



**INFORMALISATION  
AND ELECTORAL INEQUALITY**

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# Informalisation and Electoral inequality

1. Background
2. Overview of the core argument
3. How the report establishes the core argument
4. The two geographies of electoral inequality
5. Interaction between different dimensions of inequality
6. Trends
7. The place of election observation in the election reform process.



# Background

- Fourth large-scale systematic observation of elections in PNG – ANU studies, however, go back to 1964.
- Reanalysis of previous studies
- Geographic focus
- Detailed analysis of new electorates
- Attitudes to DSIP and money politics
- Study of heterogeneous electoral process (ie. electoral inequality)
- Available here:
- <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/entities/publication/e020223e-ed3c-4be2-b712-57350a3f2136>



# Background

1. In 2022, the ANU led a large-scale study of the National General Election.
2. We observed at 755 locations across 16 provinces, and interviewed nearly 10,000 people.
3. Our objective was to assess the election, compare it to previous elections and understand how PNG elections have been changing.
4. We developed new tools to help make sense of the very diverse conditions we see in PNG. These tools help us see the geography of elections in unprecedented clarity.
5. We applied the same method to studies carried out since 2007. This re-analysis helps us understand how PNG's elections are evolving





# Basic argument

1. **Papua New Guinea is extremely diverse**
2. Social conditions, political organisation, livelihoods and state capacity **vary from place to place.**
3. **The PNGEC does not fully control the electoral process** – there is decentralisation, devolution and informalisation
4. Informalisation means that the process set in law is substituted for processes with greater participation by communities, candidates, scrutineers and others.
5. This leads to **very different electoral practices** in different places.
6. This clashes with a basic tenet of electoral democracy: not all citizens have the same right to vote.
7. There is a distinct pattern to how this happens – it isn't random.
8. **The pattern is to a large extent geographic.**



# How we show this

## 1. Mapping PNG's electoral practices...

- ...which requires a way to classify them...
- ...using existing data sources (2007, 2012 and 2017) observations, as well as (2022) and future elections
- ...build tools that are effective and easy to use.

## 2. Understanding PNG's cartography and how different agencies create geographical information.

- This is much harder than you might expect, because there are multiple sources of geographical information and they don't necessarily work together.
- The decentralisation and informalisation issues are present already at this fundamental level

## 3. Work out a way to present this information that is easy to understand, and

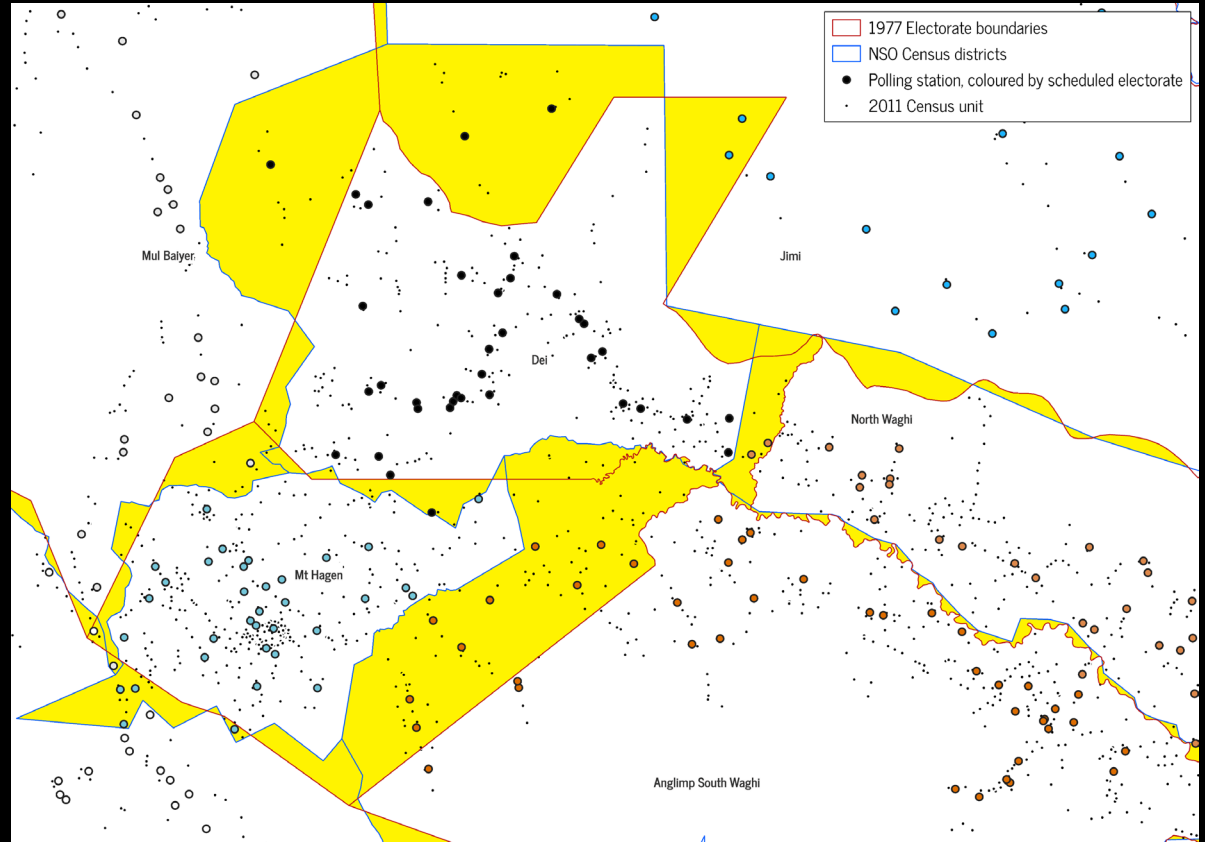


# Informalisation

1. All electoral systems rely to some degree on local norms and practices, 'unwritten rules', improvisation.
2. The situation in PNG is extreme, however.
3. Basic aspects of electoral administration are in a state of disarray, **compelling** improvisation
4. This includes critical functions needed for an election:
  - The definition of an electorate
  - The electoral roll
  - The organisation of polling practices



# Electoral boundaries



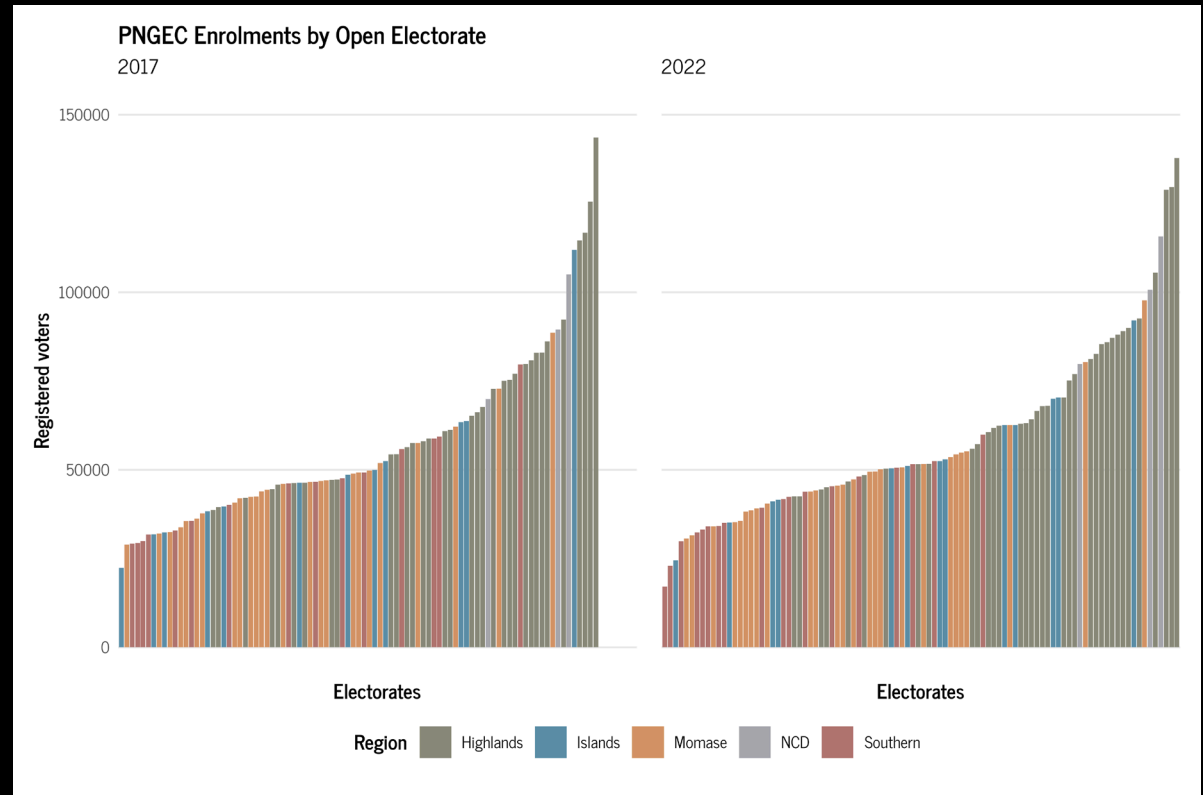
# Electoral boundaries

- First revision of electoral boundaries since 1977. Advertised as creating 13 new electorates.
- **Methodology differed from previous attempts to redistribute.**
- 1977: focus on ensuring electorates stayed within +/- 20% average population quota, exception thoroughly justified, using fresh census data
- 1977: meets and bounds definition of electorates, carefully produced mapset.
- 2021: Population balancing only one factor among several. Stale census data, effectively redistributed PNG as if it were 2011.
- Electorates defined in terms of LLGs and wards, mapset gives inconsistent representation of this.



# Effects of 2022 redistribution: very limited

- Slight reduction in inequality between electorates.
- Many electorates outside band
- Worsened regional inequality

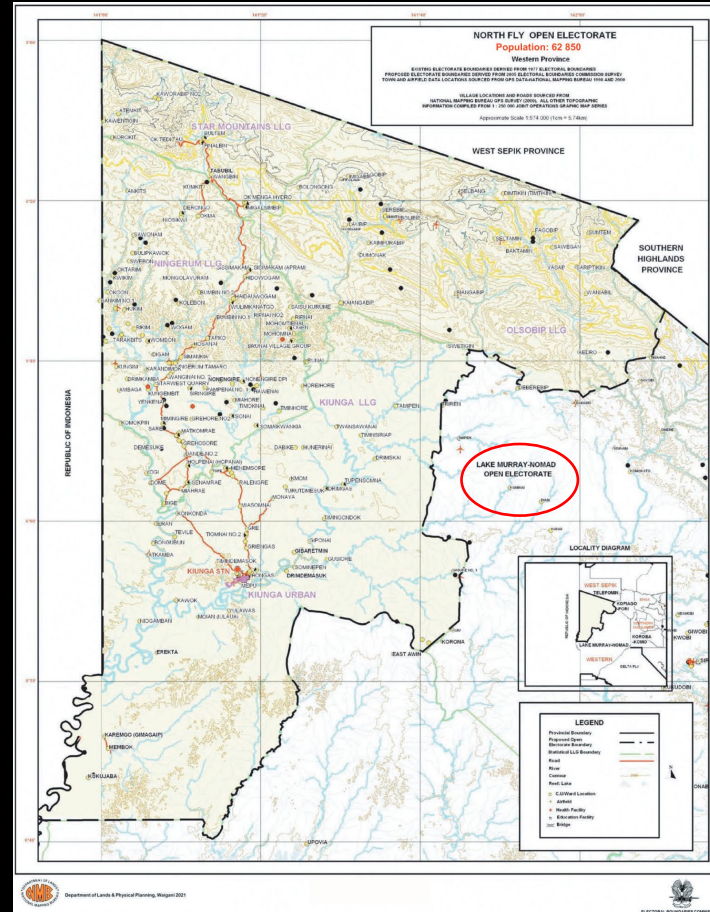


# Consequences of 2022 redistribution

- Inconsistent electoral boundaries
- The redistribution made a minimal impact on the malapportionment issue – but it had many other unintended effects.
- The set of maps approved by parliament in fact include changes to 54 open electorates. Most of these were unannounced changes.
- The maps are inconsistent – there is an overall picture of PNG, the index map, which most likely shows only the advertised changes. However, the individual electorate maps are drawn from different and incompatible sources.
- This includes, electoral boundaries, NSO census district maps and previous – rejected – redistributions.
- Some of the maps show clear signs of being prepared in haste.

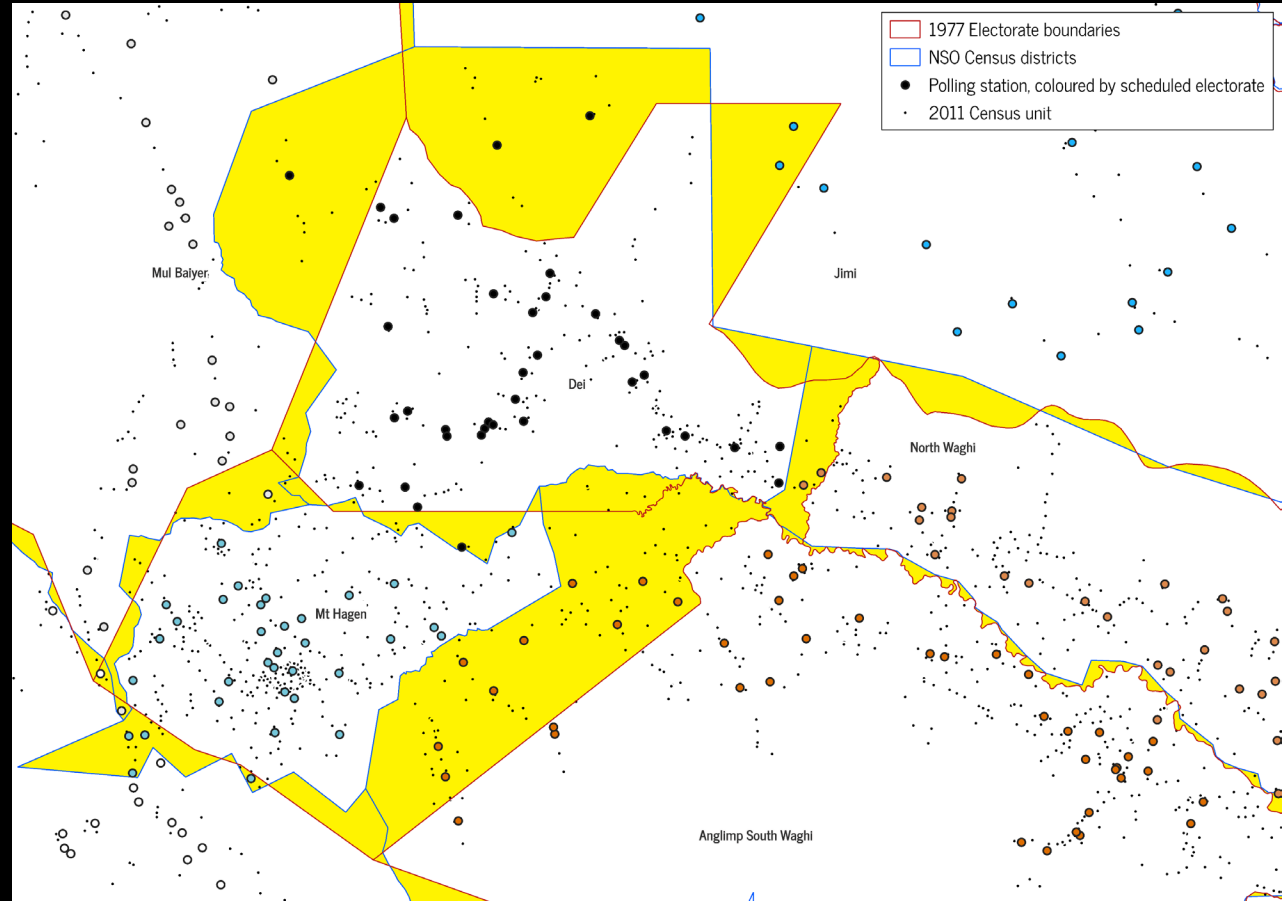






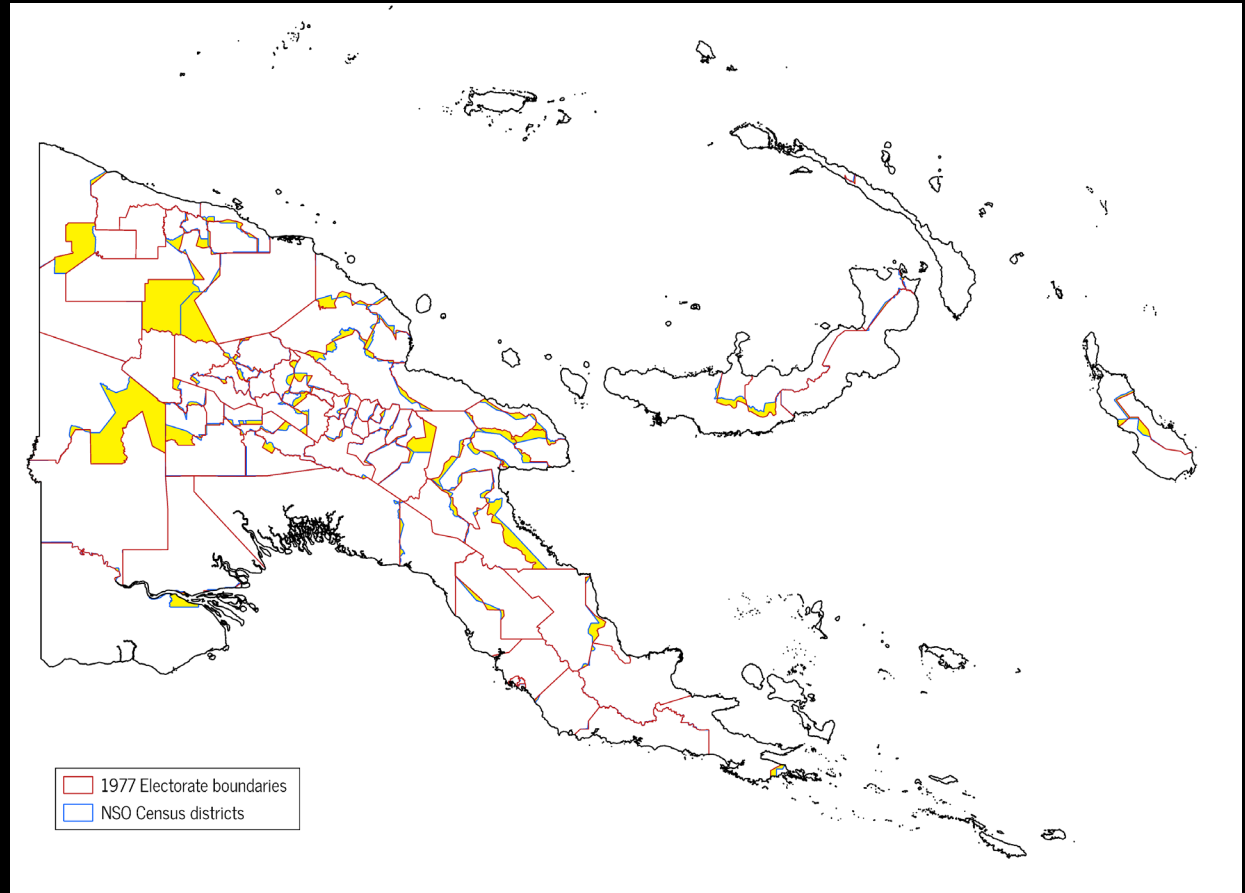
# Clashing maps

- Here the red boundary (1977 electorates) define the provincial boundary.
- The new electorates are partly in the wrong province.



# Districts and electorates

- OLPGLLG: districts = electorates.
- But in practice? Not so much



# LLGs and Wards

- Malapportionment is worse below the Open electorate level
- All of this has implications for funding, not just representation
- Defining electorates in terms of wards and LLGs, as done in the 2022 redistricting is unsound.
- LLGs do not have to be within a district/electorate – hence the splits talk about ‘parts of’ LLGs.
- Despite extensive changes, the LLG boundary map has not been updated since 2017.
- Defining LLGs or Open Electorates in terms of wards is even worse, because wards do not have formally recognised boundaries
- Trying to map electorates with wards would be like trying to map a country using only its post offices.
- Of course – on the ground people know (but also frequently disagree) about ward boundaries.
- This is a critical dimension of informalisation: the electorate boundary depends on these local people agreeing. In practice this happens when the roll is compiled, a highly decentralised process with notorious shortcomings.



# Informalisation

Multiple government agencies produce geographic data – DPLGA, EBC, Lands, NMB, PNGEC (the roll is a partly a geographic record)

The office which might be expected to coordinate – the – the NMB – has limited function.

This has consequences, notably for the electoral roll



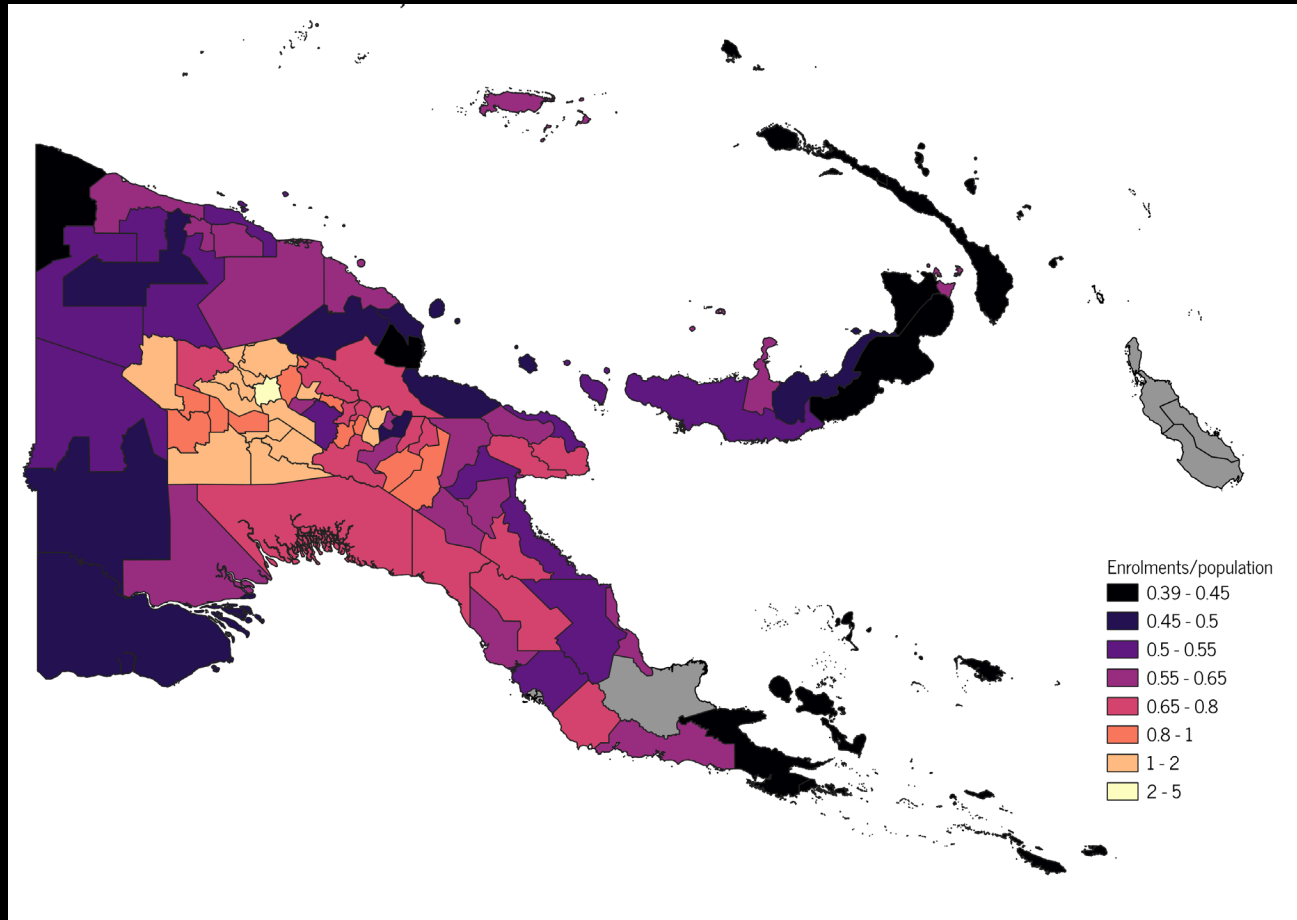
# The electoral roll

- The electoral roll is a record of **people and places**.
- The electoral roll establish a right to vote.
- Under PNG law, the electoral roll establishes who can vote.
- This contrasts with the Australian system, in which the right to vote is prior to the electoral roll, and it is possible to contest the roll. (This is very unusual – most countries are like PNG in this respect)
- PNG’s system used to be like Australia, but this led to widespread abuses of so-called ‘sectioned voting’, which ended in 1991...
- ...but the depth of that change was not appreciated, it was introduced on the eve of the 1992 election with minimal voter education. The result was the collapse of voter identification in the Highlands, and widespread ‘nogat nem’ problems elsewhere
- The electoral roll in PNG faces to basic, and very difficult problems:
  - **Personal identity – names – are complex and dynamic**
  - **Geographical structure, as we just saw, is very messy.**



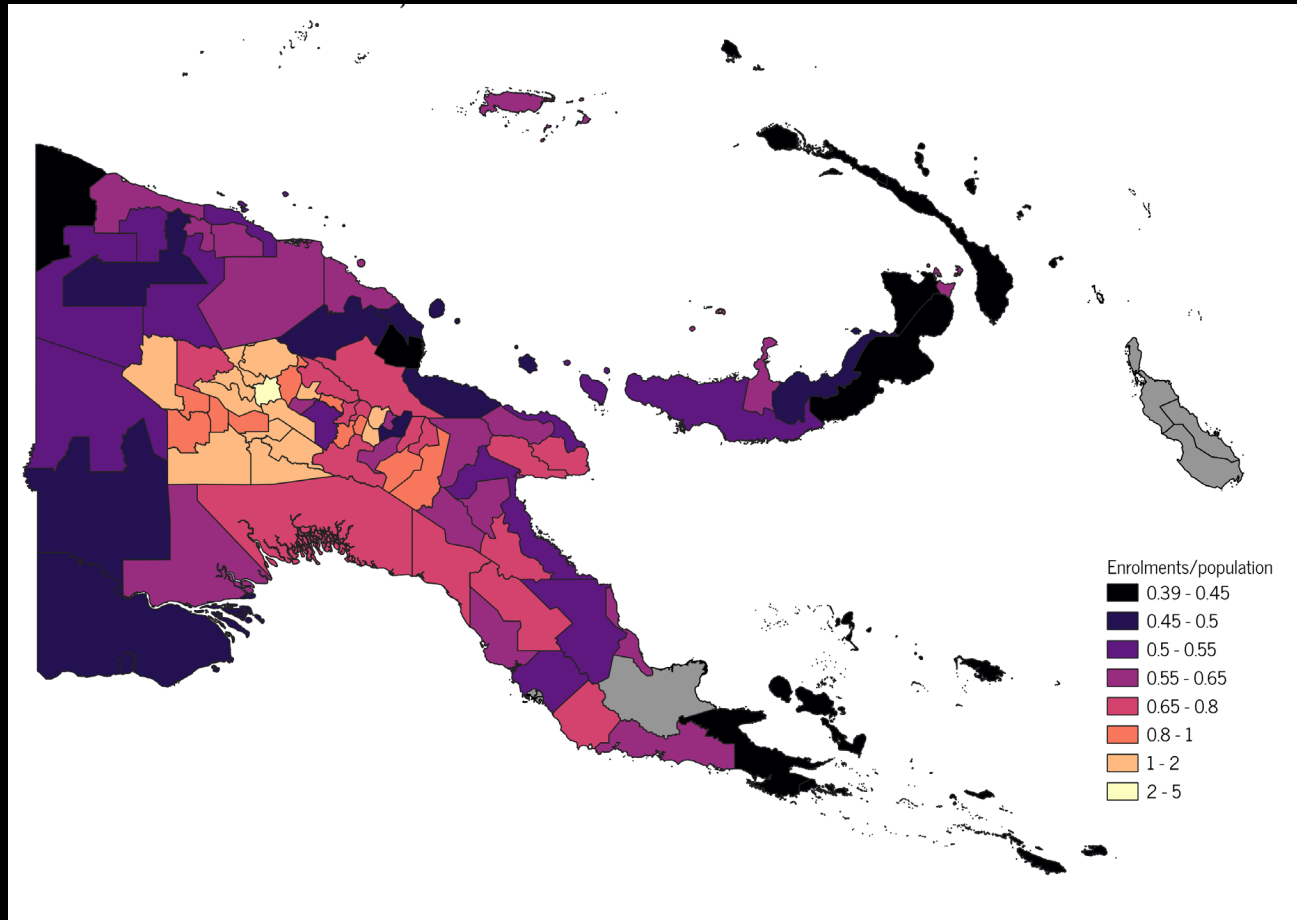
# Size of the roll

- Enrolments 2025 / census 2024
- Approx 15% of wards have more voters than population
- 30% in the Highlands

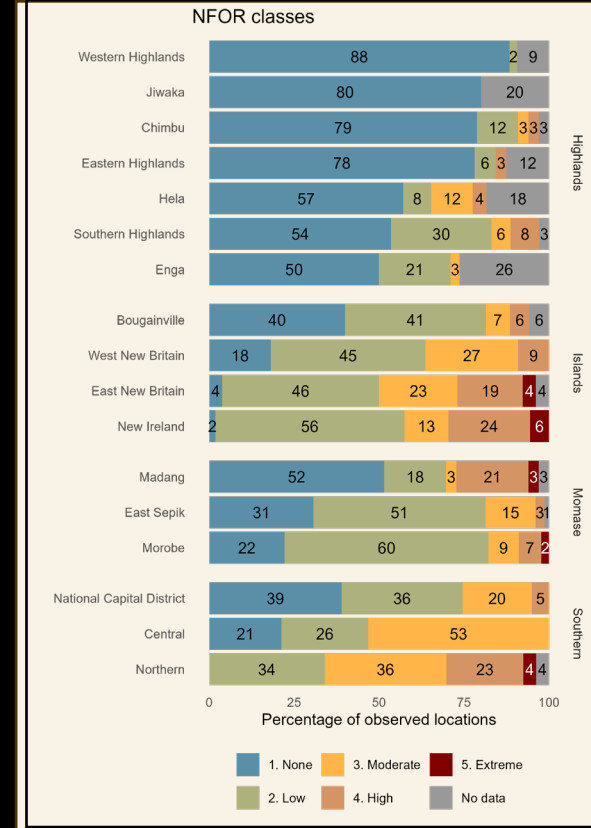
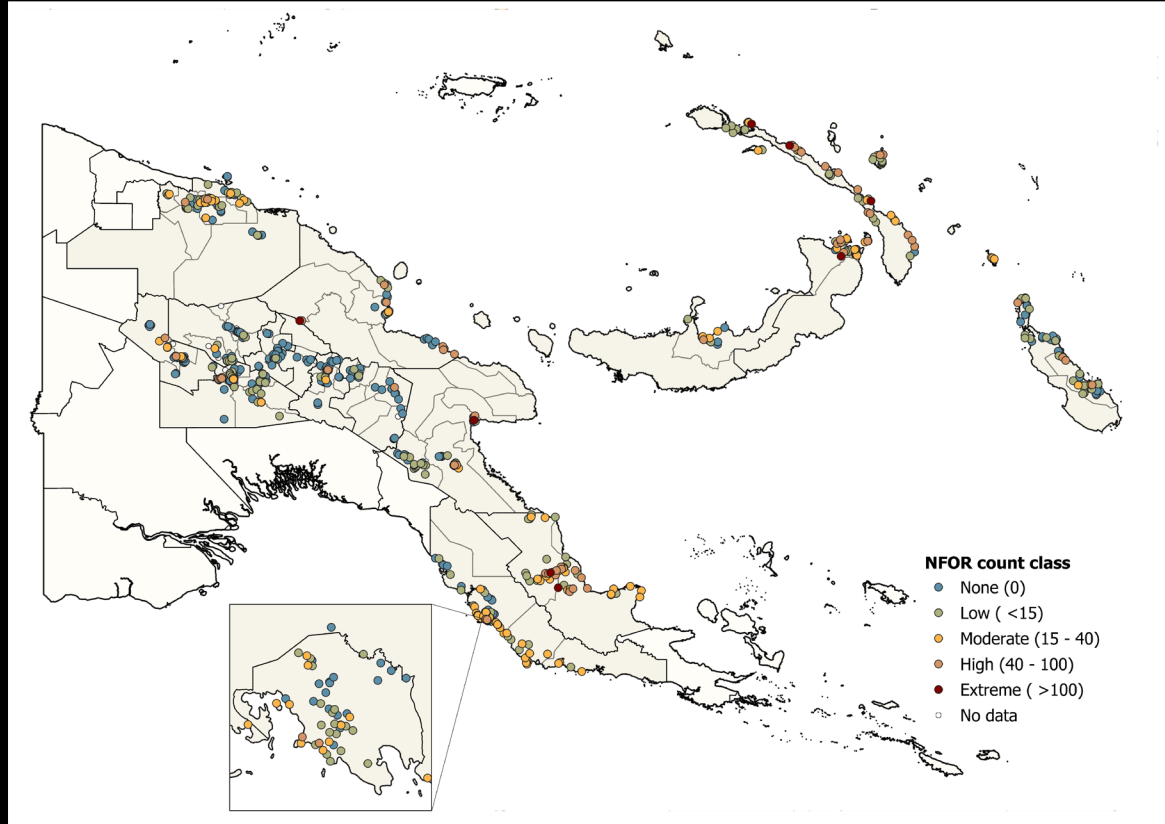


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# NFORs



# Verification rolls

- Only a minority of people see verification rolls, but of those who see them most find their names.
- Failure to follow the process appears to be the main problem

CP12 "Were electoral rolls publicly displayed in your ward?"			
	Percent of all respondents who saw verification roll	Percentage of those who saw the roll who attempted to find their name.	Attempted to find name and succeeded.
<b>Highlands</b>	16%	74%	94%
<b>Islands</b>	33%	88%	95%
<b>Momase</b>	11%	85%	87%
<b>National Capital District</b>	45%	82%	90%
<b>Southern</b>	30%	83%	96%



# Verification rolls

- There is little change in this respect

CP. 12 Were rolls displayed?			
	2012	2017	2022
Highlands	21%	16%	16%
Islands	29%	24%	34%
Momase	12%	19%	11%
National Capital District	38%	40%	45%
Southern	33%	38%	36%
Overall	24%	22%	22%



# Consequences of the roll's shortcomings

- The roll holds the election together.
- Abandoning the roll has serious implications
- Poor quality rolls create pressures on officials to allow voting outside the roll.
- Without the roll, however, it is easier to vote multiple times.
- Candidates pay attention to this. If there is a threat that a rival candidate will 'stack' their village, they are pressured to do the same.
- An 'electoral offending arms race' begins.
- The roll establishes an individual right to vote, without it, the next step is loss of individuality.
- Block voting, cut votes, etc...
- In a block vote, however, hundreds of ballots are available – a tempting prize.
- The next step is control of the polling station.
- We call this the 'alienation pathway'. It is one of several pathways: when the roll is abandoned, it is not the unenrolled voter who becomes free to vote, it is the ballot that becomes free of the voter.



# Voting procedure

- To understand informal voting methods, we need to consider what **should** happen.
- The mandated process is sound – if it is followed.

The process established by law is this:

1. Voter initiates by approaching desk/lining up.
2. Check for indelible ink
3. If no ink, check roll
4. If on roll, issue ballot
5. Apply ink
6. Ballot filled in compartment
7. Voter places ballot in box
8. Leaves unharmed

**Assistance *only* for disabled and illiterate. Must be supervised by officials.**

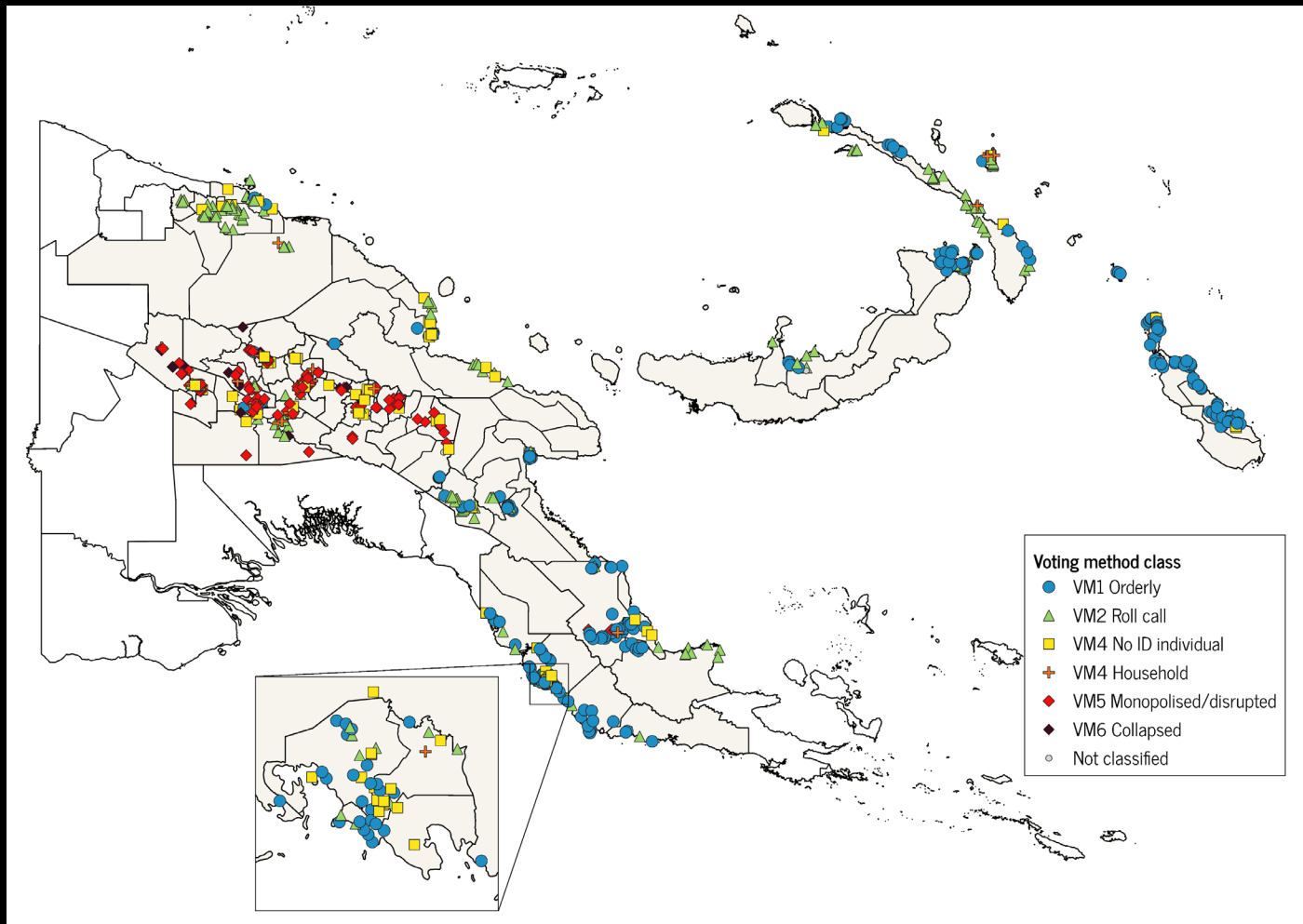


# Voting methods

	VM1 'Orderly'	VM2 'Roll call'	VM3 'No id, individual'	VM4 'Household'	VM5 'Monopolised'	VM6 'Collapsed'
Who initiates?	Voter	Officials	Voter or official	Faction leaders	Faction leaders, EC	Agents
Voter id?	Present	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Ballots issued to	Individual	Individual	Individual	Households	Faction leaders	Not issued
Ballots marked by	Individual	Individual	Individual	Leaders or individuals	A small minority	Agents
Control	EC	EC	Mostly EC	Diverse	Agents, EC	Agents
Exclusion	No	No	Mostly no	'Consensus'	Mostly yes	Always

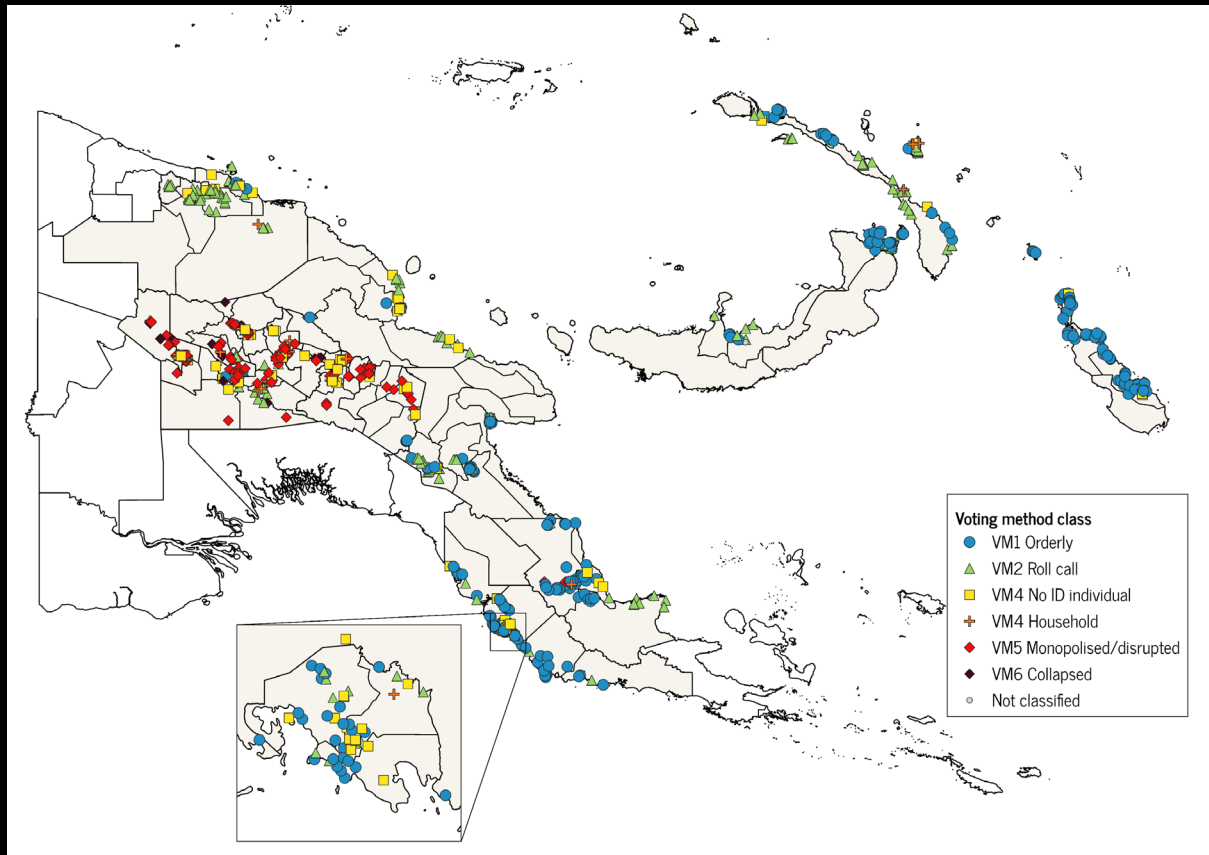


# Voting methods



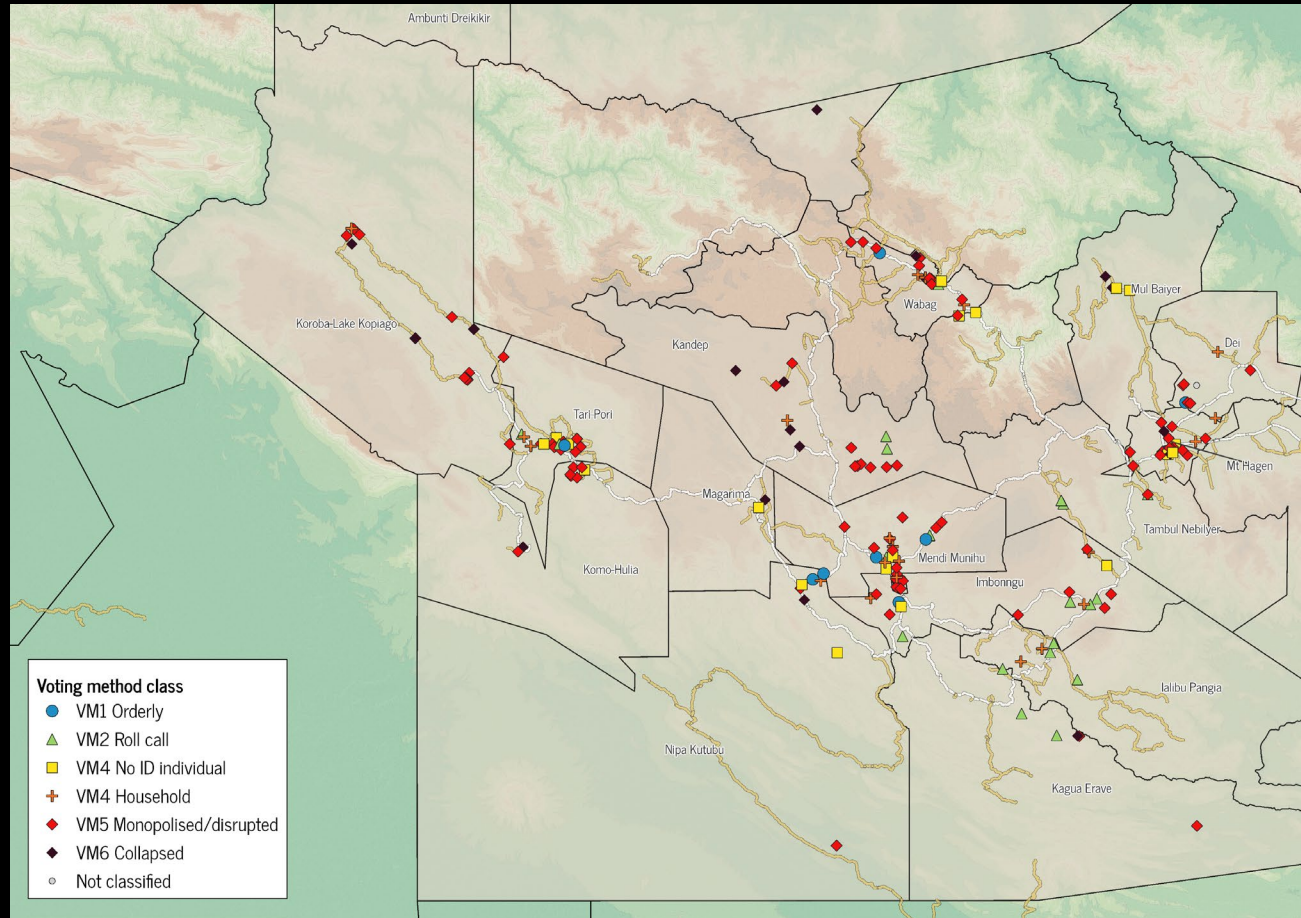
# Voting methods

- The geographical differences are immediately obvious.
- But there are important details.

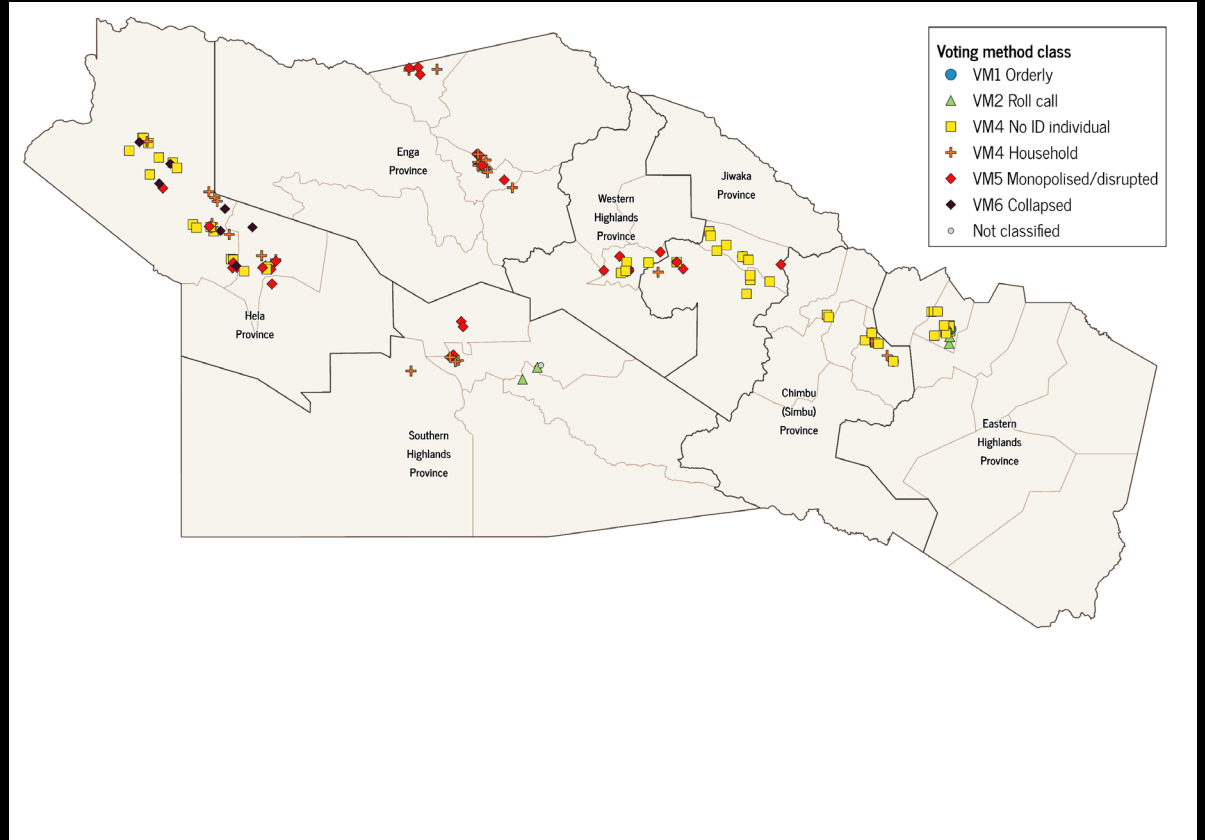
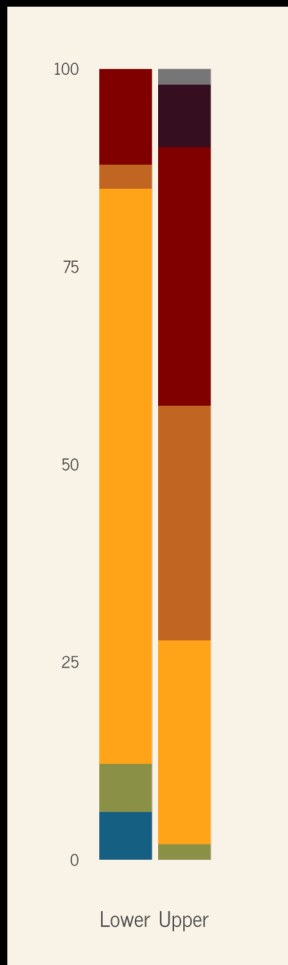


# Voting methods

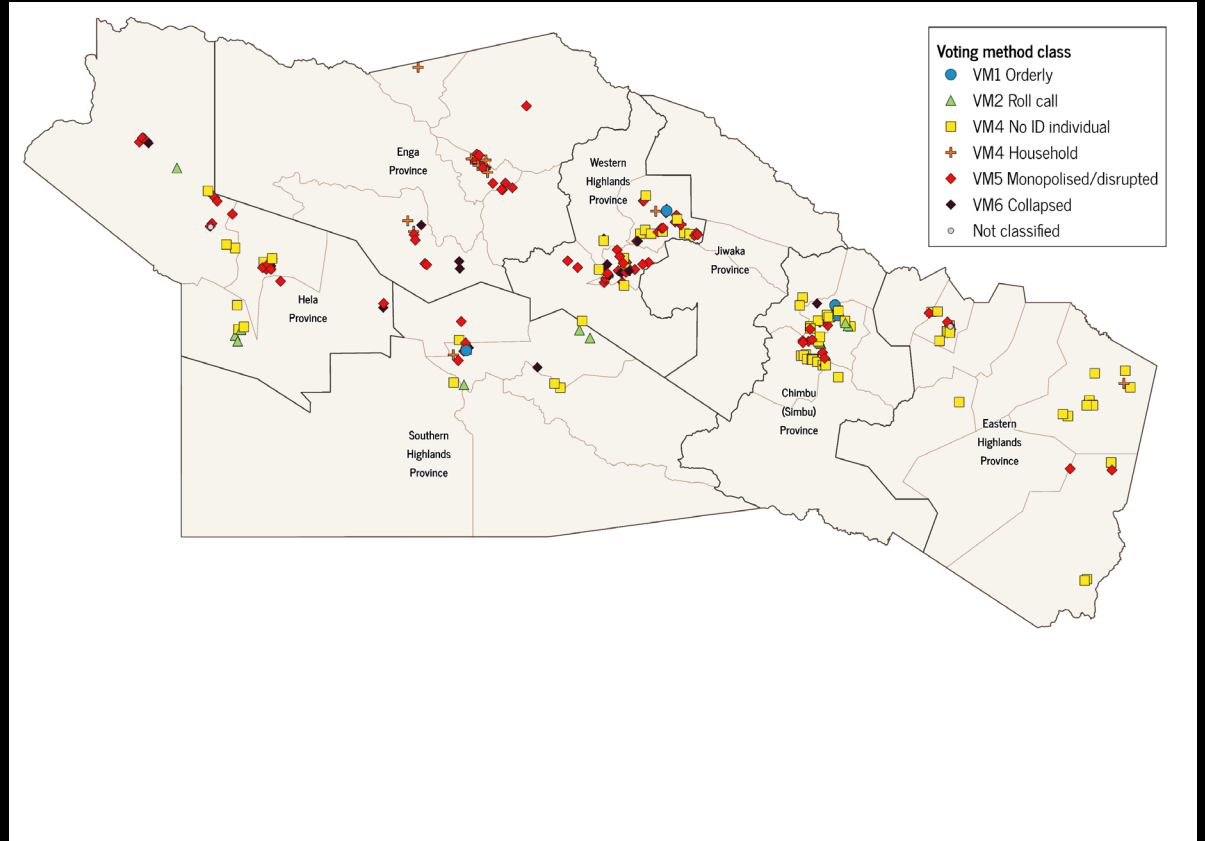
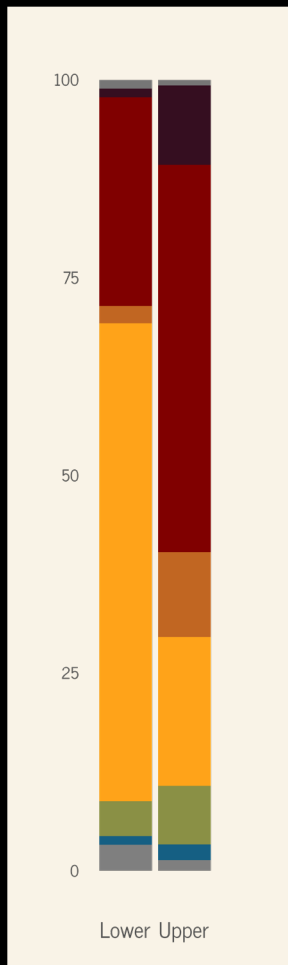
- Within the highlands, we still see ‘islands of relative compliance’
- High status individuals, but also some broader clusters



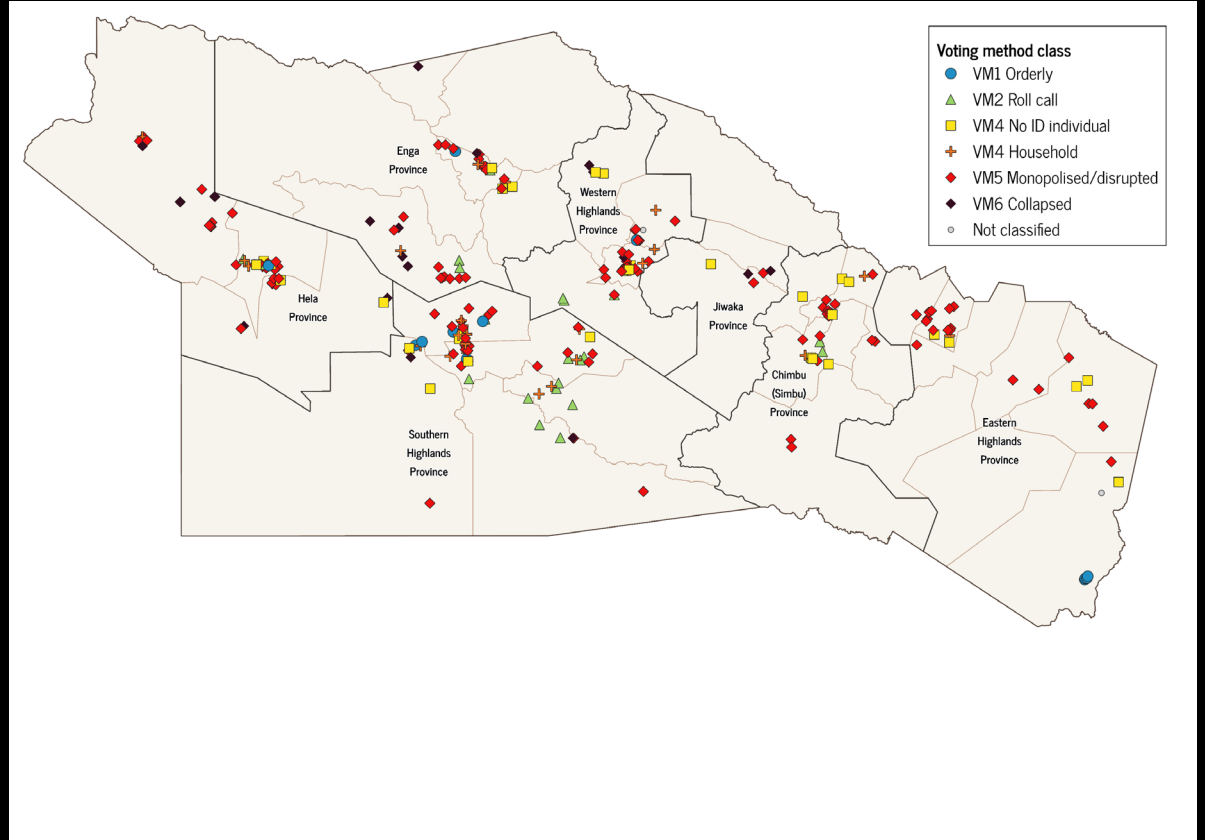
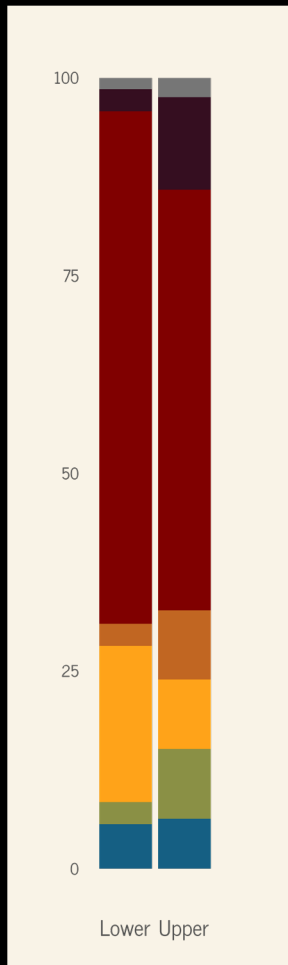
# 2012



# 2017



# 2022



# The trend

1. Observations of the LLG election and Dei by-election suggest that these trends have in fact continued, and in some ways intensified.
2. Dei by-election was substantially worse than in 2022.
3. Transition is mostly between 'inclusive' cut votes (sharing votes) and block votes in which community has some influence, to 'exclusive' cuts imposed by a candidate (cutting the vote up like pig at a feast), and total control
4. Broader trend is also one of more widespread and deeper problems – the problems themselves are not new.



# However...

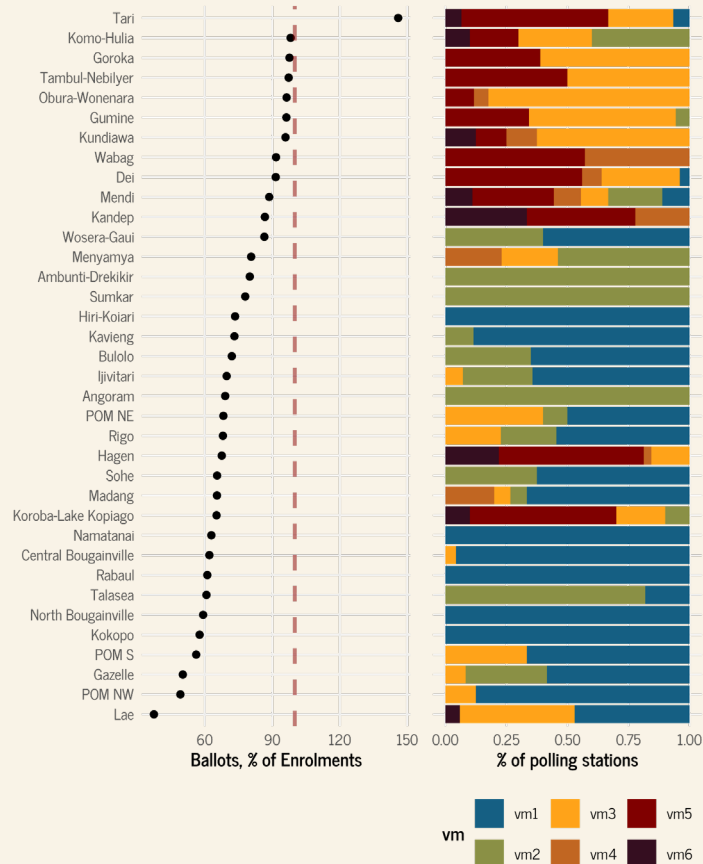
1. Serious violence in the Highlands has been present for a long time – 1984 Provincial elections, 1991 and 1993.
2. Roll use was **never** properly established in the Highlands. Usage most likely declined after 1991 changes to the organic law.
3. 2002 conditions most likely similar to 2017/2022
4. 2007 generally better – but intense effort to stabilise the situation was not sustained.
5. **Changes seen since 2012 are genuine – less individual participation, more explicit control of polling.**



# Voting methods and turnouts - 2017

- Note some problematic electorates have lower turnouts. These are not outliers: once the election becomes very disrupted, boxes end up destroyed or excluded

Reported turnouts and observed voting methods by district  
2017 National General Election

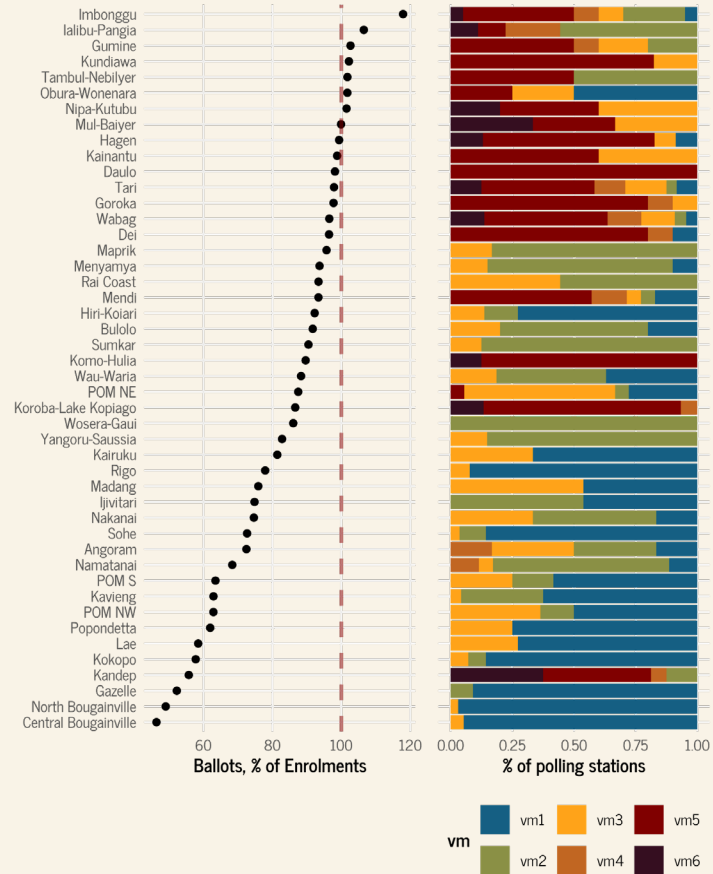


# Voting methods and turnouts - 2022

- Imbonggu has >100% turnout, partly because of inconsistent boundaries.

## Reported turnouts and observed voting methods by district

2022 National General Election



# Implications

## - 1

- Turnout figures should be used with great caution.
- The same goes for vote shares of winners.
- The differences in voting method reflect profound differences in how the election is organised.
- ‘Turnout’ is not really a reflection of how many voters voted – at least not in the Highlands.
- Outside the Highlands, the participation rate – ie. the number of people who attempted to vote – is higher than the recorded turnout, as NFOR is a significant factor.
- This also applies to election results. The ‘ballot generating process’ differs markedly across PNG.



# Implications - 2

1. Informal 'voting methods' aren't just different ways of organising an election – they have deep effects in the political process.
2. The changes have a directionality: it is 'easier' to go from an 'orderly' election to 'individual voting without the roll' than it is to go the other way.
3. This leads to worsening conditions over time.
4. No-id voting by individuals appears to be an unstable configuration.
5. Voting methods are also closely related to other dimensions of election quality – offences, violence, interference.



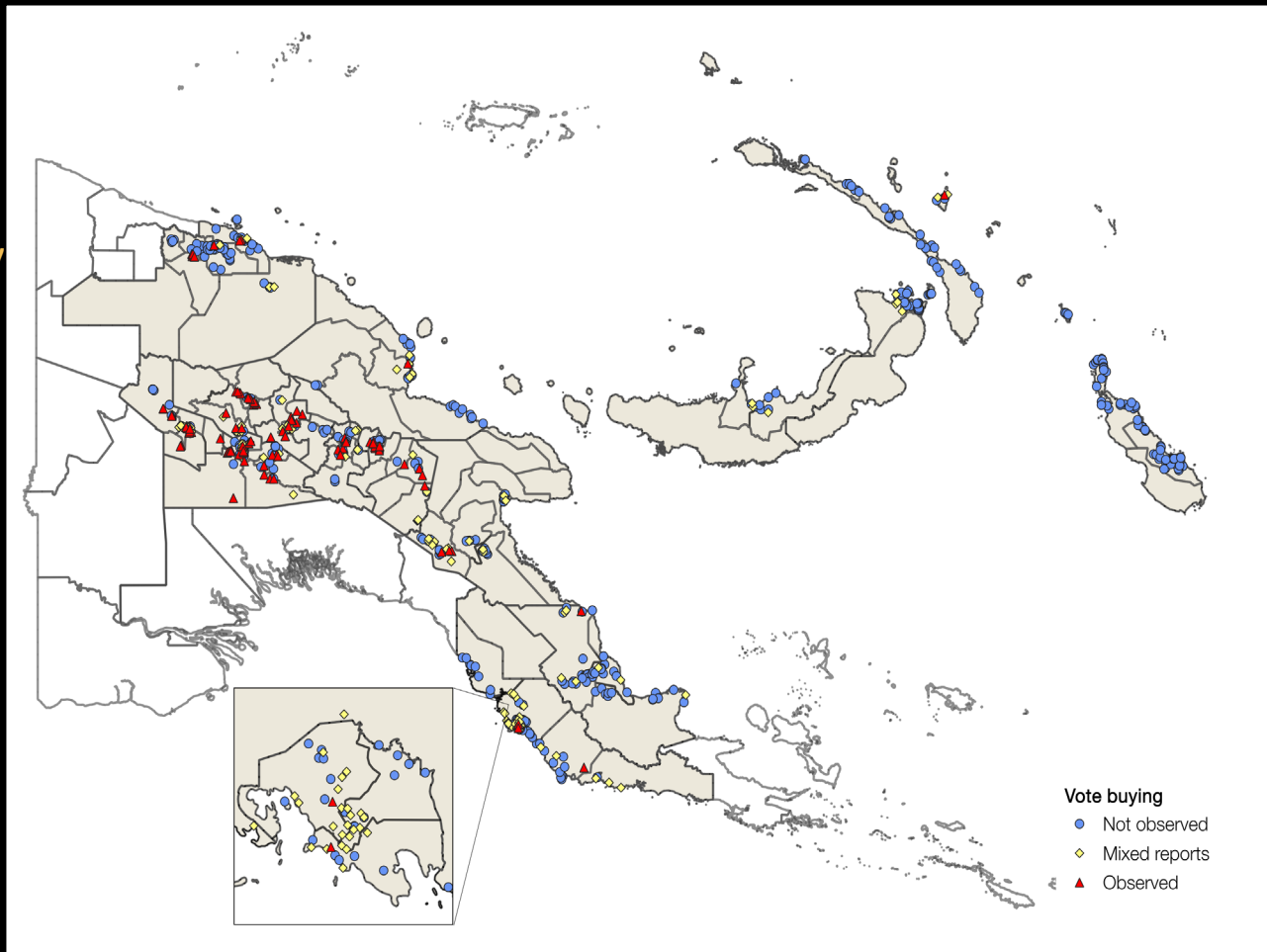
# Money

1. Electoral conditions are far from the only inequality we see in PNG elections
2. 'Money politics' is also widespread.
3. We examined this by asking people, before and after the election, how much money they had received.



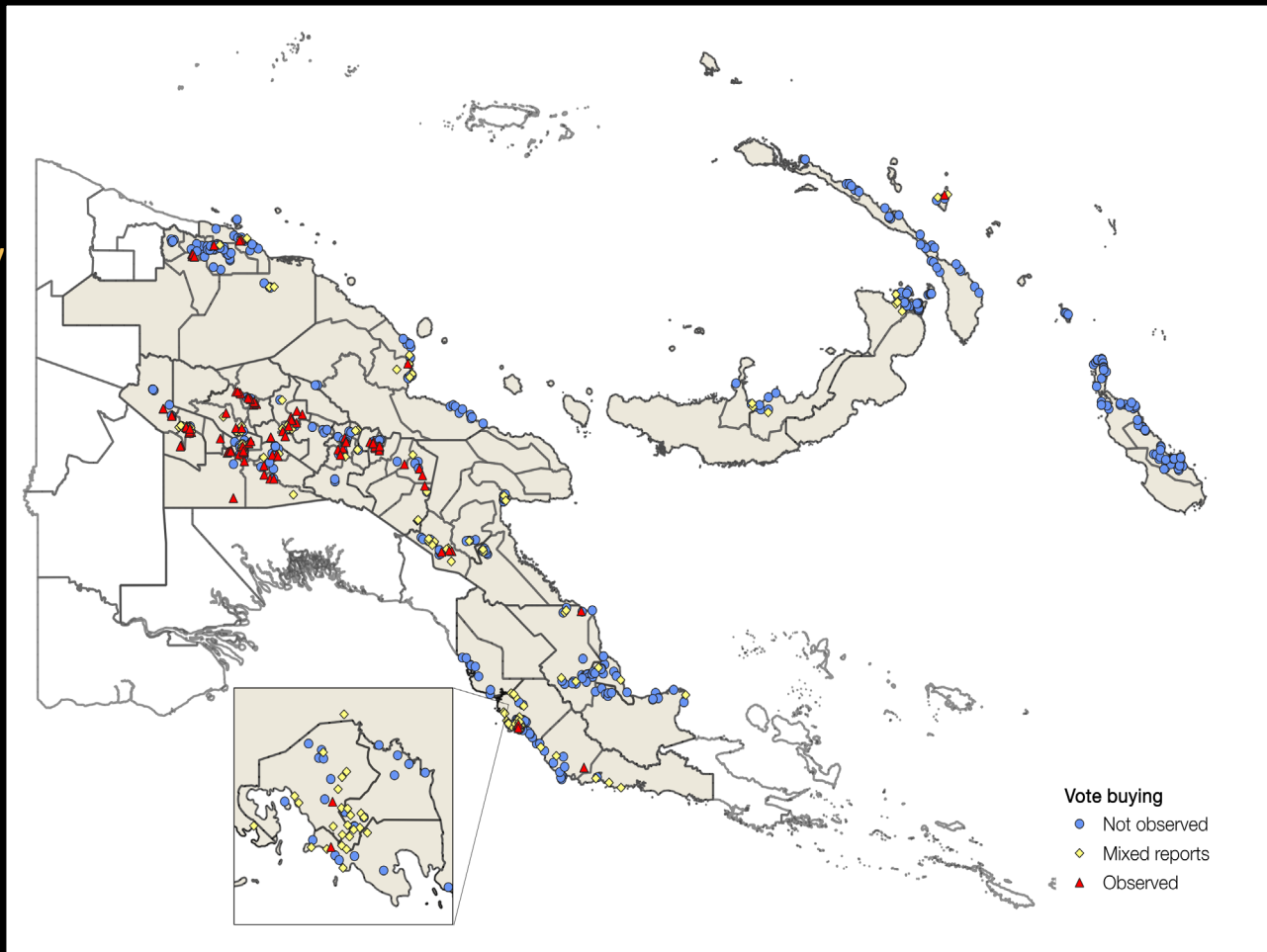
# Money

1. “Vote buying” on election day – heavily concentrated in the Highlands
2. But money politics is more widespread.
3. Importance of norms.



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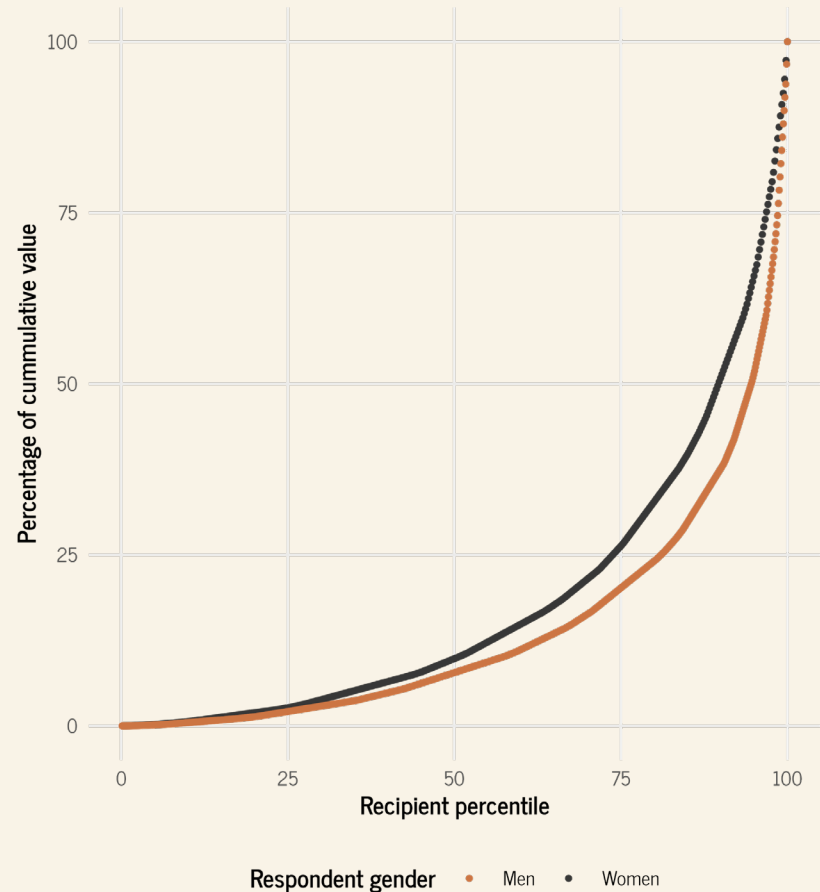


# Money

1. The 'income distribution' for cash gifts is quite unequal.
2. It is more unequal for men than women. Some men receive very large 'gifts'

PP17: Cash received from all candidates

Concentration curves for cash gifts by gender



# Money

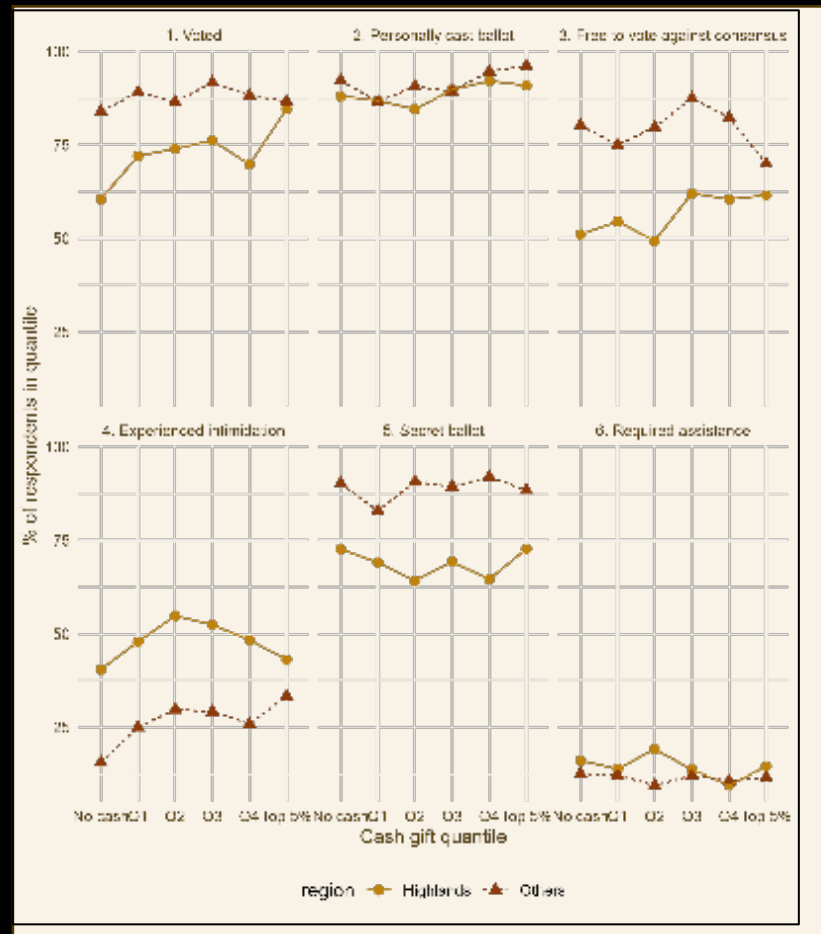
1. We can use this ‘income distribution’ to look at people’s voting experience and attitudes.

Bracket	Gift size	Percentile	Respondents
No cash	No cash gift		2663
1	Less than K100	Up to 25	365
2	K105 – K200	25 – 50	228
3	K205 – K500	50 – 75	225
4	K517 – K2000	75 – 95	144
Top 5%	More than K2500	Top 5%	50



# Money

- Cash gifts have a surprisingly minor association with voting.



# Money

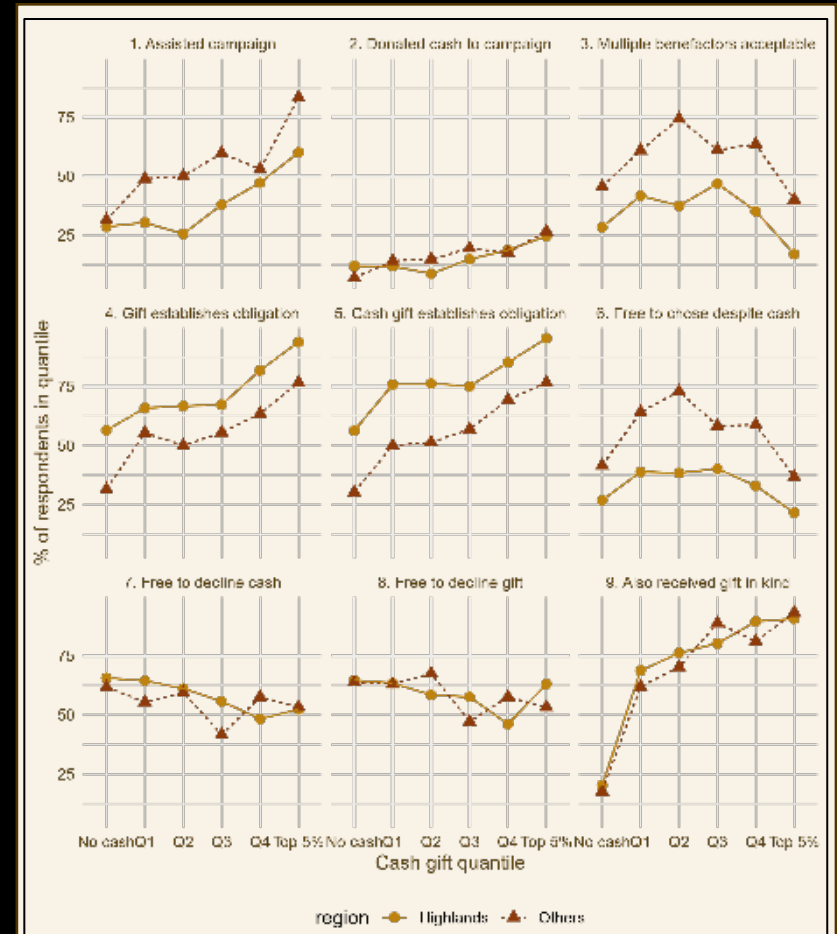


1. There seems to be a difference by gender, however. In the Highlands – where most gifting was recorded – there is a clearer increasing trend for women

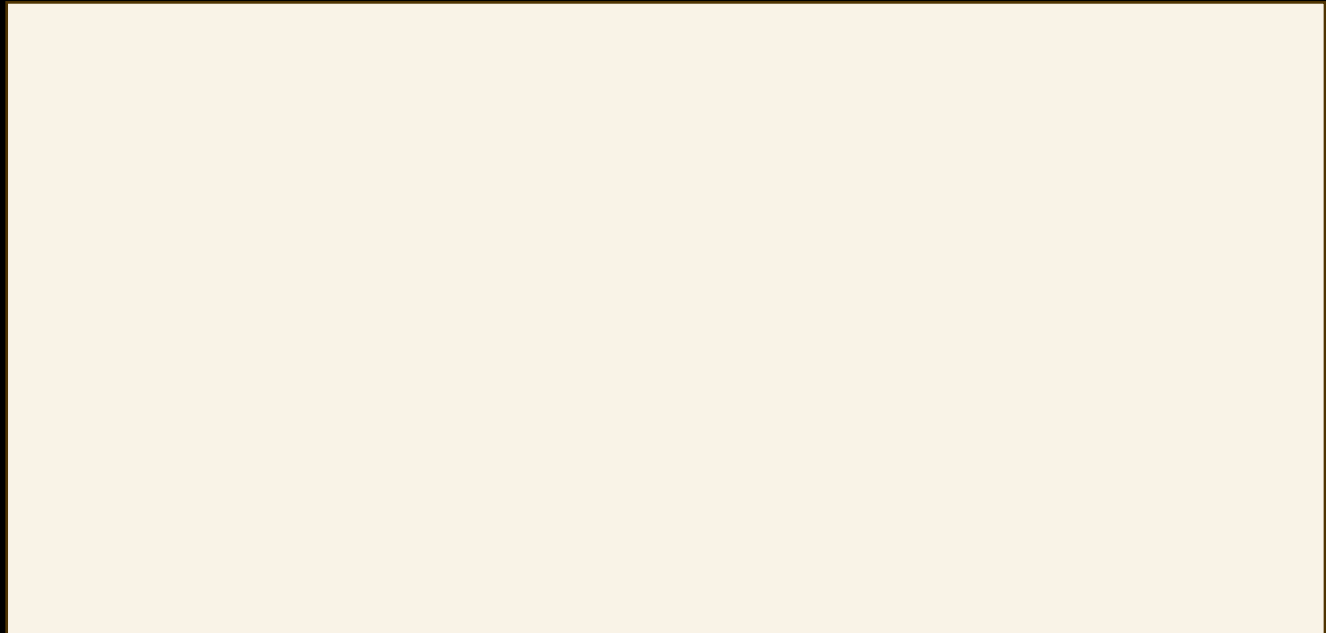


# Money

1. Cash gifts have a clearer association with participating in a campaign.
2. Relationship between cash gifts and gifts in kind give us important clues about how gifting works in PNG politics



# Women



1. Receiving a cash gift does not markedly increase the probability that a male respondent voted.
2. In the Highlands, it does increase the probability that a woman respondent v



# What can be done?

- Our report paints a worrying picture, but it also helps us pinpoint key faultlines in the system.
1. Electorates and the electoral roll
  2. Re-establishing individual voting
  3. Election monitoring



# The electoral roll and electorates

- These issues are not separate. The roll is a record of people and places.
- Solving the ‘roll problem’ has to start with clear geography. If electorates are not well defined, people and ballots will end up in the wrong place.
- In the long term, the issue needs to be addressed from the bottom up – starting with wards and the process by which they are proclaimed.
- In the medium term, efforts should be made to create a central office to coordinate PNG’s cartography – proper legislation for the NMB
- In the short term, it is essential that consistent electorate maps are used.



# The roll

The roll has **always** had problems – since 1964.

It **seems** to have gotten worse in 1990s because loopholes were closed.

It is a formidable problem

- The roll is a problem with ‘two horns’: in some places, there are too many people enrolled, in others, not enough.
- Measures that fix one problem can make the other one worse.
- Different measures for different places.
- In the Highlands, NCD and parts of Momase, the priority should be on restoring voter identification.
- In the Islands and high-functioning areas of the mainland such as Milne Bay and most of Central, greater emphasis on self-enrolment.
- In both cases the roll itself needs to be better.



# Restoring individual voting

- *Tanim tebol, blok vot, katim vot* are often driven by community leaders – sometimes fearing violence.
- Addressing them would also require community action
- “Maybe this is just our way of voting” – “eleksen i hauslain samting”
- But in fact block voting is (a) often done because of threats of violence (b) leaves many people dissatisfied.
- Block votes create a ‘tempting prize’, and control of polling stations rests of deals.
- It is up to you to decide what to do about this.
- If you want to have block votes, PNG should consider some form of legal pluralism and have clear rules. However the experience of Indonesia with this (noken) has been problematic.
- This would clash with PNG’s constitution and treaty obligations.
- Restoring individual voting would require concerted action – police and officials need to be prepared to take action, communities need to build a democratic peace.



# Re-establishing consequences

- *Tanim tebol, blok vot, katim vot* are often driven by community leaders – sometimes fearing violence.
- Addressing them would also require community action
- Whatever you decide to do about the voting system, consideration has to be given about how electoral laws are enforced.
- Elections petition system frames the election in terms of the interests of candidates.
- Perhaps there should be a clearer statement of the rights of the community and nation.
- Petitions are nearly always brought by candidates against each other and the PNGEC.
- Reliance on private initiative in this fashion has been problematic because the candidates have vested interests, which don't necessarily align with the wider community.
- As the system becomes saturated with offending, the threshold gets higher and higher.



# Future

While our report took a long time to write, its legacy is to make it possible to report on elections accurately, in detail and much faster.

1. An obvious issue with our study is that it took a long time to publish.
2. Part of the reason for this is the difficulty involved in handling and analysing a large quantity of data – not just the 2022 material, but also the previous three elections.
3. Another reason is that we had to develop new tools for analysis.
4. Drastic improvements in this workflow are now possible.
5. Using updated tools, APNG:WLN was able to produce a report similar to ours in a fraction of the time for the LLG election last year.



# Future

1. Our dataset includes over 2,000 locations observed at least once since 2007.
2. 755 locations were observed in 2022, of which over 100 were repeat observations from 2017.
3. It is envisaged that future studies would target these locations to refine our understanding of how polling changes – at a polling-station level across elections. This can also help us understand if targeted efforts to improve the election work.
4. Further extensions of the methodology would allow a much larger dataset to be captured by a network of observers, or even ordinary citizens.



# Why we should do this?

1. Critical problems in PNG's election system.
2. Worsening conditions, diffusion of more severe practices into new areas.
3. Action is required – this much is understood by most people.
4. Voter education, peace building, enhanced training and addressing serious systemic flaws is necessary.
5. But we also need to know which of these measures work, and what 'side effects' they might have.



# THANK YOU

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