Bougainville may be the World's Next Country  
  
  
The process is under way for the possible introduction of a new member to the global family of nations. The people of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea have voted overwhelmingly for independence in a referendum. The vote was held on the island between the 23rd of November and the 7th of December. The vote was a non-binding referendum, which means the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government does not have to pass it into law. However, PNG gave the vote its full consent and should now consider acting on the result of the vote. Voters had two options-greater autonomy or full independence. Over 181,000 people cast their ballot and nearly 98 per cent of them voted in favor of independence.  
  
  
Bougainville is the largest island of the PNG chain of islands. It is geographically part of the Solomon Islands archipelago and used to be known as the Republic of North Solomons. It has a population of around 250,000 people. Bougainvilleans started a fight to achieve their independence in the 1960s. This was a decade before Papua New Guinea was granted independence in 1975. Bougainville was declared part of the PNG in 1976. This sparked the Bougainville Civil War between  1988-1998. Over 20,000 people lost their lives in that conflict. The Prime Minister of PNG said: " I ask for some time for the people of PNG to absorb and process this result." He said his government was committed to adhering to the polls result.