

PEV popularity grows as Timor-Leste takes top slot

by Stephen Howes and Natasha Turia

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Australia's Ambassador to Timor-Leste Caitlin Wilson talks about the Pacific Engagement Visa during a RTTL World News segment

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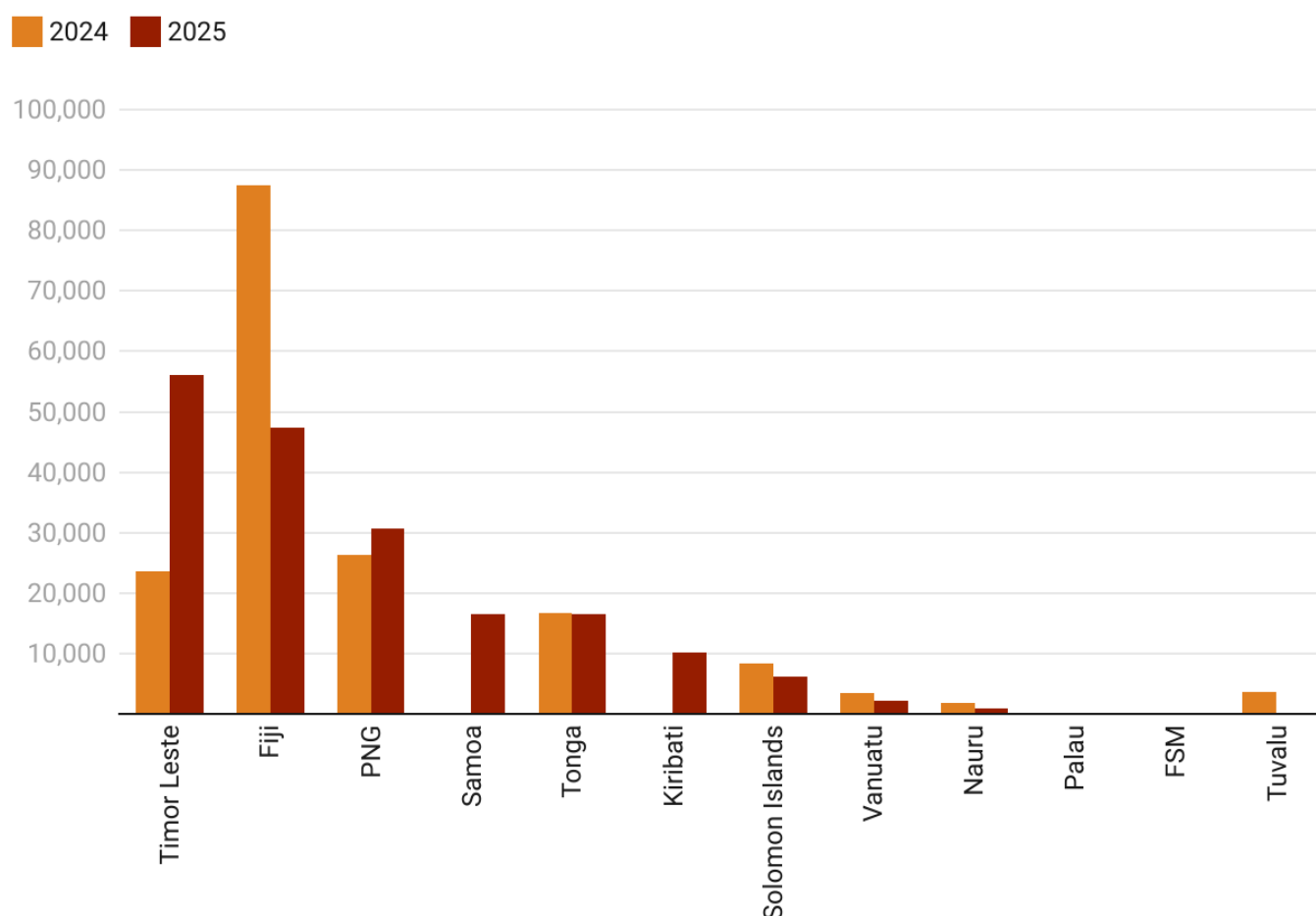
The second Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV) ballot has closed and the results show that the visa, which was **surprisingly popular the first time around (last year)**, was even more popular this year. The total number registering for the ballot has grown from 171,297 last year to 186,783 this year, an increase of 9%. This increase is all the more striking given that last year the ballot was open for almost three months, whereas this year it was only open for one.

The country recording the biggest absolute increase is Timor-Leste. Last year, 23,594 Timorese entered the PEV ballot. This year, 56,092 did, more than twice as many (Figure 1). Meanwhile, the number of Fijians applying fell by almost half, meaning that Timor-Leste became the country recording the most PEV ballot registrations. Fiji is now in second place and PNG, which recorded a 17% increase, in third.

Samoa and Kiribati, neither of which participated in the PEV last year, both showed strong interest in the visa. Samoa edged out Tonga for fourth place in terms of ballot registrations, and Kiribati came in sixth.

No ballot was held in Tuvalu. This is not surprising since the country now has access to **Falepili Pathway visas**, which have much better conditions than regular PEV ones. And ballot numbers fell in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, both by about 30%. Explaining these individual country trends is not easy, but **a recent national survey of Timor-Leste citizens** found that 33% would like to work overseas, including 52% already living in Dili and 47% aged 18-34. With migration being such a popular option in Timor-Leste, it is little surprise that it has become the biggest source country for PEV ballot registrations.

Figure 1: Pacific Engagement Visa ballot registrations, 2024 and 2025

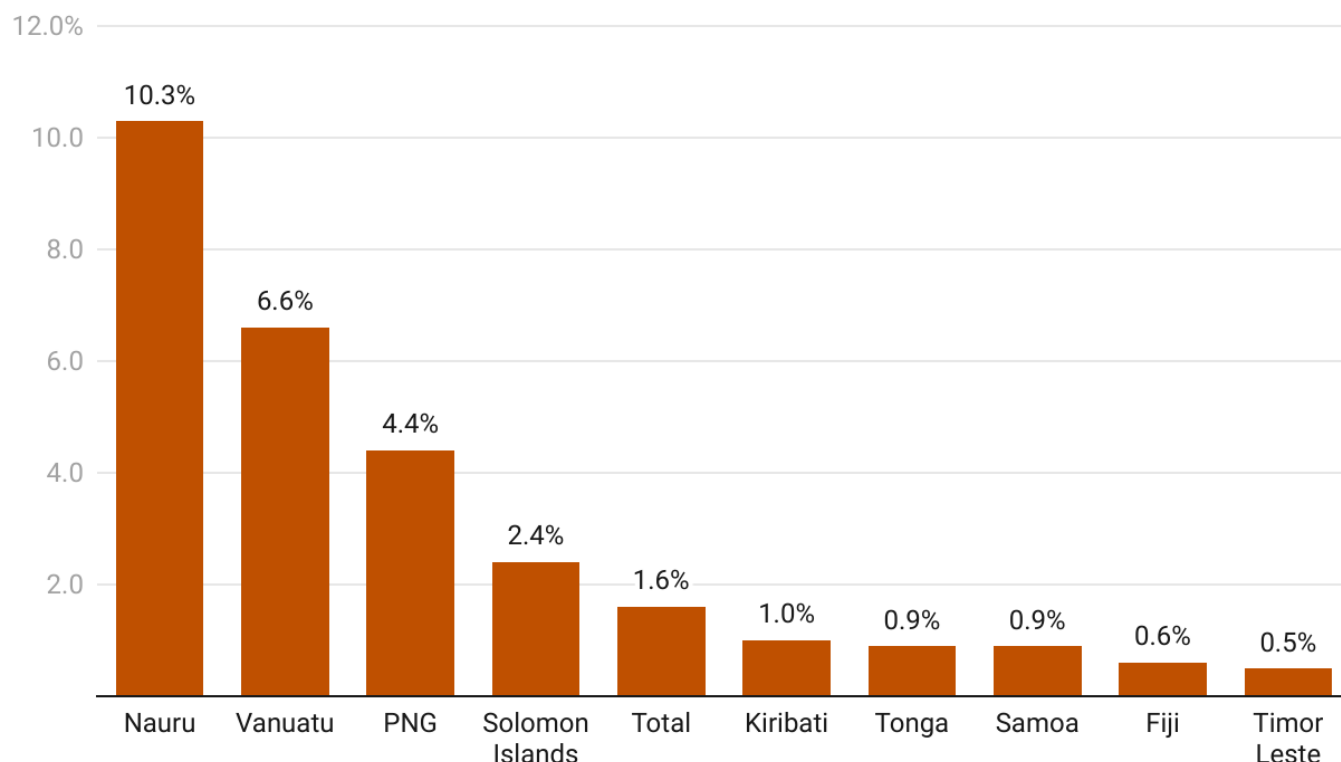


Source: Department of Home Affairs • Created with Datawrapper

Comparisons between this year and last year are complicated by Tuvalu exiting and Samoa and Kiribati entering the PEV. While, as mentioned, total ballot registrations increased by 9%, if we look at only the countries that participated in both years, the number of registrations actually declined by 5%. Factors behind this small decline could include: (a) the much shorter application period (one month instead of three); (b) a reduction in the perceived chances of being selected, based on a realisation of how popular the visa is; and (c) **the difficulty of finding a job**, which is needed to secure the PEV visa after ballot selection.

PEV ballot winners have already been notified. The chances of ballot success were lowest in Timor-Leste (0.5%) followed by Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati (0.6-1.0%). Chances were higher in PNG at 4% (Figure 2). Chances are highest in Nauru at 10%, and in FSM and Palau where, for the second time, the number of ballot entrants fell short of the number of visas on offer because both countries already have full migration rights to the US. Based on these numbers, there is a strong case for increasing the quota allocated to Timor-Leste next year.

Figure 2: Chances of Pacific Engagement Visa ballot success, 2025



Note: The chances of ballot success are the visas issued to each country divided by the ballot registrations.

Source: Department of Home Affairs • Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: **Earlier**, we reported on 2024 ballot registrations based on primary applications and an estimated ratio of total to primary applications (or registrations). Now we have data on all applicants – our estimate was about 20% too low. Note that a person might register twice in the ballot, for example, as a partner and as a primary applicant. This fact means that the ratio of visas available to ballot registrations shown in Figure 2 underestimates the probability of ballot success.*

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/pev-popularity-grows-as-timor-leste-takes-top-slot-20251106/>