Political history and Government Structure

European Colonization did not really begin untilthe nineteenth century.  In 1884, Germany annexed the northern parts and the British placed the southern portion of the Island and proximate islands under a British protectorate in response to to parallel German colonization in the north. This area called British New Guinea was formalized as a protectorate in 1888 and placed under the authority of the Commonwealth of Australian.In 1906, Australia took over British New Guinea, renamed a year earlier as the Territory of Papua. The Australian army occupied German New Guinea in World War I and in 1920 Australia received from the League of Nations a mandate for the government of New Guinea, as it was then called.

During the second World War the Japanese army occupied parts of New Guinea and Papua; the Australian military administered the rest. Under the Papua and New Guinea Act of 1949, the two parts were united for administration as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea and put under United Nations International Trusteeship.

The Act also set up a legislative council, under an administrator, with 28 members, of whom three were elected, nine appointed and 16 official. There had to be at least three Papua New Guineans among the appointed members. Under the Papua and New Guinea Act of 1963, the council became a house of assembly, with 64 members, ten of them nominated official members.

Consequently, at its opening in June 1964, the Assembly had a majority of elected Papua New Guineans. The following year, the House set up a Select Committee on Constitutional Development, whose recommendations were put into effect in 1967, when the number of elected seats in the House was increased to 84, and in 1968, when a new ministerial system was adopted and an Administrator’s executive council set up.

In 1970 an appointed spokesman for this council was recognised as the House’s leader for government business. In 1971 the Select Committee recommended that the Territory prepare for self- government. Elections were held in April 1972. The House had 100 elected members, with an additional three appointed and four official members, and Michael Somare became Chief Minister of a coalition government. Self-government was granted at the end of 1973 and in the spring of 1975 Australia gave up certain remaining powers over defence and foreign affairs.

In September 1975 Papua New Guinea proceeded to full independence, becoming an independent sovereign state as a constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, represented by Governor-General, Sir John Guise, a Papua New Guinean.

**Constitutional framework**

[Papua](https://www.britannica.com/place/Papua) [New Guinea’s](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Guinea) [constitution](https://www.britannica.com/topic/constitution-politics-and-law) was adopted in 1975 and has been [amended](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/amended) frequently since then. The country is a [constitutional](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitutional) [monarchy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/monarchy) and a member of the [Commonwealth](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-association-of-states). The British monarch, represented by a governor-general, is head of state, and the prime minister is head of government. The unicameral National Parliament has 111 members who are elected to serve five-year terms. Of those, 89 represent single-member “open” electorates (districts); each of the other 22 represents one of the provincial electorates. Parliament nominates the governor-general, who is then appointed by the British monarch. Parliament also elects the [prime minister](https://www.britannica.com/topic/prime-minister), who in turn appoints the ministers of the National Executive Council (cabinet).

**Local government**

Provincial-level government formerly consisted of 19 elected provincial assemblies and their executives. In 1995 the National Parliament instituted reforms that replaced this system with one in which the members of Parliament (MPs) who were elected to represent the provinces usually became the provincial governors while retaining their seats in the National Parliament. MPs from the “open” districts [constitute](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitute) the membership of the provincial assemblies along with presidents of local-level councils. This has meant that national legislators effectively control executive government at local levels. Although the parliamentarians gained control over considerable funds for their electorates, few provinces have seen appreciable benefits, and in most districts the coverage and quality of government services declined markedly after 1995.

**Justice**

Papua New Guinea’s [judicial system](https://www.britannica.com/topic/judiciary) has at its base a network of district courts presided over by [magistrates](https://www.britannica.com/topic/magistrates-court). The higher-level National Court has the power of [judicial review](https://www.britannica.com/topic/judicial-review) over the lower courts and handles serious civil and criminal matters. The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal, and it also reviews the decisions of the National Court and issues rulings on the constitutionality of laws. The Ombudsman Commission is a significant constitutional body with a major role in monitoring the [ethical](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethical) behaviour of national leaders under the Leadership Code—a set of ethical guidelines and responsibilities for state officers that is established in the constitution—as well as monitoring [public administration](https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-administration).

The courts have dealt increasingly with political disputes over elections, constitutional and parliamentary matters, and Leadership Code cases. Below the formal court system but not [integrated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integrated) into it is a network of more than 1,000 village courts run by part-time local [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community) appointees; these use customary law, mostly in dispute resolution aimed at preventing the escalation of local conflicts. Village court magistrates, almost all male, are assisted by local peace officers. Each province has a system of correctional institutions.

**Political process**

National elections are held every five years, and many hundreds of candidates run for seats in the National Parliament. Commonly, a high proportion—as many as three-fourths—of sitting MPs may lose their seats in a given election cycle, indicating popular discontent with the performance of legislators and reflecting the intensity of competition and fragmented nature of their electorates. Some regions have seen electoral violence and fraud. International and domestic observers, including civil-society watchdog groups, citizen election monitors, and local churches, have for decades [alleged](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alleged) problems of corruption in government.

There are dozens of political parties in Papua New Guinea, although they generally lack clear policy differences or bases in [ideology](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideology) or class. Many of them succeed in gaining parliamentary representation, which prevents the dominance of the legislature by one or two major parties. Parties tend to be, essentially, parliamentary factions based around prominent leaders. Most MPs owe their election to local connections rather than to any [political party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-party) that may have supported them. That has tended to create among elected officials a lack of loyalty toward parties, resulting in a fluid party system and party-hopping by MPs seeking personal advancement—often called “yo-yo politics.” A 2001 law, the Organic Law on the [Integrity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Integrity) of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC), created a degree of relative stability by forbidding individual MPs from leaving or changing parties, although some of its provisions were later successfully challenged in court. Most parties have negligible local organization, although, after the institution of the OLIPPAC, incumbency helped the National Alliance Party to develop a branch structure in the provinces, gain more parliamentary seats, and lead the government for a number of years.

Economy

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| Papua New Guinea (PNG) is richly endowed with natural resources, but exploitation has been hampered by rugged terrain, land tenure issues, and the high cost of developing infrastructure. The economy has a small formal sector, focused mainly on the export of those natural resources, and an informal sector, employing the majority of the population. Agriculture provides a subsistence livelihood for 85% of the people. The global financial crisis had little impact because of continued foreign demand for PNG's commodities.  Mineral deposits, including copper, gold, and oil, account for nearly two-thirds of export earnings. Natural gas reserves amount to an estimated 155 billion cubic meters. Following construction of a $19 billion liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, PNG LNG, a consortium led by ExxonMobil, began exporting liquefied natural gas to Asian markets in May 2014. The project was delivered on time and only slightly above budget. The success of the project has encouraged other companies to look at similar LNG projects. French supermajor Total is expected to begin construction on the Papua LNG project by 2020. Due to lower global commodity prices, resource revenues of all types have fallen dramatically. PNG’s government has recently been forced to adjust spending levels downward.  Numerous challenges still face the government of Peter O'NEILL, including providing physical security for foreign investors, regaining investor confidence, restoring integrity to state institutions, promoting economic efficiency by privatizing moribund state institutions, and maintaining good relations with Australia, its former colonial ruler. Other socio-cultural challenges could upend the economy including chronic law and order and land tenure issues. |