ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Popular political attitudes in Samoa: Findings of the Pacific Attitudes Survey

Michael Leach[1] | **Julien Barbara[2]** | **Ioana Chan Mow[3]** |
Sina Vaai[4] | **Christopher Mudaliar[1]** | **Patila Amosa[3]** |
Louise Mataia[3] | **Susana Tauaa[5]** | **Taema Imo[6]** | **Vernetta Heem[7]**

[1]Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

[2]School of International, Political & Strategic Studies (SSGM), College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

[3]Faculty of Science, National University of Samoa, Samoa, Australia

[4]Faculty of Arts, National University of Samoa, Samoa, Australia

[5]Department of Social Sciences, National University of Samoa, Samoa, Australia

[6]Department of Science, National University of Samoa, Samoa, Australia

[7]Department of English and Foreign Language, National University of Samoa, Samoa, Australia

Correspondence
Michael Leach, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia.
Email: mleach@swin.edu.au

Abstract

Popular political attitudes surveys have been conducted globally for several decades, but the Pacific region remains an exception. This paper presents the findings of the first *Pacific Attitudes Survey* (PAS), conducted in Samoa from December 2020-January 2021. Drawing on a nationally representative sample of Samoans of voting-age (n = 1319) the PAS gauges the attitudes of ordinary Samoans to their democracy, levels of popular trust in institutions, attitudes towards the role of government, and to women's participation in politics. Findings reveal high levels of support for democracy and trust in democratic institutions. At the same time, popular political attitudes highlight a distinct model of Samoan democracy, in which respect for modern democratic

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
POLICY STUDIES

Australian
National
University

409

norms is tempered and entwined with deeper traditions of Samoan community and identity.

KEYWORDS

democracy, Pacific, popular attitudes, Samoa, survey

1 | INTRODUCTION

Popular political attitudes surveys have been conducted globally for several decades, but the Pacific region remains an exception. This paper presents the findings of the first Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS), conducted in Samoa from December 2020-January 2021. Drawing on a nationally representative sample of Samoans of voting-age (n = 1319) the PAS gauges the views of ordinary Samoan citizens on a range of questions related to democracy, economics, governance, tradition, climate change, social media and international relations. This paper focuses on how Samoans understand and participate in democracy, levels of popular trust in institutions, attitudes towards the role of government, and to women's participation in politics.[1] While the Pacific is generally noted for its constitutional history of elite commitments to democracy, the PAS seeks to assess if this is matched by popular values, and the rejection of authoritarian alternatives by ordinary citizens. The PAS also seeks to place these findings in an internationally comparative context. Drawing on core modules of the Global Barometer Survey (GBS), allowing for comparative analysis, the PAS adds a host of new questions for contextual relevance to the Pacific. Findings of the PAS Samoa reveal high levels of support for democracy and trust in democratic institutions. At the same time, popular political attitudes highlight a distinct model of Samoan democracy, in which respect for modern democratic norms is tempered and entwined with deeper traditions of Samoan community and identity.

2 | BACKGROUND: POPULAR POLITICAL ATTITUDES SURVEYS AND THE PACIFIC

Since the 1980s, large-scale surveys of popular political attitudes have been recognised as important resources for political analysis by policy makers and academics alike. Most regions of the world are well served by repeat cross-sectional popular surveys, such as the Global Barometer Survey, World Values Survey, and the International Social Survey Programme. Yet in the Pacific, there is little reliable quantitative data on popular political attitudes, owing in part to the region's persistent neglect by large-scale international survey organisations. The reasons for this omission are perhaps understandable, given comparative population sizes in Pacific states, relative cost per survey wave, and the relatively challenging tasks of developing sampling frames and regional travel within some archipelagic states.

Nonetheless, as Corbett (2015, p. 23) notes, this gap comes at substantial cost: 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'. As a consequence,

---

[1]Results exploring attitudes towards gender, climate change, international relations and social media will be explored further in subsequent publications.

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 absence of large-scale popular attitudinal data means many long-standing assumptions drawn from the qualitative literature are unable to be triangulated.

To the extent that attitudinal surveys have been conducted in the Pacific region, they have tended to be narrowly focussed, associated with specific development agendas, sectors, or topics. For example, The Australian National University Department of Pacific Affairs has conducted large scale electoral observations in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Samoa which have included surveys on popular attitudes on a small range of political and development issues (Haley & Zubrinich, 2018; Wiltshire et al., 2019). Similarly, the RAMSI People's Survey in Solomon Islands included a range of topics including attitudes to certain political, social and development issues (ANU, 2006). Other examples include policy-focused surveys such as the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) which are conducted sporadically in the Pacific (McDonald, 2018, p. 188). One notable Samoan survey was conducted in 2001 which aimed to study voter behaviour and opinion (Vaa et al., 2006). This aimed to examine why and how Samoans voted for their leaders, as well as their views on party politics and issues of significance that influenced their voting.

However, because single-issue surveys are carried out by different actors, using various survey designs, methods, and sampling frames, these individually useful data sources rarely facilitate comparative analysis. Indeed, the lack of cross-regional, intra-regional and longitudinal data has severely limited the possibility of testing longstanding theoretical assumptions in Pacific literatures. While some small-scale comparative attitudinal survey work has been undertaken in the Pacific, including on attitudes towards national identity (Leach et al., 2013), this was a targeted sample focussed on university students in the region, and did not employ a popular national sampling methodology.

The lack of popular attitudinal data is especially unfortunate given the distinctive features of politics in the region. Dominant themes in the qualitative literature are wide ranging but remarkably persistent. They include democratic variety and democratic persistence (Aqorau, 2017; Corbett, 2015; Fraenkel, 2018); the hybridisation of imposed (Western) democratic systems to incorporate local cultures and political economies (Veenendaal & Corbett, 2015); the persistence of tensions between modernity and traditionalism (Baker, 2014; Baker & Barbara, 2020; Foster, 1995); the fragility of state institutions and associated challenges of governance stemming from issues of state legitimacy and its absence (Dinnen & Peake, 2015; Walton, 2013); and incomplete processes of nation-building in highly diverse societies (Dinnen & Firth, 2008; Foster, 1995; Leach et al., 2013).

These themes have become important frames of reference for understanding politics in the region. What is absent from many of these debates, however, are the views and attitudes of ordinary Pacific citizens. Baker and Barbara (2020, p. 135), for example, have argued that the standard research focus on formal institutions and political elites fails to consider the ways non-elite Pacific citizens relate to politics in their daily lives. This has become a progressively more serious omission as processes of urbanisation, rising social media influence, and increased exposure to global communities drive change in hitherto assumed norms of political behaviour, especially among younger generations. Understanding popular political attitudes is all the more important as these forms of social change create new socialities, languages of class, and national identities, with potential to disrupt traditional orders (Barbara et al., 2015). Popular attitudinal data can thereby help chart political change in Pacific societies over time.

3 | DEMOCRACY IN SAMOA

Samoa is a small island nation situated in the central south Pacific, comprising two large (Upolu and Savai'i) and several smaller islands, four of which are inhabited. Samoa has a youthful population, with a median age just under 22, and some 99 per cent of Samoa's 198,000 population live on Upolu and Savai'I, with 80 per cent living in rural areas. Samoa's capital Apia is situated on Upolu. Notably, some 124,400 expatriate Samoans live in New Zealand, Australia, USA, and American Samoa (UN, 2020). Given this figure represents almost 60 per cent of Samoa's domestic population, diaspora links play an important role in shaping Samoa's economy, politics and society (Howes & Surandiran, 2021).

Samoa is a Polynesian society governed by a traditional system known as the *fa'a Samoa* or Samoan way. The Samoan way has three pillars – the chiefs (*matai*), extended family (*aiga*) and Church. *Matai* have a particularly complex role in Samoa, as heads of extended family units, but also in assuming civic and political duties in their villages. Samoa has approximately 360 villages represented by around 16,000 *matai*.[2] The concept of service for *matai* is particularly significant in Samoa, based on the need to support one's *aiga*. One distinctive feature of Samoan democracy is the restriction of candidature in parliamentary elections to matai title holders.

As Western Samoa, Samoa was the first Pacific country to achieve independence in 1962. Samoa's National Legislative Assembly has 51 members elected by universal suffrage for five-year terms. As noted, assembly seats are reserved for matai who have chiefly status. Constitutional reforms introduced in 2013 prescribe a minimum number of five seats for women candidates: if fewer than five women are elected, the highest-polling unsuccessful women candidates are deemed elected, and additional seats are added to parliament. Samoa has 11 administrative districts. The incorporation of tradition in Samoa's democracy has been considered integral to its stability, providing balance and local legitimacy to an imported parliamentary system (La'alaai-Tausa, 2020). However, some scholars have argued that some aspects of traditional elitism have undermined fundamental liberal democratic standards of democratic participation and accountability (Lawson, 1996).

The 2021 general election tested Samoa's political institutions, putting pressure on the electoral commission, the judiciary, and on the head of state to install a government that would be widely perceived as legitimate. The election saw the incumbent Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP)—in power continuously since 1987—and the upcoming *Fa'atuatua I Le Atua Samoa ua Tasi* (FAST) party win 25 seats each. After considerable delays, the FAST party was ultimately installed as the new government with the support of one independent MP. The Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS) took place some three months before this election, and thus gauged popular sentiment at a time of significant change.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The PAS was implemented using face-to-face interviews from randomly selected participants (n = 1319) of voting age (over the age of 21). Sampling design was clustered, stratified and multi-staged, with sampling at all stages using probability proportionate to population size and

[2]The estimated number of *matai* holders in Samoa was placed at 15,929 in the 2016 census. A more recent report by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2020, p. 40) suggests these numbers have not changed substantially.

balanced for gender and age.[3] Based on household lists from the 2016 Census (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2016), systematic random sampling was used for the selection of households, with individual selections drawn to reflect the roughly equal proportion of men and women in Samoa. The National University of Samoa survey team worked closely with the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development (MWCSD) and village *pulenu'u* (village representative, recently renamed '*sui o nu'u*') to organise the contacting of participants and sample substitution. Participants were given the choice to answer the survey in either Samoan or English, with most (94 per cent) choosing Samoan. Following the survey, the sample was checked against census data using a goodness of fit test to ensure its representativeness of the national population. Minor weighting was applied to both age and gender to ensure a representative sample.

5 | SURVEY FINDINGS

Below we outline key findings from the survey modules on national identity, attitudes to democracy, civil liberties and political rights, trust in institutions, political participation, and women in politics. Findings are presented in two ways throughout this article. Descriptive statistics in the form of tables or figures detail the attitudinal responses of the national sample (n = 1319).[4] In addition, where relevant, results are disaggregated by gender, age, education, and income level, to show any statistically significant associations, or cohort effects.[5] Thus, for example, we examine the data to see if there are significant associations between respondent gender and certain political attitudes.[6] Using these independent variables to deepen the analysis of the national sample is standard in political attitudes surveys.

5.1 | National identity

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.

---

[3]The first level of stratification split Samoa into four subregions (Apia, North West Upolu, Rest of Upolu and Savaii), and the second level into districts within each subregion, and lastly villages within each district.

[4]Percentages obtained from the total sample (N = 1319) are reported with an accuracy of better than 2.75 per cent with 95 per cent confidence. Completion rates for individual questions were generally greater than 98 per cent, allowing non-response categories of 'decline to answer', 'can't choose', and 'don't know' to be ignored in this report, except where noted.

[5]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 per cent to merit discussion. A significance level of less than 1 per cent is used throughout for identifying significant relationships. This means there is a less than 1 per cent chance a reported association is a random occurrence.

[6]The PAS also attempted to associate levels of religiosity with political attitudes, however, analysis proved difficult as only two distinct cohorts appeared, those who practice religion daily and those who practiced at least once a week. In effect, the high level of religiosity in Samoa meant no scalable analytical data could be extracted from the survey linking religiosity and particular political beliefs.

LEACH ET AL.

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
POLICY STUDIES

Australian
National
University

413

5.1.1 | 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).[7] These included their home village or town, home district, Samoa, and the Polynesian and Pacific regions. Responses were constructed in a Likert-scale 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 strongest feelings of attachment to the nation (Samoa) and the home village levels, with intervening (district) levels attracting a lower degree of closeness (Figure 1). These levels were well in advance of supra-national (Polynesia and the Pacific) affiliations.

When disaggregating these results by age, significant associations were noted. For example, older Samoans expressed higher feelings of closeness to Polynesia than younger age cohorts. Where 89.5 per cent of senior Samoans over 60 expressed closeness to 'Polynesia' this figure dropped to 74.6 per cent among young Samoans under 29. This finding may reflect the higher level of Polynesian sub-regionalism in the 1960s and 1970s compared to today (Fry & Tarte, 2015). Notably, rural Samoans expressed significantly stronger feelings of closeness to their home village (63.6 per cent very close) than urban respondents (52.9 per cent).

5.1.2 | National identity indicators

Common understandings of national identity play a key role in unifying political communities and cultural groups under one common national umbrella. Forging a common sense of national identity proved a key challenge in Melanesia in the wake of independence (Leach et al., 2013, p. 448) where high levels of ethno-linguistic diversity, combined with an array of regional, historical and cultural divisions, continue to present obstacles to the creation of a cohesive sense of national
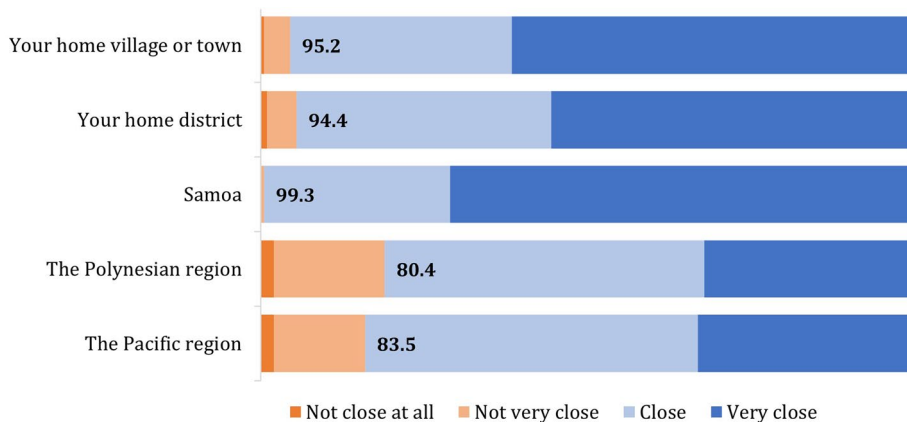

FIGURE 1 How close or emotionally attached are you to each of the following? (%)

---

[7]Values represented are the combined totals of 'close' and 'not very close'.

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' (Figure 2).[8] 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 elements 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'.

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 ethnic indicators like 'respecting culture and traditions', 'to be Christian', and 'to have been born in Samoa'. On average, civic/voluntarist (mean 3.66) and ethnic/objectivist (mean 3.63) indicators were valued equally by respondents. 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.

Notably, urban Samoans (73.5 per cent) were more likely to place importance on Samoan citizenship over their rural counterparts (61.7 per cent), suggesting that formal links to the state are valued higher by urbanites. Younger Samoans under 29 were less likely to place importance on 'having lived in Samoa for all of one's life' (52.7 per cent very important), than older Samoans

To have been born in Samoa — 98.6
To have Samoan citizenship — 97.4
To have lived in Samoa for most of ones life — 93.7
Being able to speak Samoan — 98.8
Being able to speak English — 79.3
To be Christian — 98.6
To respect Samoa's political institutions and… — 97.5
To respect culture and traditions — 99.1
To feel Samoan — 99.5

■ Not important at all ■ Not very important ■ Fairly important ■ Very important
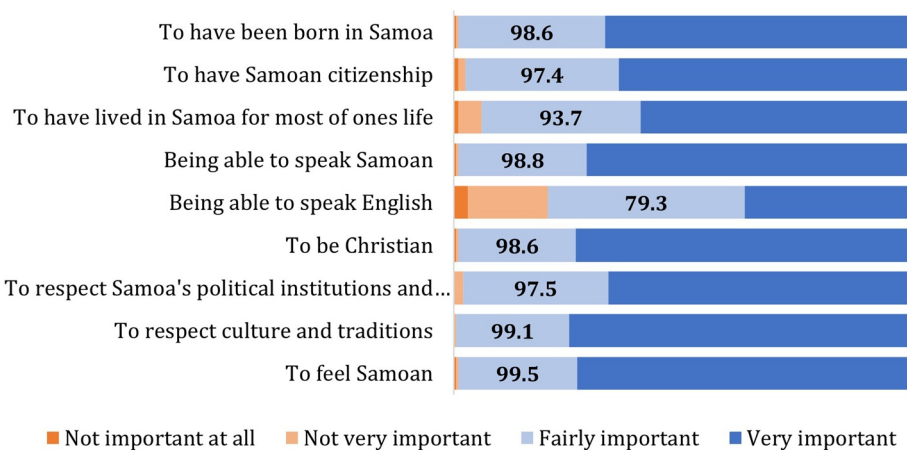
FIGURE 2 Some people say the following things are important for being truly Samoan. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following? (%)

[8]Values represented are the combined totals of 'fairly important' and 'very important'.

LEACH ET AL.

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
POLICY STUDIES

Australian
National
University

415

over 60 (67.5 per cent very important). 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' to be very important (42.5 per cent) than Samoans over 60 (23.2 per cent).

5.1.3 | National pride

Respondents were also asked how proud they feel about different aspects of Samoan politics, history, and culture (Figure 3).[9]

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, such as 'the way democracy works' and 'the fair and equal treatment of all groups in society'. This indicates that the key strength of contemporary Samoan nationalism 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. This anomaly may be explained by the traditional concept of *feagaiga* or 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, p. 242). Gender quotas introduced in 2013 to increase women's representation in parliament may also help explain the high levels of pride displayed in the fair and equal treatment of women, as opposed to 'all groups in society'.

One standout 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.
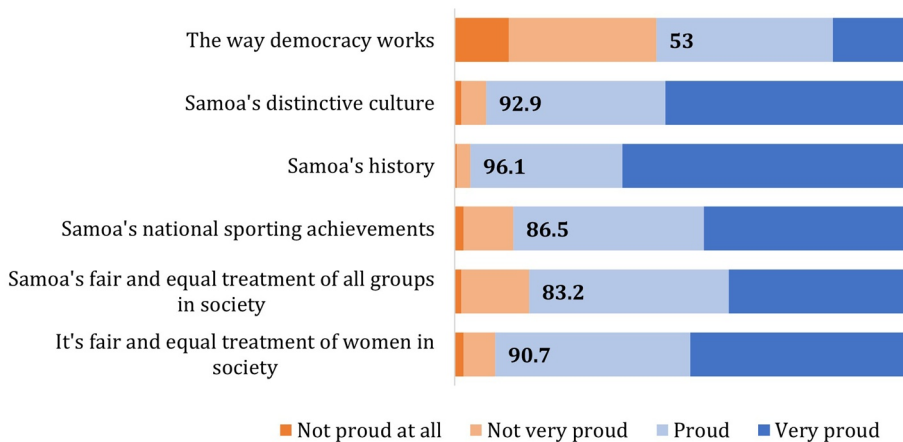

FIGURE 3 How "proud" are you of Samoa in each of the following? (%)

[9]Numbers represent total pride ('very proud' plus 'proud').

5.2 | Attitudes to democracy

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.

5.2.1 | Support for democracy

The PAS gauged respondents' preference for democratic systems, as opposed to the alternative of authoritarian rule. This question is one of the most extensively used indicators for measuring popular support for democracy globally (e.g., Welsh et al., 2016). Overall, 61.1 per cent of Samoan respondents agreed that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government'. By contrast, just 8.5 per cent 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 (24.3 per cent) selected the third option 'for people like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have'.

These responses indicate a strong foundation of popular support for democracy in Samoa, and a low level of support for authoritarian alternatives when compared to equivalent responses in Southeast Asian countries.[10] 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 (29.5 per cent) were significantly more likely to report that 'for people like me it does not really matter what kind of government they have' than men (19.5 per cent). Similarly, age was a significant determinant of attitudes to this question. Respondents aged 21-29 were significantly less likely (57.9 per cent) to agree that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government' than respondents aged 30-59 (67.3 per cent); or aged 60+ (68.8 per cent). This finding was the first of several to suggest relatively strong generational differences in political attitudes in Samoa.

5.2.2 | Satisfaction with democracy

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

Having assesssed how respondents feel about democratic governance in principle, above, the PAS then asked respondents to reflect on how Samoan democracy performs in practice. In response to the question 'on the whole, how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Samoa?' (Figure 4), 53.3 per cent of respondents reported that they were either

---

[10]For example, the Asian Barometer Survey found significantly higher levels of support for authoritarian alternatives scores in most Southeast Asian countries, including formal democracies like the Philippines (31 per cent) and Indonesia (16 per cent). Notably, Burma was the only country to produce a lower score than Samoan respondents (4 per cent) (Welsh et al., 2016, p. 134).
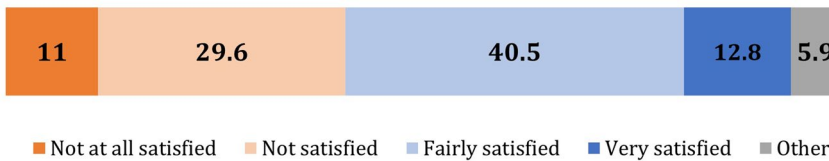
| 11 | 29.6 | 40.5 | 12.8 | 5.9 |

■ Not at all satisfied ■ Not satisfied ■ Fairly satisfied ■ Very satisfied ■ Other

FIGURE 4 On the whole how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Samoa? (%)

'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied', compared with 40.6 per cent 'not satisfied' or 'not at all satisfied'. 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 per cent expressing pride compared with 47 per cent who were not.

We then used cohort analysis to assess the factors associated with democratic satisfaction. Notably, there were no significant associations between democratic satisfaction and respondent age, income, education level or gender. There was, however, 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 per cent) than those who rated the economic condition negatively (42 per cent).[11] This reflects performance-based support elsewhere in the democratic world, which tends to rise and fall with economic performance (e.g., GBS, 2018, p. 24).

Overall, respondents demonstrated moderately strong levels of support for democracy on both ideal (61.1 per cent) and performance-based (53.3 per cent) grounds. It is notable that in developing countries, performance-based measures tend to dominate. This is often considered a fragile basis for liberal democracy (see GBS, 2018, p. 15). Despite being classified as a lower-middle income country (World Bank, 2021), Samoa joins higher income democracies in having a relatively strong ideal-based preference for democracy.

5.2.3 | 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. Responses indicate a strong popular recognition that Samoa promotes fundamental civil liberties and political rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly. An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that people can say what they think (85.8 per cent), or join organisations they like (89.3 per cent), 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 (56.7 per cent) 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 per cent) 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

---

[11]Respondents were asked 'How would you rate the overall economic condition of our country today?', with response categories of 'very bad', 'bad', 'so-so', 'good', and 'very good'.

were evenly divided, with 48.4 per cent agreeing that it is 'okay for the government to ignore the law to deal with it'.

5.2.4 | Role of government in democracy

A further series of questions then assessed 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, respondents strongly favoured a conception of government as guardian or leader of the people.

For example, a majority favoured the view that 'government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that might be harmful to society' (66.3 per cent), rather than 'the media should have the right to publish news ideas without government control' (32.7 per cent). Respondents likewise favoured the view that 'government is like a parent, it should decide what is good for us' (63.9 per cent) over the idea that 'government is our employee; the people should tell government what needs to be done' (35.2 per cent). More than three-quarters of respondents agreed with the notion that 'government leaders do what they think is best for the people' (76.3 per cent) rather than implementing 'what voters want' (22.9 per cent).

These findings were reinforced by a 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 81.5 per cent 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 (83.9 per cent) were more likely to hold the view that 'the government should decide whether certain ideas should be discussed in society' than urban respondents (73.2 per cent). Moreover, respondents aged 60 or above were more likely (25 per cent) to oppose this view than those from younger age brackets (15.3 per cent); as were the university educated (26.2 per cent), compared to those with primary or secondary education (16 per cent). Taken together, results suggest a distinctive mix of democratic and traditional values in Samoa's political culture, favouring a view of the state as a guardian of society, leavened with more liberal democratic views on civil liberties and the separation of powers.

5.2.5 | Parties and elections

Respondents also displayed high levels of confidence that 'people have the power to change a government they do not like' (77.9 per cent), despite the fact that at the time of the survey, there had not been a change of government in some 35 years.[12] Confidence in the administration of the Samoan electoral system was also strong, and relatively few respondents (11.5 per cent) 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' (50.3 per cent) and those who do not (48.6 per cent). As we discuss below, popular trust in political parties as institutions

---

[12]Barring a short period in 1986-7 when a coalition of parties defeated the HRPP (but enough MPs crossed the floor for a HRPP majority) the HRPP has been the dominant force for formal institutional politics in Samoa since 1982.

LEACH ET AL.

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
POLICY STUDIES

Australian
National
University

419

is also relatively low, when compared with other political institutions in Samoa. As Wood (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 customary institutions offer a focus for collective action that is provided by competing political party platforms elsewhere, and this has hitherto allowed for single party dominance.

5.2.6 | The role of tradition

Several questions sought to gauge the importance ascribed to traditional forms of legitimacy in modern democratic contexts. When asked whether 'it is important to respect tradition and culture even if it goes against the law', some 85 per cent of respondents agreed. The statement that 'government should recognise the traditional way of doing things', attracted even stronger agreement from respondents (97.2 per cent).

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 support for practices of *matai* candidature to be evenly divided, with 50.1 per cent approval, and 49.4 per cent disapproval.[13] Notably, support for *matai* candidature was significantly higher among rural respondents (53.1 per cent) than urban respondents (39 per cent). Male respondents (56.3 per cent) also expressed higher degrees of support for this restriction than did women (43.3 per cent). Just 10 percent of *matai* titles are held by women (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Education was a key factor here as well, with 37.6 per cent of tertiary-educated supporting the system, compared with 52 per cent of secondary educated respondents and 67.9 per cent of primary-educated.

A minority—albeit a significant one of 42.1 per cent—agreed that 'traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people'. Both rural residence and levels of education again proved influential. Where 45.9 per cent of primary and secondary educated respondents supported this view, support dropped to 30.4 per cent among the university educated. Again, rural respondents were more likely to support this proposition (44.6 per cent) than urban respondents (34.3 per cent). Yet, 70.1 per cent of respondents did agree 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 of the specific examples above.

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 distinct aspect of these findings.

5.2.7 | Consensus and majoritarianism

Though practices vary widely across the Pacific, traditional modes of decision making may emphasise consensus decision making over majoritarian decisions. This is the essence of conceptions of the 'Pacific way', much emphasised in the decolonisation era (Fraenkel, 2018, p. 35). For more traditional communities, majoritarian democracy may often be seen as divisive, and prone to fostering party competition and conflict. Conversely, traditional approaches to democracy 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 &

---

[13]24.2 per cent strongly approve, 25.9 per cent approve and 31.8 per cent disapprove, while 17.6 per cent strongly disapprove.

TABLE 1   There are many ways to come to a decision. Would you disagree or agree with the following alternatives?

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Democracy means the majority wins	18.7	41.9	**60.6**	26.3	5.2
Democracy means everybody should come to an agreement	26.3	49.8	**76.1**	14.7	2.9
It is better that as many people as possible agree, even if this means decisions or outcomes are compromised	26.8	47.4	**74.2**	15.6	4.1

Leach, 2012, p. 95). 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 'implement the will of the majority', 74 per cent of respondents favoured the former, consensus view of government, with 25.2 per cent favouring the majoritarian view. Given the strong leaning towards social conformity (Vaai, 2021), which is seen as a cultural imperative in Samoan society, this result is not surprising. Notably, no significant cohort effects 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 1).[14] 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 60.6 per cent supported a definitional notion that 'democracy means the majority wins', substantially stronger support was found for the following two questions, which reflected consensus-based approaches to decision-making.

5.2.8 | What do Samoans want from government?

When asked to choose between 'reducing economic inequality or protecting political freedom', 60.6 per cent of respondents responded that reducing economic inequality was more important. These findings resonate strongly with Samoa's *fa'amatai* (traditional system of governance) and the 'ideal social organisation' (Le Tagaloa, 1987) based on mutuality and reciprocity where everyone has a place and the well-being of all in the *aiga* (an extended family that acknowledges a *matai* as their head) 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 (37.3 per cent) and health (37.2 per cent) were the two biggest areas of concern for respondents [see Figure S1]. Specifically, the largest responses were for disease control, general health expenditures, economic management, and wages and incomes. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the survey was conducted during the COVID-19 outbreak, and in the wake of Samoa's measles epidemic. A majority of respondents were confident in the ability of their government to address their key problems. More than two thirds (72.5 per cent) of respondents indicated confidence that their identified problem 'will be solved within the next five years'.

---

[14]Non-response categories of 'don't know', 'decline to answer' and 'can't choose' averaged <7 per cent across this question battery.

5.3 | Trust in institutions

The PAS sought to assess trust in a range of institutions which fall 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. Our third category seeks to evaluate trust in traditional institutions.[15] Figure 5 shows the various levels of trust in different institutions[16], while Table 2 breaks 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* or village woman representative, *sa'o* or chiefly head of the family, village *pulenu'u* or mayor, and village *fono* or council).[17]

Findings indicated that respondents placed higher levels of trust in traditional institutions (81.5 per cent) followed by non-elected (71.5 per cent), and then elected institutions (66.4 per cent). This suggests that Samoans have somewhat more trust in state capacity than in the government's reputation (GBS, 2018, p. 63). More importantly, both these dimensions of institutional trust were overshadowed by trust in traditional institutions.

This is reflected most clearly in the role of village *fono*, which were second only to church leaders in terms of popular trust. This was especially true in rural areas, where were 85.1 per cent of respondents reported trust in the *fono*, compared with 72.6 per cent in urban areas. This
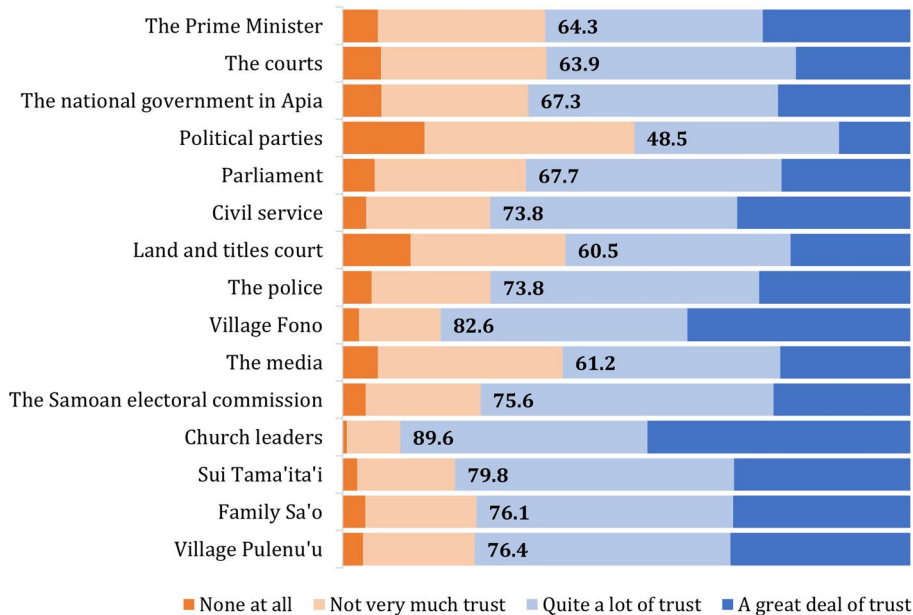

The Prime Minister	64.3
The courts	63.9
The national government in Apia	67.3
Political parties	48.5
Parliament	67.7
Civil service	73.8
Land and titles court	60.5
The police	73.8
Village Fono	82.6
The media	61.2
The Samoan electoral commission	75.6
Church leaders	89.6
Sui Tama'ita'i	79.8
Family Sa'o	76.1
Village Pulenu'u	76.4

■ None at all ■ Not very much trust ■ Quite a lot of trust ■ A great deal of trust

FIGURE 5 How much trust do you place in the following? (%)

[15]Trust in institutions is divided into two components by the Global Barometer network of surveys. Our addition of traditional institutions is, to our knowledge, unique to popular attitudes surveys.

[16]Values listed represent the combined totals of 'a great deal of trust' and 'quite a lot of trust'.

[17]Non-response categories of 'don't know', 'decline to answer' and 'can't choose' averaged <0.5 per cent across this question battery.

T A B L E 2   Trust in institutions (%)

	A great deal of trust	Quite a lot of trust	Total trust	Not very much trust	None at all
Elected	24.2	42.2	**66.4**	27.0	6.0
Non-elected	26.3	45.2	**71.5**	24.0	4.0
Traditional	36.5	45.0	**81.5**	16.0	2.0

high level of trust helps explain other results, including the question of whether the 'Village *fono* should have more authority over local decisions than it does now', which attracted 83.4 per cent agreement from respondents. 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 generally high levels of trust for both formal and traditional systems of government, trust in political parties was comparatively low.[18] Likewise, the media and the land and titles court appear to hold more disputed levels of public trust.

5.4 | Political participation and engagement

A vibrant democracy relies on politically engaged citizens. The PAS asked a range of questions to better understand forms of political participation in Samoa. Participants were initially asked how interested they were in politics. A substantial majority of respondents (72 per cent) expressed some level of interest in politics, noting that the survey was conducted in the lead up to the 2021 Samoan general election.[19]

We found a strong positive correlation between age of the respondents, and their reported interested in politics. For example, where 38.7 per cent of respondents aged 21-29 reported little or no interest in politics, this figure dropped to 22 per cent for respondents aged 30-59; and 25.9 per cent for those aged 60+. To emphasise this pattern, younger people reported being 'very interested' in politics at half the rate (20.5 per cent) of older cohorts (40 per cent). 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 (43.4 per cent) more likely to be 'very interested' in politics compared to women, with only 26.9 per cent being 'very interested' (Table 3.). The reasons for this are likely to be the same as for younger people: that is, women feel less connected to political life as a result of traditional limitations. This finding reflects similar outcomes globally (GBS, 2018, p. 55).

When asked how often they discuss political matters with friends or family members, 29 per cent of respondents selected 'frequently', while 55 per cent reported 'occasionally' discussing political matters, and 15 per cent reported 'never' talking about political matters. Again, older respondents were significantly more likely to report discussing political matters with friends or family: where 37.9 per cent of seniors reported discussing political matters 'frequently', this figure dropped to 30.1 per cent of adults and 21.7 per cent of young respondents.

[18]Women were significantly less likely to express trust in political parties (42.5 per cent) compared to men (54 per cent).
[19]34.9 per cent of respondents said they were 'very interested' in politics, 37.1 per cent 'quite interested', 11.2 per cent 'not very interested' and 15.3 per cent 'not at all interested'.

TABLE 3   Gendered interest in politics (%)

	Very interested	Quite interested	Total interest	Not very interested	Not at all interested
Men	43.4	33.2	**76.6**	10.0	13.4
Women	26.9	42.4	**69.3**	12.9	17.8

TABLE 4   Have you done any of these things in the past 3 years? (%)

	Once	More than once	Never done
Got together with others to try resolve local problems	17.2	37.9	44.8
Talked to your MP	11.2	20.8	67.9
Signed a petition	7.5	8.7	83.8
Joined an NGO or advocacy group	6.9	8.8	84.0
Attended a demonstration or protest march	3.8	3.6	92.6
Joined a political party	2.5	2.1	95.1

The PAS then asked whether respondents had engaged in any of the following forms of political action in the previous three years (Table 4).[20] 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 per cent). Higher again was the response rate for 'got together with others to try resolve local problems' (55.1 per cent). This reflects the notion that while formal political engagement might be low, informal activities at the local level attract stronger engagement.

These measures also highlight a correlation between age and increased political participation. For example, where 60.4 per cent of youth reported they had 'never' got together with others to solve local problems, this figure dropped to 42 per cent for adults and 31.1 per cent for seniors. This same pattern held true across multiple participation measures. These figures plainly reflect the increasing authority to act within traditional communities that come with age.

Parallel findings were evident when results were disaggregated by gender. For example, men (42.2 per cent) were more likely to have 'got together to try and resolve local problems' than women (33.2 per cent). Men (19.1 per cent) were also significantly more likely to have attended a campaign meeting or rally for the 2016 election compared to women (8.9 per cent).

One important finding from the PAS was that the majority of respondents surveyed 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 60.8 per cent 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* (60.1 per cent) close behind.[21]

The gendered differences in participation noted above were especially profound in relation to contacting traditional institutions. Women reported contacting the village *pulenu'u* (54.6 per

[20]Non-response categories of 'don't know', 'decline to answer' and 'can't choose' were negligible in this question battery (<.03 per cent).

[21]50.5 per cent of urbanites had contacted the village *pulenu'u* at least once, this rose substantially to 63.5 per cent of those from rural areas. The same pattern was evident for the village *fono*.

cent) or village *fono* (45.1 per cent) at significantly lower rates than men (66.8 per cent and 74.7 per cent). Taken together, these breakdowns illustrate the way more traditional forms of political participation are oriented toward older male members of society.

5.5 | Women in politics

The PAS further examined 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. Current laws now require six women (10 per cent) MPs as a minimum (an increase from five at the time of the survey): a requirement that would become an important feature of post-election negotiations following the very close 2021 election.

When asked about the five women MPs who were then in Samoa's parliament of 51, 55.8 per cent of respondents believed there were 'too few' women in parliament. Another 37.4 per cent thought the number was 'just right', while just 6.6 per cent felt that there were 'too many'. Interestingly, older Samoans (30+) were more likely to think there were 'too few' women in parliament (58.5 per cent) than younger Samoans (48.8 per cent). Similarly, those with tertiary education (65.2 per cent) were significantly more likely to think that there were 'too few' women in parliament compared to those with primary and secondary education (53.8 per cent).

Overall, there was strong majority support for women to play active roles in government (Table 5).[22] Notably, 88 per cent of respondents felt 'women should be involved in politics as much as men'. This finding was reflected in strong agreement (85 per cent) that 'a women should become Prime Minster 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 49.7 per cent 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. 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' (43.5 per cent).

Here too, the PAS found significant differences between the views of young and older Samoans, with younger Samoans being more conservative in their views. Where 51.3 per cent of those aged 21-29 strongly agreed that 'a woman should become Prime Minister of our country', this figure rose significantly among those aged 30 or above (65.0 per cent). There was, however, one exception. Younger people were more likely to agree that a woman could become Head of State (55.6 per cent) than were seniors (44.0 per cent). 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.

Education levels were another significant factor. Tertiary-educated respondents were less likely to agree that 'in general men are better at political leadership than women' (32.5 per cent), than primary or secondary educated respondents (45.6 per cent). Likewise, tertiary educated respondents were less likely to agree that 'university education is more important for a man than a woman' (10.9 per cent) than the primary or secondary educated (22.5 per cent).

---

[22]Non-response categories of 'don't know', 'decline to answer' and 'can't choose' were negligible in this question battery (<1 per cent).

TABLE 5 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	46.0	42.0	**88.0**	8.5	3.0
A woman should become Prime Minister of our country	61.0	23.8	**85.0**	8.0	5.6
A woman should become head of state in our country	24.3	25.4	**49.7**	25.4	24.1
There should be temporary special measures in increase women's representation in parliament	38.6	39.0	**77.6**	14.9	7.1
In general men are better at political leadership than women	16.7	26.0	**43.5**	29.7	26.2
University education is more important for a man than a woman	5.0	15.4	**20.4**	30.0	49.2
Women should not speak in village councils	17.6	18.5	**36.0**	25.9	37.6
Men and women should have the same rights to own land	62.4	24.3	**86.7**	8.3	4.7

6 | CONCLUSION

The Pacific Attitudes Survey 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 tended to be portrayed in the literature as stable, the PAS took place in the lead up to an historic election which saw HRRP's 40-year rule challenged by a new party, FAST, and ultimately resulted in the first change of government since 1987. The survey therefore provides an important snapshot of popular attitudes in what turned out to be a significant moment of political change.

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 strong 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 democratic governance in practice. Notably, the survey identified a strong correlation between respondents' level of economic satisfaction and their level of satisfaction with democracy. Though popular trust in Samoa's institutions is generally high, respondents reported 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 pathways, rather than national institutions. Expressing mixed feelings over the role of political parties, respondents' political engagement was stronger at the local level, and focussed 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.

Finally, the PAS found strong intergenerational differences in political attitudes in Samoa. In a consistent theme reflected across several modules, findings suggested that young people feel more 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.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest/competing interest is reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research complies with the guidelines set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – Updated 2018.

ORCID

Michael Leach https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6420-9629
Julien Barbara https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9276-4598
Christopher Mudaliar https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5109-9974
Patila Amosa https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0006-7988

REFERENCES

ANU Enterprise P/L and The Australian National University on behalf of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). (2006). People's Survey Pilot. https://www.ramsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Peoples-Survey-2006-Pilot-Complete-report-d6cc0b53-723e-4a14-800a-2c3f23d5cc61-0.pdf

Aqorau, T. (2017). *Choosing our Leaders: Western Electoral Systems versus Traditional Leadership Selection in the Pacific Islands – A Personal Perspective* (pp. 1–2). SSGM. http://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2017-03/ib-2017-06-aqorau.pdf

Baker, K. (2014). Explaining the outcome of gender quote campaigns in Samoa and Papua New Guinea. *Political Science*, *66*(1), 63–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032318714531428

Baker, K., & Barbara, J. (2020). Revisiting the concept of political participation in the Pacific. *Pacific Affairs*, *93*(1), 135–155. https://doi.org/10.5509/2020931135

Barbara, J., Cox, J., & Leach, M. (2015). *The emergent middle classes in Timor-Leste and Melanesia: Conceptual issues and developmental significance* (pp. 1–22). SSGM. http://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2015-12/DP-2015-4-Barbara-Cox-Leach_0.pdf

Corbett, J. (2015). Democracy in the Pacific Islands: Comparable practices, contested meanings. *Democratic Theory*, *2*(2), 22–40. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2015.020203

LEACH ET AL.

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
POLICY STUDIES

Australian
National
University

427

Cummins, D., & Leach, M. (2012). Democracy Old and New: The interaction of Modern and Traditional Authority in East Timorese Local Government. *Asian Politics and Policy*, *4*(1), 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-0787.2011.01321

Dinnen, S., & Firth, S. (2008). *Politics and state-building in Solomon Islands*. ANU Press. https://doi.org/10.22459/PSBS.05.2008

Dinnen, S., & Peake, G. (2015). Experimentation and innovation in police reform: Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and Bougainville. *Political Science*, *67*(1), 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032318715580623

Foster, R. (Ed.). (1995). *Nation-making: Emergent identities in postcolonial Melanesia*. The University of Michigan Press.

Fraenkel, J. (2018). *Postcolonial political institutions in the South Pacific Islands: A survey*. ANU Press.

Fry, G., & Tarte, S. (2015). *The new Pacific Diplomacy*. ANU Press.

Global Barometer Survey. (2018, August 24). Exploring support for democracy across the global: Report on Key findings. https://www.arabbarometer.org/publication/exploring-support-for-democracy-across-the-globe/

Haley, N., & Zubrinich, K. (2018). *2017 Papua New Guinea general elections: Election observation report*. The Australian National University.

Howes, S., & Surandiran, S. (2021, February 1). *The NZ pathway: how and why Samoans migrate to Australia – part one*. Devpolicy Blog. https://devpolicy.org/the-nz-pathway-how-and-why-samoans-migrate-to-australia-part-one-20210201-1/

La'alaai-Tausa, C. (2020). *Conflicting power paradigms in Samoa's 'traditional democracy' from tension to a process of harmonisation?* PhD Thesis. Massey University.

Lawson, S. (1996). *Tradition versus democracy in the Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*. Cambridge University Press.

Le Tagaloa, A. F. (1987). *Tapuai: Samoan worship*. Institute of Pacific Studies.

Leach, M., Scambary, J., Clarke, M., Feeny, S., & Wallace, H. (2013). National identity in fragile states: Insights from tertiary students in Melanesia and Timor-Leste. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, *51*(4), 447–478. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2013.841004

McDonald, L. (2018). Household coping behaviour and its contribution to resilience to global macroeconomic shocks in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. *Review of Development Economics*, *22*(4), 185–201. https://doi.org/10.1111/rode.12522

Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS) and UNDP. (2016). *Samoa hardship and poverty report: Analysis of the 2013/2014 Household Income and Expenditure Survey*. Apia.

United Nations. (2020). Country profiles. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/countryprofiles.asp

Va'a, L. F. (2009). Samoan custom and human rights: An indigenous view. *Law Review*, *40*(140), 237–250. https://doi.org/10.26686/vuwlr.v40i1.5388

Vaa, R., Afamasaga, G., Vaai, E., & Willams, W. (2006). *The 2001 Samoa general elections: A study of voter behaviour and voter opinion*. The University of the South Pacific.

Vaai, S. (2021, December 22). Personal communication.

Veenendaal, P., & Corbett, J. (2015). Why small states offer important answers to large questions. *Comparative Political Studies*, *48*(4), 527–549. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414014554687

Walton, G. (2013). Is all corruption dysfunctional? Perceptions of corruption and its consequences in Papua New Guinea. *Public Administration and Development*, *33*(3), 175–190.

Welsh, B., Huang, K., & Chu, Y. (2016). Burma votes for change: Clashing attitudes toward democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(2), 132–140. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0018

Wiltshire, C., Batley, J., Ridolfi, J., & Rogers, A. (2019). *2019 Solomon Islands National General Elections Observation Report*. ANU Press.

Wood, T. (2021, August 26). *What political crises in Vanuatu and Samoa tell us about their past and future*. Devpolicy Blog. https://devpolicy.org/vanuatu-samoa-politics-past-future-20210826/

World Bank. (2021). Personal Remittances, received (% of GDP) – Samoa. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=WS

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Leach is Professor in Politics and International Relations at Swinburne University of Technology.

Julien Barbara is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University.

Ioana Chan Mow is Professor of Computing and Computer Education at the National University of Samoa.

Sina Vaai is Professor of English at the National University of Samoa.

Christopher Mudaliar is a Research Fellow in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology.

Patila Amosa is Dean of the Faculty of Science at the National University of Samoa.

Louise Mataia is Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the National University of Samoa.

Susana Tauaa is Associate Professor of Geography at the National University of Samoa.

Taema Imo is Associate Professor in Environmental Science at the National University of Samoa.

Vernetta Heem is Senior Lecturer in English at the National University of Samoa.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

LEACH ET AL.

ASIA & THE PACIFIC
POLICY STUDIES

Australian
National
University

429

APPENDIX A

Gender			Age			Rural/urban		
Women	645	48.90%	Youth (21-29)	339	25.70%	Rural	1057	80.13%
Men	667	50.56%	Adult (30-59)	752	57.01%	Urban	262	19.86%
Other	7	0.53%	Senior (60+)	228	17.28%			
Total	1319		Total	1319		Total	1319	
Education levels			**Income per week**			**Subsistence reliance**		
No formal	9	0.68%	Less than SAT$115	190	14.40%	Not reliant at all	87	6.59%
Primary	82	6.20%	SAT$115 to 295	430	32.60%	Not reliant, but some food grown at home	172	13.04%
Secondary	829	62.85%	SAT$295 to 460	320	24.26%	Sometimes reliant	104	7.88%
Technical/ vocational	133	10.08%	SAT$460 to 700	182	13.79%	Frequently reliant	446	33.81%
University	241	18.27%	SAT$700 to 1250	96	7.27%	Always reliant	505	38.20%
Post-graduate	25	1.89%	SAT$1250 +	70	5.30%	N/A	5	0.37%
			Decline	31	2.35%			
Total	1319		Total	1319		Total	1319	