,

I believe that people who go to the church are liars. I don’t go to church. I study people who go to church, and I am not convinced. The things they say is powerful, fit to dig the ground, but sometimes their promise is water nothing...You see, parliament is the place for corruption, even church people go and get lost there. Parliament is the place where you go and become insane.

Similarly, a male participant said,

People are like this; two or three years before the elections, he or she can strategically become a religious person, first to gain the favour of the people because that is the taste and the attitude of the people and so, very quickly, candidates say ‘oh, let me go to the church first’.

Participants often said that a true leader had good attitudes and was respectful and hospitable. These attributes, they said, were cultural values, and they could tell if a person had them or not. They said that a leader who was grounded in cultural knowledge and traditions would know how to take care of them.

### **6.8.2 *The visible giver***

Participants also mentioned that a good leader was someone who had a name in the community; an outstanding citizen who was usually generous and empathetic. Visibility in the community came through the activities in which they participated. Involvement in all community events opened a person's road in elections, giving them access to voter preferences. One woman said,

The way to know a person and know whether he is honest or not is to find out about his contributions in the community. If he starts giving now, if he wants to stand, people will already know him, so they will say 'oh, he gave already so we know him'. You see this seating member, he made promises, but he didn't return to fulfil those promises.

There were female participants who said that putting people with wealth into office was not working because as soon as they got into office, they forgot the people. As one participant explained, voting does not necessarily lead to useful change:

Actually, we have had enough of voting because we will continue in this situation. The life our parents lived, we continue with it, so enough of voting. I have decided to not vote in the coming elections because I know that my children will still face this life.

Participants said that a good leader was someone who knew what the women, children and men all needed. Such a leader knew what the resources of each village were, and how to make those things work for voters in each of them.

### **6.8.3 *The forward planner***

In Kalo village, participants said the word 'chief' means '*tughu righo, tughu raghe*' (to send/give down, to send/give up). Some of the male participants said that a chief was a forward planner. He saw ahead and surrounded himself with people who were also visionaries. These men saw what the chief saw and they decided together. Similarly, they said that a good leader invested in young people, which also meant looking forward to the future. Parents from villages without schools said they send their children to live in Port Moresby with relatives so that they

can go to school there. They also said many parents withdrew their children when their children's lives became unbearable with their relatives. Still others said that they sent their children to other villages to live with friends or distant relatives so that they could access the village primary school there. One parent had this to say:

This is what I want to say...you came to see us, and if we voted for you and if we asked you to help us with our children's school fees, you will pay the fees? That is my question to you. We live in the village. We want to find out, are you going to pay our school fees? You came and got our names [but] what is that for? You tell me. We are tired of being told lies to. That is my answer!

When participants gave answers to the question of why voters vote for men more than they do for women, most of them were angry because many candidates who came to campaign in their villages during elections who won never returned to their villages to honour their promises. The group considered that a 'good' leader was someone who did not lie, and who was not biased. Good members of parliament according to the participants of the focus groups believed that they should always put the requests of their voters first. The participants recalled that men candidates while on the campaign trail were not afraid to spend money, saying that a male candidate's expenses included paying for food and drinks for possible voters at campaign rallies. Because most voters did not know the candidates personally, they used these events as a measure of a person's generosity. This meant that an aspiring candidate had to prepare well before the elections; that is, prepare to play host to possible voters when they were on the campaign trail.

## **6.9 Voters' role in decision-making**

Traditionally, people in a village did not choose their leaders; the hierarchical structure (presented in Figure 35) that was in place already provided the list and chose the leaders for them. However, in a newer system, such as in elections of elected leaders, political boundaries shift to include areas outside of citizens' villages. This means people must now choose leaders from a group of unknown people. As one male participant from Gomore village explained,

Random people stand for elections and then, out of them, choosing a leader from among several candidates is new. We already had chiefs in our clans; we had big man there already. He came out from within the clan. In this election, a new person comes

inside...During our grandparent's time, there was nothing like that. (Male focus group participant, 2019)

When the list of possible leaders (that is the list of candidates for elections) no longer comes from within a known group, the hierarchical power structure becomes irrelevant because those at the apex – in most cases, the chiefs and elders in villages – do not engage actively in election campaigns unless a candidate seeks their assistance. In such cases, younger men who do not hold any position of importance in the village rise up and take on roles as organisers, mediators and executors of the candidates they support during the election periods, therefore making authority both vertical and horizontal. This structure, while social, also has political connotations attached to it because the campaign manager who is not the chief of a clan or a village elder distributes the campaign finances and decides how the elections will be conducted.

By way of an anecdote, in the 2022 NGEs, the campaign committee of one male candidate, Turai Elemei was made up entirely of younger men. Such was their ability to influence voter behaviours; voters folded their ballots in a triangular shape when casting their votes so that their candidate's scrutineers could keep a tally of all the votes he was collecting. Irrespective of age and gender, voters followed this instruction.

It is also common for family members to trade preferences with other family members. As one male participant noted,

Our voting style is changing because now, even a woman can advise a man on whom to vote. For example, that happened to me. I had my candidates, but my Misis said no, vote for these people.

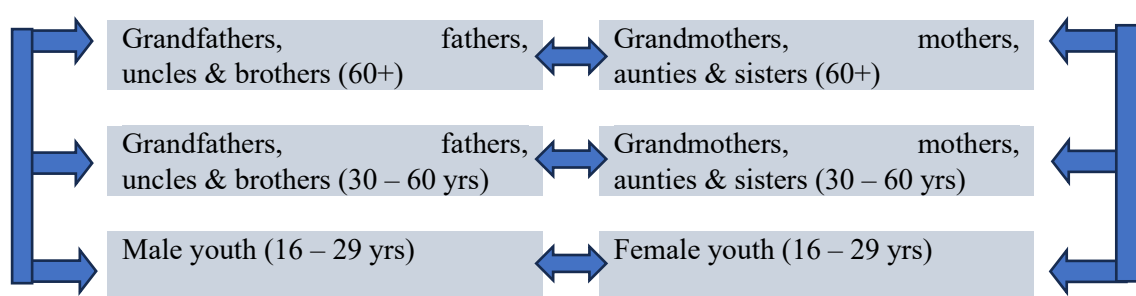
Another male participant said,

When they opened Turai Elemei's box, who was it that won? His two and three made Lekwa win! We don't force our family members. We say, 'Okay, you gave me one, I gave you two, you got three, that's how we distribute ourselves'. We do not hassle anyone to vote for our candidates. We do not hit anyone. What we do is distribute ourselves because of the different candidates that we support. That is how we operate so our children give their votes to someone else, but they give us their twos so if I give my one to someone, I give my threes to my child. (A male focus group participant: 2019)

Both men and women can exert influence over their relatives through seniority, and the titles and status familial ties give (see Figure 36). During elections, the social structure created by relationships becomes the instrument to canvass support for a candidate. Here, relationships are transactional because there is mutual reciprocity where voters trade their preferences with family members.

In Gomore village, the participants explained that the population in the village was young. As such, during the 2017 elections, this crowd actively engaged with candidates from outside the village setting. They said that these ‘young’ men did not hold leadership roles, and they were absent in community activities and the church but during elections they became the most influential people.

**Figure 36: A possible structure based on relationships where power is fluid**



Source: Author.

While a hierarchical structure provides the criterion that the winning candidate must be a man, during elections voters are required to choose candidates from a list that comes into a village from outside the domestic space. A chief who is usually an elder becomes irrelevant because he is not privy to electoral information. Those in authority now are those who are aligned to a candidate or candidates; those who are exposed to outside information. A chief does not lose his title or his authority. He retains his position in the hierarchical structure, but what becomes important now is the relational structure where power is fluid, and someone lower in the traditional hierarchy can become the source of influence because he or she has access to outside information. As such, voters within a village may end up exercising their autonomy and ‘give their little fingers’ to a candidate of their own choice while distributing their second and third preferences among male relatives, or they may give their first preference to a male relative by voting for his or her candidate and give their second and third preference votes to candidates of their own choice. Alternatively, they may choose to ‘throw away’ their votes or give their

second or third preference to a village man who is a committee member of a candidate. In this manner, they vote for the village man who is not a contestant but the supporter of one. As one female participant explained,

You see that's how we vote around here. We give our votes to our village men. If there is no connection, we will not vote for nothing.

Another female participant said,

How can you vote for someone you do not know? You cannot vote for a stranger until and unless you meet that person. I said I voted for (name of candidate), I threw away my vote to her. (Female participant in focus group discussion: 2019)

Throwing away a preference or preferences means voting for a candidate who is most likely not going to win so that a voters chosen candidate may have a chance to win.

In the traditional relational social structure, title and age become sources of a person's power and authority, such as with in-laws, grandfathers or grandmothers, aunts or uncles, fathers or mothers. This system still exists, and in this way of distributing importance and relevance, power becomes a fluid commodity flowing both horizontally and vertically among people (see Figure 37). For a woman who plans to contest an election, convincing the men in the community is half the work, but the most important half is getting the approval of the extended family because they are ones who will validate a candidate's eligibility for elected office. One male participant said,

We went to this female candidate's village because we were doing land mediation there. When we passed one house, the village magistrate said, "There, that's (name of female candidate) parents' house, she is contesting but look at the size of her parent's house, she does not come to the village". I looked at the house, and it was a match box house. (Male participant, in-depth interview: 2019)

The exchange in the quote was one of irony. The female candidate is financially well off and resides in Port Moresby.

A woman's brother is an important person to his nieces and nephews because he is believed to be able to bring about their sickness if he is unhappy with them or their parents. In the same manner, a father's sister is highly regarded by her brother's children. The in-laws are also important people because they take care of their daughter-in-law and grandchildren. All these

roles render status in the family. Attached to these familial ties is the power to have a say in matters of importance, meaning those ties have the powers to make you or break. Relatives can become judge, jury and prosecutor to a candidate. During the 2022 election campaign period, some of the stories told about candidates came from family members of those candidates. Voters were not reading their campaign posters; they were listening to the stories told by family members and their village people, thereby influencing voters' choices on polling days.

## 6.10 Discussion

As noted above, many participants in the focus groups stated that they did not vote for women candidates because they were following the teachings of their customs in which leadership roles are exclusively men's department and not women's. This explained why women could not sit on the platform of the chief. However, what the participants said in the focus groups contradicted their voting behaviours. Figure 34 shows that participants from Rigo electorate voted for women candidates as well, in spite of cultural beliefs and practices that discourage women from running for elections and voters from voting for women. Participants from Rigo Open electorate commonly assigned one of their preferences to women candidates. These voting outcomes are the manifestation of the notion that Rigo Open electorate has a big-woman concept.

On September 16, 2025, Papua New Guinea, a catchment of more than 800 different cultures, will celebrate 50 years of independence. On the eve of its half-century of adherence to western democracy, only three women sit in the legislature, bringing the total number of women MPs to 10 since 1972 (Josephine Abaijah, Nahau Rooney, Waliyato Clowes, Carol Kidu, Delilah Gore, Julie Soso, Loujaya Toni, Rufina Peter, Kessy Sawang and Francisca Semoso). Five of these women MPs are from the Southern Region and, as noted previously, women from the Southern Region generally poll relatively well. Returning to Rigo Open electorate as a case study to illuminate this phenomenon, I am compelled to ask the question, why do certain women in Rigo Open electorate and Central regional perform well at polls in national elections?

According to participants in my focus groups, the gifting of land to a daughter or niece, teaching the art of magic to a daughter, or bestowing the title '*roghea*' (lady) as a means of recognising and honouring a 'good, strong' woman may explain why certain women candidates in Rigo Open and the Central regional electorate poll well at the national elections. Again, this offers affirmation of my argument that Rigo Open electorate does have a big-woman concept.

Bighori Raga, the son of a chief from Rigo Clan in Kwalimurubu village, said that the men in his village knew which women could approach the chief's platform, that is, only a *roghea foro*. In Sinaghor language, *foro* is the longest feather on the tail of the rooster. On the headdress of a man, the *foro* is usually the centrepiece. A *roghea foro* was an exceptional, hardworking woman. She had the biggest yam gardens, which produced the biggest yams, and she was generous and virtuous.

### **6.10.1 Cultural influence**

In some parts of PNG, men plant and harvest the yams. However, in Rigo Open electorate, women do this. In areas where men plant the yams, they have powers to prohibit women from entering the yam garden if they are menstruating, but in Rigo, women decide themselves when to stay away from the yam gardens if they are menstruating. Because women own the yam gardens, they have agency. In 1912, Murray wrote,

A leading feature among the Sinaugolo [Sinaugoro] is the festival known as Tabu. I saw one of these feasts in 1908 at the village of Gomorodobu [modern day Gomore] ...on the first day of the festival a distribution of food is made to all strangers who are present. The strangers put their baskets in a row in the middle of the village, and the givers of the feast run up in a body with wooden bowls containing yams and other vegetables with which they fill the baskets...The Tabu itself is a huge structure, about 30 feet high, hung round with coconuts, yams, and taro...Next came what appeared to be a comic interlude, a distribution of a nauseous looking but pleasant tasting mess of bananas and coconuts, boys and girls running around with wooden platters of this preparation and often thrusting it into the not unwilling mouths of their native guests. (Murray, 1912, p. 499)

In the account above, Murray does not talk about the banana, a food crop that is planted and harvested by men and gives him status; instead, he mentions yams and taro. Being an outsider, he lacks knowledge of the importance these food crops give to women in Rigo. He says that the givers of the feast ran up in a body with wooden bowls containing yams and other vegetables to fill the baskets in front of the '*tabu*'. He describes the *tabu* as a huge structure, about 30 feet high and says that from it hung coconuts, yams and taro. Again, he fails to mention the banana. The only time Murray mentions it is when he discusses the feeding frenzy. He describes it as a comical interlude and describes the *bariva* as a 'nauseous looking but pleasant tasting mess of

banana and coconuts'. The production of this 'nauseous looking...mess' is laborious; involving mashing the ripe banana with the banana bunch stalk and then mixing it with sago, scraping coconuts and extracting the milk from the flesh by hand, then boiling the coconut milk to make oil, collecting banana leaves and drying them over the fire and wrapping the banana and sago mixture in the dried banana leaves and dropping the packages into big pots of hot boiling water sitting over a raging fire.

This delicacy may seem insignificant, but it is important because it is an accompaniment to a bride price ceremony. This ritual, where the groom's family hand-feeds the bride's family, indicates alliances and nuanced declarations that any child coming from this union belongs to them. Most importantly, however, it is a public display of the groom's manhood, signalling that he qualifies to sit amongst elders and have a say in the affairs of the clan and village. A bride price in Rigo is incomplete without yams, which is the currency through which recognition and status for a woman is earned in the community. As a male participant from Sivatana village explained,

In the past, a woman used to say to her husband, 'I want to pay my brother's bride price, are you all right?' She used to look at her yams, and she knew she was ready. So, when she told her husband, 'Are you okay', she was really saying, do you have enough bananas to accompany my yams? (A male focus group participant: 2019)

One male participant from Kwalmurubu village said that women were powerful because they were always heating their hands in the fire every time they cooked. This statement, and the quote above, are significant because they point to other possible reasons why certain women candidates perform well at the polls in Rigo electorate. In Londairi village, participants told a story of how a female family member had sat on some logs stark naked because a fight was about to break out between the men of her family and the men of another Rigo village. A question had been raised in the 1980s as to who the rightful owners of the harvested logs were. These men said that women were important because '*maino ghiana maki ghe gigiato ghoi*' (they brokered peace). Heekeren (2008) offers another example of women's power to intervene in conflict and broker peace:

Again, Wari Lui adds to the description of Kila Wari's death. He explains that after he was speared and "as spears landed on him like rain" he instructed his brother to run for his life. His body was then taken to the village for public display and for Babaka warriors to use for target practice. As we know, Kila Wari's sister, La'a was at that time

living at Makerupu. Hearing of the incident, La'a ran to her dead brother and took off her grass skirt and placed it over his body. The violence to her brother's body ceased immediately. The reasons for this remain unclear, although I am confident, they will be found in further investigation of the cosmological system. (Heekeren, 2008, p. 25)

Likewise, a male participant from Kwalimurubu village pointed to power held by certain women, saying that, in the olden days, a woman decided the fate of her son's wife:

If she was *ghosava* (lazy), they made a food basket for her back and they went and left her with her parents, and no one said anything because the parents accepted that their daughter had been rejected. (Male participant in an interview: 2019)

For a man, traditional leadership was hereditary and so a woman did not need to nominate or elect him. If she became a woman of standing in the community, it was because she earned that status, and society acknowledged it and accorded her the title *roghea foro* – the bastardisation of that term would be 'big-woman'. However, in its truest form, the Sinaughoro term comprises 'roghea' – lady, and 'foro' – the longest feather on the rooster's tail. Women in Rigo electorate have a place beside their men, but certain women transcend this place because they earn special recognition.

### **6.10.2 The influence of property**

In the focus group discussions, the subject of '*vevagha ghauna*' (gifting) kept recurring. In Girabu village, an elderly male participant said,

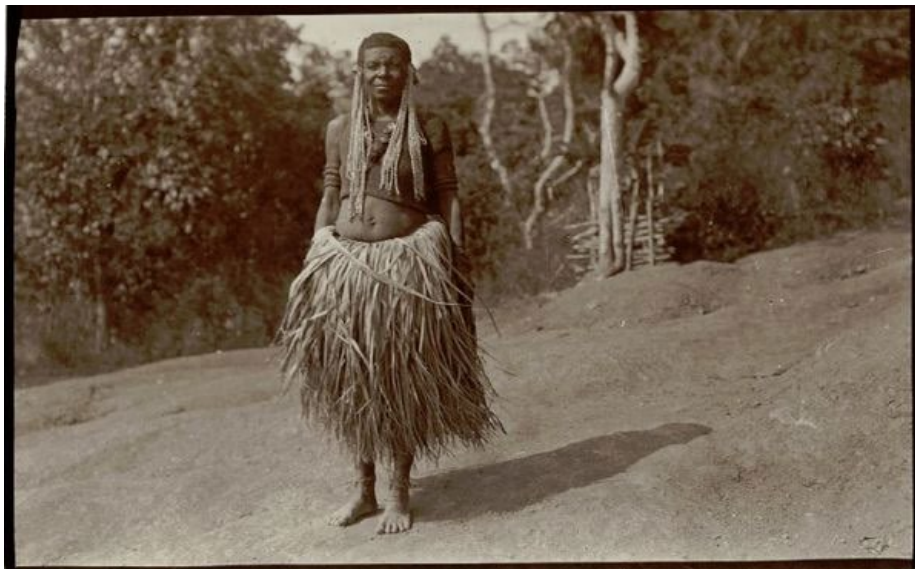
Oh, we could give away things like land to a woman, but a woman never led... That did not change! (Male participant in a focus group discussion: 2019)

Male respondents said that if a woman's maternal uncle had land, he sometimes gifted a piece of it to his niece as a marriage gift. If a woman came from a chiefly family that had land, her father also did the same thing (see image 19). According to the Cooke Daniels Expedition 1903–1904, (an old photo that was taken from a social media page) the caption of the photo is '1903 Kwalimurubu woman in mourning'. The information absent from this photograph is that the woman's name was Ghareni Kamali. Her father was a chief of one of the clans in Kwalimurubu village. Because he had no sons, she represented him in co-signing a piece of land over to the British Crown so that the London Missionary Society could use it for Christian activities. Her father's land bordered Kauri Iovi's land. Her father also gave her his land in

Barume to take with her to her husband's clan, and she parcelled this piece of land and distributed it among her husband's clansmen. A good daughter, or an only daughter or an eldest daughter, was usually appreciated by the men in her family in this way.

Certain women candidates do well at the polls during elections. This may be the manifestation of the practices of the people of Rigo electorate regarding the status of women. Below are anecdotes from male participants indicating dichotomies in the valuing of women in patrilineal descent systems. As Befu (1963, p. 1329) explains in describing Japan, 'under this rule, the oldest son inherits the family property, takes over the family occupation, succeeds to the family headship, and worships the family ancestor so that the perpetuity of the family as a corporate unit is insured by the oldest son'.

**Image 19: Ghareni Kamari, daughter of the chief of Bau Maoro clan**



Source: Social media group post from Eda Gabu, accessed 2019.

In Sabuia village, one male participant said:

Sorry, let me say like this. The people we vote are...let me use my grandmother as an example...when she spoke, there was power in it. She was a woman, but she spoke with a lot of authority. However, she was generous too. She had a soft heart...She talked like a man, but she had empathy. You know...to get up to that place you must be very aggressive but deep within, you must be able to connect with the people. That's the whole thing. You can't go in there and be quiet. We want people who can talk and fight and bring services to the people.

This male participant said that his grandmother stepped into her father's position when he died. His great-grandfather was the chief of the village, and his grandmother was unmarried. He explained that because she did not have any brothers, she took her father's place. In some parts of Rigo Central, especially in Rigo Koiari, the men said that women had also gone into battle with their husbands; these were usually women who had no children. An unmarried daughter could take on her father's role and women without children could go to inter-village wars with their husbands. This is an indication that certain women are given access to places of importance in Rigo Open electorate.

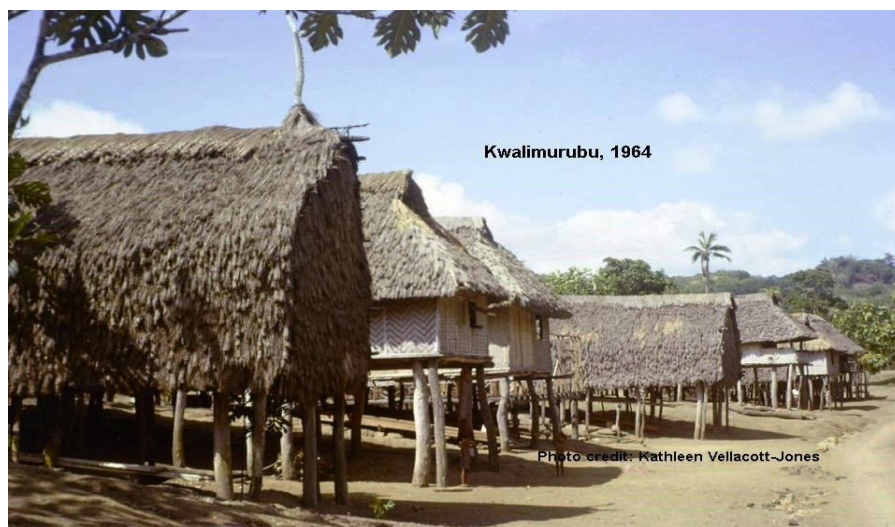
Male participants also said that such things like magic and sorcery were also possessions that fathers passed on to their daughters. If a daughter was more assertive than a son, a father bequeathed the daughter the art. The daughter became the custodian of the '*farefare*' (possession) until her brother's son was old enough to learn, and then she returned the possession back to her father's line. In the mid-1980s, when the men of Rigo stampeded Port Moresby city in a protest march because a woman from Magautou in Abau District had been murdered by a Highlander, one such woman led the fray. She walked in front, and the men followed her. This event was mentioned by the men in the Rigo Central LLG. In an individual interview with the son of a sorceress, Naoka (April 2019), he said; 'we let her lead because she could blind the policemen and stop their bullets'. He said the men did not resent her because she was going to be their shield of protection. She was from the category of strong women Rigo men recognise and acknowledge and give access to the platform on which they sit.

Men also entrusted women with their family histories. When I asked why women were accorded this responsibility, the elderly men explained to me that a men's life was short; he lived precariously. He went to war, went hunting and fishing, and took on the most difficult jobs, and so a long life was not guaranteed. Women lived longer because they stayed in the village, and so the stories were safer with women than they were with men, and so the women had to commit the knowledge of the family history to memory. In Londairi village, participants mentioned that a distant cousin went to their village seeking information about a family tree and had gone to retrieve that information from an elderly woman in the village.

In Kemaea, Gomore and Londairi villages, again, the men mentioned that women did not participate in public life, but their husbands depended on 'intelligence' the women passed on in the private domain to be able to participate in the public domain. They said that a man was away from the village most of the time, but his wife stayed in the village and saw and knew

what happened. A male participant in an in-depth interview from Kwalimurubu said that a battle had broken out between the people of Iruagharo village (today Kwalimurubu village) and Manugoro village in the 1950s because an old woman from Manugoro had let on in the afternoon that a '*minama*' (eel) was in their village (the women referred to the intruder as an eel). The man who had gone into their village was from Iruagharo. As a rule, any man found in the vicinity of another village was regarded as an enemy or a sorcerer, and the penalty was instant execution. After his murder, the men of Iruagharo invaded Manugoro. Iruagharo won, and the village became known as Kwalimurubu (or Strong Church, see image 20). This is not to say that women are powerful but is an indication that women do participate in the affairs of the village. Although they do not speak up in public gatherings, they have the ears of their husbands. Likewise, the male participants in Kemaea village stated that women also talk, but they talk with their husbands at home and in the clan setting, and their concerns are brought out in the public domain by their husbands if the issues are of grave concern.

**Image 20: Kwalimurubu village, 1964**



## 6.11 Conclusion

Elections are public affairs; a measure of democracy for all, whether they are contesting a seat or casting their votes on a ballot paper on a polling day. Via this process, voters exercise their right to participate in the political life of their country in deciding who represents them at the highest level of decision-making. Voter behaviours and attitudes towards candidates in Rigo Open electorate were influenced by the values they observed; the candidate's ability to play host at gatherings their committees initiated in the villages of the citizens, and the quality and

the quantity of the food they provided to feed people was the litmus test. Where voters lacked knowledge of a contender, they typically gave one of their three preferences to a candidate a family member was supporting. For most of the village people, policy matters were not deciders, but reciprocity and connections were of great importance. Voters also indicated that representatives must be effective service deliverers.

Rigo district is very diverse, like the rest of Papua New Guinea. The fact that it lacks communication networks hinders its ability to access and use news regarding candidates and the elections. Most of what got around to the voters was passed on by word of mouth because during the elections, many candidates never attended the villages and, according to participants, only their flyers reached them. In such cases it is worth asking if possible, voters had read the posters of aspiring candidates.

Importantly, this discussion of the status of women in Rigo is not intended to romanticise Rigo culture; rather, the motivation behind this project is to provide possible explanations to why the Southern Region has produced the highest number of women MPs. And it emerges that strength was the key criterion participants in Rigo used to choose who to vote for. When ‘strength’ is a criterion, male candidates tend to qualify more than their female counterparts do. In a patrilineal society, this behaviour is consistent with its culture, values, and norms. However, this principle appears to contradict voting behaviours when voters reported that they had given some of their preferences to women candidates in the 2017 general election. It is also clear that certain women in Rigo communities are accorded recognition. The value of strong women is recognised as much by men as by women; in terms of Rigo culture she is permitted to approach the platform of the chiefs, supporting the notion that there is a big-woman concept in Rigo Open electorate, therefore indicating that strength comes from an electorate as well.

When citizens from the Southern Region continue to give one or more preferences to a woman candidate to the point that she is mandated by the citizens in her electorate to enter parliament, then what matters most seems to be strength in matters that concern status and position in society. A woman is not recognised because she is a mother, she is recognised because she earns her place in the public space through hard work, wisdom and strength.

The key finding in this case study is that there exist dichotomies in voter attitudes towards women candidates. While participants stated that culture posed the biggest barrier to women being elected, more than 50 per cent of the participants said they had voted for both men and women candidates. This suggests there is a feminist element in the electorate, and even that

men can be feminists too in that they can recognise and respect women's capacity to lead. It also indicates that the electorate is somewhat more egalitarian than other parts of PNG, that power is contextual and therefore fluid, and finally that strength and visibility are important values in Rigo.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

For PNG, the basic principles upon which its society is grounded are enshrined in the preamble of its national constitution. Every citizen is to:

be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others.

...

have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the development of [their] country, through political, economic, social, religious and cultural [engagements].  
(Independent State of Papua New Guinea, 1975, pp. 2–5)

These principles demonstrate an allegiance in PNG to democratic values and practices. NGEs conducted every five years are a manifestation of the state's commitment to ensuring that every citizen exercises his or her civic and political rights in adult suffrage and as candidates as a way of demonstrating those values.

### 7.1 Research scope and approach

Given these enshrined rights, this thesis initially set out to look at how voters take advantage of their constitutional rights and responsibilities at election time. I was originally interested in voter behaviours and attitudes towards women candidates in Rigo Open electorate. The project was motivated by the fact that past studies have tended to concentrate on the factors that impede women's political representation at the national level, with little focus on those who did vote for women. The fact that eight women contested the 2017 elections for Rigo Open electorate offered an excellent research opportunity. However, along the way, the thesis evolved from just looking at these women to examining more broadly the strength of women candidates who have contested since 1972, ten of whom have been elected as members of parliament.

#### 7.1.1 Research questions

While women do not contest elections in the same numbers as men in PNG, almost 750 women have done so since 1972. In addition to the ten who have been elected, some of these women candidates ran strong campaigns. I was interested in understanding how we might more

accurately measure the strength of those contests in PNG, and to this end asked the following questions:

- Given norms of masculine political leadership and ‘big men’ politics in Papua New Guinea, can the concept of ‘strength’ explain the support of voters for successful women candidates?
- How can strength be measured in the cultural and political context of PNG elections?
- In which parts of PNG is it more evident that strong women matter?

### **7.1.2 Research methods**

I used a mixed methods approach to answer these questions. Quantitatively, I analysed election data. I first established which women candidates had made it into the top 10 between 1972 to 2022 and then tracked their electoral performances using a combination of data from the ANU’s Development Policy Centre and the PNG Electoral Commission 66B forms for the 2017 and 2022 NGEs. I provided a historical profile of each woman at the polls, looking at the elections they won and comparing them against the other candidates that contested the same electorate using averages as the measure to state that they were indeed strong candidates. Second, I categorised those same women candidates according to PNG’s four regions to demonstrate that women in the Southern Region poll better in national elections.

I then took a qualitative approach to understand the attitudes of voters towards these candidates. Because of the fragmented nature of the country, it was not possible for my project to examine the factors in every part of the Southern Region. Instead, I limited my focus to Rigo District to consider possible explanations for why women in this region have performed better at the polls than women candidates in other regions. I collected data in Rigo Open electorate, through focus groups and interviews, to seek explanations for why women from this region perform relatively well electorally.

### **7.1.3 Thesis argument**

Although females make up half of the total population of PNG, women’s political representation at the national level in PNG continues to be less than three per cent. While the number of women contesting elections is increasing, their numbers remain far lower than the number of men who contest. For example, in 2022, 159 out of 3619 candidates who contested

the national elections were women. Furthermore, the number of women legislators at the national level is low, for example, only two women out of 118 members were elected to eleventh parliament (in 2022), with a late 2023 by-election raising the number of women to three. This is the same number as in the 2012 to 2017 parliament. Hence, in 2024 PNG has been ranked 182 out of 185 countries in the participation of women in parliament (IPU, 2024).

Studies attribute the limited numbers of women candidates to a 'patron-client relationship between voters and candidates, traditions of big-man political organisational systems, illegal activities, including widespread voter fraud and a proliferation of money politics' (see for example, Meki, 2021, pp. 2–3). Although women's participation as candidates is low and their entry into national parliament significantly lower again, they continue to make inroads into a domain that is generally accepted as the *hausman* (the house of man). Beyond immediate questions about gender equity, other pressing questions should be asked of this house of men: how well is it run when those men continue to end up in camps with impending motions of no confidence? Is the retreat to hotels and back door rooms for political negotiations, an indication that these spaces constitute the modern *hausman*? Does that imply that the national parliament is not the *hausman* but just another village square? Furthermore, if it has a public gallery where people can sit and listen to parliamentary proceedings, can we consider parliament an exclusive space?

If parliament is to change in PNG, more women need to be elected by the voters. This thesis has found that both men and women can and do support women as candidates, framed by cultural interpretations of women's power in society as relational. While the 33 strong women candidates were visible women in their own right, all were connected to significant male figures who played a role in the electoral standing of these women. Two Australian men advised Abaijah, and Rooney and Clowes were married to white men, however, Rooney was also connected to the late Paliau Maloat, the founder of the Paliau Movement, and to the late Michael Somare as she had worked in his administration. Kidu, on the other hand, is a white woman married to the late Buri Kidu, a prominent judge and PNG's first national judge. All were educators and engaged in civic work that enabled them to have many personal encounters with voters. Somare, Hau'ofa, Baing, Parkop, Toni and Unagi were connected to prominent men but they also all had extensive personal voter connections through the work they did in public service and community work. Soso and Gore contested multiple times and were affiliated to political parties such as the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Party and People's National

Congress Party under the leadership of Don Polye, member for Kandep Open electorate and Peter O'Neill member for Ialibu-Pangia Open electorate.

This study also sheds light on the distribution of electorates throughout the country and the number of political parties contesting elections. This is significant because it is an indicator that power is concentrated in regions, and this in turn has implications for women's political participation at the national level. When it is clear that the parliament is going to be filled with men from other parts of the country, the effect is apparently that voters will give more of their polling preferences to men candidates than women because, traditionally, indigenous knowledge was always held in conversations within the same sex; men talked to men and women talked to women. If a woman spoke to a man or vice versa, by law, this had to be a blood relative. Traditionally, women may talk in the private domain, be it the family circle or the clan, but when the discussion occurs in the public domain, women listen while men talk. This ensures that if there is any heated arguments or confrontations, they occur between men, not between a man and a woman.

These cultural protocols are challenged in the discussion of women in politics in PNG. Women candidates are perceived through the lens of culture, as is evident in the comments from my focus group participants. In some of these responses, the woman candidate was seen to dishonour three elements of etiquette regarding social behaviour: dressing appropriately, distributing betel nut and displaying physical affection to a man who was not her relative.

Participants were also concerned about women candidates' social responsibilities towards the family when they entered politics. For voters, the family as an institution is important, therefore making it a security concern. The argument that a woman 'might go and get married and that she will not have time for her husband and children' can be made of a man as well, but men are excluded from this discussion, implying that women are vital to the survival of the family unit and its operations and functions, and are also the channel through which a name and stories are passed on. Women are the transmitter of values, norms and legacies. Furthermore, modesty in a woman is a security measure as well, because when a woman is mindful of her dress and her actions, she is viewed with respect, and this confers protection on her and the men around her. To protect men, a woman must adhere to the laws of society, honouring the practice of defined spaces – one for man and one for women – because there is a saying that goes '*veribaghani tu ghoi kwakumu fanananai ai mogho*' (temptation is never far away, it is just at your feet).

When women's low political representation at the national level in PNG is discussed, it is mostly subsumed into gender discourses rather than as a survivalist agenda (see Beier & Brigg, 2024, p. 244). Yet when participants in my focus groups discussed leadership in the Rigo context, one theme kept recurring: the notion of security and survival. Relational ties are also important because it is within this system that exists the support base, a social safety net.

Participant responses alluded to the notion that leadership entails war and conflict. Although strength is mentioned, 'masculinities' is not because there is no word in Rigo languages and dialects that are synonymous with it; the closest would be 'gwada' meaning 'strength'. Parts of the Southern Region have seen strong women candidates elected, suggesting that voters attribute strength to those women. In Rigo, these 'big women' are referred to as 'roghea' or 'logea kou'.

The words that reflect concepts such as patriliney, matriliney, patriarchy and matriarchy in Rigo languages are '*tauna rekena*' meaning man's side, and '*vavinena rekena*' meaning woman's side, or '*sinana rekena*', mother's side and '*tamana rekena*'. father's side. These are compound words; when taken apart 'tauna', comes from the root word 'tau' (man) 'na' is a suffix meaning belonging to, while 'vavine' means woman, 'tama' means father, and 'sina' means mother. These relational terms define relationship ties tracing kinship, lineage and membership back to a mother or father, or a woman or man, with a father's (man's) sister and a mother's (woman's) brother two very important people in familial relationships, showing no disparity between genders. This is where the strength of women is defined in Rigo.

## **7.2 Research contributions**

### **7.2.1 Methodological contribution**

This thesis has shown that, through a mixed-methods approach, we can track both the votes cast and the attitudes of voters towards women candidates in PNG. This is important in proving that votes are cast for women candidates across all regions of PNG, but also in proving that there are significant differences across provinces and electorates. Taking both a big picture and small picture approach allows us to understand where women's candidacies are legitimised by their voting populations, and why.

However, there are challenges in collecting data from across the Southern Region. I suggested that focusing on the electorate of Rigo provided the means to investigate the enablers that makes

it possible for women in the Southern Region to do well at the polls during NGEs. Five districts vote for the regional member and Rigo is one of them. This is where the combination of quantitative and qualitative data was useful: electoral data were useful in demonstrating the electoral candidacies of two women – Josephine Abaijah and Rufina Peter – as well as the three others who contested the Rigo Open seat who performed very well at the polls in 2017 and 2022.

This thesis also confirms that there are specific protocols to be observed when undertaking research in PNG. I found that, in Rigo, conduct and the observance of societal norms are signs of respect and humility, providing validation and acceptance into the community. Thus, I was advised by one person in the village to first visit my sister-in-law before approaching participants. For this village, I followed the instructions of my father, by going to this village with my sister in-law because it was her village but when I got there, one male focus group participant angrily told me that had I done this during colonial times, I would have returned to my village in a coffin.

### **7.2.2 Epistemological contribution**

The second contribution of the thesis is epistemological. When we use culture as a conceptual framework, we can privilege cultural knowledge as it informs voter attitudes and behaviours in PNG. Of the 33 strong women contenders, ten of them became members of parliament. Of ten women members of parliament, five were elected in the Southern Region, suggesting that women candidates in the Southern Region continue to perform better in PNG elections than women in other regions. This thesis in essence unmasks the feminist element in patrilineal Papua, that being those men who accord recognition to women who meet the criteria for ‘strength’.

Understanding strength in the Southern Region (and PNG more broadly) is also about privileging indigenous knowledge. On this, I am comforted by the words of Beier (2023, pp. 671–672):

The kind of social power I am most concerned with is that which [resides] in the making and remaking of social facts and ‘common sense’ about the world...Not knowing is always inseparable from the production of knowns. If we do not know that structures and practices of political community other than those that turn on the dominant European form of sovereign power also furnish viable arrangements for the provision

of social order... how...are we to account for that which may in fact be perceived but is nevertheless ignored, rejected, or judged implausible?...Power explains why hegemonic knowns – as social facts and common senses – can work erasures of other ways of being and knowing but not why they...[erase] lifeways, organisational structures, and philosophical traditions of Indigenous peoples. Among other things, this involves the rejection of Indigenous knowledge as knowledge (often by reducing it to myth or superstition) and of Indigenous ways of knowing (dismissing bases of authority over knowledge and practices of knowledge production by way of appeals to culturally specific, Euro-derived epistemological standards).

Rigo electorate voters have produced women MPs because of their culture. If ideologies like realism and liberalism, just to name two, are lenses through which one looks at world events to make sense of what is happening in the international arena, then using culture as a lens to make sense of the electoral behaviours of the people of Rigo electorate is reasonable. As Tickner (2011, p. 260) explains,

When [feminists] think of characteristics such as power, autonomy, rationality, and public, [they] associate them with masculinity or what it means to be a “real man”. Opposite characteristics, such as weakness, dependence/ connection, emotionality, and private are associated with femininity.

Feminists have demonstrated the ways in which

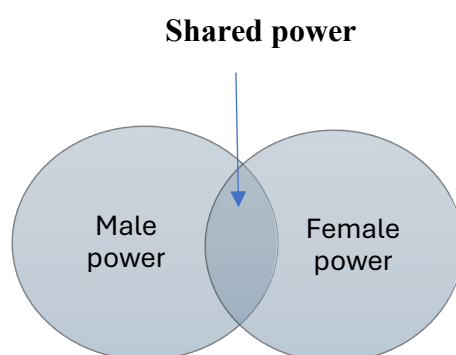
gender is a system of social hierarchy in which masculine characteristics are more valued than feminine ones [and that] it is a structure that signifies unequal power relationships between women and men.

Studies on very low women’s representation in national politics in PNG attribute these outcomes to culture and patriarchy. However, the Southern Region has produced ‘strong’ (strong being the antonym of weak, and weak being associated with femininity) women candidates, indicating that there is a feminist element.

That voters, both men and women, are giving some preferences to women candidates suggests that their electoral behaviours are informed by their cultures and traditions, in which certain women are accorded status and are given access to the public domain, thus creating a third social structure. Beside the hierarchical structure, where the apex of power is occupied by elders and chiefs, and the familial structure, where age and expertise are the currency, power becomes

fluid and can be used during elections (see Figures 36 and 37). This is built on a shared understanding of power, composed of an overlap between men's power and women's power (see Figure 38). Here, the sharing of power is not created for the purpose for suppression and inequality, but to preserve the longevity of the family institution, making it a security and survival mechanism. It allows divisions of labour where men and women's differing roles complete and complement each other to avoid a break down in social cohesion. It provides a blueprint for indigenous knowledge, where men talk with men and women talk with women, and a middle ground where both men and certain women engage. The sustainability and overall well-being of society is upheld through the complementary roles fulfilled by men and women, each contributing distinct yet interdependent functions within the social structure. These social constructions are for storing and transmitting knowledge, negotiating and resolving conflicts, and planning and executing decisions collectively.

**Figure 37: A new understanding of power in PNG**



Source: Author

### **7.2.3 Empirical contribution**

A third contribution of the thesis is empirical. I have shown the importance of investigating voters by region, given that PNG societies are predominantly patrilineal with only a few pockets of matrilineal societies. While the status of women may be higher in matrilineal societies, this has not resulted in electoral success for women in such societies. The system of belonging and owning land through the mother's line has not manifested itself in the outcomes of elections in those parts of the country.

Out of the 33 strong women candidates who contested seats in NGEs in PNG since 1972, five were elected in the Southern Region, two from Momase, two from the New Guinea Islands,

one from the Highlands. While Moresby Northeast is in Port Moresby and so it is supposed to be in the Southern Region, I place it outside the NCD municipality because the majority of those candidates who contest this seat every election are mostly citizens from the Highlands region, and as this electorate is mostly made up of compounds and settlements that are predominantly occupied by others, I place it outside this region. Similarly, I place Moresby South in the Southern Region because most of its voters, who reside in urban villages and the settlements, are of Papuan origins. This claim is supported by a long-time resident of Nine Mile in Moresby Northeast Open electorate, Doctor Philip Mitna, Deputy Commissioner of Police Operations.

This thesis also contributes to the literature on women's political participation and representation in PNG. Previous literature point to obvious enablers such as persistent contesting and visibility through 'hanmak'. As Fairio (2019, p. 3) explains, 'Hanmak refers to a candidate having tangible impact in the community, such as contributing to provision of basic services, for example schools and roads' or, in an example given by Meki (2021, pp. 96–97), 'donating a dinghy to a coastal community...it is about addressing communal needs rather than simply responding to the demands of relatives and friends, as is common in PNG' Disablers of the election of women have been documented as incumbency, money politics, election violence and electoral fraud, culture and Christian teachings. This thesis, however, points out the systematic way in which enablers and disablers operate where candidates are played off against each other in electoral politics, also influencing election outcomes. These factors not only work for and against women candidates, but they also affect men candidates too. When defining corruption, Sir Mekere Morauta said,

I think it would be fair for me to describe corruption as both systemic and systematic. Systemic because it has invaded the whole processes of policy making and decision making. It has drowned the whole system so it's systemic. It's systematic because it is organised. (Morauta, 2020)

While Morauta was describing corruption in the fabric of government institutions, this is true for electoral processes as well. Enablers include the capacity for ordinary village men to run fully-fledged campaigns with financial backing from unknown sources because they contest as independents, or as party candidates with the aim of splitting votes for a candidate who may be a threat to another candidate. These are also disablers because the proxies are there to split a strong opponent's votes. Beyond these issues, the whole election process is compromised, from

the updating of electoral rolls to excessive or insufficient ballot papers, to some returning and assistant returning officers turning a blind eye to questionable actions in polling booths, such as where people are seen to be escorting voters in and out of booths and underage voting. As politician Jean Eparo Parkop said of the 2017 election outcomes,

In the case of Oro, the problem is not that men and women are not voting for women. They are. The problem is with the people put in there in the counting room and in the polling teams. We saw they managed the counting to ensure Delilah (Gore) didn't pick up the 2s and the 3s she was expecting...And in the oil palm area my supports were denied their right to vote. Many were oil palm workers. My scrutineers reported that they were given time to vote at around 3pm, although when they arrived the polling team simply began packing up, even though there was still some hours left to vote (quoted in Haley & Zubrinich, 2018, p. 100).

### **7.3 Future directions: Increasing the number of women in parliament**

The fact that voters from across PNG cast votes in favour of women candidates suggests that cultural practices do give certain women access to the *hausman* or the *hausboi*. Just as in Rigo electorate, in those parts of PNG where societies are matrilineal, women speak through their male relatives in decision-making processes in public gatherings. Acknowledging and valuing women's voice in patrilineal societies like Rigo, however, has not resulted in high numbers of women in the PNG national parliament, and certainly not in the numbers required to change the institution.

In part, this is because of numerous undemocratic practices in PNG elections. Challenges to these practices have been underway for many years. For example, advocates for women's greater representation came together following the 2007 election, in which 102 women candidates ran but only one, Carol Kidu, won. These advocates suggested a 'three-pronged approach' which involved both capacity-building among future candidates and advocating nominated seats for women in parliament. While this was ongoing, a proposal for reserved seats for women was also developed based on the provision in section 102 of the constitution, which permits the appointment of up to three nominated members to parliament through a two-thirds absolute majority vote (Baker, 2019, p. 66).

Two attempts were made to increase women's representation in parliament. The first attempt was in 2009:

The Minister for Community Development, Dame Carol Kidu, put forward to Cabinet a submission to nominate three women in accordance with the PNG Constitution. As a result, Cabinet gave its blessings to utilize the National Constitution provisions of Sections 101 and 102 to invite women citizens to submit their Expressions of Interest on 26 October 2008. However, Parliament voted for three nominated women on March 10 but defeated by 60 to 16, 13 votes short of the number required. (UNDP, 2009, p. 2).

The second attempt was made in 2012 through a proposal to establish 22 reserved seats. According to Kabuni & Agon (2021), these seats would have seen,

women MPs elected by voters, not appointed by political leaders. Reserved seats required an amendment to section 101 of the Constitution, with the addition of section 101(d) creating the seats. This amendment just needed a simple majority in parliament. Yet, the enabling legislation involved an Organic Law, which required a two-thirds majority. When the vote for the enabling legislation, the Organic Law on National and Local Level Government Elections, was taken in early 2012, it failed to reach the two-thirds majority. By then, Somare – who had been supportive of the reserved seats – had been removed as prime minister in 2011, and Dame Carol Kidu had moved to the opposition. The new O'Neill government failed to pass the enabling legislation.

As noted by Sepoe (2019, p. 2), the fact that both of these attempts failed demonstrates the 'practical difficulty' of securing sufficient political support. However, if cultural tradition allowed certain women access to the chief's platforms, the *hausman* and the *hausboi* throughout PNG, what has stopped contemporary PNG from allowing these practices to continue? The Temporary Special Measures (TSM) system is just that, a manifestation of those enabling laws of societies in PNG. TSM are, as Sepoe (2021) points out, 'measures designed to increase women's participation in politics [and] only a handful of Pacific Island countries have embraced it, [they] include Samoa and New Caledonia. In Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Autonomous Region of Bougainville parliament has three reserved seats for women. On 27 May 2011, the then Prime Minister Peter O'Neill made the following statement while presenting the Bill on Equality and Participation for debate':

Mr Speaker, more women in Parliament will bring more perspective to the House. We must start by ensuring that the voices of women are heard and represented here in Parliament. Mr Speaker, this Amendment Bill provide for a new category of seats in National Parliament. The National Parliament will now be comprised of the following

members: open members representing an open electorate, provincial governors representing provincial electorates and women representing women's electorates in the regional seats. (Hansard, 2011: 53)

Speaking at a two-day PNG Political Parties and Women in Political Leadership Forum in Port Moresby in 2019, the current Prime Minister, James Marape, said that he would not support reserved seats because he 'personally believed that it was a downgrading avenue for women to enter Parliament' (Papua New Guinea Today, 2019). He argued that it was more important to 'clean-up the entire electoral process' so as to give both men and women a conducive environment in which to contest elections. Yet the reports of the carnage and violation of democracy in the 2022 elections outlined in this thesis suggest that the Prime Minister had forgotten about this clean-up.

Until such time that undemocratic ways that have been normalised become criminal acts and punishable through enacted laws; until such time that voter behaviours and attitudes change to voting for women, the 22 reserved seats for women remain necessary. While money politics, election violence, electoral fraud and missing names are common, women will continue to be at a disadvantage. Culturally, certain women have long been given access to the chief's platform, the hausman and the hausboi, and so who better than men sitting in parliament to give access to capable women to participate at the public domain through Temporary Special Measures? There are models to follow already in PNG: in the Motu Koita Assembly, only women vote for women for the two reserved seats in the assembly, while in Bougainville, three reserved seats were created for women based on regions, and both men and women vote to elect the women through direct election or pass the bill on the 22 reserved seats, continue on with the current model where men and women are contesting the same electorates, and let the best performing women who places above average to occupy a seat. If a woman wins by absolute majority, she becomes a governor.

Finally, for development partners like the Women in Leadership Support Program (WiLSP) "mentoring "strong" women candidates, and grow[ing] a pool of mentors and facilitators, "should a future iteration of WiLSP be funded, it is recommended that provision be made to partner with a local contractor who will assume responsibility for in-country program logistics and who could make payments to local service providers in a timely fashion, ... preserving the core ways of working the program. Key [being] flexibility ... listening and learning" (Haley, 2024, p. 123).

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