

Introducing the PNG MP Database

by Stephen Howes and Thomas Wangi

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It's not easy keeping track of PNG's Members of Parliament. MPs might change from one party to another, or from government to the opposition. To help make it easier, we've created the [PNG MP Database](#).

A few years ago, we created the [PNG Elections Database](#), which can tell you right back to independence who has competed in every seat in almost every election, and how they fared.

Now to complement that, we have the [PNG MP Database](#), which tells you about what MPs do once elected. We've only done it for the Tenth Parliament (2017–2022), but we plan to keep it going through the life of the next parliament and beyond.

For the Tenth Parliament, we've captured at six critical points of time which parties MPs belonged to, and whether they supported government or the opposition. These are:

- at the July 2017 elections
- when the O'Neill government was formed after those elections (August 2017)
- when O'Neill was overthrown as PM and replaced by Marape (May 2019)
- the vote of no confidence (VoNC) on Marape (December 2020)
- just after the VoNC, which Marape narrowly survived (February 2021)
- now (February 2022).

Here are some of the interesting things you can learn from the database.

Number of MPs and their terms of parliament

111 MPs were elected at the general election. Four have joined since, but one has resigned, one has been disqualified and, sadly, six have died, so there are now 107.

55% of MPs lost their seat at the last election, but only 45% of MPs are in their first term. This is because a significant number of experienced MPs (about 10) returned to parliament in 2017 after being out of it for at least one term.

32% of MPs are in their second term, 9% are in their third term, 10% are in their

fourth term, and 3% have five terms or more. It is surprising that there are as many fourth as third term MPs (see this [Discussion Paper](#) for more on MP terms).

Parties

28 parties have been represented in the Tenth Parliament (not counting independents). There are currently 25, up from 21 at the start of parliament.

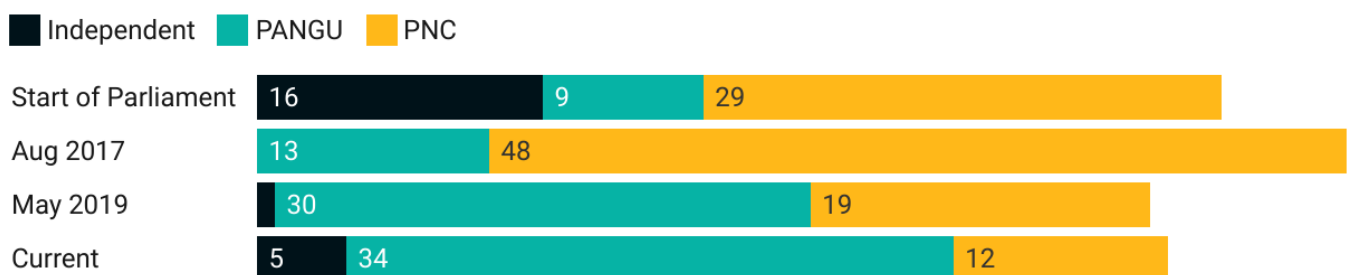
40 MPs have stayed in the same party (or as an independent) throughout their stay in parliament. 48 have moved parties once, 24 twice, and 4 three times. (Going from being an independent to a party counts as moving parties – 16 independents won election, but there are only five now.)

PANGU (Papua and Nuigini Union Pati), the party of the current PM, has been the big winner of the Tenth Parliament. Only nine PANGU party members were elected, but the party now has 34 members. By contrast, the membership of the former PM's party, PNC (People's National Congress), has fallen from 29 to 12 MPs.

Only three parties have 10 members or more: PANGU currently with 34, PNC with 12, and the new United Labour Party with 10. The National Alliance had 15 at the start of the parliament, but is now down to nine.

Party size is not static over the life of the parliament. The graph below shows the two biggest parties and also the number of independents – nearly all of whom joined a party immediately after the elections. Clearly, whichever party heads the government has more MPs.

The two major parties and independents throughout the Tenth Parliament



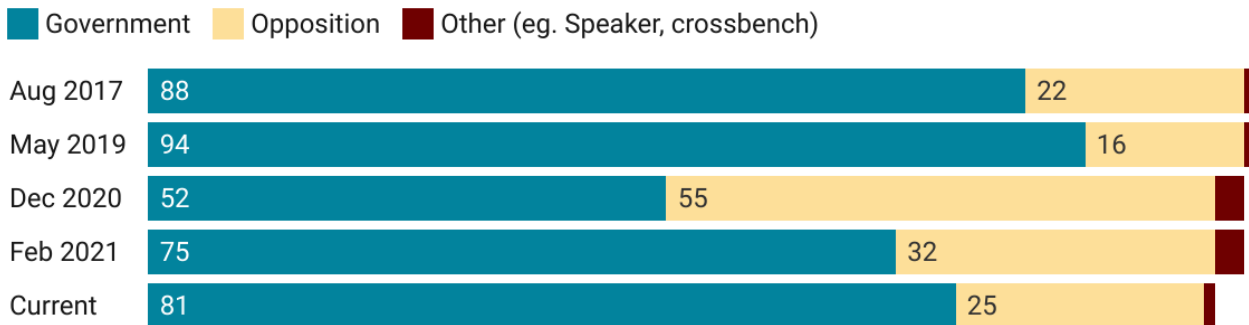
Source: PNG MP Database • Created with Datawrapper

Support for the PM

The current Prime Minister, James Marape, has largely, but not fully, recovered from the vote of no confidence at the end of December 2020. Before that, 94 MPs supported the government. At one point, it looked like he only had minority support,

but by the time of the actual vote he had recovered significant numbers. Marape has continued to regain support. The government camp now numbers 81, a convincing majority, but below the 88 who supported O’Neill when he became PM in 2017, and the 94 who supported the election of Marape.

Support for government and opposition in the Tenth Parliament



Source: PNG MP Database • Created with Datawrapper

We can go further to categorise MPs based on their positioning in relation to government. The 81 current government supporters can be divided into four groups:

- governmentals – those who have been in the government camp throughout this term of parliament – the largest group, 37
- swinging – those who supported Marape, then tried to overthrow him, but have since gone back to government – the second largest group, 25
- loyal Marape supporters – those who moved to government when Marape became PM and were loyal during the VoNC – 12
- others – recently elected, and a few others – the remaining seven.

Likewise, the 25 members of opposition can be divided into three groups:

- former Marape supporters – the 13 who supported Marape until the VoNC, and have been in opposition since
- O’Neill supporters – those who supported O’Neill in government and then went with him to opposition – nine
- oppositionists – in opposition throughout this parliament – only three.

This categorisation confirms that, in PNG politics, there is only a minority rusted on to one side or the other. Most MPs want to be in government. The ‘governmentalist’ and ‘swinging’ MPs make up 57% of all MPs. Hence the importance for forming government of convincing others that you have the numbers.

The [ANU–UPNG PNG MP Database](#) is not official. For official information on MPs, visit the [PNG Parliament](#) or the [IPPC](#) websites. But we do the best we can to be

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accurate, drawing on these databases as well as media reports, and our website lets you track changes over time, keeps you informed of the level of governmental support, and is up to date.

The academics who have created the PNG MP Database are independent and non-partisan. We hope that our work will be useful for the general public, for journalists, and for researchers. Please provide us your **feedback** so that we can continue to improve the **PNG MP Database**.

*The **PNG MP Database** was created by Stephen Howes, Thomas Wangi, Michael Kabuni, Maholopa Laveil, Geejay Milli and Terence Wood.*

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/introducing-the-png-mp-database-20220217/>