



The local government system in

# Kiribati



## Key facts

**POPULATION (Census 2005):** 92,533  
**AREA:** 726 sq km  
**CAPITAL:** Tarawa  
**CURRENCY:** Australian dollar (AUD)  
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP:** -  
**HEAD OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT:** President Anote Tong  
**FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** republic  
**PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM:** unicameral  
**STATE STRUCTURE:** unitary  
**LANGUAGES:** English and I-Kiribati (official)  
**NATIONAL ELECTIONS:** last: 2007; turnout: - next: 2011  
**LOCAL ELECTIONS:** last: Aug 2008; turnout: 45%; next: 2012

## SUMMARY

Kiribati is a unitary republic with two levels of government, central and local. Local government is enshrined in the constitution and the main legislative Act is the Local Government Act 1984 (amended 2006). The Minister of Internal and Social Affairs is responsible for overseeing local government, which is made up of three town (urban) councils and 23 island (rural) councils. Local authorities are empowered to raise local revenue through by-laws, although this forms a much greater proportion of overall revenue for town councils, than for island councils, who rely much more on transfers from central government. Local government services include early years schooling, primary healthcare, public sanitation, transport, water supply and economic regulation.

## 1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Kiribati is a unitary republic with a unicameral parliament. The head of state and government is the president (beretitenti) who is elected following nomination of the three candidates, from amongst the Members of Parliament (MPs). The president appoints a vice-president, an attorney general and up to ten further MPs to make up the cabinet. Parliament is known as the House of Assembly (Maneaba ni Maungatabu) and comprises 40 elected members, one ex-officio member (the attorney general) and one

nominated member from the Banaban community in Rabi, Fiji Islands. Each member of parliament is elected by the first-past-the-post system to represent a single constituency.

## 2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 2.1 Constitutional provisions:

Local government is enshrined in the constitution.

### 2.2 Main legislative texts:

- The Local Government Act 1984, Amendment 2006
- The Electoral Ordinance 1978.

## 3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 3.1 Local government within the state:

Kiribati is divided into two main island groups: the Gilbert, and Line and Phoenix groups. Local government is established on all inhabited islands and is made up of two types: town (urban) and island (rural) councils.

### 3.2 Ministerial oversight:

The Minister of Internal and Social Affairs is responsible for local government, administers the Local Government Act 1984 and oversees local government policy. S/he also provides assistance to local councils in drafting by-laws, undertaking internal audits, compiling financial accounts for the Auditor General's scrutiny, and approving local authority budgets. There have been two cases in

which the minister has suspended a council due to corruption and abuse of office.

### 3.3 Council types:

The democratic system is uniform across the country. Sub-committees deliberate and make recommendations to full council, which takes the final decision. The council also includes those MPs who represent the area in ex-officio capacity, and co-opted members. However, the number of ex-officio and co-opted members cannot exceed one-third of the elected members in total.

**3.3.1 Town (urban) councils:** There are three town councils with an average population of approximately 15,000 at the time of the 2005 Census. The range was from Kiritimati (Christmas) Island Council with a population of 5,115 to Betio Town Council with a population of approximately 36,000.

**3.3.2 Island councils:** In 2005, island councils had an average population of approximately 2,000, ranging from Banaba Island Council with a population of 276 to Abaing Island Council with a population of 5,502. There are 23 councils in Kiribati, and they face considerable problems with communication due to the distance from the capital. They also struggle to provide the basic infrastructure for which they are responsible, in contrast to urban areas where this infrastructure



**Table 1.** Distribution of councils and population 2005

Province	Number of authorities		Population	% rural*
	Urban	Rural		
Northern	2	6	60,198	n/a
Central	Nil	5	10,731	n/a
Southern	Nil	7	12,754	n/a
Northern Line Islands	1	2	8,850	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>92,533</b>	<b>56.4</b>

\* Rural is defined as all islands except South Tarawa

is mostly provided by central government. For these reasons Kiribati experiences considerable migration from rural to urban.

### 3.4 Traditional leadership:

Kiribati has a strong system of traditional authority. The traditional leadership (Unimane) is well respected and can, on occasion, influence the council decision-making to make it more responsive to local people's needs. The Unimane have a reserved seat on the council as a nominated member. Local government arrangements often blend traditional governance with democratic governance.

## 4. ELECTIONS

### 4.1 Recent local elections:

The last election was held in 2008, with a turnout of 45%. The next council elections will be in 2012.

### 4.2 Voting system:

Councillors are elected for a term of four years by the first-past-the-post system on the basis of universal adult suffrage. By-elections can be triggered by a resignation or death. The leader of the council is the mayor (meeaa) and is elected by registered voters on the island. The mayor holds office for four years.

### 4.3 Elected representatives:

Each council is required by law to establish a liquor licensing committee and area committees must be established in urban councils to provide planning approval. Councils have the discretion to establish other committees as necessary.

### 4.4 Women's representation:

In the 2008 local elections, 2% of nominated representatives were women. Of those elected, 3% of councillors, and 4% of mayors, were female.

## 5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### 5.1 Legal requirement:

No information provided for this edition.

### 5.2 Implementation:

The council consults with the local community when setting its annual budget. Together they review past performance and agree current and future actions.

### 5.3 E-government:

There is no e-government strategy in place.

## 6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The two urban councils on Tarawa formed a joint association with the rural council of North Tarawa. The association is voluntary and recognised in law. Its purpose is to further the strategic governance of the region and permits a synchronisation of policy and services. It is funded solely by the three member councils.

## 7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Dialogue between the central and local government is formally conducted through a local government forum involving all mayors and clerks and the relevant minister. In addition, all councils have MPs representing their area as ex-officio members. The Local Government and the Rural Planning divisions of the Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, which is mandated to promote intergovernmental relations, are responsible for assisting local authorities in achieving their goals and pursuing revenue-generating projects.

## 8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

Councils have established finance committees to oversee the smooth running of the council, and report to the full council. The Auditor General is responsible for independent scrutiny of local government and is empowered by the Local Government Act 1984.

## 9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

### 9.1 Locally raised revenue:

Under the Local Government Act, a council is empowered to charge fees to the public only if a corresponding by-law is in place. Disadvantaged citizens, and those with special needs, are exempt from paying rates and this is reflected in

the Act and by-laws. Urban councils have a diverse range of income-generating activities. Local authorities are not permitted to set deficit budgets.

### 9.2 Transfers:

There is an annual support grant (US\$1.2m) distributed to all rural councils according to a formula based on population. A certain percentage is reserved for specific activities such as the maintenance of roads and causeways, offices, school buildings, hospitals and housing for government seconded staff. Other grants from central government are project-specific and are not part of the support grant.

### 9.3 Local authority staff:

The mayor is not a full-time position, but, an honorarium is paid by the council. Councillors receive a sitting allowance for attending meetings. The level of remuneration is determined by a resolution of the full council, which must be approved by the minister.

Individual councils pay for their own elected representatives and officers' allowances and salaries. Seconded officers from central government however are paid by the central government, and financial assistance is given for their salaries and housing, office stationery and ferry travel between main islands and islets that cannot be accessed by road.

Senior staff are recruited jointly by the ministry and the individual local authority. Both retain the powers to promote and discipline. Each council is required by law to have a clerk, treasurer and assistant treasurer. The head of the paid service is referred to as the town clerk in the urban authorities and as clerk to the council in island authorities. The staffing structure typically follows hierarchical lines and councils are permitted to jointly employ staff.

## 10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

Local government is responsible for a wide range of services including fire protection, early years schooling, social welfare services, primary healthcare and health protection, town planning, transport and its local infrastructure, environmental and public sanitation, water supply and economic regulation. Sharing of responsibilities for services between local government and central government often results in the local authority taking responsibility for day-to-day management and monitoring, while central government provides funding.



**Table 2.** Aggregate local government revenue and expenditure 2009/2010

Revenue	A\$ (000s)	Expenditure	A\$ (000s)
<b>Government transfer</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>Admin and operational</b>	
Local tax	n/a	Salaries	150
Charges for services	n/a	Operations	40
		<b>Service delivery</b>	
		Utilities	5
		Education	4
		Health	7
		Waste	50
Miscellaneous/other		Roads	4.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>n/a</b>		<b>260.8</b>

**References and useful websites**

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Kiribati census 2005 [www.spc.int/prism/country/ki/stats/Census2005/reports/KIR%20Report%202005%20-%20Volume%20II%20-%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.spc.int/prism/country/ki/stats/Census2005/reports/KIR%20Report%202005%20-%20Volume%20II%20-%20FINAL.pdf)
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6. Web links to Provincial and Territorial Ministries responsible for Local Government
7. UNDP Human Development Report 2010 [www.hdr.undp.org](http://www.hdr.undp.org)
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9. Government finance statistics [www.spc.int/prism/country/ki/stats/Economic/GFS/Expend-Current.htm](http://www.spc.int/prism/country/ki/stats/Economic/GFS/Expend-Current.htm)



## Annex A. Summary of service provision in different spheres of government

Service	Delivering authority		Remarks
	Central	Local Government	
<b>GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</b>			
Police	■		
Fire protection	■		
Civil protection	■	■	
Criminal justice	■		
Civil justice	■		
Civil status register	■	■	
Statistical office	■		
Electoral register		■	
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
Pre-school		■	
Primary	■	■	
Secondary	■	■	
Vocational and technical	■		
Higher education	■		
Adult education	■		
<b>SOCIAL WELFARE</b>			
Kindergarten and nursery		■	
Family welfare services	■	■	
Welfare homes	n/a	n/a	
Social security	n/a	n/a	
<b>PUBLIC HEALTH</b>			
Primary care	■	■	
Hospitals	■		
Health Protection	■		
<b>HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING</b>			
Housing	■	■	
Town planning	■	■	
Regional planning	■		
<b>TRANSPORT</b>			
Roads	■	■	
Transport		■	
Urban roads	■		
Urban Rail	n/a	n/a	
Ports	■		
Airports	■	■	
<b>ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION</b>			
Water and sanitation	■	■	
Refuse collection and disposal		■	
Cemeteries and crematoria		■	
Slaughterhouse		■	
Environmental protection	■	■	
Consumer protection	■	■	
<b>CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS</b>			
Theatre and concerts		■	
Museums and libraries	■	■	
Parks and open spaces	■	■	
Sports and leisure	■	■	
Religious facilities			
<b>UTILITIES</b>			
Gas services	■	■	
District heating	n/a	n/a	
Water supply	■	■	
<b>ECONOMIC</b>			
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	■	■	
Electricity	■	■	
Trade and industry	■	■	
Tourism	■	■	

■ = Discretionary service by the local authority