

Political Reviews

The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2019

NIC MACLELLAN

Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2019

VOLKER BOEGE, REBECCA BOGIRI, MATHIAS CHAUCHAT,
JOSEPH DANIEL FOUKONA, BUDI HERNAWAN,
MICHAEL LEACH, JAMES STIEFVATER, JOPE TARAI

The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 32, Number 2, 523–619
© 2020 by University of Hawai'i Press

papua-human-rights-situation-religious-freedom-focuses-of-wcc-delegation-visit-to-indonesia [accessed 21 Feb 2020]

YTHP, Yayasan Teratai Hati Papua. 2019. *Laporan Pengungsi*. Yayasan Teratai Hati, Wamena (unpublished report).

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Dramatic changes in national leadership, the final realization of the long-promised Bougainville referendum, and the painfully slow process of relocating asylum seekers from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and phasing out the Manus Detention Centre played key roles on the national stage of PNG in 2019.

While not an election year, 2019 proved to contain a tumultuous chapter in the halls of Port Moresby's Parliament Haus. Flagging support for Prime Minister Peter O'Neill and signs of an impending vote of no confidence led the prime minister to suspend Parliament in early February, a tactical move to buy time to try and shore up support for a government on the wane. The decision was controversial but ultimately proved to be ineffective, as the three-month gap merely postponed the inevitable.

In April, with Parliament still on hiatus, members of Parliament for government and the opposition set up camp at two Port Moresby hotels, the former at the long-established Crown Plaza, located on the hill in downtown Port Moresby, and the latter at the newer Laguna Hotel near Parliament Haus in Waigani. After only a short time, several high-ranking ministers from the prime minister's camp began

to make their way to the opposition quarters, most notably Finance Minister James Marape, who would eventually be selected as prime minister. Marape initially only resigned from his Cabinet position, citing policy differences, but did not leave the government side, stating in Tok Pisin that “government wok mas go yet”—meaning the work of the government must continue” (Fox 2019b). Five days later, however, he made the trek to the opposition. Reports that Defence Minister Solan Mirisim had followed him surfaced hours later but turned out to be false (Tamahana 2019), highlighting the speculative nature and rushed reporting of rumors from observers in both the media and the general public.

Marape's defection put O'Neill under tremendous pressure, leading him to talk up the unity within his group and downplay the gravity of the moment (Whiting 2019c), but more pressure was to come, as Attorney General and Justice Minister Davis Steven quickly followed Marape. Steven had his own reasons for leaving the government's camp, stating that “important state institutions and agencies are weakened by our leadership to serve few people's interests and needs” (RNZ 2019a). With a minimum requirement of 56 MPs to control Parliament, the 26 MPs of the opposition that initially set up at the Laguna Hotel were counting closely as they were joined by some two dozen more parliamentary representatives within the span of eight days, from the end of April through the beginning of May. These included all five governors of the Highlands provinces (Wayne 2019a), as well as three more

ministers from the prime minister's cabinet: Health Minister Sir Puka Temu, Defence Minister Solan Mirisim (as previously rumored), and Forestry Minister Douglas Tomuriesa. A significant number of those joining the opposition were members of the Pangu Party, a historic political party that was once a key ally and coalition partner of O'Neill's People's National Congress (PNC), which essentially fell apart as leader Sam Basil and others changed sides (Blades 2019). The wave of people and parties leaving the PNC-led coalition continued throughout May as the United Resources Party, including the ministers for police and state enterprises, joined the opposition, giving them control of at least sixty parliamentary seats (RNZ 2019c).

The choice of hotels for the government and opposition to stage their meetings, internal caucuses, and press conferences can be seen as allegorical, as each represents the standing of the group based within it. The Crown Plaza is an established institution in Port Moresby, located high on the hill in the well-to-do downtown area with views over all sides of the peninsula. Like the O'Neill government and its key ally, the Pangu Party, it is recognized widely but out of the reach of most local people, and its age is evident. The opposition's Laguna Hotel—ironically a key venue for many Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings—is a newer establishment with contemporary architecture and is located in a middle-class area close to neighborhoods, settlements, and Parliament Haus. Whether or not the features of these venues were intended to subtly

communicate connectedness to class and citizens, the shift in support from O'Neill's government to the opposition and impending change in leadership was obvious.

The mass defection of individual representatives and political parties, or parts thereof, also highlights the fluid nature of politics in PNG. Individuals changing parties or switching sides in Parliament is not new, although the scale and speed of the changes leading to O'Neill's ouster appear to be unprecedented. Political parties are not based in fundamental ideals or policies, but such blocs are often used as power-sharing or even power-seeking vehicles to procure resources, power, or both, often for the individual representative first, then for their electorate.

When Parliament resumed in May, the new dynamics of government were immediately evident. Debates and question-and-answer sessions became hotly contested battlefields, with opposition members asking strongly worded questions and taking extended amounts of time, and with some, like Ian Ling-Stuckey, directly requesting the prime minister to step down (Nicholas 2019). O'Neill was once again able to outmaneuver the opposition, as he sought and was granted another three-week suspension of Parliament. The Lowy Institute's Shane McLeod observed that a no-confidence vote was still coming but that O'Neill had "robbed the opposition of momentum and forced members to re-evaluate their tactics" (Davidson 2019).

On 26 May 2019, O'Neill resigned as prime minister, stating that although he maintained the support

of forty-eight MPs, he recognized the need and “agreed to a change in direction” (Whiting 2019a). The controversy surrounding his leadership was not finished, as he appointed Sir Julius Chan to lead in his stead. Critics immediately highlighted that the laws regarding the prime minister’s succession did not allow for a resigning prime minister to appoint a replacement, leading Chan to issue an official press statement clarifying that he was not the acting prime minister but rather the “provisional caretaker of the Government Coalition” (New Ireland Government News 2019).

The task of appointing a new prime minister left no shortage of drama in Parliament Haus, as fiery debates, speeches replete with strong language, and many boos were broadcast live across the nation by media outlets. Great public interest led many across the country to tune in, including hundreds of people who watched live on a giant screen set up at the Bernard Vogae Memorial Park sports field grandstand in West New Britain (Tautik 2019). Minister of Parliament for Tari-Pori District James Marape was eventually selected as prime minister by a vote of 101 to 8. Esa’ala MP Davis Steven was appointed as deputy prime minister. Marape’s election in Parliament was widely hailed as a victory for the country, and, for some, like Thomas Potape, president of the Komo local-level government, it fulfilled a prophecy. Potape also stated that Marape’s origins from the resource-rich region of Hela Province made him the “owner of the pig,” referring to natural gas resources, and asserted that he would “share the meat with

the rest of the country” (*Post-Courier* 2019b).

A devout member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Marape quickly unveiled plans to ensure benefits for the country instead of losing out to foreign interests, with the new government unveiling ambitious-sounding catchphrases that highlighted their intentions to “take back PNG”—a phrase borrowed from outspoken leader and Governor for Oro Province Gary Juffa—and “make PNG the richest black Christian nation on planet earth [*sic*]” (Laveil 2019). According to political observer Bal Kama, Marape needed to quickly stabilize Parliament, “establish himself as a transparent and approachable national leader,” and then “set a new direction for the country” (Kama 2019). Policies pursued by the new government included the cancellation of Tuition Fee Free (TFE) education program and the implementation of a student loans program in its place, the slowing down or cancellation of major oil and gas deals with international conglomerates to maximize earnings, discouragement of provincial day celebrations in the name of national unity, and efforts to root out corruption.

The appointment of Madang’s Bryan Kramer, one of O’Neill’s most outspoken critics during his time as prime minister, to the position of police minister underscored efforts to get a handle on corruption. Kramer immediately instigated investigations into O’Neill; missing funds in the Health Department; numerous accusations of abuse of power by police officers, including an incident captured on cell phone video in which police beat a man in public, resulting in the man’s

death; and several other instances of graft and abuse. Subsequently, former Forestry Minister Tomuriesa was arrested on charges of misappropriating funds, false pretense, and money laundering (NBC News PNG 2019). In a gesture of openness, Marape himself offered to resign if implicated in illegal activities by the announced investigation into the procurement of an infamous loan worth K3 billion (US\$951 million) from the United Bank of Switzerland (MOU 2019). Whether the aggressive efforts of Kramer's police force and other investigations will lead to lasting change in a state where corruption is seen to be simply part of the system remains to be seen.

When O'Neill first became prime minister in 2011, his appointment was met with optimism, as he was seen to represent a new generation of leaders in the country. Replacing Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, who had served several nonconsecutive terms in the office for a total of some fifteen years, was no small task, although there were many questions and disputes leading up to O'Neill's appointment regarding the way in which he ousted Somare. Nevertheless, it was hoped that O'Neill would lead toward greater prosperity and the promised reduction in corruption in what many viewed as a rampantly dishonest governmental system. Public approval seemed to continue to climb when he introduced the Investigation Task Force Sweep, an anti-corruption investigative body empowered to root out officials who had betrayed the public trust. Plans for the country to host the 2018 APEC meeting and the implementation of the TFF public school funding program to make education more affordable also

bolstered support from the populace and raised the country's profile worldwide.

The dismantling of the Investigation Task Force Sweep in order to thwart investigations into O'Neill himself, the police shooting of student protesters at the University of Papua New Guinea, the acceptance of the massive loan from the United Bank of Switzerland outside of standard channels in 2014, and general overdependence on the natural resources industry in hopes of rapid financial prosperity appear to have been key components in the downfall of his government. As journalist Liam Fox observed, "O'Neill entered the prime minister's office surrounded in controversy and . . . exited the same way" (Fox 2019a).

While O'Neill is still a sitting member of Parliament, though now located in the opposition seats, his term as prime minister has left a legacy of substantial major public infrastructure development and efforts to raise the country's profile through large events like APEC—the benefits of which are still debated—to be contrasted with scandals, continued corruption, poor implementation of the TFF education initiative, uneven development between urban and rural communities, and a failure to deliver on promises of large financial windfalls from natural resource sales.

The long-awaited referendum on independence by the people of Bougainville finally took place in December. A vital part of the 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement that settled what was known by many as simply "the Crisis," the referendum was originally slated to take place in June but was deferred twice, first to Octo-

ber, then to November. The Bougainville Referendum Commission, chaired by former Prime Minister of Ireland Bertie Ahern, stated that the delays were necessary in order to ensure that all Bougainvilleans, even those in the most remote locations, were enrolled to vote and to allow enough time for the voting rolls to be thoroughly checked (RNZ 2019b). The move was welcomed by all, and leadership from Port Moresby was supportive of the processes of preparation and voting, although some were wary of potential outcomes. In January, then Prime Minister O'Neill stated that his government was "fully committed to implementing the Bougainville Peace Agreement and that includes the upcoming referendum," but he also warned the island's populace to be aware of external influences and misinformation from unspecified groups and individuals "looking to gain at the expense of the people of Bougainville" (*Post-Courier* 2019a).

Preparations also included a two-part reconciliation ceremony in which members of the PNG Defence Force and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army ritually broke arrows, marking a final end to hostilities. At the first meeting in Kokopo, Sir Rabbie Namaliu, who was prime minister when the conflict erupted, gave a tearful speech publicly apologizing for the war, and veterans from both sides joined in shaking hands and laying the past to rest (EMTV Online 2019).

That the people of Bougainville would vote for independence rather than greater autonomy within PNG was never really in doubt. The final outcome, however, was surprising to many observers: 87.4 percent of

eligible voters participated, and of that number, 97.7 percent voted for independence (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2019). The large turnout included many young men wearing upe—ceremonial head-dresses worn during initiation rites that have become the national symbol of Bougainville and are pictured on the flag. Complementing the overwhelming results were the findings of the referendum's observers, especially Transparency International's PNG division, which noted that they had witnessed almost no inappropriate behaviors such as coercion, bribery, or violence during the polls and reported only one anomaly of a voter filling in ballots on behalf of others and watching how they voted. There were some procedural deficiencies, including balloting sites that closed early, insufficient provisional ballots, and limited polling booths, but while the referendum was not without incident, it was accepted overall as a free and fair democratic exercise (Transparency International Papua New Guinea 2019). The results were also welcomed by Prime Minister Marape, who noted that the "conduct of the vote was excellent" and gave full credit to the Bougainville Referendum Commission (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2019). Chan, who was prime minister when the government hired mercenaries in an attempt to conclude the conflict, also congratulated the people of Bougainville on a peaceful referendum and stated that the Parliament of PNG must respect the wishes of the people (Wayne 2019b). Further negotiations to decide the processes, means, and timetable for the realization of independence

began in December 2019 and will continue in 2020.

Subnationalist tendencies have always been strong in PNG, as in other states with a multiethnic or multicultural populace and colonially imposed boundaries, but fears that a domino effect of secessionism would follow in the wake of Bougainville's vote for independence remain unfounded. While a few posts on social media sites encouraged other provinces to consider their own futures as self-governing states, including a Facebook group dedicated to independence for Hela Province, most Papua New Guineans accepted the results, and official discussions between the national and provincial governments regarding special autonomy packages or other forms of decentralization of powers took a back seat to other political proceedings.

While mostly out of sight of a majority of Papua New Guineans, the plight of a large number of men detained on Manus Island was brought into view when Ezatullah Kakar, a Pakistani asylum seeker, won the national kickboxing title in the cruiserweight class. He dedicated his win to his fellow detainees in Manus and Nauru but refused the invitation to represent PNG internationally, citing poor treatment during his time in confinement (Voloder 2019; Careem 2019).

As the number of suicide attempts among detainees increased—some seventy from May to June following the Australian election (Whitten 2019)—greater concern was cast on the means by which the overseeing security firm Paladin secured its contract. The lucrative deal, worth A\$423 million

(US\$293.6 million, or A\$17 million per month) was given to the unproven company through a legal but not fully transparent means of tender. The optics of the awarding of the contract, as well as widespread acceptance that PNG's holding of the asylum seekers amounts to what National Capital District Governor and human rights lawyer Powes Parkop has called a "Pacific Gulag" (Walton and Dinnen 2019), led Prime Minister Marape to announce on his very first day in office his intention not to renew Paladin's contract so that local firms could fill the role (Whiting 2019b). Marape later requested from Australian Foreign Minister Peter Dutton a timeline for shutting down the Manus site (RNZ 2019d).

By the end of the year, the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre on Manus Island was finally emptied, and a contract to maintain security for the site was awarded to a locally run provider. The migrants formerly housed on Manus were either resettled in third countries, returned to their places of origin, or rehoused at the Bomana Immigration Centre in Port Moresby—a portion of the Bomana Prison complex jointly administered by Australia and PNG. Over time, officials overseeing the would-be migrants to Australia have increased pressure for them to return to their places of origin voluntarily. Many detainees who held out through years of trauma in Manus found the transfer to Bomana in the latter part of the year to be their breaking point, citing that the place was "designed to torture," and requested to be sent home, despite the likelihood that doing so would lead to prison terms (Chandler

2019). One news report from July stated that 457 men remained in custody in PNG, but the exact number at the year's conclusion was—like their futures—unclear.

Far and away, the drawn-out battle for parliamentary leadership occupied the political landscape in 2019, with the overwhelming referendum result from Bougainville and the ongoing saga of Manus also being noteworthy. Maneuvers and counter-measures from numerous individuals and parties highlighted the malleability of politics in PNG, as party blocs were manipulated to seek positions of power rather than legislate on ideals and preferred policy designs. By year's end, the exact form Bougainville's future would take was not yet guaranteed, but the general shape of an independent future promised since 2001 began to come into focus. The continuation of the saga of detained asylum seekers saw some leave the country—though not always to a better place—while the rest were relocated to facilities on the periphery of Port Moresby. With a new prime minister at the helm of governance in PNG, the greatest question that remains is whether policies adopted by the new government will bring about positive change in a complicated nation.

JAMES STIEFVATER

References

- Blades, Johnny. 2019. Drums for Change Beat Louder Among PNG MPs. RNZ, 4 May. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/388491/drums-for-change-beat-louder-among-png-mps> [accessed 5 May 2019]
- Careem, Nazvi. 2019. Refugee Pakistani MMA Fighter Ezatullah Kakar Battling for Manus Survivors after Years Living amid Death and Despair. *South China Morning Post*, 7 December. <https://www.scmp.com/sport/martial-arts/mixed-martial-arts/article/3041078/refugee-pakistani-kick-boxer-ezatullah-kakar> [accessed 21 February 2020]
- Chandler, Jo. 2019. “Designed to Torture”: Asylum Seeker Chooses Iranian Prison over PNG Detention Centre. *The Guardian*, 10 November. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/10/designed-to-torture-asylum-seeker-chooses-iranian-prison-over-png-detention-centre> [accessed 12 November 2019]
- Davidson, Helen. 2019. Papua New Guinea Leader Sees Off Rebellion by MPs Despite Mass Defections. *The Guardian*, 7 May 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/08/papua-new-guinea-leader-sees-off-rebellion-by-mps-despite-mass-defections> [accessed 9 May 2019]
- EMTV Online. 2019. Sir Rabbie Namaliu Apologizes to Both Sides of the Bougainville Conflict. 7 November. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUN1TXMPmR4> [accessed 8 November 2019]
- Fox, Liam. 2019a. PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill Survived Scandal after Scandal, So What Went Wrong? ABC News, 28 May. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-29/peter-oneills-wasted-years-as-pngs-prime-minister/11159928> [accessed 30 May 2019]
- . 2019b. Resignation of Senior PNG Minister Sends Shockwaves through Government. Pacific Beat, 12 April. <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificbeat/james-marape-resignation-senior-png-minister/10996190> [accessed 13 April 2019]
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems. 2019. Bougainville Referendum

- Results Announced. 13 December. <https://www.ifes.org/multimedia/bougainville-referendum-results-announced> [accessed 19 February 2020]
- Kama, Bal. 2019. "Take Back PNG": Prime Minister Marape and His Audacious Vision for PNG. *Devpolicy Blog*, 8 August. <https://devpolicy.org/take-back-png-prime-minister-marape-and-his-audacious-vision-for-png-20190808/> [accessed 1 September 2019]
- Laveil, Maholopa. 2019. Can PNG Become the Richest Black Nation in the World in Ten Years? *Devpolicy Blog*, 14 June. <https://devpolicy.org/can-png-become-the-richest-black-nation-in-the-world-in-ten-years-20190614/#:~:text=Amid%20thanking%20the%20former%20government,planet%20earth%E2%80%9D%20within%20ten%20years> [accessed 27 December 2019]
- Mou, Freddy. 2019. I Will Resign if Implicated: PM. *Loop PNG*, 4 July. <http://www.looppng.com/png-news/i-will-resign-if-implicated-pm-85371> [accessed 5 July 2019]
- NBC News PNG. 2019. Douglas Tomuriesa Arrested. Facebook post, 18 July.
- New Ireland Government News. 2019. Sir Julius—"I am Not Acting Prime Minister." Facebook post, 27 May.
- Nicholas, Isaac. 2019. One Questions Causes Mayhem in Parliament. *Post-Courier*, 8 May. <https://postcourier.com.pg/one-question-causes-mayhem-parliament/> [accessed 9 May 2019]
- . 2019a. PM O'Neill Warns ABG to Be Weary [*sic*] of Outside Influence. 17 January. <https://postcourier.com.pg/pm-oneill-warns-abg-weary-outside-interference/> [accessed 1 February 2019]
- . 2019b. Prophecy Fulfilled, Says Potape. 4 June. <https://postcourier.com.pg/prophecy-fulfilled-says-potape/> [accessed 8 June 2019]
- RNZ, Radio New Zealand. 2019a. Another Resignation from PNG Cabinet. 18 April. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/387346/another-resignation-from-png-cabinet> [accessed 18 April 2019]
- . 2019b. Bougainville Referendum Delay Welcomed. 6 August. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/396062/bougainville-referendum-delay-welcomed> [accessed 1 September 2019]
- . 2019c. More Resignations from Papua New Guinea Govt. 24 May. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/389980/more-resignations-from-papua-new-guinea-govt> [accessed 25 May 2019]
- . 2019d. PNG's Marape Wants Australia to Close Manus Detention Camps. 22 July. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/394882/png-s-marape-wants-australia-to-close-manus-detention-camps> [accessed 25 July 2019]
- Tamahana, Jamie. 2019. Defence Minister to Stay in PNG Government, Bolstering O'Neill. *RNZ*, 12 April. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/386871/defence-minister-to-stay-in-png-government-bolstering-o-neill> [accessed 13 April 2019]
- Tautik, Nicole Joannes. 2019. The Dias [*sic*] at Bernard Vogae Memorial Park is Filled to Capacity. Posted to West New Britain Provincial Government Facebook page, 29 May.
- Transparency International Papua New Guinea. 2019. TIPNG Bougainville Referendum Observation Preliminary Statement. 24 December. <https://www.transparencypng.org.pg/tipng-bougainville-referendum-observation-preliminary-statement/> [accessed 27 December 2019]
- Voloder, Dubravka. 2019. Ezatullah Kakar Fought His Way to Victory in a Kickboxing Event at the Weekend.

SBS News, 8 May. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/former-manus-detainee-dedicates-kickboxing-title-to-fellow-refugees> [accessed 21 February 2020]

Walton, Pat, and Sinclair Dinnen. 2019. Gulag politics? Perceptions of PNG-Australia Relations and the Paladin Contract. *DevPolicy Blog*, 17 March. <https://devpolicy.org/gulag-politics-perceptions-png-australia-relations-paladin-contract-20190315/> [accessed 1 April 2019]

Wayne, Hilda. 2019a. Ol hailans gavana lusim People's National Congress party. *ABC News Tok Pisin*, 25 April. <https://www.abc.net.au/tok-pisin/2019-04-26/png-governors-resign/11050186> [accessed 26 May 2019]

———. 2019b. Sir Julius: PNG imas respektim laik blong ol Bougainville pipol long independents. *ABC News Tok Pisin*, 12 December. <https://www.abc.net.au/tok-pisin/2019-12-13/sir-julius-png-iman-respektim-laik-blong-ol-bougainvillean-lon/11798358> [accessed 13 December 2019]

Whiting, Natalie. 2019a. Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O'Neill Resigns, Hands Leadership to Sir Julius Chan. *ABC News*, 26 May. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-26/peter-oneill-resigns-as-papua-new-guinea-prime-minister/11150934> [accessed 26 May 2019]

———. 2019b. PNG Prime Minister Calls for End to Manus Island Security Contract. *ABC PM*, 25 June. <https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/png-pm-calls-for-end-to-manus-island-security-contract/11246056> [accessed 1 August 2019]

———. 2019c. PNG Prime Minister Rushes to Regroup after Resignation Upheaval. *ABC PM*, 17 April. <https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/png-prime-minister-rushes-to-regroup-after>

-resignation-upheaval/11026800 [accessed 18 April 2019]

Whitten, Conor. 2019. Dramatic Increase in Manus Island Suicide Attempts. *Newshub*, 15 June. <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/world/2019/06/dramatic-increase-in-manus-island-suicide-attempts.html> [accessed 15 June 2019]

SOLOMON ISLANDS

This has been a year of twisting tales in Solomon Islands' political landscape. The country held its national general elections on 3 April. This was a significant election because it was the first under the new 2018 Electoral Act and the first since the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) concluded in 2017 (Wyeth 2019). But in a total of fifty constituencies, of the 48 incumbents who re-contested their seats, only 13 were unsuccessful. One explanation for this was the amount of constituency development funds that the incumbent MPs had access to prior to polling day (Baker 2019). There were allegations of cross-border registrations and vote buying that influenced the election results (Hawkins 2020; see also Batley and others 2019). Consequently, 28 out of the 50 MPs who won their seats had petitions filed against them in the High Court (RNZ 2019a).

The process of government formation after the April election was an interesting flashpoint. From the 50 elected MPs, 8 represented the Solomon Islands Democratic Party, another 8 represented the Solomon Islands Kadere Party, 21 were independents, and the remaining 13 belonged to other minority parties (Gray 2019).