

UPNG students: POM unsafe, PNG heading in wrong direction

by Anna Kapil and Stephen Howes

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Graduates of the University of Papua New Guinea walk into the graduation ceremony, April 2025

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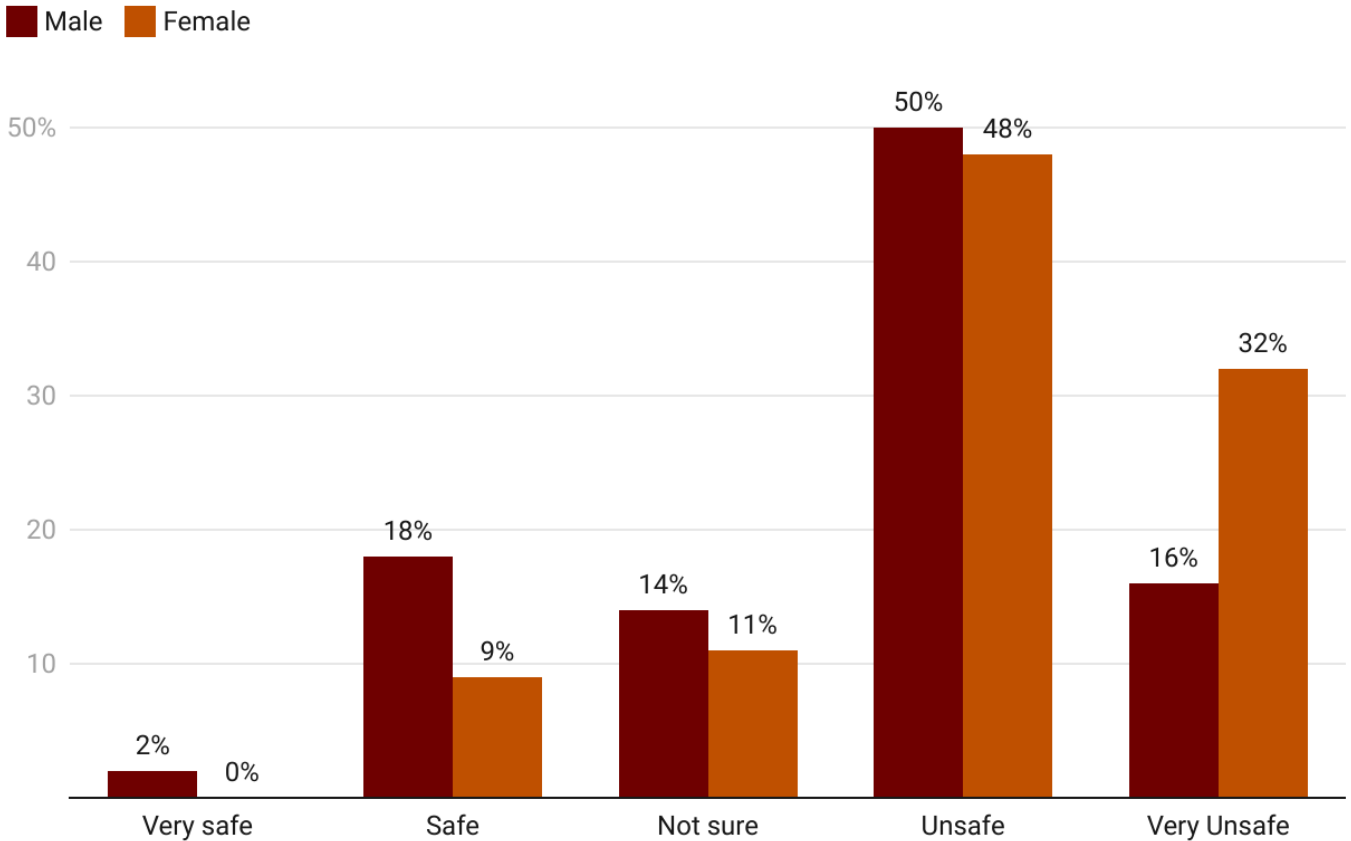
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There is a general perception, both locally and internationally, that the capital of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, is unsafe. We thought it would be interesting to investigate what University of PNG students think about the safety of the city in which they are living, and so included questions on safety in [our second annual survey of UPNG students](#). Almost 400 UPNG School of Business and Public Policy first-, second- and third-year students were asked about their perceptions of security and crime in Port Moresby in a survey we conducted earlier in the year. Questions about safety within the university campus were not asked.

The students were asked to say whether they felt very safe, safe, unsafe or very unsafe in Port Moresby. Almost half (49%) said they felt unsafe and a further 21% said they felt very unsafe. 13% of the students were unsure and 15% said they felt safe. Only 1% of the students surveyed said they felt very safe.

Women felt less safe than men. Twice as many female students said they felt very unsafe (32% vs 16%). And half as many female students said they felt safe (9% vs 18%). No female student said they felt very safe.

Figure 1: How safe do you feel in Port Moresby?



Source: 2025 UPNG Student Attitudes Survey • Created with Datawrapper

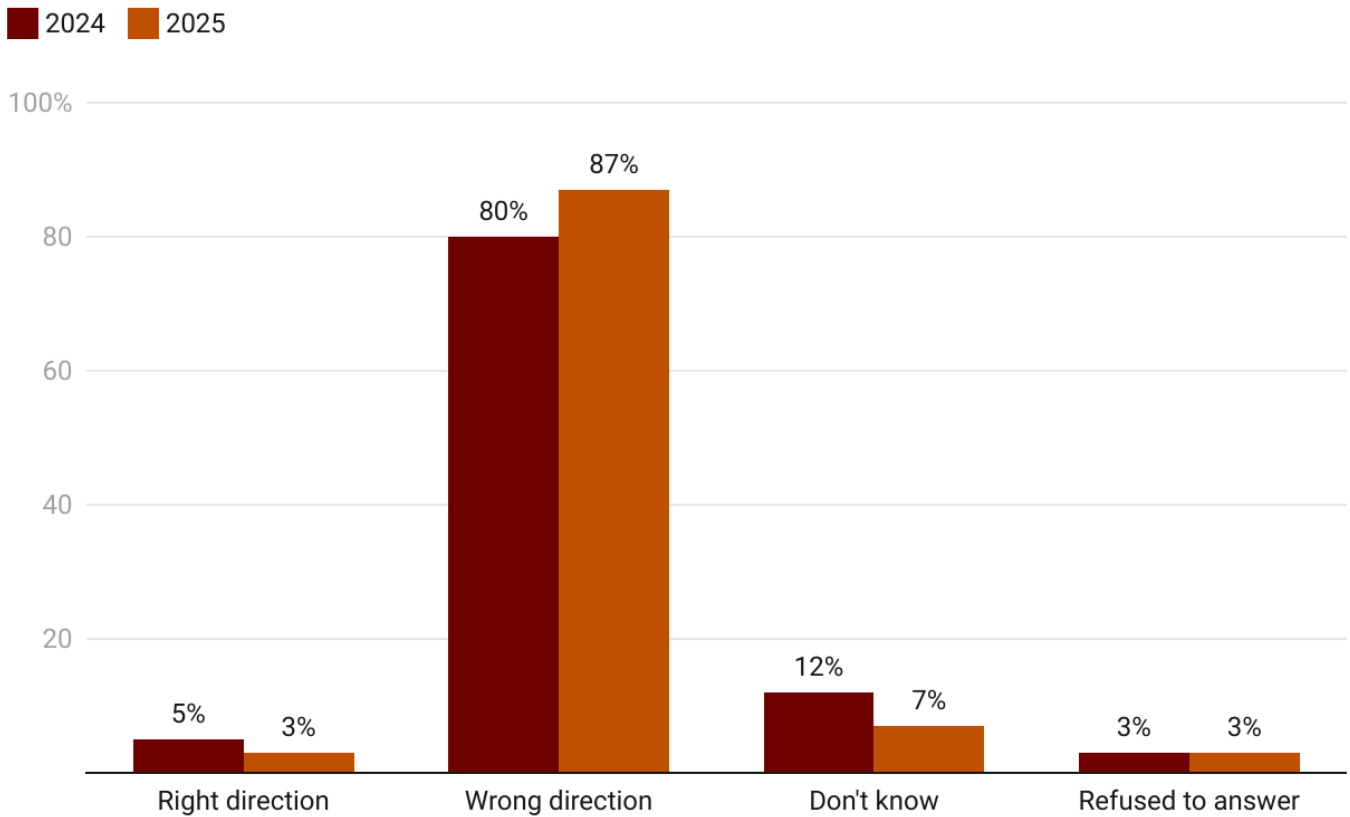
The survey also asked whether students had themselves experienced insecurity. 29% of the students reported being a victim of crime during their time in Port Moresby. There was a slightly higher share of female than male students (33% vs 27%), but the difference is not statistically significant. Only about one-quarter (26%) of those who said they had been a victim of crime reported it to the police.

Students were also asked what types of crime they thought were becoming more of a problem. Almost 70% of the students responded that violent crime was getting worse. More than 70% thought a riot similar to the infamous “Black Wednesday” riot on 10 January 2024 was likely to happen in the future. 40% said it was very likely to recur, and 32% said it was likely. Only 10% said it was unlikely and 2% very unlikely.

These negative sentiments about security might have fed into responses about the country’s direction. **As in 2024**, students were asked a standard question asked in attitude surveys around the world: do they think PNG is going in the wrong or the right direction? Last year, 80% said PNG was going in the wrong direction. This year it was 87%. Only 3% said the nation was heading in the right direction. 7% responded with “don’t know” and another 3% said they didn’t want to answer. Although the change in shares between the two years is not strongly significant

statistically, it is clear that students are still very pessimistic about the direction in which their country is going.

Figure 2: What direction do you think PNG is heading in?



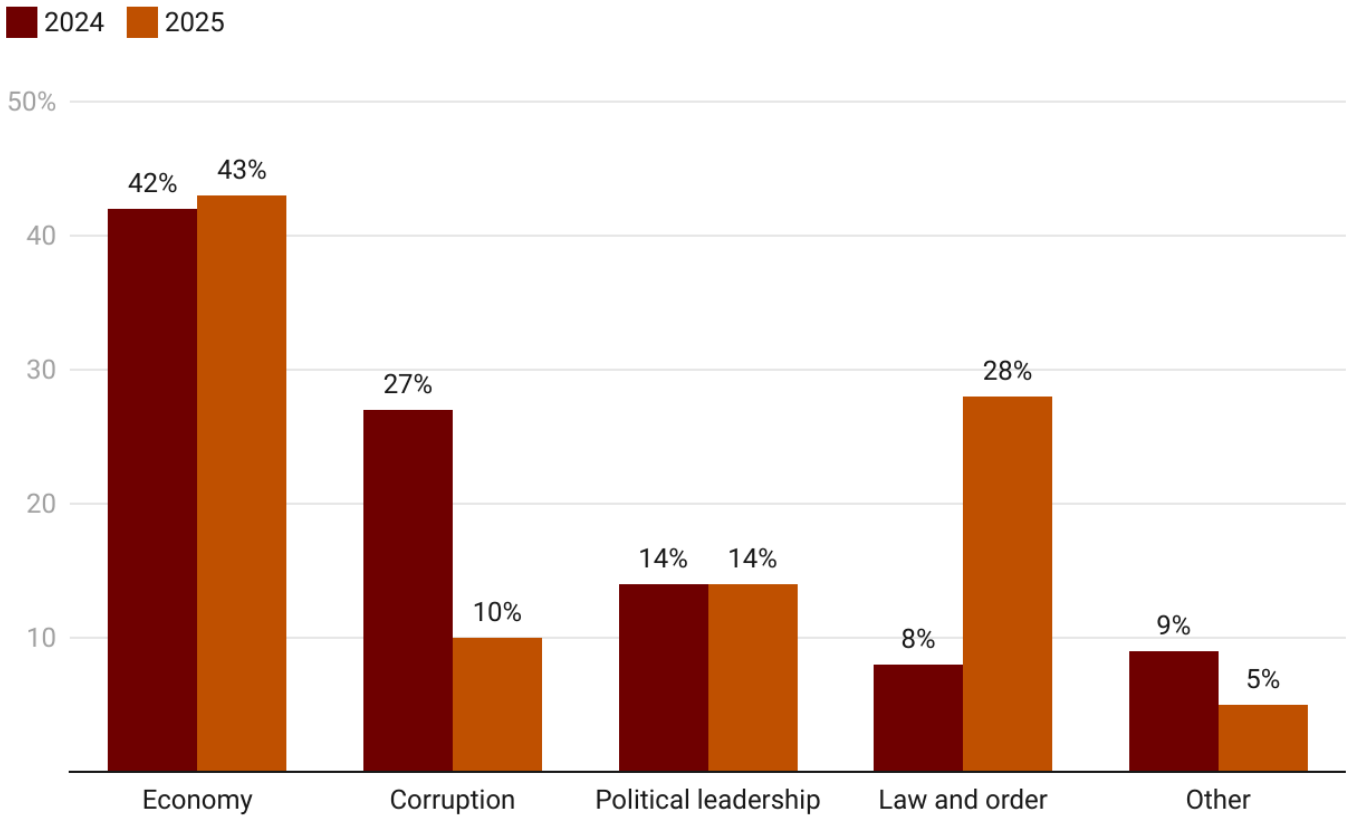
Source: 2025 UPNG Student Attitudes Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Although we asked the question about national direction before the questions about crime and security, it is clear that perceptions about the latter fed into answers about the former. Students were asked to say why they thought the country was going in the wrong (or right) direction. They could give two reasons, but here we analyse only the first reason they gave, on the assumption that this is their most important reason. (The results didn't change much when we analysed both reasons.)

While students could give any response they wanted, most responses were easy to categorise. The most popular reason given for thinking the country was going in the wrong direction related to the economy. Students complained of both poor economic management and outcomes (43%, hardly changed from last year's 42%). They were especially worried about inflation and unemployment. There was a big increase in the share of students who listed a lack of security or problems with law and order as the reason for their negative response: 28%, up from only 8% in 2024. 14% still gave political leadership as the problem, but the share who listed corruption and other concerns fell sharply due to our increased focus on law and

order.

Figure 3: Why do you think the country is heading in the wrong direction?



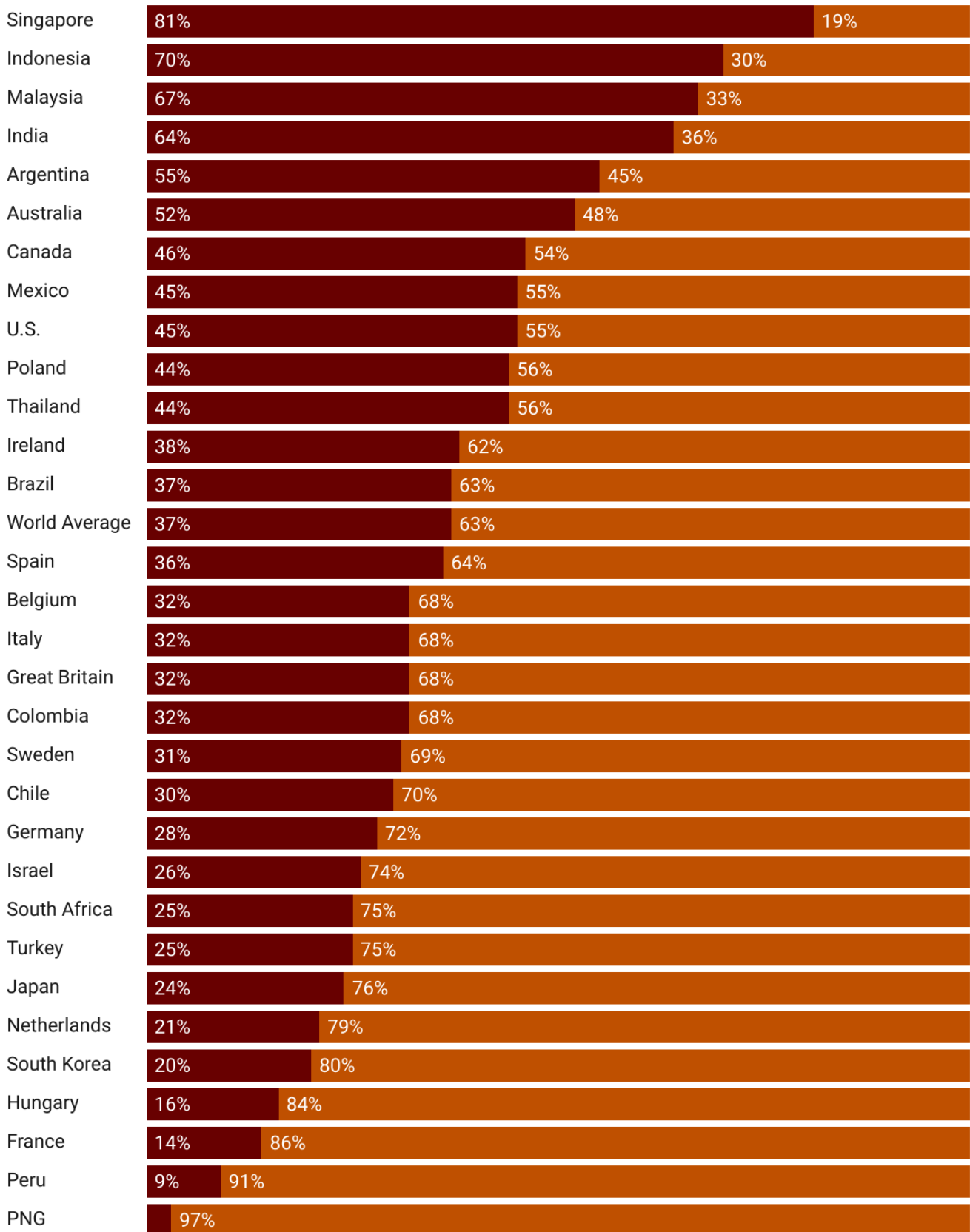
Source: 2025 UPNG Student Attitudes Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Because this question about country direction is asked in so many countries, we can compare the answers of the UPNG students to those of citizens in other countries. To do this, we take out those who didn't want to answer or said they didn't know. As with last year, the PNG students emerge as the most pessimistic compared to citizens of more than 30 countries in the [Ipsos February 2024 What Worries the World report](#), with 97% pessimistic and only 3% optimistic. Perhaps students are more negative than other social groupings. Or perhaps with growing concerns around security and real worries about rising prices and the difficulty of finding a job, PNG as a nation is in a highly pessimistic mood.

Figure 4: What direction is this country is heading in?

Percentage share surveyed by Ipsos and UPNG.

■ Right Direction ■ Wrong Direction



Note: Numbers scaled to so that right and wrong direction shares add to 100%.

Source: Ipsos - What Worries the World report February 2024. UPNG Student Attitudes Survey. • Created with Datawrapper

This is a finding which, in the country's fiftieth year of independence, should give us pause.

For other findings from the 2025 survey, see [this article series](#) and the [2025 PNG Update presentation](#). The results of the first survey, conducted in 2024, were [reported here](#). All the differences reported are statistically significant at the 5% level using the Chi-square test except where noted.

Disclosures:

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