

I Nogat Inap Polis
Man na Meri:
A police shortage in
Papua New Guinea
Sean Jacobs

REGIONAL OUTLOOK

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About the Author

Sean Jacobs

Sean Jacobs is a Port Moresby-born Australian writer, government relations and policy specialist. He has worked with all levels of government in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. He currently works in local government in Australia and is the author of three books. He is a graduate of Griffith University and Macquarie University, and writes at www.seanjacobs.com.au.

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Introduction

The state of Papua New Guinea (PNG) suffers a range of acute police-related challenges. One critical area of reform is police recruitment. Since independence in 1975, the size of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) has stagnated, despite a trebling of the population¹ and a range of police-assistance measures from PNG's primary development partner—Australia. This leaves PNG in a position of one police officer for every 1,845 civilians²—nearly four times below the level recommended by the United Nations (UN) to maintain a reasonable standard of law and order.³

Given these figures, the frequency of serious criminal activity in PNG—violent kidnapping, rape, robbery, tribal violence, civil unrest—has become almost expected. There is considerable benefit in building a professional and efficient police force to mitigate these events, while also providing public safety and building community respect. Clearly, however, such objectives are made impossible without a steady stream of well-trained and committed police recruits.

This paper examines a high-volume and highly targeted police recruitment and training drive as a consideration to address this gap. A politically endorsed and locally tailored initiative would produce a new wave of RPNGC recruits, widen the police talent-base, contribute to the PNG Government's recruitment targets and may help usher members of PNG's 'youth bulge' toward a potential occupation. Such an initiative will not be immune from the range of political, cultural and governance difficulties that confront programming and development of all types in PNG. Yet an isolated focus on recruitment, shored up by strong political endorsement, may provide a more tangible return on law-and-order investments in PNG than existing PNG and Australian Government policing assistance measures.

Crime and the constabulary

PNG's capital, Port Moresby, consistently gains an unenviable ranking as one of the world's most dangerous cities.⁴ This notoriety is endorsed by consistent news reports of often extremely violent crime, especially outside of town centres in PNG's rural-remote areas, where an estimated 86 percent of Papua New Guineans reside.⁵

Instances of lawlessness are met by a police force unable to keep pace. PNG's police, like police forces in most developing states, have become defined by overlapping themes of corruption, ill-discipline and a severe lack of funding. In 2018, then-RPNGC Commissioner Gari Baki notably dubbed 2015 to 2017 as "the years of discipline", delivering countless disciplinary rulings and 250 court-led dismissals.⁶ "PNG police personnel work in some of the toughest conditions in the world," notes one ABC recent report, "with a lack of simple resources, including uniforms and vehicles."⁷ In terms of resourcing, a 2020 Australian Government funded RPNGC report found that "a one-off cost of 3.9 billion kina (approximately \$AUD 1.5 billion) is needed to fix its existing problems such as a lack of resources, training, and infrastructure."⁸

These findings are certainly not new. In a landmark 2010 report by UN Rapporteur Manfred Novak, an assessment of the RPNGC determined that: "Owing to insufficient human and financial resources, a high level of corruption and a lack of professionalism, the (RPNGC) is unable to provide security and prevent and investigate crime throughout the country, particularly in rural areas."⁹

At the political level, the police are represented by the Internal Security Minister on the National Executive Council—PNG's equivalent of federal Cabinet. Given the longstanding law and order problems, however, many Ministers take interest in police affairs, which creates a tangled and at times questionable web of loyalties between Members of Parliament (MPs) and the police bureaucracy. The disciplinary offences ex-Commissioner Baki listed above, for example, cascade throughout all ranks of the police machinery and are not solely prescribed to lower-ranking officers.

Questions as to why PNG's political leaders have not committed more—politically or via resourcing—toward improving the quality of the police force over past decades, especially when it is a clear priority, invites greater scrutiny into the dysfunctional nature of political-police relations. From observation, the RPNGC at a senior leadership level closely resembles a monopoly market structure in that it is highly controlled and vulnerable to nepotism. Senior, politically connected, police leaders remain secure in top-level positions, in some cases for decades, prohibiting the upward mobility and personal motivation of junior officers and the refreshment of new ideas.¹⁰ An enlarged and better-quality police force would disrupt the political and economic interests at play within the closed and uncompetitive police machinery. This highlights the need for any police reform in PNG to require strong political endorsement—a point I discuss further below.

The problems of a small police force

In addition to *quality*, the *quantity* of PNG's police is highly problematic. Since independence in 1975, PNG's population has more than doubled, growing from 2.9 million to 9 million in 2023.¹¹ The RPNGC has not grown in proportion. At present, there are roughly 6,535 police officers in PNG, according to Internal Security Minister, Peter Tsiamalili.¹²

Consequently, PNG's 'police to civilian ratio' has widened significantly. According to the UN, an ideal police-to-civilian ratio is one officer for every 450 civilians.¹³ PNG's current ratio, however, now sits at roughly one police officer for every 1,845 civilians. In some provinces, such as PNG's Northern Province, there is evidence of the ratio expanding as high as 1:2700.¹⁴

Table 1: Historical Police Officers to Civilians in PNG

Year	Population	Police-to-civilian ratio
1975	2.9 million	1:600
2008	6 million	1:1200
2023	9 million	1:1845

Source: Dinnen 1996¹⁵; The PNG Medium Term Development Plan 2011–2015; Kuku 202.

Aspirational targets for police numbers have been listed in various PNG Government documents for some time. In 2007, a commitment was made to increase the force size to 12,000 officers by 2014.¹⁶ This target was revised downward in the 2011–2015 PNG Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP), which listed an aspiration of 8,440 officers by 2015¹⁷, while 2018–2022 MTDP listed a specific ratio target of 1:900.¹⁸ No targets have ever been reached, exacerbated not only by limited recruitment success but accelerated population growth.

Table 2: PNG Government targets for the RPNGC

Year	PNG target
2015	8,440 ¹⁹
2020	10,000 ²⁰

Source: The PNG Medium Term Development Plan 2011–2015; The PNG Medium Term Development Plan 2018–2022.

Such wide police to civilian ratios can be a familiar problem across the developing world. However, compared to its Melanesian neighbours, PNG does appear in a unique position due to its population size. In the Solomon Islands and Fiji, for example, the ratios are 1:500 and 1:550 respectively.²¹

In PNG, the deficit in police officers creates three immediate problems. First, the most volatile of PNG's public spaces suffer from a lack of police presence. Port Moresby's marketplaces, for example, are hives of commercial and social activity that also serve as prominent venues for violent crime, violence against women (market traders), and a host of other subterranean cultural tensions that spill into physical and non-physical confrontation. This applies to other crowded public places such as high-transit and high-volume bus stops as well as many settlements or remote villages and where virtually no police are present.

In addition to limited public presence, a smaller force size results in a shortened list of candidates for 'specialist units' to respond to specific types of crime. The RPNGC Family and Sexual Violence Unit, for example, based at Port Moresby's Boroko Police Station, is

chronically under-staffed and maintains an average of four police officers to respond to cases of sexual violence in a city of over 400,000.²² This shortage is replicated in other specialist policing portfolios such as border patrol, water police, special weapons and tactics, forensics and, counter narcotics.

The third most immediate problem involves police resource diversion. PNG's 2022 national elections offer an example where instability in various parts of the country required the RPNGC to reassign multiple officers—often province by province—in order to maintain law and order.²³

There are also several deeper sovereign effects of an amputated police force. Modern liberal democracies—from which PNG's political institutions are drawn—thrive on an impersonal and present system of law and justice. In developing states, where there is an absence of effective local government, the police—although sparse—are often the most visible institutions of state. When police are not present in conflict situations, or at best ineffective, kinship groups can seek power functions in providing protection and retribution. Although at times romanticised, this form of cultural justice is hugely debilitating for a declared liberal democracy like PNG, suspending large sections of the population to remain sunk in perpetual states of conflict.²⁴ This undercuts the role of the PNG state, violating its declared guarantee on protection for individuals. Put simply—poor quality police, in low numbers, can significantly undermine the application of state-led justice in PNG.

Development partners' assistance to PNG in relation to policing

Australian policing assistance to PNG has long been receptive to PNG's policing problems. The Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP), launched in 2004 at the height over global concern for 'failed states', is perhaps the most well-known of contemporary Australia-PNG police assistance measures. While the ECP was not an exclusive police assistance package, it included a strong law and justice component of 200 front line Australian police officers that briefly deployed alongside RPNGC counterparts.²⁵ Although executed with genuine concerns over state stability, placing Australian police onto PNG's streets had obvious politico-legal complications and, at the time, was swiftly ruled unconstitutional by PNG's Supreme Court.²⁶ The Australian front line police concept has not been reactivated.

As a result, however, Australian police assistance to PNG is now significantly more careful and less penetrating. For example, the long-running PNG-Australia Policing Partnership (PNG-APP) currently consists of 42 personnel that occupy 'advisory' capacities only.²⁷ While the programme goal is admirable—"for the RPNGC to be a professional, effective and trusted community-oriented police service"²⁸—it has an expansive remit that covers not only training but operations, corporate reform and enabling services. The PNG-APP is one of three main pillars of Australia's law and justice assistance to PNG, which also includes the Justice Services and Stability for Development Program (JSS4D) and smaller select investments in PNG's law and justice sector.

Although not discounting the programme's intent, the capacity of 42 advisers—serving across a range of functions—is challenged not only by its broad remit but also many of the RPNGC quantity and quality issues noted above. While there is an obvious need for policing assistance to PNG, the current assistance regime is arguably well short of the level required to seriously disrupt the prevalence of crime or encourage public comfort in law and order. This does not detract from the individual effort of current Australian police advisers, but simply recognises the uphill challenge that individual practitioners face when tasked with a broad agenda—in an extremely limited environment—intensified by runaway population growth.

Other development partners provide policing assistance to PNG. The New Zealand Government, through New Zealand Police, provide targeted community policing support to the Autonomous Bougainville Government, where "New Zealand Police officers work in advisory positions helping with the recruitment, training and operational management of 350 Community Auxiliary Police (CAP)."²⁹ The United States, through its new region-wide assistance measures, offers a range of law and order police-related assistance measures to PNG under its 'Partners for Peace and Prosperity' pillar. This includes strengthening community capacity to respond to gender-based violence, improving justice systems and professionalising security services, as well as measures to counter transnational maritime and organised crime.³⁰ China, meanwhile, does not appear to have as comprehensive security or policing agreement in place, instead providing a range of in-kind equipment assistance measures—such as a recent donation of bulletproof vests and helmets—to the RPNGC.³¹

Why support state-based justice?

Poor state policing performance has driven many in the developing world and in PNG to look ‘beyond the state’ to reduce crime and deliver public safety. As Bruce Baker notes, in the African context, “more than 80 percent of justice services are delivered by nonstate providers” and is the work of “customary leaders, religious organizations, ethnic associations, youth groups, street associations, community police forums, neighborhood organizations, local and international security companies, and local entrepreneurs.”³² Development partners and the PNG Government have eagerly subscribed to this strategy with a list of projects and programs that encourage ‘joined up’ or cross-sector approaches to increasing public safety and offsetting PNG’s high crime rate.³³ Community-led policing has thus emerged as a concept to be encouraged in the face of limited police effectiveness.

Another factor to acknowledge here is the rise of PNG’s non-state private security providers—believed to be the nation’s third largest employment sector with 30,279 security guards as at 2018.³⁴ As Sinclair Dinnen notes, “Private security services are now routinely used by a wide range of clients including government departments, schools and universities, hospitals, banks, hotels, shopping centers, embassies, NGOs, as well as by some households and individuals.”³⁵ In terms of security functions, Dinnen adds, these include “static protection... escorting mobile assets, close personal protection, security training and assessments, emergency evacuations, rapid response capabilities, and, increasingly, the supply, installation and monitoring of sophisticated electronic surveillance and satellite tracking systems.”³⁶

These non-state examples introduce a wider discussion on both institutional effectiveness and legitimacy in a divided and culturally pluralistic society like PNG. Indeed, the wisdom of constant support to the RPNGC, despite its consistent underperformance, invites warranted criticism and a search for new policing approaches. As has been acknowledged in PNG for some time, a visibly undisciplined police force also has harmful consequences for institutional legitimacy. One of the first proper examinations into the country’s law and order problems, the 1984 Clifford Report, warned “Deteriorating public respect fosters frustration, undermines confidence, adversely affects motivation and commitment and in turn intensifies the very cause of public distrust.”³⁷

Non-state justice systems identified by Baker—ethnic and customary units—may prove more effective than the police in delivering greater stability and protection for the population. Clearly there may be value in pointing greater Australian assistance away from state institutions and toward these non-state actors and mechanisms.

But there are two points to keep in mind. First, relying overwhelmingly on non-state justice mechanisms can inevitably lead to concerns over human rights³⁸, especially in scenarios where police are entirely absent – clearly a common occurrence in PNG. Without the PNG state acting as an official and neutral judicial umpire, there is very limited scope to determine what is a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to deliver justice—only the views of the belligerents themselves.

Second, PNG’s state institutions—while underperforming—are not unfamiliar. The majority of PNG’s young population have, since independence in 1975, grown up within the Westminster system and its associated machinery of government. Military coups have not eventuated, the cycle of national elections—despite recent instability—remains unbroken, and no large scale foreseeable institutional change is on PNG’s horizon. The PNG state may be weak but, at the very least, is well-established. Although fatigued, public

security expectations on the PNG Government regarding security and safety are unlikely to subside.

Indeed, community expectations specifically on state-led policing appear to remain strong, despite the RPNGC's consistent absence and underperformance. In particular, community leaders have called for the urgent need for major law and enforcement intervention. Ruth Kissam, chairwoman of Advancing PNG Women Leaders Network, signalled this urgency following the mid-2023 abduction and torture of over twelve women from the village of Walagu in the Southern Highlands—served by only two police officers tens of kilometres away.³⁹ “We’re facing this terrorism right at our doorstep,” notes Kissam,

“where women and girls are being raped, and rape is being weaponised. Park everything aside. The government should now concentrate on law and order for the next six months, the next year. We need to bring back a semblance of respectability, we need to bring back a semblance of hope for women and girls.”⁴⁰

To be clear, non-state and community-led policing has its place. But there are interventions, such as the above, and of a kinetic nature, that only the police can ultimately perform. PNG's Constitution, for example, clearly lists the specific functions of the police force, “in accordance with the Constitutional Laws and Acts of Parliament,” which includes not only “to preserve peace and good order in the country” but mandates the RPNGC to maintain and enforce the law, to lay charges in accordance with the law, and to fulfil international policing functions directed by the law or the parliament.⁴¹ While there are certainly limits on what the PNG Government may hope to achieve in terms of expanding police presence, and what external assistance can presently offer, a disciplined focus on high-volume recruitment and training is relatively unambitious in comparison to a broad security capacity building agenda.

Benefits of high-volume recruitment and training

There are several clear theoretical gains from recruiting, training and operationalising more RPNGC officers. First, a new stream of recruits—provided other support functions keep pace and receive appropriate resourcing—would seek to correct the two immediate problems identified earlier—public presence and the zero-sum resource diversion from relocating police officers within PNG. The third problem of ‘specialist units’ would also be mitigated through sourcing human capital from the high-end skill sectors of PNG’s labour pool. This would meet the skills required to handle the more technical functions of policing—Information and Communications Technology, family and sexual violence, surveillance, money laundering. As much of PNG’s human capital has purposefully moved toward the private sector, however, this would require a strong element of financial and professional incentivisation on the part of the PNG Government. PNG’s high schools, trade colleges and even universities are a natural recruiting ground for these types of police candidates.

Generating more recruits could also mitigate PNG’s high youth unemployment rate. Similar to most developing states, PNG is demographically young with a majority of its population—between 58 to 67 percent—under the age of 25, many of whom are unemployed and formally uneducated.⁴² The gap between major youth unemployment and low police numbers is certainly an area to explore. Notably, there appears significant current interest in the prospect of a policing job. In June 2023, according to Internal Security Minister Tsiamalili, around 38,000 Papua New Guineans applied for 500 RPNGC positions—a considerable demand regardless of the mixed motivations these numbers may represent.⁴³ Regardless, there is simply not enough capacity to train more officers, Tsiamalili notes, given that the national training college at Bomana can only train 640 officers annually. Enhancing the existing training facility, therefore, would need to be considered in tandem with any large-scale recruitment drive.

Here it is important to add that a degree of appropriate expectation is warranted, given the severe lack of formal education among many potential recruits. This is common to many police forces, even in the developed world. Former New York Police Department (NYPD) deputy commissioner Jack Maple’s notable comment—“we don’t recruit from Planet Perfect, we recruit from society”—provides a frank but generic metaphor on the common challenges around police recruiting, accountability and performance.⁴⁴ Although obvious care must be taken not to excuse sub-standard police candidates, a reasonable level of criteria, fully reflective of PNG’s underlying demographics, can be developed.

At present, and as touched on earlier, a large portion of the younger demographic have found employment with PNG’s private security firms, undertaking very basic sentry and protective duties. If many of these recruits, from PNG’s streets and settlements with little formal training, are already responsible for the protection of government officials, foreign dignitaries, commercial interests, and high-value property—it is worth examining opportunities where they can enhance auxiliary functions to the police. It may even be worth examining why they cannot take the additional step of becoming police officers themselves. Recruiting police from PNG’s young population involves winning the attention of these young men and women.

How would a high-volume recruitment drive work?

Exact administrative details behind a high-volume recruitment and training program are beyond the scope of this paper. There are, however, four key areas to consider. First, sub-national and non-state structures may in fact serve well in the recruitment process. Seeking the buy-in of local political leaders in recruiting potential police officers is crucial. This would be an opportunity for serious political leaders seeking wider legitimacy to move beyond their constituencies, prove their effectiveness and attract the popular support of alternative kinship or tribal groups.

Secondly, a number of key steps early in the recruitment and training process will be required to ensure that the police force will not be an institutional forum for competing cultural loyalties. If not managed properly, cultural factionalism would be corrosive inside an enlarged police force. Police codes of conduct and internal disciplinary manuals, however, provide levers of regimentation that do not exist as rigidly in other faculties of government. Although clearly difficult to apply, there is at least greater scope within the RPNGC for improving cross-cultural cohesion through these mechanisms. The RPNGC, for example, according to a report tabled in 2004, has a “good, clear Disciplinary Manual.”⁴⁵ For potential international and current RPNGC trainers, this is a decent foundation to build upon and adjust where necessary.

Thirdly, there may be scope to straddle existing training institutions. The Bomana Police College, as noted, remains the nation’s central police training venue. Scaling it up limits the need to design, build and construct new infrastructure, although it is understood that a new location at Gusap in Morobe Province is also being considered to perform as a ‘regional’ training centre.⁴⁶

Fourthly, it may be worth considering and expanding upon proven hybrid public-private recruitment models. In 2013, for example, Morobe Mining Joint Venture (MMJV) paid for 26 reserve police to undertake the six-month RPNGC training program.⁴⁷ It was made clear by an MMJV official that the police were RPNGC officers and “must not be seen as company police.”⁴⁸ Yet under these arrangements, MMJV were responsible for administration and resourcing the reservists but, operationally, they were under the command and control of the RPNGC. It is a mixed model worth exploring for further consideration.

Measuring success

A key attractive feature of recruitment and training is a relatively unambiguous success measurement process. A strong conceptual case could be made for clear recruitment targets—2024 trained police recruits by 2024 for example. A proportion of this could be assigned to the specialist units identified earlier, especially where gender-specific roles or female police officers are critical (e.g. family and sexual violent unit).

Australian Federal Police (AFP) personnel, who have built up a high degree of expertise in developing environments, would remain within Australia's strategic 'non frontline' agenda as police trainers. Australian police officers training RPNGC recruits within a police training college, for example, does not qualify as 'front line policing'. Identifying and leveraging other forms of existing policing assistance from New Zealand, the United States and China could also be explored, whether significantly scaling up in-kind support - as is Beijing's approach - or through other forms of specialist training, which is delivered by New Zealand and the US.

An exact number of trainers is well beyond the expertise of the author. As outlined earlier, however, it is unlikely that the current amount of Australian personnel in PNG will be enough to service an ambitious and immediate recruitment (and concomitant training) target. Given that 200 Australian officers were deployed at the height of the ECP, it may be worth considering a similar number of personnel but specifically for training purposes.

Beware unintended consequences

There are three key areas where large-scale police recruitment has the potential to deliver unintended consequences. First, without a strong commitment to standards or accountability, the RPNGC will need to avoid becoming a collective of “low-cost trigger pullers”, to borrow from the RAND Corporation’s William Rosenau—an outcome observed where security forces, in developing states, are provided high resourcing without command discipline.⁴⁹ Oversight, accountability and a premium on police quality are crucial for making greater police numbers work effectively. The Police Oversight Program, established in 2004, is governed by a joint agreement between the Ombudsman Commission and RPNGC.⁵⁰ Increased resourcing to this program will be important to drive accountability for any increased volume of complaints from an increase in police officers. The current mechanisms for reporting corrupt, inappropriate or illegal police activity should be as accessible as possible.

The second complication emerges from the organisational and institutional effects of an increased force size—pressures on the court, judicial and prison systems. It therefore may be advisable to commission an immediate analysis under the scenario of a sudden increase in police numbers and, in tandem, conduct a corresponding business case with current JSS4D practitioners that examines court, judicial and correctional resourcing. Other logistical support services, such as the initiation of construction-ready police housing, could be commissioned as part of this analysis.

A third complication derives from the observation that strong state security forces in fragile democracies have a capacity to cause more harm than good. A sudden surplus of trained and armed police officers, for example, and potentially at odds with a weak state political machinery, would create significant complications for both PNG and Australia. The 1997 ‘Sandline Affair’, in which PNG Defence Force Commander Jerry Singirok ordered the arrest of Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan for procuring international security firm Sandline International, illustrates the complications that may transpire at a military level.⁵¹ Neighbouring Fiji, known for its ‘coup culture’, is a further example of a relatively strong state security apparatus overriding the state’s brittle political institutions.⁵² Tensions between the RPNGC and Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) have also been stretched, especially within the last decade. In 2014, a shootout between RPNGC and PNGDF officers left four men in hospital with gunshot wounds.⁵³ The Sandline Affair also stoked tensions between police units and the PNGDF.

A time for reform

Although these concerns are entirely valid, an argument in favor of PNG's law and order *status quo* is difficult to sustain, particularly if humble yet well-targeted strategies can be pursued to offer some correction and respite from criminal activity. Ongoing population growth and demographic challenges of high youth unemployment, compounded by a brittle and ever-absent police force, point to a likely increase in criminal violence in the coming years. Complications will likely aggravate unless genuine steps are taken to increase the size and quality of the police force. This will only place additional political pressure on current and future governments to address law and order issues.

Tribal violence in PNG's remote communities provides a further case for invigorating police presence. The Okapa district in Eastern Highlands Province, which gained international notoriety in 2008 amid reports of infanticide, provides a chilling example of where active state and police presence is a clear necessity.⁵⁴ The feud, which commenced in 1983 and was finally resolved in 2009, involved numerous villages and was believed to have claimed hundreds of lives. As many observers of PNG would concede—the Okapa situation is not isolated. Accounts of tribally related conflict in PNG news reports are common and, as noted in the South Highlands kidnappings case above, immediate attempts to inject law and order need to be considered.

Equally unsettling, and worth touching on briefly, is the witchcraft and sorcery that accompanies many forms of violence in PNG. Mysterious illnesses or deaths—easily explained by modern medicine—are attributed to 'evil curses' while suspected sorcerers, primarily women, are blamed and then often brutally killed.⁵⁵ Although legislation was modified in 2013 to alter the country's sorcery laws, any serious path of justice will require a more muscular state judicial machinery shored up by additional police officers. A large investment in police personnel may help to reduce the severity of harm caused by such conflicts and reclaim some of the administration of justice from non-state elements.

Although an analysis of aid performance in PNG is better discussed at length elsewhere, a brief observation of the assistance regime to PNG since the 1970s reveals a general and sometimes unavoidable lack of consistency—capacity builders move on, many aid projects alter course or sit idle, supportive politicians and local partners lose respective portfolios and interest, and institutional knowledge eventually dissolves. Given these circumstances, a retreat to a sharpened focus on relatively humble and targeted goals—a hallmark of a high-volume police recruitment and training program—appears an attractive and advisable course of action.

Garnering political commitment

Ultimately, political commitment will be critical to ensuring increased police numbers in PNG. Despite difficulties, creating the conditions for political will is achievable and can be attempted in a number of ways.

One immediate initiative may be for the PNG Prime Minister and Internal Security Minister to convene a recruitment roundtable with PNG's largest resource and private sector companies, with the aim of replicating the MMJV mixed model approach identified earlier. Under this approach, the private sector resourced the training of new police recruits, who were then used for provincial policing and remained under the RPNGC command while providing assurance to MMJV investments. This could enable the visible commitment of political action while also creating a tangible recruitment outcome. It is a practical place to start.

Here it may also be optimal to leverage training expertise from outside traditional development cooperation circles. Many individuals in PNG external to government have a strong understanding of PNG's underlying cultural dynamics and how to attract, train and nurture local talent. Sporting teams, for example, have relative degrees of success in training and then fostering local excellence. Exogenous sectors to aid and law and order could provide generic but relevant sources of knowledge or guidance.

Creating momentum and accountability at the regional level is also a strategy to consider. Australia, as a member of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), could consider introducing police recruitment as part of the suite of existing regional law and justice assistance measures. A scan of law enforcement capacity building activities across PIF countries highlights that police recruitment does not feature highly among existing programmes, which are overwhelmingly targeted toward training existing personnel.⁵⁶ While this is likely due to the adequate force size of most of PNG's Melanesian neighbours, the Australian government could explore using this as a leveraging technique. A low number of PNG police officers has transnational effects that spill over into other Pacific countries. Highlighting the relative success of most of the PIF police forces to maintain adequate police to civilian ratios may compel the PNG government to be held more accountable to its policing shortage by other PIF governments.

Conclusion

There is a fair consensus that the number of police recruits and personnel should be considerably higher in PNG. This objective ultimately requires not just resourcing but also political will.

Australia has invested considerably over decades to assist the PNG Government to develop its law and justice sector. While such assistance plays a core role, a small number of advisers with high-level duties is unlikely to offset PNG's law and order problems. A high-volume recruitment and training program, by contrast, would provide a sensible equilibrium between Australian frontline efforts and high-level assistance.

In turn, a large increase in RPNGC officers would: increase police presence; limit zero-sum temporary police relocation; widen the police talent-base to cater to skilled policing areas; mitigate youth demographic unemployment; and rationalise the role of some non-state actors in the application of justice. It would also respond to overwhelming occupational demand for many Papua New Guineans to serve with the police.

For development partners, investing in a specific target number of police officers would give some precision on where to allocate resources, contribute to aid effectiveness and provide clear benchmarks on whether Australian, international and PNG Government efforts are, most importantly, contributing to making PNG a safer place.

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GRIFFITH ASIA INSTITUTE

Griffith University Nathan campus
Nathan Queensland 4111, Australia

Email: gai@griffith.edu.au

griffith.edu.au/asia-institute