

# **Papua New Guinea**

# *Ethnicity in Papua New Guinea*

## *Group selection*

EPR codes the following ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea:

**Papua New Guineans and Bougainvilleans.**

## *Power relations*

Political factions in Papua New Guinea did not make claims in the name of an ethnic group or experience ethno-political state discrimination. From its independence in 1975 until 2013 no ethno-political groups were active in Papua New Guinea.

Elections have been characterized by competitiveness and inclusive participation. Papua New Guinea's ethnic divisions are plentiful and mostly driven by ethnolinguistic and geographic divisions (more than 800 distinct languages are spoken). On a global scale, Papua New Guinea has the highest ethnic diversity score (as calculated by <sup>4259</sup>, p. 216). The resulting unique ethnic structure makes it unlikely that any group may gain a dominant position within the political system, even on a regional level (<sup>4260</sup>, p. 682). For example, attempts to unite the lowlands Papua by creating an ethno-regional consciousness have so far failed and not resulted in the emergence of relevant ethno-regional cleavages. State institutions even benefit from the ethnic diversity as the state forces are ethnically so heterogeneous that they are in most cases neutral decision-makers on ethnic issues (<sup>4261</sup>).

<sup>4259</sup> [Fearon, 2003]

<sup>4260</sup> [Minority Rights Group, 1997]

<sup>4261</sup> [May, 1993]

An exception to this pattern is the region of Bougainville. The island, that is geographically and culturally part of the Solomon Islands, became part of Papua New Guinea as a remnant of German colonialism and the later Australian mandate. Soon after the independence of Papua New Guinea, the Bougainvilleans claimed independence and announced the creation of an own state. These efforts for independence collapsed six months after the initial declaration of independence. It was under the Australian mandate that Rio Tinto was granted mining rights in the resource rich center of the island. The ecologically disastrous mining practices combined with a very low backflow of the generated revenue to local communities lead to increased grievances.

These tensions erupted in the Bougainville conflict from 1988 lasting until the end of the 1990s. The conflict, which was fuelled by the distributional conflict about the economic spoils of the large

copper and gold mine, soon took the shape of a nationalistic struggle trying to achieve independence from the central Papua New Guinean state. During this conflict the differences in culture and appearance that already have been of relevance during the first period of independence gave rise to an ethno-nationalistic framework. The people inhabiting Bougainville are culturally part of the Solomon Islands archipelago and therefore share cultural practices with the inhabitants of the Solomon Islands. Although the huge majority being Christian, a spiritual connection to the land of their ancestors is a wide spread belief. Also phenotypically the inhabitants of Bougainville are different from the rest of Papua New Guinea as they, as the other native inhabitants of the Solomon Islands, are of a darker skin color (4262; 4263). The conflict was resolved with a peace treaty in 1997 and the 2002 constitutional reform granting autonomy to Bougainville as well as promising a referendum about independence to be held before 2020 (4264; 4265). In 2016, the referendum was announced to take place in 2019.

Besides the conflict in Bougainville, it would be generally misleading to interpret occasional violent conflicts in Papua New Guinea "as part of an ethno-nationalist quest or a competition for regional or national hegemony" (4266, p.176).

At the end of 2019, Bougainville held a non-binding independence referendum. With 98% of the votes, the Bougainvilleans voted in favor of independence (4267). Although the referendum is non-binding, the overwhelming mandate puts pressure on the Papua New Guinean government to take the results seriously. So far, the government of Papua New Guinea has always resisted full independence for Bougainville. As of 2021, the prime minister of Papua New Guinea - James Marape - and the newly elected president of Bougainville - Ishmael Toroama - are in consultation over the result of the referendum and the future planning with the Bougainville region (4268). Since no concrete developments have taken place yet, no change in the coding is warranted as of 2021.

<sup>4262</sup> [Hermans, 2007]

<sup>4263</sup> [Minority Rights Group, 2017]

<sup>4264</sup> [Bougainville Peace Agreement, 2001]

<sup>4265</sup> [Regan, 2002]

<sup>4266</sup> [Reilly, 2000]

<sup>4267</sup> [BBC, 2019]

<sup>4268</sup> [RNZ, 2020]

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## Political status of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea

From 1975 until 1975

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Papua New Guineans	0.966	DOMINANT
Bougainvilleans	0.034	POWERLESS

From 1976 until 1976

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Papua New Guineans	0.966	DOMINANT
Bougainvilleans	0.034	SELF-EXCLUSION

From 1977 until 1988

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Papua New Guineans	0.966	DOMINANT
Bougainvilleans	0.034	POWERLESS

From 1989 until 2002

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Papua New Guineans	0.966	DOMINANT
Bougainvilleans	0.034	SELF-EXCLUSION

From 2003 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Papua New Guineans	0.966	DOMINANT
Bougainvilleans	0.034	POWERLESS

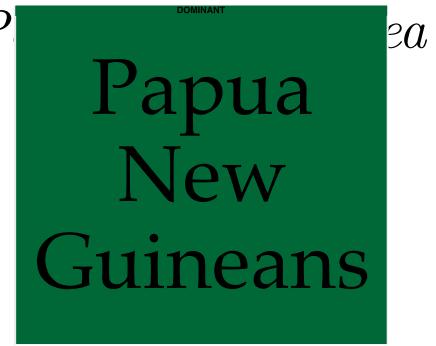


Figure 811: Political status of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1975-1975.

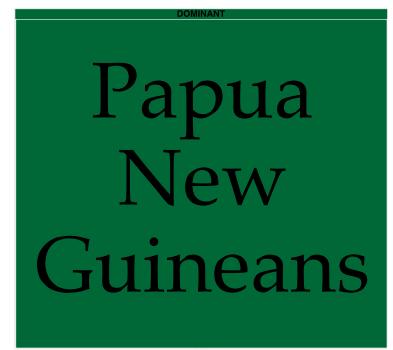


Figure 812: Political status of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1976-1976.

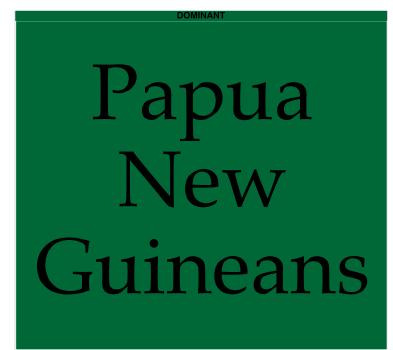


Figure 813: Political status of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1977-1988.

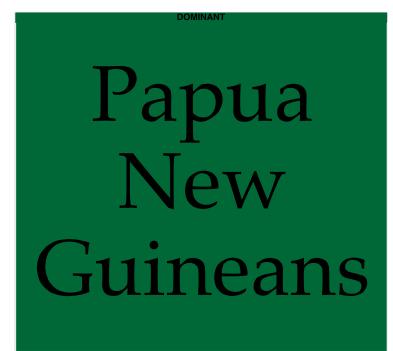


Figure 814: Political status of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1989-2002.

# *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea*

*From 1975 until 1975*



Figure 816: Map of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1975-1975.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Papua New Guineans	452 232	Regionally based
Bougainvilleans	9456	Regionally based

Table 301: List of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1975-1975.

*From 1976 until 2021*



Figure 817: Map of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1976-2021.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Papua New Guineans	452 232	Regionally based
Bougainvilleans	9456	Regionally based

Table 302: List of ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea during 1976-2021.

# *Conflicts in Papua New Guinea*

*Starting on 1989-04-05*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Papua New Guinea	BRA	Bougainvilleans	1989-04-05	Explicit	Yes	Yes