

# Police, politics, and issues of brutality

PNG Update

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# I. Introductions

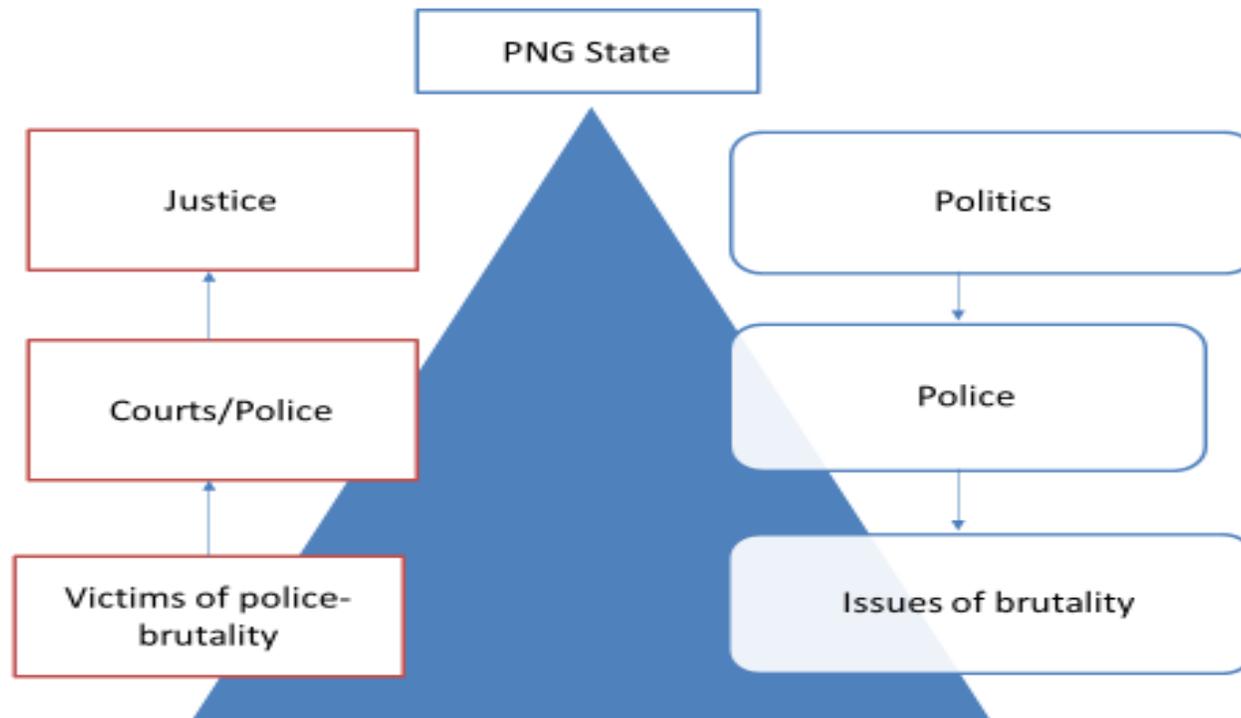
*Political interference* in the PNG police has been a concern that sometimes infringes on the role of police, .....questions the *integrity and impartiality* of the RPNGC, .....and could implicate on the *citizens' basic human rights* including: the *right to life*

This research looks at how politics interferes with the role police.....,leading to confrontations.....,and/or police brutality. It specifically looks the 2016 police shoot out on unarmed university student plus the recent political tussle between lawyer Laken Lapatu and Sir Peter Ipatas

**Note:** this research is independent....and its meant for academic debate/research. It does not favor any side of the topic.

- **Questions:** Does *political interference* and *factionalism* implicate on the role of police leading to issues of police brutality in PNG? And how can we maintain *police impartiality*, and achieve justice for victims of politically-instigated cases of police brutality?

How do we address issues of police-brutality instigated by politics?

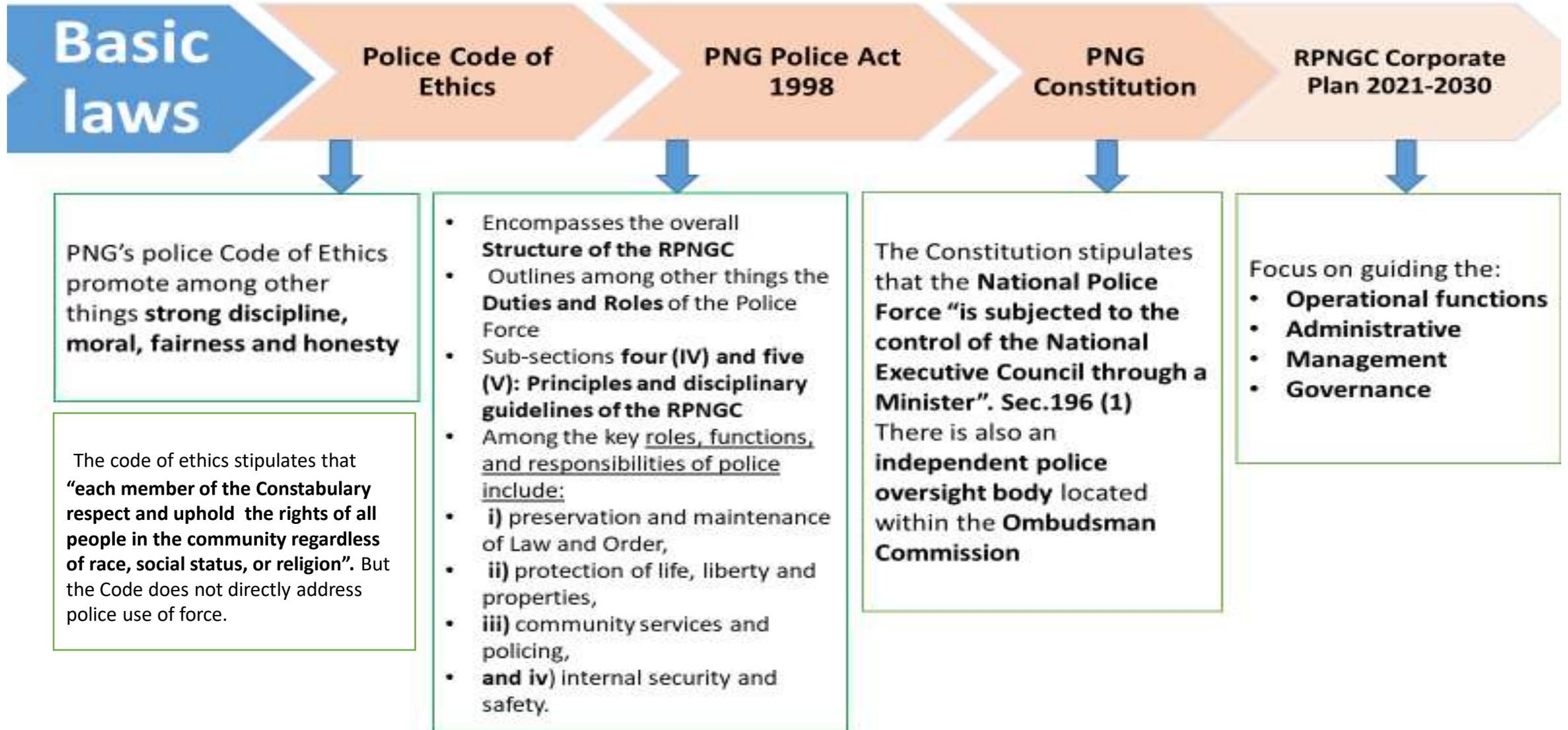


## 1.1. Role of Police: Theoretical Aspects

- ***Social Contract theory***-John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Jacques Rousseau (16th & 17th C)
- Locke-citizens have to render some of their *inalienable rights to the government/state* in return for protection of ***life, liberty, security, and property.***
- Hobbes-“People live together in society in accordance with an agreement that establishes *moral and political rules of behavior*”.
- In the state of nature where there is *no State*, then, *every man will be at war against each other.*
- *“in the state of nature, life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes)*

## II. PNG's case

### 2.1. Role of the PNG Police



## 2.2. Nature of police brutality (violence) in PNG differs depending on the situation:

- i) state-sponsored
- ii) Isolated cases
- iii) Resource/land-based
- iv) Electoral violence (more factionalism)

The nature of police brutality in PNG has two sides to the debate:

- i) police reactionary approach to contain certain situations (general lack of adherence to law by citizens)
- ii) Institutional weakness of police

## The issue of Police Brutality in Papua New Guinea (Okole Midelit, 2019)



### Institutional/Structural (more top-down)

- Organizational structure and environment
- Administration and management
- Education training & Facilities
- Human rights awareness
- Community responsibility and policing
- Human capacity
- National Consciousness & Unity
- Financial support and welfare
- Command & Control
- Political Factionalism (National, Local, Ethnic)

### Police Brutality

- Use/abuse of the right to the use of force
- Reacting to social pressures
- Support State Legitimacy
- Civil Disobedience
- Violation of Human rights
- Raises questions on democracy
- Could indicate political power struggle (case study)

### Behavioral/Dynamic (more bottom-up)

- Rural-urban migration leading to imbalance clusters of youth population
- Resource-based conflict
- Development and modernity
- Perceptions of the State
- Growing population
- Education and Civic/societal responsibility towards State

**Police recruitment: less than 5 000 police officers**

**Police to Citizen ratio: 1: 1, 367**

**Less than UN's recommended ration of 1: 450**

# Role of PNG Police in 2022 National General Elections

The National Security challenge in delivering a free, fair, and safe 2022 National General Elections.

## The security challenges to the role of the PNG police in 2022 National general Elections

### Institutional/Structural

- **Human Capacity** (est. 10, 000 Security personnel provided security in the 2022 National Elections)
- 1, 200 Defence personnel, 6, 000 Police personnel, & 500 Correctional servicemen
- **Election Funding**-K645.8 million (RPNGC, est. recurrent funding gap of K126 million per/annum & K3.9 billion one-off injection to deliver its mandate)

### Dynamic/Behavioural

- **Tribal/ethnic clashes**
- **PNG's growing population & rural-urban migration**
- **Land/resource-based conflict**
- **Etc.**

### Political factionalism

- Polarization of national politics exacerbates the cases of tribal fights in the 2022 elections
- This complicates the role police in elections

## 2.3. Politics and police brutality: the two case studies

### *i) 2016 police shoot-out on unarmed students*

In 2016, students at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) led nationwide protests against Prime Minister Peter O'Neill. Their grievances were many but centered on accountability and the lack of execution of a long-standing corruption charge and arrest warrant against the prime minister.

To quell the protest, armored police officers went to UPNG and opened fire on unarmed university protestors, injuring several students. The action was **viewed by the public as politically motivated in order to protect politicians.**



## *ii) political tussle between lawyer Laken Lepatu and Sir Peter Ipatas*

A day after Mr Aigilo lodged a formal complaint against Sir Peter over allegations relating to financial mismanagement of the Porgera mine landowners' royalty payments, few police officers entered Mr Aigilo's residence at night, assaulted, kidnapped, and threatened to kill him before detaining him at the Boroko Police Station.

Though, Mr. Aigilo was later released the next day, he indicated that his detainment was done without any prior formal complaint lodged against him, and without an arrest or search warrant.

According to Mr Aigilo, police involvement in his alleged assault and arrests was **politically motivated**, and raises the question on **police impartiality and integrity**.



## 2.4. Implications of brutality on human rights

Police is the legitimate representation of state authority in societies, and plays a critical role in community development. But with the use or abuse of the right use force, it can implicate on citizens **human rights and freedoms.**

**The Constitution contains a select number of human rights:**

- the right to life, liberty and security of person and protection of the law
- the right to take part in political activities.
- freedom from inhuman treatment and forced labour.
- freedom of conscience, expression, information, assembly and association.

How do we address the concern of political interference in the police?  
And how do we achieve justice to the victims of politically-instigated cases of police brutality?



## III. Conclusions

- Political interference in the police is an ongoing concern in PNG, that requires collective effort from politicians, police, courts, and the public to resolve.
- It is important that politicians need to stop interacting with the police, and stop using them for political reasons. Also, it is crucial for police officers to be educated about their constitutional roles so that they must not take sides when dealing with national matters. Police need to adhere to the police **Code of Ethics and the Police Act**.
- From the two cases discussed above, it is difficult to achieve justice for the victims of police brutality linked to political interests.....because even the **Courts and Commission of Inquiries** are very long processes that can take forever.

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Thank you!