A media briefing ahead of the 2022 elections

PNG's online electoral data remains inaccessible

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Papua New Guinea is the [only country in the Pacific to sign](#) onto the [Open Government Partnership](#) (OGP), a multilateral initiative of 76 countries that aims to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance. When it signed in 2015, PNG adopted commitments to improve access to information of public interest.

Affected public institutions include the [PNG Electoral Commission](#), which is required under the OGP to make election data public when elections are underway, as well as curating online repositories of past election data. "Election data" refers to information relating to aspects of the process throughout the electoral cycle. The right to information is integral to electoral rights because it is impossible to participate meaningfully without information needed to make informed electoral choices.

However, the [*Promoting election integrity in the Pacific Island countries*](#) report of 2021 shows that, in PNG, election data was not open for the entire electoral process, except for electoral complaints, disputes and resolutions, and the electoral legal framework, which were "mostly open", followed by political party registration which was "partially open".

Following the report, the Political Science Department of the University of Papua New Guinea, with technical and financial assistance from the [National Democratic Institute](#), conducted an observation and analysis on PNG's election data openness throughout the 2022 elections, to evaluate the transparency and openness of public-interest data related to the elections. The team monitored 15 electoral processes from December 2021 to October 2022 (see Table 1).

These 15 electoral processes were measured against minimum standards of transparency derived from [OGP principles](#). These principles include: availability of data for free on the internet; granularity (data is available to the finest level); completeness (data is available for all items at once); analysability (data is available in CSV or Excel); being non-proprietary (no

organisation has exclusive control); non-discriminatory (for example, no registration required to access data); licence-free (data is open for reuse); permanently available (data is available for an indefinite period); and timely.

A scoring algorithm was used to calculate data openness, which allocated six points for data availability, three points each for granularity, completeness and analysability, and one point each for non-proprietary, non-discriminatory, licence-free, permanency and timeliness principles. At the end of the scoring exercise, each process was given a score to determine its level of openness. A score equal to or less than 30% classifies data as not open, between 31% and 70% as partially open, and above 70% as mostly open. This method was developed by the Open Election Data Initiative, and is being used to study government data openness. Table 1 presents a summary of the findings.

Table 1. Summary of election data openness

Process	Assessment
Election management body and administration	Partially open
Election management body processes	Not open
Electoral boundaries	Partially open
Election security	Partially open
Political party registration	Partially open
Ballot qualification	Not open
Election campaign	Not open
Campaign finance	Not open
Voter registration	Not open
Voter lists	Partially open
Voter education	Partially open
Polling stations	Not open
Election results	Partially open
Electoral complaints, disputes and resolutions	Partially open
Electoral legal framework	Mostly open

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Similar to the 2021 *Promoting election integrity* report, our findings show that only the electoral legal framework of PNG meets the data openness requirement of the OGP out of the 15 electoral processes monitored.

Whilst the *Promoting election integrity* report categorises PNG's electoral complaints, disputes and resolutions as mostly open, we categorised it as partially open. This is because immediately following the election, the information on disputed results was not updated in a timely manner.

We found that seven other processes also fall under the "partially open" category, which at first seems like an improvement from the 2021 *Promoting election integrity* report. However, the reason there seems to be an improvement is because our observation coincided with the election period, and there were some attempts by the relevant government departments to make electoral data available online. For instance, the website and the Facebook page of the Electoral Commission published a series of voter education materials and the electoral calendar, as well as some election results.

Six of the processes observed still remain under the "not open" category.

The study revealed several reasons explaining PNG's failure to adhere to OGP principles. First, low levels of education, lack of awareness, and low demand for election data have put little pressure on key bodies to make election data available to the public. While key legislation is publicly available, public awareness remains low.

Second, there's slow uptake of online connectivity and making information available online. The new Voter Roll Look-Up system is a welcome innovation, but its implementation is also hindered by the digital divide, low internet connectivity and digital illiteracy.

Third, difficulties we faced in gaining access to data from public institutions with key roles in the election indicate a prevalent culture of reluctance to release information of public interest. Budget and campaign finance data seemed to be the most difficult to obtain.

A lack of funding has affected the preparedness of the PNG Electoral Commission to deliver elections and ensure that key data is made available to all stakeholders – including candidates, voters and observers – in a timely manner. Poor management and limited technical capacity also contributed to ineffective and untimely implementation of electoral activities, such as publishing new electoral boundaries and the polling schedule. Official data on security incidents is especially key to assessing how ethnic fragmentation and other interrelated factors continue to drive high levels of election-related violence.

Access to information about electoral processes, including government-held electoral data, and the steps taken by government institutions to establish accountability in the electoral context, is fundamental to creating and reinforcing public confidence in the integrity of elections and the government that derives from them. It also enhances voter education, dissuades disinformation, and improves the link between citizens and government. The government intends to conduct an inquiry into the 2022 elections. This exercise must include review of access to electoral data and the constraints identified above to give confidence to the integrity of the electoral process.

Read the full report [The openness and transparency of election data in Papua New Guinea: qualitative assessment of the 2022 national general election](#).

This blog is [based on a paper](#) presented at the 2022 [PNG Update](#).

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