

Papua New Guinea's Public Services Commission since independence: sidelined or strengthened?

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Content

- Main questions the paper addresses
- PSC at Independence and after
- PSC reforms and rationales
- Key findings and future pathways

Main questions

- Has PNG's PSC been sidelined or strengthened, that is, has it become less or more powerful over time? And what forces have led to its convoluted trajectory?
- Our paper investigates reforms to the Public Services Commission (PSC) in PNG since independence.
- It looks at the original roles of the PSC, and
- The various reforms the PSC has been subject to:
 - in 1986, 2003 and 2013 by constitutional and legislative change; and
 - in 2019, by court ruling.
- What plausible pathways exist ?

Changes in PSC functions and roles

- The PSC at and after independence
- PSC reforms and drivers
- Reducing PSC powers, 1983-86
- Increasing PSC powers, 1999-2003
- Reducing PSC powers, 2003-2014
- Reinstating PSC powers, 2019

	1975-1986	1986-2003	2003-2013	2013-2019	2019-current
Entire civil service	Central	Marginal	Marginal (no change)	Marginal (no change)	Marginal (no change)
Senior appointments	Central	Marginal	Even more central (than 1975-1986)	Even more marginal (than 1986-2003)	Even more central (as per 2003-2013)

Conclusion

- Establishing the right balance between politics and public administration has long been a challenge.
- PNG has been affected by the new waves of reforms in public sector, such as the New Public Management (e.g. privatization, decentralisation)
- The first question this paper asks is whether the PSC has been sidelined or strengthened since independence. The answer is: some of both.
- The second question this paper asks is why. How do we explain the contradictory trajectories public service reform has taken in PNG? The answer lies in the contradictory motives for reform.
- Third, given this controversy, it is unlikely that current arrangements regarding senior appointments will survive indefinitely.
- Fourth and finally, we refrain from providing advice as to the desirable direction for future reform.
- The lesson of the PSC reform story may be that structural reform is not the answer. In the words of Ron May, what is needed “is less institutional reform than a fundamental shift in patterns of political behaviour” .