

Definition: **Kiribati** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

(formerly Gilbert Islands) Independent nation in the W Pacific Ocean, comprising c.33 islands, including the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands, and straddling the Equator over a vast area; the capital is Bairiki (on Tarawa). British navigators first visited in the late 18th century. They became a British protectorate in 1892. Kiribati achieved independence within the Commonwealth of Nations in 1979. Phosphate mining dominated the economy until 1980, when production ended. Agriculture is now the major economic activity. Land area: 726sq km (280sq mi). Pop. (2002 est.) 99,000.



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Summary Article: **Kiribati**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Republic in the west central Pacific Ocean, comprising three groups of coral atolls: the 16 Gilbert Islands, 8 uninhabited Phoenix Islands, 8 of the 11 Line Islands, and the volcanic island of Banaba.

Government Kiribati's 1979 constitution provides for a popularly elected president, the Beretitenti, who is head of both state and government, and is elected by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and a single-chamber legislature, the Maneaba ni Maungatabu. The president may not serve more

than three terms. The Maneaba has 46 members: 44 are popularly elected; one is appointed to represent evacuees from the island of Banaba who now live on Rabi, in Fiji; and the other is the attorney general by virtue of office. It also serves a four-year term. The president governs with the help of a vice-president and cabinet chosen from and responsible to the Maneaba. Until the 1980s, all candidates for the Maneaba fought as independents, but since then an embryonic party system has emerged. After each general election, the Maneaba nominates from among its members three or four presidential candidates, who then stand in a national contest.

History The first Europeans to visit the area were the Spanish in 1606. The 16 predominantly Micronesian-peopled Gilbert Islands and 9 predominantly Melanesian-peopled Ellice Islands became a British protectorate in 1892, and then the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC) in 1916. The colony was occupied by Japan (1942–43) and was the scene of fierce fighting between Japanese and US forces.

Independence In preparation for self-government, a legislative council was set up in 1963, and in 1972 a governor took over from the UK high commissioner. In 1974 the legislative council was replaced by an elected house of assembly, and in 1975, when the Ellice Islands separated, becoming independent as Tuvalu in 1978, the GEIC was renamed the Gilbert Islands. The islands achieved internal self-government in 1977 and full independence within the Commonwealth in 1979, under the name of Kiribati, with Ieremia Tabai as their first president.

Tabai was re-elected in 1982, 1983, and 1987. In 1985 Kiribati's first political party, the opposition Christian Democrats, was formed. Tabai was re-elected in the general election in May 1991, but was constitutionally prohibited from serving a further term in office and gave his backing to Vice-President

Teatao Teannaki in the contested presidential election in July. In May 1994 the government was defeated on a vote of confidence and resigned. Teannaki's ruling National Progressive Party was decisively defeated in the July 1994 general election, ending a 15-year-period in power, and the assembly chose Teburoro Tito as president.

In House of Assembly legislative elections, in September 1998, the ruling Maneaban Te Mauru (MTM – 'Protect the Maneaba') and the opposition National Progressive Party (NPP), lost seats to independents. In November 1998 President Teburoro Tito, of the MTM, was re-elected for a second term by the House of Assembly, defeating two rival candidates.

The threat posed by climate change In July 2003, Anote Tong, the son of a Chinese immigrant family, was elected president representing the Pillars of Truth (BK) grouping, narrowly defeating his brother, Harry Tong, of the MTM.

He was re-elected president by parliament in October 2007 and January 2012. Under Tong, Kiribati developed close relations with Taiwan, which bought fishing rights in its waters, but this led to China breaking off diplomatic relations in 2004.

The country's low-lying islands are progressively under threat from rising sea levels, with its area reducing each year; Kiribati may become the first country to see all its land territory submerged through climate change, by the 2050s. In 2008, President Tong warned that the country was at 'the point of no return' and called on Australia and New Zealand to accept its citizens (many of whom were unemployed) as permanent refugees. In 2012, President Tong began negotiations with the Fijian government to buy 6,000 acres of land on Fiji for resettling Kiribati citizens if sea levels rise much further.

Tong succeeded as president by Mamau Tong was debarred by the constitution from standing in the March 2016 presidential elections for a fourth term. The BK fielded two new candidates, but both were defeated by Taneti Mamau of the Tobwaan Kiribati Party (TKP), who attracted 60% of the vote and received backing also from former president Teburoro Tito. However, the BK won a majority in Kiribati's parliament in the December 2015–January 2016 elections, winning 26 of the 46 seats.

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