Pacific Attitudes Survey: Samoa

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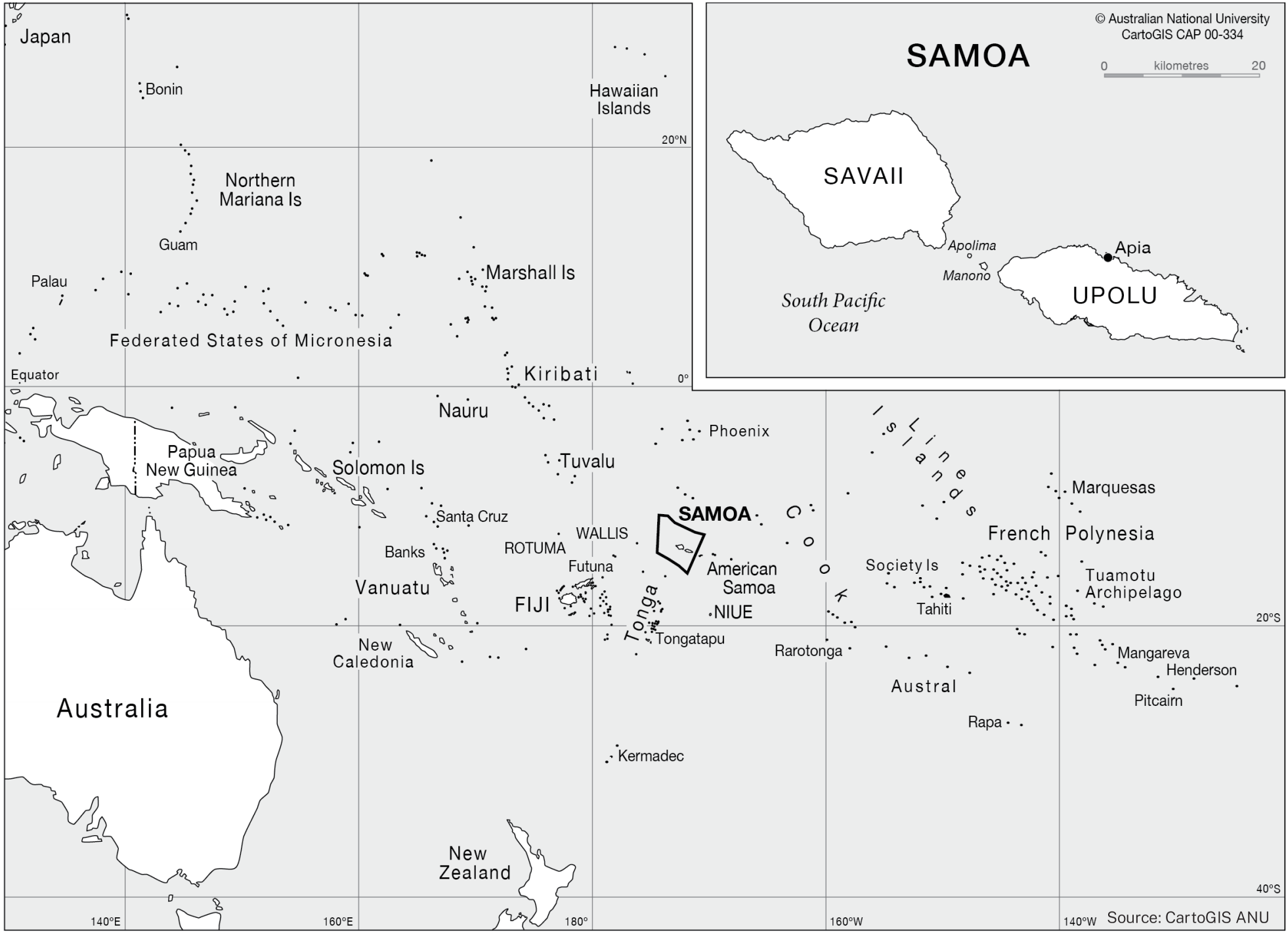
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Contents

Figures

Tables

Boxes

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The Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS) was developed in partnership between researchers from The Australian National University's Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) and Swinburne University of Technology (SUT). The pilot survey in Samoa was conducted in a partnership with the National University of Samoa (NUS). One of the strengths of the PAS was the strong partnership between NUS, SUT and ANU. We are particularly grateful to the NUS enumerators who implemented the survey from December 2020 to January 2021 given the challenges of COVID-19 and the associated complications this created on the ground.

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About the authors

Michael Leach is Professor in Politics and International Relations at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, where he teaches in Comparative Politics, and the Politics of the Pacific. His research interests include nation-building in the Asia-Pacific, and the politics of Timor-Leste and Pacific nations.

Julien Barbara is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Pacific Affairs at The Australian National University. He conducts research on governance and development issues in Melanesia, and on elections and political participation in the Pacific. Prior to joining ANU he worked for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and for AusAID.

Ioana Chan Mow is Professor in Computing and Computer Education at the National University of Samoa where she teaches in the postgraduate and masters programs in Applied Computing. Her research interests include ICT4D (information and communications technology for development), technology enabled learning and ICT in disasters.

Sina Vaai is a Professor of English in the Faculty of Arts at the National University of Samoa. She has teaching and research interests in literary representations of Western Polynesians by indigenous and migrant creative writers in the postcolonial literatures of Oceania, reading abilities of first year university students, creative writing especially short story and poetry compositions, literacy and the arts or humanities, and is a member of the Reference Group for Literacy for the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in Samoa.

Christopher Mudaliar is a Research Fellow at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. His research interests include national identity construction and nation-building in the Asia-Pacific, and the politics of Fiji. Prior to his fellowship he completed a doctorate in political science focusing on nationalism and nation-building in Fiji.

Tuifuisa'a Dr Patila Amosa is Dean of the Faculty of Science and an Associate Professor in Environmental Science at the National University of Samoa. With climate change impacts evident in both fresh and marine resources of island communities, Dr Amosa's areas of research have focused on the chemical and microbiological assessment of water resources in Samoa as well as marine biogeochemistry, particularly on leading ocean acidification research at the university.

Louise Mataia Milo is a Senior Lecturer in History and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Her research interests include political, social and environmental histories of the Pacific Islands, aspects of Samoan women's experiences and conflict, and gender and Pacific intersections since the 19th century.

Susana Tauaa is Associate Professor in Geography at the National University of Samoa. She teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses in urban studies, coastal processes, and land management issues in the Pacific. Her research interests include the informal economy and employment creation, and prospects for smallholder farming in the Pacific.

Taema Imo-Seuoti is Associate Professor in Environmental Science at the National University of Samoa where she teaches the Postgraduate and Masters program in Environmental Science. Her research interests include terrestrial, marine and atmospheric pollution, environmental management, and environmental security.

Vernetta Heem is Senior Lecturer in English at the National University of Samoa. She has teaching and research interests in reading abilities of first year university students, challenges in English proficiency of students, and creative writing.

Executive summary

The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Samoa* is the first large-scale popular political attitudes survey conducted in the Pacific region. Comprising 181 questions set out in 26 thematic modules, it covers a broad range of topics including attitudes to democracy, national identity, tradition, leadership, governance, development and international relations. The survey took place in late December 2020 and January 2021, and was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the lead up to what would prove an historic election.

The conduct of large-scale, nationally representative popular attitudes surveys is something new in the Pacific region. Indeed, the Pacific is the only region not covered by systematic global democracy and values surveys such as the Global Barometer Surveys and World Values Survey. Drawn from a nationally representative sample of 1319 respondents of voting age (21 or above), the Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS) findings detail an intriguing and complex picture of Samoan popular political, cultural, and socioeconomic attitudes. As such, the PAS provides new perspectives on key issues of democratic governance.

Samoans are strongly supportive of democracy. When asked about their 'ideal' preference for forms of government, 61% of Samoans agreed that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government'. By contrast, just 8% of respondents think that 'under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one'. Notably, a substantial cohort of nearly one-quarter (25%) believe that 'for people like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have'.

Samoans were also satisfied with the way their democracy performs in practice, with some 53% of respondents reporting that they were satisfied with 'the way democracy works in Samoa' compared with 41% who were dissatisfied. Here we found a strong correlation between those who perceived the economy positively, and satisfaction with democracy. Accordingly, those rating the overall economic condition of the country positively were significantly more likely to report satisfaction with 'the way democracy works in Samoa' (66%) than those who rated the economic condition negatively (42%).

But the PAS findings also highlight a more complex picture of Samoan democracy, with a distinctive mix of democratic and traditional values in Samoa's political culture. Strong support for civil liberties and checks on executive power was balanced with views of the state as a guardian of society. Thus, an overwhelming majority of respondents support individual freedoms of speech (86%), and assembly (89%); but also believe 'the government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society' (82%).

Similarly, findings reveal a distinct model of Samoan democracy, in which respect for modern democratic norms is tempered and entwined with respect for tradition. For example, we found a strong preference for consensus-driven understandings of democracy (74%) over majoritarian perspectives (25%). Notably, respondents expressed higher levels of trust in traditional institutions (81%), such as the village *fono* (council) (83%) and *sui tama'ita'i* (women's representative) (80%), than they did in non-elected institutions (70%) such as the courts; or in elected institutions (66%) such as parliament.

The PAS then asked respondents about national identity, and specifically, the importance of certain attributes for being 'truly Samoan'. Respondents ranked traditional markers of identity such as 'respect for culture and tradition' (75%) and affiliations to Christianity (73%) as both 'very important' for being 'truly Samoan'. Yet these indicators were closely followed by strong support for modern 'civic' understandings of national identity, such as 'respect for political institutions and law' (66%), and 'being a citizen' (64%). Respondents expressed high overall levels of national pride, though pride in Samoa's distinct culture (93%) and history (96%) tended to score higher than those aspects tied to state functions, such as 'the way democracy works' (53%).

The PAS sought to ascertain how Samoans participated in politics. Samoans reported mixed feelings about political parties, with respondents evenly divided over whether 'political parties are suitable for Samoa's system of government' (50% agree, 49% disagree). Samoans were more likely to participate at the local rather than national level; contacting local institutions such as the village *pulenu'u* (mayor) and village *fono* at higher rates than national institutions. Unsurprisingly, 83% of Samoans report that 'the village *fono* should have more authority over local decisions' than it does now.

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) reported being satisfied with their government's performance. Respondents considered the economy (38%) and health (37%) as the 'most important problems' facing Samoa. Overall, Samoans (73%) were confident that their government is capable of solving these issues within the next five years.

The PAS found attitudes to women's participation in politics was generally positive, with clear support

(78%) for temporary special measures to improve representation. Some 56% of respondents believed there are 'too few' women represented in parliament. Notably though, while the PAS found strong agreement (85%) that 'a woman should become Prime Minster of our country', such support did not extend to the head of state (O le Ao o le Malo), with just 50% agreeing a woman should become head of state.

The PAS found strong intergenerational differences in political attitudes in Samoa. A consistent theme running through the survey was that young people generally feel disconnected from politics. Younger Samoans were more likely to report lower levels of interest in politics, with 39% of Samoans aged 21–29 reporting little to no interest in politics, compared with 22% of Samoans aged 30–59, and 26% for those aged 60 or above. Older Samoans were also more likely to report being politically active.

The PAS included modules on thematic issues such as media use, climate change and international relations. Television (83%), radio (57%) and the internet (48%) are the main sources used by Samoans for gathering information about politics and government. Social media is overwhelmingly (87%) used for contacting family and friends overseas, at least once a week, and plays a limited role for political organisation. A majority (59%) of respondents report 'practically never' expressing their opinions about politics and the government over social media.

The PAS found significant splits between those who believe that climate change is an 'urgent problem that needs to be addressed' (43%), and those who believe it will 'never be necessary to address it' (39%). A further 10% believed climate change is not yet an urgent problem but will be in the future; and another 9% think climate change is real but 'there is little we can do about it'. Urban respondents (56%) were significantly more likely to identify climate change as 'an urgent problem that needs to be addressed' than rural respondents (39%). Educational differences were also relevant, with tertiary-educated respondents more likely to believe that climate change is an 'urgent problem that needs to be addressed' (57%) compared to the secondary- or primary-educated respondents (39%).

In terms of popular perception of international relations, respondents regard China as the country with the most influence in the Pacific (58%). China (69%) was also rated as the country with the most influence on Samoa specifically, while New Zealand (40%) ranked next, above both Australia (28%) and the United States (23%). When asked how positive these influences were, New Zealand (95%) and Australia (92%) were both perceived to have the most positive influence on Samoa. The United States followed with 81%, while perceptions of Chinese influence (57%) remain strongly mixed.

Introduction

The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Samoa* is the first large-scale, nationally representative popular political attitudes survey conducted in the Pacific region. This report presents the findings of the survey comprised of 181 questions set out in 26 thematic modules covering a range of topics including attitudes to democracy, national identity, tradition, leadership, governance, development and international relations.

The conduct of large-scale popular attitudes surveys is something new in the Pacific region. Indeed, the Pacific is the only region not covered by global democracy and values surveys such as the Global Barometer Surveys and World Values Survey. There are a number of reasons for the absence of popular attitudinal surveys in the Pacific, including the relatively high cost of undertaking large-scale survey research there, a social science tradition that has relied predominantly on qualitative methodologies, a lack of local capacity to undertake large-scale survey-based quantitative analysis in some countries, and high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity in the region — particularly in Melanesia.

The absence of popular perspectives on democracy, governance, and significant policy issues has been a notable gap in the Pacific region and means we have only a partial understanding of such issues. As Corbett (2015:23) comments, it is difficult to make empirically grounded conclusions about democracy in the region because 'there are no widespread surveys of citizen attitudes about democracy in the Pacific'. A consequence of this is that policymakers and academics are unable to test popular attitudes to political reforms, attitudes to democratic and non-democratic regimes, popular trust in institutions, and satisfaction with governments. Likewise, the lack of popular attitudinal data means many longstanding assumptions drawn from the qualitative literature are unable to be triangulated. Baker and Barbara (2020:135) have observed that:

> the study of Pacific politics has generally been analysed through a narrow set of conceptual frameworks centred on a common set of research subjects — the persistence of tradition and the fragility of formal political institutions — that pay little attention to Pacific peoples and struggle to capture the fullness of political participation and how the majority of people engage politically … What is missing is a research approach that examines how ordinary people see and practice politics in the region and what it means for Pacific Islanders to be citizens who participate in politics.

This PAS is an attempt to begin to fill this gap. We hope it brings fresh perspectives to enduring debates that have occurred in the region, while opening up new lines of enquiry into issues that have been neglected or overlooked. The lack of survey data has also made it difficult for the Pacific to engage with the rest of the world. The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Samoa* has been developed to facilitate comparisons with the Global Barometer Surveys[1] on a core suite of questions, to enable us to take the Pacific to the world and to participate in comparative debates about attitudes to democracy and development, in which the Pacific has largely been overlooked.

In developing the PAS we have also sought to develop a survey that is relevant to the Pacific region, while engaging with issues of interest to the global community. The survey therefore adopts core questions used in the Global Barometer Surveys (GBS) in order to maintain '3MC' (multinational, multiregional and multicultural contexts)[2] best practice and comparability, concerning attitudes to democracy and governance. The survey tool also uses some questions from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) module on national identity, modified for use in Pacific contexts by Leach (2003; 2008; 2013). Notably, however, the PAS also includes a host of new questions developed because of their relevance to Pacific communities and engagement with issues of enduring academic and policy interest in the region. These represent approximately half the survey tool, balancing the twin goals of providing a voice for the people of the Pacific and facilitating international comparisons in that process. The aim is to provide a voice for local communities and a benefit to the region. A key goal of the PAS is to stimulate public debate on issues that matter to the region. We hope also that the data presented is of interest to Pacific governments, civil society and donors.

While this is a popular attitudes survey focused on Samoa, our hope is that this will be the first in a series of surveys that ultimately covers the entire Pacific region. Indeed, our goal is to support the development of a pan-Pacific survey network producing a wealth of comparative data on popular political attitudes. Over time, we also hope to repeat the surveys to produce time-sequenced data. An important, separate goal of the PAS is to support the development of Pacific scholarship, building a network of Pacific scholars interested in using survey analysis to complement and expand Pacific research agendas. Surveys will be developed in partnership with local researchers and the process will include a focus on building the capacity of Pacific researchers to undertake survey research and quantitative analysis. Pacific Attitudes Survey data will also be made available as a public good. In time, we

aim to facilitate regular meetings of Pacific Attitudes network members, to discuss research findings and use the data to support public debates. One of the strengths of the PAS approach we have adopted is its flexibility, allowing for a core survey to be adapted to include modules of specific interest to partner country researchers.

We have sought to write a report that is of interest not only to a Samoan audience, but also to a broader Pacific audience, looking ahead to when our survey is expanded to other Pacific countries. We have also had to be judicious in selecting the data we have presented, making judgements on what to highlight and analyse in depth. We will ensure that all of the data is publicly available for general analysis, in the form of an appendix to this report and online.

The Survey

The PAS was implemented using face-to-face interviews with randomly selected participants (n=1319) of voting age (21 years and over). Sampling design was clustered, stratified and multi-stage, with sampling at all stages carried out using probability proportionate to population size and balanced for gender and age. This meant that the first level of stratification split Samoa into four subregions (Apia, North-west Upolu, Rest of Upolu and Savai'i), and the second level into districts within each subregion, and lastly villages within each district. Systematic random sampling was used for the selection of households, with individual selection alternating by gender to reflect the roughly equal proportion of men and women in Samoa. Using 2020 population projections by age group obtained from the Pacific Data Hub (SDD 2021), and the 2016 census for gender and subregion population percentages, the representativeness of the sample was checked and found to be acceptable, with only minor weighting required.[3]

Assembly of the sample was based on the household lists from the 2016 census (SBS 2017). The survey team worked closely with the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development (MWCSD) and village *pulenu'u* to organise the contacting of participants, sample substitution where required, as well as the schedule of transport for the respondents to the selected interview venues. A list of participants by village was sent to the MWCSD to inform village *pulenu'u*[4] (now renamed '*sui o nu'u*') of the details surrounding survey schedules, venues and implementation. Participants were provided with an information/consent form in Samoan which provided background information and the purpose of the survey as well as information on informed consent.

The National University of Samoa (NUS) survey implementation team consisted of five steering committee members, five team leaders, 25 interviewers as well as a logistics team of 20 responsible for managing wi-fi, survey uploads, venue, catering and transport. Training sessions were conducted by Australian National University (ANU), Swinburne University of Technology (SUT) and Akvo with the implementation team. Akvo is a non-for-profit software development foundation which specialises in building and maintaining data collection tools. For the PAS, Akvo provided tablet-friendly survey software, survey digitisation and coding support, and live monitoring of data entry.

Team leaders were trained in their supervisory roles, while the broader team had to familiarise themselves with the survey content, and were also trained on interview skills, coding, and ethical interview practices, as well as practice sessions on the conduct of the survey in Samoan and English.

An initial 100-participant pilot of the survey was conducted shortly after interviewer training around urban Apia. The purpose of the pilot was to ensure that problems such as unclear wording, conceptually vague words/sentences, or data recording difficulties were identified and corrected before the main fieldwork commenced. The survey was tested using members of the university community, including academics, administrative as well as support staff from across Samoa, and hence provided a diverse range of respondents ensuring representativeness. Feedback from the initial survey was used to assess the average length of interviews (about 45 minutes to 1 hour), to amend the wording of questions where unclear, to add new items or eliminate less significant questions, and to address any remaining issues of question sequence, translation and coding as well as the survey instructions. This 100-person pilot was not included in the overall national sample of 1319 participants.

Survey implementation took place over 12 days in selected locations on the two main islands of Upolu and Savai'i. Interviews were conducted at preselected sites and participants were allocated to sites in close proximity to their villages. Transport was provided for participants to reach selected venues on their scheduled day. Since survey interviews were conducted in either a large hall or similar venue, the survey team of 25 interviewers could interview roughly 25 participants at a time — with a target of 100 interviews per day.

To comply with state of emergency (SOE) restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing, the use of masks and sanitisers was enforced, as well as a limit of 100 individuals allowed inside a venue at any one time. The interviews were conducted by interviewers under the close supervision of team leaders to ensure prompt and proper implementation of survey procedures. Participants were given the choice to answer in Samoan or English with the vast majority (94%) choosing to answer in Samoan or mostly in Samoan.

Interview teams conducted the survey using electronic tablets, uploading each survey in real-time upon completion to a secure database maintained by Akvo. Respondent data was de-identified and anonymised at the point of collection in order to guarantee the privacy of respondents. Aside from survey centre, no identifiable data were recorded alongside survey results. Spot checks were conducted by the team leaders to maintain quality control and to ensure all surveys were completed.[5]

Wireless routers were installed at each venue for internet access. On Savai'i, where internet access proved unstable, hardcopy surveys were used in the interim to record interviews which were digitised and uploaded later. Each team member kept a journal of all their interviews as well as any other observation notes.

The survey was originally scheduled to be implemented over 12 days from 23 November to 9 December, with an initial 6 days in Upolu at NUS, 3 days in Savai'i and the remaining 3 days in rural Upolu. However, increased SOE restrictions in December due to a COVID-19 case in quarantine resulted in a change of survey schedule with an additional day in Upolu and the Savai'i implementation of the survey deferred to January 2021.

Report structure

This report has three sections. The introduction outlines the Samoan context and provides details about the survey partnership established between the National University of Samoa (NUS), Swinburne University of Technology (SUT) and the Australian National University (ANU).

Part 1 of the report examines popular political attitudes to core issues in democracy and governance; trust in institutions; elections and campaigning; gender and politics; economic expectations; and conflict management and leadership.

Part 2 of the report deals with issues of thematic significance, which are relevant both to a Samoan audience but also engage with broader audiences across the region and globally. This includes survey modules on climate change, international relations, youth, and social media.

Reading the findings

Findings are presented in two ways throughout this report. Descriptive statistics in the form of tables or graphs detail the responses of the national sample (n=1319).[6] Following this, results may be disaggregated by gender, age, education and income level, where relevant, to show any statistically significant cohort effects. Thus, for example, we examine the data to see if there are any significant associations between respondent gender and certain political attitudes. Using these independent variables to deepen the analysis of the national sample is standard in political attitudes surveys. The PAS, however, also adds new independent variables of potential relevance to the Pacific, including *level of subsistence reliance*, *dependence on remittance income* and *urban–rural location*. In doing so, we adopt a two-step convention for reporting any cohort effects: first, the associations must be statistically significant at $p < .01$; and second, we adopt the protocol that these must result in substantial cohort differences in excess of 10% to merit discussion. Percentages obtained from

Box 1: Statistical tests and reporting

Survey design: A majority of questions asked in the PAS follow a Likert-scale design. This means that question responses are constructed as a scale to measure a respondent's level of agreement with various statements. For the PAS we use a 4-point scale, which means we generally asked if respondents (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Agree; or (4) Strongly agree with a statement. At times this might be worded as 'approve', or respondents may be asked to assess the perceived level of 'importance'. Data sets for each question also record if a participant 'declines to answer', 'can't choose', or 'does not understand'. These three options are recorded and presented as 'other' throughout the findings. High response rates for the 4-point Likert scales were consistent across the survey, hence there are only limited findings for 'other' throughout. The benefit of a Likert-scale design means we can look for significant associations in the data between demographic characteristics and political attitudes (see below).

Findings in the report are generally presented through either a descriptive analysis or as a notable significant association. Descriptive analysis refers to the basic percentage response to a question. Significant associations reported in the analysis refer to correlations found in the data between demographic categories (such as age, gender, urban/rural location) and political attitudes. For instance, it might be reported that a significant relationship was found between age of respondents and particular attitudes to democracy. This would occur if an appropriate crosstab test (Chi-Square test of association) rejects an assumption of independence with a chance of error (Type 1 error) of less than 1%. In lay terms, this provides support for the hypothesis that a particular attitude towards democracy correlates positively or negatively with age. It should be noted that correlation is not causation; that is, while a relationship might exist between age and certain democratic attitudes, age does not necessarily cause these beliefs, as there may be other factors driving this association.

At times, a particular attitude to democracy may attract multiple correlations across different demographic variables. For example, some responses demonstrated significant associations with respondent age, education and gender. We used a general linear model to ensure that findings were significant in their own right, while controlling for relationships with the other demographic variables. It should be assumed throughout the report that each significant relationship was identified in this way.

Effect size is another issue. As a rule of thumb, this describes the magnitude (or strength) of the relationship found. A minor or small effect size is sometimes described as having limited or experimental value, compared to a larger effect size that is said to have larger practical ramifications.

the total sample (n=1319) are reported with an accuracy of better than 2.75% with 95% confidence. In addition, a significance level of less than 1% is used throughout for identifying significant relationships. Completion and response rates for individual questions were very good for this survey (generally greater than 98%), allowing non-response categories of 'decline to answer', 'can't choose', and 'don't know' to be ignored in this report, except where noted. In addition, as rounding to whole numbers is used throughout, total percentages may not always tally to 100%.

The Samoan context

Samoa is a small island nation situated in the central south Pacific, comprising two large islands (Upolu and Savai'i) and several smaller islands, four of which are inhabited. Around 99% of Samoa's population of approximately 196,000 live on Upolu and Savai'i. Some 80% of Samoa's population live in rural areas. Samoa's capital, Apia, is situated on Upolu.

Samoa has a youthful population, with a median age of almost 22. Some 124,400 migrant Samoans were reported in 2019 as living in New Zealand, Australia, United States and American Samoa (UN 2020). Given this figure represents almost 60% of Samoa's domestic population, diaspora links play an important role in shaping Samoa's economy, politics and society (Howes and Surandiran 1/2/2021).

Culturally, Samoa is a Polynesian society governed by a traditional system known as the *Fa'asamoa* or Samoan way. The Samoan way has three pillars — the chiefs (*matai*), extended family (*aiga*) and the Church (see Box 3). *Matai* have a particularly complex role in Samoa, as heads of extended family units, but also assuming civic and political duties in their villages. The *Fa'amatai* was incorporated into the adopted Westminster parliamentary system under the constitution at independence. This feature of Samoan democracy means that candidature in parliamentary elections is reserved for *matai*. The estimated number of *matai* title holders in Samoa was placed at 15,929 at the 2016 census. A report in 2020 by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development suggests these numbers have not increased substantially much since (p. 40). The concept of service is particularly significant in Samoa, based on the need to support one's *aiga*. *Matai* have particular service responsibilities to their *aiga* and village.

Christianity is a Western concept introduced into Samoa in the 1830s and has been deeply incorporated into the *Fa'asamoa*. Samoans are devoted Christians and Christianity infuses much of Samoan social and political life.

As Western Samoa, Samoa was the first Pacific country to achieve independence in 1962. A parliamentary democracy, Samoa's political system and constitution nevertheless strongly reflect Samoan traditions and culture. Samoa's National Legislative Assembly has 51 members elected by universal suffrage for five-year terms. As noted, assembly seats are reserved for *matai*. Constitutional reforms introduced in 2013 provide for a minimum number of seats for women, with at least 10% of parliamentary seats now reserved for women candidates (adding additional seats to the parliament if fewer than five women are elected).[7] Samoa has 11 political districts.

Since independence, Samoa has enjoyed a stable system of government with a capable public sector. Traditional governance structures at the village level are an important part of this public administration system. Samoa has ranked highly in the quality of governance indicators across different measures. For instance, Freedom House (2021) scores Samoa's civil liberties and political rights at 81 out of 100, while World Bank Governance Indicators (2021b) rate Samoa's government effectiveness at 71% with a rule of law rating at nearly 78%.

The PAS took place some three months before the April 2021 Samoan general election, gauging popular sentiment at what would prove a time of significant change. The election saw the incumbent Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) — in power continuously since 1986 — and the upcoming Fa'atuatua I Le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST) party win 25 seats each, with one independent elected. This outcome — and subsequent court cases — tested Samoa's political institutions, putting pressure on the electoral commission, the judiciary and the head of state to install a government that would be widely perceived as legitimate.

Initially, the electoral commission found that the electoral results did not fulfil the constitutional obligation for at least 10% of seats to be held by women (only 9.8% were held by women) and this resulted in an extra seat being awarded to the HRPP, giving them 26 seats. However, the sole independent candidate had sided with the FAST party, once again levelling both parties. The Court of Appeal eventually overturned the electoral commission's provision of an extra seat to the HRPP under the gender quota, while simultaneously ruling against the leader of the HRPP's call for new elections. This paved the way for numerous legal disputes in the Court of Appeal on a seat-by-seat basis, which eventually saw the FAST party declared the legitimate government with 26 seats over the HRPP's 18 seats on 17 August. By-elections held on the 26 November 2021 then returned two HRPP candidates and four FAST candidates, with a fifth elected unopposed. This result triggered the 10 per cent constitutional requirement for women members of parliament (MPs), which saw two HRPP women candidates elevated to MPs. This left the FAST party with 31 seats overall to HRPP's 22.

Samoa is a mid-level developed country, ranking 111 in the 2020 Human Development Index. It has a relatively small private sector, based on agriculture and fisheries. Some two-thirds of Samoa's work force is employed in agriculture, which contributes to around 90 per cent of the country's exports. In 2019, Samoa

was the second largest recipient of remittances in the Pacific, drawing in approximately US$200 million (Howes and Surandiran 5/11/2020), accounting for approximately 17.2% of GDP in that year (World Bank 2021b).

Samoa is environmentally vulnerable, being exposed to tropical cyclones, tsunamis, floods, earthquakes and drought. The country ranks 130 out of 180 on the Global Climate Risk Index of 2019 (Eckstein et al. 2021). Natural disasters have had a major impact on Samoa's economy and society over the last decade.

Source: Ludo Kuipers (http://ozoutback.com.au)

Part 1 Popular political attitudes in Samoa: Attitudes to democracy and government

Part 1 of the PAS focuses on popular attitudes to democracy and government. It examines how Samoans understand their political community, the operation of their democracy and their capacity to participate within it. It is structured around four substantive sections. The first deals with national identity and Samoan attitudes to political community. The second deals with attitudes to democracy as a political system in Samoa, normative perspectives on the purpose of democracy in Samoan society, and the role of tradition. Section three investigates Samoan attitudes to government including the development priorities government should pursue. The final section focuses on political participation and who gets a voice within Samoa's democracy. It pays particular attention to issues of leadership, gender and how Samoans engage with politics.

1.1 National identity

The challenges of nation-building and constructing national identities in Melanesia are well known (Leach et al. 2013), where high levels of ethnolinguistic diversity coupled with regional, historical and cultural fault lines have limited the development of a sense of national political community. By contrast, Polynesian nations are characterised by high levels of ethnolinguistic commonality. A cohesive sense of national political community is an important contributor to the stability of a country, as has become evident in the contribution of nation-building fault lines to regional conflicts.

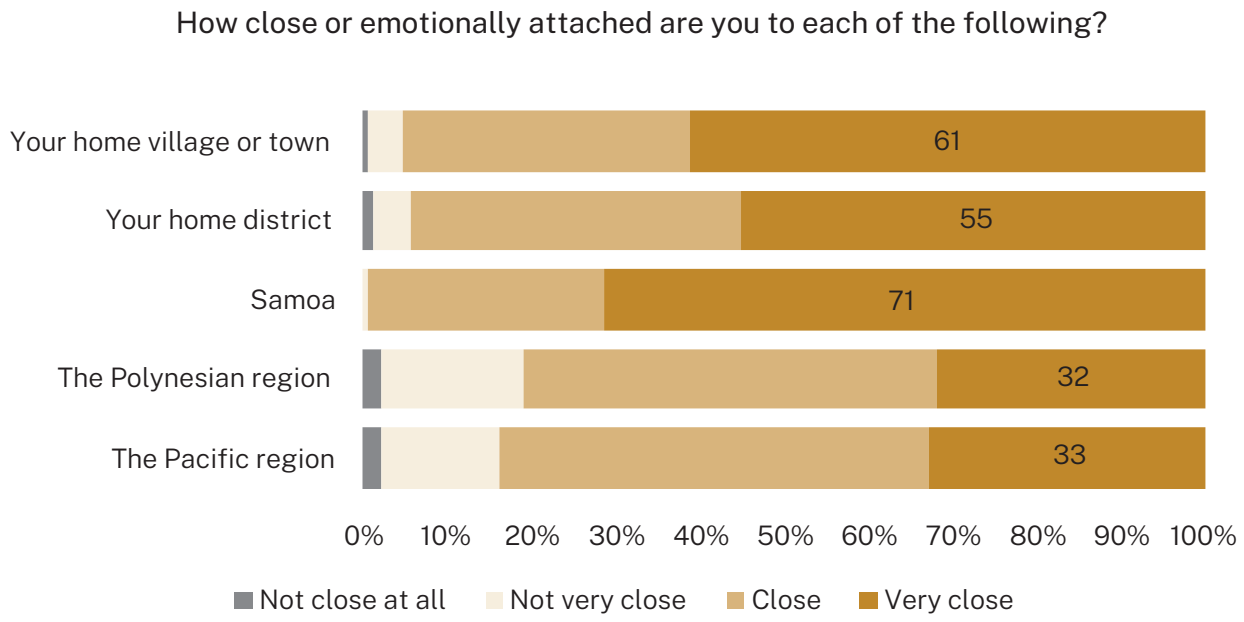
The PAS asked Samoan participants a range of questions about what they think lies at the heart of their national political community. This included how close they feel to different levels of Samoa's political community, where their sense of national identity lies, the focus of their national pride, and what attributes they consider important to being 'truly' Samoan.

Affiliations to political community

Respondents were asked to assess their feeling of closeness (or 'emotional attachment') to various levels of political community in Samoa (Figure 1). These included their home village or town, home district, Samoa, and the Polynesian and Pacific regions. Responses were constructed in a Likert-scale (see Box 1) as either 'very close', 'close', 'not very close', or 'not close at all'. The purpose of this module is to identify how Samoans relate to different levels of political community, and whether there are any significant associations between these attitudes and particular demographic characteristics of respondents.

Reflecting results found elsewhere in the Pacific (Leach et al. 2013), Samoan respondents expressed the

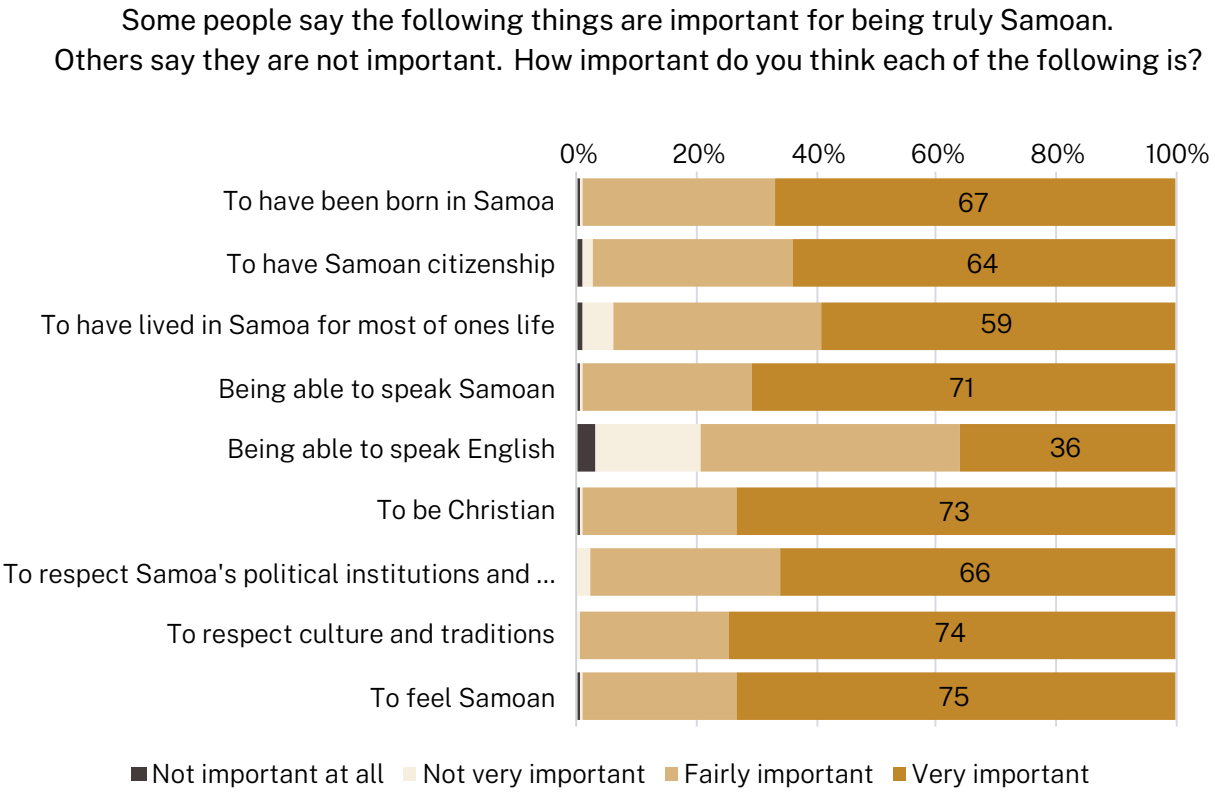
Figure 1: Degree of attachment to differing levels of political community in Samoa (%)



strongest feelings of attachment to the nation (Samoa) and the home village levels, with the intervening (district) level attracting a lower degree of closeness. These levels were well in advance of supra-national (Polynesia and the Pacific) affiliations (Figure 1).

When disaggregating these results by age, some significant associations were noted. For example, older Samoans (aged 60 or above) expressed greater feelings of closeness to Polynesia than younger age cohorts. Where 90% of senior Samoans over 60 expressed closeness to 'Polynesia' this figure dropped to 75% among young Samoans under 29. This finding may reflect the higher level of Polynesian subregionalism in the 1960s and 1970s compared to today (Fry 23/2/2021). Notably, rural Samoans expressed significantly stronger feelings of closeness to their home village (64% very close) than urban respondents (53%).

Figure 2: Degree of importance of various attributes in being truly Samoan (%)



National identity indicators

Common understandings of national identity play a key role in unifying political communities and cultural groups under one national umbrella. Forging a sense of national identity has proven a major challenge in Melanesia in the wake of independence (Leach et al. 2013:448) where high levels of ethnolinguistic diversity, combined with an array of regional, historical and cultural divisions, continue to present obstacles to the creation of a cohesive sense of national political community. By contrast, Samoa is largely considered a homogenous population with a well-established sense of collective political identity. There are, however, different ways of conceiving of national identity, which questions in this module examined.

The PAS asked respondents about the importance of certain attributes to being 'truly Samoan'. These indicators test the relative strength of civic (or 'voluntarist') conceptions of national identity (which emphasise voluntary attachments to the nation, such as respect for political institutions and laws, or 'feeling' Samoan); and ethnic (or 'objectivist') understandings of national identity (which emphasise features individuals are less able to choose, such as notions of common descent and culture, being born in Samoa, being able to speak Samoan, or being Christian). Respondents rated their responses to these questions as 'very important', 'fairly important', 'not very important' or 'not at all important' (Figure 2).

Respondents expressed strong support for each of these national identity indicators, bar a significantly lower value found for the 'ability to speak English' as a marker of being 'truly' Samoan.

Notably, civic indicators like 'respecting Samoa's political institutions and laws', 'to have Samoan citizenship', and to 'feel Samoan', received comparable levels of support to objectivist indicators like 'respecting culture and traditions', 'to be Christian', and 'to have been born in Samoa'. On average, civic/voluntarist and ethnic/objectivist indicators were valued equally by respondents.[8]

This is an instructive finding, revealing the way respondents' understandings of political community combine high levels of respect for traditional conceptions of community with strong support for modern 'civic' understandings of national identity. In other words, findings reveal the comparable strength of importance of 'modern' indicators — such as 'respect for political institutions and law', and 'being a citizen' — and more 'traditional' notions of political community, such as respect for culture and traditions.

Several aspects of Samoa as a society in transformation are highlighted in the responses. In the first instance, the survey underlines the enduring importance of culture in contemporary Samoan politics. The results highlight how Samoan culture has framed how Samoans have engaged as a political community in the last 50 years (Afamasaga 2007; Chan Mow 2007; Meleisea 1992; So'o 2007). Aspects of the traditional political institution of *Fa'amatai* — the traditional chiefly system founded on *alofa* (love) and *pule* (authority) — that has governed Samoa have been adapted and integrated into the introduced political institutions and laws (Le Tagaloa 1997; Vaai 1999). At the same time, the survey also highlights the importance of popular nationalistic sentiments identified through the question 'to have Samoan citizenship', which provides an indicator of how Samoan society has adapted with time. Previously, the general understanding was that Samoans tended to identify more with the villages and traditional districts rather than the nation (Mataia-Milo 2017; Meleisea 1992; So'o 2007).

This is further highlighted by almost every respondent believing that 'our country should defend our way of life instead of becoming more and more like other countries', which drew an overwhelming 97% approval rating. This can likely be attributed to a strong sense of national pride that has permeated Samoan society since colonial times and leading up to independence (Liuaana 2001; Meleisea 1987).

These results also validate the views of indigenous scholars such as the founding professor of Samoan language and culture at NUS, Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, who observed that the *Fa'amatai* is the 'ideal social organisation' (1992:123) and is notable for its flexibility and ability to incorporate and adapt to social change while retaining its core cultural and traditional values (see also Meleisea 1992; Vaai 1999).

Findings also signalled the strong importance of Christianity to notions of national identity, which drew similar levels of response to 'respecting culture and traditions'. Notably, both 'respect for culture and traditions' and 'being Christian' were considered even more important to being truly Samoan than 'respecting political institutions and laws', though this last indicator also received a high level of support. Christianity was entrenched effectively in Samoa through a traditional political system, such that by the 1920s and 1930s it was difficult to separate what a purely Samoan outlook consisted of, without taking Christianity into consideration (Mataia-Milo 2017; Meleisea 1987, 1992).[9]

Several significant demographic relationships were found in the responses to these questions. Urban Samoans (73%) were significantly more likely to place a high level of importance on Samoan citizenship over their rural counterparts (62%), suggesting that formal links to the state are valued more strongly by urbanites. Younger Samoans under 29 were less likely to place importance on 'having lived in Samoa for all of one's life' (53% very important), than older Samoans (67% of those aged over 60). This is unsurprising given that younger Samoans are more likely to travel overseas for extended periods of time and suggests an evolving transnational aspect of Samoan identity. Notably, younger Samoans were significantly more likely to declare an 'ability to speak English' very important (43%) than Samoans over 60 (23%).

Samoan national pride

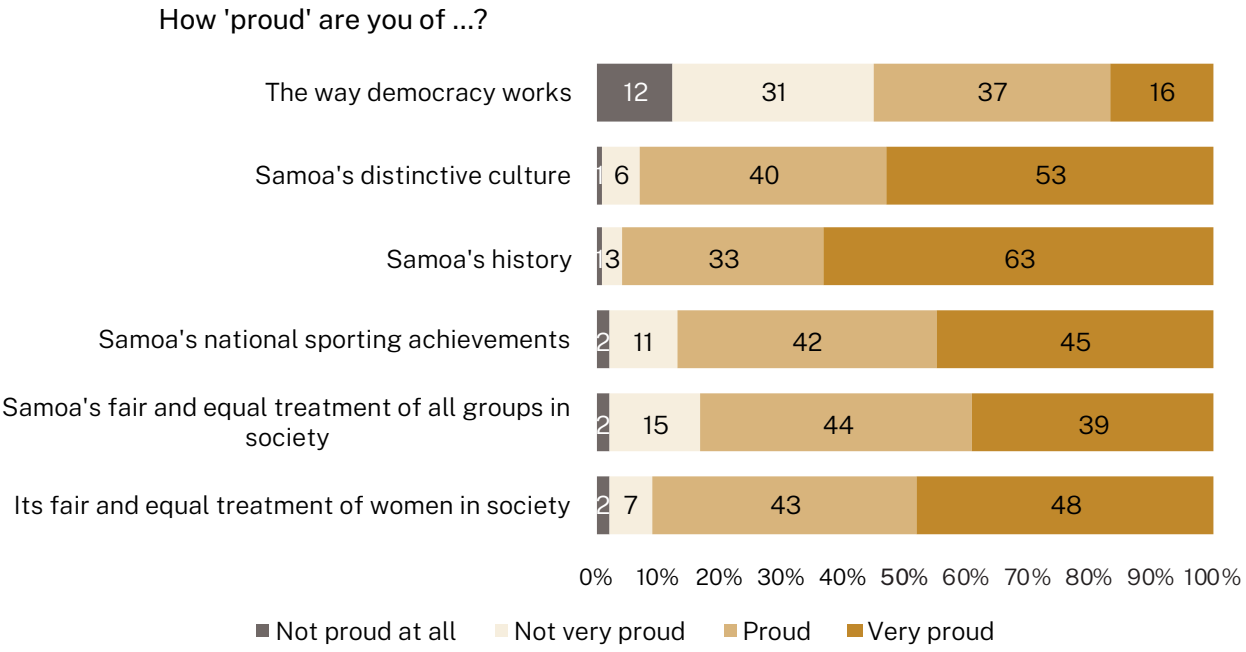
Respondents were also asked how proud they feel about different aspects of Samoan politics, history, and culture (Figure 3).

Respondents expressed high levels of national pride, though pride in Samoa's distinct culture and history tended to score higher than those aspects tied to state functions, like 'the way democracy works' and 'the fair and equal treatment of all groups in society'. These results reveal an overall preference for cultural elements over institutional ones when conceptualising Samoan nationhood. This indicates that the key strength of contemporary Samoan national identity lies less in the capacity of the state, and more in wider popular affiliations to Samoan culture and history.

Surprisingly, pride in the equal treatment of women went against this trend with a strong positive result, especially when compared to perceptions of the fair and equal treatment of 'all groups' in Samoa. This anomaly may be explained by the traditional concept of *feagaiga* or the covenant between a brother and his sister, where sisters are afforded *tama sa* (sacred sibling), *feagaiga* (covenant), *ilamutu* (family deity), *pae ma le auli* (peacemaker) and *itupa vaivai* (weaker party) status in the village and family social hierarchy (Va'a 2009:242). Moreover, Samoan traditional values of *faaaloalo* (respect), *tautua* (service) and *usitai* (obedience) (Va'a 2009:246) prescribe the behaviour and social interactions between men and women that most likely influence how men treat women. Seen in this context, gender quotas introduced in 2013 to increase women's representation in parliament may explain the high levels of pride displayed in the fair and equal treatment of women, as opposed to 'all groups in society'.

One stand-out finding of the national pride module is the relatively lower levels of pride respondents expressed in 'the way democracy works', compared with substantially higher levels of importance placed on 'respecting Samoan political institutions and laws'. Taken together, these findings suggest high levels of respect for political institutions and the law *in-principle*, but a relatively weaker perception of contemporary democratic performance *in practice*. These findings were largely paralleled in respondents' attitudes to democracy, discussed below.

Figure 3: Degree of 'pride' in aspects of Samoan society (%)



1.2 Samoan attitudes to democracy

With extremely few exceptions, Pacific democracies have proven highly resilient in the postcolonial era. That said, Pacific democracies are highly diverse in terms of their formal democratic institutions, including forms of parliamentary representation and electoral systems. More importantly, Pacific democracies have been adapted in a myriad of ways to reflect local traditions and circumstances, such that the nature and experience of Pacific democracies is often quite different to democratic systems in other parts of the world.

Samoan democracy is one of the oldest and, until recently, most stable in the Pacific. It has often been described as a hybridised or traditional system of democracy, in which traditional systems under the *Fa'amatai* have been incorporated into the modern democratic system (Huffer and So'o 2005). For example, only *matai* title holders are able to run for parliament. The incorporation of tradition in Samoa's democracy has been considered an important reason for its stability, providing balance and local legitimacy to an imported parliamentary system (La'alaai-Tausa 2020).

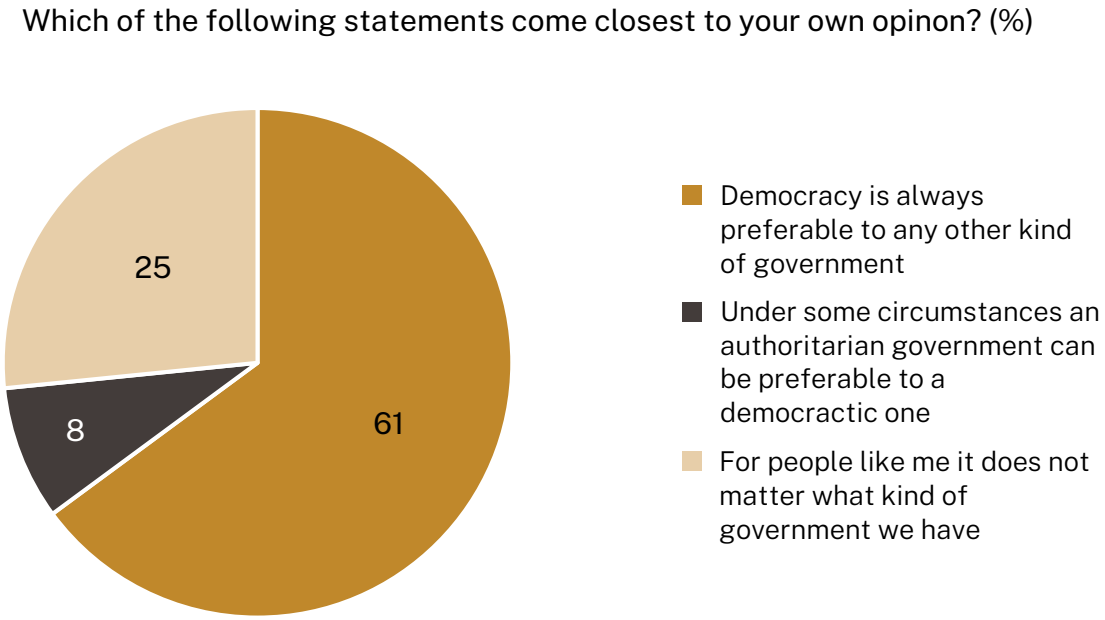
However, some scholars have argued that the incorporation of tradition has acted to undermine fundamental liberal democratic standards of democratic participation and accountability. Lawson (1993), for example, has argued that the traditional system of *Fa'amatai* has acted as a barrier to the proper functioning of democracy. She also argues that some aspects of traditional elitism have undermined these standards (Lawson 1996).

Indeed, the very stability of Samoan democracy, reflected in the longevity of the former HRPP government, raises the question of whether traditional notions of government have worked to limit democratic contestability and accountability in defence of notions of tradition and stability. These debates, along with the recent, historic change of government in 2021, highlight the timeliness and relevance of understanding popular political attitudes to democracy in Samoa.

The PAS asked a range of questions to improve understanding of how Samoans understand democracy, its value to their society, and how they rate its performance as a political system. While the Pacific is generally noted for its constitutional history of elites' commitments to democracy, the survey seeks to assess if this is matched by popular values, and popular rejection of authoritarian alternatives. The PAS also seeks to place Pacific understandings of democracy in an internationally comparative context. This is especially pertinent in recent times where global trends point towards the rise of illiberal democracies, populism and democratic recession (Diamond 2015). Whether a distinctive local understanding of democracy exists and remains resilient against these global trends is explored through respondent data in Samoa.

It should also be noted that the need to understand popular attitudes to democracy in Samoa was given fresh relevance by the national election in April 2021, and the historic change of government that ultimately followed. Taken as a whole, the survey results below suggest that Samoans value their democratic institutions very strongly. Moreover, Samoans have adapted their democratic institutions and values in line with deeper traditions of Samoan community and identity to form a distinctive notion of democracy with strong elements of consensus.

Figure 4: Preference for democracy (%)



Support for democracy

The PAS gauged respondents' preference for democratic systems, as opposed to the alternative of authoritarian rule (Figure 4). This question is one of the most extensively used indicators for measuring popular support for democracy globally (e.g. Welsh et al. 2016). Overall, 61% of Samoan respondents agreed that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government'. By contrast, just 8% of respondents selected 'under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one'. Notably, however, a substantial cohort of nearly one-quarter (25%) selected the third option: 'for people like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have'.[10]

These responses indicate a strong foundation of popular support for democracy in Samoa, and a very low level of support for authoritarian alternatives when compared to equivalent responses in South-East Asian countries, for example (see Box 2; Welsh et al. 2016:134).

Yet they also reveal a substantial minority unconvinced that the choice of political system directly matters to their own lives. In explaining why this group feels this way, cohort analysis can offer useful insights. When these responses were disaggregated by gender, women (30%) were more likely to report that 'for people like me it does not really matter what kind of government they have' than men (20%). This finding suggests women feel relatively disempowered in decision-making, at least relative to men.

Similarly, age was also found to have a strong significant relationship with attitudes to this question. Respondents aged 21–29 were significantly less likely (58%) to state that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government' than respondents aged 30–59 (67%) or aged 60+ (69%). This finding was the first of several to suggest relatively strong generational differences in political attitudes in Samoa.

Satisfaction with democracy

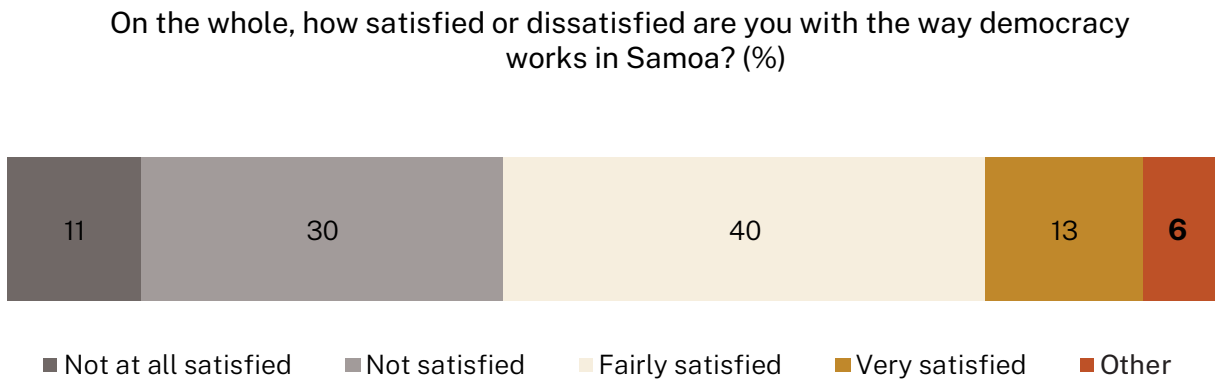
Typically, political attitudes surveys (e.g. GBS 2018) divide popular support for democracy into two types. These are best understood as ideal-based and performance-based models of support for democracy. Essentially, these models test whether people support democracy because democratic values and procedures are considered inherently valuable, and superior to

Box 2: Support for democracy in international comparison

As we identified at the start of this section, the PAS found a strong foundation of popular support for democracy in Samoa, and a very low level of support for authoritarian alternatives, when compared to equivalent responses elsewhere. For example, the Asian Barometer Survey found significantly higher levels of support for authoritarian alternatives in most South-East Asian countries, including formal democracies like the Philippines (31%) and Indonesia (16%). In contrast, Burma (4%) was the only country to produce a lower score than Samoan respondents (see Welsh et al. 2016:134).

As we also pointed out, respondents demonstrate strong levels of support for democracy on both ideal (61%) and performance-based (53%) grounds. It is notable that in developing countries, performance-based measures often tend to dominate. This is often considered a fragile basis for liberal democracy, susceptible to populist surges (see GBS 2018). Despite being classified as a lower-middle income country (World Bank 2021b), Samoa joins higher income democracies in having a strong ideal-based preference for democracy.

Figure 5: Degree of satisfaction with how democracy works in Samoa (%)



the alternatives (ideal-based); or because democracy currently delivers good results, such as development or economic growth (performance-based).

Having assesssed how respondents feel about democratic governance in principle, above (Figure 4), the PAS then asked respondents to reflect on how Samoan democracy works in practice. Overall, Samoans were satisfied with the way their democracy works. In response to the question 'on the whole, how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Samoa?' a total of 53% of Samoans reported that they were either 'fairly satisfied' or 'very satisfied',[11] compared with 41% who were 'not at all satisfied' or 'not satisfied' (Figure 5).[12]

We then used cohort analysis to assess factors associated with democratic satisfaction. Notably, there were no significant correlations between democratic satisfaction and respondent age, income, education level or gender. There was, however, a very strong correlation between those who perceived the economy positively and satisfaction with democracy. Accordingly, those rating the overall economic condition of the country positively[13] were significantly more likely to report satisfaction with the way democracy works in Samoa (66%) than those who rated the economic condition negatively (42%). This reflects performance-based support elsewhere in the democratic world, which tends to rise and fall with economic performance (GBS 2018:24).

Civil liberties and separation of powers

The PAS also sought to gauge respondent perceptions of the suite of civil and political rights associated with liberal democracies, and popular understandings of the separation of powers. Table 1 details responses to these questions, and a range of related questions about key elements of modern democracies. Responses indicate a strong popular recognition that Samoa promotes fundamental civil liberties and political rights, such

Table 1: Civil liberties and separation of powers — 'How much do you agree?' (%)

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
People are free to say what they think without fear	44	42	86	10	4
People can join any organisation they like without fear	45	44	89	7	3
When the government breaks the law, there is nothing the legal system can do	25	18	43	24	33
When judges decide important cases, they should follow the view of government	14	26	40	29	31
When the country is facing a difficult situation, it is okay for the government to ignore the law to deal with it	16	33	49	32	19

Table 2: Parties and elections — 'How much do you agree?' (%)

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Political parties are suitable for our system of governance	15	36	51	35	14
Politics seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what is going on	27	36	63	26	10
People have the power to change a government they don't like	41	37	78	17	5

as freedom of speech and assembly. An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that people can say what they think (86%), or join any organisations they like (89%), without fear.

There was also broad popular appreciation of the separation of powers, and the ability of courts to hold governments to account, with a majority (57%) disagreeing with the proposition that 'when the government breaks the law, there is nothing the legal system can do'. Likewise, a clear majority of respondents (60%) rejected the notion that judges 'should follow the views of government' when deciding important cases. In the case of invoking government emergency powers 'when the country is facing a difficult situation', however, responses were evenly divided, with 49% agreeing that it is 'okay for the government to ignore the law to deal with it'.

Parties and elections

Respondents also displayed high levels of confidence that 'people have the power to change a government they do not like' (78%), despite the fact that, at the time of the survey, there had not been a change of government in some 35 years (Table 2).[14] Confidence in the administration of the Samoan electoral system was also strong, and relatively few respondents (12%) considered the previous election (2016) had not been free and fair.

An especially notable finding is that respondents were evenly divided between those who believe 'political parties are suitable for Samoa's system of government' (50%) and those who do not (49%). As we will see below, popular trust in political parties as institutions is also relatively low, when compared with other political institutions in Samoa (see Table 2). As Wood (26/8/2021) notes, national politics has had a fundamentally local focus in Samoa, and takes place against a background of strong hierarchical, customary political institutions. These institutions provide a strong focus for collective action that has hitherto allowed for single party dominance. Likewise, So'o (2008:203) argues that the Samoan party system reflects aspects of the traditional context in which it developed. Thus, while democracy and political parties are slowly becoming accepted, a substantial section of the population still hold significant reservations (So'o 2008:204). This may explain why 63% of respondents feel that politics is so 'complicated' to understand.

Box 3: The role of the Church

One notable finding was the importance respondents placed on the government consulting with the Church when making decisions. The view that the 'the government should consult the Church when making laws' was supported by nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents. This represents a fairly emphatic rejection of secularism. It is, however, unsurprising in the Pacific context, where several countries have placed specific religious references in their constitutions.

This is not to suggest that the relationship between Church and state in Samoa is a simple or unidirectional one. These relationships are often uneasy and adversarial in Samoa and one has a relative impact on the other in the formation of public opinion, particularly in relation to whether issues are perceived as secular or religious, political or moral concerns. The recent imposition of taxes on the *faifeau* (clergy) and the head of state with the introduction of the Income Tax Amendment Bill in 2017 is a case in point. The issue caused much public controversy and resulted in defiant pastors from the EFKS – CCCS (Ekalesia Faalapotopotoga Kerisiano I Samoa – Congregational Christian Church of Samoa) facing court action (2017, 2021). Such publicly displayed tensions between the Church and the state can influence participants' responses.

Table 3: Role of government in a democracy — 'Which of the following statements do you agree with most? Choose the first or the second statement.'

Statement	Selected (%)	Statement	Selected (%)	Statement	Selected (%)	Average value (%)
Government leaders implement what the voters want.	23	Government is our employee; the people should tell government what needs to be done.	35	The media should have the right to publish news ideas without government control.	33	30
Government leaders do what they think is best for the people.	76	The government is like a parent, it should decide what is good for us.	64	The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that might be harmful to society.	66	69

Role of government in democracy

A further series of questions then assess the degree to which respondents held a 'bottom-up' conception of popular sovereignty, or a more 'top-down' view of government as a guardian of society. Despite a robust endorsement of civil liberties and checks on executive power, noted above, respondents strongly favoured a conception of government as guardian or leader of the people (Table 3).

In these responses, a majority of respondents believed government 'should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that might be harmful to society' (66%) and that the 'government is like a parent, it should decide what is good for us' (64%). More than three-quarters of respondents agreed with the notion that 'government leaders do what they think is best for the people' rather than implementing 'what voters want'. Averaged over the three questions, respondents strongly favoured (69%) a conception of government as a guardian or leader of the people.

These findings were reinforced in further questions designed to examine democratic values (see Table 4). Perhaps most striking of these was the popular endorsement of government's role in limiting discussion of certain ideas, a position inimical to the core liberal democratic norm of a free press, with 82% of respondents agreeing that 'government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society'.

Cohort analysis offered insights into these distinctive responses on the role of government in a democracy. Though support was high in general across all demographic groups, rural respondents (84%) were

Table 4: Democratic values — 'There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?' (%)

Indicator	Strongly approve	Approve	Total approve	Disapprove	Strongly disapprove
The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society	33	49	82	11	7
People with little or no education should have as much say in politics as highly educated people	42	37	79	15	7
The government should consult the Church when making laws	33	41	74	18	8
Traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people	12	31	43	39	18

more likely to hold the view that 'the government should decide whether certain ideas should be discussed in society' than urban respondents (73%). Moreover, respondents aged 60 or above were more likely (25%) to oppose this view than those from younger age brackets (15%); as were the university-educated (25%), compared to those with primary or secondary education (16%).

Balancing out these views of government as a guardian of society, respondents strongly supported notions of citizen equality in relation to education levels (79%), agreeing that 'people with little or no education should have as much say in politics as highly educated people'. A majority (57%) also disapproved of the notion that 'traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics', though this proposition had the support of a very substantial minority (42%).

Taken together, the findings above point to a distinct model of Samoan democracy in which respect for modern democratic norms is tempered and entwined with respect for tradition and associated notions of hierarchy and community leadership. The results suggest a traditional political culture favouring a view of the state as a guardian of society, leavened with more liberal democratic views on civil liberties, the separation of powers and citizen equality.

Certainly, as we note above in the national identity module, the ongoing importance of traditional authority in conceptions of political community was matched by indicators of respect for modern state authority. These various responses suggest that popular perceptions of the government as a 'guardian' of society are balanced by strong support for democratic norms and institutions. Overall, these responses demonstrate a distinctive mix of democratic and traditional values in Samoa's political culture, and the way certain types of traditional legitimacy are integrated within the democratic order in Pacific societies.

The role of tradition

Following on from the above, several questions sought to gauge the importance ascribed to traditional forms of legitimacy in modern democratic contexts. The PAS asked respondents two questions related to the role of Samoan tradition and democratic principles. When asked whether 'it is important to respect tradition and culture even if it goes against the law', some 85% of respondents agreed. The statement that 'government should recognise the traditional way of doing things', attracted even stronger agreement from respondents (97%).

Focusing on specific features of Samoa's polity, the survey also gauged respondent attitudes to the proposition that 'only traditional leaders should be able to run for parliament'. We found that attitudes to practices of *matai* candidature were evenly divided, with 50% approval, and 49% disapproval[15] (see Boxes 4 and 5 for further discussion). And as noted above, a minority — albeit a significant one of 42% — agreed that traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people. Notably, 70% of respondents agreed that 'our system of government works well because it blends modern and traditional elements', suggesting that support for the general principle of hybridity exceeds some specific examples.

Considered as a whole, these results are indicative of the way traditional systems and notions of legitimacy have been intertwined in modern democratic institutions in Samoa. Attitudes towards notions of consensus politics formed another distinctive aspect of these findings.

Box 4: Changes in *matai* candidature

The *Fa'amatai* is a fundamental element of Samoan culture which was incorporated into the adopted Westminster parliamentary system under the constitution. This important cultural element provided a unique feature of Samoan democracy: only persons with *matai* titles can stand as candidates in parliamentary elections. The practice echoes the Samoan understanding that decision-making in parliament at the national level mirrors the assembly of chiefs at the village and district level. Such an understanding was also reflected in the consensus political approaches from the 1960s to the 1980s when the candidates were mostly paramount chiefs such as those with the *Tama-a-Aiga* chiefly titles and orators of highest ranks.

The election of university-educated paramount chiefs and the development of political parties in the mid-1970s brought a new dimension to *matai* candidature. Since 1975, no *Tama-a-Aiga* has held the office of prime minister until 2021 when Fiame Naomi Mata'afa became the first female prime minister of Samoa.

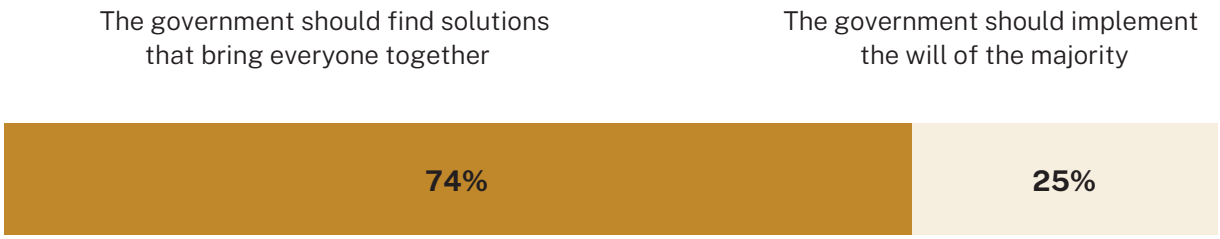
Conservative Samoans have often claimed that the earlier practice of *matai* suffrage — in which the franchise itself was limited to *matai* — led to the proliferation of *matai* titles to improve parliamentary candidates' chance of winning. It was only in the 1991 general election that all Samoans aged 21 years and above were allowed to vote.

Today, *matai* candidature continues to be a unique feature of Samoan democracy but merit, party designs and political prowess have increasingly brought lower ranks of *matai* as candidates to parliament.

Democratic culture: Consensus versus majoritarianism

Though practices vary widely across the Pacific, traditional modes of decision-making may emphasise consensus decision-making over majoritarian decisions.[16] This is the essence of conceptions of the 'Pacific Way', much emphasised in the decolonisation era (Fraenkel 2013:35). Though there is an ideological component

Figure 6: Consensus-driven or majoritarian attitudes (%)



to those notions, it also frequently reflects traditional realties. These modes of decision-making may be highly legitimate in local contests, highlighting tension with modern forms of democratic decision-making based on individualised voting and electoral majorities. These in turn are linked to related tensions between communal rights and individualised notions of political rights, more consistent with Western democratic norms.

For more traditional communities, majoritarian democracy may often be seen as divisive, and prone to fostering party competition and conflict. Conversely, traditional conceptions of consensus decision-making may be seen to undermine ideas of formal citizenship equality, through the reproduction of customary power relations, and embedded hierarchies of gender, age and class (Cummins and Leach 2012:95). Without valorising either model, there are distinct conceptions of democracy at play here. With this background in mind, the PAS attempted to capture popular preferences for consensus versus majoritarian models of democracy.

When asked if 'government should find solutions that bring everyone together' or 'government should implement the will of the majority' (Figure 6), some 74% of respondents favoured the former, consensus view of government, with 25% favouring the majoritarian view. Given the strong leaning towards social conformity, which is seen by many as a cultural imperative in Samoan society (Vaai 2021), this result is not surprising. Notably, no significant demographic associations were evident in these results. This suggests consensus understandings of democracy are nationally pervasive, transcending group differences.

A further set of questions explored notions of consensus in more detail (Table 5). Responses here also demonstrated a strong preference for consensus-driven understandings of democracy, even when potential drawbacks of consensus decision-making were highlighted in the question. Though a majority of 61% supported a definitional notion that 'democracy means the majority wins', substantially stronger support was found for the next two questions, which reflected a consensus-based approach to decision-making.

The purpose of democracy

The PAS then sought to understand what Samoans understand the purpose of their democracy to be. Respondents were asked to select statements that corresponded with four distinct understandings of the value of democracy: good governance (e.g. quality public services, minimal corruption); social equality (reducing the gap between rich and poor); individual freedom and liberty (e.g. protecting political rights and civil liberties); or democratic norms and procedures (e.g. fostering free and fair political competition). Majority support for good governance and social equality indicators indicate a country has a 'substantive' (or performance-based)

Table 5: Consensus-driven or majoritarian attitudes — 'How much do you agree with the following?' (%)

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Democracy means the majority wins	19	42	61	26	5
Democracy means everybody should come to an agreement	26	50	76	15	3
It is better that as many people as possible agree, even if this means decisions or outcomes are compromised	27	47	74	16	4

interpretation of democracy. This means that a majority judge democracy in terms of its outcomes. Conversely, where a majority understand democracy as a system protecting freedom and liberties, or guaranteeing democratic norms and procedures, and checks and balances on power, the country has a 'procedural' or idealist interpretation of democracy (GBS 2018).

As noted at the start of this section, our survey found strong levels of support for democracy on *both* ideal-based and performance-based grounds, albeit with a narrow lead for the former. These questions generally reinforced that finding, with respondents declaring broadly similar levels of a substantive (50%) and a procedural (44%) understanding of democracy.[17] The largest number of Samoan respondents (31%) expressed an understanding of democracy as a system that encourages good governance, while another 19% of our sample understood democracy to be a system supporting social equality. Some 27% understood democracy as a system guaranteeing democratic norms and procedures, while a further 17% of respondents understood democracy as a guarantor of rights and liberties.

1.3 Samoan attitudes to government

The previous section gauged Samoan attitudes to the role of government in a democratic context. We found that a majority of Samoans viewed government as a guardian or protector of society and valued a consensus approach to governing. This section focuses on popular satisfaction with government performance, and levels of popular trust in institutions. It also examines the expectations Samoan citizens have of their government.

Satisfaction with government

Above we found that some 53% of Samoans reported that they were satisfied with democracy. Figure 7 reports on a parallel question, this time asking: 'how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current national government?' Overall, respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with their government (66%).[18] Notably, this figure is higher than respondent satisfaction with democracy as an ideal political system.

A significant correlation was again found between a positive perception of the economy and levels of satisfaction with the government's performance. As such, those who rated the overall economic condition of the country positively were significantly more likely to report satisfaction with the current government (79%) than those who rated economic conditions negatively (44%).

Trust in institutions

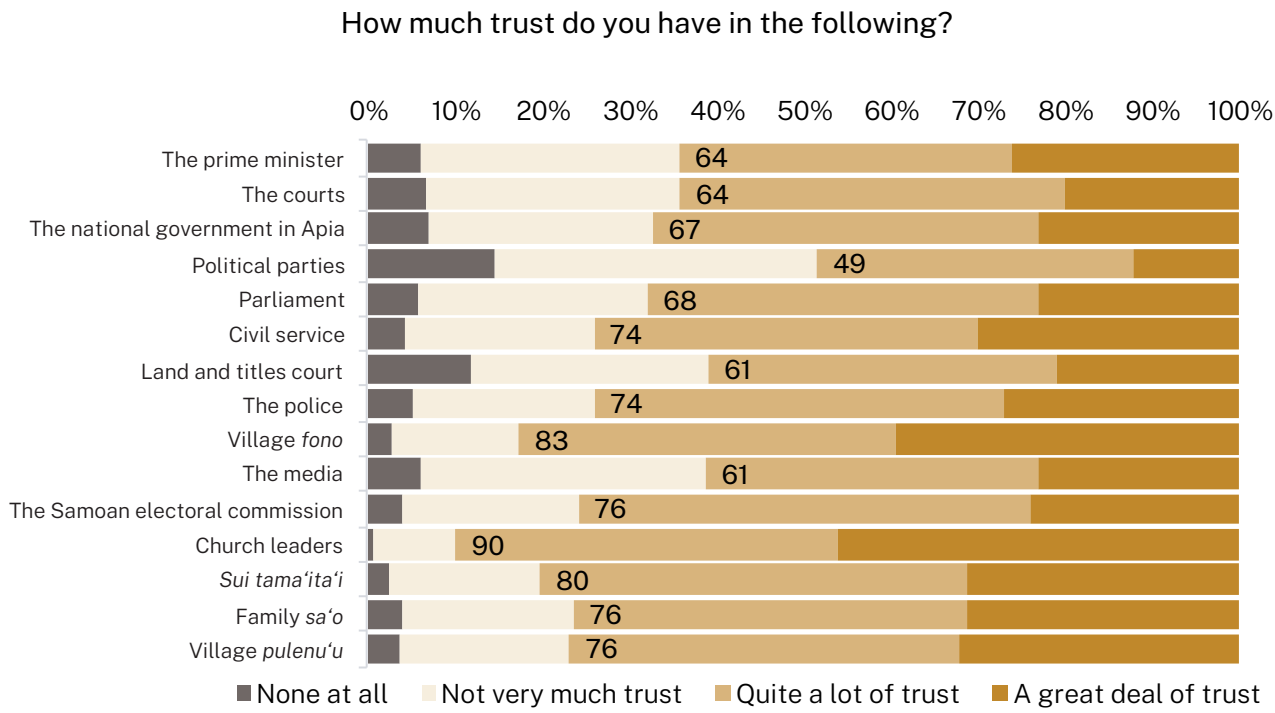
The PAS sought to assess trust in a range of institutions, categorised into three types. The first is elected institutions, such as the parliament. The second group is non-elected branches of government, such as the courts or civil service. This distinction is important because in theory citizens' trust towards elected institutions tends to be reflective of government reputation, while trust in non-elected institutions tends to be an evaluation of state capacity (GBS 2018:63). Our third category seeks to evaluate trust in traditional institutions.[19] Figure 8 shows the various levels of trust in different institutions, while Table 6 groups these into elected (the prime minister, parliament, the national government), non-elected (the courts, civil service, the police), and traditional categories (Church leaders; *sui tama'ita'i* — village woman representative; family *sa'o* — chiefly head of the family; village *pulenu'u* — mayor; village *fono* or council).

Findings indicated that respondents placed higher levels of trust in traditional institutions (81%), followed by non-elected (71%) and then elected institutions (66%). This suggests that Samoans have somewhat more trust in state capacity than in the government's reputation. Importantly, however, both these dimensions of institutional trust were overshadowed by trust in traditional institutions.

This is reflected most clearly in the role of village councils. Samoa's Village Fono Act 1990 formalised the position of the village *fono* as a tier of governance.[20] The PAS found that trust in village councils was second only to Church leaders in terms of popular trust. This was especially true in rural areas, where 85% of respondents reported trust in the *fono*, compared with 73% in urban areas. This high level of trust helps explain other results, including the question of whether the 'village *fono* should

Figure 7: Degree of satisfaction with the current national government (%)

Figure 8: Degree of trust in institutions (%)



Note: Figures represent combined totals of 'quite a lot of trust' and 'a great deal of trust'.

have more authority over local decisions than it does now', which attracted 83% agreement from respondents. This view was also held especially strongly in rural areas (85%) compared to urban (74%). In general, the survey found higher levels of trust in traditional institutions in rural areas. This reinforces the idea that traditional notions of government are strongest where they remain most relevant and closest to communities.

While our survey found high levels of trust for both formal and traditional systems of government, trust in political parties was comparatively low.[21] Likewise, the media and the land and titles court appear to hold more disputed levels of public trust.

Overall, the PAS found high levels of trust in government generally, with 79% of respondents agreeing that 'you can generally trust the people who run government to do what is right'; though rural respondents were more likely (81%) to agree than were urban respondents (72%). Satisfaction with the present government was also high (70%) in early 2021, though Samoans also rated governments of 10 years ago as 'more democratic' than the present government, while also believing governments will be substantially more democratic in 10 years time.

What do Samoans want from their government?

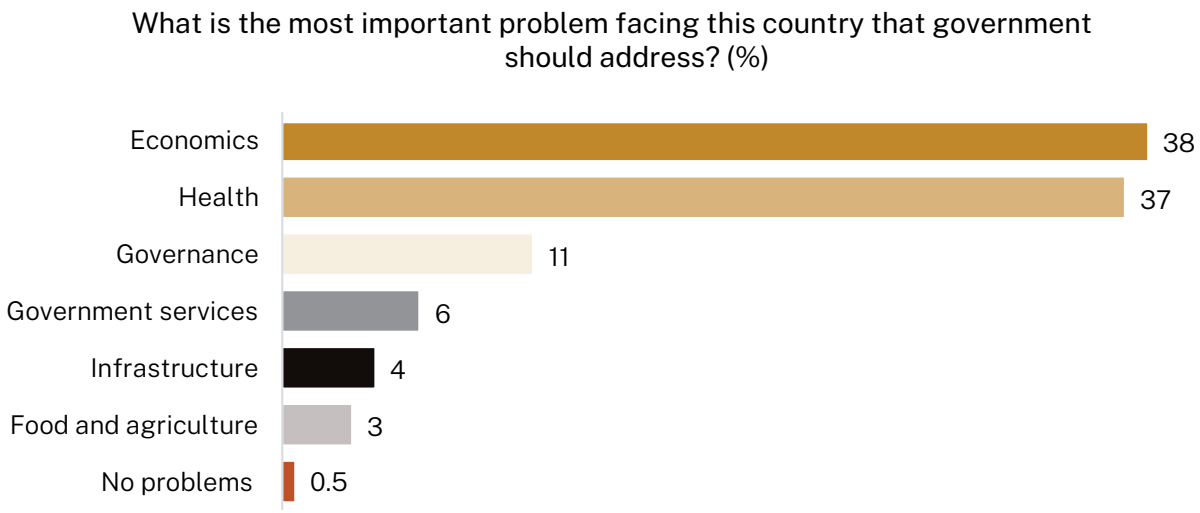
We asked Samoans what they want from their government. When asked if they had to choose between 'reducing economic inequality' or 'protecting political freedom', 61% of respondents said 'reducing economic inequality' was more important than 'protecting political freedoms'. These findings resonate strongly with Samoa's *Fa'amatai* and the 'ideal social organisation' (Le Tagaloa 1992), based as it is on mutuality and reciprocity, where everyone has a place and the well-being of all in the *aiga* is paramount. This particular finding is a measure of a collective notion of rights.

When asked 'what is the most important problem facing this country that government should address?' economics (38%) and health (37%) were the two biggest areas of concern for respondents (Figure 9). Specifically, the largest responses were for disease control, general health expenditures, economic management, and wages and incomes. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the

Table 6: Trust in institutions (%)

	A great deal of trust	Quite a lot of trust	Total trust	Not very much trust	None at all
Elected	24	42	66	27	6
Non-elected	26	45	71	24	4
Traditional	36	45	81	16	2

Figure 9: Samoa's most important problem for government to address (%)



survey was conducted during the COVID-19 outbreak, and in the wake of Samoa's 2019 measles epidemic.

A majority of Samoans were confident in the ability of their government to address their key development problems. More than two-thirds (73%) of respondents indicated confidence that their identified problem will be solved within the next five years.

Corruption

It is well established in the comparative literature that perceptions of corruption undermine support for democracy (GBS 2018:83). In the Pacific, 'corruption' as a concept remains difficult to navigate, as definitions and local understandings of corruption vary widely between different Pacific states (Walton 2013:178). The PAS asked a set of questions designed to understand how respondents view the extent of corruption in Samoa, and whether certain activities are locally perceived as legitimate or corrupt.

Political attitudes surveys frequently find that citizens perceive significantly higher levels of corruption at the national rather than local level (e.g. GBS 2018:86). This was not the case in Samoa, where perceptions of corruption were strikingly similar at the national and village levels (Figure 10). Some 51% of respondents believed there was some level of corruption in the village council, as compared to 57% in the national government. One factor in the relative similarity in perceptions of corruption may lie in the close links between local and national government. For example, the requirement of traditional local legitimacy (*matai* title) for national candidacy means national MPs have strong ties to local communities. The Village Fono Act, which incorporates village government into national government, clearly links the two levels of government and blurs significant demarcations.

The PAS examined local definitions of corruption, asking a series of questions to test how cultural notions of service and obligation influenced understandings

Figure 10: Degree of corruption (%)

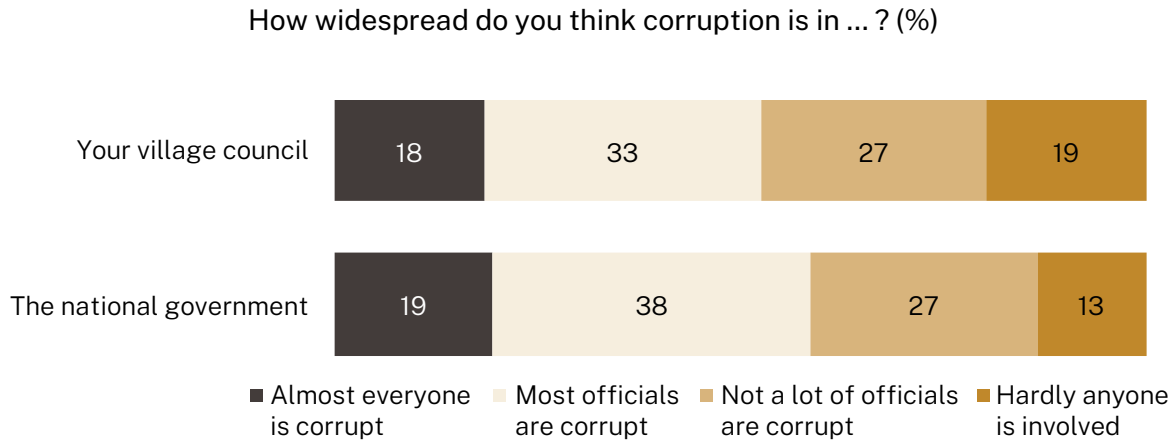
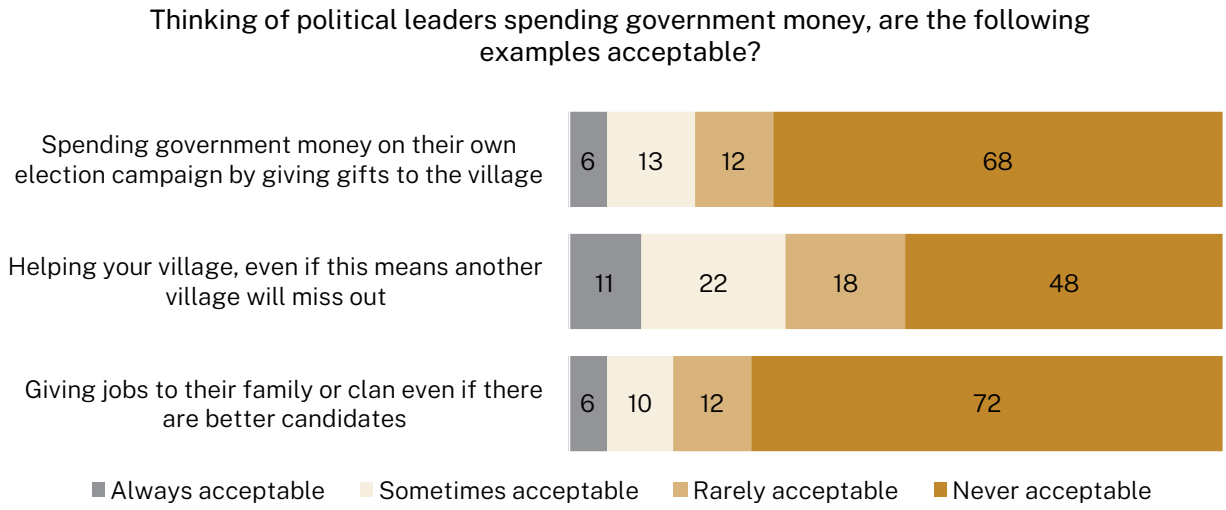


Figure 11: Understandings of corruption (%)



of corruption. Interestingly, the example of political leaders 'giving jobs to their family or clan, even if there are better candidates' provoked the strongest negative response, with just 16% of Samoans believing this is ever acceptable. The strong response here suggests that the idea of a meritocracy within Samoa is quite prevalent, which reflects other survey responses underlining social equality. Just 19% of respondents considered 'spending government money on their own election campaign by giving gifts to the village' to be an acceptable practice.

By contrast, a larger number of respondents (34%) considered it acceptable for political leaders to 'help their own village, even if this means another village will miss out'. Notably, this practice was considered somewhat more acceptable by younger respondents aged 21–29 (40%) than by older respondents (29%) aged 30 and above.

1.4 Political participation — who gets a say in politics?

A vibrant democracy relies on politically engaged citizens. The PAS asked a range of questions to better understand forms of political participation in Samoa. This section examines popular attitudes to issues of political participation, including levels of interest in politics, perceptions of leadership qualities at different levels of government, attitudes to the participation of women, forms of political engagement by citizens, and attitudes to different modes of dispute resolution.

Leadership in Samoa

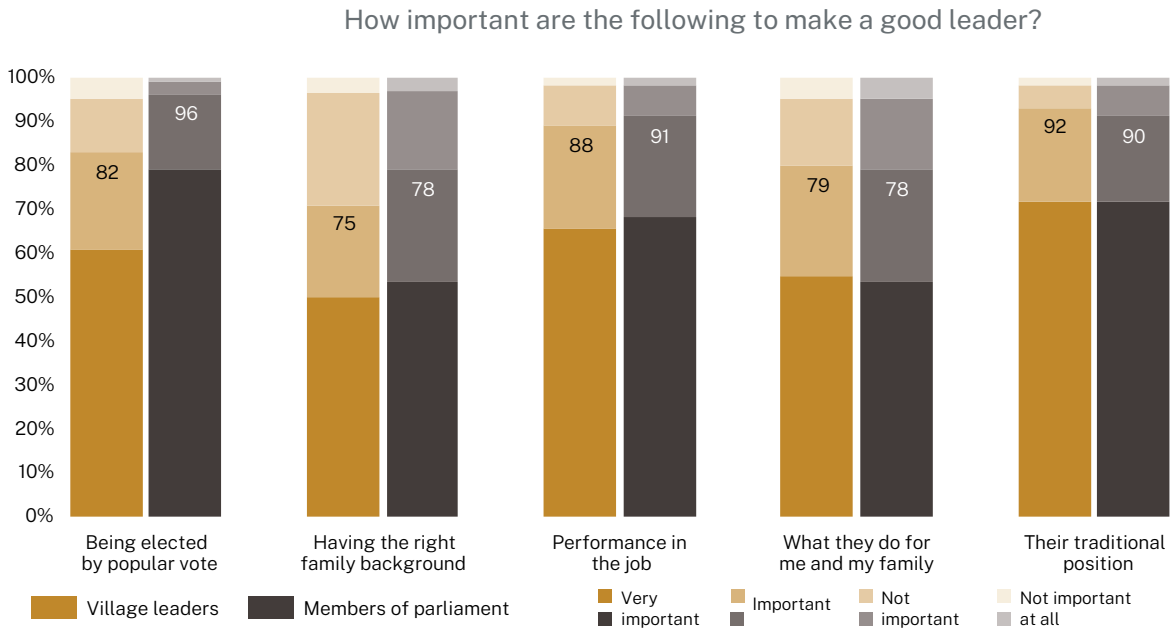
The *Fa'asamoa* accords particular importance to traditional forms of leadership. In particular, the position of *matai* is a key leadership institution, incorporated formally into the state through the Village Fono Act and in the privileged position accorded to *matai* to run for parliament.

The literature in Samoa nonetheless highlights tensions between the types of authority enjoyed by traditional leaders, and by democratically elected leaders. Some (e.g. Aiono 1986 cited in La'alaai-Tausa 2020) have argued that incorporation of the *Fa'amatai* into Samoa's political system makes it a true democracy and 'the perfect manifestation of the will and authority of the people'. That is to say, Samoan democracy embodies the ideal of *matai* service and the need for anointed traditional leaders to serve the collective interests of community. Others (Larmour 1997; Lawson 1993) have argued that the incorporation of traditional institutions into Samoa's democratic system has instead compromised democracy, by undermining key principles such as citizen equality and individual freedoms.

While Samoa is often understood to have a traditional or hybridised form of democracy, our results paint a more complex picture of leadership. This was particularly evident in terms of popular expectations of leaders. The PAS asked a number of questions about village leaders, who as noted above are often the most visible and proximate political leader Samoans relate to (Figure 12). A clear majority of respondents agreed it was important for village leaders to be elected by popular vote (60% very important, 22% important). At the same time, a significant number also thought it was important village leaders had the right family background (53% very important, 22% important). This 'double legitimation' captures the intertwined natures of the two sources of authority in Samoa.

Respondents also thought performance in the job was an important criterion in judging the effectiveness of village leaders. When asked how important 'performance in the job' was in terms of making a good leader, some 65% chose 'very important' and 23% 'important'. Interestingly — though with one important exception — Samoans tended to apply the same leadership criteria to members of the national parliament as they did to

Figure 12: Attributes of a good leader (%)



Note: Figures represent combined totals of 'somewhat important' and 'very important'.

village leaders, emphasising their traditional position, and performance in the job, at similarly high levels. The sole exception was 'being elected by popular vote', in which expectations of MPs were significantly higher (96%) than on village leaders (82%).

Attitudes to leadership also varied depending on the demographic profile of respondents. For example, those with a tertiary education were significantly less likely to think a village leader's traditional position was important (65%) compared to those with a secondary or primary education (75%).

Box 5: Traditional leadership and *matai* candidature

The PAS gauged respondent attitudes to the proposition that 'only traditional leaders should be able to run for parliament'. We found support for practices of *matai* candidature to be evenly divided, with 50% approval and 49% disapproval.

	Strongly approve (%)	Approve (%)	Total approval (%)	Disapprove (%)	Strongly disapprove (%)
Only traditional leaders should be able to run for parliament	24	26	50	32	17

Notably, support for the notion that traditional leaders alone should be able to run for parliament was significantly higher among rural respondents (53%) than urban respondents (39%). Male respondents (56%) also expressed higher degrees of support for this restriction than did women (44%). Notably, just 10% of *matai* titles are held by women (SBS 2017). Education was a key factor in attitudes as well, with 39% of tertiary-educated supporting the system, compared with 69% of primary-educated and 52% of secondary-educated Samoans.

When asked a similar question about whether 'traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people', 42% of respondents agreed. Again, both rural residence and levels of education proved influential. Where 46% of primary-and secondary-educated respondents supported this view, support dropped to 31% among the university-educated. Similarly, rural respondents were more likely to support this (44%) than were urban respondents (34%).

Table 7: Gender and politics — 'How much do you agree with the following?' (%)

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Women should be involved in politics as much as men	46	42	88	9	3
A woman should become Prime Minister of our country	61	24	85	9	6
A woman should become Head of State in our country	24	25	49	25	24
There should be temporary special measures to increase women's representation in parliament	39	39	78	15	7
In general men are better at political leadership than women	17	27	44	30	26
University education is more important for a man than a woman	5	15	20	30	49
Women should not speak in village councils	18	19	37	26	37
Men and women should have the same rights to own land	62	24	86	8	5

Women in politics

The PAS further explored popular attitudes towards women's participation in politics. This is especially pertinent in Samoa, which is one of the few countries in the region to have introduced gender quotas within their parliament. The laws at the time of the survey required five women (10%) MPs as a minimum:[22] a requirement that would become an important feature of post-election court cases following the very close 2021 election.

When asked about the five women MPs in Samoa's parliament of 51 at the time of the survey, 56% of respondents believed there were 'too few' women represented in parliament. Another 37% thought the number was 'just right', while just 7% felt that there were 'too many'. Interestingly, older Samoans (30+) were more likely to think there were 'too few' women in parliament (58%) than younger Samoans (49%). Similarly, those with tertiary education (65%) were more likely to think that there were 'too few' women in parliament compared with the primary-and secondary-educated (53%).

The PAS then canvassed a broader range of popular attitudes about gender and political participation (Table 7). Overall, there was strong majority support for women to play an active role in government. Notably, 88% of respondents felt 'women should be involved in politics as much as men'. This finding was reflected in strong agreement (85%) that 'a woman should become Prime Minister of our country'. However, this same level of support did not extend to the head of state (*O le Ao o le Malo*), with just 49% agreeing that 'a woman should become Head of State in our country'. This likely reflects the fact that the head of state in Samoa has a strong traditional basis.

Once again, the PAS found significant differences between the views of young and older Samoans, with younger Samoans being more conservative in their views than older Samoans. Where 51% of those aged 21–29 strongly agreed that 'a woman should become Prime Minister of our country', this figure was significantly higher among those aged 30 or above (65%). However, there was one exception. Younger people were more

Figure 13: Degree of interest in politics (%)

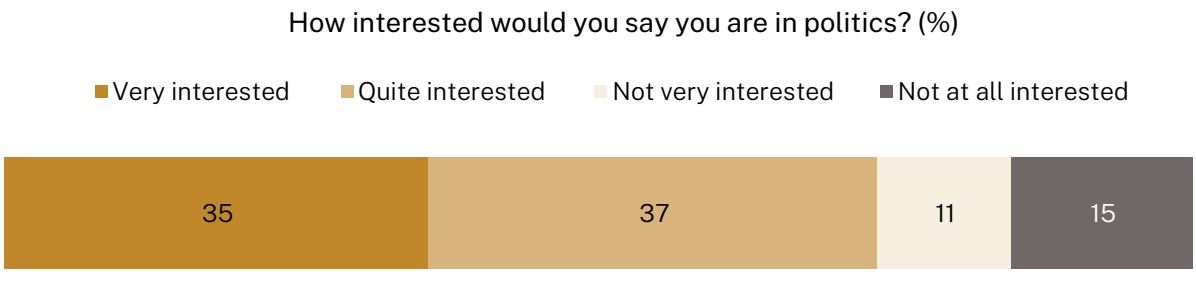


Table 8: Gendered interest in politics (%)

	Very interested	Quite interested	Total interest	Not very interested	Not at all interested
Men	43	33	76	10	13
Women	27	42	69	13	18

likely to agree that a woman could become head of state (55%) than were seniors, aged 60+ (43%). This fit a wider pattern in the data which showed that while older respondents have more democratic attitudes, they were also more traditional in their outlook.

While popular attitudes to women's participation in politics were generally positive, there was nonetheless a large minority who agreed that 'in general men are better at political leadership than women' (44%). Education levels were a significant factor here. Tertiary-educated respondents were less likely to agree that 'in general men are better at political leadership than women' (35%), than were primary or secondary-educated respondents (46%). Likewise, tertiary-educated respondents were less likely to agree that 'university education is more important for a man than a woman' (12%) than the primary-or secondary-educated (23%).

Political engagement

This section examines forms of political engagement and participation by Samoans, to better understand how they relate to their democracy and seek to affect change on issues that matter to them. Participants were initially asked how interested they were in politics (Figure 13). A substantial majority of respondents (72%) expressed some level of interest in politics, noting that the survey was conducted in the lead-up to the 2021 Samoan general election.

We found a strong positive correlation between respondent age and their reported interest in politics. Thus, for example, where 39% of respondents aged 21–29 reported little or no interest in politics, this dropped to just 22% for respondents aged 30–59; and 26% for those aged 60 and above. To emphasise this trend, younger people reported being 'very interested' in politics at half the rate (20%) of older cohorts (40%). These results reflected other indicators in the survey which suggest young people feel disconnected from politics as their ability to engage is limited by tradition.

Similar findings were evident when responses were disaggregated by gender, with men (43%) more likely to be 'very interested' in politics compared to women (27% 'very interested') (Table 8). The reasons for this are likely to mirror those applying to younger people; that is, that women feel less connected to political life for traditional reasons. This finding reflects similar outcomes globally (GBS 2018:55).

When asked how often they discuss political matters with friends or family members, 29% of respondents selected 'frequently', while 55% reported 'occasionally' discussing political matters, and 15% reported 'never' talking about political matters. Again, older respondents were significantly more likely to report discussing political matters with friends or family: where 38% for seniors reported discussing political matters 'frequently', this figure dropped to 30% for adults and 22% for young respondents.

The PAS then asked respondents whether they had engaged in any of the following forms of political action in the previous three years (Table 9). While some of these standard measures of political participation were undertaken by relatively few respondents, one-third of respondents reported talking to their MP at least once (32%). Higher again was the response rate for 'got together with others to try resolve local problems' (55%). This reflects the notion that while formal political engagement might be low, informal activities at the local level attract stronger engagement.

These measures generally highlighted the correlation between age and increased political participation. For example, where 60% of youth reported they had 'never' got together with others to solve local problems, this figure dropped to 42% for adults and 31% for seniors. This same pattern held true across multiple participation measures. These figures clearly reflect the increasing authority to act within traditional communities that comes with age.

Table 9: Political participation — 'Have you done any of these things in the past three years?' (%)

	Once	More than once	Never done
Got together with others to try resolve local problems	17	38	45
Talked to your MP	11	21	68
Signed a petition	7	9	84
Joined an NGO or advocacy group	7	9	84
Attended a demonstration or protest march	4	4	93
Joined a political party	2	2	95

Parallel findings were evident when results were disaggregated by gender. For example, men (42%) were more likely to have 'got together to try and resolve local problems' than women (33%). A separate question found that men (19%) were also significantly more likely to have attended a campaign meeting or rally for the 2016 election compared to women (9%).

Notably, political parties were not seen as a particularly significant forum for political participation by the public at large. As noted above, the PAS found a degree of scepticism about the utility of political parties in Samoa's democracy, with just 51% of respondents agreeing that 'political parties are suitable for our system of government'.

One important finding from the PAS was that the majority of respondents related to politics in more direct and localised ways. Respondents indicated a strong preference for working within traditional institutions such as the village *pulenu'u* or village *fono*, which saw much higher reported rates of participation. Some 61% of respondents reported contacting the village *pulenu'u* at least once in the past three years to address 'personal, family, or neighbourhood problems, or problems with government officials and policies', with the village *fono* (60%) close behind (Table 10).

The gendered differences in participation noted above were especially profound in relation to contacting traditional institutions. Women reported contacting the village *pulenu'u* (55%) or village *fono* (45%) at significantly lower rates than men (67% and 75%). Taken together, these breakdowns illustrate the way more traditional forms of political participation are oriented toward older male members of society.

Table 10: Political participation — local problems

'In the past three years, have you done any of the following because of personal, family or neighbourhood problems, or problems with government officials and policies?' (%)

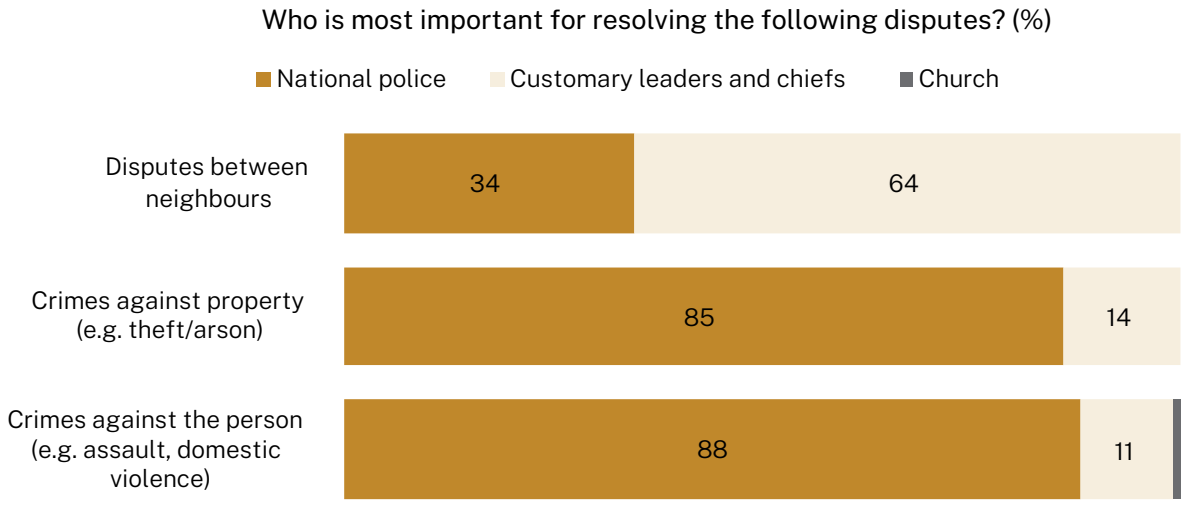
	Once	More than once	Never done
Contacted your village *pulenu'u*	16	45	39
Contacted village *fono*	10	50	40
Contacted government officials	13	42	46
Contacted news media	6	9	86

As noted above, most respondents believe the village *fono* should have more power. This comes in the wake of the 2017 Village Fono Amendment Act, which expanded their authority and encouraged the codification of customary regulations (see Boodoosingh 2019).

Conversely, the village *pulenu'u* had their authority reduced through the passing of the Internal Affairs Amendment Bill 2021, with commentators arguing this was aimed at weakening the *pulenu'u* system, and by extension weakening the power of village councils to choose representatives (Samoan Observer 10/3/2021).

Electoral campaigns and policies by the HRPP and FAST parties both invoked arguments surrounding the roles of the village *fono* and *pulenu'u*. The FAST party

Figure 14: Dispute resolution — 'Who is the most important to resolve disputes about the following issues?' (%)



for example, advocated for the decentralisation of services to village councils (RNZ 31/7/2020), while the HRPP reverted to a line of protecting 'independence institutions' (Sauni and O'Brien 12/4/2021).

Dispute resolution

Respondents were asked who should resolve different kinds of disputes, ranging from 'disputes between neighbours', to more serious issues of 'crimes against property', and 'crimes against the person' (Figure 14). These questions offer insights into where respondents view the line between traditional and modern modes of dispute resolution, and where complaints are addressed when conflicts arise.

Notably, customary leaders and chiefs were strongly preferred in addressing 'disputes between neighbours' (64%), whereas 'crimes against property' or 'crimes against the person' were clearly seen as the province of the national police. This is a finding consistent with those found in other Pacific nations (Leach et al. 2013), with strong preferences for neighbourhood disputes to be addressed through traditional avenues that tend to employ consensus-oriented resolutions.

Disputes over customary land ownership drew similar responses (Figure 15), with just 19% of respondents favouring the national government, compared with family (12%), extended family (36%), family *sa'o* (20%), and village *fono* (13%).[23]

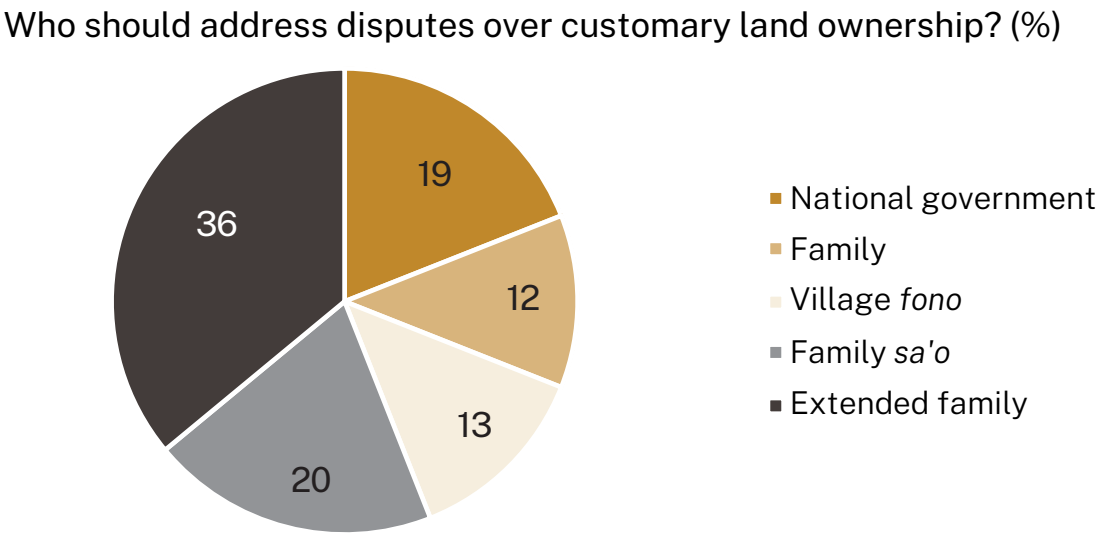
Interestingly, we found significant differences between younger and older respondents in their preferences for dispute resolution. Younger respondents (27%) were significantly more likely to favour 'the national government' in dealing with customary land disputes than were adults (18%), or seniors (10%). This same pattern was evident across all four dispute resolution questions, with, for example, older Samoans more willing to approach traditional leaders to deal with crimes against the person (20%) and crimes against property (22%), compared to young Samoans (7% and 10%). Likewise, younger Samoans were significantly more likely to see a role for police in resolving 'disputes between neighbours' (40%) than were older Samoans (24%). In each case, these findings suggest that respondent age correlates positively with stronger preferences for traditional dispute resolution.

Box 6: Contacting local authorities: Urban/rural residence and education level

Significant demographic associations were found in this data set. Where 50% of urbanites reported contacting the village *pulenu'u* at least once, this rose substantially to 64% of those from rural areas. The same pattern was evident for the village *fono*. Subsistence farmers were also significantly more likely to have contacted the village *fono* (54%) or village *pulenu'u* (50%) at least once over the past three years, compared to those who were not subsistence reliant (village *fono* — 34%, village *pulenu'u* — 32%).

Perhaps most notable was the role of education. Tertiary-educated respondents were more likely to have contacted news media at least once (21%) compared to the secondary- or primary-educated (11%). Similarly, tertiary-educated respondents were less likely to have contacted the village *pulenu'u* (51%) or village *fono* (46%) compared to those with secondary or primary education (66% contacted the village *fono* at least once, and 65% contacted the village *pulenu'u* at least once).

Figure 15: Disputes over customary land ownership (%)



Source: Ludo Kuipers (http://ozoutback.com.au)

Part 2 Popular political attitudes in Samoa: Attitudes to key policy issues

Part 1 of the report examined popular political attitudes to national identity, democracy, and government. Part 2 of the report examines Samoan attitudes to key issues in public policy of relevance across the Pacific, including climate change, social media use, and international relations. Reflecting the demographic 'youth bulge' it also examines the political attitudes of younger Samoans in more detail. It concludes by examining respondents' assessments of Samoa's overall economic condition, and their own family's economic situation.

2.1 Climate change

For the Pacific, climate change poses an existential risk, with the region already experiencing tangible impacts from a warming climate. The outsized climate risks faced by Pacific states has seen them become strong advocates for climate action on the global stage (Carter 2015; Ratuva 2017). This global activism is often taken to reflect broad concern about climate change within Pacific communities. However, relatively little is known about popular attitudes to climate change within Pacific communities at the domestic level. The lack of robust attitudinal data on climate change represents a serious gap in our knowledge, because '[h]ow people perceive their natural and social environment is key to how they behave in order to address the situations they are confronted with' (Beyerl et al. 2019:144). As Beyerl, Mieg and Weber go on to note (2019:144):

> In order to better support the planning of adaptation strategies, awareness-raising programs, and the implementation of effective precautionary measures, it is crucial to be aware of how people perceive the situation that needs to be addressed. Simply put, if people do not notice adverse change, they might not see the need to do something about it. And even if they perceive certain changes, their attribution of the relevant causes can vary, and can lead to behaviours that are not necessarily optimal for mitigation and adaptation.

The PAS sought to ascertain popular attitudes to climate change in Samoa by asking a series of questions about climate change. The first question asked respondents to assess the priority and urgency of climate change as a political issue (Figure 16).

A narrow majority of respondents identified climate change as either an 'urgent problem that needs to be addressed' (43%) or an issue that is 'not yet an urgent problem but will be addressed in the future' (10%). A further 9% acknowledge climate change is an urgent problem but 'there is little we can do about it'. While this recognition of the importance of climate change accords with prevailing perceptions that concern about climate change is broadly held, surprisingly, some 39% of respondents thought it will 'never be necessary' to address climate change. Indeed, this sizable minority suggests a strikingly different report card to some common perceptions, indicating that the level of popular awareness of climate change may be lower than assumed. This result indicates that a more nuanced approach must be taken when discussing climate change and in making assumptions about the views and level of engagement of average Pacific Islanders (McLeod et al. 2019).

Figure 16: Attitudes to climate change (%)

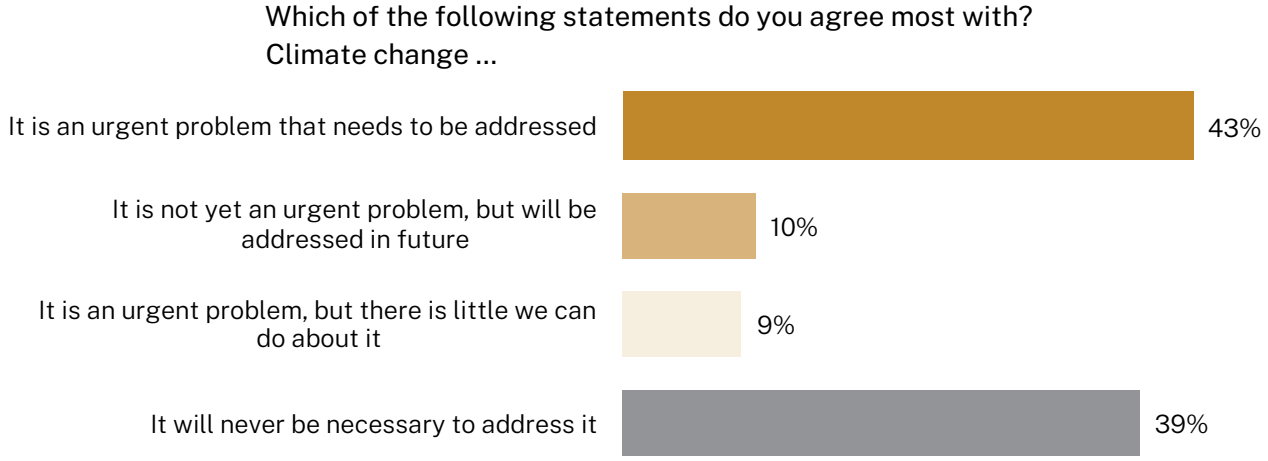
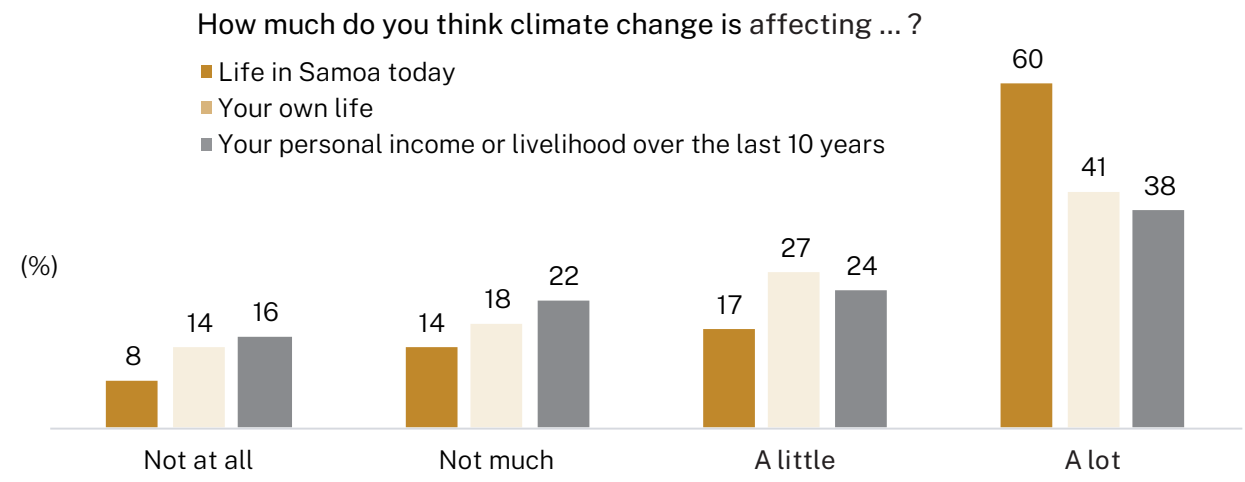


Figure 17: Impacts of climate change on Samoa (%, n=811[30])



The PAS then asked respondents whether climate change was affecting life in Samoa today, how much it affects their own life, and whether they think climate change has affected their own personal income or livelihoods over the last decade (see Figure 17). The purpose of this breakdown is to determine whether there are any significant differences between general and personal perceptions of the impacts of climate change.

Notably, while 60% of respondents think climate change has affected life in Samoa 'a lot', a somewhat lower — but still sizeable — number felt climate change had affected their own life 'a lot' (41%) or had affected their own income 'a lot' over the last 10 years (38%). This is an interesting finding which suggests the general impacts of climate change weigh more on the thoughts of Samoans than their own personal experience of climate change, or alternatively, that many have yet to be personally affected by climate change but believe that it has impacted on Samoa in a general sense.

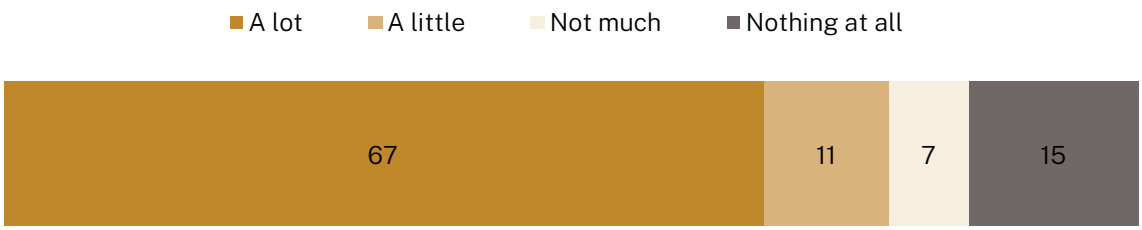
The PAS also sought to assess the degree to which Samoans felt some agency regarding climate change action, and their beliefs as to who might be responsible for addressing climate change. When asked 'what can Samoans do about climate change' (Figure 18), our survey suggested a strong sense of agency, with a majority of Samoans believing that there is 'a lot' (67%) they can do about climate change. This compared to around 7% of respondents who thought there was 'not much' could be done about climate change and 15% who thought they could do 'nothing at all' (see Box 7).

Next, the PAS assessed popular attitudes to the role of the international community in addressing climate change. This is a significant issue as Pacific governments have played a strong international role demanding urgent climate action from advanced industrial economies with large historical emissions. This issue has been of particular significance in relations between Pacific governments and traditional partners such as Australia, with Pacific states increasingly critical of Australian climate policy, including at the most recent Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Tuvalu in 2019.

When asked if they thought 'the international community is doing enough to address climate change', and if 'the national government is doing enough to address climate change' (Figure 17), respondents rated the efforts of both roughly equally. For example, 29% of respondents thought the international community was 'doing a lot' compared to 26% thinking the national government was 'doing a lot'. At the other end of the spectrum, some 16% of respondents thought both the international community and national government were 'doing nothing' (see Figure 19).

Finally, the PAS examined the relative priority of environmental protection and economic growth.

Figure 18: 'What can Samoans do about climate change?' (%, n=811)



Box 7: Understanding climate urgency

The PAS found that urban residency and education levels were both significantly associated with the view that climate change 'is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed'. Urban respondents (56%) were significantly more likely to identify climate change as 'an urgent problem that needs to be addressed' than rural respondents (39%). Conversely, the 39% of respondents agreeing that 'it will never be necessary to address climate change' were significantly more likely to come from rural (42%) than urban (23%) areas. Income levels, age, and subsistence reliance were not significant factors.

Tertiary-educated respondents were more likely to believe that climate change is an 'urgent problem that needs to be addressed' (57%) than were the secondary- or primary-educated (39%). To ensure that these relationships were not a function of each other, that is, that more highly educated people tend to live in urban areas and hence skew the dataset, we performed a general linear model to control for each group's effects. Education level was found to play a slightly larger role in climate change beliefs (with an effect size of .022) over urban residence (.013).

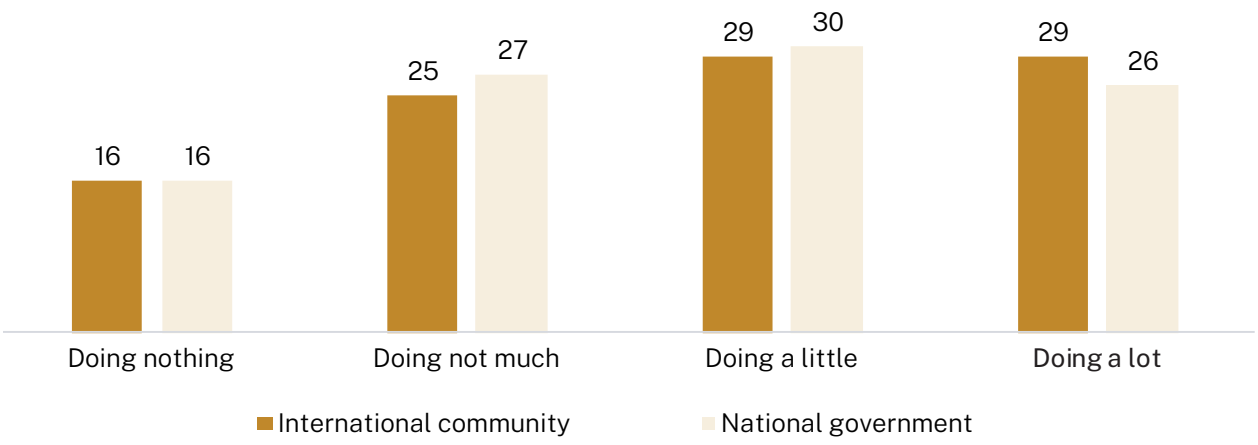
This has long been a debate in advanced economies, weighing policies of environmental conservation against policies to encourage increased economic output. The PAS asked respondents which of the following came closer to their view: 'protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs' or 'economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority even if the environment suffers to some extent'. Despite the earlier split in responses concerning whether climate change is an 'urgent problem', a strong majority of respondents (n=1319, 67%) believed that 'protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs'.

2.2 International relations

Samoa is an outward-looking country with a long tradition of regional and global engagement. This is epitomised by Samoa's history of labour migration, which has created a substantial diaspora in key regional countries such as New Zealand, Australia and the United States. The diaspora has been important to Samoa's economic development but has also ensured Samoa has a complex understanding of the national political community. The recent election in Samoa brought to the fore questions over the role of the diaspora in domestic politics and the nature of community connections with the region (ABC Radio 19/1/2021).

Samoa has significant relationships with key regional actors. It enjoys deep, long-term relationships with traditional external partners such as New Zealand and Australia. The relationship with New Zealand — its former colonial administrator before Samoa achieved independence in 1962 — is particularly important, governed by a longstanding *Treaty of Friendship*. Trade and development relationships with Australia, Japan and the United States are also significant.

Figure 19: 'Do you think the international/national community is doing enough to address climate change?' (n=811, %)



Box 8: Popular attitudes to climate change: Demographic cohort effects

Higher levels of education were found to correlate significantly with greater concern about climate change and its impacts. For example, tertiary-educated respondents were more likely to think that climate change is affecting life in Samoa 'a lot' (73%) or their own life 'a lot' (55%). This contrasted strongly with those with secondary or primary education. Among this group, 57% thought climate change is affecting life in Samoa 'a lot' while just 37% believe climate change is affecting their own life 'a lot'.

Older Samoans were more optimistic about dealing with climate change, with 73% of seniors stating there was 'a lot' Samoans can do about climate change. For younger (21–29) respondents this figure dropped to 60%.

Notably, there was a significant correlation between subsistence economic activity and the view that climate change had affected personal income and livelihoods in the last 10 years. Those respondents who were always (45%) or frequently (38%) reliant on what they grow or catch reported that their income had been affected 'a lot', compared with those 'not reliant at all' on subsistence agriculture (28%), or 'not reliant, but some food grown at home' (25%).

These demographic differences point to the challenges posed by climate change as a multifactorial, long-term issue, and to difficulties in accessing often complex information about climate change (Beyerl et al. 2019).

Over the last two decades, these traditional relationships have been complemented by a growing relationship with China, which is an important source of foreign investment and imports.[24] Samoa's close relationship with China has come under increasing scrutiny in the context of heightened geopolitical and strategic competition in the region. The PAS was conducted during a period of heightened domestic political interest in Samoa's external relations, particularly in relation to the role and influence of China. National debate has centred on China's investment in major infrastructure developments, the increase in national debt to Chinese lenders[25] and whether increased reliance on Chinese support has come with deeper political influence. This issue gained prominence in the lead up to the 2021 election, with a particular focus on China's proposed construction of a wharf in Vaiusu Bay — a project subsequently cancelled by the incoming FAST government (Barrett 20/5/2021).

We asked respondents a series of questions concerning the perceived influence of different countries in the Pacific region. Respondents were also asked how influential these countries would be in 10 years time (Figure 20). Results show a majority (58%) of respondents regarded China as the country with the most influence in the Pacific, followed by New Zealand (14%) and the United States (14%). Notably, respondents did not think the relative influence of each country would shift significantly over the next 10 years.

These results were brought into sharper relief when respondents were asked how much influence each of these countries have on Samoa in particular (Figure 21). Notably, two-thirds of respondents (69%) considered China to have a 'great deal of influence' on Samoa, while the equivalent figures for New Zealand (40%) suggested greater perceived influence than either Australia (28%) or the United States (23%). Perceptions of New Zealand's greater influence are unsurprising given the special relationship with Samoa. What is perhaps more surprising is the preponderant influence China has come to exercise in the opinion of respondents.

Respondents were then asked whether they regarded the identified influence as positive or negative (Figure 22).

Figure 20: 'Which country has the most influence in the Pacific?' (%)

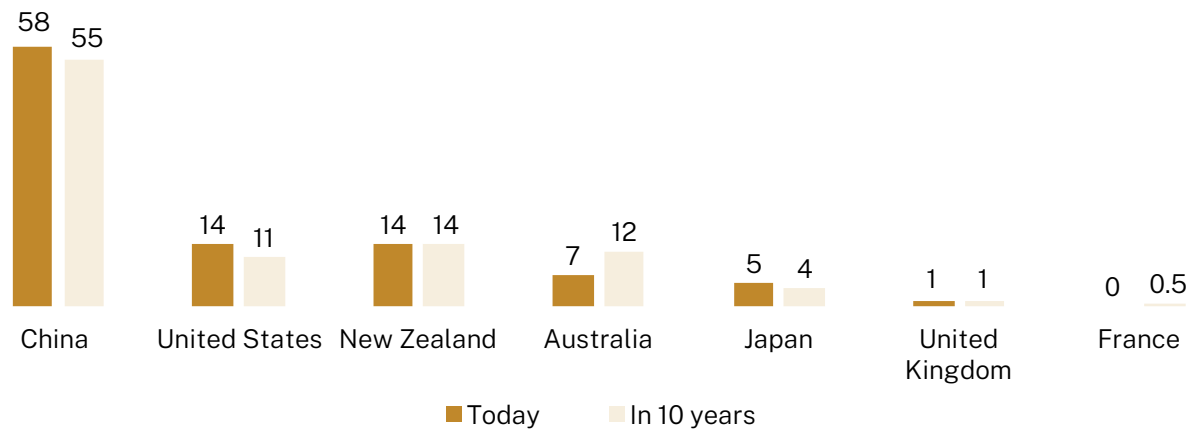
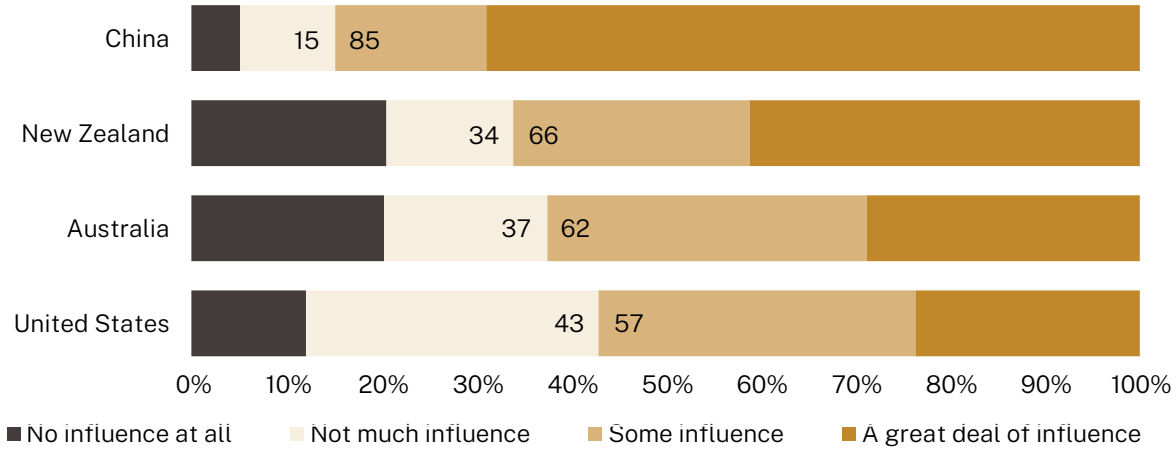


Figure 21: 'How much influence do the following countries have on Samoa?' (%)

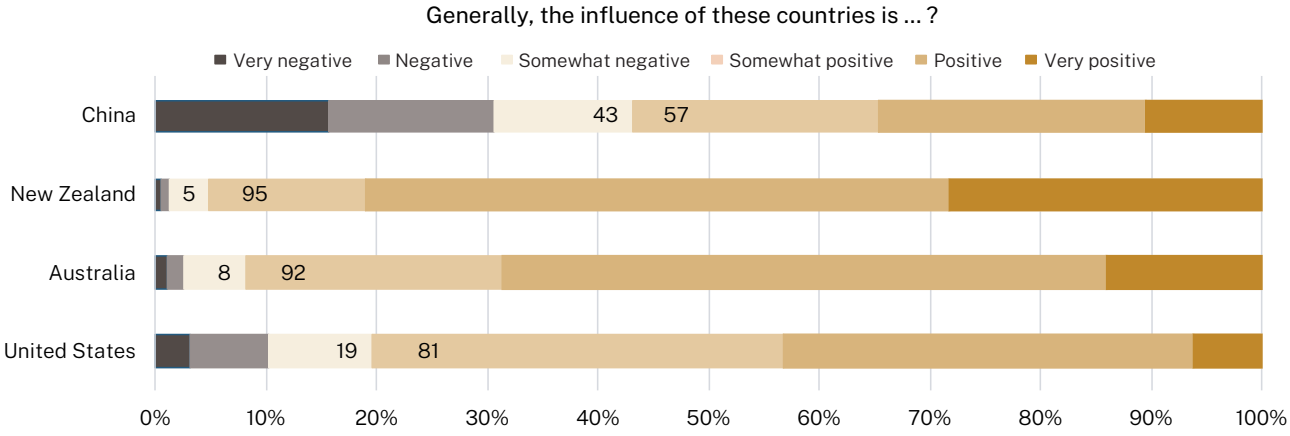


Note: Figures represent combined totals of influence.

New Zealand (95%) and Australia (92%) stand out as countries perceived to have the most positive influence on Samoa, while perceptions of China's influence (57% positive) were more mixed. While a majority of respondents perceived China's influence in a positive light, negative perceptions of China's influence (43%) substantially exceeded those of New Zealand (5%), Australia (8%) and the United States (19%).

Respondents were also asked which country should serve as a model for Samoa's development (Figure 23). Here, both New Zealand (36%) and China (33%) ranked highly as models for development, suggesting substantial polarisation in views on this question. This contrasted with lower support for Australia (17%) and the United States (12%).

Figure 22: 'How positive or negative is the influence of ... ?' (%)



Note: Figures represent combined overall totals of negative and positive influence.

Figure 23: 'Which country should be a model for Samoa's development?' (%)

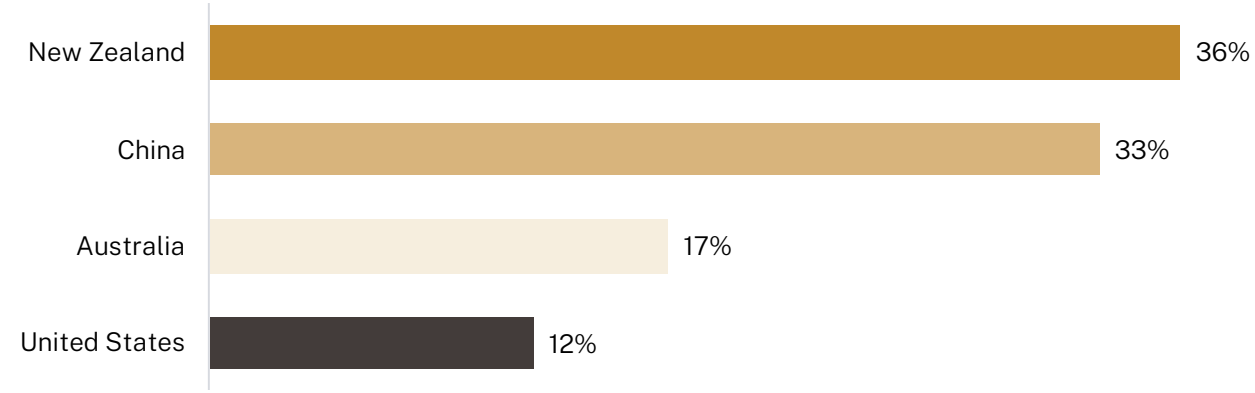
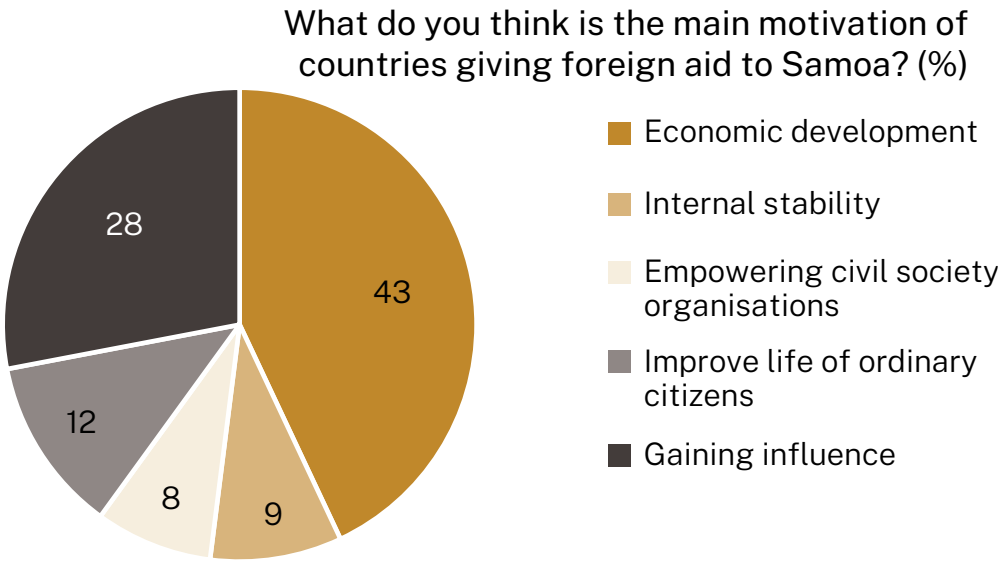


Figure 24: Main motivation of countries giving foreign aid to Samoa (%)



A related question (Figure 24) gauged respondents' perceptions of the key motivations behind foreign aid to Samoa. Overwhelmingly, 'economic development' (43%) was listed as the primary reason, while 'gaining influence' (28%) was listed second.

2.3 Generational fault lines?

In a country known for its strong sense of social hierarchy, the PAS paints an interesting intergenerational picture of Samoan society. A key finding reflected across the PAS modules points to relatively strong intergenerational differences in political attitudes in Samoa.

Younger Samoans were more likely to report lower levels of interest in political participation compared to older Samoans. This was particularly apparent with 38% of Samoans aged 21–29 reporting little to no interest in politics compared to just 22% of Samoans aged 30–59. This trend continued with older Samoans (60+) being more politically active across a range of areas over younger Samoans. This included an increased likelihood to discuss political matters with family and friends, and to attend a campaign or rally.

Given the strong hierarchical nature of Samoan society, it is likely that traditional values and viewpoints structure the way younger Samoans participate in and engage with their political system. Notably, older Samoans are more likely to occupy positions of power within the community in order to enact change, and influence political discourses. As such, it is likely that younger Samoans feel relatively disconnected from politics because their ability to engage is limited by tradition. This was further evidenced by older Samoans aged 30 or above (63%) being significantly more likely 'to have got together with others to resolve local problems' than younger Samoans under 30 (40%). This may reflect younger Samoans' feelings of alienation from the political systems dominated by their elders.

Younger respondents also expressed more ambivalent attitudes to democracy when compared to older Samoans. For instance, youth respondents aged 21–29 were significantly less likely (54%) to state that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government' than respondents aged 30–59 (64%); or aged 60 and above (62%). This is in line with global trends which suggest that younger generations' faith in democratic politics is lower than other age groups (Foa et al. 2020). Younger respondents (44%) were also less likely to agree that 'political parties are suitable for our system of government' than older respondents (64%).

Box 9: International migration

The PAS asked respondents about their willingness to travel overseas, either temporarily for work or more permanently — 73% of respondents surveyed were either 'fairly willing' or 'very willing' to temporarily work in another country. This number dropped to 54% when asked how willing they were to 'permanently move to another country'.

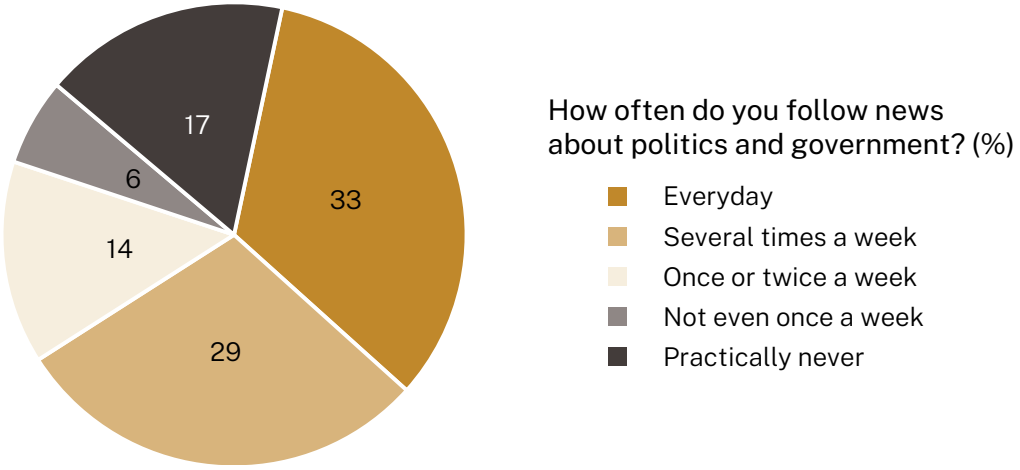
Unsurprisingly, age was an influential factor for how willing respondents were to temporarily work in another country. Younger Samoans were the most willing (84 %), followed by adults (75%) and finally senior Samoans (48%).

This trend continued for permanently moving overseas. Age was again a significant factor. As previously, younger Samoans were the most willing (69%), followed by adults (55%) and lastly senior Samoans (29%).

Young people were also more pessimistic about the capacity of government to be held to account. Younger people were significantly less likely to agree that 'people have the power to change a government they don't like' (70%) than were older respondents (80%). Young people (47%) were substantially more likely to agree that 'when the government breaks the law, there is nothing the legal system can do' than seniors (28%). Likewise, young people were more likely to agree that 'when judges decide important cases, they should follow the view of government' with near majority approval (49%), compared to adults/seniors (36%). Here it is important to note that at the time of the survey the current Samoan government had been in power since 1986 (Iati 2013; So'o 2006; Toleafoa 2013). For most of the younger participants, this had been the only government they had experienced in their lifetime.

Intergenerational differences were also evident in attitudes to gender reforms, with older Samoans aged 30 or above (59%) more likely to think there are 'too few' women in parliament compared to younger Samoans (49%). In addition, whereas 65% of respondents aged 30 or above strongly agreed that 'a woman should become Prime Minster of Samoa', this figure dropped to 51% for those aged 21–29.

Figure 25: Media use — 'How often do you follow news about politics and government?' (%)



2.4 Media and internet use

Pacific media is often characterised by its diversity (Papoutsaki and Harris 2008; Papoutsaki et al. 2011). Media organisations play a key role in shaping socio-economic and political change in the region (Harris 2014; Robie 2014), and are responsible for connecting Pacific citizens through radio, newspaper, television and, more recently, decentralised social media networks. The infiltration and development of conventional media in the Pacific, such as radio, is usually characterised as the 'most effective and far-reaching coverage', with newspapers and television usually attracting higher viewership in urban areas rather than rural (Guy 7/7/2021).

More recently, however, social media[26] has presented new opportunities for conventional media networks to diversify their platforms. Social media has also provided new and decentralised means for Pacific citizens to engage politically — in cultures that have historically practised self-censorship.

The PAS examined patterns of social and conventional media usage in Samoa.

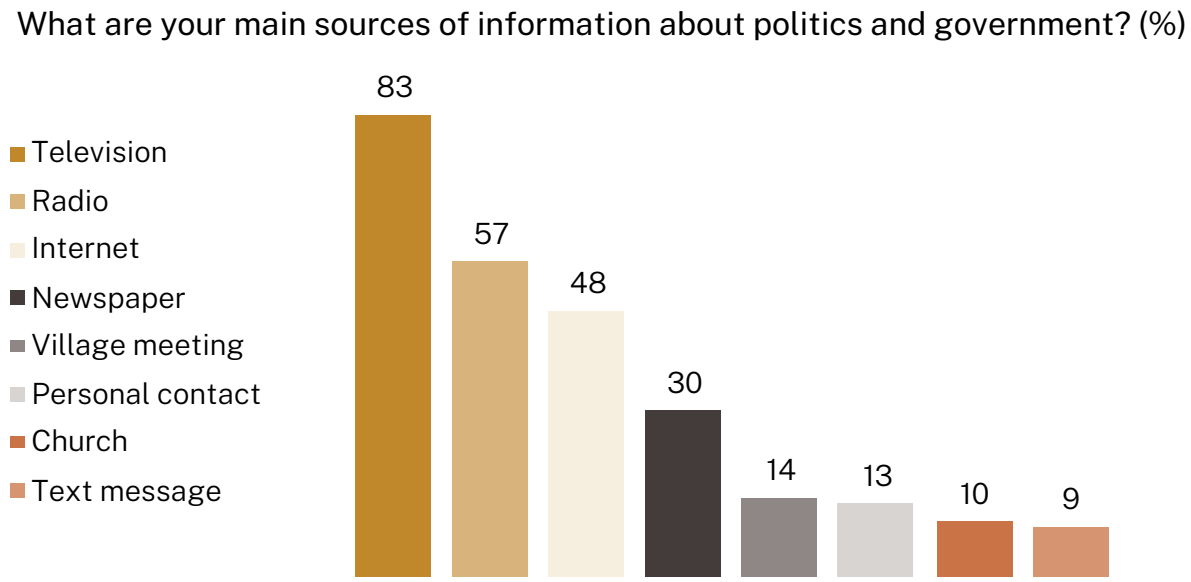
The PAS first asked Samoans how often they follow the news about politics and government (Figure 25). Almost one-third of Samoans reported following the news at least 'everyday', while another third follow news about politics 'several times a week'. Samoan men (38%) were more likely to be following the news daily compared to women (27%).

Age also proved a significant determinant of news consumption. Some 22% of youth aged 21–29 reported following the news every day. This figure increasing significantly to 37% for Samoans older than 30.

Samoans were then asked their main *sources* of information about politics and government.[27] Television (83%) emerged as a clear frontrunner, followed by radio (57%) and the internet (48%). Unlike much of the Pacific, which is traditionally reliant on radio outside capital cities, a substantial majority of Samoans rely on television networks to provide them information about politics and the government, with radio and the internet next in order of importance, and each used by roughly half of all Samoans.

Media preferences nonetheless changed significantly depending on where Samoans lived. For instance, urban Samoans (39%) reported reading newspapers at a significantly higher rate more than those from rural areas (27%). In terms of internet usage, urban–rural differences again surfaced, with 35% of rural respondents reported as 'never' using the internet, compared to the figure of 22% for urban respondents.

Figure 26: Main sources of information about politics and government (%)



Gender, age, and education levels of respondents also proved relevant to their media consumption choices. Both adult (30–59) and senior Samoans (60+) were more likely to use the radio (59% and 64% respectively), compared to 48% of younger Samoans (21–29). Conversely, we found significant generational differences in use of the internet to gain information about politics and government, with 72% of Samoan youth using it compared to 47% of adult Samoans and just 14% of seniors. Women (53%) were also more likely to use the internet for news gathering over men (42%). Unsurprisingly, 72% of tertiary-educated Samoans used the internet as a news source, compared to secondary- or primary-educated respondents (38%).

When asked *how often* respondents used the internet, four broad categories emerged, as pictured in Figure 27, with 53% of respondents reporting daily use and 33% reporting they never use it.

Education and age were also significant factors in *regularity* of internet use, with 79% of tertiary-educated respondents reporting they used the internet 'at least once a day' compared to 43% of those with secondary or primary education. Figure 28 provides a breakdown of internet users by age. Notably, respondents over the age of 45 are far more likely to have 'hardly ever' or 'never' used the internet.

Figure 27: Frequency of internet use (%)

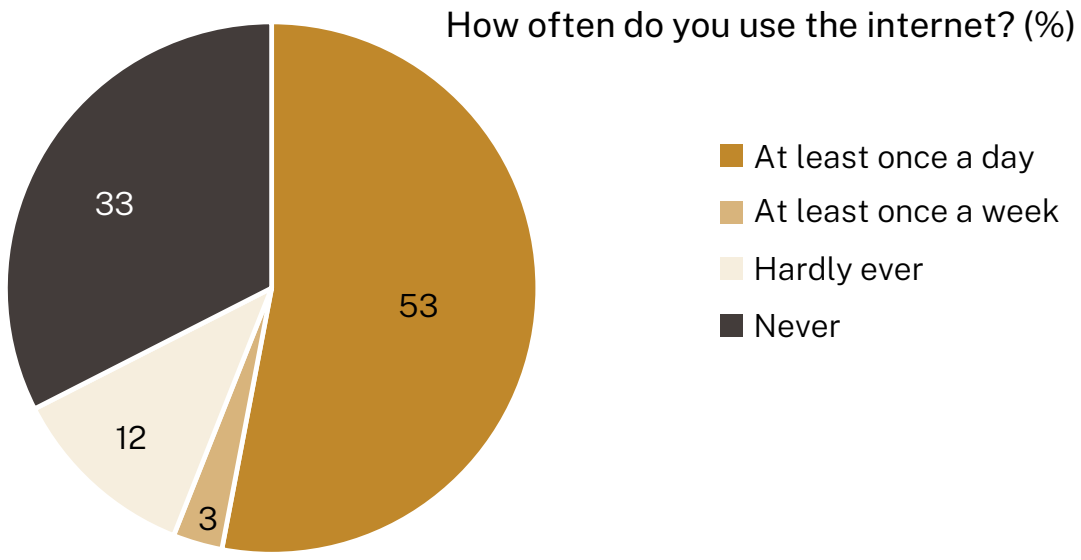
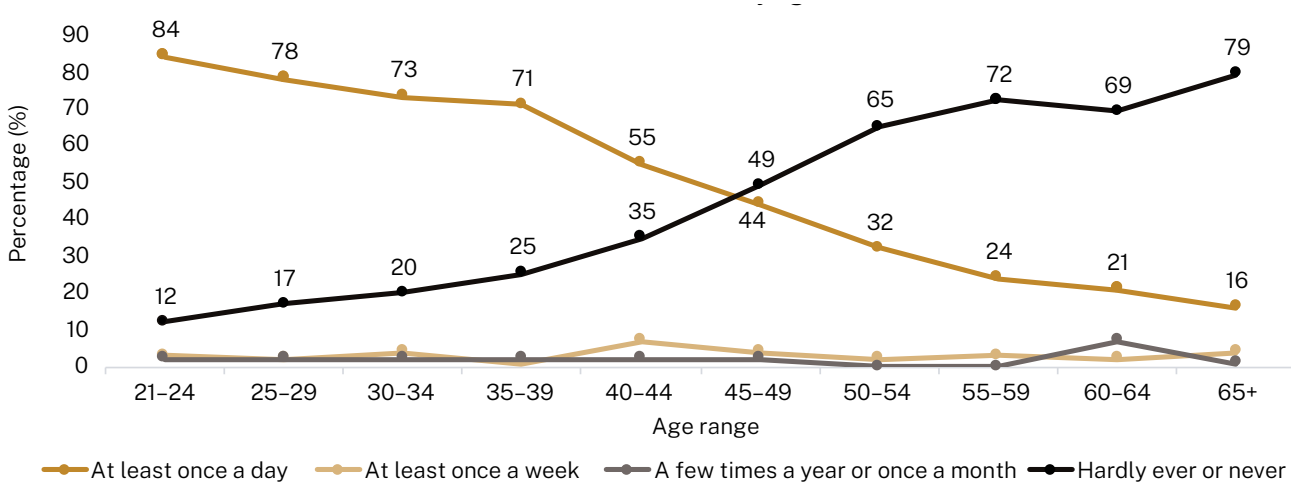


Figure 28: Internet use by age (%)



Engagement with certain media formats was also shown to correlate significantly with interest in politics. For instance, Samoans who listen to the radio were more likely to be 'very interested in politics' (39%), compared to Samoans who did not (29%). Radio users were also more likely to follow news about politics 'everyday' (38%) compared to those who did not use radio (23%). Importantly, radio usage correlated positively with interest in politics, regardless of the age of the respondent. By contrast television, newspaper and internet usage were not significant predictors of interest in politics.

2.5 Social media

The growth of social media is assumed to herald a significant shift in how people participate in social and political life. Interest in social media also reflects its potential to overcome participation barriers such as remoteness. Social media has also enabled stronger connections between diaspora communities and their home countries. Social media may also challenge established social norms and the importance of tradition, as local communities become increasingly networked into regional and global communities. It also has the potential to change how government relates to their citizens (see Box 10).

At the same time, the growth of social media in the Pacific, as elsewhere, has raised anxieties about the potential of social media to undermine democracy and tolerant political cultures. Social media in the region has also filled distribution gaps in conventional media networks, leading to 'the absence of accurate and trusted information, [where] rumour, speculation and innuendo fill the vacuum' (Ahearn 23/3/2021). Misinformation spread by social media can be particularly impactful. In 2019 Samoa felt the effects of a widespread misinformation campaign against measles vaccination. This led to a six-week state of emergency called in the wake of rising measles deaths and the arrest of an anti-vaccination activist (Oren 10/1/2020). This may in part explain results above indicating majority support for forms of media oversight or censorship by the government.

Pacific governments continue to negotiate their relationship with social media, with some employing temporary bans or shutdowns; raising tensions between civil liberties and the potential overreach of Pacific governments wary of 'unregulated' criticism directed towards them (RNZ 16/7/2020; Tarai 21/1/2019). Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Samoa have all deployed measures to combat disinformation or have introduced cyber laws that give them powers over the online conduct of their citizens. Some commentators argue that policies such as criminalising defamation over social media carry a risk of overreaching into censoring legitimate criticism directed at Pacific governments (Ahearn 23/3/2021).

The PAS asked Samoans which social media platforms they use. Overwhelmingly, the preferred social media

Box 10: Samoan diaspora

Given Samoa's large diaspora community, the widespread utilisation of social media to 'connect with family overseas' is unsurprising, with more than half of respondents connecting with family overseas at least once a week (59%). This highlights emerging research on the social, cultural and political roles that diasporic communities play in their country of origin. While the PAS did not survey these diaspora communities, responses from family residents in Samoa demonstrate the extent and regularity of transnational contact. This in turn raises questions about how diasporic communities may be using social media to participate politically. This became an issue during the 2021 national election, with the capacity of diasporic communities to campaign, donate and participate in political discussions through social media being criticised by the then incumbent government (ABC Radio 19/1/2021).

Table 11: Social media — 'How often do you use social media to … ?' (%)

	At least once a day	At least once a week	At least once a month	A few times a year	Practically never
Express your opinion about politics and the government	13	21	4	4	58
Organise politically	3	10	3	3	81
Connect with family overseas	35	24	3	2	36

platform of respondents who used the internet was Facebook at 92%,[28] confirming the widespread perception of Facebook as a default regional social media platform. The PAS then asked respondents how often they use social media for the purposes listed in Table 11.[29]

Using the internet to organise politically appeared to be a fairly limited practice by respondents. This is perhaps unsurprising given that older Samoans were more likely to attend rallies or political demonstrations, but are less likely to use the internet in general. This suggests conventional communication methods were overwhelmingly utilised for political organisation. On the other hand, some 34% of respondents reported using social media to 'express their opinion about politics and government' at least once a week.

In terms of receiving negative feedback, criticism, or abusive language over social media, roughly one-third (34%) reported experiencing this at least once a week, while 61% reported they never or rarely received any (Table 12). There were no significant gender differences found in who was more likely to receive negative feedback online.

Table 12: Social media — 'How often do you receive negative feedback, criticism or abusive language on social media?' (%)

At least once a day	At least once a week	At least once a month	A few times a year	Practically never[31]
13	21	4	4	58

2.6 Economic evaluations

The release of the *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2021* report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) paints a complex picture of Samoa's economy from 2018 to 2020 (ADB 2021). Like other economies in the region, Samoa experienced positive GDP growth (3.6%) in 2019 but a 3.2% contraction in 2020. ADB attributes this to both the measles outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic. Remittance income (see Box 11) alone grew in 2020 (4.9%), while manufacturing, commerce, and international visitor income each declined.

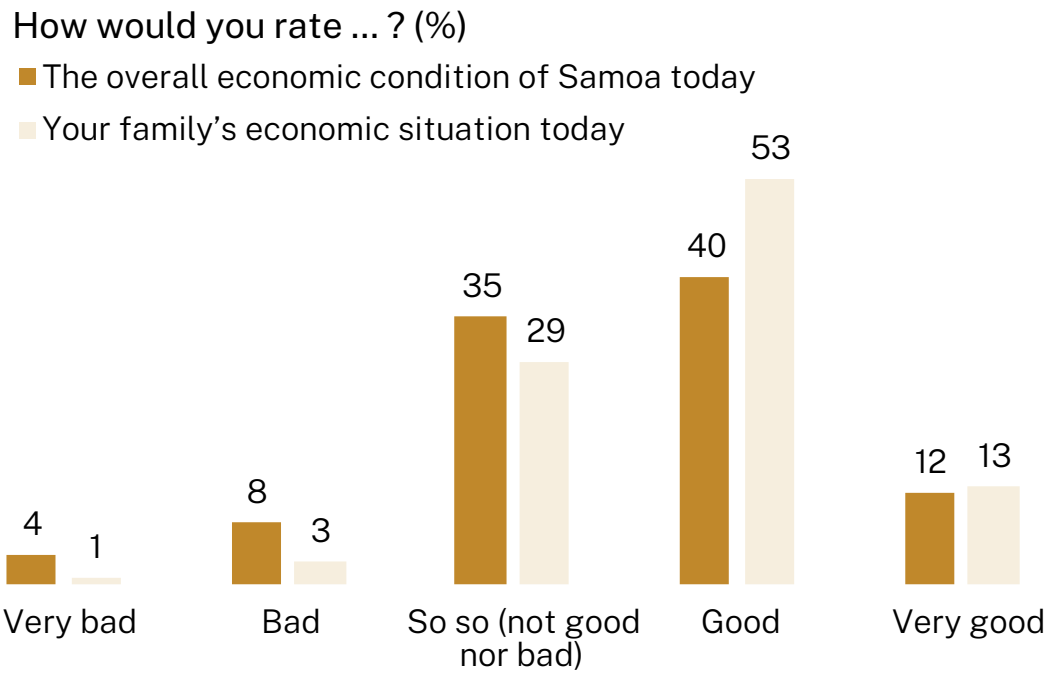
We asked Samoans to evaluate the overall economic condition of Samoa, along with their own family's economic situation. Figure 29 highlights how Samoans rate the 'overall economic condition of Samoa today' alongside their own 'family's economic situation today'.

Respondents rated the national economic condition as similar to their own family's, with a slight bias towards considering their 'own family's' economic situation better than that of Samoa at large.

This trend was reflected in two additional economic evaluation questions. The PAS then asked respondents to describe any change in these economic conditions 'over the last few years'. A majority of respondents (60%) felt their own personal economic condition had improved 'a little' over the last few years, compared to 42% for the equivalent assessment of Samoa as a whole. Recent GDP indicators show that Samoa has continued to trend upwards (until 2020) suggesting that patterns of economic growth are matching the perceptions of citizens.

The final set of questions asked respondents to assess Samoa's (and their own family's) likely economic condition 'a few years from now' (Figure 30). Generally, respondents believe that economic conditions will improve for both Samoa, and their own family over the

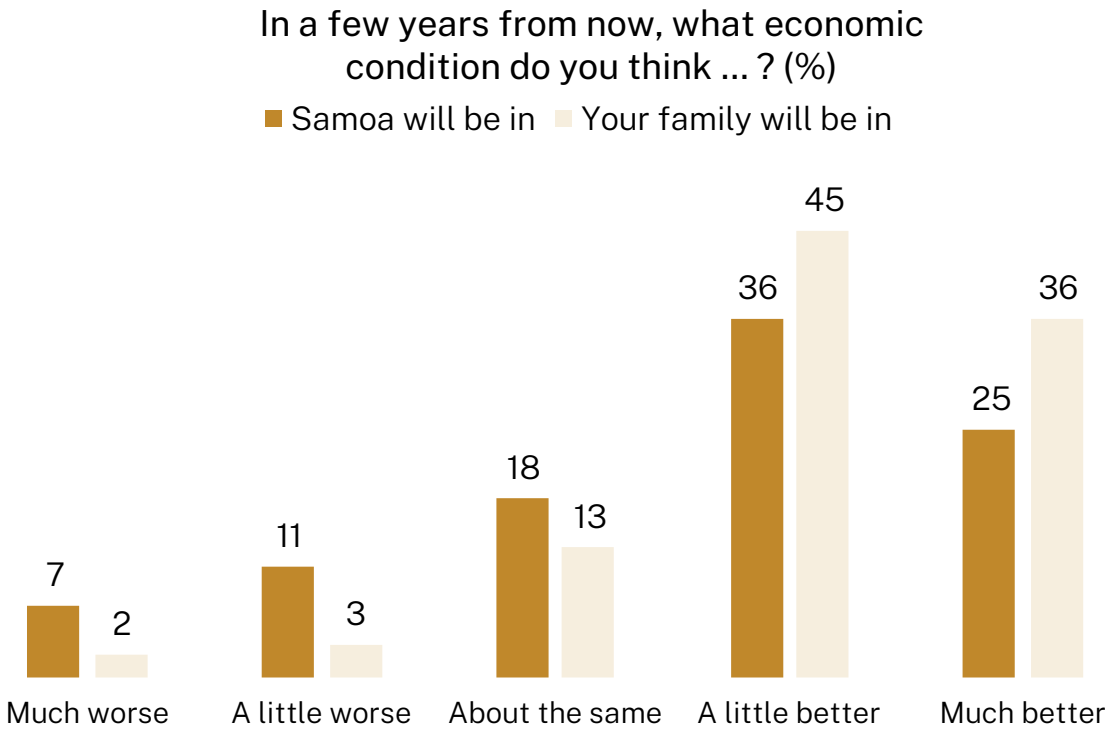
Figure 29: Assessment of current economic conditions (%)



next few years. In line with previous questions, however, assessments of their own family's likely economic conditions were more favourable than the equivalent evaluation for Samoa as a whole.

Notably, people from rural areas were more likely to have an optimistic assessment of the economic state of the country 'in a few years', with 28% believing they will be 'much better' compared to 18% of those in urban areas.

Figure 30: Assessment of economic conditions in a few years (%)



Box 11: Remittance income

In 2020 it was estimated that Samoa received nearly 19% of its GDP from personal remittances alone. Respondents were asked how dependent they were on remittances sent from friends and family overseas: 26% of our respondents 'do not receive remittances', while 26% were 'a little bit' dependent, 28% were 'somewhat dependent' and 20% were dependent 'a lot' on remittances.

Notably, Samoans who are either 'somewhat' or 'a lot' dependent on remittance income tended to think the economic situation of 'their family today' is better (70%) than those who do not (58%) receive remittances.

The PAS also asked how willing Samoans were to 'temporarily work in another country' (73% of Samoans were willing) or 'permanently move to another country' (54% willing). Curiously receiving remittances was not a motivating factor influencing respondents' willingness to either temporarily or permanently move overseas.

Finally, the PAS asked if Samoa 'should become more self-sufficient and less reliant on aid and remittances from other countries', with 85% agreeing. Interestingly, no relationship was found between how dependent Samoans were on remittances, and responses to this question.

Conclusion

The Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS) was conducted in Samoa from December 2020 to January 2021, surveying a representative national sample of Samoans above the voting age of 21. The findings detail an intriguing and complex picture of popular political and social attitudes, with a distinctive mix of democratic and traditional values in Samoa's political culture. While Samoan democracy has been portrayed in the literature as stable, the PAS took place in the lead-up to a historic election which saw HRPP's 40-year rule challenged by a new party, FAST, and ultimately resulted in the first change of government since 1986. The survey therefore provides an important snapshot of popular attitudes in what turned out to be a significant moment of political change.

One of the key findings of our survey was that Samoans share a strong sense of national identity and political community. Findings revealed the comparable strength of 'traditional' notions of political community, such as respect for culture and traditions, and being Christian, with more 'modern' indicators of national identity, such as 'respect for political institutions and law', and 'being a citizen'. Each of these were ranked highly by respondents as important to being 'truly Samoan'.

The PAS also highlights a complex picture of Samoan democracy, in which respect for modern democratic norms is tempered and entwined with respect for tradition. Strong support for civil liberties and checks on executive power was balanced with firm perceptions of the state as a 'guardian' or leader of society, and clear preferences for consensus understandings of democracy over majoritarian perspectives.

Support for democracy as an 'ideal' mode of government was substantial, exceeding satisfaction with the way democracy works in practice. Notably, the survey identified a strong correlation between respondents' level of economic satisfaction and their level of satisfaction with democracy. The PAS also identified distinctive findings in relation to popular trust in institutions. Though trust in Samoa's institutions is generally high, respondents placed higher levels of trust in traditional institutions, over non-elected or elected modern democratic institutions.

Our survey suggested most Samoans tend to engage with their democracy and government through local and traditional, rather than national pathways. Expressing mixed feeling over the role of political parties, respondents' political engagement was stronger at the local level, and focused primarily on discussions with elected village leaderships over local issues. Significantly, the PAS found that attitudes to women's participation in politics is generally positive, with strong support for temporary special measures to improve representation, and for the notion that women should be as politically involved as men.

The PAS also found strong intergenerational differences in political attitudes in Samoa. In a consistent theme reflected across several modules, findings suggest that young people generally feel disconnected from politics, in part because their ability to engage is limited by tradition. Younger Samoans were more likely to report lower levels of interest in politics, compared to older Samoans, who were also more likely to report being politically active.

Findings on specific policy issues also underlined the importance of obtaining popular perspectives on issues of fundamental importance to the Pacific. This was most clearly illustrated in the case of climate change. The PAS identified a significant split between those who believe that climate change is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed, and those who think it will 'never be necessary' to address climate change. This finding qualifies conventional assessments that climate change is a universally shared priority in the Pacific, with its impacts apparent to all citizens in the region. Instead, this result indicates that a much more nuanced approach must be taken when discussing climate change and making assumptions about the views of ordinary Pacific Islanders.

Finally, the PAS gauged popular perceptions of international relations in the Pacific. Respondents regarded China as the country with the most influence in the Pacific, and the country with the greatest influence on Samoa, followed by New Zealand, Australia and the United States. When asked to assess how positive these influences were, however, New Zealand and Australia led the responses, followed by the United States, with perceptions of China's influence prompting more mixed responses.

Endnotes

1 Global Barometer Surveys aims to 'measure, at a mass level, the current social, political, and economic climate around the world. It provides an independent, non-partisan, scientific and multidisciplinary view of public opinion on a range of policy-relevant issues' (GBS 2020).

2 The term 3MC is used to describe research models that emphasise equivalent and comparative research methods for surveys that take place across multinational, multiregional and multicultural contexts (Johnson et al. 2019).

3 Weights were assigned to each participant using the raking method as described in the *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods* (Lavrakas 2008), with these weights applied in all ensuing analysis.

4 In rare cases where a selected participant was unable to attend a survey interview, the village *pulenu'u* was tasked to replace the participant, guided by specific demographic criteria. Village *pulenu'u* were otherwise not involved in respondent selection, and were not present at survey venues.

5 All participants were given a small honorarium of WS$20 and light refreshment upon completion of their interviews to compensate them for the substantial time spent being interviewed. Participants were not informed of the honorarium until the survey was completed.

6 Except where specifically noted, it should be assumed data from the full sample (n=1319) is presented in tables and figures. Smaller *n* figures occur at certain points in the analysis, where the sample has been temporarily reduced by a qualifying question. In these cases, the smaller sample size is noted.

7 In this event, the highest-polling unsuccessful women candidates are deemed elected, and parliament is enlarged.

8 The mean for 'objectivist' indicators was 3.7 compared to 3.65 for 'voluntarist' indicators. In percentage terms, 'objectivist' indicators were considered 'very important' by an average 71% of respondents, compared to 68% for 'voluntarist' measures.

9 The PAS attempted to associate levels of religiosity with political attitudes. Yet crosstab (cross-tabulation) analysis proved difficult as only two distinct groups appeared, those that practised religion daily, and those who practised at least once a week. In effect, the extremely high level of religiosity in Samoa meant no useful analytical data could be extracted from the survey linking religiosity and particular political beliefs.

10 Other responses included: 4% 'do not understand', 1.5% 'can't choose' and 0.5% 'declined to answer'.

11 This result was reflected elsewhere in the PAS when respondents were asked 'how proud are you of the "way democracy works" in Samoa?', with 53% expressing pride compared with 47% who were not.

12 'Other' responses included: 4% 'do not understand', 1.5% 'can't choose' and 0.5% 'decline to answer.'

13 Respondents were asked: 'How would you rate the overall economic condition of our country today?'. See page 37.

14 Barring a short period in 1986–87 — when a coalition of parties defeated the HRPP, but enough MPs crossed the floor to restore a HRPP majority — the HRPP has been the dominant force for formal institutional politics in Samoa since 1982.

15 Specifically, 24% strongly approve and 26% approve, while 32% disapprove and 17% strongly disapprove.

16 Writing on Timor-Leste, for example, Cummins and Leach (2012:93) noted traditional views of the 'old democracy' designed to involve everyone affected in resolving an issue through reaching consensus. In some rural communities, these efforts to encourage communal cohesion were preferable to the 'new democracy', often seen as disconnected from rural Timorese lives, and the preserve of elites, and equated with divisive conflict between different political parties.

17 GBS (2018) considers a result of 55% to declare a country to have 'substantive' or 'procedural' definition.

18 'Other' includes 4% of participants who 'do not understand' and 1% who 'can't choose'.

19 Trust in institutions is divided into two components by the Global Barometer Surveys network of surveys. The addition of traditional institutions in the PAS is, to our knowledge, unique to popular attitudes surveys.

20 The Village Fono Act 1990 emphasising the authority of the village *fono* to make rules for everyone to abide by in accordance with the custom and usage of their villages (Samoa Law Reform Commission 2012:9). The Act sets out the powers delegated to the village council (*alii ma faipule*) and the parameters in which the village *fono* should function and operate with respect to the recognition of international standards for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Samoa Law Reform Commission 2012:36).

21 Women were significantly less likely to express trust in political parties (42%) compared to men (54%).

22 Court cases which followed the 2021 election made it clear the minimum number of seats under this provision is now six. Under this system, parliament gains additional seats if the required number of women are not elected. These seats are taken by the highest-polling unsuccessful women candidates.

23 Refer Vaai (1999:42–46) for an extended explanation.

24 The key source countries for imports into Samoa in 2019 were New Zealand ($96.7 million), China ($80.1m), Singapore ($66.2m), United States ($48.9m) and Australia ($46.5m). In terms of aid in 2019, the leading donors were Japan ($37.2m), World Bank ($31.9m) and Australia (25.9m). This contrasted starkly with aid in 2018, which saw China ($38.5m) ahead of Australia ($30.5m), Japan ($28.04m) and New Zealand ($20.2m) (OEC 2021; Lowy Institute 2021).

25 China is Samoa's largest creditor, accounting for around 40% of Samoa's external debt (Barrett 2021).
26 While ICT penetration rates in the Pacific are rapidly increasing as a number of mobile services become more affordable, it still largely remains an urban phenomenon.
27 Participants could select multiple sources in this question.
28 Two-thirds (67%) of respondents reported using the internet. Of these, a full 92% reported that Facebook was their main social media platform. Facebook users therefore comprised 62% of the total national sample.
29 A software error resulted in 24% of respondents skipping the four social media questions in Tables 11 and 12. As these respondents all used the internet 'at least once a day' (see Figure 27), we were able to impute results from the actual responses of the other 29% in that category, allowing for a reliable projection. This method was also utilised for Table 12.
30 The number of respondents to the remaining questions in the climate module are lower than the general response rate, as those who answered 'It will never be necessary to address climate change' at the opening question were not asked follow-on questions, which included assessments of how climate change is affecting Samoa. However, the full sample was then asked the final question comparing the relative importance of the economy and the environment.
31 The PAS was conducted after the measles epidemic and during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Department of Pacific Affairs

Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs
ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 2600

E dpa@anu.edu.au
W dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au

DepartmentofPacificAffairs
@anudpa
DepartmentofPacificAffairs

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