Female candidates are under-represented in parties at Papua New Guinean (PNG) elections. This is concerning given over 80 per cent of successful candidates since 2002 had party affiliations, and no female candidate was successful in 2017. A proposed revision to the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) includes a requirement in which 20 per cent of all candidates in a party be women. In this post I describe the extent to which women have been endorsed by parties in the previous two elections, and investigate the impact if the proposed revised OLIPPAC is passed.

The proportion of female candidates endorsed by parties in PNG is the lowest in the Pacific, and one of the lowest in the world. Just 31 per cent of female candidates were endorsed by parties in 2012, and 34 per cent in 2017. In elections in India in the same period, 43 per cent of all female candidates were endorsed by parties. In Samoa the figure was 90 per cent, and in Solomon Islands it was 69 per cent.
In 2012, there were 119 female candidates (compared to 3,308 male candidates), and this increased to 176 female candidates (compared to 3,156 male candidates) in 2017. As mentioned above, women with party affiliations averaged about a third of all female candidates contesting in both elections.

One hope is that by joining parties, women will become more competitive. This seems like it might be the case based on comparisons of female candidate competitiveness between women in parties, and women who are not in parties. This can be done by comparing the competitiveness scores across first-preference votes (data on after-preference votes is unavailable, however first-preference vote totals change little at the after-preference count). The competitiveness score is found by dividing the number of first preference votes of each female candidate by the number of votes won by the candidate in the lead. The score ranges from 0 to 1, and if the female candidate is leading, her score would be 1. As the chart below shows, in 2012 party endorsed female candidates were slightly more competitive (median score) in votes won, and their competitiveness improved significantly in 2017, while female candidates who identified as independents became less competitive.
However, there is no way of knowing whether the current relationship is caused by parties helping women become more competitive, or whether it is simply because parties look for female candidates who they think are more competitive.

In general, although women in parties performed better than women who were independents, women still comprised a tiny share of all candidates in parties. In 2012, 3.2 per cent of all candidates with a party affiliation were women. This share increased to 4.4 per cent in 2017. Although the current OLIPPAC does not have a quota for female candidates in parties, a proposed revised OLIPPAC currently before parliament does. The quota was initially set at 5 per cent, however, it has been revised to now require 20 per cent of all party candidates to be women. In a parliament comprised entirely of men, it remains to be seen if there will be support for the proposed quota.

The proposed quota would see a radical change in the composition of party candidates. A total of 43 parties contested both the 2012 and 2017 elections. In 2012, female candidates made up 5 per cent or more of all candidates in only a quarter of all parties. In 2017, female candidates made up 5 per cent or more of all candidates in 37 per cent of all parties. Only in one party in 2017 – the Wantok in Godly Services Party, a party of 3 candidates – were all candidates women.
Note: This table can be sorted by party or by either of the years. Sorting by 2017, for example, shows the Wantok in Godly Services Party at the top of the table with 100 per cent of female candidates.

The proposed quota would also dramatically increase the number of female candidates. Under a 20 per cent quota there would have been 219 party endorsed female candidates, instead of the 37 party endorsed female candidates in 2012; in 2017, instead of 61 party endorsed female candidates, there would have been 264. The largest party in 2017, the Grassroots United Front Party (GUF), endorsed 3 female candidates for 98 male candidates. Under a 20 per cent quota, GUF would have endorsed 20 female candidates.

Although we cannot be sure whether being backed by a party will make women more
competitive, a 20 per cent quota will have the clear effect of increasing the number of
women standing in elections. Simply from a statistical perspective more women candidates
ought to increase the chances that some women win. Hopefully, parties who need women
candidates and who would like to back winning candidates, will look for more competitive
women candidates to support. This may also help. Even if it does not, the change would still
be significant at least in that there would be many more women candidates in future
elections.

Note: The author is grateful to Dr Terence Wood for comments on earlier drafts. Election and party data were taken from
the PNG Elections Database.

Disclosure

This research was undertaken with the support of the ANU-UPNG Partnership, an initiative
of the PNG-Australia Partnership. The views represent those of the author only.

About the author/s

Maholopa Laveil
Maholopa Laveil is the FDC Pacific Fellow at the Lowy Institute, seconded from the
University of Papua New Guinea.

Link: https://devpolicy.org/png-parties-need-to-do-more-to-help-women-get-elected-20210922/
Date downloaded: 14 September 2023