

# FIGHTING AND VOTES: VIOLENCE, SECURITY AND THE 1992 NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA\*

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## INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the June 1992 national elections, the Papua New Guinean Police Commissioner announced that police and defence forces would mount a massive joint security operation for the duration of the election period. This would be the largest such exercise since Independence,<sup>1</sup> surpassing that provided for the 1991 South Pacific Games in Port Moresby and Lae, as well as earlier police/defence force operations on Bougainville.<sup>2</sup> Security was to be concentrated in the Highlands Provinces — particularly Western Highlands, Eastern Highlands and Enga — which, according to police intelligence reports, were likely to be the main troublespots.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon of election-related violence is by no means confined to Papua New Guinea. Nor is there any evidence that its incidence in this country matches, as yet, the intensity of that experienced in many other developing nations.<sup>4</sup> The comparatively short history of elections in Papua New Guinea nevertheless suggests a relationship between violence and political change, whereby “a certain level of violence is *expected* to occur in conjunction with elections, whether at national or provincial level”.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the elaborate security operation proposed for 1992 caused little surprise.

Violence occurring in the context of PNG elections must be set against the broader context of pervasive concern with what is euphemistically referred to as the “law and order problem”. A crucial dimension of this more diffuse set of concerns<sup>6</sup> relates to the capacity of the state to respond to escalating levels of lawlessness and other perceived challenges to its authority. The ongoing Bougainville rebellion, growing violence on the part of organised criminal gangs,<sup>7</sup> militant compensation claims against the state by

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1 *Post-Courier* 19 May 1992 at 15.

2 *Post-Courier* 21 May 1992 at 3.

3 *Times* 21 May 1992 at 2.

4 Chandidas, R, “Electoral System and Political Development”, in Singhvi (ed), *Elections and Electoral Reforms in India* (1971).

5 Strathern, A J, “Violence and Political Change in Papua New Guinea”, (1993) forthcoming in *Pacific Studies*, at 13.

6 Dinnen, S, “Causes for Concern: Control Talk in Papua New Guinea” (1993) 1/1 *TaimLain (J Contemp Melanesian Stud)* 13–37.

customary landowners,<sup>8</sup> and the waging of tribal warfare in many parts of the Highlands provide ample evidence of the extremely tenuous writ of centralised authority in Papua New Guinea and the limited ability of the state to control illegal violence. The increasing availability of firearms (both home-made and factory produced) and rumours of their intended use in the elections accentuated these concerns.<sup>9</sup> In February 1992, for example, Foreign Affairs Minister Sir Michael Somare claimed that police in the Highlands had uncovered high powered rifles imported from Australia and were concerned that these might be used to intimidate voters during the elections.<sup>10</sup> Experience from previous elections also confirmed the intense passions aroused on such occasions and their potential for generating conflict and violence.<sup>11</sup>

In this paper I shall look very generally at the issue of collective violence in the Papua New Guinean context with particular reference to its incidence in the 1992 general elections. The review is nation-wide in scope and largely based on newspaper reports, documentation from relevant government agencies, and interviews conducted during fieldwork in Port Moresby, Southern Highlands and Enga. The media reports must necessarily be treated with caution in terms of their veracity and depth of coverage. At the same time, these sources remain influential in the moulding of public opinion in PNG and in shaping the direction of official policy, in terms of electoral arrangements, reforms and security measures. In the first section, I shall look critically at the concept of violence and its current usage in Papua New Guinea. In the second, essentially descriptive section, I shall outline the security measures adopted by the state during the election period and the pattern of violence as reported in the media. Drawing on this earlier material, the concluding section will provide a broad outline of the principal features and dynamics of collective violence in contemporary PNG, within and beyond the electoral context. Whilst much of the debate on law and order in Papua New Guinea has emphasised the disintegrative aspects of lawlessness and violence, less has been said about the integrative dimensions of these phenomena. The paper seeks to locate the phenomenon of collective violence, including election-related violence, within the broader context of current configurations of power in PNG and the interplay between different cultural traditions.

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7 Harris, B M, "The Rise of Rascalism — Action and Reaction in the Evolution of Rascal Gangs", *Discussion Paper No 54*, Institute of Applied and Social Economic Research, 1988.

8 Above n5.

9 Bill Standish confirmed that in Chimbu Province many such rumours accompanied the elections. One example concerned an MP who allegedly had high powered automatic Chinese rifles. Those who voted against the MP, according to the rumour, were likely to be attacked by the weapons, which, it was claimed, had been used in 1990 tribal warfare. The police searched but failed to uncover the guns. Such rumours and threats play an important role in the mobilisation of votes in the electoral context. (Personal Communication).

10 *Post-Courier* 10 Feb 1992.

11 Iamo et al, *The Reduction of Election Violence in the Highlands and Other Selected Areas* (1992), Port Moresby: National Research Institute.

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## VIOLENCE AND ELECTIONS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

It is common in Papua New Guinea, as in many other parts of the world, to decry an increasing propensity to violence amongst certain groups and individuals. Media reports emphasise, often sensationalise, the violent aspects of contemporary criminality and, in the process, often promote dramatic images of impending social disintegration. Whilst this treatment of violence might sell newspapers, it rarely does justice to the complexity, diversity and rational aspects of such phenomena.<sup>12</sup> This is not to deny the gravity of current levels of violence in Papua New Guinea or the widespread fear they induce. Rather, it is to caution that the phenomenon of violence, whether election-related or otherwise, does not constitute a discrete or homogenous category of behaviour, and that it remains vital that we venture beyond “commonsense” perceptions in seeking a more adequate, and ultimately more useful, understanding of the complex dynamics involved.

History teaches that rather than being atypical or anomalous, violence has been usual and endemic in the historical development of most societies and nations. We need only think of the violence — threatened and actual — of sorcery and tribal warfare in so-called stateless societies, on the one hand, and the appalling level of violence endemic in modern warfare, on the other, to be reminded of the normality and continuity of violence in our history. Moreover, the highly selective manner in which the label “violence” is commonly applied alerts us to the significant role of perception and social definitions in this context. As employed in popular usage, “violence” is a pejorative term used to discredit a particular act or type of behaviour. In practice, however, what may be deemed violent to one individual, group or culture, may not to another. A defining feature of violence, and one that underlies its difficulty as a concept, is thus its essential contestability. Social and cultural definitions are crucial in determining whether particular behaviour is perceived as violence or not. Ultimately we “see” violence according to our underlying social, cultural and political values. The interplay of culture and politics is, in this sense, central to the study of conflict and violence. This point, as we shall see, is of particular significance in Papua New Guinea — marked as it is by a profusion of overlapping social, cultural and political contexts.

The current conflict on Bougainville and accompanying “propaganda war” between government and rebel forces provides an obvious and topical illustration of the more general point about contestability. Both sides to the conflict denounce the “violence” of the other whilst simultaneously seeing similar acts by their own side in terms of legitimate coercion or self-defence.<sup>13</sup> Selective application of the term is evident across a whole range of social fields where coercive behaviour plays an important and contested role. At a global level, conflicting perceptions over the definition of “human rights” and their abuse illustrates the same point. As Riches remarks, “violence is a concept which can easily be manoeuvred into an ideological ambience, coming particularly to symbolize moral impropriety in a range of actions and policies”.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Cohen, S, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1973); Erickson, R. V. Baranek, P. M. and Chan, J. B. L., *Representing Order — Crime, Law and Justice in the News Media* (1991).

13 Havini, M., “A Bougainvillean Perspective on the Crisis”, in Spriggs and Denoon (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis — 1991 Update* (1992) at 161–169.

Without becoming entangled in the hermeneutic issues, we can tentatively define “violence” as acts involving the intentional use of physical force. Despite a tendency — most apparent in popular western media representations — to dismiss selected acts of violence as “senseless” or “mindless”, those engaged in conflict and violence will usually seek to legitimate their actions in terms of specific rationalisations. Use or threats of physical force, like most other forms of social behaviour, usually occur in the furtherance of particular objectives. It is the task of the researcher to identify these reasons, whilst, simultaneously analysing the perceptions of those who challenge the legitimacy of such acts. The relations between parties to conflict and dispute must be further located within the overall context of power relations and accompanying strategies of domination and resistance. As Warren remarks:

For analysts of specific cultures and places, the imperative is to dispel the view that violence is inherently chaotic and irrational by tracing the implications of particular forms of domination, resistance and violence.<sup>15</sup>

The labelling of behaviour as violent and hence illegitimate will usually be done by reference to some preordained code of values or norms. In the modern nation state it is usually those definitions contained in state law that determine the official legitimacy or otherwise of violent behaviour. Even within the framework of state law, however, certain acts performed by one actor may not be deemed illegitimate, whereas exactly the same behaviour engaged in by another may be. The immediate context in which coercion is employed — in particular, the relationship between perpetrator and victim — is crucial in determining issues of legitimacy in both formal and informal contexts. State law, for example, allows coercive behaviour under certain circumstances, as in the case of self-defence or judicial execution, and recognises a reduced degree of culpability in others, as in the case of retaliation in the face of provocation. In the informal customary setting, the basis of “legal liability” in conflict situations is largely determined by the relationship between the parties.

It is only with the development of the modern nation-state and the centralisation of political authority that we find rulers claiming a monopoly over coercion and proscribing acts and threats of interpersonal violence. This claim to monopolise coercive powers and receive allegiance from citizens has become a defining feature of the ideal of modern statehood.<sup>16</sup> Legitimacy in this idealised representation flows vertically downwards from the government, or other source of sovereignty. It is, in other words, “top-down” legitimacy. Such a formulation inevitably encourages bias towards the powers of state, formal institutions and national leaders, and consequent neglect of alternative formulations emerging from more localised sites within the overall national society. In doing so, it also neglects the important role of intra-national conflict between different collective entities (state and non-state) in the generation and reformulation of cultural change. In order to achieve a fuller understanding of the character and role of conflict and violence among the heterogeneous communities that make up Papua New Guinea, it is

14 Riches, D (ed) *The Anthropology of Violence* (1986) at 4.

15 Warren, K B (ed) *The Violence Within: Cultural and Political Opposition in Divided Nations* (1993).

16 Hall, S, “The State in Question”, in McLennan, Held and Hall (eds), *The Idea of the Modern State* (1984) 1–28.

thus vital to accommodate the critiques and legitimation strategies of both state and non-state sources of power.

Anthropologists have long recognised that legitimacy in small-scale societies, in contrast to that embodied in conventional statist formulations, tends to be much more widely distributed along horizontal lines and not delegated from any central place or person. As Southall points out:

(F)undamental responsibility for the maintenance of society itself is much more widely dispersed throughout its varied institutions and its whole population, at least, usually, all its adult males.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst the formal status of nation-state was attained in 1975, the state in Papua New Guinea remains weak and fragmented. Its lack of internal coherence and limited external purchase over the plethora of communities comprising civil society is widely acknowledged<sup>18</sup> and manifests itself in numerous ways. The current review of the provincial government system and the new village services scheme are two of the most recent examples of official acknowledgement of the weakness of state processes in Papua New Guinea and of the need to strengthen them. Many of the features of the so-called breakdown in law and order are indicative of profound underlying conflicts within and between the different sources of power that remain widely dispersed throughout the national Papua New Guinean society. The extent of this dispersal, particularly of coercive power — which should, ideally, reside in the state — in turn, accentuates the problems of authority for both state and non-state entities in Papua New Guinea.

Mention has already been made of the Bougainville rebellion which entails conflicts within and between different non-state entities, notably landowning communities, as well as the more obvious and explicit challenge to state authority. Similar dynamics of conflict involving both state and non-state entities underlie, to varying degrees, the phenomena of “rascalism”,<sup>19</sup> tribal warfare,<sup>20</sup> compensation demands by customary landowners,<sup>21</sup> and corruption.<sup>22</sup> Filer has recently claimed “that the only substantial collective actors on the stage called “Papua New Guinea” are private companies, local communities, and a strange variety of creatures, which he calls “bits of state”.<sup>23</sup> In the same paper he speaks of the “the Humpty Dumpty state” — comprised of “bits of state” — whose fragmented and autonomous qualities are part of a wider process of social and political fragmentation affecting both state and non-state sources of power in contemporary Papua New Guinea.<sup>24</sup>

17 Southall, A, “Stateless Societies”, in Sills (ed), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968) at 167.

18 Ashton, C, “Papua New Guinea: A Broken-Backed State?” Submission No 49. Australia’s Relations With Papua New Guinea. Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. Canberra, December 1991.

19 Above n7.

20 Jansonius, R, “Lo I No Bosim Mipela, Mipela Bosim Lo — Tribal Warfare and Rascalism in Papua New Guinea”, unpublished paper, Department of Cultural Anthropology, State University of Utrecht, 1989.

21 Above n5.

22 Barnett, T, *The Barnett Report — a Summary of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Aspects of the Timber Industry in Papua New Guinea*. Hobart: Asia-Pacific Action Group, 1990.

23 Filer, C, “The Escalation of Disintegration and the Reinvention of Authority”, in Spriggs and Denoon (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis — 1991 Update* (1992) at 114.

24 Ibid.

The phenomenon of tribal fighting provides a useful illustration of behaviour that, from a state-centred perspective, challenges the PNG state's proclaimed monopoly over violence, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the existence of more parochial non-state sources of power which also claim a prerogative over coercion. From the viewpoint of the state, it is the illegal coercion entailed in tribal fighting that constitutes the problem, whereas for the participants the fight is perceived as a legitimate mechanism, albeit of last resort, for resolving an underlying dispute over land, pigs, an earlier killing or whatever.<sup>25</sup> Discussing the results of a survey of popular attitudes towards tribal fighting, Mapusia found that "(tribal fighting itself was not perceived as an example of lawlessness" but, rather "was seen as an attempt at solving a problem".<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein the Clifford Report commented:

Tribal fighting is a response to disorder, to a dispute or a breach of a norm not a problem in itself. For participants the law and order problem is the offence or dispute, not the fighting.<sup>27</sup>

Tribal fighting or, more accurately, tribal warfare<sup>28</sup> also draws attention to an important defining feature of violence in Papua New Guinea — namely, its group or collective character. The social organisation of much violent crime in western industrialised contexts has led many criminologists to a pragmatic focus on its manifestation in individual crimes and criminals and, consequently, has favoured behavioural analysis of individual criminal careers.<sup>29</sup> This orientation has, to some extent, been reinforced by the continuing influence of biological and genetic approaches in the study of human behaviour, including violent behaviour.<sup>30</sup> In PNG, however, the student of crime is confronted with crimes of violence that are overwhelmingly collective in character, such as those involving tribal warriors or "rascal" gangs. Whilst the line between individual and collective violence remains conceptually and operationally ambiguous, these two forms of violence generally suggest quite different lines of causal inquiry and interactional dynamics.

The collective form of much violent behaviour in Papua New Guinea is, in turn, a reflection of the communal character of the social organisation of Melanesian societies. In these societies, elaborate kinship networks define the social units within which the rights and obligations of community members to each other and outsiders are determined. The primacy of extended kinship in the Melanesian social order has often been contrasted with

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- 25 Strathern, A J, "Contemporary Warfare in the New Guinea Highlands: Revival or Breakdown?" (1977) 4/3 *Yagl-Ambu* 135-46.
- 26 Mapusia, M, "Police Policy Towards Tribal Fighting in the Highlands", in Morauta (ed), *Law and Order in a Changing Society*, Political and Social Change Monograph 6, Australian National University, 1986 at 60.
- 27 Clifford, W, Morauta, L, Stuart, B, *Law and Order in Papua New Guinea* (vol 1). Port Moresby: Institute of National Affairs and Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research, 1984 at 92.
- 28 Meggitt, M J, *Blood Is Their Argument* (1977); Reay, M, "Lawlessness in the Papua New Guinea Highlands", in May and Nelson (eds), *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity* (vol 2, 1982); Burton, J, "Tribal Fighting — the Scandal of Inaction" (1990) 14 *Research in Melanesia* 31-40.
- 29 Weiner, N A, "Violent Criminal Careers and 'Violent Career Criminals' — an Overview of the Research Literature", in Weiner and Wolfgang (eds), *Violent Crime, Violent Criminals* (1989).
- 30 Goldstein, J H, *Aggression and Crimes of Violence* (1986).

the atomised individualism and impersonal social relations of large-scale capitalist societies. This is particularly so in discussion of social control processes in both contexts.<sup>31</sup> An earlier tendency by scholars to articulate the relationship between different cultural traditions in terms of dichotomous formulations contrasting “custom” and “law”, “tradition” and “modernity”, and so on, has been increasingly questioned over recent years.<sup>32</sup> This critique has gained momentum as the significance of processes of cross-cultural integration has become appreciated.<sup>33</sup> The interaction between socio-cultural traditions, in turn, provides a promising avenue for analysis of many aspects of contemporary social and political change in Papua New Guinea, including the phenomenon of collective violence.

Indeed, the constitution of many prevalent forms of contemporary criminality in Papua New Guinea (including crimes of violence) demonstrates the extent of interplay between these different traditions. At one end, corruption offences appear to exhibit many of the features of customary kinship translated into the context of the formal political and economic arena. As Larmour observes:

The prevalent concern with official and political ‘corruption’, particularly in Papua New Guinea, is partly about the conflict between the obligations of kinship and public service — at least, that is the way corrupt officials defend their actions.<sup>34</sup>

At the other, the social organisation of rascal gangs represents a remarkably successful integration between distinctly Melanesian social relations and the dynamism of the modern urban cash economy. As Goddard has argued:

The evolution of the gangs can in fact be interpreted as the evolution of an urban gift economy fed by theft and burglary, involving social relations which are typical of pre-capitalist Melanesian societies in general.<sup>35</sup>

There is general agreement that escalating levels of collective violence — in particular, the revival of tribal fighting<sup>36</sup> — accompanied the gradual dismantling of the former colonial system of decentralised administration and its replacement with a highly centralised system of government. In social control terms, several observers have identified the demise of the colonial system of district-level administration as having generated a social control vacuum at local level which has, in turn, facilitated increasing levels of violence and lawlessness. It is in this context, that popular demands are often heard for the return of the *kiap* (district officer).<sup>37</sup> The claim that decentralised state

31 Lawrence, P, “The State Versus Stateless Societies”, in Brown (ed), *Fashion of Law in New Guinea* (1969).

32 Aleck, J, *Traditional Law and Legal Traditions in Papua New Guinea*, Department of Law, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1990.

33 Zorn, J G, “Customary Law in the Papua New Guinea Village Courts” (1990) 2/2 *Contemp Pacific* 279–311.

34 Larmour, P, “States and Societies in the Pacific Islands” (1992) 1/1 *Pacific Studies* 104.

35 Goddard, M, “Big-Man, Thief — the Social Organization of Gangs in Port Moresby” (1992) 15/1 *Canberra Anthropology* 20–34 at 30.

36 Gordon, R, “The Decline of the *Kiapdom* and the Resurgence of ‘Tribal Fighting’ in Enga” (1983) 53 *Oceania* 205–223; Paney, P, *Report of the Committee Investigating Tribal Fighting in the Highlands*, Port Moresby, 1973.

37 *Post-Courier* 13 Aug 1991 at 10.

controls were exclusively responsible for the temporary colonial peace, however, tends to over-emphasise the purchase of the former at the expense of the role of existing informal customary controls. Pax Australiana — which lasted less than thirty years in some parts of the Highlands — was not achieved through the displacement of informal authority. Given the severely limited resources of the colonial administration and the short periods of time involved, pacification could only have been achieved through the active cooperation of customary authorities.<sup>38</sup> How long this peace might have endured had Independence not been achieved in 1975 remains an open question. As the Clifford Report said of the colonial period:

(C)ustomary law held sway and only when it failed was the kiap involved .. Papua New Guineans accepted this odd system with its ritual and irrelevant sanctions only as long as they had to.<sup>39</sup>

By the late 1960s and early 1970s an increasing propensity to challenge state authority was becoming apparent. The immediate context of the contemporary law and order situation is relatively well known. The removal of discriminatory legislation (in particular that concerning freedom of movement and alcohol consumption), urbanisation, rapid population growth, and a growing constituency of marginalised youth provided important preconditions for crime and delinquency. Added to this, slow and uneven economic development, increasing social disparities, limited employment opportunities, and a deteriorating system of infrastructural support and delivery of government services contributed to social discontent which manifested itself, at one level, in escalating lawlessness.

At another level, the tensions between central and local sites of power have contributed to the emergence of what some writers<sup>40</sup> identify as a deepening crisis of internal legitimacy in post-colonial Papua New Guinea. This crisis also exhibits distinct criminogenic tendencies. The right to use coercion as a legitimate means of conflict resolution is simultaneously claimed by both state and customary authorities. This prerogative ultimately underwrites both sources of authority. Whilst the formal legitimacy of the former resides in state law backed by the coercive powers of the police, courts and prisons, the informal legitimacy of the latter lies in appeals to customary authority which may sanction coercion as a legitimate form of dispute resolution. Attempts by the state to suppress the “violence” of the latter have not only been manifestly unsuccessful, but may well have accentuated overall levels of societal violence. Strathern addresses this issue in terms of a “social control gap” that has been opened up as a result of the growing contest between formal and informal sources of legitimacy in the transition to nationhood:

It is evident that courts had formal legitimacy, if necessary backed by force in the shape of the police; customary procedures had informal legitimacy, not backed by the state but dependent on self-regulatory mechanisms and ultimately on the sanctioning power of inter-group violence itself — yet this was precisely what state control disallowed. We can

38 Gordon, R and Meggitt, M J, *Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands* (1985).

39 Above n27 at 112.

40 Above n38; above n5.



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identify a gap here in the overall system of social control, which has subsequently produced a set of severe problems nowadays.<sup>41</sup>

The weak state in Papua New Guinea simultaneously facilitates violence by and between both non-state and state actors.<sup>42</sup> In the former case, the tenuous purchase of centralised authority enhances the already considerable autonomy of more parochial sites. In the latter, violence may result from frustrations experienced by state actors charged with controlling challenges to state authority but who, in practice, lack the necessary operational capacity and popular legitimacy to do so. Similar frustrations may arise from the tensions and contradictions inherent in the workings of the different component parts of the criminal justice system. Thus, many PNG police believe their work is constantly undermined by the perceived leniency of court sentences, as well as by the manifest failure of the Correctional Institutions Service (CIS) to provide secure custody. The ineffectiveness of the internal police disciplinary procedures in turn ensures that officers who succumb to the temptation to dispense “summary justice” to suspects have little fear of formal reprisals.

The problematic character of “violence” in general, and its application within the Melanesian context, is particularly evident in the case of election-related violence. Under state law there is no criminal offence of “election violence” per se. Insofar as violent behaviour occurring during an election attracts legal sanctions these will be for standard criminal offences such as assault, inter-group fighting, carrying a weapon and so on. Particular electoral offences provided for under the Criminal Code<sup>43</sup> and the Organic Law on National Elections tend to deal with non-violent attempts to subvert the electoral process, although some of these might also involve the use or threat of violence, such as Undue Influence;<sup>44</sup> Interference at Elections;<sup>45</sup> Disorderly Behaviour at Meeting.<sup>46</sup> As with other forms of violent behaviour, an understanding of that occurring in the course of elections needs to be situated within the broader encompassing social and cultural contexts.<sup>47</sup>

First introduced in 1964, the electoral process in Papua New Guinea, and its host political system, have had a relatively short period of gestation. The flurry of recent electoral debate and reform demonstrates growing official recognition of the need to modify and adapt the system as more unforeseen difficulties become apparent. As with other contemporary state institutions and processes,<sup>48</sup> the social embeddedness of the electoral system in Papua New Guinea remains tenuous and its operation susceptible to contention and dispute. Far from being displaced or neutralised by the downward thrust of centralised government, local political traditions have proved remarkably resilient and, in

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41 Above n5 at 2.

42 Amnesty International, *Papua New Guinea — Human Rights Violations on Bougainville, 1989-1990* (1990); Robie, D, “Human Rights Abuses in the Pacific — a Source of Regional Insecurity”, in Clements (ed), *Peace and Security in the Asia Pacific Region: Post-Cold War Problems and Prospects* (1993), 124–141.

43 Chapter 262, Revised Laws.

44 S102 of the Criminal Code.

45 S108 of the Criminal Code.

46 S198 of the Organic Law on National Elections.

47 Above n14 at vii.

48 Above n34.

many respects, have successfully penetrated state processes in a process described by Gordon and Meggitt as "upward colonization".<sup>49</sup> Standish has documented the same process in the case of Chimbu Province.<sup>50</sup> He argues that the state has been absorbed into Chimbu politics through the appropriation of state resources in the context of inter-group political competition. His work demonstrates:

(T)he utilization of Simbu values within the new arenas created by the state and the use of new political resources deriving from the state within Simbu political arenas, competitions and conflicts. The process was thus one of interpenetration. It could even be argued that the introduced state has been coopted into Simbu politics, or been colonized by Simbu political values.<sup>51</sup>

The processes of integration between different traditions can be seen in a number of features of evolving Melanesian political culture. Indigenous expectations of the role of political leadership, to take an obvious example, diverge in significant respects from those embodied in the introduced system. Standish has commented that in the Highlands "(a) Member is expected to be a delegate, rather than a representative with freedom of political judgement" and, further, that "local kinship loyalties preclude the transfer of much trust to the member of a potentially (or actually) hostile lain".<sup>52</sup> Whereas a strong party system is usually associated with the Westminster model, it is well established that party affiliation plays little part in the decisions of the vast majority of voters in Papua New Guinea.<sup>53</sup> The persistence of tribal and clan allegiances as factors influencing voter behaviour has also been noted by many commentators. In the study cited above, Standish remarked that "elections are contests between the clans and tribes, a poorly sublimated manifestation of traditional rivalries".<sup>54</sup> Strathern<sup>55</sup> has further argued that the local power bases of Highlands politicians have, in fact, become progressively more tribalised in recent years. According to May, a major consequence of this form of electoral loyalties is that:

(I)t ensures the interplay of traditional and modern politics, with the implications this has for the accumulation and distribution of wealth and influence for political purposes, the manipulation of *kastom* to political ends, and occasionally the use of violence.<sup>56</sup>

The intensely competitive character of Papua New Guinean elections is, in part, evidence of the extremely high stakes involved and levels of expectations on the part of both candidates and supporters. This, in turn, is evidence of the more general processes of interaction referred to above. Membership of the National Parliament is seen as providing access to funds and resources that can be used to secure and promote a member's local power base, as well as advancing his own material position. Even more spectacular

49 Above n38 at 181.

50 Standish, W A, "Simbu Paths to Power. Political Change and Cultural Continuity in the Papua New Guinea Highlands", PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1992.

51 Id at 250.

52 Standish, W A, "'They Want to be the Highest Always': the Elections in Simbu", in Hegarty (ed), *Electoral Politics in Papua New Guinea* (1983) at 117.

53 Oliver, M (ed), *Eleksin: the 1987 National Election in Papua New Guinea* (1989).

54 Above n52 at 117.

55 Above n5.

56 May, R J, "Political Style in Modern Melanesia", in May and Nelson (eds), *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity*, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University (vol 2, 1982) at 645.

powers of patronage and opportunities for self-enrichment are associated with ministerial office and the competition for ministries is as intense, if not more so, as that evident in the initial election contest. As well as structuring the relationship between national parliamentarians and their electors, patronage may also determine the relationship between politicians at national and provincial levels. Where conflicts and disputes arise in this situation, they are likely to be reproduced at different levels of the political system, thereby adding to their overall intensity and propensity to violence.

A member's local power base bears little relation to constituency boundaries and is more usually determined by extensive kinship and patronage networks. As some early observers of PNG's elections put it:

In many electorates nearly all the people linked by village residence, clan or language voted for one candidate ... The election was then basically a test of the size of inter-electorate groups and not concerned with comparing the policies or qualities of the different candidates.<sup>57</sup>

The longstanding practice of granting national parliamentarians access to a variety of discretionary funds (the so-called "slush funds") for sponsoring local development projects reinforces the politics of patronage. The observations of Gordon and Meggitt in Enga appear to have resonance throughout many parts of the Highlands:

Government is seen not as a mechanism for development but as an instrument to be used to establish and extend patronage ties.<sup>58</sup>

This highly localised orientation of national politicians inevitably departs from official perceptions of the government process and is also likely to generate considerable tension at the local level. As Strathern points out, this *modus operandi* undermines the official system of government administration, whilst simultaneously encouraging "the factionalisation of relationships between groups within their electorates"<sup>59</sup> which may, in turn, facilitate conflict and violence. Where the constituency units are smallest, as in the case of provincial assembly elections, competition between candidates and their supporters tends to be in the form of head-on clan and tribal confrontations. In larger constituency units, as in national elections, "splitting" within tribes and clans inevitably occurs and this process of intra-group division has been identified by several observers as a major precipitating factor underlying contemporary patterns of collective violence in the electoral context.<sup>60</sup>

These processes of adaptation affecting the competition for political office are illustrated in a number of familiar features of post-Independence elections and parliamentary politics in Papua New Guinea. These include: the high number of candidates contesting seats,<sup>61</sup> the small margin of votes polled by successful candidates,<sup>62</sup> the

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57 Griffin, J, Nelson, H and Firth, S, *Papua New Guinea — a Political History* (1979) at 133.

58 Above n38 at 158.

59 Above n5 at 6.

60 Dr Standish claims that this process of "splitting" has been the cause of most post-election violence in Chimbu Province in recent years. In this situation, people are blaming members of their own tribe/clan for the loss of their own preferred candidate. (Personal Communication).

61 In 1992 a total of 1,654 candidates contested the 109 parliamentary seats (Standish, W A, "Papua New Guinea in 1992: Challenges for the State" (1993) 33/2 *Asia Survey* Feb 1992, 211–217 at 212).

frequency of disputed returns, the absence of election issues, the growing number of Independents, and the willingness of elected members to switch party allegiances in order to secure access to power.<sup>63</sup> In his review of the 1987 elections, Saffu quotes approvingly from the work of another political scientist who said that in many contemporary post-colonial situations "elections have become the alchemy that turns base metal into gold".<sup>64</sup> Such an analogy is particularly apt in PNG at a time of extensive mineral exploitation which, in turn, provides ample opportunities for patronage, as well as personal advancement, for those in political office. Given the level of expectations raised in the electoral context, it is hardly surprising that the disappointment and frustrations of losing candidates and their supporters can easily turn to open hostility and violence.

How we perceive the dynamics and direction of the political process in Papua New Guinea will clearly influence the way we view the phenomenon of election-related violence. For some, the disorderly struggle for political power is indicative of the lack of local understanding of the introduced political system and the inadequacy of administrative and logistical support.<sup>65</sup> For others it demonstrates the absence of alternative means of material advancement. Some even see it as signalling the vigour of the democratic process. A contemporary newspaper article went so far as to claim that:

The potential threat of election violence according to authorities, is an indication that the people of PNG have made great progress since independence and are conscious of their political rights.<sup>66</sup>

The weight of evidence reviewed and arguments made in this paper suggest yet another view. That is, that the most significant underlying causes of most election-related violence in Papua New Guinea lie in the continuation of other forms of inter-group (sometimes intra-group) competition whose genesis lies beyond the electoral context. From this viewpoint, it is not the election process per se that generates conflict and violence. Rather, the latter constitute the manifestation of the inherently competitive and combative character of Melanesian societies as accentuated by the pace and character of ongoing socio-economic and political change.

Before looking at the data from the 1992 elections, it is useful to distinguish between incidents occurring at different stages of the electoral process. Conflict may occur prior or subsequent to voting, as well during the voting process itself. For the purpose of the following review, we shall distinguish between three broad stages:

- 1 Violence occurring in the lead up to the election, ie, during pre-polling electioneering;
- 2 Violence occurring during the election period, ie, during polling and counting;

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62 52 members won with less than 20 per cent of the vote and only 7 gained over 50 per cent (Standish, above n61 at 212).

63 Above n53.

64 Saffu, Y, "Papua New Guinea" (1988) 34/2 *Aust J Polit & Hist* at 255.

65 Smith, T E, *Elections in Developing Countries* (1960).

66 *Post-Courier* 19 May 1992 at 15.

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- 3 Violence occurring after polling, ie, in the context of disputed returns, failure to pay electoral officials and so on.

In this context it is also useful to distinguish between two broad categories of factors that may precipitate election-related violence. Firstly, there are those which relate to ongoing local power struggles that may manifest themselves in election-related violence but whose causes lie beyond the immediate electoral context. Examples would include tribal and ethnic disputes that pre-date, and may well post-date, the immediate election period. On the other hand, there are those precipitating factors relating directly to the administrative conduct of the election. Examples here include violence related to failure to supply sufficient numbers of ballot papers, deficiencies in the common and supplementary rolls, allegations of malpractice against electoral officials,<sup>67</sup> inadequate security etc. In practice there will inevitably be overlap between both categories — as in the case of conflict generated by allegations of malpractice against officials on the grounds of their tribal or clan allegiances. The distinction may nevertheless be of use in contemplating reforms. Thus, problems in the administration of elections that contribute to violent responses may be relatively straightforward to resolve through more rigorous preparation, planning, resourcing or procedural reform. Precipitating factors related to more profound issues of local social and political organisation will clearly require quite different courses of remedial action.

## THE 1992 ELECTIONS

The general impression conveyed in public commentaries following the 1992 national elections was that their conduct had been largely peaceful and trouble-free. Expectations of widespread violence voiced in the months prior to June had not been fulfilled. This was certainly the view promoted by those responsible for providing security. In his debriefing document Deputy Police Commissioner Bob Nenta, overall commander of the security operation, concluded that it had been “most successful” and that there had been few incidents of serious violence. Police Commissioner Geno claimed that these were “the most peaceful we ever had in Papua New Guinea (sic)”.<sup>68</sup> Such a view was not, however, shared by everyone and reports from candidates, voters and electoral officials around the country indicated a less rosy and more varied picture.

### 1 SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

As mentioned earlier, security arrangements for the 1992 elections were elaborate, involving large numbers of police and defence force personnel, and planning began many months prior to the actual conduct of the election between 13 – 27 June. In order to reduce the chances of disruptions it was decided to hold one-day polling in all Highlands provinces, except Eastern Highlands, as well as in the Lae Metropolitan area and the

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67 Dr Standish advances the view that there is often a convenient scapegoating mechanism at work in this respect. It is easier to blame and harass a small group of electoral officials than to fight a tribal/clan enemy or precipitate a fight within the tribe/clan. In a sense blaming officials constitutes a face-saving safety valve. (Personal Communication).

68 *Post-Courier* 29 Jun 1992 at 5.

National Capital District. Such an operation required a high degree of planning, mobility and coordination between electoral officials and security personnel. In 1991 an initial planning meeting was held at the Gateway Hotel in Port Moresby between the police and Electoral Commission. Subsequently, regular meetings between the principal institutional actors were held in different parts of the country. Thus, in February a team of senior defence force officers visited Western Highlands, Enga and Southern Highlands and were briefed by the respective provincial secretaries on their preparations and about potential troublespots.<sup>69</sup> In the same month regional police commanders, senior defence force officers and officials from the Electoral Commission met in Goroka to discuss preparations for the June elections.<sup>70</sup> In March the Police Minister announced the establishment of a police intelligence unit to gather and collate information on individuals, including candidates, expected to cause problems during the election.<sup>71</sup> Provincial police commanders, senior defence force officers and provincial returning officers from the Highlands region met with acting Police Commissioner Bob Nenta, in Mount Hagen in May to finalise operational plans for the elections.<sup>72</sup> Similar meetings were held in the other four regions.

Preparatory actions also included pre-emptive police operations designed to detect and confiscate illegally held weapons and close down black market liquor outlets, as well as the announcement of liquor bans for the duration of the elections in different provinces. In the National Capital District, for example, police raided a number of settlements in May, confiscating a wide range of weapons, including home-made and factory-made guns, as well as suspected stolen property.<sup>73</sup> Some Highlands Provincial Police Commanders authorised pre-emptive raids against suspect villages (as in Enga) whereas others did not (as in the Southern Highlands), preferring roadblocks as a means for detecting and confiscating weapons and alcohol. In June, for example, it was reported that police manning roadblocks in the Southern Highlands had confiscated 10 factory-made guns, as well as home-made guns and ammunition.<sup>74</sup> The same report said that police in the Western Highlands had confiscated three pistols from two intending candidates at a roadblock, whilst in Enga police raids had netted 7 factory-made guns, many home-made guns and a large quantity of ammunition.

In April, Electoral Commissioner Reuben Kaiulo told all provincial secretaries that a liquor ban was essential in order to minimise disruptions at the forthcoming elections. In his view:

The increase in the number of home-made and factory-made firearms, some of which are high powered automatics, as well as the fact that the Constabulary's police strength will be taxed to the limit, should be seriously considered.<sup>75</sup>

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69 *Post-Courier* 24 Feb 1992 at 4.

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Post-Courier* 11 Mar 1992 at 5.

72 *Post-Courier* 5 May 1992 (Provincial News) at 2.

73 *Post-Courier* 8 May 1992 at 1.

74 *Post-Courier* 17 Jun 1992 at 4.

75 *Post-Courier* 22 Apr 1992 at 19.

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Whilst some Highlands provinces such as Enga and Chimbu already had liquor bans in force, other provinces in the region subsequently introduced controls, either bans or restrictions on trading, for the duration of the election period.<sup>76</sup> The association between alcohol and violence also led to restrictions being imposed by provincial authorities in other regions, including Morobe,<sup>77</sup> Central, Gulf<sup>78</sup> and the National Capital District.<sup>79</sup>

Concern with tribal fighting led to the declaration of the entire Chimbu Province as a fighting zone under the *Inter-Group Fighting Act*.<sup>80</sup> Explaining this action, the Provincial Secretary said the decision was made “in anticipation of any election-related violence” especially during polling and after the declaration of results.<sup>81</sup> The Chimbu Provincial Government also presented the police with 24 pump action shotguns and four .22 calibre pistols worth a total of K7,000 to assist in policing the election.<sup>82</sup> Bans were also placed on the holding of political rallies and other forms of campaigning within the boundaries of Kundiawa town. Similar restrictions — with or without legal authority — were introduced elsewhere in the Highlands Region. The Provincial Police Commander in the Southern Highlands, for example, spoke of a successful “self-imposed” curfew applied in Mendi during polling between 28–30th June whereby people were told to stay off the streets between 6pm and 6am.<sup>83</sup> In addition, public displays of strength by police and defence force personnel were carefully staged to ensure maximum public awareness of the state’s intention to deal promptly with electoral disruptions, using force where necessary. Thus, on Saturday 13 June more than 1,300 policeman paraded at the Pope John Paul Oval in Mount Hagen and were joined by 50 defence soldiers who had marched from Kimininga police barracks.<sup>84</sup>

Resort to public displays of strength by the security forces and the subsequent scale and character of the joint security operation should be understood against the background of severely depleted police resources throughout the country. For many years the police have been vocal in their demands for an expanded force to meet the demands of a growing population and other factors contributing to rising crime rates. In July 1991, for example, Police Commissioner Ila Geno revealed that whereas at Independence in 1975 the ratio of police to public was 1:520, it had since fallen to 1:800.<sup>85</sup> Table 1 at the end of the paper provides a breakdown by province of the current police/population ratio in Papua New Guinea. Based on these figures, Table 2 presents the average police/population for each of the five Police Commands. These latter figures reveal that the Highlands region, where general concern with law and order, and election-related violence in particular, has been especially high has a police/population at the lower end of the national scale. The limited

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76 *Post-Courier* 3 & 5 Jun 1992 at 16.

77 *Post-Courier* 10 Jun 1992 at 2.

78 *Post-Courier* 16 Jun 1992 at 4.

79 *Post-Courier* 17 Jun 1992 at 4.

80 Chapter No 344 of the Revised Laws.

81 *Post-Courier* 10 Jun 1992 at 2.

82 *Post-Courier* 10 Jun 1992 at 2.

83 Interview, 6 July 1992. According to Dr Standish, a similar “unofficial curfew” was imposed by police in Kundiawa, Chimbu Province. (Personal Communication).

84 *Post-Courier* 16 Jun 1992 at 2.

85 *Post-Courier* 11 Jul 1991 at 1.

character of the state presence in significant parts of the nation, including the populous Highlands, has undoubtedly contributed to its limited legitimacy and effectiveness.

On 20 May the Police Commissioner publicly announced details of the massive nationwide security operation, code-named “Natel 92”, planned for the elections.<sup>86</sup> Over 2,500 personnel from both police and defence force were to be involved. Of these 2,000 would be police of whom 1,500 would be deployed in the Highlands Region where most trouble was anticipated. Subsequent reports indicated that the number of police actually deployed in the Highlands was between 1,300<sup>87</sup> and 1,400.<sup>88</sup> In addition, 75 members of a Police Rapid Response Unit were already on the ground guarding strategic resource developments including those at Yagifu, South East Gobe, Porgera, Mount Kare, and the Hides gas fields.<sup>89</sup> Mr Geno put the estimated cost of the police involvement at K2 million. The objectives of the police operation were to ensure “a smooth and trouble free election” and involved:

- (a) the guarding of polling stations;
- (b) the security of ballot boxes;
- (c) the security of polling officials;
- (d) the controlling of traffic;
- (e) assisting polling teams;
- (f) the prevention and detection of election offences; and
- (g) the general maintenance of law and order.<sup>90</sup>

The highly centralised character of the security operation is evident in the operational arrangements. Overall Commander for Operation Natel 92 was Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Operations Bob Nenta, assisted by Chief Superintendent Albert Mula in his capacity as Police/Electoral Commission Co-ordinator for the election. The five Divisional Commanders (Border, Central, Highlands, Coastal, and Islands) were in charge of all police operations in their divisions and were to report daily to the overall commander. The operation was to be conducted in two phases. Phase one covered the polling period from Saturday 13 June to Saturday 27 June 1992. Phase two covered the counting period from Saturday 27 June to Saturday 4 July 1992.

The role of the Defence Force was authorised under Section 23 of the *Defence Act* (Chapter 74 of the Revised Laws) which provides for the force to assist in “Service to the Public” under the following circumstances:

- (1) If the Minister thinks that it is in the public interest to do so, he may authorize any part of the Defence Force to perform any public service within or outside the country that is capable of being performed by the Defence Force on such conditions (including conditions as to payment) as he determines.

86 *Times* 21 May 1992 at 2; *Post-Courier* 21 May 1992 at 3.

87 *Post-Courier* 17 Jun 1992 at 4.

88 Police Debrief Document, dated 19 August 1992. Port Moresby: Royal PNG Constabulary.

89 *Post-Courier* 17 Jun 1992 at 4.

90 Source: 1992 National General Elections — Police Debrief, above n88.



It was envisaged that the Defence Force would perform a supporting role to the police in maintaining law and order during the election. The latter would provide the frontline security whereas the former would:

- (a) assist police in enforcing curfews;
- (b) provide backup for police in maintaining control points such as road blocks;
- (c) show a PNGDF presence by conducting highway patrols and moving around different districts;
- (d) provide radio communication for polling teams in remote areas.<sup>91</sup>

The auxiliary and deterrent character of the defence force involvement was stressed in discussions with both the Provincial Police Commander for the Southern Highlands<sup>92</sup> and the Wabag Station Commander in Enga.<sup>93</sup> High mobility was an essential component of the display of strength given the relatively small number of defence force personnel involved. The defence force Commander announced in June that only 40 soldiers would be deployed in each of the four Highlands provinces.<sup>94</sup> A further 200 would be on standby at Taurama barracks in Port Moresby to be deployed if required. Throughout the operation control of the soldiers remained with the defence command.<sup>95</sup> Traditional rivalries between the two principal security agencies — the police and defence force — emerged in the former's post-election debriefing document. This recurring tension is significant given the increasing resort to joint police/defence force operations over recent years in a variety of "law and order situations".<sup>96</sup> Speaking about the involvement of the defence force, the Deputy Police Commissioner claimed that "(t)heir role was not clearly defined" and "(a)t times they operated in isolation".<sup>97</sup> In the same report he recommended against any future joint operations.<sup>98</sup>

## 2 PRE-POLLING VIOLENCE

In general, there were few reported incidents of violence occurring prior to polling. An election rally in Mendi, Southern Highlands Province, where three different candidates simultaneously nominated for the Imbonggu seat, degenerated into fighting as rival supporters clashed.<sup>99</sup> Whereas the *Post-Courier* reported a "riot" involving 15,000 supporters, the *Times* estimated the crowd at a more conservative, but still substantial, 9,000. The former also reported hospital authorities in Mendi confirming that nine people were treated for injuries sustained in the disturbance. The latter reported one casualty and

91 *Post-Courier* 22 Apr 1992 at 19.

92 Interview, 6 July 1992.

93 Interview, 7 July 1992.

94 *Post-Courier* 10 Jun 1992 at 2.

95 *Post-Courier* 22 Apr 1992 at 19.

96 Dr Standish reported the Provincial Government Secretary in Chimbu as saying that the defence force commander had agreed that soldiers be kept in their barracks as a deterrent force. Well before polling, however, they were moving with police in joint patrols, with green camouflage and face-paint, and also appearing at large rallies in formal units rather than joint patrols. Standish reports the Provincial Secretary as being annoyed at the blurring of the distinction between police/defence force and at the alleged procurement by police of women for sex with soldiers. (Personal Communication).

97 Above n88 at 12.

98 *Ibid.*

99 *Times* 23 Apr 1992 at 1; *Post-Courier* 23 Apr 1992 at 1.

said that damage to property was limited to a shop owned by one of the nominating candidates. The situation appears to have been inflamed by some abusive verbal exchanges between the candidates — a not uncommon feature of political rallies in the Highlands<sup>100</sup> — and the proximity of large numbers of excited rival supporters. In addition, the number of police responding from the adjoining Mendi police station was extremely small — estimated by the *Times* as 12. The riot squad, which would normally have dealt with such a situation, was in Mount Hagen undergoing training. In the same report the *Post-Courier* reported Highlands Division Commander Bunu Katusele as saying that similar fighting had occurred in Kundiawa, Chimbu Province, on Tuesday April 21.<sup>101</sup>

In May, just over a month prior to polling, supporters of former MP Gerard Sigulogo threatened disruptions in Kavieng, New Ireland Province, if their candidate was not allowed to contest the June elections.<sup>102</sup> Mr Sigulogo had previously been found guilty of misconduct in office by a Leadership Tribunal in 1990 and was subsequently dismissed from his Kavieng seat and barred from holding office for a three year period expiring on March 1993. Despite this, he nominated for the 1992 elections in April. The Chief Justice of Papua New Guinea, Sir Buri Kidu, made clear that a person barred from public office after a Leadership Tribunal hearing was ineligible to seek public office during the period of the ban.<sup>103</sup> Subsequently the Electoral Commission removed Mr Sigulogo's name from the list of candidates. The circumstances in which this decision was belatedly taken immediately aroused the wrath of the latter's supporters. In a letter to the Electoral Commissioner, the New Ireland Administrative Secretary wrote that:

Our (electoral) officials are being targeted as well as being implicated as having conspired with the sitting Member and other intending candidates resulting in Mr Sigulogo's termination from contesting. Both the provincial returning officer and the returning officer for Kavieng Open are in fear for their safety as they have been told in no uncertain terms that if Sigulogo is not allowed to contest the supporters will attack the officials.<sup>104</sup>

The threats of violence do not appear to have been fulfilled in this instance but once again attest to the intensity of local rivalries aroused by the electoral process throughout most parts of the country. Intense and belligerent pressure from Mr Sigulogo's supporters is likely to have been the decisive factor in influencing the isolated electoral officials on the ground.

A few days prior to polling the media reported clashes between rival supporters in New Ireland. 19 people were reported arrested for an earlier fight between supporters of the People's Progress Party (PPP) and Pangu Party on 6 June. Of the 14 people arrested, 14 were charged with fighting and creating disturbances and four with assault. The later incident involved rival supporters attending a rally at Sohun village in the Namatanai district and the *Post-Courier* reported 12 serious injuries and claimed that police

100 Above n52.

101 According to Dr Standish there was violence in Kundiawa, Chimbu, on 3/6/92 arising from street campaigning and a candidates vehicle was stoned in a village on 5/6/92. These incidents led to the subsequent ban on campaigning around Kundiawa. (Personal Communication).

102 *Post-Courier* 5 May 1992 at 1.

103 *Post-Courier* 1 May 1992 at 1.

104 *Post-Courier* 5 May 1992 at 1.

reinforcements had to be brought in from Kavieng.<sup>105</sup> The same report mentioned a fight between two opposing groups of supporters on the Duke of York Islands. Again, high emotions, the proximity of opposing supporters and, initially at any rate, the absence of security appear to have contributed to these incidents.

### 3 POLLING VIOLENCE

The first formally reported incident of polling related violence occurred in the Western Highlands, when a candidate for the Tambul-Nebilyer seat and some of his scrutineers allegedly smashed open four ballot boxes scattering the enclosed ballot papers.<sup>106</sup> The police had not established any grounds for the suspicions of the candidate and his scrutineers in respect of the particular boxes. The candidate and two others were subsequently charged with unlawfully opening and destroying ballot boxes.<sup>107</sup> The Chimbu police commander reported that three candidates had been charged in connection with alleged threatening behaviour and assault. At the same time the Enga police were investigating an incident in which an armed gang held up security guards at Kandep and made off with more than 8,000 unmarked ballot papers.

On 22 June, eighteen ballot boxes containing votes from the Lumusa area in Western Highlands were burnt by villagers allegedly protesting over official failure to meet their demands for an electoral boundary change.<sup>108</sup> In Wapenamanda, Enga province, disgruntled supporters of one candidate smashed open three ballot boxes and emptied their contents in front of the Wapenamanda government station.<sup>109</sup> According to the Enga Provincial Police Commander the boxes had just arrived after polling was completed when a truck full of supporters arrived and broke three open. The same report mentioned the arrest of the sitting member for Kompam-Ambum in Enga for allegedly breaking open four ballot boxes from his own electorate. An assault on a policeman accompanying polling officials was also reported at Buna village in the West Sepik province, while fighting between supporters at a polling booth was reported in the Kubalia area of the East Sepik. According to police, who claimed fourteen arrests, the Buna villagers were apparently angry over the arrest of a fellow villager for another election-related incident. In Kubalia a further eleven people were arrested and charged with fighting.<sup>110</sup>

The first reported fatality occurred on 29 June after a man was shot in a confrontation between supporters and police at the Walium government station in Madang province.<sup>111</sup> According to a subsequent report by the Police Commissioner, the incident began when scrutineers questioned the presiding officer as to why the seal on one of the uncounted ballot boxes appeared to have been tampered with.<sup>112</sup> Initial discontent spread when the Electoral Commission refused to suspend counting and led to the fatal confrontation

105 *Post-Courier* 10 Jun 1992 at 1.

106 *Post-Courier* 19 Jun 1992 at 5.

107 *Post-Courier* 22 Jun 1992 at 1.

108 *Post-Courier* 23 Jun 1992 at 1.

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Ibid.*

111 *Post-Courier* 1 Jul 1992 at 4.

112 *Post-Courier* 3 Jul 1992 at 4.

between police reinforcements and angry supporters armed with sticks and iron bars. Commissioner Geno said that “(p)olice were forced to use tear gas and gunfire to control the situation and to protect themselves, officials and property”.<sup>113</sup> In addition to the deceased, two other supporters reportedly required medical treatment.

Perhaps the most spectacular reported incident of poll related violence was the hijacking of ballot boxes containing votes cast from the Komo-Margarima seat in the Southern Highlands.<sup>114</sup> According to newspaper reports, 28 boxes were being transported under escort from Tari to Mendi on 26 June, when intercepted by an armed gang near Nipa. Twenty one of the boxes were totally destroyed, while seven were returned after having been tampered with. In their report to the Electoral Commission the Komo-Margarima returning officer and his assistant claimed that the incident was “politically motivated” and made allegations of improper conduct against the security forces. On the latter charge, the electoral officials said that it had been previously arranged to airlift the boxes from Tari to Mendi. Instead they were transported by road “in absolute defiance of explicit instructions from both the District Co-ordinator ... and acting police station commander (Tari) at the relevant time”.<sup>115</sup> They further claimed that the police escort from Mount Hagen broke into the Plant and Transport Board yard in Tari and removed the truck with the boxes to drive it to Mendi. Further criticism was directed at the police role in this incident by the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Local Government and District Administration Branch of the Department of the Southern Highlands Province who commented that: “(i)t is unbelievable when you see people removing 28 ballot boxes in front of 16 policemen”.<sup>116</sup>

#### 4 POST-POLLING VIOLENCE

Shortly after polling was completed fighting was reported between supporters of different candidates at the Koban plantation on the border of the Dei and North Waghi Open Electorates in the Western Highlands.<sup>117</sup> At about the same time, it was reported that part of a village outside Kundiawa in Chimbu province had been set on fire in an election related incident.<sup>118</sup> A senior government official in Kundiawa was quoted as claiming that the arson was the work of supporters of a number of candidates for the Sinasina/Yonggamugl electorate who were angry that villagers had supported another candidate.<sup>119</sup> A newspaper report on 3 July claimed that two tea factories and several bridges along the Hagen-Baiyer road in the Western Highlands had been destroyed by supporters of losing candidates<sup>120</sup> but this was subsequently denied in a later report<sup>121</sup> which confined the damage to an office complex and two vehicles belonging to one of the tea estates.

113 Ibid.

114 *Post-Courier* 1 Jul 1992 at 5.

115 Ibid.

116 Report to the Electoral Commissioner, dated 8 July 1992.

117 *Post-Courier* 1 Jul 1992 at 4.

118 Dr Standish reported a number of instances in Chimbu where police/defence force deliberately burnt houses to punish, or “teach a lesson” (“mekim save”) to, angry supporters of losing candidates. (Personal Communication).

119 *Post-Courier* 2 Jul 1992 at 5.

120 *Post-Courier* 3 Jul 1992 at 4.

Threats of violence by losing candidates and their supporters consumed much police time in the immediate post-polling period. The Coastal Divisional commander reported that rumours of possible trouble were rife in Lae and that police were stepping up security measures in anticipation.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, police in Wewak, East Sepik, were guarding key installations and increasing patrols after threats by losing candidates to telephone services, water and power supplies.<sup>123</sup> In Madang, police responded to threats by guarding commercial property belonging to the newly elected members for the provincial and open seats respectively. Three further fatalities were reported in the Western Highlands.<sup>124</sup> Two men were apparently killed in election related group fights — one in the Nebilyer area and the other in the Dei Council area — while the third was reportedly killed in a drunken brawl at Kudjip in what police believed was a celebration of an election win.

Discontent with the conduct of the election in the National Capital District<sup>125</sup> led to initial calls by some candidates for a recount<sup>126</sup> followed by more strident demands for fresh elections.<sup>127</sup> Police issued a general warning against public demonstrations following information that losing candidates and their supporters in the NCD were planning to stage mass demonstrations against alleged electoral malpractice.<sup>128</sup> As this warning was issued, police reinforcements moved into the Dei area of the Western Highlands amidst fears of a major fight between opposing clans following earlier election related violence in the area.<sup>129</sup> In Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands threats of violence by losing candidates and supporters resulted in restricted trading hours over a two week period and the business community complained of significant loss of revenue.<sup>130</sup> According to the Western Highlands Chamber of Commerce over K200,000 in lost sales was attributable to closures resulting from threats of violence. The senior judiciary reiterated earlier statements by the police and others that disgruntled candidates should resort to the courts for redress. The Chief Justice told the press that “(t)hose who are aggrieved by the conduct or the outcome of the 1992 national elections in any way may petition the National Court for remedy”.<sup>131</sup>

On Saturday, June 4, the Enga Provincial Police Commander’s vehicle was damaged when he drove into a fight between supporters of two rival candidates at Wapenamanda.<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile another senior Enga police officer described the post-polling atmosphere in Wabag as “explosive” owing to the Electoral Commission’s failure to pay election officials, adding that “each day we are almost having a riot here in Wabag town

121 *Post-Courier* 6 Jul 1992 at 12.

122 *Post-Courier* 6 Jul 1992 at 4.

123 *Ibid.*

124 *Post-Courier* 7 Jul 1992 at 5.

125 *Post-Courier* 26 Jun 1992 at 1.

126 *Post-Courier* 1 Jul 1992 at 5.

127 *Post-Courier* 3 Jul 1992 at 5.

128 *Post-Courier* 8 Jul 1992 at 1; *Times* 9 Jul 1992 at 1.

129 *Ibid.*

130 *Ibid.*

131 *Ibid.*

132 *Post-Courier* 9 Jul 1992 at 4.

(sic)".<sup>133</sup> At the same time reports reaching the Western Highlands Provincial Office in Mount Hagen revealed that many teachers who had assisted with polling had been threatened and prevented from going to work.<sup>134</sup> As a result several community schools had yet to resume their third term classes. Group fighting was also reported in the Southern Highlands after the announcement of the election results.<sup>135</sup>

During the frenetic "numbers game" in the immediate post-election process of government formation, the Police Commissioner warned of threats against newly elected non-aligned members to "persuade" them to join particular factions or parties.<sup>136</sup> Former Attorney-General Bernard Narokobi subsequently called for a commission of inquiry into these allegations.<sup>137</sup> When it was eventually announced on 17 July that Pias Wingti would be the new prime minister, boisterous crowd behaviour occurred in both Mount Hagen and Mendi. Although business premises were closed all day in both towns, little actual violence appears to have taken place.<sup>138</sup>

On 27 July a peace agreement was signed by four warring clans in the Dei Council area in Western Highlands.<sup>139</sup> According to the newspaper report, the agreement followed an election-related incident in which three men were killed during fighting between the four clans.<sup>140</sup> A spokesperson for the Department of Western Highlands said that if the agreement was breached, the Department would recommend that Dei be declared a fighting zone for an indefinite period and that all government services be withdrawn. In August it was reported that no government services had actually been delivered in the Kol district of the Jimi area of Western Highlands since the end of vote counting in June.<sup>141</sup> Most government workers had apparently fled because of continuing threats by disgruntled supporters of losing candidates.<sup>142</sup> A revival of the previously mentioned group fight that originated in a drunken celebration of the election results in the Kudjip area of the Western Highlands was reported in September.<sup>143</sup> According to the report, two further fatalities occurred in late August in the fight between the two clans.<sup>144</sup> The same report referred to tension persisting between Baiyer river clans in the Western Highlands over an earlier election-related shooting.

Election-related violence was still being reported as late as October, almost four months after polling was completed. In that month, the Highlands Divisional Police Commander was reported as claiming that the Kagua district of the Southern Highlands had turned into "wild west" country since trouble flared in the aftermath of the June elections.<sup>145</sup> He said that the problem began with violence between supporters of both the

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133 Ibid.

134 *Post-Courier* 10 Jul 1992 at 4.

135 *Times* 16 Jul 1992 at 6.

136 *Post-Courier* 13 Jul 1992 at 4.

137 *Post-Courier* 4 Aug 1992 at 2.

138 *Post-Courier* 17 Jul 1992 (Special Edition) at 7.

139 *Post-Courier* 28 Jul 1992 at 4.

140 Ibid.

141 *Post-Courier* 28 Aug 1992 at 3.

142 Ibid.

143 *Post-Courier* 1 Sep 1992 at 4.

144 Ibid.

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winning and losing candidates but that criminals had since taken advantage of the general breakdown in law and order. The new member for the Kagua Erave seat contended, in turn, that the police were themselves partly to blame.<sup>146</sup> He claimed that destruction of property during special police operations in several villages and the very small number of police currently stationed in the area contributed to lawlessness.<sup>147</sup> The police had the final word in the newspapers when the Southern Highlands Provincial Police Commander blamed the new member for not having done anything to resolve the conflicts he and his opponents created during the election.<sup>148</sup>

Problems associated with the non-payment of electoral officials and other administrative matters continued to surface many months after the election had been declared. In December, for example, the Provincial Electoral Officer in Wewak, East Sepik Province, was reported saying that disgruntled candidates and electoral officials had threatened him and his officers over the issue of payment and reimbursement of nomination fees.<sup>149</sup>

## DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, official post-election evaluations placed great emphasis on the peaceful manner in which the 1992 national elections had been conducted. Whilst it remains impossible to quantify the actual extent of violence with any degree of accuracy, the secondary evidence suggests an altogether less tranquil picture. Associated acts of interpersonal violence (ranging from verbal threats to actual killings) and extensive damage to property were reported at various times in different locations before, during and after the 1992 elections. As anticipated, most reported incidents occurred in the five Highlands Provinces. In addition, the majority of these took place after polling had been completed, although some serious incidents — such as the alleged hijacking of ballot boxes in the Komo-Margarima seat — also occurred during the polling phase. Reports of election-related violence continued to be heard for many months after the formal electoral process had been completed.

The seemingly complacent tone of the official evaluation appears to be not so much a deliberate attempt to mislead, as indicative of genuine surprise (and relief) that the scale of disorder had not been worse, based on high levels of apprehension and previous experience. More generally, elections, especially national elections, arouse considerable international interest and their peaceful conduct provides important “signs of good conduct to the outside world”.<sup>150</sup> Government sensitivity over Papua New Guinea’s overseas image and, in particular, its impact on potential investors has become a recurring theme in official law and order discourse in this country. The conduct of peaceful elections is a vital demonstration of government control in the law and order sphere, as well as a more general confirmation of the legitimacy of the government process.

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145 *Post-Courier* 7 Oct 1992 at 4.

146 *Post-Courier* 8 Oct 1992 at 12.

147 *Ibid.*

148 *Post-Courier* 20 Oct 1992 (Provincial News) at 2.

149 *Post-Courier* 21 Dec 1992 at 13.

150 Hermet, G, Rose, R and Rouquie, A, *Elections Without Choice* (1978) at 15.

The deterrent impact of the massive security operation is difficult to evaluate. Its highly transient character and the circumstances of some reported incidents (ie, the Mendi “riots” and Komo-Margarima case) suggest that it may have been less decisive in practice than its architects would concede. The carefully orchestrated displays of (essentially militaristic) strength by the security forces and stern warnings of swift retribution for troublemakers belie the actual capacity of the state to deal with lawlessness on any significant scale. In the absence of actual capacity, the appearance of such capacity would, hopefully, achieve the same result. As Griffin has remarked in the Bougainville context, “(t)he Papua New Guinea state is too weak for successful coercion”.<sup>151</sup> In this respect, the weak state has contributed to the notable gap between rhetoric and reality that has characterised official responses to lawlessness in the post-Independence period.

The continuing jostling for position between (and within) state and the complex array of more parochial sites of power provides the broader context of such representations, so the official state version of events should come as little surprise. The derogatory remarks by the Highlands Divisional Police Commander comparing the Kagua district of the Southern Highlands with the American “wild west” may provide a more appropriate analogy than their initial delivery suggests. The frontier experience in both the United States and Australia was similarly marked by the fragmentation of authority, relative autonomy of actors (state and non-state) and high levels of inter-personal violence.<sup>152</sup>

Resort to collective violence as a means of resolving grievances remains deeply embedded within the socio-cultural traditions of many Melanesian societies. This is particularly so in the Highlands, although it should also be noted that violence of a different order played a significant role in many lowland communities.<sup>153</sup> In their 1985 report on “law and order” in Enga, Wormsley and Toke remarked that “(v)iolence is often a conscious political strategy for achieving traditional political goals”.<sup>154</sup> Reconstructions of pre-colonial history attest to the prevalence of violence as a political tactic in these societies.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, whilst popular acceptance of the rule of the kiap appears to have successfully contributed to the suppression of much violence during the short colonial history, the resurgence of tribal fighting and “payback” since the early 1970s indicates the persistence of such traditions.<sup>156</sup> That is not, of course, to suggest that the explanation of group violence in the Highlands — whether in the context of elections or otherwise — can be reduced to one of cultural predisposition.

Twenty years ago Standish analysed the resurgence of tribal fighting on the eve of Independence in terms of the convergence between traditions of collective violence, freed from the suppressive effects of colonial rule, and pervasive social and political insecurity

151 Griffin, J, “Bougainville is a Special Case”, in May and Spriggs (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis* (1990) at 14.

152 Reynolds, H, *Frontier* (1987).

153 Knauff, B M, *Good Company and Violence — Sorcery and Social Action in a Lowland New Guinea Society* (1985).

154 Wormsley, W E and Toke, M, *Final Report: The Enga Law and Order Project* (1985) at Appendix I, 18.

155 Berndt, R, *Excess and Restraint* (1962); Hallpike, C, *Bloodshed and Vengeance in the Papuan Mountains* (1977); Meggitt, above n28.

156 Gordon, above n36; above n38.



generated by a rapid and traumatic process of decolonisation.<sup>157</sup> In the seventeen years since Independence the social and economic stresses that have contributed to the emergence of serious “law and order ... problems” in the late 1960s and early 1970s — ranging from urban “rascalism” to tribal fighting — have multiplied and intensified. The precipitating factors identified earlier<sup>158</sup> have added to the already considerable pressures upon both formal and informal processes of social control.

In the former case, the institutional capacity and popular legitimacy of state institutions and processes have progressively declined over past decades.<sup>159</sup> This applies with particular force in the case of state law which, as we remarked earlier, determines the official legitimacy of violent behaviour in the modern nation-state. The inability of the state to meet growing community expectations concerning social and economic development, combined with its patent limitations in settling grievances and containing lawlessness, have enhanced the potential for conflict and violence in both rural<sup>160</sup> and urban contexts.<sup>161</sup> At one level, this trend is exemplified in the growing willingness of communities “to take the law into their own hands” when confronted with suspected “troublemakers”.<sup>162</sup> Formal processes of adjudication are also increasingly ignored in favour of militant compensation claims backed up with threats of violence.<sup>163</sup> As Fiel suggests in the context of the Western Highlands:

(T)he perceived ineffectiveness of a weak indigenous administration has offered few alternatives to western highlanders, aside from violence, for settling grievances, disputes, and for pressing claims.<sup>164</sup>

In the informal context, the pressures of “modernisation” have diminished the effectiveness of informal community-based mechanisms of social regulation as evidenced, at one level, in growing generational conflict.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the emergence of “rascalism” — in both its urban and rural manifestations — is in some ways a response to the failure of both formal and informal sectors to meet the needs and aspirations of a burgeoning and culturally ambiguous constituency of marginalised youth.

The significance of contemporary elections for the purposes of this paper is their potential for magnifying conflicts associated with ongoing processes of political change.

157 Standish, W A, “The Highlands: OI I No Save harim Mipela” (1973) 8/3 *New Guinea* 1–30.

158 At 136 above.

159 Above n27.

160 Reay, above n28; above n20.

161 Dinnen, S, “Big Men, Small Men and Invisible Women — Urban Crime and Inequality in Papua New Guinea” (1993) 26 *ANZ J Criminol* 19–34.

162 See, for example: “‘Fed-up’ clan kills criminal kinsman”, *Post-Courier* 13 Apr 1992 at 1; “Mob beats escaped murderer to death”, *Post-Courier* 26 Nov 1992 at 1; “Hold-up victims kill gang member”, *Post-Courier* 11 Nov 1992 at 4; “Jail escapee beaten up by churchgoers”, *Post-Courier* 2 Nov 1992 at 4; “Two PMV robbers beaten to death”, *Post-Courier* 14 Dec 1992 at 1; “Angry mob beats and kills alleged rapist”, *Post-Courier* 12 Jan 1993 at 4.

163 Parliament passed the *Criminal Law (Compensation) Act* in 1991 (No 26 of 1991) to regulate compensation claims. The subsequent failure to use the Act is probably indicative of broader problems of capacity and implementation.

164 Fiel, D K, *The Evolution of Highland Papua New Guinea Societies* (1987) at 276.

165 O’Collins, M, *Youth in Papua New Guinea — with Reference to Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu* (1984).

These processes in turn involve the (at times volatile) integration between introduced and indigenous political traditions. As Standish and others have argued, introduced institutions and processes have become increasingly appropriated and transformed by existing local political cultures. The inherently competitive social organisation of Highlands societies, as embodied in patterns of socio-political leadership, competitive exchange practices, and intense status rivalries,<sup>166</sup> provides the cultural context within which the introduced processes have been absorbed and adapted. The continuing role of violence illustrates the highly aggressive nature of much of this competition. It is thus hardly surprising that the ritualised competition of the formal electoral process takes on an additional, often explosive, intensity. Moreover, it is simply not possible in such an integrated context to separate out “traditional” and “modern” spheres of activity. As Strathern remarks:

Highlanders have both been avid seekers of wealth through cash cropping and business activity and at the same time have held on quite tenaciously to some of their indigenous ways of behaviour, particularly in the sphere of prestige-seeking and exchange, but also in terms of exercising violence to resist, or per contra to effect, political changes.<sup>167</sup>

In the same paper Strathern, noting the rising trend in militant compensation claims by customary landowners against the state, suggests that clans treat the state as another clan as, indeed, they do all outside entities.<sup>168</sup> Given the high success rate of such belligerent strategies (against both immediate neighbours and state) and, conversely, the relative ineffectiveness of more formalised and bureaucratic processes, the aggression and violence entailed appear to be not only natural but also rational from the point of view of participants. At the same time, such actions, by demonstrating the rewards of illegal violence, further undermine state legitimacy.

Just as the prospect of election victory induces growing levels of financial investment on the part of candidates<sup>169</sup> and inflated expectations on the part of supporters, the prospect (or realisation) of defeat is likely to arouse passions of similar intensity. Mangi has recently argued that many incidents of post-election violence in the Highlands are carried out by the supporters of defeated sitting members. He contends that such supporters target properties erected by the former member on the grounds that these should disappear along with the demise of their original political patron:

The supporters usually argue that their candidate was responsible for the construction or improvements made to the station or school. However, now that he has lost the election they have every right to destroy all the things that he did and that the newly elected member can “start fresh” and build up his own from scratch.<sup>170</sup>

The number of incidents that occurred in the post-polling phase of the 1992 elections attests to the levels of disappointment, frustration and anger among defeated candidates and their supporters and, more particularly, their reluctance to accept defeat. They also attest to a more general reluctance to accept as “final” the results of the electoral process,

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166 Above n164.

167 Above n5 at 3.

168 Id at 17.

169 Above n64 at 255.

170 Mangi, J, Draft Manuscript on the Highlands Provinces of Papua New Guinea, unpublished, 1993 at 42.

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or any other formal process of adjudication for that matter. In the electoral context, violence is viewed by many defeated supporters as the only mechanism they have to blame and attack others. They simply cannot accept that their own tribal/clan group was divided, that they did not deserve the vote, or that their group is relatively small in numerical terms. Figures released by the Electoral Commission revealed that by December 1992 a total of 61 election petitions disputing the returns had been received. Of these, 33 had either been withdrawn or dismissed, leaving an outstanding total of 28. The 61 petitions covered 52 of the 109 electorates or, in other words, 48 per cent of all electorates. Even where the formal legal process is exhausted, a wide range of informal channels of contention remain open. When the stakes are perceived as being so high, election defeat can easily lead to prolonged process of violent protest and reprisal.

To the more profound issues surrounding the capacity and legitimacy of state authority and the ongoing struggle for economic and political ascendancy in contemporary Melanesia can be added the aggravating factor of organisational shortcomings on the part of the Electoral Commission and other "bits of state" involved in the election process. Allegations of shortage of ballot papers, deficiencies in the common and supplementary rolls, multiple voting, procedural irregularities during polling and counting, inadequate security provision and so on, were frequently made and issued from most parts of the country. Polling periods that had been deliberately shortened in order to reduce the possibility of trouble had to be extended because of administrative problems.<sup>171</sup> Major communication problems between provincial electoral officials and the Electoral Commission in Port Moresby added to the impression of chaos in some areas.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, lack of familiarity with electoral procedures, on the part of voters, candidates and officials, added to the confusion in many places. Where difficult decisions had to be made in such circumstances, as in the case of Mr Sigulogo, electoral officials would inevitably be accused of bias and manipulation. Such is the lot of many umpires. Without wishing to underestimate the magnitude of the logistical problems involved in mounting a national election in the immensely difficult Papua New Guinea terrain, the administrative failings evident in the conduct of the 1992 elections undoubtedly contributed to the overall political tension and, thereby, the potential for conflict and violence. Whether understood as a "face-saving safety valve", as suggested by Standish,<sup>173</sup> or as an expression of genuine grievance, dissatisfaction with the administration of the elections in PNG remains a recurring source of dispute.

Some violence reduction might be expected from a streamlining and simplification of the electoral process, as well as through improving the administrative conduct of elections.<sup>174</sup> Any reduction in the range of opportunities for contention and dispute is clearly desirable. Several administrative and procedural reforms have been introduced in recent years, designed to achieve this end. Reforms of this kind, however, are unlikely to achieve significant long-term change unless they directly address the underlying causes of conflict. For similar reasons, it is clear that responding to essentially

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171 *Post-Courier* 26 Jun 1992 at 1.

172 *Times* 25 Jun 1992 at 3.

173 Above n67.

174 Above n11.

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political conflicts primarily as “security problems” has limited potential for achieving more peaceful processes of political change.

One major area of potential electoral reform suggested by the foregoing review relates to electoral boundaries. Given the significance of tribal allegiances in the electoral — and broader political — context, consideration should be given to devising an electoral system that reflects this reality. Currently, electoral boundaries reflect geographical and administrative divisions that bear little resemblance to the physical distribution of tribal communities. We have previously seen how this accentuates inter- and intra-community conflict in the electoral context. Whilst account would have to be made for the more culturally heterogeneous urban areas, it would not be impossible to devise a system that reduced the potential for such conflicts through a more appropriate delineation of electoral and constituency boundaries.

It should be clear by this stage that the underlying causes of many of the activities subsumed under the heading of election-related violence lie well beyond the immediate electoral context. Consequently, the explanatory value of a narrow election focus is extremely limited. Insofar as the general levels, toleration and rewards of violence remain high, we can expect its incidence and gravity to continue and increase. This is particularly the case in the highly charged context of elections. As we have seen, resort to violence as an acceptable strategy for the pursuit of collective interests has a respectable pedigree in Highlands communities and one that significantly pre-dates modern notions of the rule of law. Moreover, whether in the context of urban street crime, land disputes, or elections, the rewards of violence are abundantly clear. The intensive flow of rhetoric from official sources and symbolic deployment of security forces do little to disguise the underlying problems of legitimacy and capacity facing centralised authority in Papua New Guinea. In this context, significant levels of legitimacy and power continue to reside at the local level in communities adapting to rapid and dislocative processes of political and socio-economic change.

In the electoral context we are currently witnessing the appropriation by local levels of introduced political processes designed to frame the processes of centralised government. This is what is meant by the process of “upward colonisation”. Rather than a unidirectional process of top-down government, we are witnessing a more dynamic and volatile process of interpenetration. Violence plays a significant role in this process as the elections, amongst other things, demonstrate. Rather than a monolithic process of disintegration, as the weak state collapses from within, we see the active colonisation of state processes and their selective deployment for local, essentially tribalised, power struggles. The outcome is not the wholesale degeneration into anarchy predicted by proponents of disintegration. Instead, we are witnessing the emergence of a new hybrid form of Melanesian politics conducted through a mix of cultural traditions. In this sense, it is more accurate to describe these developments as part of a broader process of “disintegrative integration”.<sup>175</sup>

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175 Above n5 at 17.

**Table 1**

	<b>total population 1990</b>	<b>police strength 1992</b>	<b>police/popul'n ratio</b>
<b>Papua New Guinea<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>3,529,538</b>		
<b>Western<sup>2</sup></b>	108,705	116	<b>1:937</b>
<b>Gulf</b>	68,060	44	<b>1:1546</b>
<b>Central</b>	140,584	115	<b>1:1222</b>
<b>NCD</b>	193,242	764	<b>1:252</b>
<b>Milne Bay</b>	157,288	46	<b>1:3419</b>
<b>Northern</b>	96,762	34	<b>1:2845</b>
<b>SHP</b>	302,724	267	<b>1:1498</b>
<b>Enga</b>	238,357	179	<b>1:1331</b>
<b>WHP</b>	291,090	239	<b>1:1217</b>
<b>Chimbu</b>	183,801	144	<b>1:1276</b>
<b>EHP</b>	299,619	180	<b>1:1664</b>
<b>Morobe</b>	363,535	364 <sup>*</sup>	<b>1:998</b>
<b>Madang</b>	270,299	191	<b>1:1415</b>
<b>ESP</b>	248,308	176	<b>1:1410</b>
<b>WSP<sup>3</sup></b>	135,185	82	<b>1:1648</b>
<b>Manus</b>	32,830	30	<b>1:1094</b>
<b>N/Ireland</b>	87,194	64	<b>1:1362</b>
<b>ENB</b>	184,408	316	<b>1:583</b>
<b>WNB</b>	127,547	120	<b>1:1062</b>
<b>NSP</b>	128,890 <sup>4</sup>		

Population figures taken from: Preliminary Figures, 1990 National Population Census.

The Police figures are taken from the October 1992 Monthly Returns supplied by Chief Superintendent Denis Samin, RPNGC. These figures do not include the following Police Directorates:

Traffic:	354
Prosecutions:	238
Mobile Squads:	519
Dog Squad:	40
Reserves:	1143
Rapid Deployment Unit:	90
Ancillaries:	390

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- (1) Excludes NSP which was not covered by the 1990 National Census due to the prevailing political situation.
  - (2) Excludes three census divisions, namely: Upper Strickland Tributaries, Murray Valley and Blucher where the census could not be completed owing to inaccessibility and where the population could be about 1,500.
  - (3) Excludes two census divisions namely, West Miaman and Atbalmin where census could not be completed owing to border disturbances and where the total population could be 3,000.
  - (4) This figure does not appear in the 1990 Census Figures but is an estimate based upon the 1980 figure plus 5 per cent (approx) for population growth.
- \* Figure includes Lae Metropolitan and Morobe Province.

**Table 2****Police Command****Police/Popul'n Ratio**


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<b>Central</b>	<b>1:435</b>
NCD	
Central	
Gulf	
<b>Coastal</b>	<b>1:1398</b>
Morobe	
Northern	
Madang	
Milne Bay	
<b>Islands</b>	<b>1:815</b>
East New Britain	
West New Britain	
New Ireland	
Manus	
(* Excluding North Solomons Province)	
<b>Highlands</b>	<b>1:1225</b>
Southern Highlands	
Enga	
Western Highlands	
Chimbu	
<b>Border</b>	<b>1:1316</b>
East Sepik	
West Sepik	
Western	

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