

Bougainville on path to independence

The South Pacific region of Bougainville has voted overwhelmingly for independence from Papua New Guinea, a major step towards the island group becoming the world's newest nation



AUTONOMOUS REGION OF BOUGAINVILLE

Area: 9,300 sq km

Population: 300,000 (estimate)

Main natural resources
Copper and gold

Background: Bougainville, named after 18th century French explorer, came under German control in 1886. Australia occupied island during World War I and then it became part of newly-independent Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1975



Recent events: Independence referendum is part of 2001 peace deal that ended bloody civil war between Bougainville rebels and PNG forces. Violence began in 1988, triggered by conflict over revenues from vast Panguna copper mine

2019 REFERENDUM RESULT

■ **97.7%:** Voted for independence (out of 181,067 ballots cast)

■ **Less than 2%:** Voted for greater autonomy from PNG

■ **Vote is non-binding and requires ratification from PNG parliament. Process of becoming separate nation could take years to achieve**

Left: Bougainville rebels arrive at signing of 1998 ceasefire agreement

