
Redefining Papua New Guinea's Law-and-Order Path: Learning from the Past and Forging a New Approach in the 50th Year of Independence

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Abstract: This paper analyzes Papua New Guinea's (PNG) law-and-order challenges since independence in 1975 and proposes strategies for sustainable improvements as the nation marks its 50th year of independence. PNG faces complex and diverse issues, including corruption, transnational crime, ethnic conflicts, property crimes, and violent crimes, including serious abuse of human rights, which are exacerbated by weak institutions, poverty, unemployment, and other structural socio-economic factors. Historically, state responses have been reactive and crisis-driven, often failing to address underlying structural weaknesses and socio-economic inequalities. Drawing on literature, the study emphasizes the importance of good governance, responsible leadership, and active citizen engagement in addressing crime. To achieve lasting peace and security, PNG must prioritize its people, strengthen governance and the criminal justice system, eliminate corruption and illegal firearms, reform education to enhance employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and leverage technology for accountability and effective law enforcement. The paper presents PNG's 50-year law-and-order strategic agenda (2025–2075) as a key roadmap for building a safe, equitable, and resilient society.

Keywords: Redefining, law-and-order, forging, independence, leadership, and crisis-driven

1. INTRODUCTION

As Papua New Guinea (PNG) marks 50 years of independence, the country must seriously reflect on its journey as an independent state. The territory now known as PNG was formally colonized in 1884 (Waiko, 1986) and existed under colonial rule for 90 years before gaining independence on 16th September 1975. Independence was never intended to be a pretext for continuing colonial administration. However, in the absence of a formal traditional institutional structure, the country had no choice but to adopt Western colonial systems to manage its affairs and governance (Sali, 1996).

Since the values and practices of colonial institutions were not rooted in Papua New Guinean culture, the transition to parliamentary democracy and bureaucratic administration has been challenging. As we continue to adapt to these foreign systems, issues remain regarding our effective integration of Western political and administrative models.

Before PNG gained independence, its law-and-order system was primarily shaped by traditional justice mechanisms, colonial governance, and the gradual transition to self-rule. Traditionally, PNG's diverse societies-maintained order through customary laws, where village elders, chiefs, and community leaders played key roles in resolving conflicts. These systems emphasized reconciliation, compensation, and communal harmony rather than punitive justice (Goddard, 2009). Disputes were typically settled through mediation, often involving compensation payments in the form of shells, pigs, or other valuable goods. This indigenous approach to justice was well-suited to PNG's tribal society, where maintaining social cohesion, peace and was a priority (Dinnen, 1997).

The arrival of colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries introduced a Western-style legal and law enforcement system, which often conflicted with traditional customs. Under German and later Australian administration, formal policing structures were established, such as the Armed Native Constabulary in the late 19th century, which later became the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (Sinclair, 1985). Colonial law enforcement aimed to maintain order, particularly to protect European economic interests, but often struggled

effectively control rural areas, where traditional justice remained dominant. The introduction of codified laws and the court system centralized authority away from local communities, creating tensions between indigenous practices and the imposed legal framework (Dinnen, 2001).

As PNG moved towards independence, the challenge of merging traditional and modern law enforcement became more apparent. The establishment of the House of Assembly in 1964 and self-government in 1973 marked significant steps towards legal and political autonomy (Premdas, 1985). However, law-and-order challenges persisted, particularly in balancing state-imposed justice with customary law. Upon gaining independence in 1975, PNG inherited a hybrid system, where formal legal institutions coexisted with traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms. This dual system remains relevant today, as PNG continues to grapple with law-and-order issues stemming from historical governance structures, socio-economic inequalities, and the complexities of its diverse legal traditions (Goddard, 2009).

Law-and-order is fundamental to PNG’s social and economic development, as stability and security create an environment conducive to investment, governance, and community well-being. Persistent law-and-order challenges, including crime, tribal conflicts, and weak enforcement mechanisms, have hindered economic growth, deterred foreign investment, and strained social cohesion. As PNG enters its next 50 years of independence, rethinking the approach to law-and-order is crucial to promoting a safer, more prosperous nation. A renewed strategy must address both systemic weaknesses in law enforcement and the deeper social attitudes that contribute to disorder. By integrating effective governance, community participation, and modern policing strategies, PNG can lay a stronger foundation for sustainable development, ensuring that future generations inherit a nation defined by stability, justice, and opportunity.

Law-and-order in PNG is not solely a matter of systems, policies, and enforcement mechanisms—it is fundamentally an attitude issue that extends from ordinary citizens to law enforcement officials and political leaders. Since gaining independence in 1975, PNG has faced persistent law-and order challenges, struggling to balance traditional justice systems with modern legal frameworks. Over the past 50 years, weak enforcement, political interference, corruption, and societal attitudes toward crime have contributed to ongoing instability. While efforts have been made to strengthen policing and judicial processes, these have often been undermined by a lack of urgency, political will, and commitment from those in authority. Now, as PNG marks its 50th year of independence, it is critical to redefine its approach to law-and-order with a renewed focus on accountability, ethical leadership, and community-driven solutions. Law enforcement agencies and political leaders must not only have the right attitude but also demonstrate urgency and willpower in addressing these challenges. Impartial law enforcement, stronger anti-corruption measures, and a shift in societal mindset toward responsibility and collective security are essential.

Therefore, it is essential to critically examine how far we have come, assess how we as a nation are addressing these challenges, and forge a new approach across all areas of socio-economic development, politics, the environment, science, engineering, and technology. In this context, this paper aims to redefine the country’s law-and-order path by learning from the past and charting a new course in this 50th Year of Independence.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LAW-AND-ORDER IN PNG

Before PNG gained independence in 1975, law-and-order issues were shaped significantly by the colonial justice system imposed by the Australian administration. This system, in place since 1884, focused more on maintaining control and discipline over the indigenous population than on fostering a just or culturally sensitive legal structure. Justice was administered through a punitive and militarized approach, emphasizing order and obedience rather than fairness and community resolution. Limited attention was given to creating a balanced system that could respond to the social and cultural realities of Papua New Guinean communities. Morauta (1986) pointed out that the seeds of the current law-and-order problems were sown well before independence, due to a lack of meaningful development of a justice system that resonated with indigenous values and customs.

The colonial administration’s failure to recognize and incorporate traditional justice mechanisms created a disconnect between the imposed legal structures and the lived experiences of most Papua New Guineans. In rural areas, where access to colonial justice institutions was limited or non-existent, people continued to rely on customary methods to resolve disputes and maintain peace. However, these practices were often seen as

illegitimate or inferior by the colonial authorities. As a result, indigenous communities found themselves caught between two systems—traditional norms that governed everyday life and a foreign legal system that neither understood nor respected their ways of resolving conflicts (Paliwala, 1982)¹. This duality created legal confusion, weakened traditional authority, and contributed to the erosion of communal harmony.

Despite the dominance of colonial structures, many communities maintained their traditional methods of resolving disputes and managing law-and-order. These methods, based on consensus, restitution, and restoration of relationships, were deeply embedded in Papua New Guinean societies (Sali, 1996). Leaders such as village chiefs, elders, and big men played central roles in these processes, using mediation and dialogue rather than punishment to resolve issues. While these systems were not formally recognized by the colonial government, they remained effective in maintaining peace at the local level (ibid).

The current challenges in law-and-order in PNG are largely rooted in the colonial administration's failure to formulate laws and policies that aligned with the country's traditional social regulatory systems (Narokobi, 1983). During the colonial period, the justice system was not designed to serve or reflect the values of indigenous communities but was instead used as a tool to advance the colonialists' political, economic, and religious agendas, along with their own cultural beliefs and practices (Turner, 1990). This imposition undermined existing systems of customary governance and justice, stripping Papua New Guineans of their unwritten laws, traditional social structures, communal authority systems, and ultimately their pride, dignity, and self-respect (Narokobi, 1983, in Clifford et al., 1984:110). As a result, the legacy of colonial rule has contributed significantly to the fragmented and often ineffective state of law-and-order experienced in the country today.

3. THE POST-INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENT OF LAW-AND-ORDER IN PNG

Concerns around law-and-order in PNG did not emerge suddenly but were part of ongoing debates throughout the colonial period and into the first decade (1975-1985) of independence. As Clifford et al. (1984:1) note, "Through the entire colonial period and the full decade of independence, the problem of 'law-and-order' has been under active consideration by government and people alike." Upon leading PNG to independence in 1975, the late Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare inherited a fragile internal security landscape, with rising crime largely attributed to loosely organized groups of unemployed urban youth known as raskol gangs². These gangs rapidly gained

¹ When administration of both New Guinea and Papua came under the charge of the Australians after the First World War in 1914, they extended their paternalistic technique which they have been using in the southern part of the island of New Guinea since 1884 under their control. "Under the Australian administration of both Papua and New Guinea, the lower court system was constituted by the Courts for the Native Matters in Papua and the Courts for the Native Affairs in New Guinea" (Downs, 1980:148 in Banks, 1993:18). These courts were alien and external to the indigenous people but regulated their way of lives. "The traditional leadership became subordinate to the authority of the kiap" (Paliwala, 1982: 193). This official regularity system sometimes failed to maintain law-and-order as Rowley noted: The introduction of rule of law at once involves the government in the attempt to administer justice, which proves illusive and difficult in the shadow world between two cultures (1965:76).

² See Sali, (2015) who captured that: "raskols in the PNG context are young men, usually in groups (Luker & Monsell-Davis, 2010).), who operate mainly in the larger cities, particularly in Port Moresby and Lae to commit crime against persons and properties. They are notoriously known for engaging merciless crimes like murder, rape, robbery, and armed hold-ups, which are characterized as violent and serious acts of brutality against humanity. Raskols have become one of the most prominent features of the urban landscape and one of the most significant issues facing the country at present (Harper, 1998, p.31). The extant literature reveals that raskols began to operate criminal activities in Port Moresby in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Nibbrig, 1992). It was during this time when the term raskol was introduced and used by expatriates, and then gained predominance and was later appropriated by the gangs themselves (Harris, 1988). These early raskols of Port Moresby were initially a by-product of urbanization process in parallel with the removal of the colonial control of the indigenous population (Oram, 1976). With the removal of internal migration controls after Independence in 1975, more indigenous people moved into Port Moresby and created illegal settlements. Along other freedoms, the indigenous population also gained access to alcohol, which was previously restricted to the colonial whites only (Oram, 1976). In the 1960s, illegal offences committed by raskols, who were then mainly uneducated indigenous people, were simply petty thefts and acting disorderly in public places after drinking alcohol. Their illegal activities were

notoriety for violent acts such as murder, rape, armed robbery, and other brutal crimes (Sali, 2014). In response, Somare swiftly initiated a series of forums and research efforts to establish a national response to crime, enlisting both international and local expertise. Among the foundational reports consulted were the Derham Report (1960), the Committee on Tribal Fighting in the Highlands (PNG, 1973), and the Peace and Good Order Committee Report (Papua New Guinea, 1974), alongside expert assessments from the Australian Institute of Criminology (Biles, 1976; Clifford, 1976). These reports laid the groundwork for reforms in policing, judicial administration, and legal frameworks, including the Intergroup Fighting Act (1977), which empowered the state to intervene in tribal conflicts (Mapusia, 1986). Additionally, the National Youth Movement was launched to mobilize young people and redirect them into productive socio-economic activities.

Despite these early efforts, crime rates escalated, and public anxiety intensified (Clifford et al., 1984). In response, the government commissioned a major two-volume study titled Law-and-Order in PNG—commonly known as the Clifford Report (1984). This comprehensive report reiterated concerns first raised in the late 1970s, highlighting persistent structural weaknesses in the law-and-justice sector. It emphasized the government’s growing frustration and concern over escalating violence, especially in urban centers like Port Moresby and Lae, where raskol activity, ethnic clashes, and violent crimes were increasingly reported in the media. Tribal fighting also remained a constant challenge in parts of the Highlands. Pressured by both domestic and international expectations, the government resorted to short-term, reactive measures that yielded limited long-term success. As Dinnen (2001) observes, PNG continued to rely on ad hoc, heavy-handed approaches that often-provoked retaliation and further exacerbated law-and-order problems, rather than resolving their root causes.

As we celebrate 50 years of independence, it is vital to acknowledge that throughout this period, law-and-order challenges have persisted and even worsened. Criminal and violent social behavior has escalated, facilitated by the increasing flow of firearms, as highlighted by retired Major-General Jerry Singirok, who chaired the Guns Control Committee and emphasized the urgent need to eliminate weapons and reduce centralized power to restore public safety (Post-Courier, 2023). At the same time, the law and justice sector has struggled to respond, characterized by weak institutional capacity and fragmented oversight, with scholars noting that merely strengthening individual agencies is insufficient without a broader, integrated sector-wide strategy (Dinnen, 2002). Furthermore, societal violence has been exacerbated by weak enforcement, growing impunity, and cultural dynamics that traditional criminal justice approaches fail to address (Dinnen & Allen, 2018). We must therefore redefine and reform our current practices—transforming both policy design and implementation to build stronger, more adaptive systems that truly protect citizens.

4. CONTEMPORARY LAW-AND-ORDER CHALLENGES IN PNG

PNG has faced continued law-and-order challenges, ranging from corruption and white-collar crimes to transnational crime, ethnic conflicts, property-related offenses, and violent crimes against individuals. Recent incidents such as murder cases, a mass prison breakout, and clashes between police and defense personnel have further highlighted the country’s ongoing struggle with serious crime (The National, 2025). In the absence of detailed crime statistics, descriptive accounts and theoretical perspectives continue to provide important insights into the underlying drivers and consequences of these crimes. Some contemporary law and order challenges are highlighted below:

4.1 White-Collar Crime and Corruption

White-collar crime, first defined by Sutherland (1940; 1949), involves crimes committed by individuals of high social status during the course of their occupations, including fraud, bribery, money laundering, and embezzlement. Globally prevalent (Allen & Overy, 2015), these crimes are often motivated by opportunity,

also restricted in the settlements. However, in the 1970s the raskols, who by this time recruited educated indigenous elites into their ranks, moved into more affluent neighbourhoods that yielded more profitable ‘returns’ from crime (Harris, 1988).

arrogance, entitlement, or competitiveness (Bucy, Formby, Raspanti & Rooney, 2012). Their impacts extend beyond financial damage to moral and social consequences (Meier & Short, 1982).

In PNG, white-collar crime is synonymous with corruption (Sause, 1992) and is widespread across politics, the public service, and private industries such as logging and banking (Pitts, 2001). Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked PNG 145 out of 178 nations, confirming corruption as a systemic and systematic issue (Transparency International, 2015; Yuangua, 2001; Sali, 2014). Politicians, including senior ministers and governors, have been convicted of misappropriating public funds (Dennin, 1993a; Pokiton, 2016). Similar offenses by bureaucrats and business figures, such as the theft of millions of kina from the state (Paso, 2015; Tien, 2015), reinforce the view that corruption is normalized. Weak state institutions, combined with greed and cultural obligations, have created an enabling environment for corruption to flourish (Pitts, 2001).

4.2 Transnational Crime

Transnational crimes—defined as criminal acts involving two or more nation-states (Bossard, 1990; Hensaw, 2008)—include smuggling, contraband trading, and illicit services such as money laundering and human trafficking (Reuter & Petrie, 1999). Advances in globalization, liberalized economies, and technology have made such crimes adaptable and resilient (Shelly, 2004).

In PNG, weak law enforcement, corruption, and porous borders create fertile conditions for these crimes (McCusker, 2006; Mitna, 2014). Firearms and drugs are exchanged across the PNG–Australia and PNG–Indonesia borders, contributing to internal violence (Forbes, 2014; Sakai, 2012). Human trafficking has also emerged as a major concern, with foreign and local women forced into sex work, and men subjected to bonded labor in industries such as mining and logging (US Department of State, 2010; Sakai, 2012; Forbes, 2014). These developments demonstrate how transnational crime compounds PNG's already fragile governance landscape.

4.3 Ethnic Conflicts

PNG's extreme cultural diversity has long contributed to ethnic tensions and conflict (Oram, 1976; Turner, 1990). Such conflicts, often violent, threaten national unity (Ukaha, 2014; Radio NZ, 2015). Ethnic disputes arise from bloodlines, tribal affiliations, language, and regional identities (Chandra, 2012; Cordell & Wolf, 2010). Immediate consequences include property destruction, injuries, and deaths, while long-term trauma undermines stability.

Scholars explain ethnic conflict through primordialism, which emphasizes birth-based group identity and deep allegiance (Isajiw, 1993; Perez & Hirschman, 2009), and instrumentalism, where elites mobilize ethnicity for political or economic gain (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002; Chandra, 2004). In PNG, instrumentalist mobilization was evident during the Bougainville Crisis (1988–1998), where ethnic divisions fueled a decade-long conflict with devastating social and economic consequences (Dorney, 2000).

4.4 Property Crime

Property crimes in PNG—robbery, burglary, theft, arson, vandalism, and embezzlement—are widespread and often linked to socio-economic hardship. Strain theory (Durkheim, 1933; Merton, 1957) suggests individuals facing blocked opportunities may turn to crime to achieve material goals. Merton's concept of "anomie," or imbalance between aspirations and means, resonates with PNG's high rates of theft and robbery, especially among unemployed youth (Clifford et al., 1984; O'Collins, 1984).

Agnew's (1992) general strain theory highlights emotional stress as a driver of destructive crimes such as arson and vandalism. The 2016 student riots at the University of PNG and PNG University of Technology, which saw the burning of buildings and vehicles, reflect this pattern (Sali, 2016). International assessments, including those by the US Department of State, rank PNG among the highest in the world for property crime risks (USDS, 2015; Miamel, 2016a).

4.5 Crimes Against Persons

Crimes against persons—homicide, rape, and assault—are among the most severe in PNG. Willful murder is frequently reported, linked to tribal fighting, robbery, sorcery accusations, and personal disputes (Vuvu, 2016; Gumuno, 2016; Fairparik, 2016; Sali, 2015). Despite its gravity, murder persists at alarming levels.

Rape and sexual violence remain pervasive. Incidents include both rare cases of male victims and widespread attacks on women, such as the widely condemned East Taraka rape of a nurse in Lae (Radio NZ, 2013; Uki, 2010). Cultural normalization of rape, driven by anger, social identity, and sexual gratification, sustains this cycle (Sali, 2013a). Gender-based violence is equally alarming, with reports suggesting up to 67% of PNG women experience abuse (The Guardian, 2016).

Assault—verbal, written, or physical—is also prevalent. Increasingly, cyber-based defamation on social media has emerged, prompting legislative responses (Porau, 2016; The National, 2016). Physical assaults occur in contexts ranging from domestic disputes to public brawls, often leaving both physical and emotional scars (Mera, 2013; Kuku, 2015).

Theoretical perspectives help explain these patterns. Psychological approaches emphasize poor childhood socialization leading to antisocial behavior (Shoemaker, 1990), while sociological explanations highlight poverty, unemployment, and peer influence within disorganized (Agnew, 1992). Both perspectives demonstrate how social and individual forces converge to perpetuate violent crime in PNG.

In short, PNG faces a multi-dimensional crime crisis that spans corruption, transnational crime, ethnic conflict, property offenses, and violent crimes against persons. Weak state institutions, socio-economic hardship, and cultural complexities interact to drive these challenges. Without targeted interventions, crime will remain a continued barrier to PNG’s development and national stability going forward.

5. STATE RESPONSES TO LAW-AND-ORDER PROBLEMS

5.1 Colonial Justice Administration

The roots of PNG current law-and-order challenges can be traced back to the colonial period. Morauta (1986:8) observed that “the seeds of today’s social and institutional problems were sown well before 1975,” reflecting how the Australian administration failed to develop justice systems aligned with indigenous traditions. From 1884 until independence in 1975, the colonial state prioritized stability for its own rule, using punitive and paramilitary measures rather than fostering genuine justice (Paliwala, 1982).

The justice system functioned largely as a mechanism to extend economic, political, and religious control (Turner, 1990). Indigenous governance structures, unwritten laws, and communal systems were marginalized, eroding traditional social regulation and undermining dignity and self-respect (Narokobi, 1983; Clifford et al., 1984). Consequently, PNG’s fragile justice framework at independence was a direct legacy of this neglect.

5.2 The First Decade of Independence: 1975–1985

Concerns about law-and-order persisted into the post-independence period. Clifford et al. (1984:1) note that crime was under “active consideration” during both the colonial era and the first decade of independence. With independence in 1975, Sir Michael Somare confronted the rise of “rascal” (raskol) gangs—loosely organized groups of young men engaged in violent crimes such as murder, rape, and armed robbery (Sali, 2014).

In response, Somare commissioned research and policy initiatives. Key reports, including the Derham Report (1960), the 1973 and 1974 peace and order committee reports, and advice from the Australian Institute of Criminology (Biles, 1976; Clifford, 1976), informed early strategies. Legal reforms such as the Intergroup Fighting Act (1977) aimed to curb tribal warfare (Mapusia, 1986), while programs like the National Youth Movement sought to channel youth into productive activities.

Despite these efforts, crime escalated. The Clifford Report (1984) highlighted structural weaknesses in law enforcement and justice institutions and warned of growing violence in urban centers such as Port Moresby

and Lae, alongside tribal fighting in the Highlands. Faced with mounting domestic and international pressure, the government relied on ad hoc interventions that produced limited results, often provoking retaliation and further instability (Dinnen, 2001).

5.3 Crisis-Driven Approaches: 1986–2015

Crime control policies in Papua New Guinea (PNG) between 1986 and 2016 were shaped less by coherent long-term planning than by political expediency. Dinnen (2001:3) observed that crime responses in PNG were largely reactive, with successive governments opting for short-term measures to contain crises rather than building institutional capacity or addressing root causes. This period illustrates how governance challenges, weak institutions, and public pressure pushed leaders into adopting emergency-style interventions aimed at demonstrating control. While such measures occasionally succeeded in suppressing disorder, their inability to deliver sustained outcomes entrenched a cycle of instability and eroded confidence in state legitimacy.

One of the most visible crisis-driven strategies was the repeated declaration of states of emergency in urban centers. Since 1985, governments have frequently imposed curfews and deployed security forces in Port Moresby, Lae, and other hotspots when violence escalated (Dennin, 1993a). The reliance on extraordinary powers gave the impression of decisive action, particularly in moments of heightened public insecurity. For instance, in 2012, a state-backed intervention in Lae succeeded in temporarily restoring calm (Sali, 2014). However, as Harris (1988) pointed out, such operations had limited long-term value because law and order quickly deteriorated once security forces withdrew. These patterns revealed the transient nature of militarized operations, which disrupted criminal activity in the short term but did little to prevent its recurrence.

Crisis-style interventions were also evident in state responses to tribal and ethnic conflicts. The police and, at times, the military were deployed to contain violent clashes in the Highlands and inter-ethnic conflicts in towns. While interventions sometimes halted violence in the immediate sense (Mapusia, 1986), their effectiveness was undermined by excessive use of force and the lack of follow-up strategies. In many instances, the temporary presence of security forces merely postponed further outbreaks. This was evident in the recurrent tensions between Morobe and Highlander groups in Lae between 2011 and 2016, which reignited once police contingents were withdrawn (Okole & Unage, 2011; Ukaha, 2014). These experiences underscored the inability of reactive deployments to resolve underlying disputes or build community-based mechanisms for peace and reconciliation.

The Bougainville conflict (1988–1998) stands as perhaps the most dramatic example of PNG’s reliance on militarized solutions to address crises. Initially treated as a law-and-order problem, the conflict escalated into a full-scale civil war. Prime Minister Julius Chan’s controversial 1997 attempt to hire Sandline International mercenaries reflected the desperation of the state to impose a military solution. The move backfired, sparking a mutiny within the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, mass protests, and ultimately the collapse of Chan’s government (Dennin, 1997; Dorney, 2000). The eventual resolution came not through force but through political negotiation, with Prime Minister Bill Skate’s government offering Bougainville the prospect of a referendum on independence as part of the peace settlement (Woodbury, 2015). The Bougainville experience highlighted the limits and dangers of militarized crisis management. It also revealed the fragility of PNG’s state legitimacy when leaders prioritized coercion over dialogue, reconciliation, and institution-building.

Another emblematic crisis-driven response was the reintroduction of the death penalty. In 1991, the Namaliu Government reinstated capital punishment for willful murder through amendments to the Criminal Code (Papua New Guinea, Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 1991). More than two decades later, in 2013, the O’Neill Government expanded its application to cover sorcery-related killings, aggravated rape, and violent armed robbery (Papua New Guinea, Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 2013). These reforms were framed as strong deterrent measures in response to rising public concern about violent crime. Yet, critics argued that such legislation was largely symbolic, as PNG lacked the institutional and technical capacity to implement executions (Ferea, 1995; Sali, 2015). The failure to enforce the law underscored its performative nature, intended more to appease public opinion than to strengthen justice institutions.

Importantly, PNG’s crime policies during this period were highly selective, prioritizing visible forms of disorder such as street crime, tribal violence, and urban unrest, often linked to unemployed youth (Harris, 1988). In contrast, white-collar and transnational crimes, typically committed by political and business elites, received far less attention despite their profound economic and social impacts (Dinnen, 1992; Pacific Island Report, 2012).

This imbalance reflected both political expediency and the state's reluctance to confront entrenched corruption. Watchdog bodies such as the Ombudsman Commission were systematically undermined (Clifford et al., 1984), limiting their capacity to hold elites accountable. Initiatives such as Task Force Sweep and the proposed Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) signaled official recognition of corruption but were eventually dismantled through political interference once investigations implicated senior figures (Colvin, 2015). As Sir Mekere Morauta observed, corruption in PNG is both systematic and systemic, permeating governance at every level (Yuangua, 2001).

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate how PNG's law and order policies between 1986 and 2016 were reactive, selective, and crisis-driven. States of emergency, police deployments, militarized interventions, and harsh legal measures temporarily quelled disorder but failed to address structural causes of crime and instability. The neglect of systemic corruption, combined with an overemphasis on street-level crime, contributed to cycles of lawlessness, weakened governance, and declining public trust in state institutions. Unless PNG shifts towards proactive, balanced, and institutionally grounded crime-control strategies, crime will remain not only a symptom but also a driver of broader political and social instability.

5.4 State Struggles to Deal with Law-and-Order: 2016–2025

From 2016 to 2025, the Papua New Guinea government faced ongoing difficulties in managing law and order. Tribal conflicts, election-related violence, and corruption repeatedly exposed the limitations of state institutions. Law enforcement agencies often lacked the resources, training, and personnel to control crime effectively, leaving both rural and urban communities vulnerable (Post-Courier, 2017). Weak governance structures, limited coordination between national and provincial authorities, and underfunded justice systems meant that the state could rarely provide timely responses to violence. As a result, communities often turned to traditional leaders or vigilante methods, undermining the authority of formal government institutions.

Election-related violence highlighted the state's inability to maintain security during politically sensitive periods. During the 2017 and 2022 elections, killings, property destruction, and attacks on polling officials were widely reported (The Guardian, 2017; ABC News, 2022). Despite warnings from election observers and civil society organizations, the government struggled to prevent intimidation, deploy sufficient security, and enforce the law fairly (National Research Institute, 2022). The recurrent involvement of young unemployed people in electoral clashes also demonstrated the lack of effective youth engagement, employment programs, and civic education. These failures allowed violence to escalate, eroding public trust in democratic institutions.

Ethnic and tribal clashes in urban and peri-urban areas further illustrated government weaknesses. In 2023, serious fighting in Port Moresby caused deaths, injuries, and the closure of businesses (ABC News, 2023). Security forces were often slow to respond, and law enforcement's presence was insufficient to prevent escalation. The ready availability of weapons, combined with weak policing in high-risk neighborhoods, made these conflicts difficult to control. Schools, hospitals, and markets were disrupted, and the state struggled to provide protection and relief to displaced families, demonstrating gaps in emergency planning and crisis management.

The persistence of white-collar crime and corruption exposed institutional vulnerabilities at the highest levels of government. Misuse of public funds, bribery, and abuse of office continued to divert resources away from essential services (Transparency International, 2021; Post-Courier, 2019). Efforts to investigate and prosecute high-level corruption were often blocked or slowed by political interference. This limited accountability and signaled to citizens that law enforcement was uneven, favoring powerful elites over ordinary people. Weak monitoring systems, limited oversight, and under-resourced anti-corruption agencies contributed to an environment where corruption thrived and government credibility eroded.

Gender-based violence, including rape and sexual harassment, underscored additional state shortcomings. High rates of sexual violence against women and children persisted, particularly in remote areas, and many survivors could not access support services (UNICEF, 2024; UNFPA, 2023). Health centers and support facilities were often understaffed and poorly equipped (MSF, 2016), and in some cases, law enforcement itself was implicated in abuse, as in the 2025 reported case of rape in police custody (UN, 2025). The government's inability to enforce laws, provide survivor protection, and implement preventative programs showed deep structural weaknesses in addressing gender-based crime. Without stronger legislation, improved policing, and

comprehensive support services, these problems remain entrenched, highlighting the state’s broader struggle to ensure safety and justice.

5.5 The Criminal System at Work

The major components of the criminal justice system—Police, Courts, and Prisons—have struggled to address law-and-order issues in the country. The police function to protect citizens and their property by apprehending and arresting offenders, prosecuting them through the courts, and, where guilt is established, ensuring that convicted individuals are sentenced to prison. The convicted offenders are locked up in to serve the purposes of punishment, correction, segregation, and deterrence. However, since independence, in 1975, the criminal justice system has faced persistent administrative, logistic, and prosecution challenges, and these problems have continued through the 50 years of independence.

Table 1 below, for example, presents the prosecution cases recorded in 2023 by the Divisional Commands of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC), which highlight typical prosecution challenges.

Table 1: PNGC Prosecution Cases Recorded for the year 2023 by Divisional Commands

Regions	2023 Cases	2022 Adjourned Cases	Comm itted	Grad e 5	Conviction	Lost	Sinedie	Cases adjourned to 2024
NCD/Central	1,547	1,547	132	17	196	1,115	939	5,969
Northern	3,996	3,996	495	22	1,975	3,036	4	6,647
S outhern	352	352	84	8	241	432	2	1,486
H/lands East	1,927	1,927	101	45	882	1,320	42	2,065
H/lands West	337	337	23	1	144	305	0	903
NGI	1,446	1,446	115	11	616	935	55	2,776
Border	1,033	1,033	94	4	518	779	0	1,259
AROB	237	237	10	0	184	235	0	105
Total	10,875	10,875	1,054	108	4,756	8,157	1,042	21,210

Source: RPNGC, 2023

As observed above, a total of 10,875 cases were recorded across all divisional commands, with an equal number of cases carried over from 2022, highlighting systemic backlogs in case processing. Notably, the Northern region reported the highest volume with 3,996 new cases, followed by Highlands East and NCD/Central. This pattern points to population density and socio-economic pressures contributing to crime and legal disputes.

Despite the volume, only 1,054 cases were committed for trial, and convictions stood at 4,756. This suggests that while a proportion of the cases are successfully prosecuted, the majority face delays or fail to proceed due to capacity constraints, legal complexities, or resource limitations. In NCD/Central, for example, only 132 cases were committed, yet the number of cases adjourned to 2024 reached 5,969, stressing critical inefficiencies in judicial throughput and case management. Additionally, the high number of cases lost or categorized as “sinedie” (indefinitely suspended) across all regions reflects institutional weaknesses that need urgent reform.

Fifty years after gaining independence, the RPNGC's prosecution statistics serve as both a mirror and a call to action. They reflect the persistent structural, logistical, and human resource limitations affecting the justice system. Yet, they also highlight an opportunity to redefine and reform law and justice services in PNG.

6. WHAT ARE THE STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF THE LAW-AND-ORDER PROBLEMS?

As PNG celebrates fifty years of independence, it is timely to reflect not only on the nation’s achievements but also on its enduring challenges. Among the most persistent is crime and law-and-order problems, which have long

been central to the country’s struggle for stability and development. Crime in PNG is not merely an inefficiency issue for police, courts, or prisons to manage; rather, it reflects the combined effect of historical legacies, structural weaknesses, corruption, poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic hardship that have evolved across decades. Unless these root causes are properly addressed, crime will continue to constrain the nation’s aspirations.

PNG’s crime situation is shaped by its cultural diversity, colonial inheritance, and rapid modernization. With more than 800 languages spoken, it is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world (Gordon, 2005; Turner, 1990). Governing such diversity with Western institutions and systems has always been a challenge. As Sali (1996:80) noted, the country resembles “a thousand tribes in one nation.” In urban areas such as Port Moresby and Lae, where different ethnic groups with distinct norms coexist, competing values often create tensions that escalate into law-and-order problems.

The country’s reliance on colonial-era governance systems has also played a role. Since 1975, PNG has operated under parliamentary democracy, bureaucratic administration, and judicial systems that were foreign to most of its population. Leaders and law-and-justice institutions have struggled to adapt these models to local realities, creating institutional weaknesses that criminals exploit (Dinnen, 1993a). At the same time, modernization has concentrated services and opportunities in urban centres, driving migration from rural areas. Many migrants, lacking education and formal skills, find themselves in informal settlements where unemployment and frustration fuel the rise of youth gangs or “raskols,” who often resort to crime as a survival strategy (Harris, 1988).

Youth exclusion from education and employment further compounds the problem. The recent data from the Department of Higher Education, Research, Science, and Technology, (2024) (DHERST) that in 2023, there were 29,156 Grade 12 applicants, of whom 10,007 (about 34.3%) were selected for tertiary education. In 2024, applicants increased to 30,564, with 10,203 students selected (33.4%)—a slight decline in selection rate despite the growing number of applicants. The majority of school leavers are left without opportunities, and many drift into criminal activities. A study in Lae revealed that all 68 gangs surveyed consisted of individuals who had some schooling but turned to crime due to lack of jobs (Sali, 2014). This pattern highlights how structural failures in education and employment directly translate into youth crime.

Economic inequality and poverty also contribute to law-and-order problems. Strain theory helps explain why disadvantaged individuals, unable to achieve their goals legitimately, resort to crime. In Lae, gangs studied by Sali (2014) engaged in theft, robbery, and shoplifting largely to meet basic needs such as food. Earlier studies have also shown socio-economic pressures to be major drivers of property crime in the country (O’Collins, 1984; Uki, 2010; Sali, 2016). While these forms of crime are visible in everyday life, white-collar crime and corruption are equally, if not more, destructive. Former Public Service Minister Bart Philemon estimated that PGK 1 billion is lost annually through corruption (Pacific Island Report, 2012), while Prime Minister Peter O’Neill admitted that the country could no longer sustain such losses (ibid., 2012). The consequences are severe: corruption drains resources from health, education, and law enforcement, undermining development. Papua New Guinea’s ranking of 145 out of 178 countries in the 2015 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index illustrates the magnitude of this issue (Transparency International, 2015).

Corruption in PNG is closely connected to the roles of the Legislature and the Executive, which need clearer separation and reform so that one branch does not interfere with the work of the other. Sali (2024), in his study of the 2022 National General Election violence, shows how weaknesses in the country’s three branches of government are linked to the outbreak of election-related violence. He explains that corruption is not just the result of individual actions but is built into the overlap between the Legislature and the Executive. Under the District Development Authority Act (2014), especially Section 12, Members of Parliament are given direct control over large amounts of district funds and the power to decide development priorities. This gives MPs a dual role as both lawmakers and local administrators, which weakens the separation of powers and encourages political favoritism. According to Sali, this situation creates a belief that being elected to Parliament is the main pathway to wealth and resources for both individuals and communities. For many voters, supporting a candidate is seen as a way to gain direct access to state funds, rather than simply choosing a representative. This has made elections highly competitive, with candidates and supporters often resorting to threats, intimidation, and violence to win. The 2022 General Election clearly revealed these problems, as violence broke out across constituencies, showing how unclear governance roles and the use of money in politics continue to weaken democracy and fuel corruption, violence and instability contributing to the wide law-and-order issues in PNG.

At fifty years of independence, crime remains one of the greatest obstacles to national progress. The combination of cultural diversity, imported governance systems, rural-urban drift, youth exclusion, poverty, and corruption shows that crime is deeply embedded in the country’s social fabric. Addressing these challenges requires more than reinforcing police and prisons; it calls for holistic strategies that deal with structural inequalities and institutional weaknesses. As PNG reflects on its journey since 1975, acknowledging the realities of crime is crucial if it is to chart a safer, more stable, and prosperous future.

7. FORGING A NEW APPROACH: LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND A PATH FORWARD

As PNG marks 50 years of independence, it is critical to reflect on the country’s law-and-order experiences and chart a course for the next fifty (50) years. The nation has faced continued challenges of white-collar crime and corruption; transnational crimes; ethnic conflicts; property crimes; crimes against persons (murder, rape, assault and so on); protest and strikes; election-related violence; and gender-based crimes. These challenges have exposed weaknesses in governance, policing, and justice systems, and leadership. To build a safer and more prosperous future, PNG needs a forward-looking, proactive, and technology-driven framework that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of crime. In the next 50 years, as we move on as nation, let us be guided by a framework in address the law-and-order.

Figure 1 below presents a 50-year strategic agenda that provides a forward-looking pathway for PNG as it enters the next half century of nationhood. At the core is the nation itself, supported by integrity in leadership at the top, with stronger governance, zero-tolerance for corruption, and the upholding of the rule of law and separation of powers as essential guiding principles. Enforcing an effective criminal justice system and eliminating illegal firearms remain critical priorities. By aligning education with employment, driving technological advancement, and revitalizing the economy, this strategy aims to build a safer, more prosperous, and resilient PNG for future generations.

Figure 1. PNG Law-and-Order: 50-year Strategic Agenda – 2025-2075



Source: Garry Sali, 2025

7.1 People of Papua New Guinea

The country of PNG is not just land or resources, but a nation of nearly 12 million people (PNG 2011 Census). This strategic agenda places the people of PNG at the core of development, recognizing that human development is central to nationhood. When our forefathers framed the Constitution, they placed people first, affirming that the integral development of our citizens is more important than anything else. That is why the model in Figure 1 above positions the people of PNG at the heart of all efforts to create a peaceful society.

For peace, law, and order to be sustained, the instruments of the state must function effectively. The eight elements presented above (integrity in leadership, rule of law, separation of powers, strong governance, zero tolerance for corruption, an effective criminal justice system, elimination of illegal firearms, education aligned with employment, and technological advancement) all point back to PNG and its people as the foundation of this vision.

7.2 Uphold the rule of law and the Spirit of the Separation of the Powers

Every citizen and visitor in PNG, regardless of social, economic, or political standing, must respect and abide by the nation's laws. The law applies equally to all, and no individual stands above or beneath it. Political leaders, in particular, must exercise restraint and avoid altering laws for selfish or harmful purposes. As PNG looks ahead to the next fifty years, sustained progress in peace, law, and order will depend on the consistent upholding of the rule of law by everyone. Building a peaceful society is the shared aspiration of all nations, but it is never achieved effortlessly, it requires commitment, discipline, and hard work. PNG must therefore strive with determination to secure and preserve the peace it desires.

A clear separation of powers between the legislature and the executive is vital to prevent abuse of office and overlapping authority. Members of Parliament must have clearly defined responsibilities that separate lawmaking and policymaking from administrative execution, thereby reducing opportunities for political interference in daily governance. Strengthening the capacity of the public service is equally important to ensure that citizens receive essential services efficiently and fairly, particularly in remote and underserved areas where government presence is limited (Post-Courier, 2019). The legislature should focus on oversight, monitoring policy implementation, and scrutinizing the use of development funds to guarantee that projects achieve their intended outcomes.

Looking ahead to the next 50 years, PNG must urgently reconsider how development funds are managed and distributed. Under the current arrangement, Members of Parliament for open electorates automatically serve as chairpersons of District Development Authority (DDA) Boards, as provided for in Section 12 of the District Development Authority Act 2014. These boards hold significant authority in deciding how development funds are allocated to projects within the districts. However, when an open electorate MP assumes the role of chair, he or she performs a dual function, serving both as a legislator and as an executive decision-maker. This dual role conflicts with the principle of separation of powers enshrined in the PNG Constitution. To move confidently into the next half-century, PNG must resolve this inconsistency and establish clearer boundaries that safeguard accountability, transparency, and good governance in the use of public funds.

7.3 Enforce an Effective Criminal Justice System

A strong criminal justice system is central to achieving law-and-order. PNG must ensure that its police, courts, and correctional facilities have sufficient and well-trained manpower to respond effectively to crime (Post-Courier, 2017). Modernized prisons are necessary to provide rehabilitation, education, and vocational training, ensuring that offenders can reintegrate into society as productive citizens. Effective policing requires a shift from reactive enforcement to proactive, community-based approaches, including rapid response units in high-risk areas. Strong legislative oversight, including parliamentary committees to monitor criminal justice policies, can ensure that resources are used efficiently and that institutions remain accountable. Lessons from past decades show that without sufficient resources, trained personnel, and accountability mechanisms, law enforcement efforts are often temporary and ineffective.

Inefficiencies within PNG’s criminal justice system were identified as early as independence in 1975 (1976), and over the past fifty years, many of these same challenges—such as inadequate policing, delays in court processes, outdated correctional systems, and limited resources—have persisted, repeatedly surfacing in policy debates and public forums. As the nation marks its 50th year of independence, the pressing question arises: will these problems still exist in 2075? It is no longer sufficient to merely acknowledge them; PNG must now take bold steps to modernize its criminal justice system by addressing structural, administrative, and operational weaknesses, including strengthening institutional capacity, investing in manpower and technology, combating corruption, and ensuring justice is timely and accessible for all citizens. The next fifty years cannot repeat the failures of the past; this is a time for decisive action, guided by innovation, accountability, and long-term vision, so that a peaceful and lawful society becomes a reality rather than an ongoing aspiration.

7.4 Strengthen Good Governance and Promote Zero-Tolerance Corruption

The international community widely recognizes PNG as one of the most corrupt nations globally. According to Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), PNG scored 29 out of 100, indicating a high perceived level of public sector corruption (Transparency International, 2023). This persistent issue is not only widespread but also deeply embedded within the country's institutions. Former Prime Minister Mekere Morauta aptly described corruption in PNG as "endemic, systemic and systematic," highlighting its pervasive nature across all levels of governance (Post-Courier, 2020). The systemic and systematic nature of corruption in PNG suggests that it is not merely a series of isolated incidents but a structural problem that affects the functioning of public institutions and governance.

The Deputy Opposition Leader of PNG, Hon. Donald James, has urged the government to show genuine commitment to reform, while the Prime Minister, Hon. James Marape, emphasized that PNG needs a “nation reset” to tackle corruption and promote good governance (Post-Courier, 2025). Yet, these calls risk being perceived as mere political rhetoric, as the country’s anti-corruption institutions often appear powerless, like “big tigers without teeth.” Strengthening independent bodies such as the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) is critical to ensure investigations and prosecutions proceed without political interference (DevPolicy, 2020). Transparency in public spending must be enforced through digital monitoring systems, while parliamentary oversight should mandate regular reporting and auditing of government projects. Independent audits and strict sanctions for non-compliance are essential to reinforce accountability. The past fifty years demonstrate that unchecked corruption diverts resources from essential public services, leaves communities underserved, and erodes public confidence. By putting in place transparency, accountability, and strong institutional oversight, PNG can create a foundation for effective law-and-order enforcement and good governance (DevPolicy, 2020; Post-Courier, 2025).

7.5 Elimination of Guns and Ammunition

The spread of illegal firearms has intensified violence in PNG, particularly within tribal warfare, urban ethnic conflicts, and the rascal gang context. Addressing this issue requires a detailed strategy that includes strengthening border security and deploying modern tracking systems to curb the influx of illicit weapons. Regular audits of police and defense armories are essential to ensure accountability, while strict licensing and registration laws can serve as deterrents against unauthorized ownership. Intelligence-driven operations that dismantle arms smuggling networks, combined with the prosecution of corrupt officials who enable the illegal gun trade, are equally critical. At the community level, reporting mechanisms and firearm buy-back programs provide citizens with opportunities to actively support disarmament efforts. Evidence from the past decade highlights that the presence of firearms increases the escalation of violence and conflicts, making it difficult to maintain peace and security at both local and national levels

Guns and ammunition must be eliminated from civilians. Retired Major General Jerry Singirok’s detailed 2005 gun control report, comprising 244 recommendations, advocated primarily for a complete ban on civilian ownership of firearms, asserting that “there is no need for Papua New Guinean citizens to own a gun,” and proposing that only security services should be permitted to carry weapons (Singirok, 2025; RNZ, 2022). As we

march on after 50 years of independence, the elimination of guns and ammunition is a strategic move, and it must be a priority for the government because guns are used to kill people and burn down state and private properties.

7.6 PNG Education System and Employment

The education system in Papua New Guinea—spanning primary, secondary, and tertiary levels—must undertake intentional reforms aimed at transforming the mindset of students, parents, and the broader public. Historically, education in PNG has been viewed primarily as a pathway to formal employment, a perception that limits the role of education in fostering self-reliance and innovation (Papuanigini.org, 2023). A broader perspective is needed—one that emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to prepare individuals for diverse life opportunities. Embedding an entrepreneurial mindset across all levels of education is therefore essential. Higher education institutions such as IBS University have begun fostering entrepreneurship, with promising outcomes in venture initiation and institutional reputation, but significant challenges remain due to resource constraints, gender inequities, and inadequate post-graduation support (Dadam, 2024; The National, 2024). Similarly, initiatives such as the Teen Entrepreneur program, supported by UNICEF and Education Partnerships, have been piloted to strengthen entrepreneurial teaching and learning at the primary level (Education Partnerships, 2023).

At the policy level, the PNG government is reorienting education to emphasize job creation rather than job-seeking, with reforms that integrate business ethics, technical and vocational education, and entrepreneurial competencies into the national curriculum (Edu PNG Facts, 2021). Collectively, these initiatives underscore the importance of reconceptualizing education as more than a preparation for wage employment. Instead, it should be understood as a vehicle for developing entrepreneurial spirit, self-reliance, and innovation, enabling Papua New Guineans to apply their skills not only in formal employment but also in creating sustainable livelihoods and contributing to national development.

7.7 Drive Technological Advancement

Technology offers transformative potential for law-and-order in PNG. Implementing secure digital IDs and e-governance systems can enhance service delivery, while blockchain technology ensures transparent government transactions and reduces corruption. Smart surveillance systems, AI-driven crime analytics, and cybersecurity frameworks improve policing efficiency and protect citizens from digital and physical threats. Online anti-corruption reporting platforms enable safe, anonymous citizen engagement, while biometric voter verification reduces election fraud. By embracing technology strategically, PNG can create a modern, proactive, and responsive law-and-order system, building on lessons learned from decades of reactive and crisis-driven approaches (UNICEF, 2024; UNFPA, 2023).

7.8 Create, Revitalize, and Stimulate the PNG Economy

Law-and-order concerns in PNG are not stand-alone issues but are deeply intertwined with the broader economy. These challenges stem largely from weaknesses in governance and the economic system, and in turn, they significantly undermine economic performance. Looking ahead, PNG’s future depends on transforming its economy into a K200 billion powerhouse by 2030 and beyond, a target articulated by Prime Minister James Marape (PNG Business News, 2025). Central to this vision is the empowerment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), described as the “heartbeat of PNG’s economic future,” supported through credit-guarantee schemes, export-licensing reforms, state equity participation in import-replacement sectors, zero-tax thresholds, and GST relief on essential goods, all designed to stimulate inclusive, resilient growth (PNG Business News, 2025a). Complementing this, the launch of the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Foundation Policy 2025–2032 signals a strategic pivot toward industrialisation, rural development, and economic diversification including agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing, and tourism; moving beyond past dependence on extractive sectors and projecting over a million new jobs and significant foreign investment (PNG Business News, 2025b).

7.9 Leadership with Integrity

Ethical leadership forms the cornerstone of national progress, and PNG is no exception. Leadership that embodies integrity, transparency, accountability, fairness, and decisiveness is vital for sustainable development. Importantly, this responsibility extends beyond the political sphere to all sectors of society, including government institutions, private enterprises, and community organizations. Even at the personal level, the demonstration of sound leadership principles contributes to building a just and progressive society.

Tackling law-and-order problems is, first and foremost, a political matter that demands strong will from leaders. Technical fixes alone are not enough if the political courage to act is missing. Leaders must be willing to make tough choices, even when those choices are unpopular. One example is dealing with illegal firearms, which requires bold steps such as stopping the easy issuance of gun licenses to citizens. Making these difficult but necessary calls reflects the type of firm leadership needed to restore order and build safer communities in the country.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As PNG marks its 50th Golden Jubilee, it is timely to pause, reflect, and critically assess our journey since 16th September 1975. The past five decades have been marked by challenges and achievements that collectively define our national identity. Looking ahead, it is equally important to envision what our country might become on 16th September 2075. Although many of us may not be present to witness the second Golden Jubilee, the character of that future PNG will depend on the choices, values, and commitment of today's generation, just as the progress of the last fifty years was shaped by those who came before us. Our responsibility, therefore, is not only to reflect on the road already traveled but also to ensure that we pass the torch of nationhood with purpose and vision to the generations that will follow

This paper has discussed the trajectory of PNG's law-and-order experience since independence. It reflects on the extent to which the nation has managed its socio-economic and political structures over the past fifty years to promote peace, stability, and social cohesion. The discussion highlights how law-and-order has been integral to ensuring not only security but also the stability of livelihoods and the quality of life for Papua New Guineans. In doing so, the paper also considers how lessons from the past can inform new approaches that will shape the country's law-and-order landscape as it enters the next fifty years of independence.

PNG's law-and-order trajectory over the next 50 years requires drawing lessons from past challenges while committing to systemic reforms. Strengthening the criminal justice system, enhancing governance, clarifying institutional roles, addressing education-to-employment gaps, regulating firearms, and leveraging technology form a holistic framework for progress. Through proactive measures, citizen participation, and institutional transparency, PNG can be a safer and more equitable society capable of sustaining peace and order into the future.

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