AFCLC

U.S. FORCES INDOPACIFIC

CULTURE GUIDE

Papua New Guinea

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 “Culture General” provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on Oceania.

Part 2 “Culture Specific” describes unique cultural features of Papua New Guinean society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing–an image, word, object, idea, or story–represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value–freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories–what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"–in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains–which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)–as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural

boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview–how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

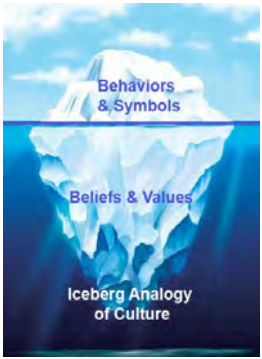
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true–regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through Oceania, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

Oceania comprises some 20 sovereign nations, states, and territories that span a large portion of the Western Pacific Ocean, from Australia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Palau in the West to French Polynesia in the East. The region is so diverse that experts typically divide it into four sub-regions: Australia and New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. While the people in each of the sub-regions share certain traits, all belong to the greater Oceania region. Furthermore, Oceania is characterized by distinct cultures that typically have more in common with each other than with cultures in other parts of the world. While Hawaii is notably a critical part of Polynesia, since it is a US state, it is not included in this guide.

Archaeological evidence suggests early humans first occupied Australia as early as 65,000 years ago, and parts of PNG and the Solomon Islands some 45,000 years ago. In contrast, humans only reached some islands in Polynesia as recently as 1000 BC. Historians tend to agree that early waves of migrants from Southeast Asia first settled in Australia and Melanesia, and later waves occupied Micronesia and Polynesia.

Many early inhabitants subsisted as seafaring hunter gatherers, typically consuming marine life and island vegetation. These early seafarers domesticated plants and animals, transporting

them between islands. As agricultural techniques became more advanced, residents cleared forests and transformed their island environments for cultivation and raising livestock.

Portugal's Ferdinand Magellan was the first notable European explorer to reach Oceania, when in 1521 he briefly landed on the Mariana Islands. Thereafter, English, French, German, and Spanish explorers sought to trade with and colonize the region. By the late 18th century, traders, whalers, and missionaries had settled across Oceania, bringing disease and weapons from Europe, resulting in the death of many islanders. Meanwhile, European powers and the US began to incorporate much of the region as official territories and colonies – political and social legacies that continue to influence the region today.

During the early 20th century, Japan sought to grow its influence in the Pacific Islands. When Germany withdrew its navy from Micronesia during World War I, Japan occupied the former German colonies in 1914, incorporating Micronesia into its expanding empire as an agricultural settler colony. In the 1930s, Japan built military fortifications in Micronesia before moving into Melanesia and Southeast Asia during the Pacific War. By 1942, the Japanese military had occupied large swathes of Oceania, which became the site of some of the war's most significant and violent battles. Over 215,000 Japanese, Australians, Americans, and indigenous islanders died in Oceania between 1942-45.

Over the subsequent decades, calls for independence grew across Oceania. While Australia and New Zealand had gained independence from Britain in the early 20th century, the island nations won independence much later. Samoa was the first, gaining independence from New Zealand in 1962. Several other countries achieved independence afterwards, with Palau the most recent in 1994. Others remain US or French territories. Apart from Australia and New Zealand, which joined in 1945,

most of Oceania joined the United Nations between the late 1970s and 1990s, after decolonization processes empowered them with the territorial sovereignty required for membership.

During the mid-late 20th century, many isolated islands in the region became sites for British, French, and US atomic testing and other military operations. The nuclear and missile tests have caused permanent loss of access to traditional homelands, including the forced removal of some inhabitants, and exposure to radiation causing significant health issues.

In the early 21st century, indigenous groups across Oceania began campaigns to assert their rights and culture, largely led by Aboriginal Australians and Maori in New Zealand. In recent years, many of the smaller island nations have increased attention to climate change, as rising ocean levels will affect inhabitants of Oceania to a greater extent than other regions. Several nations have joined organizations to combat climate change and promote conservation, often collaborating to amplify the small island states' pro-environment message in global fora.

Nevertheless, the region is not always united. In early 2021, Micronesian nations withdrew from the Pacific Islands Forum, an international organization that focuses on regional issues, due to a dispute over their representation in the group. Despite the recent political clash, as of 2023, Oceania remains largely stable and focused on combating the consequences of climate change, notably the rising sea levels, bleached coral reefs, and localized disasters like increasingly powerful storms and wildfires.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. European and Japanese colonial rule drastically changed society in Oceania. Further, the subjugation

of the indigenous population, import of South and East Asian workers, and arrival of European and Japanese immigrants during the 19th-20th centuries permanently altered the region's ethnic and racial makeup, which today varies by location.

While residents of Australia and New Zealand are primarily of European ancestry, those of other nations identify mostly as indigenous to specific islands. Some claim broader identities, as Melanesians, Micronesians, or Polynesians. Some nations such as Fiji and Palau also have significant immigrant populations.

Although all nations in Oceania are nominally democratic, their political structures are varied and relations with former colonial powers continue to influence present-day society. Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu are sovereign nations. Of these countries, Australia, New Zealand, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu are constitutional monarchies with parliamentary systems. Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is head-of-state, represented by a Governor-General, and an elected Prime Minister (PM) serves as head-of-government.

Tonga is also a constitutional monarchy led by a hereditary king, who is head-of-state and commander-in-chief. An elected parliament selects a PM, who is ceremoniously appointed by the King. Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, and Vanuatu are parliamentary republics. In Fiji, Samoa, and Vanuatu, a PM serves as head-of-government and a President head-of-state, known as ***O le Ao Mamalu o le Malo*** (head-of-state) in Samoa. In Kiribati and Nauru, the elected President is head-of-state and government.

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and Palau are Freely Associated States (FAS) under three distinct Compacts of Free Association (COFA) agreements with the US. Each country's COFA outlines its unique terms with the US, while recognizing its sovereignty

and voluntary participation in the COFA, including an independent foreign policy. Under the COFA, among other terms, the US provides visa-free access to the US and payment for access to land for military installations in FAS territories.

Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and American Samoa are US territories, though their relations with the US government vary. Guam is an unincorporated organized territory, the CNMI an unincorporated territory and commonwealth, and American Samoa an unincorporated unorganized territory. While residents of Guam and the CNMI are US citizens, those of American Samoa are considered US nationals, who may reside in the US and apply for citizenship.

Likewise, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna are French territories, whose relations with the French government vary. French Polynesia–comprising the Gambier Islands, Marquesas Islands, Society Islands, Tuamotu Archipelago, and Tubuai Islands–is a semi-autonomous overseas country. New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna are territories known as overseas collectivities.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Many of Oceania's early inhabitants led rich spiritual lives. While little is known of early religions, many were likely polytheistic. Early inhabitants recognized gods and spirits that constructed the universe and influenced everyday life, believing in connections between the natural and spiritual worlds. Accordingly, many Oceanic people venerated ancestral spirits, which influenced outcomes in agriculture, war, pregnancy, and other events.

When European explorers reached Oceania in the 16th century, they introduced Christianity for the first time. In the 17th century, Spanish Roman Catholic missionaries operating from their base in the Philippines began gaining converts across the northern part of the region. In the late 18th century, British Protestant missionaries began proselytizing in eastern Polynesia. By the 19th century, various branches of Christianity had become well established in Oceania, as Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists all established missions in the region.

Residents of several nations in Oceania rejected the colonial introduction of Christianity. Some spiritual leaders sought to isolate their communities from Christianity, while others combined local religious traditions with those of Christianity to form syncretic religions. However, in the 1970s, Christian movements opposed to traditional and syncretic religions flourished in the region. Many of these movements were Pentecostal.

Nevertheless, after centuries of colonization and missionary work, today, most people in Oceania are Christian. Over 90% of inhabitants in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia identify as Christian. Of the small island nations, Fiji is the most religiously diverse. Although most Fijians identify as Christian, over 30% are Hindu or Muslim, primarily due to a large immigrant population. Notably, New Zealand is the only nation in Oceania in which Christianity is not the majority religion, as nearly half of New Zealanders identified with no religion.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Oceanic societies. Regional inhabitants tend to maintain strong

connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. Although residence patterns differ across the region, multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity. In some regions, female-headed households are common.

Most Oceania residents live in urban areas, notably 100% of Nauruans and over 92% of residents of Guam and the CNMI. However, some 74% or more of residents of PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu live in rural areas. As such, housing types vary significantly within and between nations. In much of the region, residents tend to live on one or a handful of principal islands, with the rest scarcely populated or uninhabited. Urbanization has changed life in many areas. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse.

Due to Oceania's diversity, courtship and marriage traditions vary significantly by group and location. While close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, men and women increasingly choose their own partners. Some couples marry in civil, religious, or traditional ceremonies, while others cohabitate but remain unwed.

5. Sex and Gender

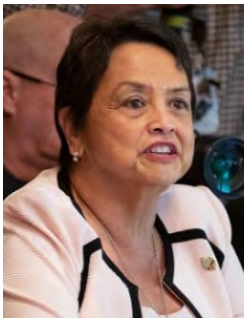
Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

Some cultures in Oceania recognize a broad range of genders besides male and female. Although the cultures of Oceania tend to be patriarchal (men hold most power and authority) and privilege the male's role as provider and leader, some societies are traditionally matrilineal (inheritance, property, and the family name pass from mother to daughter), where mothers determine

a man's rank and status. In some places, primarily in Micronesia and Polynesia, society is organized into a hierarchical system based on heredity, in which rank and status are determined by sex-defined lineages. Conversely, society is more egalitarian (the principle that all people are equal) in Melanesia, where strong, persuasive men often achieve rather than inherit power.

Despite most countries' progressive gender equality laws and policies, women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. In much of the region, women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, often having to balance both domestic duties and employment. Workforce participation rates vary by country. As of 2021, nearly as many women as men were employed in PNG and the Solomon Islands, while the ratio is closer to 50% in Fiji and Samoa.

As of early 2023, women held nearly half of parliamentary seats in New Zealand (the world's fourth-highest rate), just over 44% in Australia, and 11% in Fiji. Women occupied 10% or fewer of parliamentary seats in most other countries in the region. Only New Zealand has had multiple women heads-of-state. Women have been historically more involved in traditional than national political affairs.



Fertility rates have fallen significantly in recent decades, with Australia, Wallis and Futuna, and Palau averaging less than two children per woman. Women in Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Guam typically have an average of three children, though the rates have declined by about half since 1960. Abortion laws vary by country. While Australia's laws are the least restrictive, Palau and Tonga prohibit abortion with no explicit legal exception.

Australia and New Zealand are the only countries in the region that have legalized same-sex marriage. Although same-sex relations are permitted in some cultures, the governments of Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu criminalize homosexuality.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Oceania's linguistic diversity is unique, as the region contains more than 1,000 languages – over 20% of the world's total. PNG alone is home to over 800 languages, more than any other country in the world. Despite this linguistic variety, some linguistic groups are spoken by only a few dozen people. Consequently, some regional languages have become or soon will be extinct, as the children of native speakers opt to learn more widely spoken languages and dialects. English is commonly spoken in much of Oceania and is at least one of the official languages (in addition to indigenous languages) in most states that are not French territories.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

While education has improved across the region in recent years, quality and attainment vary. Social instability, poverty, economic inequality, natural disasters, and emigration negatively impact the delivery and quality of education. Generally, children from poor and rural backgrounds are less likely to attend school and more likely to receive a lower-quality education. While literacy rates in much of Oceania are above 90%, they are much lower in PNG and the Solomon Islands.

Public investment in education varies widely by location and does not always correlate to quality educational systems. In recent years, the Solomon Islands government has spent some 10-13% of GDP on education, though about one in four women remain illiterate. Meanwhile, Vanuatu spends below 5% of GDP on education and has a literacy rate of nearly 89%. Enrollment rates also vary widely. While over 96% of students of the appropriate age in Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, and New Zealand are enrolled in primary education, less than 75% are enrolled in PNG, RMI, and the Solomon Islands.

Many countries have 2-year community colleges but lack 4-year post-secondary institutions. Australia, New Zealand, and PNG have several colleges and universities, as do Guam and the CNMI. The University of the South Pacific was founded in 1968 with its main campus in Fiji and now has campuses in several other countries. Still, many residents travel to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, or institutions outside the region to pursue post-secondary degrees.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While this concept of time remains true for some countries in Oceania, in others, establishing and maintaining relationships takes precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or efficiently accomplishing tasks. The workday tends to run on a similar schedule as in the US, though some businesses keep more informal hours or close for midday breaks, extending their hours into the evening. Social events often start at flexible times, after enough guests arrive.

While concepts of personal space vary by country, keeping an arm's length is the norm. Handshakes are usually the most common form of greeting, though nodding to acquaintances or

kissing close friends and family on the cheek are typical in many places. Conversational touching tends to be minimal except among close friends or family. While direct eye contact is common in places such as Fiji and PNG, intermittent or indirect eye contact is the norm in Kiribati, Samoa, and among certain groups like Aboriginal Australians.

The rhythm of daily life typically changes during national holidays, many of which reflect Christian traditions and historical events. As most countries in Oceania were colonies, many people celebrate national independence days with fanfare.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Much of Oceania's art, architecture, dance, music, poetry, and sports reflect the region's Pacific location, colonial history, and modern global trends. Although dress varies by location and group, many people in Oceania follow recent US or European fashion trends and wear traditional attire only for holidays, special occasions, or ceremonies.

Music and dance vary greatly by country. Global rock and pop music, along with local variants that feature folk and country genres, are common across Oceania. Traditional music and dance in Micronesia and Polynesia tend to be connected with storytelling and poetry, while Melanesian dances usually emphasize movement, rituals, and the supernatural world. In Australia, indigenous dances are typically closely connected with music and song.

The most popular sport across the region is rugby, particularly in Australia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. National teams compete in rugby matches internationally and across Oceania. Some locals have relocated to play for international teams, becoming a mainstay of the sport. Some 20% of players in the 2011 Rugby World Cup identified as Pacific Islanders. In Micronesia, sports

introduced by Japan and the US are most popular: baseball in the FSM and Palau, and basketball in RMI. Soccer, known in many areas as football, is also widely played across Oceania. Other popular sports include cricket, swimming, and field athletics.

Traditional handicrafts such as woodcarving, leatherwork, and weaving are prevalent in many parts of Oceania. While literature was primarily an oral tradition in much of the region, popular novelists and poets have recently explored their unique history and cultural heritage. Australia's Patrick White won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 for his psychological narrative work.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region based on local products and tastes, residents tend to rely on many of the same staple ingredients, notably seafood, starches like taro, cassava, and yams, and tropical fruits. Many dishes are cooked in coconut milk, and dried coconut is a popular ingredient. Pit-roasted pig, fish, and vegetables are common cuisine for ceremonies and celebrations in much of the region. The consumption of high-calorie, processed foods and Western-style fast food has become increasingly common in recent decades.

Health in Oceania has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. While Australia and New Zealand have more physicians per person than the US, all other countries have far fewer. Accordingly, many residents seek healthcare outside their home nation if immigration policies, personal finances, or government programs allow for treatment abroad. Inhabitants of isolated islands and rural areas face challenges to healthcare access.

Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease, account for most of the deaths in Oceania, though communicable diseases account for over 22% of deaths in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands and over 30% in PNG. Indigenous and low-income inhabitants often face more health challenges than their compatriots. Obesity is a significant problem – of the world's 10 countries with the highest rates of obesity, 9 are in Oceania. The availability of imported processed and preserved foods are largely responsible for Oceania's high levels of obesity.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Prior to colonization, most regional inhabitants subsisted on fishing, farming, and localized trade. In the colonial era, foreign governments and companies extracted natural resources such as minerals, agricultural products, oil, and fish. Today, tourism is the largest sector in much of Oceania. While Australia and New Zealand have advanced economies and financial markets, most other nations rely on foreign aid. Many inhabitants are also reliant on remittances from relatives living abroad. Economic dependence on foreign governments and organizations has caused many governments in the region to pursue rapid expansion of their tourism and extractive industry sectors.

Australia is by far the largest economy in Oceania, with GDP over $1.67 trillion in 2022. GDP per capita in Australia and New Zealand is more than double that of other countries in Oceania. Fiji, Palau, Nauru, and the US and French territories tend to have relatively high living standards, with GDP per capita generally above $10,000. On the other hand, GDP per capita in Kiribati,

the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu is below $3,000, where many residents live below the poverty line.

From 2020-21, Oceania confronted the collapse of the tourism industry and decreased remittances, largely due to COVID-19 pandemic. Assuming the pandemic continues to recede and trade and tourism rebound, experts suggest GDP growth will average 4% in 2023 before stabilizing at 3% in 2024-2027.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Roads form the primary infrastructure in Oceania, though quality varies by country and tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Ports and piers are vital for local transportation and trade. Though air infrastructure is substandard in many places, airports are essential for tourism and reducing many islands' isolation.

Despite some investment in solar energy on outer rural islands, Oceania is largely dependent on fossil fuels. Apart from Australia, much of the region has limited energy resources and must import oil and gas to meet growing energy needs. Some countries, notably New Zealand, generate a large share of energy from hydropower.

New Zealand ranks highest in Oceania in a 2022 worldwide press freedom ranking. Observers generally consider media to be free in much of the region, though journalists are sometimes victims of government intimidation, threats of censorship, and eroding independence. Telecommunications infrastructure varies. As of 2021, Palau had the highest rate of mobile phone users at over 130 subscriptions per 100 people, compared to less than 40 in the FSM and RMI. Internet use ranges from about 15% in PNG to nearly 96% in Australia.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Oceanic society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in PNG.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Situated in the South Pacific Ocean, Papua New Guinea (PNG) comprises the eastern half of New Guinea Island and hundreds of smaller islands to the north and east (see p. 1-2 of *Political and Social Relations*). It is home to thousands of diverse cultures and tribes, many of whom have inhabited the region for millennia. In the late 19th century, European colonizers divided PNG into a German territory in the North and British possession in the South, while the Netherlands occupied the western portion of New Guinea Island (present-day Papua, Indonesia).

In the 20th century, the eastern half of the island came under control of the British Commonwealth and later Australia. PNG created democratic institutions and gained independence in 1975. Since then, the country has experienced several relatively peaceful transfers of power, independence movements on Bougainville Island, and many challenges to the country's human development.

Early History

Archeological evidence suggests that groups migrating from Southeast Asia first inhabited present-day PNG some 50,000 years ago. In Kuk, located in the central highlands, inhabitants began to practice intensive agriculture around 5000 BC. This advancement, developed locally and without outside influence, was one of the world's first instances of fruit and vegetable domestication. Later, around 1100-900 BC, a second wave of Austronesian peoples arrived from Southeast Asia, bringing with them new fishing techniques, pottery, and pigs.

European Arrival

The western half of New Guinea played an important role in the Asian spice trade and was home to several powerful sultanates and European colonies. Since the eastern half was largely separated from these settlements by rugged terrain (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), European and Asian explorers did not investigate much of PNG until the 16th century.

In 1526, Portuguese sailor Jorge de Meneses landed in the region after a tropical storm blew his voyage off course. He named the region ***Ilhas dos Papuas*** (Islands of the Curly-Haired People) based on the appearance of the natives he met on his expedition. Two decades later, Spanish navigator Yñigo Ortiz de Retez arrived on the main island and renamed it New Guinea, as the inhabitants' appearance reminded him of the residents of the Guinea Coast in West Africa. Despite this initial contact, European traders and explorers rarely ventured deeper into New Guinea over the following centuries. Instead, many sailors charted the coast of the region for naval maps but ignored the country's largely mountainous interior.

Early Colonization

Western interest in present-day PNG increased during the 19th century. British Christian missionaries (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) arrived in the 1870s, hoping to convert the numerous previously uncontacted tribes in the territory. Simultaneously, British and American whaling crews began to frequent the Bismarck Archipelago off the northeastern coast of New Guinea, bringing attention to the abundant natural resources in the largely unexplored region. In 1873, the British, who had settled neighboring Australia a century earlier, founded Port Moresby (present-day PNG's capital) on the southern coast of the island, serving as a base for further colonial expeditions.

Meanwhile, the newly formed German Empire began to expand its colonial holdings, hoping to establish itself as a dominant

power in the Pacific. Consequently, the German government gave Godeffroy's of Hamburg, a German corporation, a charter to settle in northeastern New Guinea to develop copra (dried coconut) and coconut oil industries. British colonial officials based in Australia, hoping to stave off the German incursion into their sphere of influence, attempted to annex the entire eastern half of New Guinea Island in 1883. While the British government in London, England rejected this move for fear of antagonizing Germany, British colonization efforts continued on the island.

In 1884, Germany officially annexed the northeastern quadrant of New Guinea, while the British established a protectorate over the Southeast, which they called British New Guinea. Soon after the European powers had claimed control over their respective colonies, colonial officials and prospectors sent exploratory missions into the interior of New Guinea and its surrounding islands. As a result, the discovery of significant gold deposits in the Mambare River and on Woodlark Island, both in British New Guinea, led to a gold rush in 1895, bringing waves of Australian fortune-seekers to the territory.

Australian Control

In 1905, British New Guinea became the Territory of Papua, likely renamed for the Gulf of Papua to the south of the main island. In 1906, the British transferred control of their protectorate to newly independent Australia, a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). Upon the 1914 outbreak of World War I (1914-18), which pitted the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, and the US) against the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire), Australian troops invaded German New Guinea on behalf of the Commonwealth. Australian troops overran the German positions, quickly ousting the relatively few German troops in the area in late 1914. After this victory, Australia's military managed the former German holdings, while its government considered Papua an overseas territory and governed it separately.

In 1921, the League of Nations (the precursor to the United Nations, or UN) formalized Australian control of the former German holdings as part of the Mandate of New Guinea. With Australian control of the entire eastern half of New Guinea Island, gold prospectors continued their expeditions into its interior. These expeditions not only uncovered more natural resources, but between 1932-36, shed light on the existence of about a million tribal Papua New Guineans, who foreigners had not previously been aware of. The first contact with these groups brought renewed attention to the region, with anthropologists arriving in both territories to study the tribes, many of whom lived in a manner mostly unchanged for millennia. Around this time, scholars like American Margaret Mead and Polish-British Bronislaw Malinowski helped establish the field of modern anthropology through their field work in PNG.

The Pacific War

Meanwhile, tensions were rising among global powers in the greater Asia-Pacific region. In 1937, Japan invaded China, igniting the Second Sino-Japanese War that eventually became part of the greater conflict of World War II (WWII). In late 1940, Japan entered WWII on the side of the Axis Powers (Nazi Germany and Italy) against the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others). About a year later, on December 7/8, 1941, Japan launched a surprise air attack on US naval forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and other Asia-Pacific colonial sites. This event triggered the Pacific War, a term that refers to WWII events in the Pacific and East Asia.

In January 1942, Japanese forces landed at Rabaul in northern New Guinea, invading much of the northern part of the island and aiming to move south to capture the Papuan capital of Port Moresby. However, Australian and American troops quickly reinforced the city, as Gen Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander for the Southwest Pacific Area, needed it as a

beachhead to retake the island and eventually launch an attack to dislodge the Japanese from the Philippines.

Fighting in Papua was intense, with both sides suffering sustained casualties. While the rugged mountain terrain of the Highlands helped protect Port Moresby from Japanese advances, tropical diseases like malaria took a heavy toll on both sides. Eventually, repeated Allied air raids and naval patrols in late 1942 interrupted Japanese supply lines and allowed Australian and US troops to retake the strategic Japanese beachheads at Buna and Gona in eastern New Guinea, despite tremendous resistance from entrenched Japanese forces. While the Japanese Navy attempted to retake the region some months later, Allied bombing raids of Axis positions in the Bismarck Archipelago impeded their efforts.

In April 1943, Japanese forces attempted once again to retake the island through a series of largescale air raids as part of an offensive named Operation I-Go. While the bombings became the largest Japanese aerial campaign since the attack on Pearl Harbor, they did not impede Allied advances deeper into New Guinea, towards the Japanese-occupied Dutch colonies to the west. Although the Allies controlled significant portions of the island, smaller-scale battles continued until 1945, by which time the Allied forces had defeated the remaining Japanese troops on the island in the final months of WWII. Over the course of the New Guinea campaign from 1942-45, scholars estimate that some 240,000 servicemembers died, most of whom were Japanese soldiers, who succumbed to tropical diseases.

Throughout the conflict, both Japanese and Australian forces treated native Papua New Guineans harshly. Japanese troops forcibly requisitioned food, displaced locals, and forced them into

service. Scholars estimate that at any point in the conflict, some 37,000 locals were working as forced laborers. The Australians were typically not as harsh as the Japanese in their treatment of Papua New Guineans in the Highlands region. Nevertheless, the Australians also forced many locals to work for the Allies by helping replenish supply lines and return lost or wounded servicemembers to friendly territory.

The Trust Territory

After Japan's unconditional surrender in September 1945, Papua and New Guinea came under Australian control. In 1949, the UN designated the Territory of Papua and the Territory of New Guinea as Trust Territories under Australian supervision and tasked the country with preparing both regions for eventual self-rule. Later that year, the Australian Parliament passed the Papua and New Guinea Act, which formally merged both colonies into a single political entity for the first time.

The Australians created government institutions in their Trust Territory, establishing a legislative council in 1951. While the council contained some local representation, most members were unelected and represented Australian, instead of Papua New Guinean, interests. During the following decade, Australia administered the region, moving slowly to prepare it for self-rule.

After the UN recommended that Australia cede its control over the legislature in 1962, the Australian government issued a series of reforms and replaced the council with the House Assembly of Papua and New Guinea in 1964. The first Papua New Guinean election, in which residents had universal suffrage (see p. 2 of *Sex and Gender*), determined the new body, which contained a majority of Papua New Guinean representatives.

Over the following years, the House Assembly accelerated the pace of reforms needed for self-rule, pushing Australia to grant the territory more freedoms. In 1971, the legislature formally

adopted the name Papua New Guinea, and in 1973, the body agreed on its western border with Indonesia (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), which maintained control of the western half of New Guinea Island.

Independence

After a prolonged transfer of power, Australia granted PNG full independence on September 16, 1975, today celebrated as the country's Independence Day (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). Michael Somare, a member of the newly established Papua New Guinean Parliament (which replaced the House Assembly upon independence –see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*), became the country's first Prime Minister (PM).

Democratic Consolidation and Political Developments: The early political system lent itself to power shifts, notably a series of leadership changes in Parliament during the first decade after independence. To this day, no party has won a majority in the legislature after a general election, which has forced PNG's politicians to form coalition governments that depend on agreements between various parties to reach a majority. The political system also allows for no-confidence votes that easily topple governments (see p. 5-7 of *Political and Social Relations*). Moreover, PNG continued as a decentralized state in which authority is dispersed to the local level, particularly in rural areas.

In part because the first 13 years of self-rule saw four different governments collapse from inter-party disagreements, PNG's members of Parliament passed a law in 1991 that prevented no-confidence votes in the first 18 months after a government's formation and a year prior to a general election. During this time, politicians including Somare (twice), Julius Chan, and Paias Wingti cycled through the PM position in rapid succession, limiting the government's ability to implement sustained policies.

The Bougainville Conflict

Meanwhile, the territory of Bougainville, comprising two islands off the eastern coast of PNG (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), had long asserted its independence from the central government in Port Moresby. In 1975, the region declared its independence from PNG, citing cultural differences with the mainland and its preference to become part of the neighboring Solomon Islands. After this unilateral declaration, PNG's Parliament responded by temporarily cutting off funds to the region, though it eventually negotiated an agreement that gave Bougainville greater local governance in exchange for remaining part of PNG.

While the conflict was dormant for a few years, tensions flared again in 1988. Many residents in Bougainville were opposed to the central government's management of the Panguna mine in their territory, which was located on one of the world's largest copper deposits and the source of significant income for the country (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*).

An Australian firm's majority control of the mine, among other issues, steadily led to increased tensions between residents and central government officials. In 1988, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), an armed separatist group, formed to fight for the region's independence. The following year, BRA leader Francis Ona again declared Bougainville independent and confronted Papua New Guinean forces in a series of armed clashes.

The fighting between the BRA and PNG soon engulfed much of Bougainville, and observers accused both sides of human rights abuses. While PNG mostly withdrew from Bougainville in 1990, the central government imposed a military blockade on the region. Additionally, Papua New Guinean forces frequently crossed into the Solomon Islands illegally to attack BRA leaders hiding just over the border.

In 1990, the BRA formed the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) to manage the territory. Nevertheless, the armed group held weak control of the region, and different factions of the BRA soon broke into formal divisions that competed for power, as the BIG exerted only limited control over Ona and his fighters. While Bougainville's civilian government was unable to control all its territory or successfully negotiate with PNG, its civilian population suffered from the blockade that prevented necessary resources and medicines from reaching the region.

After PM Wingti formed a coalition government following the 1992 general election, armed confrontations to retake Bougainville escalated, as the PM advocated for a military solution to the conflict. The increase of violence forced many residents to flee to the Solomon Islands or into refugee centers that Papua New Guinean or BRA forces protected. Consequently, by 1994, the conflict had displaced about one third of Bougainville's population.

Peace Process: Julius Chan was elected PM in 1994, a political change that marked a departure from Wingti's military push to retake the region. Although Chan brokered a ceasefire with BIG and BRA leaders, when he convened a peace conference later that year, BRA leaders failed to attend. While the PNG and moderate BIG representatives in attendance made progress in the negotiations, relations broke down in the following years after military clashes undermined trust between the groups.

In early 1997, Chan was eager to resolve the conflict before a general election later that year and hired a British mercenary firm to retake Bougainville and secure the Panguna mine. After news of the mercenary contract broke in March of that year, members of the PNG Defence Force mutinied, rioting in Port Moresby and holding the Parliament under siege for a night. The riots forced the PM to cancel the mercenary contract, and Chan lost his parliamentary seat in the election that June.

Bill Skate was elected PM, renewing hopes for a breakthrough in the peace negotiations. In early 1998, both sides agreed to a preliminary deal whereby Papua New Guinean forces would withdraw from Bougainville, while the BRA would disarm under the supervision of an international peacekeeping force. Subsequently, and after years of negotiations between PNG and Bougainville, as well as peace talks among different factions of Bougainville fighters, both sides agreed on a peace deal in 2001. The agreement created a more independent Autonomous Bougainville Government within PNG and arranged to hold a referendum on Bougainville independence within 20 years of the deal.

While Ona and a small group of BRA forces did not adhere to the agreement, most leaders in Bougainville held to the terms of the deal. In 2005, Ona died from malaria in a militarized "no-go zone," ending the last major challenge to the implementation of the 2001 agreement. In total, sources estimate that up to 20,000 people died in the Bougainville conflict.

Post-War Difficulties

While PNG was in the process of ending the Bougainville conflict, it faced severe difficulties. Extreme weather, starting with the 1997-98 El Niño phenomenon, affected some areas in PNG. The climatic event led to severe droughts throughout PNG, placing over a million Papua New Guineans at risk of malnutrition or starvation and heavily impacting the mining and agricultural sectors (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). To prevent famine, the governments of PNG and Australia mobilized foreign aid and provided foodstuffs to at-risk communities (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). Furthermore, in 1998, a major earthquake, which was immediately followed by a large tsunami, struck northern PNG (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). Scholars estimate that the two related events killed at least 2,200 people and displaced more than 10,000 in that region.

Likewise, economic stagnation starting in the late 1990s began to take a toll on Papua New Guineans, who suffered from recession, inflation, and the collapse of PNG's national bank. Economic difficulties and unrest, which had been on the rise since 1997, came to a head prior to the 2002 general election. Amidst protests and violence, Michael Somare once again was elected PM despite claims of electoral irregularities and misconduct.

During Somare's third term, violent crime increased across the country (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*), which politicians claimed was the result of economic volatility. To help remedy the situation, Australia sent a police force in 2004, although the following year, PNG's Supreme Court ruled that the use of foreign police was unconstitutional. Likewise, to help improve the economy, Somare's government legalized gambling and casinos, hoping to attract greater foreign investment and tourism. Nevertheless, a typhoon (a powerful tropical storm known as a hurricane in the Western hemisphere) in 2007 hampered the economic recovery by causing widespread devastation in eastern PNG.

Political Crisis: While Somare was reelected PM for a fourth time in 2007, he lost control of the government late in his term. In 2011, PNG's public prosecutor temporarily suspended the PM due to previous misconduct. During his suspension, Somare announced he would extend his absence for health reasons and subsequently declared he would retire from politics. The Parliament designated Peter O'Neill as interim PM in August of that year. However, Somare returned to PNG the following month and challenged O'Neill's appointment. Somare claimed that because he had made his resignation under duress, it was invalid. For the following 6 months, O'Neill and Somare led rival governments. In early 2012, a military mutiny demanded Somare's return as the uncontested PM. Eventually, elections in 2012 resulted in O'Neill wielding more parliamentary support than his rival, and Somare accepted defeat.

Australian Migrant Detention: In 2013, PNG agreed to host an Australian migrant processing center and resettle asylum seekers in exchange for generous foreign aid from the Australian government. The move proved controversial in both countries, with human rights activists claiming the center did not meet PNG's constitutional definition for humane conditions. Detainees in the center rioted several times due to the poor living conditions, and in 2015, over 400 began a hunger strike to protest their detention. Tensions over the processing center lessened somewhat after the Australian government announced it would begin to resettle asylum seekers in Australian-run facilities. In 2016, the Papua New Guinean Supreme Court ruled that hosting the center was unconstitutional, leading to its eventual closure in 2017 after the US had agreed to resettle some of the asylum seekers.

O'Neill's Turbulent Government

Meanwhile, a series of corruption probes and claims of governmental impropriety marked O'Neill's terms in government from 2011-19. Upon taking office, O'Neill tightened his control of PNG's institutions. He disbanded the country's anti-corruption task force after a court issued an arrest warrant for him due to claims of fraudulent payments linked to his office. While the PM fought the warrant in a series of lawsuits, persistent corruption scandals tarnished his reputation. In 2016, the PM survived a no-confidence vote after weeks of protests calling for his ouster. Despite the repeated scandals and public disapproval, O'Neill won reelection in 2017.

O'Neill's second term was also controversial, especially as the PM fired government figures associated with the anti-corruption probes that he faced. Public discontent over a lack of progress on government projects launched a second wave of protests against the PM in 2019. Faced with a lack of parliamentary support and unable to delay an impending vote of no-confidence, O'Neill resigned from his post in May of that year. In

2020, the former PM was arrested twice for irregularities in the purchase of generators, although a court vacated the charges soon after.

Marape's Government and the Bougainville Question

After O'Neill left office, his Finance Minister, James Marape, was elected PM after a complicated parliamentary struggle for power. While initially close with O'Neill, Marape's insistence on governing independently and selecting his own cabinet distanced him from his predecessor, who rapidly became a political rival.

In late 2019, Bougainville held its referendum on independence, fulfilling one of the 2001 peace accord clauses. About 88% of registered voters participated in the vote, which came back resoundingly in favor of full independence. About 98% of the population voted for separation from PNG. However, Marape reiterated his concerns about Bougainville's desire for independence, fearing that PNG's Parliament would not ratify a secession agreement. Marape also voiced concerns that other regions seeking greater autonomy would imitate Bougainville's planned separation. Instead, he promoted economic independence for Bougainville under a political union with PNG. While Bougainville's leaders stated that anything less than full independence would be unacceptable, negotiations between the governments remain ongoing.

In 2022, Marape was reelected for a second term, in elections marked by violence and claims of voting irregularities. While the COVID-19 pandemic (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*) had severely impacted PNG during Marape's first term, many Papua New Guineans believed a second term would help finalize negotiations with Bougainville. Both sides agreed on a 2027 deadline for a resolution of the territory's status, though Marape insisted that 2027 was the limit for the settlement of negotiations, not necessarily for Bougainville's full independence.

Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Many Papua New Guinean myths tell the stories of ***masalai***, ancestor-spirits associated with natural forces or locations in the wilderness, particularly dangerous or remote areas. *Masalai* often manifest as animals with unusual characteristics or as humanlike creatures with fatal flaws that make them vulnerable.

The *Masalai* of Sombore: A myth from Morobe Province in northern PNG tells the tale of a *masalai* living by Sombore village. Taking the form of a large ogre, the creature terrorized the locals and frequently hunted humans for food, causing the population to dwindle slowly. An elderly woman, hoping to save herself, sought shelter in a cave for several years, tending to her crops at night when the *masalai* slept. One day, the elderly woman cut herself while cooking, and from her spilled blood, two children sprung from the ground.

The children, Ningum and Sangina, eventually grew strong and learned of the *masalai*. After training and crafting bows and arrows, Ningum and Sangina confronted the spirit, despite their mother's protests. In response, the *masalai* turned his skin to stone, which made him unaffected by the humans' attacks, and chased the siblings back to their mother's cave. Once there, the *masalai* attempted to strike the old woman, who, in her fury over her sons' disobedience, transformed into a bird. While lifting his arm to swat the bird to the ground, the ogre revealed his underarm, which had not turned into stone. Although Ningum and Sangina shot this vulnerable spot and killed the *masalai*, the bird that their mother had become flew away forever as punishment for the children's disobedience.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Independent State of Papua New Guinea (PNG)
Independen Stet bilong Papua Niugini (Tok Pisin)
Independen Stet bilong Papua Niu Gini (Hiri Motu)

Political Borders

Indonesia: 509 mi
Coastline: 3,201 mi

Capital

Port Moresby

Demographics

PNG's population of about 9.8 million is growing at an annual rate of around 2%. About 13% of the population lives in urban areas, primarily in the coastal cities of Port Moresby and Lae on the eastern side of the main island of New Guinea.

Flag

Adopted in 1975, PNG's flag divides diagonally from the upper hoist side corner. A yellow bird of paradise is centered on a red background on the top right half, and a Southern Cross constellation of five white stars is centered on a black background on the lower left half. A young student, Susan Karike, designed the flag as part of a competition. The bird of paradise, native to New Guinea Island, symbolizes unity of the nation's tribes. The Southern Cross is visible in PNG's night sky and represents the country's close connections with Australia and other nations in Oceania. Black, red, and yellow are traditional colors of PNG and symbolize local clothing and art (see p. 1, 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Geography

Located primarily on the eastern half of New Guinea, PNG borders Indonesia to the west. The country stretches from the Equator to the Torres Strait, just north of Australia. New Guinea Island comprises some 85% of PNG's landmass, while about 600 small islands and low-lying atolls (ring-shaped islands at least partly made of coral) in the Pacific Ocean, primarily to the north and east of the mainland, account for the remaining 15%. Located to the northeast of New Guinea, New Britain is the largest island of the Bismarck Archipelago, and Bougainville is the largest of the Solomon Islands Archipelago. PNG's total land area is 174,850 sq mi, slightly larger than California.

PNG has a diverse and rugged landscape with tropical forests, plateaus, mountains, grasslands, swamplands, coastal plains, beaches, and coral reefs. Shared between PNG and Indonesian Papua, the New Guinea rainforest is the world's third largest rainforest by area and contains at least 5% of the world's known species. About 65% of PNG is covered by tropical rainforest, which transitions to dry savanna woodlands towards the southwest and near Port Moresby. The New Guinea Highlands, also known as the Central Range, comprise a long mountain range and plateau that span most of the central portion of the island, from the West to the Southeast. At 14,793 ft, PNG's tallest mountain is Mount Wilhelm, located in the Highlands' central Bismarck Range. The Sepik River is PNG's longest (700 mi), which winds northwest from the central highlands and then east to its mouth at the Bismarck Sea.

Climate

PNG has a tropical climate that is generally hot and humid year-round. Conditions vary by altitude, and high temperatures range between 86-91°F in the lowlands, with lows from 72-77°F. In the highlands, the average highs range between 85-89°F, with lows of 59-62°F. The northern part of PNG experiences a dry season from May-October and a northwest monsoon season from December-March. Towards the south and east, the wet season lasts from March-August. Annual rainfall varies significantly. While Port Moresby receives less than 50 in, the mountainous areas in New Britain often receive about 300 in.

Natural Hazards

PNG lies along the Ring of Fire, a belt of active volcanoes bordering the Pacific Ocean that accounts for 75% of volcanic eruptions and 90% of earthquakes around the world. In 2022, the Manam Volcano on Manam Island, some 8 mi north of New Guinea Island, erupted, causing a layer of ash to fall on houses, gardens, wells, and water catchment facilities. Despite frequent eruptions, early detection and evacuation plans help prevent casualties.

PNG is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, typhoons (powerful tropical storms called hurricanes in the Western hemisphere flooding, landslides, and wildfires. Amid an array of natural disasters in 1998 (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), PNG experienced a 7.0 magnitude earthquake, which caused three tsunami waves that destroyed villages, killed over 2,200 people, and displaced over 10,000 in northern PNG. Flooding, which often damages infrastructure, primarily occurs in the lowlands and coastal plains. In 2020, floods near Lae damaged about 500 homes and affected around 1,000 people. During monsoons, landslides pose a threat in the Highlands, which rank among the world's worst locations for landslides, primarily due to the steep terrain, high annual rainfall, and frequency of earthquakes. Landslides often damage homes, infrastructure, and forests. In early 2021, at least 15 people died in a landslide in central PNG.

Environmental Issues

Decades of commercial logging, agricultural activities, mining, and industrial development have caused extensive deforestation (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*). From 1972-2002, PNG lost some 24% of its forest cover, resulting in habitat loss and threatening biodiversity. About 70% of logging is illegal, and logging companies often threaten and terrorize locals to permit logging on their land. Illegal logging still threatens PNG's forests, which disproportionately affects communities in rural areas that depend on the forest for shelter, food, drinking water, and maintaining traditional lifestyles (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

PNG has since established the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) strategy under the Paris Agreement on climate change. It has introduced several national parks, wildlife reserves, and sanctuaries to preserve the country's forests. Nevertheless, the government lacks measures to protect local communities and their land rights. Some police protect loggers and their company vehicles, while locals face police brutality (see "Social Relations" below) for peacefully blocking roads and protesting logging.

Meanwhile, copper and gold mining pollute fields, rivers, and the ocean and contribute to a lack of accessible drinking water. Partly due to mining, poor waste management, and logging, about 60% of PNG's population lacks access to safe drinking water. Consequently, the government introduced the Water Supply Sanitation Development Plan in 2015. Nevertheless, dangerous mine waste from foreign mining operations has caused water contamination and mine closures. As of 2023, negotiations to reopen some mines are still ongoing.

Other issues arise due to global warming and forest degradation. Residents of the Carteret Islands, northeast of Bougainville, have lost about 50% of their land due to rising sea levels, making them one of the first communities in PNG displaced by climate change.

Government

PNG is a parliamentary democracy under the constitutional monarchy of the United Kingdom (UK). The country divides into 20 provinces, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (see p. 8-10 of *History and Myth*), and the National Capital District, each administered by elected governors and local governments. The governors also serve as representatives in Parliament, making their roles federal, regional, executive, and legislative. Adopted in 1975, PNG's constitution has been amended several times, most recently in 2016. The constitution outlines PNG's system of government and the fundamental rights of its citizens.

Executive Branch

As part of the Commonwealth of Nations (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), King Charles III of the UK is the ceremonial head-of-state and represented in PNG by a Governor-General. The British monarch appoints the Governor-General following a parliamentary nomination. Since 2017, Sir Bob Dadae has served as Governor-General and is in his second 6-year term. A second term is permitted only if the candidate wins a two-thirds majority vote by Members of Parliament (MPs). Although the role is mainly ceremonial, the Governor-General appoints the Supreme Court Chief Justice.

The Prime Minister (PM) is head-of-government and appointed by Parliament. Once appointed, the PM must form a coalition government from numerous political parties (see "Political Climate" below). Parliament confirms the PM's position through three votes of no confidence after the first 18, 30, and last 12 months of the PM's 5-year term. The PM is responsible for appointing ministers of the Cabinet, which is called the National Executive Council (NEC), among various other governing duties.

Since 2019, James Marape has served as PM after replacing and completing the term of former PM Peter O'Neill, who lost a

no confidence vote (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). PM Marape was reappointed in 2022 and faces his first vote of no confidence in February 2024. If Marape loses the vote of no confidence, a new PM must form a government. If a PM loses a vote of no confidence in the last 12 months of the 5-year term, PNG must hold a national election.

Legislative Branch

PNG's legislature is the 118-seat single-chamber National Parliament. In addition to the 22 MPs elected from single-member constituencies in the 20 provinces, Autonomous Region of Bougainville, and the National Capital District, 96 MPs are elected in a limited preferential, also known as ranked, voting system. MPs are elected for 5-year terms.

Since 2002, the preferential voting system requires voters to select candidates as their first, second, and third preference for their constituency. If no candidate achieves a majority of first-choice votes, the second- and third-choice votes received by the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes are distributed to the respective candidates in a process that continues until one candidate has at least 50% of the total votes. The next election is scheduled for 2027. Since gaining independence in 1975 (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), women have been notably underrepresented in Parliament (see p. 2 of *Sex and Gender*).

Judicial Branch

PNG's judiciary is based on common and customary law and includes a National Court, Supreme Court, and district, local, military, taxation, and various other courts. In addition, about 1,000 village courts are based on customary laws, which are the set of customs and beliefs that a community accepts as rules of conduct. Traditionally led by a ***bikman*** ("big man"), villages elect council and committee members, who settle local disputes.

The judiciary's highest court and final court of appeal, the Supreme Court, consists of a Chief Justice, Deputy Chief

Justice, and 43 judges. The Governor-General appoints the Chief Justice upon advice from the NEC and National Justice Administration Minister. The Judicial and Legal Services Commission, a body under PNG's Department of Justice and Attorney General, appoints the remaining judges. The Supreme Court judges also serve on the National Court bench, which hears civil and criminal cases. While PNG's judges are appointed for 10-year terms, non-citizen judges serve 3-year terms, all of which can be renewed or extended.

Political Climate

PNG's political system is decentralized and complex, partly due to its coalition system and dispersed power. Political parties gain support largely through voter appeal by having charismatic leaders, who focus on trending economic, political, and social issues, rather than fixed policies or ideology. PNG has universal suffrage for people aged 18 and older.

Political parties endorse candidates who they believe will be successful in an election. In the 2022 election, the 51 registered political parties endorsed some 1,276 of 3,625 candidates. This endorsement provides better access to financial support, and in the past nine elections, about 80% of successful candidates had been endorsed by political parties. Once elected to Parliament, political parties' MPs form coalitions and bargain for ministries to solidify the power dynamics before appointing a PM, who in turn selects members of the NEC. Political parties typically maintain power through votes of no confidence, which determine political power and allow a strong opposition coalition to oust a PM.

PM Marape was elected unopposed in 2022 and formed a coalition by calling for unity in PNG. Today, PM Marape's Papua New Guinea Union (PANGU) Party has some 39 MPs and 22 NEP Ministers. The coalition comprises mainly the PANGU and offshoot parties, as well as some independent MPs. The main

opposition party, led by former PM Peter O'Neill, holds some 14 seats. Although PANGU holds the most seats in Parliament as of mid-2023, defection from political parties and coalitional changes are common.

Further, MPs often lose their seats in each election cycle, contributing to the fragmented and competitive nature of PNG's elections. To reduce this volatility, in 2001, the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates forbade MPs from arbitrarily changing parties. However, the law has had limited success, as MPs continue to change party allegiance, notably to form coalitions, contributing to the ever-changing party system.

In the 2022 election, ballot counts were delayed due to missing ballots, fraud allegations, disrupted voting, and violence. Some 50 people died in election-related violence. PM Marape sought to address this issue by telling Parliament that an update to the electoral process was necessary and suggested electronic voting to reduce voting fraud by permitting only one vote per citizen.

Despite the presence of anti-corruption organizations, such as the Ombudsman Commission that provides government oversight and investigates complaints against ministries and local authorities, PNG historically struggles with corruption (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). In a 2023 corruption perceptions index, PNG ranked 130 of 180 countries, and some 96% of people believe the government has a corruption problem. As of 2023, the United Nations (UN) is funding the PNG Anti-Corruption Project 2021-24 to combat corruption by assisting in the creation of laws and enhancing the government's investigatory and prosecutorial capacities.

Another major issue is the political status of Bougainville (see p. 8-10 of *History and Myth*). For decades, Bougainville residents have sought independence or incorporation into the Solomon

Islands, which lie to the south of Bougainville. In 2019, an overwhelming majority (about 98%) voted for independence in a referendum. In subsequent negotiations, the government and Bougainvilleans agreed they would reach a resolution to the conflict by 2027.

Defense

The Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) consists of some 4,000 active-duty personnel in the Land, Air Operations, and Maritime Elements. In recent years, the PNGDF has focused on civil emergency assistance and defending the state, though it lacks the capacity to perform its core roles of maintaining internal stability and defense. A Commander advises the Minister of Defence, who leads the PNGDF. As of 2023, the PNGDF relies on Australia, New Zealand, the US, and China for military equipment and other forms of assistance.

Land Element: PNG's Land Element is an underfunded, small force of about 3,700 active-duty troops, consisting of a special operations unit; 2 light maneuver battalions; and a combat support battalion, unit, and squadron.

Maritime Element: As PNG's naval branch, the Maritime Element consists of about 200 active-duty troops with its headquarters at Port Moresby.

Air Operations Element: Composed of some 100 active-duty personnel, PNG's Air Operations Element has a transport squadron and a transport helicopter squadron.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Air Element

Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel

Major

Captain

First Lieutenant

Second Lieutenant

Senior Officer Cadet

Junior Officer Cadet

Warrant Officer

Sergeant

Corporal

Lance Corporal

Security Issues

PNG faces numerous security challenges, such as the Bougainville separatist movement; insecure borders; piracy; human, drugs, and weapons trafficking; gender-based violence (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*); and internal instability and violence. Most Papua New Guineans are concerned with personal security and crime.

Crime: As of 2023, PNG has the world's second-highest crime rate after Venezuela. Across PNG, criminal activity is often a result of poverty, unemployment (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*), and clashes between different clans and ***raskols*** ("criminal gangs"). Crime is particularly prevalent in the Highlands provinces, where fighting between clans is widespread. In part due to rural-urban migration (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), crime trickles into the capital and other cities like Lae and Mount Hagen.

Outbreaks of violence are also common around mines, such as the Porgera gold mine in Enga Province, often due to land ownership disputes and criminals seeking ransom payments from mining companies. Common crimes are carjacking, kidnapping, home invasion, looting, and armed robbery. Some local criminals create roadblocks to steal vehicles and attack the occupants. Perpetrators often use machetes and firearms in thefts and assaults. Sexual assault, both rape and gang rape, occur frequently. It is typically unsafe for women to walk alone in most locations.

PNG lacks security measures to protect both Papua New Guineans and foreign nationals. Underfunded and understaffed police forces often are unsuited to address criminal activity, as they have insufficient access to vehicles and petrol. Additionally, police brutality and arbitrary arrests contribute to civil unrest. For example, in 2022, police arrested an attorney without a warrant then assaulted and detained the attorney until Police Minister

David Manning ordered his release. A police investigation into the incident resulted in the arrest and suspension of the police officer involved.

Further, prisons and detention centers are overcrowded, have food shortages, and overall poor sanitation and conditions. In 2020, police in New Ireland held arrestees in a cell with no ventilation, shower, or toilet. Prisoners also often experience delays in pretrial and trial arrangements. PNG's government, notably the Ombudsman Commission, lacks sufficient resources to monitor and investigate prison conditions.

Foreign Relations

Since independence, PNG has focused on establishing friendly relations with countries in the South Pacific region, notably Australia, New Zealand, and the neighboring Indonesian state of Papua, as well as the US, European Union, Japan, and China.

PNG is a member of regional and international organizations, such as the Pacific Islands Forum, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). PNG is also an associate member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, an economic and political bloc, whose members include Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), created in 1967 to promote regional stability and development. In addition, PNG is a member of the UN, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO).

Relations with Indonesia: PNG and Indonesia established diplomatic relations in 1975 and since have negotiated bilateral treaties to establish border arrangements, promote trade, and maintain peace. As of 2021, bilateral trade totaled some $322 million. However, periods of strained relations are common, notably due to separatist upheaval in Indonesian Papua. Along

their extensive and porous border, PNG and Indonesia struggle to control human and drug trafficking and Papuan secessionists seeking autonomy from Indonesia's central government. Conflicts along this border occasionally escalate to violence. As a result, thousands of Indonesian refugees have fled to PNG to live in temporary camps, often in poor conditions. As of 2020, some 10,000-15,000 Indonesian Papuans live in PNG (see "Social Relations" below).

Relations with China: PNG and China established diplomatic relations in 1976. China is the largest foreign investor in PNG, which receives Chinese loans and grants for industrial and telecommunications equipment, infrastructure, energy, education, and agriculture programs, among others. In 2022, China funded a PNGDF hospital at Taurama Barracks in Port Moresby. China and PNG also cooperate in APEC, ASEAN, and China's Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy.

Relations with Australia: Since transitioning from an Australian Trust Territory (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), PNG and Australia have maintained numerous bilateral agreements and diplomatic relations for nearly 50 years. Recent periods of tense relations have primarily focused on Australian detention centers in PNG that held over 1,900 men and were the focus of international attention due to their inadequate conditions. As of 2021, some 120 asylum seekers and refugees remain in PNG. Nevertheless, historical ties and geographic proximity contribute to a strong bilateral relationship. In 2021, PNG received more exports – particularly meat, oil, machinery, and wheat – from Australia than any other country (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*). Australia also provides investment in mining, infrastructure, and military training and equipment. In 2022, PNG and Australia signed a cyber cooperation agreement to build cyber capacity and security. Since 1975, Australia's aid programs to PNG have focused on health, education, security, military, policing, the

environment, economic growth, and gender equality. As of 2020, Australia is PNG's largest aid donor.

Relations with the US: The US and PNG established diplomatic relations in 1975. Bilateral relations focus on combating human trafficking, protecting fisheries, climate change, public health programs, and promoting gender equality, among other issues. The PNGDF and US military focus on humanitarian exercises, and the US provides training for PNG police and PNGDF personnel. In 2023, PM Marape and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed a bilateral defense cooperation and maritime security agreement in Port Moresby, consolidating the nations' defense and security ties.

Further, the US, Australia, and PNG maintain the Lombrum Naval Base that the US built during WWII on Manus Island, north of New Britain, solidifying a Western presence in the region amid growing Chinese influence. The US and Australia have recently funded the base's expansion with a chapel, medical facility, communication center, and security fencing. Both countries also participate in international organizations such as the UN, WTO, and APEC.

Ethnic Groups

PNG is one of the world's most diverse countries, as thousands of distinct communities live throughout the country and speak over 800 indigenous languages (see p. 1-4 of *Language and Communication*). Although exact numbers are unknown, PNG likely has over 1,000 different ethnic groups that divide into over 10,000 clans, which are often more broadly classified as Melanesian, Micronesian, or Polynesian. Most residents of PNG are Melanesian, whose regions and villages differ in customs, traditions, physical appearance, and beliefs. Small Micronesian

and Polynesian minorities primarily live on the outer islands and atolls.

PNG is also home to small migrant communities, notably from the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Japan, and China. As of 2018, about 50,000 Australians and some 20,000 Chinese live in PNG and tend to concentrate in urban areas.

Social Relations

PNG's society divides along rural-urban lines. Broadly, urban society divides into three classes: working, middle, and unemployed families, and rural society divides into villages defined by kinship-based groups and gender (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). While the extended family is the basic social unit across most of PNG (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*), the country struggles to protect its people from inter-clan violence (Photo: Papua New Guineans waiting at a job search information session at US Embassy Port Moresby in 2020).

Refugees and asylum seekers often experience violence and harassment. PNG does not sufficiently protect or provide medical treatment for these people, especially for mental health. As of mid-2023, Australia is still responsible for detaining asylum seekers and refugees in PNG, who lack adequate living conditions. Asylum seekers also struggle to obtain citizenship. Approved asylum claimants must be permanently settled in PNG and can apply for citizenship only after 8 years. While Indonesian Papuans may apply for Papua New Guinean citizenship without the time limit or citizenship fee, PNG does not report the number of Indonesian Papuans with citizenship.

In recent decades, waves of violence have targeted ethnic Chinese and their businesses. Some Papua New Guineans believe Chinese businesses replace local jobs and businesses, which has resulted in sporadic waves of anti-Chinese protests and looting of Chinese businesses and shops. In 2013, four ethnic Chinese were stabbed to death in Port Moresby.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Papua New Guineans are about 98% Christian, and most of the remaining 2% practice indigenous religions. Papua New Guinea (PNG) is also home to Baha'i, Jewish, and Muslim minorities. PNG's Christians are about 26% Roman Catholic, 18% Evangelical Lutheran, 13% Seventh-day Adventist, 10% Pentecostal, 10% United Church (Australian Methodist Church offshoot) members, 6% Evangelical Alliance members, 3% Anglican, and 3% Baptist. Other Christian groups, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Kwato Church (a congregationalist church offshoot), and the Salvation Army constitute some 9% of the population.

While its constitution refers to the state's "Christian principles," PNG has no official religion, provides for religious freedom, and allows individuals to spread their religion. PNG requires religious groups to register with the state to maintain bank accounts, own property, and receive tax exemptions. Although PNG permits Christian education in public schools, religion courses are not an educational requirement (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Early Spiritual Landscape

While scholars know few details of early inhabitants' religious beliefs, they likely led rich spiritual lives and recognized several spirits and gods, who they believed constructed the universe and influenced daily life. While no religion or mythology unified PNG, most early residents practiced forms of animism (the belief that people and other things, both living and nonliving, have spirits that must be respected). For example, Papua New Guineans of the Sepik cultural group believed that ceremonial masks were imbued with spiritual powers (see p. 5 of *Aesthetics and*

Recreation). Animism also influenced construction (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), with some groups, like the Hewa, building windowless homes to keep out spirits.

Many early Papua New Guineans had some version of a creation myth (a philosophical and theological explanation for how humans and the world came to be). The Kaluli people, indigenous to the Great Papuan Plateau (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), believed that two ordinary men created the material world to solve the problems of cold and hunger, which they called ***hena madaliaki*** (when the land came into form). In this creation myth, two men directed other humans to turn into rivers, trees, and animals, creating the natural world.

Early inhabitants shared many similar customs, though the names of deities differed between groups. Many believed in divination (the ability to gain insight into a question or situation through spiritual interactions), claiming that spirits visited family members in dreams. The Abau peoples, based north of the Sepik River, practiced sorcery, healing, and death divination.

Scholars believe many of the divinations relied on gossip. Some other residents engaged in ritual acts of cannibalism to rid dead bodies of evil spirits. The Korowai tribe of western PNG believed that to kill a ***khakua*** (demon), one must eat its host. Not all early residents practiced cannibalism, but most had some type of ritual to rid a body of malicious spirits.

Many early Papua New Guineans also used ritual dances, particularly to celebrate transitions to adulthood or commemorate the dead. The Baining people of East New Britain Province host a fire dance, whereby young boys craft their first ceremonial mask and men dance around a large fire (see p. 4-5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Gender roles were also intertwined with Papua New Guinean spirituality. A Sepik myth tells of a time when women ruled powerful spirits before jealous men forcibly reversed the gender

roles (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). During this early period, some groups believed women's bodies represented spirits in rituals whereby practitioners known as shamans contacted spirits, gods, and demons. Witchcraft, or sorcery, was also a core and gendered belief, as many early Papua New Guineans thought witches and bad spirits caused illnesses. Most tribes only accused women of witchcraft. This belief persists today, as sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) against women is prominent throughout the country (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Arrival of Christianity

Although European explorers (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*) first held a Catholic mass on Sideia Island in 1606, missionaries did not spread Christianity in the region until the 19th century. In 1847, Catholic and Protestant missionaries from various countries spearheaded an initial attempt to introduce Christianity to Papua New Guineans, starting on Woodlark Island to the east of New Guinea. However, influenza and malaria outbreaks stymied this first wave of missionary efforts.

Beginning in 1871, the British London Missionary Society (a nondenominational Christian movement) led a second charge to spread Christianity. Catholic missionaries from Germany and France followed in the early 1880s, establishing themselves on New Guinea, New Britain, and Bougainville. Other Christian groups – notably Methodists, Australian Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans, and Anglicans – were also successful in spreading Christianity in the region in the early 20th century.

During PNG's colonial period (see p. 2-7 of *History and Myth*), British and German colonists established their own Christian communities. After Britain formally assumed control of southeastern New Guinea in 1888, Australia's Anglican church appointed missionaries to spread

their religion to Papua New Guineans and provide religious services to colonists. Anglicans had established about 11 missionary stations across the British colony by 1901. German missionaries similarly established stations across New Guinea's Northeast. Many Papua New Guineans, who did not immediately accept these missionaries, sought to drive them out of the region. In 1886, Johann Flierl, a German Lutheran missionary, accounted his experience undergoing a strength test to prove his worth to a Simbang warrior, who attacked him with a tomahawk. Further, many Papua New Guineans refused to work with missionaries without receiving a good or benefit, such as European tobacco, in return. Papua New Guineans often played missionaries off each other, extracting the maximum benefit from each without adopting any Christian beliefs.

Westerners, returning home from PNG after campaigns during World War II (see p. 4-6 of *History and Myth*), grew increasingly interested in converting the local population to Christianity. Many members of this third wave of missionaries were Pentecostals, primarily from the South Seas Evangelical Mission, Christian Brotherhood, Church of Nazarene, Apostolic Church, New Tribes Mission, Foursquare Gospel Church, and the Christian Revival Crusade. Missionaries localized their efforts and permitted Papua New Guineans to serve in leadership positions. Local Christian leaders, like Sir Louis Vangeke, who became the first indigenous Papua New Guinean Bishop in 1976, often connected their religious beliefs to political reforms. For example, they challenged some of the Australian colonial authority's restrictions on indigenous peoples, such as the banned use of traditional clothes and alcohol (see p. 4-7 of *History and Myth*).

In the 1970s, anthropologists studied how local rituals influenced Christianity's spread. One anthropologist noted how PNG's Kyaka tribe merged their own traditional supernatural beliefs with Christian figures like God, Jesus, and Satan. Other scholars

have stated that the acceptance of Christianity has resulted in a surface-level adoption of the religion without any sort of radical transformation of basic values and beliefs. Many Papua New Guineans were more willing to absorb Christian beliefs when framed in line with their traditional values. For example, to many Papua New Guineans, the Christian conception of the Holy Spirit aligned with the local conception of ***Mana*** or ***Pawa*** (Power).

Following the Roman Catholic Church's reforms in the 1960s and 1970s that allowed Catholics to work with Protestant groups, many Christian groups worked across denominations to convert more Papua New Guineans. Cross-denominational efforts yielded the Melanesian Institute (a Christian organization that conducts sociocultural research) and *Wantok Publications* (a Tok Pisin-language Christian newspaper – see p. 1-2 of *Language and Communication*). In 1984, the Pope (leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy) visited PNG, acknowledging the country's many Catholic adherents as part of the global Catholic community.

In recent years, Christianity has continued to spread in PNG, as the Christian population increased from 96% to 98% between 2000-11. Until 2022, all of PNG's Archdiocese reported to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (CEP), a Roman Catholic congregation that managed all colonial and missionary activities. Since the CEP's dissolution in 2022, PNG's Archbishops were elevated to the same level as any other Archbishop.

Religion Today

Although PNG is predominantly Christian, these beliefs tend to be deeply intertwined with indigenous spirituality. While this combination preserves many indigenous traditions, it also serves as a justification for gender-based violence, including the killing of women accused of sorcery and their daughters. Most religious leaders in PNG advocate for an end to SARV, but such violence has increased in recent years.

Religion serves as a vehicle for many social services, with the government funding churches to deliver health and educational programs through the Church-State Partnership Program, which operates about half of schools and hospitals in PNG (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge* and p. 5 of *Sustenance and Health*). Christian churches and mission houses are present throughout the country and vary widely in design and complexity. Urban centers tend to have large churches constructed in a modern Western style, while rural churches are often simple halls made from local materials.

Since an overwhelming majority of Papua New Guineans identify as Christian, some politicians advocate constitutionally defining the country as a Christian state. Many Christian and civil society groups object to this proposal for fear that defining the state religion could cause conflict among various denominations. PNG also exhibits notable discrimination against Muslims. Many Muslims report harassment outside of mosques and persecution for wearing ***burqas*** (full body and face coverings). Further, PNG's government periodically threatens to ban Islam in the country.

Catholicism: With nearly 2.4 million Roman Catholics, PNG is home to more Catholics than any other country in Oceania except for Australia. Seated at St. Mary's Cathedral, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port Moresby governs Catholic life in PNG. John Ribat, Archbishop of Port Moresby, became PNG's first Cardinal (senior Catholic Church clergy member) in 2016.

Indigenous spirituality often merges with Catholic practices to form unique cultural traditions. The Catholic Church supports various indigenous initiation rites, like extended stays in a forest for spiritual purification. Similarly, some Catholics baptize their children during a public event in a dammed stream, aligned with some indigenous practices. Further, about 500,000 students are enrolled in Catholic primary, secondary, or post-secondary schools (see p. 4-5 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Other Christian Groups: PNG is home to many Protestant, Pentecostal, and other Christian groups. Unlike Catholics, many evangelical Christian groups portray Christianity as a modern global movement and disavow local spirituality. In 2013, for example, then-Speaker of the Parliament Theo Zurenuoc attempted to remove traditional carvings from the Parliament building's exterior in order to "cleanse ungodly images and idols."

Christian groups host many celebrations, though few are distinct to PNG. Protestants usually celebrate Christmas in the Western mold, attending Church and hanging decorative lights. Distinct from Western Christmas, however, Papua New Guineans do not typically exchange gifts.

Indigenous Religions: While some 178,000 Papua New Guineans report their primary religion as indigenous, many practice these religions alongside their Christian beliefs. Further, no single indigenous religion has more than 60,000 followers, as beliefs typically vary by group. Today, indigenous religious practices include ancestor worship and dances to portray local mythologies. For example, Sepik Papua New Guineans pay tribute to crocodiles that have spiritual significance during their annual Crocodile Festival, where men engage in scarification (intentional scarring of the skin for spiritual purposes) to replicate a crocodile's scales (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*).

Other Religious Groups: PNG is home to about 60,000 Baha'is, 10,000 Muslims, and fewer Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish expatriates. Baha'is (adherents of a religion that combines aspects of Islam with a belief in the unity of all religions and humanity) have many sites of worship across the country. Muslims, most of whom are Sunni, primarily live in the Port Moresby area, where they pray at multiple mosques. Some Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists call PNG home, although most are expatriates, not Papua New Guineans.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Society in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is rooted in multi-generational kinship groups and clans (extended families) that serve as economic and emotional support systems for their members.

Residence

Some 87% of Papua New Guineans live in rural areas, making PNG one of the world's most rural countries. Traditionally, clans own land where their members can build homes and grow crops. In rural areas, families tend to have land to keep pigs and grow their own food (see p. 3, 5 of *Economics and Resources*). Most buildings lack indoor plumbing and electricity. While increasingly common, as of 2018, only about 15% of households have electricity and some 29% have modern toilets. Many Papua New Guineans fetch water from wells, natural springs, rivers, and communal taps.

Rural: Many rural residents construct their houses from natural, locally sourced materials. Village homes typically have woven bamboo walls with timber frames and roofs made of palm leaves or grasses. While coastal residents often build their houses on raised platforms, those in the Highlands (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*) build theirs on the ground with dirt floors. Rural houses typically have separate rooms or buildings for sleeping with communal living and dining areas. Kitchens usually lack ventilation, creating smoky living environments to deter insects. Indoor plumbing and electricity are uncommon in rural areas.

Urban: Middle- and upper-class urban families tend to reside in Western-style homes with wooden floors and walls, tin roofs, electricity, indoor plumbing, and amenities like in-house stoves. By contrast, many lower-class families live on the city outskirts in shantytowns or squatter settlements – densely populated areas with makeshift homes, often made of plywood or bamboo.

Family Structure

Familial relationships are an integral aspect of Papua New Guinean daily life and social organization. Some households include extended family members, who otherwise often live nearby. Elderly family members, who many families care for as they age, typically serve as sources of advice for younger generations. While Papua New Guinean society is generally patriarchal, meaning men hold most power and authority, some matriarchal societies exist in rural areas. By contrast, in urban areas, men and women increasingly make decisions together.

Polygyny: This term refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. Historically, polygyny was an accepted custom in PNG, particularly among village leaders. Today, having a second wife is illegal. Since 2014, PNG requires that all marriages be registered, effectively banning polygyny.

Despite this policy change, as of 2018, about one in five women report having a husband who has another wife or wives.

Children

Historically, Papua New Guinean families had many children, but today, they average about three (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*). Extended family members typically assist with raising children, who often begin working at a young age. Although young children usually learn homemaking skills such as cleaning and cooking, girls typically continue to perform these domestic tasks as they age, while boys often work outdoors and farm.

Birth: In rural areas, most women give birth in village homes without men present. Some women, who have access to health facilities (see p. 5-6 of *Sustenance and Health*), deliver in a hospital or have a midwife. To avoid large babies and pregnancy complications, some women limit meat consumption during pregnancy. Papua New Guineans typically celebrate their firstborn child with a party similar to a baby shower. Relatives usually provide food, toys, and money for the child and parents.

Rites of Passage

These rituals vary by region, clan, and family. Many young men participate in initiation ceremonies that mark detachment from their mothers and transition from boys to men. Along the Sepik River (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), most men in the Chambri indigenous group participate in ceremonies that mark adulthood in a ***Haus Tambaran*** (men's meeting house, see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Uncles typically bring their nephews between the ages of 11-20 to a *Haus Tambaran* to undergo body modifications. Traditionally, young men were cut on their backs, shoulders, and upper torsos with sharpened bamboo to create healed scars that resemble a crocodile's hide. Many Chambri believe that humans evolved from crocodiles, and marking the skin honors the animal and symbolizes its power. Young men typically spend months in a *Haus Tambaran* to learn about traditional belief systems, fishing, and how to support a family. Other rites of passage include different body modifications, such as piercing and tattooing, bloodletting, and other practices.

Marriage: Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union resulting in the joining not only of two individuals, but also their clans. In many regions, marrying within one's own clan is uncommon and considered incestuous. Today, men and women still often have supervised "courtships," whereby a third person accompanies the couple on dates. Women typically leave their family and clan to live with their husband's clan. While most men and women marry between 18-25 years old, about 27% of girls marry before the age of 18 (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Bridewealth: In PNG, the bridewealth, often known as a "bride price," traditionally symbolizes social obligations between families and clans, who bid on a payment for the bride that can include food, pigs, and money. The groom and his clan typically pay the bridewealth before the wedding ceremony. Today, bridewealth traditions and methods of payment are changing,

partially due to the cash economy and the increasing number of women initiating interest in men.

Weddings: The law recognizes civil and customary marriages, the latter of which is a union between the bride, groom, and their respective clans. Most wedding celebrations include singing, exchanges of gifts and food, and elaborate feasts featuring baked pigs (see p. 3 of *Sustenance and Health*). A celebratory meal sometimes symbolizes sealing of the marriage.

Divorce

While precise figures are unknown, divorce is increasingly common in PNG. In a 2007 study in Enga Province, located in the western Highlands, about 17% of women under the age of 30 were divorced, lower than women between 31-50 years old (24%), but much higher than women over the age of 51 (5%). Traditionally, women were reluctant to divorce because children belong to the husband's clan, and men were entitled to custody. In some divorce cases, part of the bridewealth must be repaid to the man's clan. The Divorce Act was amended in 2018, granting more rights to women in divorce settlements and allowing parties to claim half of marital savings.

Death

Funeral customs and ceremonies tend to differ by region and clan. When a relative dies, friends and family members typically gather at a designated home or area to grieve. In the Highlands, many women go into seclusion from their village, sometimes for months, after the death of their husband. The women wrap their bodies in a large cloth and adorn themselves in ***kasi*** (ornaments), such as large necklaces made of seeds. Some highland widows coat their bodies in a gray clay, the color of mourning, after their husbands pass away. Some Papua New Guineans chant or sing songs to send the deceased's spirit to the afterlife. In most areas, the deceased is buried close to their village on clan or family land. In urban areas, families typically bury their relatives in cemeteries.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Historically, the social system in Papua New Guinea (PNG) was mostly patriarchal, meaning men held most power and authority, and patrilineal (inheritance, property, and the family name passes from father to son). However, some clans (extended family) in rural PNG are matriarchal and matrilineal. Today, men hold most positions of power in government and business. As of 2021, PNG ranks 160 of 161 countries in the United Nations (UN) Gender Inequality Index.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: In most clans, men are the heads-of-household and primary decisionmakers in family affairs. Women are often responsible for domestic work, such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, gardening, and gathering food, among other responsibilities. In matrilineal societies, primarily in Milne Bay Province and on some small islands, women are responsible for decisions about family and land. In urban areas, men and women may both work outside the home and more often make decisions together.

Labor Force: As of 2010, about 48% of women worked outside the home, equivalent to neighboring Indonesia (48%) and lower than the US (58%). Women are relatively underrepresented in PNG's economy. As of 2010, women held about 19% of senior and middle management positions, the same as Indonesia and much lower than the US (39%). High rates of gender-based violence contribute to the gender employment gap, as women often avoid or miss work due to safety and related issues.

Gender and the Law

Although PNG's constitution (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees gender equality, laws fail to ensure equal pay and protect women against sexual harassment. While PNG

has laws against domestic violence and rape, systemic violence against women creates a generally unsafe environment.

PNG does not provide paid parental leave for all workers. In the public sector, women are guaranteed 6 weeks of paid maternity leave before and 6 weeks after giving birth. However, the private sector does not guarantee maternity leave, and it is often unpaid. Men are not guaranteed parental leave.

Gender and Politics

Papua New Guinean women first gained the right to vote in 1964. PNG has one of the world's worst female representation records (see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*), as women are continuously underrepresented in elections. Only nine women have been elected since independence in 1975 (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). To correct this lack of representation, Prime Minister Peter O'Neill (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) initially supported a proposal to reserve 22 parliamentary seats for women as part of the 2011 Equality and Participation Act. However, the Act never became law. As of 2023, women comprise less than 2% of seats in Parliament, lower than Indonesia (22%), the US (29%), and Australia (38%).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

PNG is one of the world's most dangerous places for women. According to a UN study in 2014, over 90% of women and girls experience violence on public transportation. About 62% of men report having raped a woman or girl at least once. Nearly two-thirds of women experience GBV, and on average, a woman is beaten every 30 seconds. Although some laws have expanded the definitions of abuse, assault, and family violence, GBV remains common. In 2021, a criminal code amendment added the criminalization of sorcery accusations (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). However, 12 women were accused of sorcery in Enga Province that year. The women were sexually assaulted and burned, resulting in serious injuries and four deaths.

The law stipulates sentences of 10-15 years for rape, with longer sentences for aggravated rape cases. However, PNG fails to provide comprehensive legal protections for survivors and does not prosecute most perpetrators. In 2020, only 250 people were prosecuted and 100 convicted out of some 15,444 reported domestic violence cases. In large part due to lack of funding, resources for GBV survivors, such as medical treatment, legal assistance, shelters, and counselling services, are limited.

Primarily due to cultural sensitivities and social stigma, child abuse and incest are underreported. In a 2014 report, over half of the 3,000 GBV survivors surveyed were children and one in six were under 5-years-old. The age of sexual consent is 16 for unmarried girls and 14 for boys, increasing the risk of sexual abuse and violence among children.

Sex and Procreation

PNG's birthrate declined from 6 births per woman in 1960 to 3.3 in 2020, higher than Indonesia (2.2) and the US and Australia (1.6). As of 2014, sexual and reproductive health policies promote family planning options with free and legal contraceptives available across health facilities. However, the prevalence of contraceptive use is only 37% as of 2018, significantly lower than the East Asia and Pacific average (76%). PNG is one of the most unsafe places for pregnancy, with high maternal death rates. Although the maternal mortality ratio declined from 249 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 145 in 2017, it remains much higher than the US (19) and Australia (6). Abortion is illegal except in cases to save a woman's life.

LGBTQ+ Issues

PNG maintains a law from the Australian colonial era (see p. 4-7 of *History and Myth*) that criminalizes sexual relations between men, with punishment of up to 14 years imprisonment. LGBTQ+ individuals are often targeted for harassment, extortion, assault, and murder. Consequently, underreporting of harassment and crime is common, primarily due to social stigma.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Overview

Tok Pisin, English, and Hiri Motu are the official languages of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Tok Pisin, a pidgin language (a simplified means of communication), and English serve as the country's principal languages of government, entertainment, and education. PNG is the world's most linguistically diverse country, home to over 840 distinct living languages, nearly all of which are indigenous to the region. Although most indigenous languages are not mutually intelligible, they generally belong to two distinct language groups: Austronesian and Papuan, with over 200 and 550 languages, respectively. Because no indigenous language in either group has more than 100,000 speakers, Tok Pisin tends to serve as a lingua franca, or shared language.

Tok Pisin

With over 4.1 million speakers in PNG, Tok Pisin is the country's most widely spoken language. Although over 40% of residents speak it, Tok Pisin is the first language of only about 122,000 inhabitants, as most Papua New Guineans first learn their local indigenous language. Tok Pisin emerged in the late 19th century, as European traders brought Melanesian, Malaysian, and other workers, whose languages were not mutually intelligible, to labor on copra (dried coconut) and sugarcane plantations in PNG (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Tok Pisin became a lingua franca for these linguistically diverse groups, combining elements of indigenous Papuan and Austronesian languages, German, Malay, and English.

Tok Pisin's alphabet is almost identical to the Latin alphabet, although certain letter sounds feature different pronunciations. Tok Pisin uses a distinct sound system whereby the English "p" and "s" sounds replace the "f" and "sh" sounds, respectively, as

in the word ***pinis*** (finish). Unlike English, Tok Pisin features dual/plural distinctions, such as when describing a group of people using the inclusive ***yumitupela*** (you and me) compared to the exclusive ***mitupela*** (someone other than you and me), both of which translate to "we." This language also features the use of a numeral classifying system that merges words with numbers to describe their quantity, such as in ***pela*** (fellow) and ***tupela*** (two fellows).

Today, Tok Pisin is considered an expanded pidgin language because it has its own complex grammatical structure. Papua New Guineans often speak Tok Pisin in casual urban settings. Further, the media and government use Tok Pisin in certain contexts, particularly when communicating to solely local audiences, as well as for the first 3 years of primary education in many schools (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

English

Some 832,000 people, or nearly 9% of Papua New Guineans, speak English, the country's primary language of government. In the late 1800s, British colonizers first introduced English to the islands of New Britain and New Ireland (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), where missionaries founded schools to teach English-language religion courses (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*). From 1884-1907, British colonists made English classes compulsory at mission schools across their colony. When Australia inherited administration of PNG from the British and formalized control in 1921 (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), it displaced German officials in the North, allowing English to spread more easily across the country. During World War II, Western soldiers, primarily from Australia and the US, reinforced English, as both countries stationed troops in Port Moresby to combat the Japanese occupation of northern PNG (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*).

Today, many Papua New Guineans learn English in school. PNG has a standardized English curriculum and requires

English classes in primary and secondary schools. Papua New Guineans actively debate the role of English as a medium of education. While many parents believe students should learn indigenous languages throughout their studies, in 2013, the government mandated that primary schools convert to English-language instruction.

Hiri Motu

Around 100,000 Papua New Guineans (about 1% of the population) speak Hiri Motu, a pidgin language that merges English, German, and Motu (an indigenous language from the Port Moresby area). Informally called Police Motu, Hiri Motu developed from interactions between colonial police officers and indigenous peoples in the Port Moresby region. After its early formation in the 1880s, Hiri Motu served as a lingua franca, and many residents widely used the language until the 1960s, when Tok Pisin and English increasingly began to replace it.

Hiri Motu has two dialects, Papuan (the most widely spoken) and Austronesian (less widely spoken, but closer to Motu in grammar and vocabulary). Hiri Motu shares a similar alphabet to English but does not include the letters c, f, j, q, x, y, and z, and often replaces the sounds from the letters "l" and "r" with "n" and "m," respectively. Hiri Motu also shares the same vowels as English. Further, context is essential for understanding Hiri Motu, as many words share multiple meanings, such as ***guria*** ("to pray" and "to bury").

Indigenous Languages

PNG's nearly 840 distinct indigenous languages include an even greater number of dialects and related pidgin languages. Most Papua New Guineans still use their indigenous languages at home and in daily life. With such linguistic diversity, many scholars have difficulty classifying PNG's many languages. As a result, some scholars document differences in language families without specifying the names of individual languages. Within language families many languages

are not mutually intelligible. The largest indigenous language families in PNG are Madang, Finisterre-Huon, and Kainantu-Goroka. Because many indigenous languages have less than 1,000 speakers, as of mid-2023, scholars believe PNG has around 267 endangered and 46 dying languages.

Other Languages

PNG hosts small communities of Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Tagalog, Indonesian, and other speakers (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). International schools, primarily in Port Moresby, cater to these largely foreign national communities and typically offer classes in English or the expatriates' respective languages. While uncommon, some Papua New Guinean schools offer classes in a non-English foreign language (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Additionally, some residents communicate in Papua New Guinean sign language.

Communication Overview

Communicating in PNG requires knowledge of English, Tok Pisin, and the ability to interact effectively using language. This notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). These forms of communication ensure statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Papua New Guineans are typically informal and relaxed communicators. Communication patterns tend to vary by group, as PNG has few standardized social norms affecting communication style. While many Papua New Guineans are direct communicators, they often prefer indirect communication for some sensitive topics (see "Conversational Topics" below). Some social norms require more formal communication, especially when in the presence of a chief, elder, or other individual of high status.

Many Papua New Guineans use nonverbal communication such as facial expressions or gestures (see "Gestures" below) to convey additional meaning or emphasis. One might answer the question "Where are you going?" by slightly lifting his head, raising their eyebrows, and moving their eyes in the planned direction. Staring at members of the opposite sex is sometimes considered rude. Likewise, public displays of affection between people of different genders are usually unacceptable (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*).

Greetings

While standard greetings vary by region, the general customary greeting is to shake hands and in Tok Pisin ask ***Yu stap gut?*** (How are you?), to which one often replies, ***Mi orait. Na yu?*** (I'm fine. And you?). When greeting, some Papua New Guineans clasp one another's hands in an extended salutation.

For those who are less acquainted, a head nod of acknowledgement typically suffices. Some people greet each other with a handshake and hold the other's hand against their chest as a sign of friendship.

Names

Papua New Guinean names tend to mirror those of English-speaking countries, largely due to PNG's colonial history. Names typically include a first, last, and sometimes a middle name. Generally, children adopt their father's surname.

In the instance of an absent father, and in some matrilineal groups (in which inheritance, property, and the family name passes from mother to daughter – see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*), Papua New Guineans adopt their mother's last name. As most Papua New Guineans are Christians (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), many derive their children's names from the Bible.

Forms of Address

Papua New Guineans primarily engage in informal conversation by addressing each other by first name or a nickname, although some situations require more formality, especially when addressing someone of importance. When speaking to an individual of high rank or status, it is appropriate to use their title (such as Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Dr.) and full name. Similarly, some Papua New Guineans defer to elders in conversation and use parental terms ***mama*** (for women) and ***papa*** (for men) to address them.

Conversational Topics

Papua New Guineans typically converse about the wellbeing of each other and their families (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*). Food and sports, particularly rugby (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), are also common conversational topics. Conflict-averse Papua New Guineans tend to criticize one another through a third person because they consider direct critiques as rude.

To avoid offense, foreign nationals should not comment on some of PNG's traditional practices, such as gender roles (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) or marriage traditions (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*), as Papua New Guineans might interpret the comments as judgmental of their cultures. Many Papua New Guineans also yield easily to social pressures. Consequently, foreign nationals should avoid encouraging Papua New Guineans to engage in activities that could be counter to their conservative values, such as drinking alcohol, as they might find it difficult to decline.

Gestures

Papua New Guineans use body language to convey additional meaning and add emphasis to their verbal communications. Head movements are particularly important. Many residents point with their chin rather than their finger or hand. They often

hiss and shake their heads to indicate disgust or unhappiness. Similarly, a “tsk-tsk” sound with a shaking head motion is another way to show surprise, awe, or sympathy. Some Papua New Guineans also use hand and finger movements as gestures or to convey additional meaning. For example, they flag down public vehicles by pointing down at the pavement. Foreign nationals should avoid using a “thumbs up” sign, which some Papua New Guineans consider offensive.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Tok Pisin	Hiri Motu
Hello	Hello	Hello
Goodbye	Lukim yu behain	Bamahuta
How are you?	Yu stap gut?	Oi Namo?
I’m well	Mi orait	Lo, lao namo
Please	Plis	Plis
Thank you	Tenkyu	Tanikiu
Yes	Yes	Oibe, Lo
No	Nogat	Lasi
Excuse Me	Sikus	Lauegu lohiabada e
What is your name?	Wanam nem bilong yu?	Oi be daika?
My name is…	Nem bilong mi emi…	Lauegu Iadana be…
Good morning	Moning	Daba Namona
Good afternoon	Apinum	Adorahi Namora
Good night	Gut nait	Hanuaboi Namora
Man	Man	Tau
Woman	Meri	Hahine
Today	Tete	Hari Dina
Yesterday	Asde	Varanai
Tomorrow	Tumora	Kerukeru
Now	Nau	Harihari
Do you know English?	Yu save tok Inglis?	Inglis gado oi diba?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 64.2%
- Male: 65.6%
- Female: 62.8% (2015 estimate)

Early Education

Before the arrival of European colonists in the late 19th century (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), most regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations. Papua New Guineans educated their children at home or during community gatherings through legends, stories, and moral lessons, while emphasizing the importance of humility and the traditional clan (extended family) hierarchy (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

Traditional education has changed little in some areas of Papua New Guinea (PNG). In some communities in East Sepik Province and the Highlands, village leaders take young men from their mother's home to the ***Haus Man*** or ***Haus Tambaran*** (men's meeting house, see p. 3-4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), where elders teach tribal customs, hold coming-of-age ceremonies, impart religious knowledge, and show younger generations how to fulfill gender roles (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). In some rural communities, men and boys still rely on customs related to the *Haus Man* or *Haus Tambaran* as their primary form of formal education.

Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea

European missionaries (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) arrived in present-day PNG during the 1870s to preach to the region's inhabitants. Many of these religious groups established schools to educate local youth and facilitate the religious

conversion of Papua New Guineans. In the South, the British London Missionary Society founded institutions that promoted Protestant values and offered formal education to girls for the first time. In German New Guinea to the north (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), missionaries founded German-language institutions.

Notably, German schooling was largely secular and primarily focused on reading, writing, and basic arithmetic.

At the turn of the 20th century, British colonial officials promoted the establishment of English-language vocational schools that focused on training Papua New Guineans for skilled work in Port Moresby and agricultural outposts. Upon the outbreak of World War I (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), Australia took control of German New Guinea and extended English-language education to the former German territory.

Education in the Trust Territory

After the Allied victory in World War II, the UN designated PNG as a Trust Territory in 1949 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), tasking Australia with preparing the country for self-rule. Australia began to establish a modern educational system for PNG, enacting a policy of "deliberate education" that aimed to increase school enrollment and prepare Papua New Guineans to manage their country. Simultaneously, many Papua New Guineans began to perceive formal education as a tool to develop a national identity and assert local culture. Educators looked to former British colonies, particularly in East Africa, to learn from their post-independence educational systems.

Education After Independence

After PNG's 1975 independence (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), the country's Department of Education (DoE) took control of existing religious and colonial schools and prioritized increasing the country's literacy rate, as only about a third of the population

could read and write. While the central government oversaw the school system, it delegated daily management to provincial officials as part of a broader process of decentralization.

The DoE designed a general philosophy of education to guide curricula development and standardize offerings among regions, focusing on the principles of self-development and national sovereignty. Nevertheless, independent reports in the 1990s showed that the provinces had made little progress in ensuring the quality of local school systems, which suffered from a lack of adequate funding and low levels of enrollment.

Modern Education System

Today, the DoE oversees educational policy, although provincial officials have significant autonomy in managing schools. While PNG's central government, through a series of laws passed in the 1970s and 80s, promises education for all citizens, attendance is not compulsory at any stage. As such, high levels of truancy (children not attending school) and low completion rates have remained a persistent problem in the country, especially among girls (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender)*. While the DoE announced plans to reorganize its schooling system in 2023, moving to a "1-6-6" model, whereby 1 year of pre-primary school precedes 6 years each of primary and secondary schooling, the rollout timeline remains unclear.

Until the reorganization, students attend a community school for primary education and then proceed to a provincial school for the first 2 years of secondary school. Many of these schools lack adequate physical infrastructure, with buildings needing repair or unable to accommodate all attending students. Likewise, schools often do not have necessary teaching materials and rely on outdated or insufficient supplies. Due to a lack of resources, the central government manages only four "national high schools," which teach the final 2 years of secondary school (see

"Secondary Education" below) and are meant to prepare Papua New Guineans for post-secondary studies or entry into the workforce. While better funded than community and provincial schools, national high schools also lack adequate financing and qualified teachers.

Recurring inter-clan violence in rural PNG also has impacted learning outcomes in many communities. Conflict can make the commute to school dangerous for children and their families, and combatants sometimes loot and burn school buildings (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Through the Church-State Partnership Program, religious institutions (which are often Roman Catholic–see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) manage many primary and secondary schools on behalf of PNG's government. As of 2020, religious organizations administered about half of the country's schools, often with subsidies from the central government. These schools largely follow the national curriculum and provide education to local communities regardless of the students' faith.

PNG also has some private schools, mostly in Port Moresby and other urban areas (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Many are international schools that do not follow PNG's curriculum, but rather foreign, often Australian or British, curricula. The number of students enrolled in these institutions is minimal, with about 1% of primary-aged children attending private fee-based schools in 2018, compared to 25% in the neighboring Solomon Islands.

Pre-Primary Education: Most pre-primary institutions in PNG are private, sometimes fee-based schools, often managed by religious congregations (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) or local communities. While some of these institutions receive government funding, they are not part of the formal educational system. As of 2020, some 42% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary school.

Primary Education: Primary education starts at age 6 and comprises 9 years of schooling that divide into two stages. Stage 1 is "Elementary School," which lasts 3 years (1 of "elementary prep" and grades 1 and 2). At this level, teachers lecture in English and local languages (see p. 1-4 of *Language and Communication*), and children study a generalized curriculum that prepares them for "Primary School," the subsequent 6 years of education, or stage 2. In grades 3-8, teachers lecture primarily in English, and students take courses in math, social sciences, health, English, physical education, art, and "making a living" (home economics courses that focus on agriculture, computing, or business management). As of 2016, some 76% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary education.

Secondary Education: Secondary education comprises grades 9-12 and is divided into 2 years each of "lower secondary" and "higher secondary." At this level, students take more specialized courses in subjects like agriculture, accounting, math, history, literature, music, and legal studies. After completing lower and higher secondary school, students must take exams to certify their course completion. Students who do not continue to formal secondary schooling after grade 8 can take distance learning courses and obtain a secondary school completion certificate from the Flexible Open and Distance Education institute. As of 2016, some 32% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary school.

Post-Secondary Education: PNG has eight universities, and its five public universities are spread across the country. Each school has a separate admissions process, which usually ranks applicants according to grade point averages. The University of Papua New Guinea and the University of Technology are among the country's most prestigious institutions. Non-governmental entities run three universities in PNG. Two of the organizations are religious groups, while the other is private but secular.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Papua New Guineans tend to view interpersonal and family connections as key to conducting business. Generally, they have a casual approach to time that extends to business dealings.

Time and Work

The work week in Papua New Guinea (PNG) typically runs Monday-Friday, and work hours vary by establishment type. Business hours are usually 8am-4:30pm, with an hour break between 12-1pm for lunch. Government and post offices generally open between 7:45am-4pm. Most retailers are open on weekends for a reduced schedule, often running from 8am-12pm. Supermarkets and service stations typically open from 8am-4:30pm throughout the week. In rural areas, operating hours tend to be more informal, varying according to owners' preferences.

Working Conditions: Papua New Guinean labor laws establish a 42-hour workweek, national minimum wage, paid vacation, sick leave, severance pay, and other benefits. The law also requires employers to pay into an employee superannuation (pension) fund for most employees. Although PNG has laws that specify safe working conditions, lax enforcement sometimes results in unsafe workplaces, particularly in the mining subsector (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*), where hazardous conditions are common. Further, as of 2017, about 80% of PNG's population was employed in the informal sector (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*), whereby labor codes such as the minimum wage and other standards are inapplicable.

Time Zone: PNG has two time zones. Most Papua New Guineans live in PNG Standard Time (PGT), which is 10 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 15 hours ahead of

Eastern Standard Time (EST). Bougainville has its own time zone, Bougainville Standard Time (BST), which is 11 hours ahead of GMT and 16 hours ahead of EST. As PNG does not observe daylight saving time, PGT and BST are 14 and 15 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), respectively, during part of the year.

Date Notation: Like the US, PNG uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Papua New Guineans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March/April: Good Friday (dates vary)
- March/April: Easter (dates vary)
- June: King's Official Birthday (the day when Papua New Guineans celebrate the monarch's birthday–see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*–typically the second Monday in June)
- July 23: Remembrance Day
- August 26: National Day of Repentance
- September 16: Independence Day
- December 25: Christmas Day
- December 26: Boxing Day

Any holiday that falls on a weekend is observed on the closest weekday.

Time and Business

While many Papua New Guineans have a relaxed approach to time, business practices are evolving, and residents increasingly expect punctuality in professional settings. Personal relationships are key in business, and meetings often begin with substantial polite conversation (see p. 6 of *Language and Communication*) and the exchange of business cards to establish rapport. Likewise, business discussions may occur outside of working hours, during meals, or in more relaxed settings than at an office. The ***wontok*** ("one talk") system, whereby Papua New Guineans favor family or members of the

same clan (extended family), at times extends to professional settings, leading to nepotism and favoritism in some situations.

Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in PNG depends on the nature of the relationship. Most Papua New Guineans maintain about an arm's length when conversing with strangers but stand closer to family and friends, especially as compared with the US.

Touch: In business settings, greetings usually include minimal touching beyond the initial handshake or greeting (see p. 5 of *Language and Communication*). Papua New Guineans typically reserve physical affection, especially in public settings, for family and friends of the same gender.

Eye Contact: Many Papua New Guineans make brief but direct eye contact during greetings and maintain eye contact throughout conversations, considering it evidence of interest and respect. While Papua New Guineans sometimes avoid sustained eye contact with elders as a sign of respect, they may consider avoiding eye contact entirely as a display of dishonesty.

Photographs

Some churches, museums, landmarks, and military installations prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should acquire a Papua New Guinean's consent before taking his photo. Explicit permission is particularly important when photographing children.

Driving

In urban areas, roads are often littered with potholes, and many drivers disobey traffic laws and overcrowd vehicles. In rural areas, poor road conditions combined with a lack of lighting, signage, and security can make driving particularly hazardous. Unlike Americans, Papua New Guineans drive on the left side of the road. PNG's rate of traffic-related deaths in 2019 was 13 per 100,000, equivalent to the US rate and higher than neighboring Indonesia (11).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Papua New Guinean traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect the country's diverse ethnic and tribal traditions and modern global influences.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: While increasingly uncommon, traditional dress tends to be practical. Some rural men and women wear a ***laplap*** (wraparound ***sarong***, a long cloth sewn at the ends to form a tube) or grass skirt with or without a t-shirt, and for women, sometimes a "meri blouse" (colorful blouse). When working outdoors or nursing infants, some women do not wear a top to stay cool in the heat (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). To carry heavy loads, women often wear ***bilums*** (woven string bags) on their heads, while men wear them over their shoulders or use baskets. In many remote areas, shoes are uncommon. For various special ceremonies, many Papua New Guineans decorate their bodies with facial paint and jewelry, headdresses, or other decorative accessories made of beads, shells, and other materials.

Modern: Urban and most rural Papua New Guineans typically dress casually in Western-style warm-weather clothing and shoes. While men often wear shorts or pants with an optional shirt, most women wear dresses or long skirts with a meri blouse or t-shirt. In urban and some rural areas, many women wear modest shorts, as short skirts and shorts are uncommon. In business settings, formalwear typically consists of suits for men and dresses or pantsuits for women.

Recreation and Leisure

Papua New Guineans often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities are storytelling, family barbecues, and going to the beach or park. In rural areas, many Papua New

Guineans spend time together making weapons or *bilums*. Gambling is increasingly common in urban areas.

Holidays and Festivals: Papua New Guineans hold a variety of festivals and traditional ceremonies, many reflecting the country's ethnic and tribal diversity. PNG hosts annual art, cultural, and other local festivals. Clans (extended families) near the Sepik River (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*) host the Crocodile Festival (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), featuring ***singsings*** (gatherings of singing and dancing, see "Dance" below). Many participants decorate their bodies with paint and crocodile teeth necklaces. The Mount Hagen Festival attracts hundreds of tribes and clans, who showcase cultural performances and traditional clothing. Performers from the Huli tribe often wear ornate headdresses with birds-of-paradise feathers and red, yellow, and white face paint. Other performers from the Chimbu tribe decorate their bodies with paint to depict a skeleton.

While not celebrated in every village, Christmas festivities are relatively common and typically include family gatherings, a feast, and church services. Other holidays, such as King Day in June and Boxing Day on December 26 (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), reflect PNG's Commonwealth of Nations traditions (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in PNG's history. On September 16, Papua New Guineans celebrate Independence Day (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*) with parades, flag-raising ceremonies, fireworks, and related festivities.

Sports

Papua New Guineans participate in many sports, such as rugby, football (soccer), basketball, volleyball, cricket, sailing, and some traditional sports. Some groups play ***goomboobooddoo***, a traditional wrestling game in which two men from different families or clans compete after greasing their bodies. Others play ***bubberah***, a traditional boomerang throwing game.

While PNG first participated in the Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada in 1976, it has never won a medal. Since 1962, PNG has participated and had some success in other international competitions, such as the Commonwealth Games. That year, PNG won its first bronze medal at the Games in boxing. PNG has had notable success in weightlifting, boxing, swimming, shooting, and lawn bowling (like bocce). In 1990, Geua Tau won the women's lawn bowling singles event, earning PNG's first gold medal. In 2006, Ryan Pini won a gold medal in swimming.

Rugby: Most likely due to Australian influence (see p. 4-7 of *History and Myth*), rugby is PNG's most popular sport. Many children and young adults play recreationally. PNG participates in both the International Rugby League and Rugby Union. As of 2022, PNG's national men's rugby league team, nicknamed the ***Kumuls*** (birds of paradise), ranks sixth in the world. PNG's national union team, nicknamed the ***Pukpuks*** (crocodiles), has had some regional success, winning the Oceania Rugby Men's Championship in 2019 and 2022. Notable Papua New Guinean rugby players often join teams in England or Australia. Winger Marcus Bai represented PNG at the 1995 Rugby League World Cup, and Menzie Yere was one of the best players on the Sheffield Eagles, an England-based team, until 2020.

Music

Traditional music in PNG features various singing styles and musical instruments, reflecting the country's cultural and linguistic diversity (see p. 1-4 of *Language and Communication*). Examples of traditional instruments are the ***kundu*** (hourglass-shaped drum), ***garamut*** (slit drum), seed pod rattle, shell rattle, ***iviliko*** (bamboo pan pipe), and ***launut*** (friction drum). Some traditional music is ceremonial and relies on percussion and wind instruments to accompany dancing and occasionally evoke ancestral spirits. Many traditional musical styles include vocals with trance-like rhythms. Along the Sepik River, men often store ceremonial drums in a ***Haus Tambaran*** (men's meeting house – see p. 3 of *Family and*

Kinship and p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*) to protect the drums' spiritual power from women and children. For special occasions, such as inaugurating a *Haus Tambaran*, Papua New Guineans often use the *kundu* for its repetitive rhythms to accompany ***sui*** (solo) or ***namoi*** (group) singing.

While some remote areas maintain traditional indigenous musical forms, many Papua New Guineans also use Western instruments. During World War II (see p. 4-6 of *History and Myth*), US and Australian soldiers introduced guitars and ukuleles, which, when combined with traditional styles, resulted in a distinct form of music. In the 1960s, the Paramana Strangers became a popular band that blended local language with Western instruments. In the 1970s and 80s, Sanguma gained popularity, combining Western instruments, like the saxophone, guitar, and keyboard, with traditional instruments, such as pipes and drums. Blending rock and jazz, Sanguma became one of the first Papua New Guinean bands to perform internationally. George Telek also gained international recognition, singing in Tok Pisin and his local Tolai language of Kuanua.

Today, Papua New Guineans listen to pop, jazz, reggae, and other styles. Primarily due to missionary work, some Papua New Guineans listen to gospel music. Anslom Nakikus is a notable reggae singer, who performed at the International Independent Music Festival in India and released the hit single "I Will Love You" with Big Records, a Canadian record label, in 2022.

Dance

Dance is an important part of Papua New Guinean culture. Many ceremonies mark events, such as hunts, births, and harvests, and incorporate *singsings* with dancing, traditional dress, and music. For example, men of the Baining tribe in East New Britain perform a fire dance for special occasions, such as the initiation

of young boys into adulthood. Men step to the beat of rhythmic chanting and the sound of bamboo poles hitting logs around a large bonfire. Women are not allowed to dance in or watch the fire dance. Some Tolai men and boys perform the whip dance, a ceremonial practice that includes chants of traditional songs and whipping canes around the arms and legs of other dancers. Alternatively, the "mudmen" of the Kaulga tribe perform their *singsing* in silence as they walk slowly, cover their bodies in mud, and wear loincloths and grotesque mud masks to scare enemies away. In Enga Province, some women perform the ***suli muli*** dance in which they chant to a *kundu* beat and wear traditional skirts, ornate headdresses, and black face paint.

Literature

PNG does not have a long history of written language, as Papua New Guinean languages were historically spoken, not written. Storytelling is an oral tradition (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) that continues today. Much of traditional Papua New Guinean literature consists of legends or myths (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*). Often considered PNG's first novel, "The Crocodile" (1970) was written by Vincent Eri and depicts a clash of power and culture between indigenous Papua New Guineans and colonial men during World War II. Papua New Guinean literature has relatively limited publications and international recognition.

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

PNG has a rich collection of arts and crafts that reflect the country's diverse culture and people. Some examples are ceramics, headdresses, shields, weaving, and wooden storyboards that depict daily village life. Traditionally, some wooden figures have religious or spiritual significance and represent heroes or deities (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Today, wood carvings, such as figures and masks, vary significantly by region and tribal group and are world renowned. Carvings often feature different characteristics, colors, patterns, and types of wood.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Shared meals with friends and family are often important social events in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Papua New Guinean culinary traditions, while varying significantly by clan (extended family – see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), exhibit an array of Pacific and Melanesian influences. Many meals incorporate fresh, locally grown, and brightly seasoned ingredients.

Dining Customs

Papua New Guineans typically eat two daily meals and snack throughout the day. Breakfast, if eaten, is often small and consumed quickly, while the mid-day and evening meals tend to be more substantial. As most Papua New Guineans rely on subsistence agriculture (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*), diets vary significantly across the country, depending on the availability of local crops. Likewise, agricultural and hunting or fishing responsibilities vary between clans, with different groups sometimes dividing responsibilities by gender (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) or social status (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). Papua New Guineans eat some meals with their hands, using their fingers and thumb to scoop food into their mouths, though the use of cutlery is more common.

Clans in PNG observe a variety of dining customs and taboos that often vary by tribe and region. Many Papua New Guineans consider stepping over food rude, prohibit men from eating in the presence of their mothers-in-law, and discourage second helpings, which signify a host not providing sufficient food. Likewise, some groups do not allow pregnant or menstruating women to consume certain meats and fruits or help cook meals. If clans have totemic (symbolic) animals, they often prohibit the consumption of that animal.

Diet

Although Papua New Guinean cuisine varies somewhat by region, it typically relies heavily on staple foods that communities grow locally. Dishes tend to highlight starches, fruits, and fresh seafood over meat and dairy products. ***Kaukau*** (sweet potato) is one of the country's most important staples, and multiple varieties, often mashed or boiled, form part of many dishes throughout PNG. Another common staple is taro, a starchy root vegetable or tuber common in some Asian-Pacific cuisines. It is prominent in many traditional dishes and served steamed, boiled, roasted, or fried. ***Kumu*** (greens –especially the boiled leaves of several edible plants, often rungia and amaranth), also feature as a side dish in many meals. ***Sago***, the boiled or steamed spongelike interior of the *sago* palm, similar in texture to tapioca, also appears in dishes throughout PNG.

Animal protein is uncommon in Papua New Guinean dishes, though fish and seafood are components of several popular meals. ***Kokoda mogurnda***, a small freshwater fish that inhabits rivers and streams in the forests of PNG, is common, as is imported canned or tinned fish. Pork and chicken are central to large feasts or celebrations but do not feature in many daily meals or staple dishes. Other staples are coconut (used for its flesh and milk), multiple banana varieties, passionfruit, mango, pawpaw (a green fruit with an aromatic yellow interior), breadfruit, and ***pit pit*** (the flower of a local sugarcane species).

Popular Dishes and Meals

As many Papua New Guineans eat two large meals daily, they usually consume little or no food in the morning aside from coffee or tea and ***parem*** (discs of cooked dried *sago*). The mid-day meal is much more substantial, and some popular options are ***saksak*** (*sago* dumplings boiled with banana in coconut milk) or *kokoda* fish marinaded in lime juice with chilis, cilantro leaves, and taro or *kaukau* chips. If Papua New Guineans have access to poultry, many make chicken pot (chicken, *kaukau,* onions, and

corn slow cooked with coconut milk and curry powder), whereby they remove the chicken and vegetables from the stew and serve them with a side of the broth.

The evening meal features similar dishes to lunch. Other options are ***bugandi*** egg drop soup (made with pumpkin, spinach, and onions, with an egg added to the dish before serving) or ***kol pis no rais*** (canned fish, often tuna, with rice and vegetables). For special occasions, Papua New Guineans prepare a ***mumu*** for a large feast, whereby pork and chicken, along with *kaukau* and coconut milk, steam cook in underground ovens lined with banana leaves for several hours. Some clans cover the oven with soil, while others have a taboo against this practice and instead cover it with more banana leaves. For dessert, ***talautu*** (shredded coconut and pineapple chunks served with lime juice, coconut milk, and sugar) and fresh fruits are popular.

Beverages

Due to PNG's tropical climate, fresh fruit juice and smoothies are available year-round. Many Papua New Guineans consume ***kokanas wara*** (coconut water), which market stalls and street vendors often sell. Soft drinks are also popular options, notably locally canned *Gold Spot* fruit sodas and Australian *Solo Lemonade*. Coffee from the Highlands, a major export (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*), is also common.

Many Papua New Guineans buy or brew their own beer or distill ***paia wara*** ("fire water," or sugar cane spirits). Nevertheless, Southern Highlands Province instituted an alcohol ban in 2010, linking its sale and consumption to heightened crime (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Despite claims that the ban has led to an increase in smuggling and a robust black market, other provinces also commonly institute temporary alcohol bans, often during the holidays (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). Some Papua New Guineans consume ***kava***, a traditional drink

prepared from a root of the same name, related to pepper, and known for its mildly intoxicating effects.

Eating Out

Restaurants in Port Moresby and other urban areas range from upscale establishments specializing in international cuisine to inexpensive, casual pan-Asian eateries and fast-food restaurants serving Western-style dishes. Small towns typically have a few casual restaurants that serve Papua New Guinean food or street stalls that sell snacks or fresh fruit. As many Papua New Guineans consider hospitality an important component of their culture, they do not encourage tips.

Health Overview

Papua New Guineans' overall health has improved in recent decades. While life expectancy increased significantly from 46 to 62 years between 1960-2000, improvements have slowed in recent years. Between 2000-2020, life expectancy increased from 62 to 66 years, lower than the average of low- and medium-income countries in East Asia and the Pacific (76) and the US (77). Between 2000-20, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 54 deaths per 1,000 live births to 34, higher than the rates in the neighboring Solomon Islands (16) and Indonesia (19).

Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Papua New Guinean medicine centers on the use of prayer and herbal remedies to identify illness and treat disease. Many shamans or traditional healers consider illness a result of conflict with ancestral spirits or evil spirit attacks and witchcraft (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). To address physical or spiritual afflictions, they communicate with the spirit world and perform certain rituals. Fears of illness stemming from witchcraft or curses remain prevalent in PNG, and suspicion of

sorcery was an admissible legal defense in murder cases until 2013. In recent years, high-profile cases of women and girls being tortured or killed after being accused of witchcraft have captured significant media attention (see p. 2 of *Sex and Gender*).

Modern Healthcare System

PNG's constitution (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) designates basic access to healthcare as a right for all citizens and names the national government as the entity responsible for ensuring quality care. As part of a broader decentralization process in the 1990s, the central government oversees large hospitals and finances the overall healthcare system, while provincial and municipal governments manage smaller clinics, health centers, and sanitation outposts. Most of PNG's healthcare funding comes from the national budget, as well as from foreign, largely Australian, aid (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*). The national government also heavily subsidizes religious groups that provide healthcare services as part of a program titled "church health services" (CHS). At government and CHS centers, Papua New Guineans pay a small co-payment to receive medical attention that is otherwise largely free.

Public health experts have raised concerns that PNG's challenging geography has excluded many residents from the health services to which they are entitled. While the government's 2021-30 health plan aims to expand the number and accessibility of health centers, this disparity in treatment options leads to uneven health outcomes between urban and rural residents. Further, those who have access to care often face a shortage of qualified medical staff and inadequate equipment.

Some Papua New Guineans, largely those who work for mining firms or agribusinesses (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*), receive private insurance coverage as a fringe benefit under the

terms of their employment. Private hospitals and clinics often require some upfront payment at the time of service and are located in Port Moresby or Lae, making them inaccessible for most Papua New Guineans, who face logistical and financial difficulties in seeking care. If they can afford it, some Papua New Guineans travel to Australia for complex procedures, as the standard of care is much higher in the neighboring country.

Healthcare Challenges

The leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, which accounted for about 62% of deaths in 2019. Of these, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and diabetes are the most common. Preventable "external causes," such as suicides, car accidents, and other injuries, resulted in about 7% of deaths, equivalent to the US rate. About 30% of deaths in PNG are from communicable diseases, prenatal or maternal complications, or nutritional conditions, significantly higher than the US (5%). Food insecurity is a recurring concern in PNG, particularly during periodic droughts due to the El Niño climatic phenomenon (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Some 22% of the population suffered from undernourishment in 2020, higher than the Solomon Islands (18%) and Indonesia (7%).

As of 2019, about 7 of every 10,000 residents live with HIV/AIDS, the Pacific region's highest rate and significantly higher than the rate in neighboring Indonesia and the US (2). In 2020, PNG accounted for some 95% of the reported HIV/AIDS infections in the region. Likewise, water-related diseases are widespread, with typhoid, cholera, malaria, and diarrhea representing major causes of death in PNG, particularly in rural regions. As of mid-2023, PNG has reported some 47,000 cases of COVID-19 that caused almost 700 confirmed deaths, although public health experts believe official statistics have undercounted rural cases. Slightly less than 4% of the country's population has received at least two doses of a vaccine against the virus.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

While much is unknown about Papua New Guinea's (PNG's) early economy, anthropologists believe that between 10000-2000 BC, early inhabitants subsisted by farming, hunting, and making pottery to trade. Papua New Guineans notably domesticated the banana plant, sugarcane, and some edible greens. Prior to the arrival of European colonists, Papua New Guineans likely traded with island peoples across Southeast Asia and Oceania.

Europeans sought to colonize the present-day islands of New Guinea, New Ireland, and New Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; however, many died of fever or left PNG for Australia (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). During this period, European colonists engaged indigenous Papua New Guineans to trade for sandalwood, cedar, copra (dried coconut), sea cucumbers, pearls, and mother of pearl shells. Throughout the 19th century, whaling ships operated along PNG's northern coast, employing some Papua New Guineans as crew, interpreters, carriers, and laborers for short periods of time. While some locals traded with the Europeans, others attacked passing boats.

In the late 19th century, Europeans established plantations and trading firms in PNG. British and German companies recruited or kidnapped Papua New Guineans as forced labor. Particularly after the British and Germans annexed northern and southern PNG, respectively (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), colonists used forced cheap labor to maintain tobacco and copra plantations and gold mines.

Forced, indentured, and unpaid labor defined PNG's colonial economy. Colonial authorities required Papua New Guineans to toil at the hands of Germans or Australians, often building roads. By 1914, PNG's most profitable export had become gold, the

mining of which was extremely labor intensive. After Australia formally took over German and British PNG in 1921 (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), officials justified the exploitation of local labor on the grounds that the work would be "socially and morally good" for Papua New Guineans. Although Australia attempted to establish a plantation economy, PNG was unable to compete successfully in global markets, as its remote location was disadvantageous for shipping crops to many places. Australian authorities encouraged the creation of village coffee and cacao plantations for Papua New Guineans to increase their economic output. Nevertheless, the profits were negligible, and the returns and working conditions were similar to those in other subsectors.

Well into the mid-20th century, most Papua New Guineans subsisted as small farmers, while some new businesses run by foreign nationals helped develop the economy. Chinese businessmen, many of whom immigrated in the early 1900s, established trading firms, hotels, shipyards, several plantations, a brothel, an opium house, and a gambling den in Port Moresby. Meanwhile, Europeans primarily exported cacao, rubber, coffee, oil palms, and tea.

During World War II, nearly 1.5 million foreign – mostly Japanese, Australian, and American troops – served in PNG (see p. 4-6 of *History and Myth*). Many of them forced Papua New Guineans into involuntary labor, even while suffering food shortages. Because this coerced labor persisted for years, many Papua New Guineans led strikes in the mid-20th century to demand fair wages and better working conditions.

When PNG declared independence in 1975 (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), major mineral discoveries transformed the economy. PNG became dependent on mineral exports, and therefore began to continuously experience the boom-and-bust cycle common among countries reliant on commodities for growth. In Enga Province, Bougainville, Misima Island, and New Ireland,

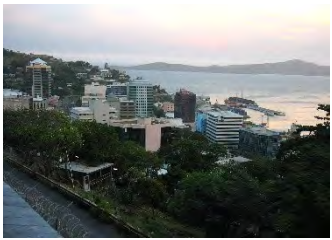
residents discovered gold and copper deposits that fueled local development. As gold prices rose in the 1980s, many Australian firms invested in mining operations, while continuing to underpay Papua New Guineans. Although the country's largest mine, the Panguna copper mine, was responsible for nearly 12% of the country's GDP in 1987, it caused devastating environmental issues and contributed to the Bougainville conflict (see p. 8-10 of *History and Myth*).

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, several natural disaster such as droughts, earthquakes, and tsunamis impacted PNG's economy (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). The 1997-98 El Niño climatic phenomenon caused a drought that was particularly devastating, destroying many crop harvests and causing millions to go hungry. Coupled with the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis, PNG's economy suffered. The ***kina*** (PNG's currency) lost much of its value, inflation rose to about 16%, the budget deficit grew, and PNG entered recession in 5 of the 6 years from 1997-2002.

To recover, PNG adopted some liberalizing economic reforms. It transferred economic control from the federal to the state level and removed foreign investment barriers. Coupled with a global rebound in mineral commodity prices, PNG balanced its budget and stabilized the *kina* against the US dollar. Soon after, PNG suffered from the 2008-09 global financial crisis, which resulted in a steep decline in mineral revenues. Foreign investment to construct liquified natural gas (LNG) terminals in the late 2000s helped foster an economic recovery in the 2010s. Nevertheless, in 2020, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions caused the economy to contract by 3.5% (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*). In 2022, mining revenues helped the economy grow by nearly 4%, recovering losses caused by the pandemic.

As of 2022, PNG's GDP per capita is $3,020, below neighboring Indonesia's $4,788. Scholars attribute this difference to most PNG residents' participation in the subsistence economy. Not

only do about 40% of Papua New Guineans live in poverty, but the economy is highly unequal. Mine owners retain much of PNG's wealth, having benefited from the economic growth and commodity price boom in the early 21st century. In addition, job growth has not kept pace with population growth. The share of working-age people attaining jobs in the formal economy has fallen in recent years, as nearly 80% of Papua New Guineans toil largely unprotected in the informal economy (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*).



Services

As the largest sector of the economy, services account for nearly 44% of GDP as of 2020 and 31% of employment in 2019. Major subsectors are tourism, telecommunications, and financial services.

Tourism: In 2019, around 211,000 tourists visited PNG, often to see natural sites such as Mount Wilhelm, the Owen Stanley Range, and the Mount Giluwe volcano. In the same year, Australia accounted for some 103,000 tourists, followed by the Philippines (19,000) and China (14,800).

Telecommunications: PNG's telecommunications subsector is one of the country's fastest growing. Between 2006-20, mobile phone service coverage increased from about 3% to 89% of the population. PNG is home to competing national and foreign telecommunications firms. Recently, Australia has promoted its firms as part of wider efforts to counter the expansion of Chinese telecommunications companies in the region. In 2017, Australia won a bidding war between its Vocus firm and China's Huawei to build a new undersea cable connection to PNG.

Financial Services: Four commercial banks operate in PNG, the largest of which is the locally owned Bank of the South Pacific. PNG is one of the most unbanked countries in the world, as some 80% of the population does not use formal financial services due to geographic and security obstacles. PNG is home to an array of microfinance companies that provide small loans at low interest rates to small businesses, such as local farms.

Industry

Industry accounts for some 33% of GDP and 13% of the labor force. Mining and natural gas are the largest subsectors.

Mining: As one of PNG's most critical subsectors, mining has contributed over 25% of GDP since 1999. PNG has significant gold, silver, and copper deposits. While beneficial to the economy, some of the country's largest mines, such as Ok Tedi, Edie Creek, and Hamata, cause significant environmental damage by discharging contaminants into rivers (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). Recent reports cite the Ok Tedi mine releasing nearly 80 million tons of pollutants since its initial construction in the late 1970s.

Natural Gas: PNG holds nearly 5 trillion cubic ft of proven natural gas reserves. The country exported about $3 billion of natural gas in 2020, accounting for nearly 5% of GDP that year. While PNG is home to five natural gas pipeline projects, only Texas-based Exxon Mobile's Hides Gas Field is fully operational as of mid-2023, making the company the country's largest LNG exporter.

Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for over 19% of GDP and 56% of the labor force.

Farming: Most farms are on small plots of land. In recent years, plant diseases have posed a major threat to the economy and the almost 80% of Papua New Guineans who engage in subsistence farming. From 2011-16, coconut, coffee, and cocoa plants were afflicted with plant diseases, drastically limiting output. In addition, PNG's agricultural sector has shrunk as rising labor costs and land tenure issues proved too expensive for some commercial agricultural businesses to remain operational. Nevertheless, nearly 17% of the country's exports were agricultural products in 2018. The most profitable agricultural export is palm oil, accounting for some 51% of total agricultural exports, followed by coffee (27%), cocoa (15%), and copra (7%).

Forestry: Commercial and illegal logging contribute nearly 5% of PNG's GDP. While major logging firms employ local people, they also contribute to PNG's deforestation. Between 1972-2014, PNG lost 9 million hectares of rainforest, roughly the size of Portugal, to logging operations. Although government officials regulate logging, lack of compliance with environmental standards and inadequate monitoring make them ineffective.

Fishing: Given its long coast, PNG's fishing sector accounts for about $96 million in export value and is growing rapidly. From 2014-19, fish and fishery product exports nearly doubled. Major fish exports are frozen whole tuna and canned tuna.

Currency

The Papua New Guinean *kina* (K or PGK) is issued in two coins (1 and 2) and six banknotes (2, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100). The PGK divides into 100 ***toea*** (cents, t) issued in four coins (5, 10, 20, 50). Between 2018-23, US$1 fluctuated between K3.17-3.57.

Foreign Trade

PNG's exports, worth about $11 billion in 2021, primarily consist of natural gas, gold, copper, and palm oil sold to Japan (25%), China (25%), Australia (15%), and Taiwan (6%). In the same year, imports totaled $4.3 billion and included refined petroleum, rice, delivery trucks, and excavation machinery from Australia (27%), China (25%), Singapore (13%), and Malaysia (8%).

Foreign Aid

PNG received nearly $615 million in foreign aid grants and loans in 2020, most of which came from Australia (63%), Japan (5%), and New Zealand (4%). In the same year, US humanitarian assistance to PNG comprised nearly $21 million to combat HIV/AIDS, support biodiversity, and recover from COVID-19. PNG also receives significant funding from the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank. In 2020, the two financial institutions provided a collective $578 million in loans, mostly for economic restructuring and infrastructure development.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

While Papua New Guinea (PNG) has improved its physical and telecommunications infrastructures in recent decades, it faces economic, geographic, and environmental challenges. Although PNG's laws generally protect press freedom, the country does not offer a right to information, meaning journalists cannot access official documents. Despite a robust media presence, many outlets struggle to reach portions of the population due to its linguistic diversity (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*).

Transportation

Papua New Guineans' travel habits tend to vary by their residence and socioeconomic status. A primary form of transport is walking. Most residents do not own personal vehicles, but many rely on others who do. In 2016, PNG's registered vehicle ownership rate of about 11 per 1,000 people was far lower than neighboring Indonesia's (490). Local taxi services supply rides around some urban areas (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Although buses service cities, they are often privately owned and poorly maintained. PNG has no railways, and roadways do not span the entire country, though flights connect most cities. PNG has some bike trails, but most bikers are tourists. Further, poor road maintenance makes most biking in the country unsafe (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*).

Roadways: Only 1,864 mi of PNG's 5,809 mi of roadways are paved. Geographic isolation and treacherous terrain make travel by road between regions difficult. Most paved roads are in urban areas and do not connect population centers. Port Moresby, for example, is not connected by road to any other major city.

Ports and Waterways: PNG has some 6,835 mi of navigable waterways. Fly River, PNG's second longest, serves as a navigable waterway for inland mining operations. PNG's 3,201

mi of coastline is critical to trade, with major seaports in Kimbe, Lae (the country's largest), Madang, Rabaul, and Wewak.

Airways: PNG has 561 airports, 21 of which have paved runways. PNG has the world's eleventh most airports, which demonstrates its reliance on flights between urban centers. Port Moresby International Airport is PNG's main hub and serves 154 flights weekly. PNG has five airlines. Air Niugini, based in Port Moresby, is the country's flag carrier and largest airline, serving 40 domestic and international destinations.

Energy

As of 2020, PNG generates some 80% of its energy from fossil fuels, while hydroelectric plants account for much of the remaining 20%. PNG has untapped potential for greater hydroelectric, wind, solar, and geothermal power. While an increasing number of buildings are connected to the electric grid, only about 15% of households have access to electricity (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). PNG has about 164 mi of oil pipelines and a growing liquified natural gas subsector that features one operational and four planned pipelines (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources)*.

Media

While PNG's constitution does not protect press freedom, the country has a relatively free media landscape. In 2022, PNG ranked 62 of 180 countries on a press freedom index. Some journalists face intimidation, threats, censorship, lawsuits, and bribery attempts, though the government has not imprisoned any journalists in the past decade. Resource constraints, especially a lack of linguistic resources, mean that many PNG residents cannot access media in their first languages. Further, journalists are often constrained by their employers, some of whom are concerned with commercial factors. For example, *The National* reporters avoid covering environmental issues, as a logging firm owns the outlet. Journalists also often avoid reporting on culturally contentious issues, such as abortion (see p. 3 of *Sex*

and Gender). In 2023, PNG's government proposed a new media policy that critics say will increase the state's control.

Print Media: PNG has robust print media offering daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers. Most national print media is based in Port Moresby, although some smaller localities have their own newspapers. The English-language *The National* and *The Post-Courier* are PNG's only national dailies.

TV and Radio: TV is a popular source of news and entertainment. PNG has one major national TV network, state-owned *NBC Papua New Guinea*. In cities, foreign broadcasters like *EMTV* (Fiji) and *ABC* (Australia) feature national news. Where available, some residents buy multi-channel cable packages or get international programming via satellite or Internet providers.

Radio is a vital source of information. As of 2009, PNG has several commercial radio stations and three state-run radio networks that operate 20 local stations. Most stations broadcast in English and Tok Pisin (see p. 1-3 of *Language and Communication*).

Telecommunications

PNG's telecommunications network covers major cities and is expanding to rural regions. In 2020, PNG had 2 landlines and 54 mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Many families in PNG share phones. Mobile phones are growing in popularity in rural areas, as residents increasingly engage in mobile banking to access loans. PNG's government has partnered with Japan, the US, and Australia to build a planned 5G mobile network.

Internet: As of 2019, about 11% of Papua New Guineans access the Internet daily, the world's 14th lowest rate. PNG has just 0.2 fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people. While Internet access is unrestricted, high-speed connections are not widely available, as most people use mobile phone or satellite-based connections that are often relatively slow and unreliable.

AFCLC

For more information on
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:
airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC

For more information on
Pacific Air Forces visit:
http://www.pacaf.af.mil

CULTURE GUIDE

Access all of the AFCLC's expeditionary culture field guides in our mobile app!

GET IT ON Google Play

Available on the iPhone App Store

DoD Enterprise Mobility Personal Use Mobile Apps