

Low Risk - Ones to Watch

Papua New Guinea

The risk of atrocity in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is generally low but high levels of criminal activity are endemic throughout regions of Papua New Guinea, and sexual and gender-based violence is likewise common.ⁱ Crime is mostly at local and regional levels, targeting tourists or foreign workers. Political corruption is one major challenge for Papua New Guinea. Anti-corruption watchdogs in the country are limited in number, and those that do exist are subject to political interference.ⁱⁱ This corruption has been suggested to extend to its national fiscal assessment, with the government accused of manipulating figures to serve its own interests, including manipulating its predicted GDP.ⁱⁱⁱ Discrimination against minority groups is apparent, and women are disadvantaged in all facets of society. Minority groups include the LGBTQI community and Chinese migrant communities, both of which are the target of hate speech, though large-scale incitement to violence is rarely an outcome.^{iv} Sexual and gender based violence remains endemic.

A planned referendum on independence in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville could provide a trigger for violence, though. Originally scheduled for June 15, 2019, the referendum has been postponed due to independence referendum on October 17, 2019 due to voter registration problems.^v This serves as the latest chapter to the uneasy relationship between the Bougainville Government and the government in Port Moresby which has come close to armed conflict more than once.^{vi} Despite being politically part of Papua New Guinea, the region itself is part of the Solomon Islands Archipelago and is regarded as “one of the accidents of late 19th century colonial map drawing”^{vii} between British and German colonial administrations. In 1988 tensions boiled over and civil war erupted over monetary and resource distribution as well as environmental damage caused by the Panguna Copper Mine.^{viii} In 1997 a truce was declared, and a peace agreement was finalised in 2001.^{ix} Part of the peace agreement included a requirement that the Autonomous Region of Bougainville have an independence referendum by 2020 at the very latest.^x Tensions between the Bougainville government and Port Moresby remain as there is an explicit desire by Bougainville residents to become independent, while the reopening of the Panguna Copper Mine and entitlement to future profits remain a source of tension between Port Moresby and Bougainville. Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O’Neil has also contested the validity of the referendum, calling it ‘non-binding’^{xi} while the government in Bougainville has accused O’Neil of financially constraining the island, stymying its progress to independence.^{xii} The outcome of the October Independence Referendum, if it happens, remains to be seen.

Recommendations:

The government of PNG and its partners should:

1. Thoroughly investigate all allegations of the use of excessive force by the security forces and ensure full legal accountability for all shootings and other acts of violence.
2. Publicize, educate, and enforce the human rights of girls and women and minority groups.
3. Ensure improved access to justice for the victims of sexual and gender-based violence.
4. Tackle impunity by strengthening the training and accountability of security forces, including police.
5. Increase support for the victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

6. Develop and implement a strategy for reinforcing anti-violence norms amongst men.
7. Empower women through increasing educational and economic opportunities.
8. Fulfil its responsibility to protect all populations on its territory, including women, refugees and asylum seekers.

On Bougainville, the government should:

1. Ensure a free, fair, and peaceful referendum.
2. Allow the deployment of international observers to monitor the voting.
3. Respect the result of the referendum.

And the international community should:

1. Offer and provide international monitors.
2. Provide technical support.
3. Ensure that diplomatic staff closely monitor the situation.
4. Urge the government to ensure a free and fair referendum and respect the results.

ⁱ https://smartraveller.gov.au/Countries/pacific/Pages/papua_new_guinea.aspx

ⁱⁱ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/papua-new-guinea>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://pngconomics.org/2019/01/the-corruption-of-pngs-economic-statistics-summary/>

^{iv} <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/papua-new-guinea>

^v “Bougainville Independence Vote Delayed to October.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 1 Mar. 2019.

^{vi} [Woodbury](#), 5.

^{vii} Woodbury, 5.

^{viii} Grant Wyeth, “Delayed But Looming: The Question of Bougainville Independence.” *The Diplomat*, *The Diplomat*, 14 Mar. 2019.

^{ix} [Wyeth](#), Delayed But Looming.

^x <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-papua-bougainville/bougainville-independence-vote-delayed-to-october-idUSKCN1QI3XI>

^{xi} “Bougainville Independence Vote Delayed to October.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 1 Mar. 2019.

^{xii} Grant Wyeth, “Will Bougainville Hold Its Independence Referendum?” *The Diplomat*, *The Diplomat*, 28 Sept. 2017.