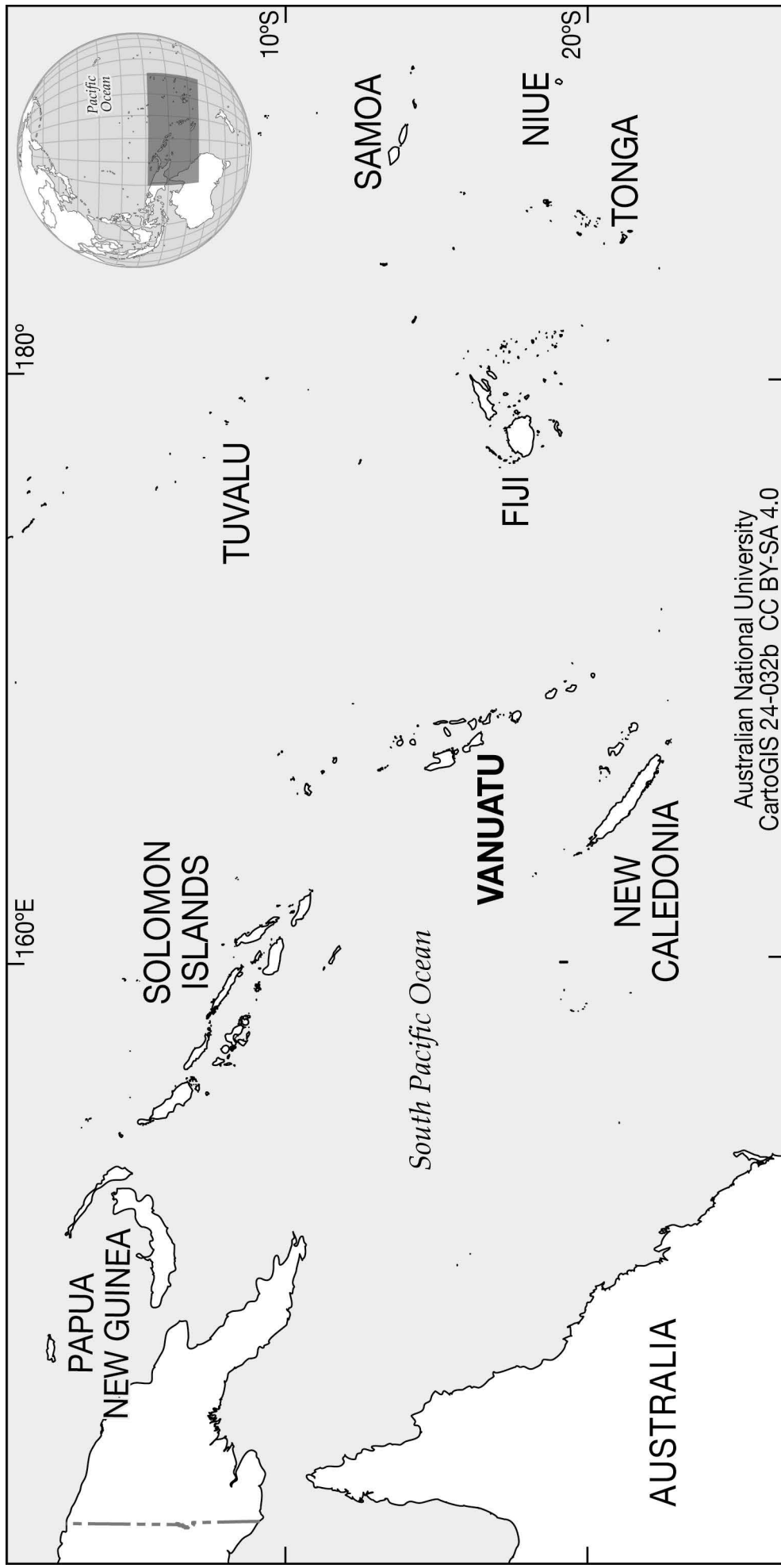


Pacific Attitudes Survey: Vanuatu

Christopher Mudaliar, Michael Leach, Kerryn Baker,
Julien Barbara, Milla Vaha, Krishna Kumar Kotra and
Trevor Leodoro





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Pacific Attitudes Survey: Vanuatu

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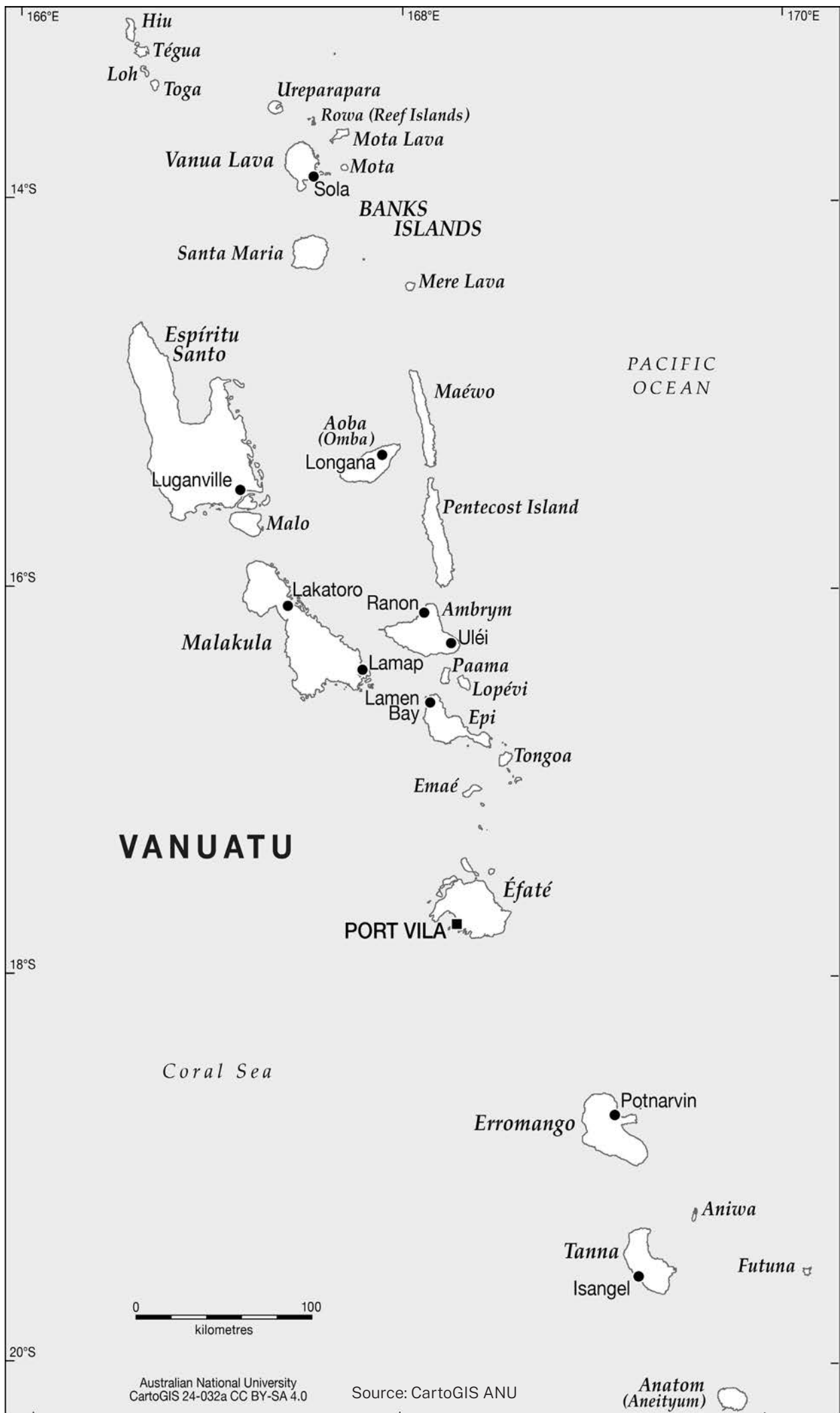
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Source: Kerryn Baker

Executive summary

The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Vanuatu* (PAS: Vanuatu) is the second large-scale popular political attitudes survey conducted in the Pacific region, following the first survey in Samoa conducted in late 2020 and early 2021 (Leach et al. 2022). Comprising 191 questions set out in 21 thematic modules, it covers a broad range of topics including attitudes to democracy, national identity, tradition, leadership, governance, development, climate change and international relations. The survey was nationally representative and conducted between August and October 2023, coinciding with a period of political instability for Vanuatu in which two successful votes of no confidence took place.

The conduct of large-scale, nationally representative popular attitudes surveys is relatively 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 randomised, nationally representative sample of 1330 eligible voters (aged 18 or older) from all six provinces of Vanuatu, the PAS provides important data on prevalent political, cultural and socio-economic attitudes. As such, the PAS offers fresh insights into Vanuatu's vibrant and unique democratic culture. Importantly, the PAS has been developed as a distinctly Pacific survey, combining questions from the Global Barometer network with a host of new survey modules of relevance to the region, including climate change and labour mobility.

PAS: Vanuatu findings reflect **strong support for both 'civic' and 'ethnic' markers of national identity**. Respondents ranked more traditional markers of national identity very highly, such as 'to respect *kastom*' (95%), 'to practise *kastom*' (94%) and 'to have been born in Vanuatu' (94%) as 'very important' for being 'truly ni-Vanuatu'. Yet these indicators were closely matched by strong support for modern 'civic' understandings of national identity, such as 'respect for Vanuatu's political institutions and law' (94%), and 'to have Vanuatu citizenship' (94%).

Respondents also expressed high levels of national pride, though pride in Vanuatu's distinctive *kastom* and culture (92% 'very proud') and history (91% 'very proud') scored significantly higher than those aspects tied to state functions, such as pride in 'the way democracy works' (82% 'very proud').

PAS: Vanuatu findings show that **ni-Vanuatu are strongly supportive of democracy**. When asked about their 'ideal' preference for forms of government, 76% agreed that 'democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government'. Vanuatu citizens were also

highly satisfied with the way their democracy performs in practice, with some 84% of respondents reporting that they were satisfied with 'the way democracy works in Vanuatu', compared with only 16% who were dissatisfied. Respondents displayed high levels of confidence that 'people have the power to change a government they do not like' (81%). We also 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 Vanuatu' (92%) than those who rated the economic condition negatively (81%).

But the PAS: Vanuatu findings also highlight a distinctive and widely embraced mix of democratic ideals and *kastom* values, representative of the hybrid nature of the Vanuatu state. Throughout Vanuatu, strong support for civil liberties and checks on executive power was balanced with high levels of respect for customary institutions. For example, 74% of respondents agreed that 'traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people'. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of respondents believe 'the government should consult the Malvatumauri [Council of Chiefs] when making laws' (94%).

Respondents demonstrated **a high level of trust in Vanuatu's institutions, despite widespread concerns about corruption at both national and local levels**. The highest levels of popular trust in institutions were reserved for traditional institutions (95% average), such as chiefs and the Malvatumauri; these were followed closely by non-elected institutions (94% average) such as courts; yet elected institutions, like parliament, also enjoyed high levels of popular trust (85% average). Respondents also reported high levels of satisfaction with their government (77%), a perhaps surprising number given the context of relative political instability in which the survey data collection took place. On key political issues, respondents considered a group of issues relating to the economy (19%), infrastructure (16%) and government services (15%) as the top three 'most important problems' facing Vanuatu.

PAS: Vanuatu findings show that **ni-Vanuatu citizens engage with politics more strongly through local and traditional, rather than national pathways**. Reported rates of political participation were consistently higher at local levels, across all demographic cohorts. On the question of what their member of parliament (MP) currently focuses on the most, 'promoting national development' (23%) was the most common answer.

In terms of what respondents believe that their MP should be doing, however, the most common answer was ‘helping community projects’ (35%), revealing a substantial gap between respondent perceptions of their MPs’ current activities, and a popular preference for MPs to focus on local development.

This PAS sought to ascertain how ni-Vanuatu participate in politics. **It found that women and youth are disproportionately disengaged from politics.** Younger people were less likely to report interest in politics and political activity, and the same was true for women. A recurring observation throughout the survey was the relative detachment of young people from politics. Younger ni-Vanuatu reported lower levels of interest in politics than older cohorts, with 60% of respondents aged 18–29 reporting some interest in politics, compared with 68% of adults (30–59), and 80% for seniors (60 or above). Older ni-Vanuatu were also more likely to report being politically active. Overall political engagement was relatively high, with 60% of total participants agreeing that ‘voting in elections makes a difference to my day-to-day life’. However, young people (26%) and women (27%) were less likely to strongly agree with this proposition than were seniors (42%) and men (37%). Generally, respondents believed that the 2022 election was completely or mostly free and fair. In terms of the media, radio was the most trusted news source for information about politics. A substantial proportion of respondents (41%) reported ‘practically never’ using the internet, a subset weighted towards older people and women.

Climate change is a major and pressing issue for ni-Vanuatu. The PAS: Vanuatu found that a strong majority of respondents believe climate change is an ‘urgent problem that needs to be addressed’ (81%). The vast majority of respondents also stated that they had observed changes in the climate over their lifetime (94%). Notably, a significant majority of ni-Vanuatu believe that they have a responsibility to accept other ni-Vanuatu who are displaced by climate change into their own village over the long term (90%). Findings also showed a strong belief among ni-Vanuatu that ‘protecting the environment should be top priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some

loss of jobs’ (77%) over ‘economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, even if the environment and community suffers to some extent’ (22%).

There were strong positive attitudes towards labour mobility schemes. Almost half of PAS: Vanuatu respondents (49%) reported knowing someone who has been part of a Pacific labour scheme. Some 77% of respondents said they would be willing to travel overseas to work temporarily. Though ‘worsening family relations’ was identified as the most significant negative impact of labour mobility schemes by 60% of respondents, 76% agreed that labour mobility schemes had been a net positive for their community.

The PAS found attitudes to women’s participation in politics were generally positive. Some 82% of respondents believed there are ‘too few’ women represented in parliament. There was clear support (87%) for temporary special measures to improve representation. The PAS also found strong agreement (74%) that ‘a woman should become Prime Minister of our country’. Yet social norms of political leadership in Vanuatu still favour men, with 55% of respondents agreeing that ‘in general men are better at political leadership than women’.

Both China and Australia are seen to have a lot of influence on the Pacific, and Vanuatu specifically, and their influence is broadly construed as positive. In terms of popular attitudes to international relations, respondents regard China (41%) as the country with the most influence in the Pacific today, ahead of Australia (35%). When asked to rate how much influence individual countries have on Vanuatu specifically, 77% of respondents said that China has ‘a great deal’ of influence in Vanuatu, narrowly ahead of Australia (76%), and followed by New Zealand (62%), France (55%) and the United States (41%). When asked which country should be a model for Vanuatu’s future development, Australia (47%) was rated above China (17%), US (15%), France (7%) and New Zealand (6%) respectively. Notably, however, the country most ni-Vanuatu believed should be prioritised in making security agreements was the United States (59%), followed by Australia (26%), France (5%) and China (4%).

Introduction

The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Vanuatu* is the second large-scale, nationally representative popular political attitudes survey conducted in the Pacific region, and the first in Melanesia.¹ This report presents the findings of the survey comprising 191 questions set out in 21 thematic modules covering a range of topics including attitudes to democracy, national identity, tradition, leadership, governance, development, climate change and international relations.

As noted in the first *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Samoa* (PAS: Samoa) report (Leach et al. 2022), there is as yet no strong tradition of surveying popular attitudes on political issues in the Pacific region, particularly at national levels. The Pacific is the only region not covered by recognised global democracy and values surveys, reflecting scholarly traditions that have tended to eschew quantitative analysis of politics but also, perhaps more importantly, the practical challenges of conducting large-scale surveys in a region of such complex geographies and cultural diversity.

The absence of nationally representative popular perspectives is a significant gap that limits our understanding of politics and society in the region. Accounting for popular perceptions of issues such as democracy, gender, development or climate change has the potential to challenge accepted wisdoms and open up new possibilities for scholarly debate and public policy engagement. Ensuring Pacific data is included in global conversations on popular attitudes can also combat the marginalisation of the region and ensure such debates are truly global.

The Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS) project aims to fill this gap through a series of attitudinal surveys in Pacific states. A key objective of the PAS project is to generate robust survey data on issues relevant to civil society researchers, policy-makers, academics, and governments. The PAS project, by building on established global survey instruments such as the Global Barometer, World Values Survey, and International Social Survey Program, will facilitate comparisons between the Pacific and the wider world. The PAS also develops a unique set of questions responding to the distinct challenges of the region, with an even balance of questions from the Barometer network, and others developed specifically for Pacific contexts.

The PAS project aims to build survey research capabilities and networks in the Pacific region. The survey process is based on deep partnership between local research institutions, to ensure questions respond to local priorities but also to help build local capabilities to undertake survey research. The Vanuatu survey was developed in partnership with

local researchers from the University of the South Pacific Emalus campus, and the National University of Vanuatu. The partnership-based approach is a key strength of the PAS process and ensures the relevance of the survey questions, and the utility of the findings in terms of public policy.

An important goal of the PAS project is to support academic and policy debates across the Pacific region. Comparability of surveys between countries will facilitate new forms of cross-country research and collaboration. This second iteration of the PAS project – Vanuatu – will enable comparative analysis within the region, between Samoa and Vanuatu. We hope over time to conduct surveys across the entire Pacific region.

We have sought to write a report that is of interest not only to a Vanuatu audience, but also to a broader Pacific audience, looking ahead to when the survey is expanded to more Pacific countries. Given the length and breadth of the survey, 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 are publicly available online.

Approach and methods

The PAS: Vanuatu was implemented using face-to-face interviews with randomly selected participants (n=1330) of voting age (18 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 Vanuatu into its six provinces (Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, Shefa and Tafea), 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 Vanuatu. Using 2023 population projections by age group obtained from data within the 2020 National Vanuatu census, the representativeness of the sample required only minor weighting.²

Assembly of the sample was based on projections from the 2020 National Census and household GPS data obtained from the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO). The VNSO identifies Port Vila and Luganville as the only two urban areas in Vanuatu, meaning that 76% of Vanuatu's voting age population lives in rural areas. Our sampling process reflected this, with 24% of the sample drawn from urban areas.

The survey team worked closely with area and district administration officials to provide advance

notice of survey schedules, and of the presence of PAS enumerators for survey implementation. Participants were provided with information and consent forms in their language of choice (Bislama, English or French) which provided background information on the purpose of the survey as well as information on informed consent. Surveys were available in all three languages, determined by respondent choice, with a majority (75%) choosing to answer in Bislama or mostly in Bislama.

The survey was delivered by a partnership between The Australian National University (ANU), Swinburne University of Technology (SUT), the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the National University of Vanuatu (NUV). Preliminary activities of the partnership included organising and conducting in-country workshops on Vanuatu-specific questions, translation reconciliation and validity workshops to ensure comparability between survey translations (Bislama, English and French), as well as ethics and research permit approval processes.

A local project manager, Trevor Leodoro, was employed to direct 16 enumerators responsible for data collection. Enumerators were all ni-Vanuatu students or recent graduates from USP and NUV, and were multilingual, with fluency in Bislama, English, French and/or local languages. These enumerators were split into four teams with a team leader responsible for managing communications, survey uploads, transport and accommodation. Vanuatu has a high degree of linguistic diversity and differing cultural norms across provinces. As such, at least one enumerator per group was selected to work within their own province of origin to facilitate navigating cultural norms, and in a small number of cases to conduct live translation of particular questions into a local language.

Training sessions were conducted by SUT and ANU survey team members in Port Vila. Training ensured that enumerators were familiarised with the survey content, and also covered interview skills, coding, and ethical interview practices, as well as practice sessions on the conduct of the survey in Bislama, English and French. An initial 50-participant pilot of the survey was conducted shortly after interviewer training at USP's Emalus campus in Port Vila. The purpose of the pilot was to ensure that problems such as unclear wording, conceptually vague wording, or data recording difficulties were identified and corrected in the survey tool, before the main fieldwork commenced. Feedback from the pilot was used to assess the average length of interviews (about one 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 50-person pilot was not included in the overall national sample of 1330 participants discussed in this report.

Survey implementation took place over 45 days (14 August – 30 September 2023) and saw enumerators deployed to every province in Vanuatu. Interviews

were conducted at pre-randomised sites utilising GPS data from the VNSO. Surveys were conducted by enumerators with randomly selected participants using tablets, uploading each survey in real-time upon completion to a secure database maintained by Akvo.³ Respondent data was de-identified and anonymised at the point of collection in order to guarantee the privacy of respondents. No identifiable data was recorded alongside survey results. All participants were offered a small honorarium of VT1000 to compensate them for their time spent being interviewed. Participants were not informed of the honorarium until the survey was completed.

Report structure

This report is set out in two parts.

Part 1 of the report examines the survey results relating to issues of domestic political importance in Vanuatu. These include attitudes to democracy and governance, trust in institutions, elections and campaigning, gender and politics, economic expectations, dispute resolution and leadership.

Part 2 of the report deals with key issues of thematic significance, which are relevant to a Vanuatu audience but also engage with broader audiences across the region and globally. These include findings on climate change, labour mobility, gender and international relations.

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=1330).⁴ Following this, particular results may be disaggregated by gender, age, education level and, where relevant, other demographics, 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 $p < .05$; and second, we adopt the protocol that these must result in substantial cohort differences in excess of 10% to merit discussion. Percentages obtained from the total sample (n=1330) are reported with an accuracy of better than 2.75% with 95% confidence. Completion and response rates for individual questions were very good for this survey (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 Vanuatu context

Vanuatu is an archipelagic nation made up of 83 islands with a small, but highly dispersed, population of just over 300,000 (VNSO/SPC 2022). The official languages are Bislama, English and French, and more than 100 local languages are also spoken. Most ni-Vanuatu identify as Christian, with Presbyterianism, Seventh-day Adventist, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism the largest denominations. Similar to most other Pacific countries, the majority of land in Vanuatu is held under customary tenure (McDonnell and Regenvanu 2022).

Vanuatu is one of the most ethno-linguistically diverse countries in the world, with customs and traditions – including the extent of chiefly authority – varying widely from place to place (Lindstrom 1997; Premdas and Steeves 1984). Nevertheless, the idea of *kastom* is central in terms of national identity and creates a unifying framework for Vanuatu as a country. *Kastom* as a concept is inherently ambiguous, relating less to culture in a primordial sense and

more to how cultural traditions are reinterpreted in the present (see Keesing 1982; Mahit 2016). Indeed, *kastom* should not be translated into English simply as ‘tradition’ or ‘culture’, as it instead encapsulates a holistic way of being (Nimbtik 2016). In terms of governance, *kastom* encompasses traditional modes of development, politics and diplomacy at the local level (Nimbtik 2016).

Vanuatu at independence faced the formidable challenge of grafting a Western system of parliamentary government onto deep-rooted (and varied) traditional systems of political and cultural organisation (Forsyth 2009). As such, Vanuatu’s governance systems combine modern elements with traditional knowledge and values (Nimbtik 2016; Naupa 2017). The Malvatumauri (National Council of Chiefs), a constitutionally enshrined body representing traditional leaders, is one example of a hybrid institution. Elected by the District Councils of Chiefs, the Malvatumauri is a consultative body on matters relating to land, custom, tradition and cultural and linguistic heritage.

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. Alternately, 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 presented as a descriptive analysis or as a notable significant association. Descriptive analysis refers to the basic percentage response to a question from the entire respondent group. Significant associations reported in the analysis refer to correlations found in the data between demographic categories (such as age, gender, and urban/rural location) and particular political attitudes. For instance, it might be reported

that a significant relationship was found between the 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, 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 greater practical ramifications.

Prior to independence, Vanuatu was co-administered by the French and British through a 'condominium', an unusual arrangement that was criticised for its 'inherent politico-legal contradictions' that led to, among other consequences, statelessness for ni-Vanuatu (Kele-Kele 1977:17; see also Lightner and Naupa 2005). From the 1960s, nationalist political movements arose in Vanuatu in opposition to the colonial arrangements (Lightner and Naupa 2005). The first directly elected legislative body, the Representative Assembly, was established in 1975. The unusual legacy of the joint British and French colonial era resulted in parallel education systems and a broad sociolinguistic division between Anglophone and Francophone ni-Vanuatu that has endured in varying forms.

The Vanua'aku Party dominated politics for the first decade of independence, before splits in the party destabilised it (Morgan 2008). Since then, coalition-based governments have been the norm, and politics has become more volatile, with frequent realignments and changes of government. The fragmentation of Vanuatu's politics has been both facilitated and reinforced by the country's immense cultural diversity and increasingly localised political cultures (van Trease 2005). Despite a high rate of government turnover – 2023 saw the tenure of three different prime ministers – there exists a 'robust and resilient' system of checks and balances that places some guardrails around political instability (Forsyth and Batley 2016:276).

Vanuatu uses a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) electoral system, in which most constituencies are multi-member and voters cast a vote for a single candidate. The system is simple for voters, and tends to limit one-party dominance in areas. Instead, it rewards smaller and more localised party structures, which also contributes to fragmentation (Morgan 2008). Voter turnout has declined substantially over time. In 2022, turnout was fewer than 50% of registered voters (VEC 2022).

The state of Vanuatu has always pursued a staunchly independent foreign policy (Arutangai 1995). This is exemplified by its strong stance on decolonisation in the region, active role in the nuclear-free movement, and status as the first Pacific member of the non-aligned movement. Since independence, Vanuatu has been a member of the Pacific Islands Forum. Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, hosts the secretariat of the Melanesian Spearhead Group.

Vanuatu has a largely agricultural-based economy. More than three-quarters of Vanuatu's population live in rural areas, with smallholder agriculture proving the livelihood basis for many ni-Vanuatu (VNSO/SPC 2022). Almost 90% of businesses in Vanuatu are informal, with a majority of these being related to retail and transport (VNSO/SPC 2022). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic,

tourism contributed around one-third of Vanuatu's GDP (Naupa et al. 2021). Following the reopening of borders, tourism has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels (Cruz and Wells 2023). Vanuatu has a strong arts and culture sector, and in 2023 hosted the Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival (MACFEST).

Vanuatu is a significant sending country to Australian and New Zealand labour mobility schemes. Ni-Vanuatu make up around one-in-three Pacific workers in the Australian and New Zealand schemes, the largest share of any Pacific country, with more than 10% of the working population of Vanuatu participating in seasonal work (Bedford 2023). There is substantial economic benefit to individual workers who participate, and their families and broader communities, although concerns have been raised about the impact of skills shortages within Vanuatu (Bedford 2023).

Vanuatu has a young population. Estimates suggest that in 2023, ni-Vanuatu under the age of 25 represented 50% of the overall population (SPC 2023). Often this 'youth bulge' is framed negatively, with commentators suggesting it will present a number of challenges to employment, health and urbanisation (Wilson 2020). Vanuatu has developed innovative approaches to youth inclusion in governance, with the passage of the 2018 National Youth Authority Act providing for a youth-led government advisory body (Craney 2022).

Government service delivery is an ongoing challenge for Vanuatu, especially given its small and highly dispersed population (see Cox et al. 2007). As state reach is limited, so too is the ability of institutions like the media to disseminate information and generate public discourse. The traditional media environment in Vanuatu is impacted by funding and capacity constraints, and at times by tensions with the government of the day and self-censorship from journalists (Singh 2017; Tacchi et al. 2013). Access to the internet has grown exponentially in the past decade, although there are inequalities in telecommunications access across the country. For internet users, social media provides an informal medium of communication between citizens and representatives (Finau et al. 2014). Social media sites have been used both to facilitate political discussion within Vanuatu and to amplify issues affecting Vanuatu to global audiences, as seen by the use of YouTube and Facebook by civil society groups to share information about the effects of Cyclone Pam (Spyksma 2019).

Vanuatu has emerged as a leading advocate for climate action, including loss and damage measures, in global fora (Wewerinke-Singh and Hinge Salili 2020). This activism is driven by its status as a climate vulnerable nation, exemplified in the increasing frequency and intensity of major disaster events. Cyclone Harold in 2020, for example, displaced some 87,000 people and caused major economic damage. Regionally, Vanuatu has been a leading

proponent calling for increased climate mitigation efforts on behalf of regional actors with large carbon footprints, notably Australia with its significant fossil fuel industry (Vurobaravu 23/9/2022). In 2023, Vanuatu spearheaded an international campaign for an Advisory Opinion on loss and damage from the International Court of Justice. This global movement began as a student-led initiative at USP's Emalus campus in Port Vila in 2019 (PISFCC 21/2/2023).



Source: Department of Pacific Affairs



Source: Christopher Mudaliar

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

Part 1 of the PAS: Vanuatu focuses on popular attitudes to democracy and government. It examines how ni-Vanuatu conceive of 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 ni-Vanuatu attitudes to political community. The second deals with attitudes to democracy as a political system in Vanuatu, normative perspectives on the purpose of democracy in ni-Vanuatu society, and the role of tradition. The third investigates ni-Vanuatu attitudes to government, including popular views on the development priorities government should pursue. The final section focuses on political participation and who gets a voice within Vanuatu’s democracy. It pays particular attention to issues of political stability, engagement and leadership.

1.1 National identity

The challenges of nation-building and constructing national identities in Melanesia are well known (Leach et al. 2013). At independence, the cultural diversity of Vanuatu, combined with the Anglophone-Francophone cleavage that had emerged through its unique colonial arrangements, formed significant barriers to fostering a cohesive sense of national identity (Rousseau 2008). Nonetheless, studies have shown that despite an

enduring linguistic divide, there is a relatively strong sense of national identity in Vanuatu (Clark, Leach and Scambary 2013; Mahit 2016).

The PAS asked ni-Vanuatu respondents a range of questions about how they perceive their political community. This included how close they feel to different levels of Vanuatu’s political community, where their sense of national identity lies, the focus of their national pride, and which attributes they consider important for being ‘truly’ ni-Vanuatu.⁵

Affiliations to political community

Respondents were asked to assess their feeling of closeness (or ‘emotional attachment’) to various levels of political community in Vanuatu (Figure 1). These included their home village or town, language group, home province or island, and the Melanesian 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 ni-Vanuatu relate to different levels of political community, and whether there are any significant associations between these attitudes and particular demographic characteristics of respondents.

Respondents were more likely to feel ‘very close’ to their ‘home village’ (82%) and language group (85%) in relation to other political communities. Yet, overall (‘very close’ and ‘close’ combined), they are more likely

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

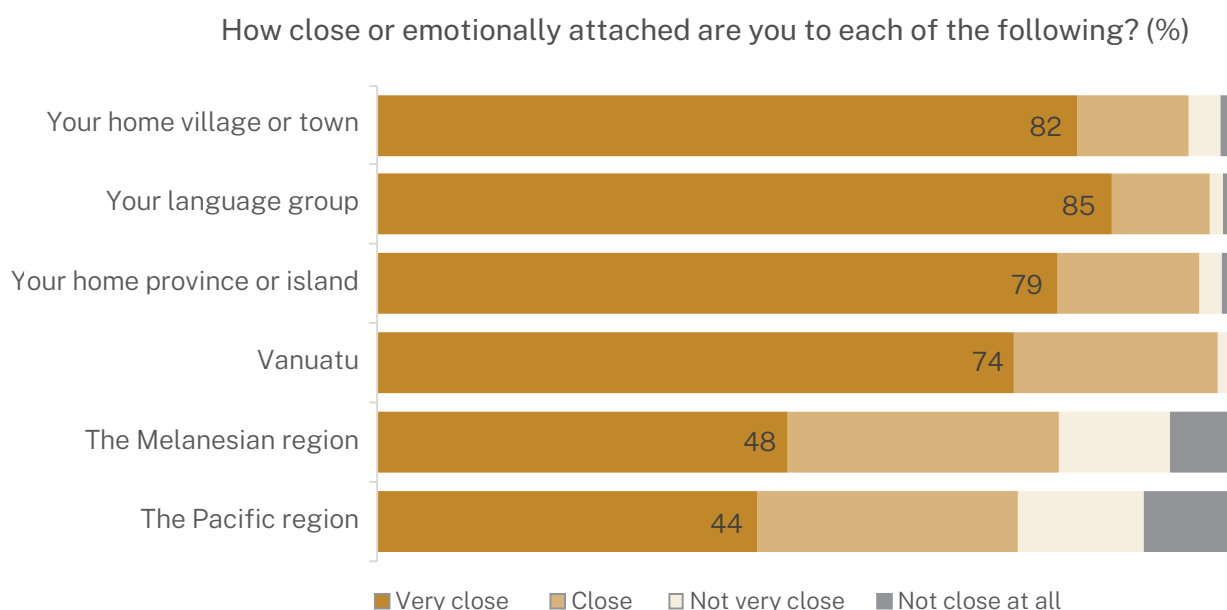
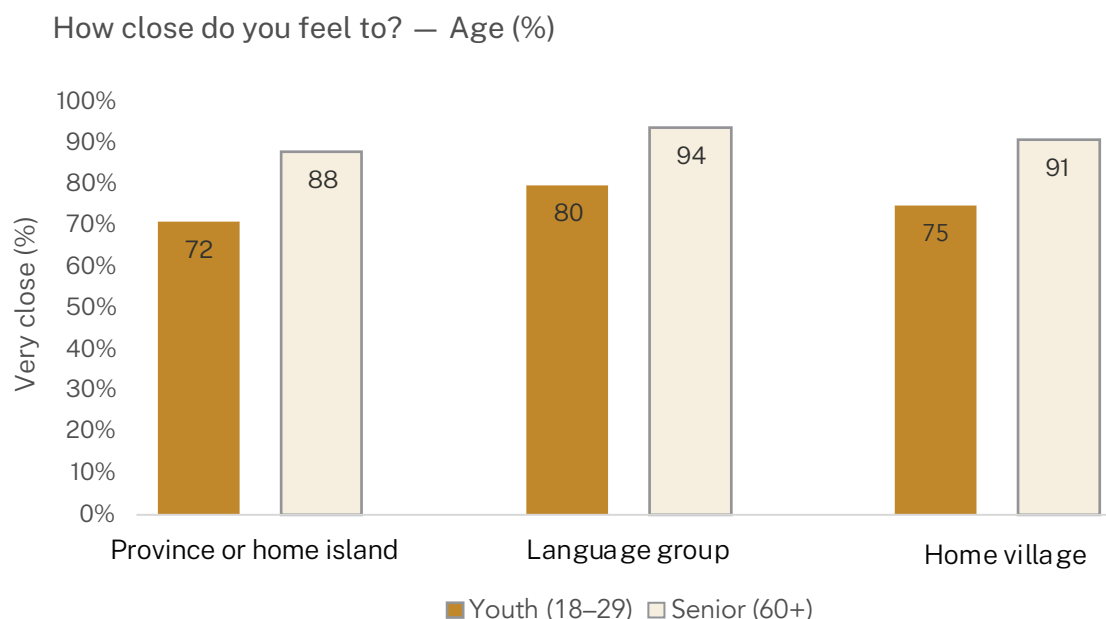


Figure 2: Political community – how close do you feel to? – Age (%)



to feel close to Vanuatu (98%) than any other political community. Respondents reported feeling significantly closer to ‘the Melanesian region’ than to ‘the Pacific region’, though both supranational affiliations were of a lower order to national and subnational affiliations.

Both age and location played a role in how different cohorts related to their political community (see Figure 2). For instance, though responses were strong across all age cohorts, younger ni-Vanuatu (18–29) were significantly less likely to feel ‘very close’ to their home village or town (75%), language group (80%), and province or home island (72%) than were senior (60+) ni-Vanuatu (91% to home village or town; 94% to language group; 88% to home island). There was, however, no significant association between respondent age and feelings of closeness to Vanuatu as a whole.

Rural respondents were more likely to feel ‘very close’ to their home village (87%), language group (89%) and home island (83%) when compared to urban respondents. Despite this difference, urban respondents still expressed significant levels of closeness to their home communities, feeling ‘very close’ to their home villages (65%), home islands (66%) and especially their language groups (74%). In urban areas like Port Vila, those who belong to the same language group often reside within the same vicinity, and maintain close links within their home community.

National identity indicators

Common understandings of national identity play a key role in unifying political communities and cultural groups under one common national umbrella. The PAS asked respondents about the importance of certain attributes to being ‘truly ni-Vanuatu’. 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, ‘feeling’ ni-Vanuatu or having ni-Vanuatu citizenship); 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 Vanuatu, being able to speak Bislama, being Christian or having Melanesian ancestors). Respondents rated their responses to these questions as ‘very important’, ‘fairly important’, ‘not very important’ or ‘not at all important’ (Figure 3).

Respondents attached high levels of importance to each of these national identity indicators as markers of being ‘truly’ ni-Vanuatu, with the exception of significantly lower values found for the ability to speak English and French.

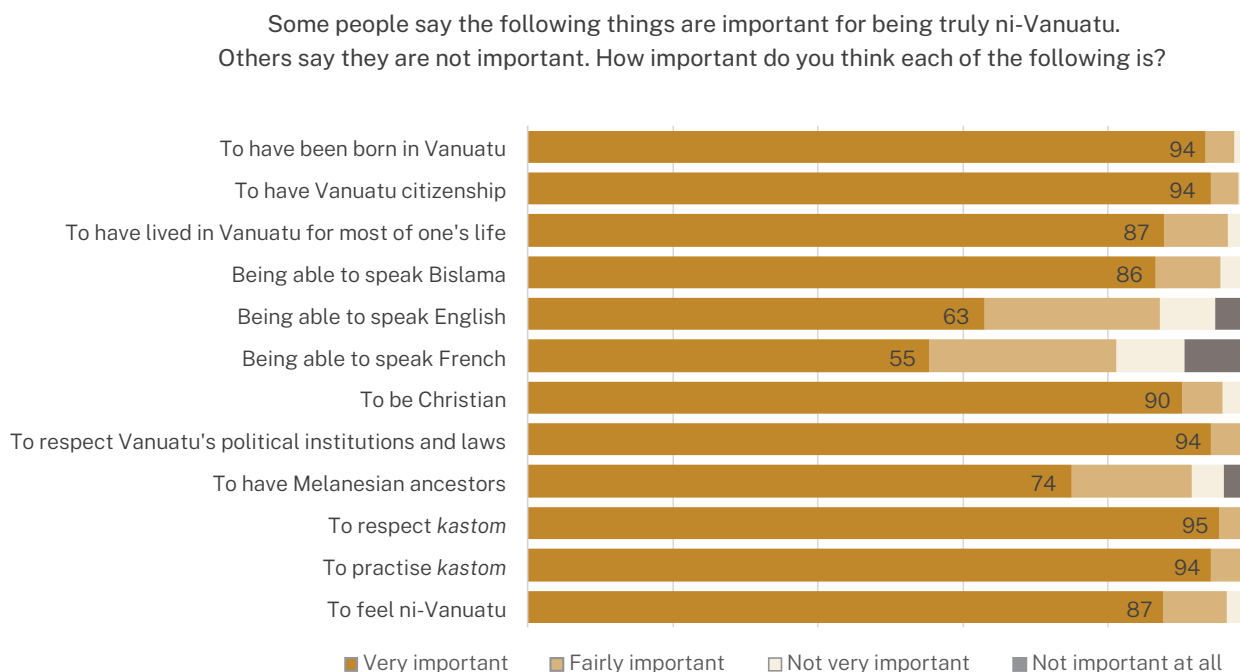
Notably, civic indicators like ‘to respect Vanuatu’s political institutions and laws’ (94% very important),

Box 2: Language fluency in Vanuatu

The PAS: Vanuatu asked respondents to self-identify their fluency in Bislama, French, English and other local languages. Notably, 85% reported they were fluent in Bislama, 32% said they were fluent in English and 14% reported being fluent in French. A combined 46% said they are also fluent in their own local language.

Our results suggested that youth (18–29: 38%) were more likely to claim fluency in English than adults (30–59: 28%) and seniors (60+: 27%). Urban respondents were likewise more likely to claim fluency in English (43%) than rural respondents (28%). No other languages had similar cross-effects.

Figure 3: Degree of importance of various attributes to being ‘truly ni-Vanuatu’ (%)



‘to have ni-Vanuatu citizenship’ (94%), and ‘to feel ni-Vanuatu’ (87%) were matched by objectivist indicators like ‘to respect *kastom*’ (95%), ‘to practise *kastom*’ (94%), ‘to be Christian’ (90%), and ‘to have been born in Vanuatu’ (94%). On average, civic/voluntarist and ethnic/objectivist indicators were valued relatively equally by respondents.⁶

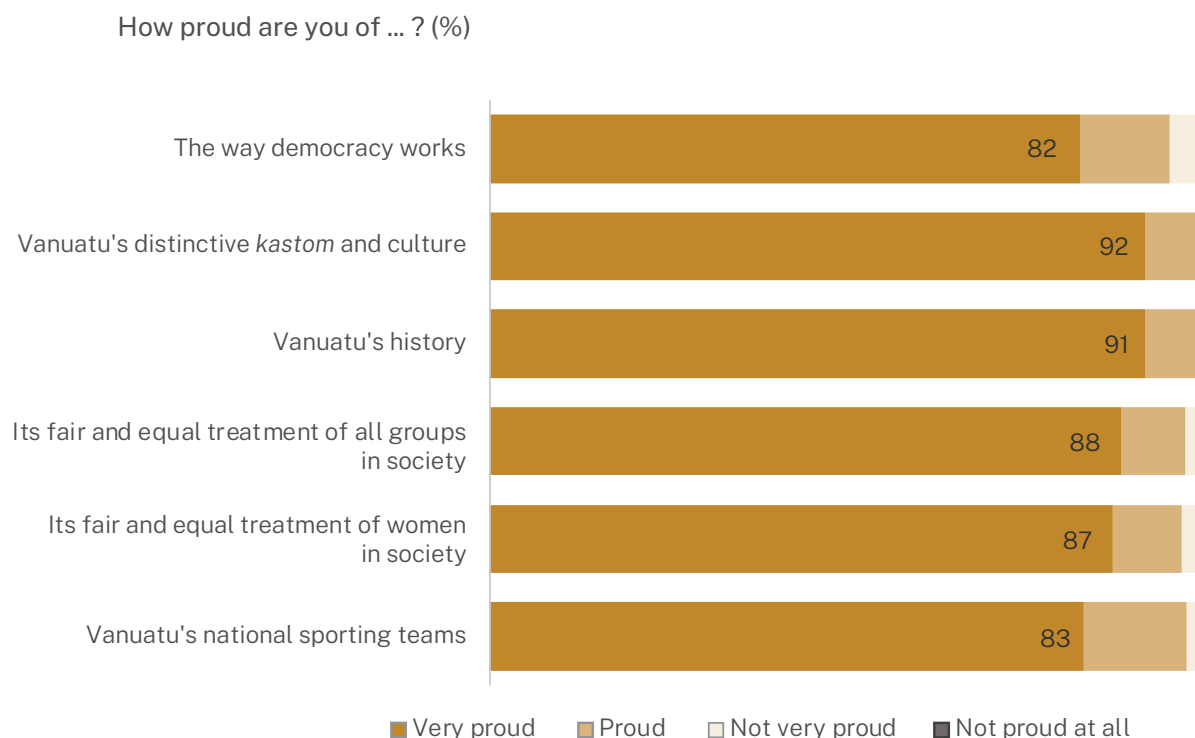
Findings therefore reveal the comparable importance of ‘modern’ indicators — such as ‘to respect political institutions and law’, and ‘to be a citizen’ — and more ‘traditional’ notions of political community, such as respect for *kastom* and tradition. This is an instructive finding that indicates the ongoing importance of *kastom* in national life, and the hybridised features of state and governance in Vanuatu.

The survey also found that ni-Vanuatu consider ‘to be Christian’ as very important to being ‘truly ni-Vanuatu’ (90%), reflecting the embeddedness of Christian churches in Vanuatu society, and also their role in service delivery, particularly in the area of education. Notably, focus groups conducted in a survey of ni-Vanuatu tertiary students emphasised the importance of Christianity in understanding what it means to be ni-Vanuatu, arguing that Christianity has helped to ‘bring people together’ across Vanuatu’s many islands (Clark, Leach and Scambary 2013:727). Despite the evident importance of Christianity to respondent perceptions of national identity, it is notable that ‘to respect *kastom*’ (95%) exceeded this indicator as an important attribute of being ‘truly’ ni-Vanuatu.

Box 3: Christianity and *kastom*

Kastom in Vanuatu is a holistic term relating to the way relationships are ordered in Vanuatu, and the obligations, norms and customs which shape daily life (see Mahit 2016; Nimbtik 2016). Different provinces, home islands and language groups have varying conceptions of *kastom*, but *kastom* also acts as a collective term that underpins a sense of national identity in Vanuatu, and a ‘ni-Vanuatu’ way of doing things (Rousseau 2008). As a concept, *kastom* is not fixed, but rather represents how cultural traditions are interpreted in the present day (Mahit 2016). Forsyth (2009:11) suggests that both Christianity and *kastom* have become inexorably linked in Vanuatu, with both having a role in ‘shaping the spiritual foundation of the country’. Christianity in Vanuatu began with the arrival of missionaries in the nineteenth century, and today more than 90 per cent of ni-Vanuatu identify as Christian. The role of the Church in Vanuatu is central to most communities, from providing services like health and education in lieu of access to state infrastructure to solving intracommunity disputes and providing counselling. Both *kastom* and Christianity are entwined with the modern Vanuatu state, with the preamble to the constitution stating that the country is ‘founded on traditional Melanesian values, faith in God, and Christian principles’.

Figure 4: Degree of 'pride' in aspects of ni-Vanuatu life (%)



A significant association was found in relation to place of residence. Rural respondents (90%) were significantly more likely to regard 'to have lived in Vanuatu for most of one's life' to be 'very important' to being truly ni-Vanuatu, than were urban respondents (79%).

Self-reported language fluency proved a strong factor in questions concerning the importance of the official languages for being considered 'truly ni-Vanuatu'. Those who considered themselves fluent in either Bislama, English or French were significantly more likely to consider fluency in the corresponding language as 'very important' to being 'truly ni-Vanuatu'. This demonstrates the importance of language instruction to conceptions of national identity.

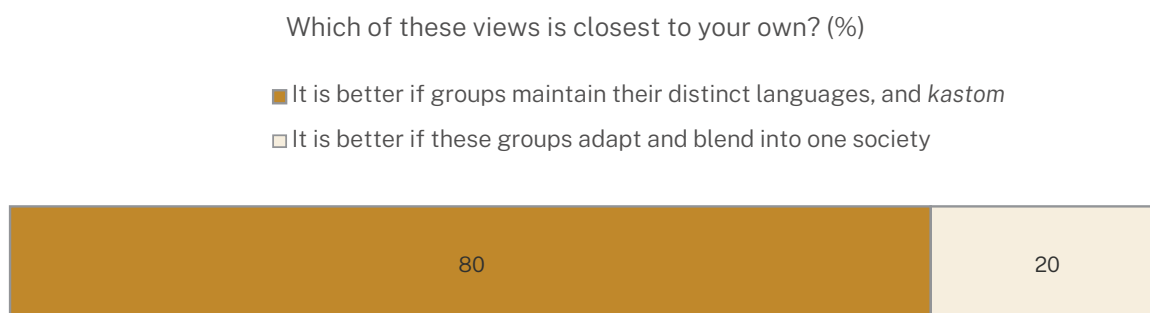
National pride

A further set of survey questions asked respondents about their level of national pride in relation to various aspects of Vanuatu's politics, history and culture (Figure 4).

Results reflected high levels of national pride across every indicator. Notably, pride in Vanuatu's history, and the country's distinctive *kastom* and culture returned the strongest results in terms of total pride ('very proud' and 'proud' combined: 99%). Notable also are the lower levels of pride in 'the way democracy works' (82% 'very proud'). This indicates that the key strengths of Vanuatu nationalism lie less in the capacity of the state, and more in wider popular affiliations to society, culture and national history.

Another aspect of understanding national identity lies in the profound and continuing importance of local cultures. While culture was found to be a key object of national pride, the very idea of culture nonetheless remains firmly associated with local, rather than national, communities. Accordingly, in another question, 80% of respondents agreed with the statement that 'it is better if groups maintain their distinct languages, and *kastom*', compared with 20% who chose the alternative of 'it is better if these groups adapt and blend into one society' (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Views on diversity of cultures (%)



1.2 Ni-Vanuatu attitudes to democracy

With few exceptions, Pacific democracies have proven 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. In Vanuatu, as in other Pacific countries, democratic institutions have been hybridised to reflect local traditions and context, creating a unique style of democratic practice.

Vanuatu's politics is characterised by volatility, with weak coalitions and regular episodes of crossing of the floor in parliament. From independence in 1980 to 2023, Vanuatu had 27 changes of prime minister. The PAS took place in the context of two votes of no confidence in August and October 2023 which led to changes of government, a relatively common occurrence in Vanuatu politics. A bill to strengthen the political party system and reduce opportunities for party-switching was withdrawn in the context of the political turmoil around the first vote of no confidence. The second no-confidence motion brought in a government that pledged to continue efforts to reform the political party system (Naupa, Kalpokas Doan and Nimbtkik 6/12/2023). A referendum on these proposed changes has been scheduled for May 2024; it is set to be the first referendum in Vanuatu's history.

Despite this relatively unstable environment, democratic institutions are highly resilient in Vanuatu. In particular, the strength of judicial institutions has been tested and proven in multiple political and constitutional crises since independence. Recent examples include the successful prosecution of 15 MPs over corruption charges associated with a no confidence motion in 2015 (Forsyth and Batley 2016).

The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Vanuatu* asked a range of questions to gain understanding of how ni-Vanuatu understand democracy and its value to their society, and how they rate its performance as a political

Box 4: Support for democracy in international comparison

Typically, popular political attitudes surveys (see for example GBS 2018) divide popular support for democracy into two types. These are best understood as regime-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 the alternatives (regime-based); or because democracy currently delivers good results, such as development or economic growth (performance-based). These broadly equate with in-principle support for democracy, and in-practice satisfaction, respectively.

Respondents in Vanuatu demonstrated strong levels of in-practice (84%) satisfaction with democracy, which was higher than in-principle (76%) support. This contrasts notably with Samoa, where in-principle (61%) support was stronger than in-practice (53%) satisfaction with democracy (see Leach et al. 2022). The Global Barometer has separate compound indicators to identify regime-based support for democracy.⁷

system when compared to 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 illiberalism, populism and democratic recession (Diamond 2015).

Support for democracy

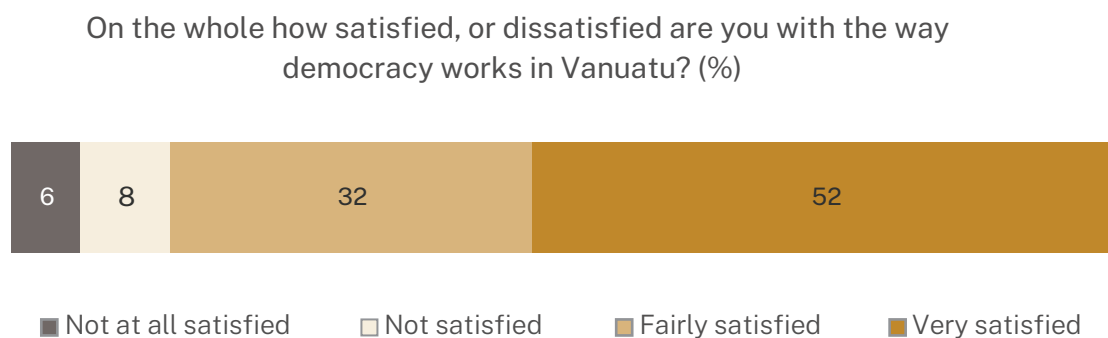
The PAS gauged respondents' preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives (Figure 6). This question is one of the most extensively used indicators for measuring popular support for democracy globally (see for example Welsh, Huang and Chu 2016). Overall,

Figure 6: Preference for democracy (%)

Which of the following statements come closest to your own opinion? (%)



Figure 7: Degree of satisfaction with how democracy works in Vanuatu (%)



76% of ni-Vanuatu respondents agreed that ‘democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government’. By contrast, 17% of respondents selected ‘under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one’. Just 6% 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 principle. No significant cohort effects (e.g. age, gender or education levels) were found in relation to preference for democracy or authoritarian rule, suggesting this is a relatively unifying position across different societal groups within Vanuatu.

Satisfaction with democracy

The PAS then prompted respondents to reflect on how Vanuatu’s democracy works in practice by asking ‘on the whole, how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Vanuatu?’ (Figure 7). A total of 84% of ni-Vanuatu reported that they were either ‘fairly satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’, compared with 14% who were ‘not at all satisfied’ or ‘not satisfied’.⁸

We then used cohort analysis to assess factors associated with democratic satisfaction. Notably, rural respondents were significantly more likely to be ‘very satisfied’ (58%) with how democracy works in Vanuatu, when compared to urban respondents (38%).

Elsewhere in the democratic world, satisfaction with democracy tends to rise and fall with the economic performance of the country (GBS 2018:24). In the survey, we also asked respondents to evaluate the overall economic condition of Vanuatu, along with their own family’s economic situation (Figure 8).

Respondents generally rated the national economic condition as very similar to that of their own family. Notably, there was 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 were significantly more likely to report satisfaction with ‘the way democracy works in Vanuatu’ (92%) than those who rated the economic condition negatively (81%).

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 Vanuatu promotes fundamental civil liberties and political rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly. An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that

Figure 8: Assessment of current economic conditions (%)

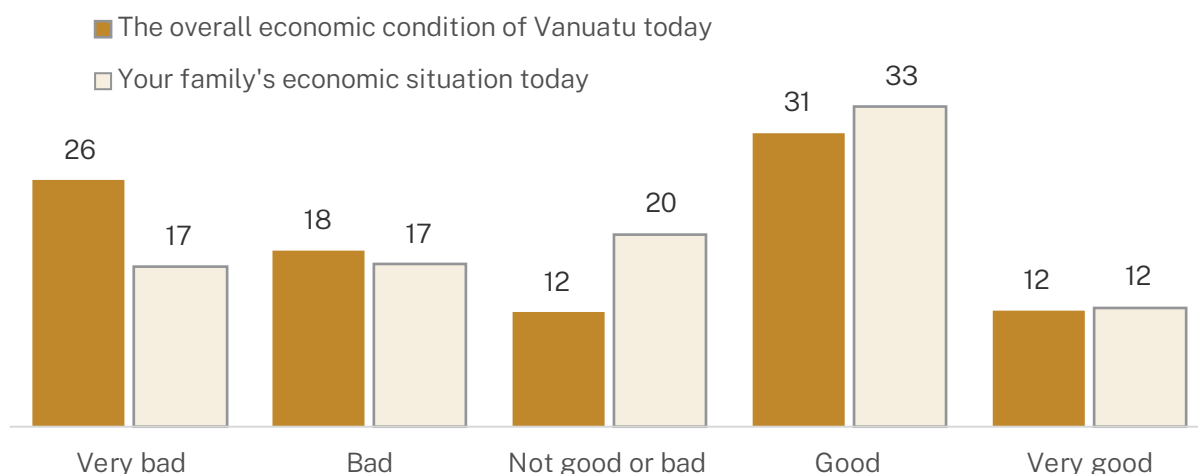


Table 1: Civil liberties and separation of powers – ‘How much do you agree?’ (%)

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
People are free to say what they think without fear	76	18	94	3	3
People can join any organisation they like without fear	73	19	92	5	2
When the government breaks the law, there is nothing the legal system can do	11	4	15	25	59
When judges decide important cases, they should follow the view of government	26	19	45	24	29
When the country is facing a difficult situation, it is okay for the government to ignore the law to deal with it	24	23	47	24	28

‘people are free to say what they think without fear’ (94%) and that ‘people can join any organisation they like without fear’ (92%).

There was also broad popular appreciation of the separation of powers, and the ability of courts to hold governments to account, with a majority (84%) disagreeing with the proposition that ‘when the government breaks the law, there is nothing the legal system can do’. However, a much narrower majority (53%) disagreed with the view that judges ‘should follow the view of government’ when deciding important cases. Respondents expressed mixed opinions on the notion that ‘when the country is facing a difficult situation, it is okay for the government to ignore the law to deal with it’, with 47% in agreement.

Education levels proved a significant factor in these responses. Respondents with no formal education or a primary level of education were significantly more likely to agree that judges should follow the view of the government

when deciding important cases (55%), compared to those with secondary (45%) or further education (33%).⁹

Parties and elections

Respondents also displayed high levels of confidence that ‘people have the power to change a government they do not like’ (81%). This is especially remarkable given that the survey was conducted in a period of political instability in which the government changed twice through votes of no confidence. It is also interesting in the context of declining voter turnout rates, with fewer than half of all registered voters casting a ballot in the 2022 Vanuatu general elections.

On political parties, respondents were split between those who believe ‘political parties are suitable for our system of government’ (57%) and those who do not (40%). As we will see below, popular trust in political parties as institutions is also relatively low, when

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	27	30	57	20	20
Politics seems so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on	60	25	85	8	7
People have the power to change a government they don’t like	63	18	81	8	9

compared with other political institutions in Vanuatu (see Table 6 below). This may reflect Vanuatu’s now highly factionalised and fluid party setting (van Trease 2005), characterised more by loose coalitions of often disparate groups. It may also reflect the localised nature of electoral campaigning in Vanuatu.

Despite strong support for democracy in principle, the findings revealed a widespread sense among ni-Vanuatu that politics was complicated and hard to follow. A large majority (85%) of respondents believe that ‘politics seems so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on’.

Respondents with further education were significantly less likely to agree that political parties are suitable for Vanuatu’s system of governance, with 51% agreement, compared to those with no education or a primary level (64%).¹⁰

These results reflect Vanuatu’s distinctive political culture around parties and elections, in which changes in government in Vanuatu are often a result of votes of no confidence, between regular election cycles. For instance, a snap election was called in 2022 after the president dissolved parliament, following an attempted vote of no confidence by the opposition against the incumbent government. This election saw voter turnout rates drop to 44% relative to the previous scheduled election which had seen a turnout rate of 52% (VEC 2020).¹¹ Against a backdrop of weak political parties and a trend towards localisation, it is unsurprising that survey results reflect a lack of trust in political parties in Vanuatu, and a widespread popular sense that national politics is ‘complicated’.

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. Following a robust endorsement of civil liberties and checks on executive power, noted above, respondents strongly

favoured a ‘bottom-up’ conception of government as a set of institutions which ought to respond to voters’ needs (Table 3).

In these responses, a majority of respondents believed the media ‘should have the right to publish new ideas without government control’ (63%), and that the ‘government is our employee; the people should tell the government what needs to be done’ (55%). Respondents were relatively evenly split on their views of the relationship between government and people, with 50% believing ‘government leaders do what they think is best for the people’, while 48% believed ‘government leaders implement what the voters want’. Averaged over the three questions, respondents (55%) favoured a conception of government that takes direction from the demands of its citizens.

These findings were reinforced in further questions designed to examine democratic values (see Table 4). Perhaps most striking of these was the strong majority of respondents agreeing that the government should consult the Church (91%) and the Malvatumauri (94%) when making laws.¹² This illustrates the centrality of Christianity and *kastom* in the lives of many ni-Vanuatu.

Also notable, though more contested, was the popular rejection of government’s role in limiting discussion of certain ideas. In Vanuatu, 51% of respondents disagreed with the notion that ‘the government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society’. In Samoa this result was very different, with just 18% disagreement (Leach et al. 2022:14).

A relatively strong majority believe that traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people (74%). Notably, however, respondents reported greater support for notions of citizen equality in relation to education levels, with 53% agreeing that ‘people with little or no education should have as much say in politics as highly educated people’, and 46% disagreeing.

Respondent gender proved to be a significant factor in these responses. Men were more likely to strongly agree (81%) that the Malvatumauri should be consulted

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.	48	Government is our employee; the people should tell government what needs to be done.	55	The media should have the right to publish news ideas without government control.	63	55
Government leaders do what they think is best for the people.	50	The government is like a parent, it should decide what is good for us.	44	The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that might be harmful to society.	35	43

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	24	23	47	21	30
People with little or no education should have as much say in politics as highly educated people	30	23	53	20	26
The government should consult the Church when making laws	66	25	91	5	3
The government should consult the Malvatumauri when making laws	74	20	94	3	2
Traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people	43	31	74	14	11

when making laws compared to women (69%). Older respondents (81%) were more likely to strongly agree with the same proposition, compared to youth (70%). Rural respondents (78%) were also more likely to strongly agree, compared to urbanites (65%).

Taken together, findings on democracy reveal a unique combination of endorsement for Vanuatu’s democratic institutions, along with a significant level of popular regard for customary institutions, reflective of the hybridised nature of the Vanuatu state. There is also a relatively strong popular view that government should take direction from citizens, rather than leading in a ‘top-down’ manner. However, this relationship is moderated at a local level, where respondents express stronger preferences for traditional leaders to speak on their behalf. This indicates that within Vanuatu there are dual perspectives on how democracy is perceived, both at national and local levels.

The role of *kastom*

Following on from the above, the PAS asked respondents further questions related to the role of *kastom* and democratic principles. When asked whether ‘it is important to respect *kastom* even if it goes against the law’, some 90% of respondents agreed. The statement that ‘government should recognise the traditional way of doing things’ elicited even greater total agreement from respondents (99%). Notably, rural respondents were more likely to strongly agree (86%) that the government ‘should recognise the traditional way of doing things’, compared to urban respondents (72%).

The strong role of *kastom* as a source of political legitimacy reflects broader literature on the powerful influence of *kastom* on life in Vanuatu (see Mahit 2016;

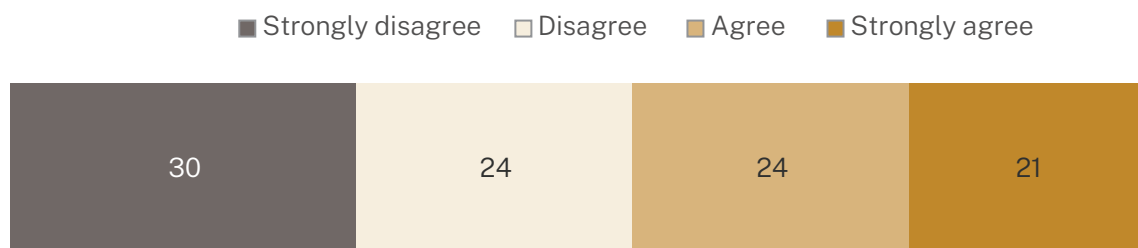
Nimbtik 2016). It is also potentially explained in part by the relatively weak reach of the state in Vanuatu, particularly in more remote areas. In lieu of extensive contact with the state, chiefs play an important role in local governance.

In terms of political practice, however, there is strong popular recognition of the ways in which democratic and customary institutions are entwined in Vanuatu’s political

Box 5: The role of chiefs

The role of chiefs in politics and decision-making in Vanuatu is relatively dynamic, and the term ‘chiefs’, as is understood today, is not necessarily reflective of pre-colonial leadership structures (Bolton 1998; Lindstrom 1997; Tabani 2019). The role of traditional leaders in national governance is institutionalised through the National Council of Chiefs (Malvatumauri), a body that was established in 1977 (Lindstrom 1997). Yet the role of chiefs in political leadership and governance extends well beyond this formally recognised body and varies significantly depending on local context. Importantly, village chiefs often act as local moderators for, and interpreters of, national political discourses. Politicians may ostensibly operate in a different public sphere than chiefs, but given ‘the political sway’ of *kastom* they may align themselves closely with local chiefs or even adopt chiefly titles themselves to secure political capital (see Kernot and Sakita 2008:10). Both formally and informally, chiefs wield influence in political spaces.

Figure 9: ‘Only *kastom* leaders should be able to run for parliament’ (%)



system. Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents agreed that ‘our system of government works well because it blends modern and traditional elements’. As noted, there was also significant support for the statement ‘traditional leaders should have a greater say in politics than ordinary people’ (74%). On the other hand, responses to the proposition that ‘only *kastom* leaders should be able to run for parliament’ were more starkly divided (Figure 9).

Democratic culture: Consensus versus majoritarianism

Attitudes towards notions of consensus politics formed another distinctive aspect of these findings. Though practices vary widely across the Pacific, traditional modes of decision-making may emphasise consensus over majoritarian models.¹³ This is the essence of conceptions of the ‘Pacific way’, much emphasised in the decolonisation era (see Crocombe 1976). Though there is an ideological component to those notions, the ‘Pacific way’ also frequently reflects traditional realities. These modes of decision-making may be highly legitimate in local contexts, highlighting potential conflicts with modern forms of democratic decision-making based on individual voting and electoral majorities. These in turn are linked to related tensions between communal norms and individualised notions of political rights, more consistent with Western democratic models.

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 10), results were close, with 55% of respondents favouring the former, consensus view of government, and 45% favouring the majoritarian view.

A further set of questions explored notions of consensus in more detail (Table 5). Responses here reflected the initial response, with mixed attitudes towards majoritarian and consensus-driven ideas of democracy.

The purpose of democracy

The PAS then sought to assess what ni-Vanuatu 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

Figure 10: Consensus-driven or majoritarian attitudes (%)

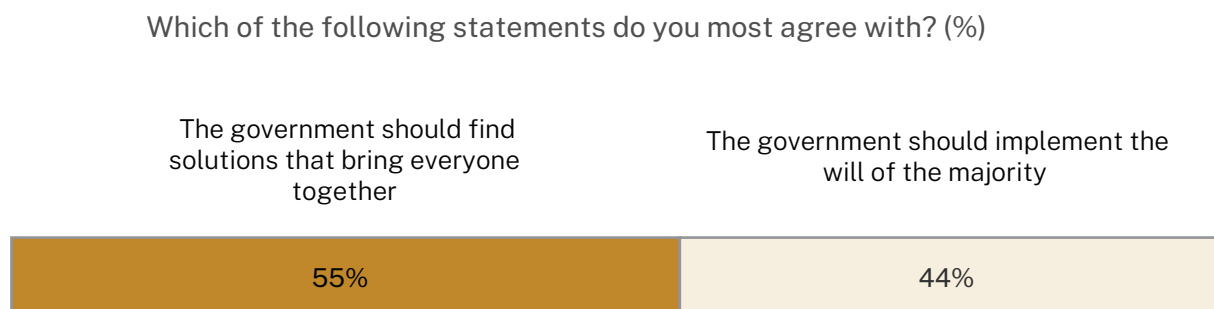


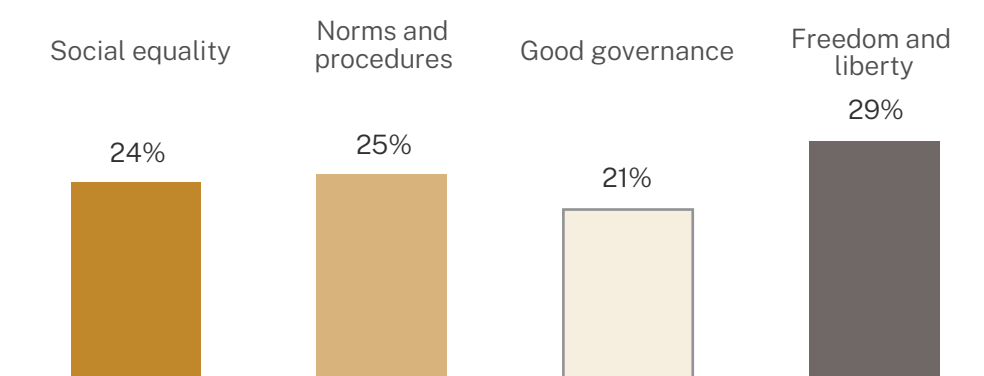
Table 5: Consensus-driven or majoritarian attitudes — ‘How much do you agree with the following?’ (%)

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Democracy means the majority wins	73	20	93	4	2
Democracy means everybody should come to an agreement	74	19	93	4	3
It is better that as many people as possible agree, even if this means decisions or outcomes are compromised	58	26	84	10	5

(e.g. 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). In Global Barometer studies, majority support for good governance and social equality indicators suggests a country has a ‘substantive’ 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 2018:26).

The largest cohort of ni-Vanuatu respondents (29%) expressed an understanding of democracy as a system that protects political rights and civil liberties, while another 25% understood democracy as a system guaranteeing democratic norms and procedures (Figure 11). Some 24% of our sample understood democracy to be a system supporting social equality, while a further 21% of respondents understood democracy as providing good governance. While responses were fairly evenly divided across the four indicators, when aggregated, a procedural view of democracy (54%) narrowly exceeded substantive (45%) understandings of democracy among ni-Vanuatu respondents.¹⁴

Figure 11: Understandings of democracy (%)



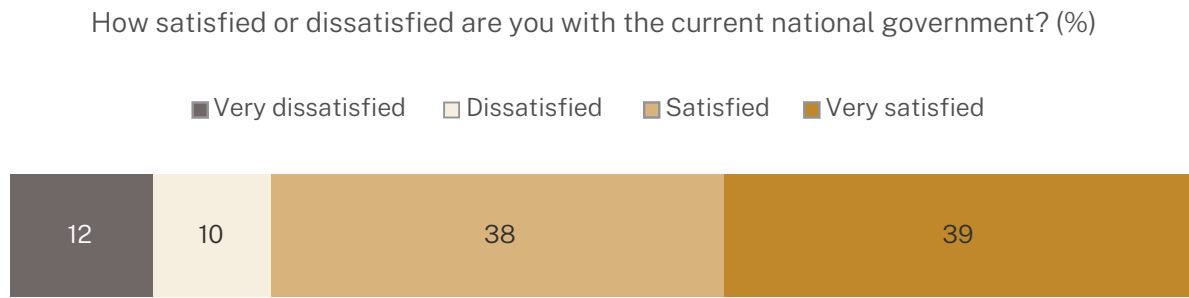
1.3 Ni-Vanuatu attitudes to government

The previous section gauged ni-Vanuatu attitudes to the role of government in a democratic context. We found that a majority of ni-Vanuatu believed the government should be accountable to the demands of citizens. This section focuses on popular satisfaction with government performance and levels of popular trust in institutions. It also examines the expectations that Vanuatu citizens have of their government.

Satisfaction with government

Above we found that some 84% of Vanuatu citizens reported that they were satisfied with democracy. Figure 12 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 (77%). This figure is notable, and perhaps surprising given the context of relative political instability in which the survey data collection took place.

Figure 12: Degree of satisfaction with the current national government (%)



Trust in institutions

The PAS then assessed trust in a range of institutions, categorised into three types. The first are elected institutions, such as the parliament. The second group is the 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, distinctive to the PAS, seeks to evaluate trust in traditional institutions.¹⁵ Figure 13 shows the various levels of trust in different institutions. Table 6

then groups these into elected (the prime minister, parliament, the national government, municipal and provincial administration), non-elected (the courts, public service, the police and Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF),¹⁶ and traditional categories (church leaders, chiefs, the Malvatumauri).

Findings indicated that respondents placed higher levels of trust in traditional institutions (95%), followed by non-elected (94%) and then elected institutions (85%).¹⁷ The relatively higher levels of trust placed in traditional and non-elected institutions are notable. While trust in elected institutions in Vanuatu is high, levels of popular trust appear to reflect their greater propensity to change and

Figure 13: Degree of trust in institutions (%)

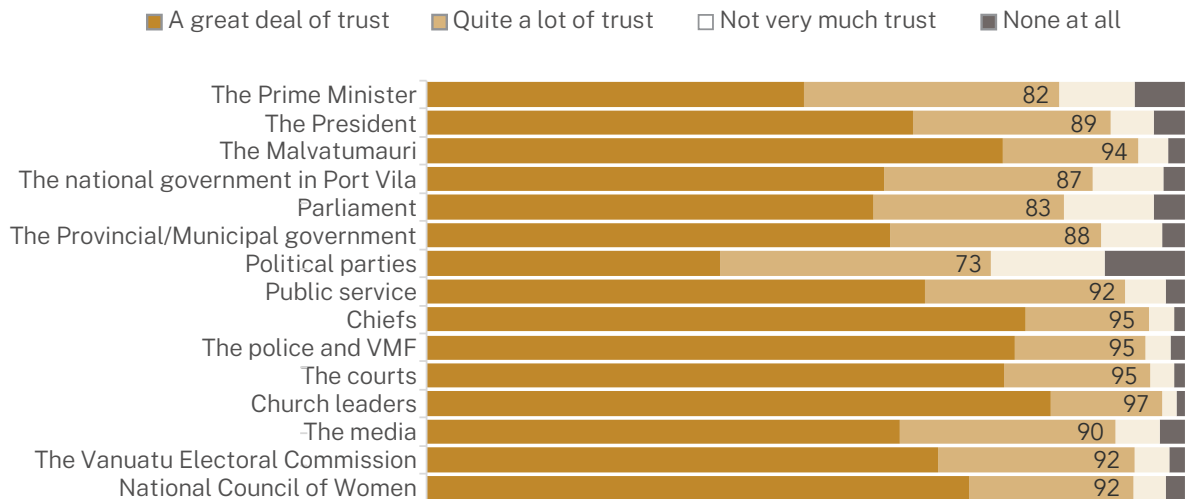
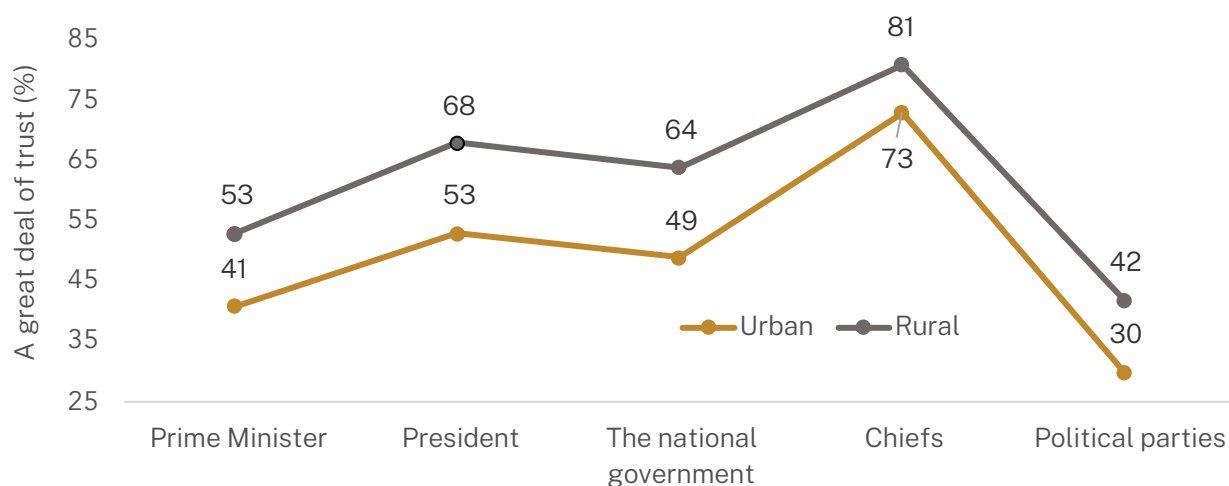


Table 6: Trust in institutions (%)

	A great deal of trust	Quite a lot of trust	Total trust	Not very much trust	None at all
Elected	57	28	85	10	4
Non-elected	73	21	94	4	2
Traditional	79	16	95	4	1

Figure 14: Degree of trust in institutions – Urban and Rural (%)



instability. This factor was especially strong in relation to political parties. While our survey found generally high levels of trust in institutions, political parties proved to be the least trusted institution of all the options (73%).

On the other hand, the high levels of popular trust placed in non-elected institutions seem to signify a strong understanding of the separation of powers in Vanuatu. For instance, the court system was seen as highly trustworthy when compared to political parties, the prime minister and parliament. Throughout Vanuatu's political history, the High Court has often played a key role in adjudicating political disputes that prompt government turnover (see Forsyth and Batley 2016).

Notably, respondents from rural areas were more likely to trust a range of institutions over urban residents (Figure 14). For instance, rural respondents (53%) were significantly more likely than urban respondents (41%) to place 'a great deal of trust' in the prime minister, the national government (64% to 49%), and political parties (42% to 30%).

Similarly, trust in institutions was significantly associated with education level (Figure 15). Those with further education were less likely to place a 'great deal of trust' in a number of institutions than those with primary education or lower, or with secondary education. This included the president (56% among further educated), the national government (47%), and chiefs (64%). This trend continued with the further educated less likely to place a great deal of trust in political parties (27%), when compared to secondary (35%) and non or primary educated (51%).

In terms of gender, women (78%) were more likely to place 'a great deal of trust' in the National Council of Women over men (65%). While there were limited differences in trust in institutions across age groups, there was a significant trust gap in relation to the Malvatumauri, which was trusted 'a great deal' by 87% of seniors and 79% of adults, compared to 69% of youth.

Despite these varying levels of popular trust in institutions, the PAS found high levels of trust in

Figure 15: Degree of trust in institutions – Education (%)

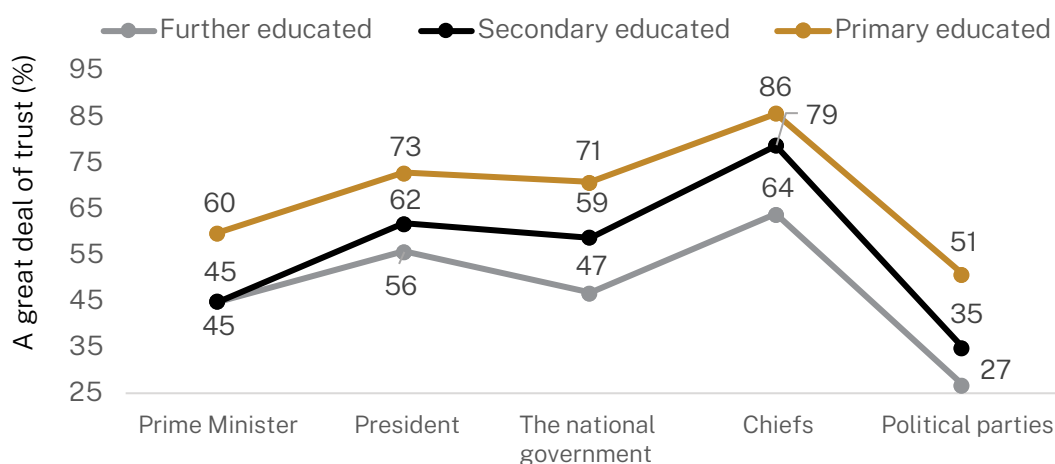
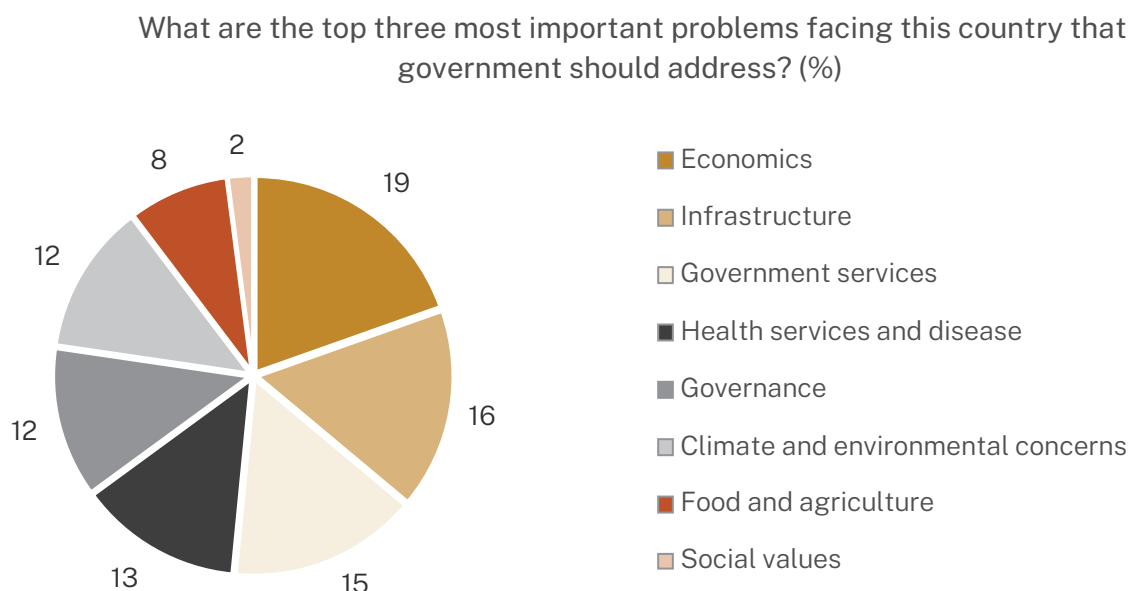


Figure 16: Vanuatu's most important problems for government to address (%)



government generally, with 79% of respondents agreeing that 'you can generally trust the people who run government to do what is right'.

What do ni-Vanuatu want from their government?

Respondents were then asked to name what they considered to be the 'top three most important problems to address in Vanuatu'. The question was asked in an open-ended format; enumerators transcribed individual responses which were then coded into broad categories. Economics (19%), infrastructure (16%), and government services (15%) were the top three most identified problem areas (Figure 16).¹⁸ These were closely followed by issues related to health services and disease (13%), governance (12%) and climate and environment concerns (12%).

Notably, a strong majority of ni-Vanuatu were confident in the ability of their government to address these problems. Just over two-thirds (68%) of respondents indicated confidence that their first-identified problem would 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). Vanuatu faces a number of challenges in tackling corruption (see Nimbtik 2016). In 2021, Transparency International conducted a mobile survey in the Pacific on citizens' views and experience of corruption. In Vanuatu they reported that 73% of respondents believe that 'corruption in government is a big problem'. They also found that 21% of ni-Vanuatu had reported having paid a bribe to access public services in the previous 12 months (Kukutschka 2021). Our findings broadly reflect this result.

The PAS asked a set of questions designed to understand how respondents view the extent of corruption in Vanuatu, and whether certain activities are locally perceived as legitimate or corrupt.

Figure 17: Degree of corruption (%)

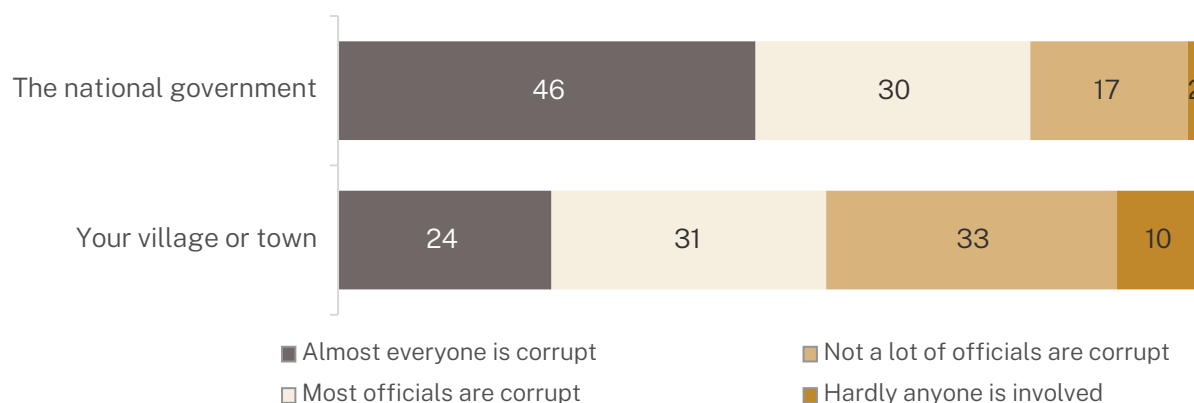
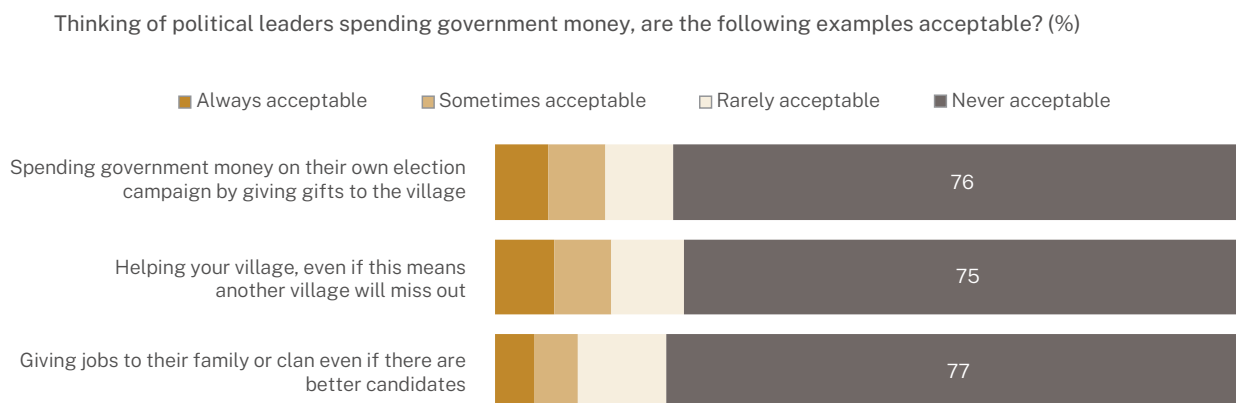


Figure 18: Understandings of corruption (%)



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 also the case in Vanuatu, where perceptions of corruption were perceived to be significantly higher at national levels than local levels (Figure 17). Reflecting the Transparency International findings, a large majority of respondents either believed ‘almost everyone’ (46%) or ‘most officials’ (30%) were corrupt at the national government level, with a smaller (but still considerable) proportion reporting the same at the local village or town level (24% ‘almost everyone’; 31% ‘most officials’). However, significant differences were evident between urban and rural settings. Respondents from rural areas were more likely to believe ‘almost everyone is corrupt’ in national government (51%) when compared to urban respondents (39%). By contrast, urban areas were more likely to perceive corruption in their local area (65%) than were rural respondents (53%).

For instance, examples of political leaders ‘giving jobs to their family or clan, even if there are better candidates’ provoked the strongest negative response, with just 11% of respondents believing this is always or sometimes acceptable (see Figure 18). Using government expenditure for personal campaigning and political leaders distributing resources to their own villages were also seen as unacceptable overall.

Again, rural respondents were more likely to believe corruption in these examples is less acceptable than urban respondents. For instance, 79% of rural respondents think it is never acceptable for political leaders to help their village if this means another village will miss out, compared to 63% of urban respondents. Rural respondents were also more likely to think political leaders spending government money on their own election campaign by giving gifts to the village was never acceptable (79%), when compared to urban respondents (67%).

1.4 Political participation — who gets a say in politics?

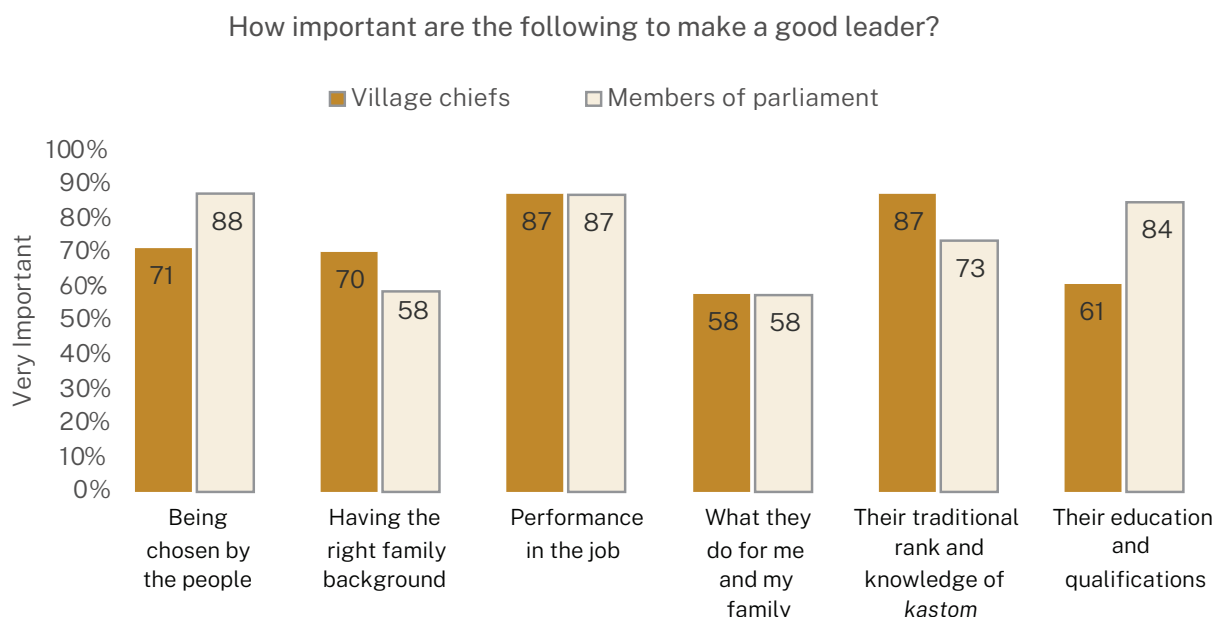
A vibrant democracy relies on politically engaged citizens. The PAS asked a range of questions to better understand forms of political participation in Vanuatu. This section examines popular attitudes to issues of political participation, including levels of interest in politics, perceptions of leadership 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 Vanuatu

Customary leaders and chiefs play an important role in local communities, dealing with disputes and other local matters, and provide a contact point between local communities and the state. In Vanuatu, political leadership must be understood in a context in which ‘unique and localised systems of community governance and dispute resolution remain central to people’s lives, alongside introduced models of church leadership and even more recent systems of state government’ (Morgan 2013: 1). In this respect, contemporary models of state leadership and accountability coexist alongside systems of *kastom* governance which draw on localised traditional and religious practices (Nimbtik 2016; Denney, Nimbtik and Ford 2023). Leadership at local and national levels therefore involves different roles and tasks and relies on different leadership qualities and sources of legitimation. The PAS asked a number of questions about leadership in Vanuatu (Figure 19).

Respondents prioritised different leadership attributes for chiefs and parliamentarians. For instance, respondents were more likely to rate having ‘the right family background’ as being very important for chiefs (70%), while only 58% considered it very important for members of parliament. Similarly, a village chief’s ‘traditional rank and knowledge of *kastom*’ was more

Figure 19: Attributes of a good leader (%)



commonly rated as very important (87%) when compared to MPs (73%). On the other hand, ‘being chosen by the people’ and ‘their education and qualifications’ was overwhelmingly considered ‘very important’ for MPs (88% and 84% respectively), but significantly less so for village chiefs (71% and 61% respectively). Both ‘performance in the job’ and ‘what they do for me and my family’ was rated equally for village chiefs and MPs, reflecting the strong performative expectations on political leaders in Vanuatu.

Notably, rural respondents were more likely to think that education is very important for chiefs (66%) when compared to urban respondents (47%). Similarly, those with a primary or lower education level were significantly more likely to think education is important for a chief (67%), compared to 51% of those further educated.

In respect to the attributes for being a good leader as an MP, larger differences between rural and urban communities were apparent. Rural respondents were more likely to believe an MP’s traditional rank and knowledge of *kastom* (78%) was ‘very important’ compared to urban residents (61%); that what MPs do for the respondent’s family was ‘very important’ (61%) compared to urban residents (49%); and that MPs being chosen by the people was ‘very important’ (90%) compared to urban residents (80%).

The role of a Vanuatu MP

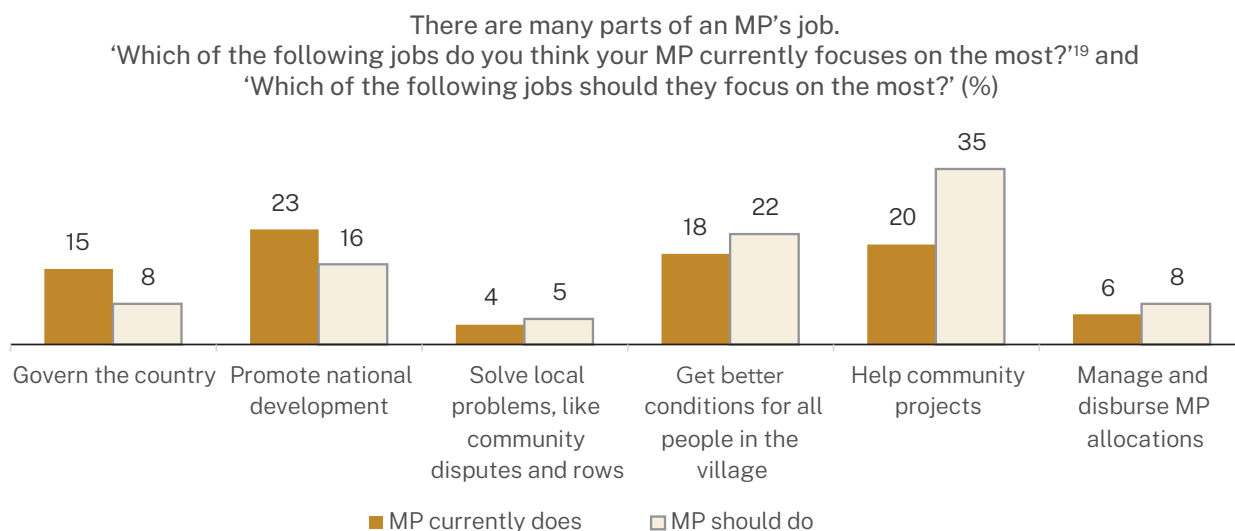
The PAS then asked respondents which aspects of the job they believe their MP currently focuses on, alongside the aspects of the job respondents think their MP *should* be focusing on (see Figure 20).

These results suggest that ni-Vanuatu citizens want their MP to spend more time on helping community projects over promoting national development. Scholars

have argued that there is a ‘Melanesian political culture [that] draws the attention of MPs away from their institutional responsibilities as lawmakers and overseers of government’ (Morgan 2005:12; see also Kurer 2007). On the question of what their MP currently focuses on the most, ‘promoting national development’ (23%) was the most common answer. In terms of what respondents believe that their MP should be doing, however, the most common answer was ‘helping community projects’ (35%), revealing a substantial gap with respondent perceptions of their current activities. While there were no significant differences between demographic cohorts on the question of what their MP currently does, rural respondents felt more strongly that MPs should help community projects (40%) than did urban respondents (29%).

The PAS findings align with what other research has found in neighbouring Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands: ‘Voters have a clear preference for particularistic, localized benefits over national benefits’ (Wood 2018:483). In those two countries these approaches are institutionalised through constituency development funds (CDFs), which account for a significant proportion of government support for local communities (Wiltshire and Batley 2018). This model is less entrenched in Vanuatu, but CDFs are becoming more important (Veenendaal and Corbett 2020). Such approaches arguably represent a response to the challenges of state fragility and difficulties national governments have faced in providing services to remote communities. Yet they also align with cultural and social expectations around development, which is understood as a local challenge (Barbara 2018). Our findings suggest that these development models may enjoy considerable public legitimacy.

Figure 20: Focus of MPs' job (%)



Political engagement

This section examines forms of political engagement and participation by ni-Vanuatu, to better understand how they relate to their democracy, and seek to affect change on issues that matter to them. It includes data on how ni-Vanuatu participated in the most recent election (2022).

Participants were initially asked how interested they were in politics (Figure 21). A substantial majority of respondents (67%) expressed some level of interest in politics. We found a strong positive correlation between

the age of the respondents and their reported interest in politics (Table 7). Where 61% of respondents aged 18–29 reported interest in politics, this increased to 68% for respondents aged 30–59, and was significantly higher for those aged 60 and above (80%).

When responses were disaggregated by gender, men (78%) were significantly more likely to report being interested in politics than women (56%). The reasons for this are likely to mirror those applying to younger people; that is, that women feel less connected to political life because social norms prioritise the political

Figure 21: Degree of interest in politics (%)



Table 7: Gender and age interest in politics (%)

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Total interest	Not very interested	Not at all interested
Men	36	42	78	9	13
Women	19	37	56	13	31
Youth (18–29)	20	41	61	11	28
Adult (30–59)	30	38	68	11	21
Senior (60+)	41	39	80	8	12

contributions of older men. This finding reflects similar outcomes globally (GBS 2018:55).

When asked how often they discuss political matters with friends or family members, 15% of respondents selected 'frequently', while 55% reported 'occasionally' discussing political matters, and 30% reported 'never' talking about political matters.

Again, senior ni-Vanuatu were more likely to discuss political issues with friends or family. Seniors (25%) reported 'frequently' discussing politics with friends or family at significantly higher rates than youth (10%). Similarly, women were significantly less likely to discuss politics than men. For instance, where 80% of men discussed politics frequently or occasionally with friends or family, for women this number dropped to 61%.

The 2022 election

The PAS asked respondents a number of questions concerning the 2022 general election. The snap election was called as a result of the president dissolving parliament, before a motion of no confidence could be held against then Prime Minister Bob Loughman. The next election was originally scheduled to be held in 2024. Voter turnout was reported at 44% of eligible voters.²⁰

When asked their main reason for voting in 2022, three major responses emerged. While 29% of respondents reported 'community obligations' as their main reason for voting, 28% reported 'the character of the candidate' and 17% reported that 'candidate promises' motivated them to vote (Figure 22). 'Party policies' was the fourth most-cited reason. Taken together, these findings suggest voting practices in Vanuatu remain localised and personality-based, with parties playing a limited role in voter choice (see also Veenendaal 2021). This aligns with findings elsewhere in Melanesia (Wood 2016).

When asked whether 'voting in elections makes a difference to my day-to-day life', 60% of respondents agreed. Notably, this was more pronounced in men, who

were more likely to strongly agree that voting makes a difference (37%), compared to women (27%). Reflecting a wider trend, seniors were also more likely to strongly agree that voting makes a difference (42%) compared to adults (33%) and youth (26%).

Overall, respondents believed that the 2022 election was free and fair, although with a few caveats. When asked 'on the whole was the last national election held in 2022 free and fair?', 37% stated it was completely free and fair, 27% believed it was free and fair with minor problems, while 13% thought that although it was free, there were 'major problems'. A considerable proportion of respondents (19%) held the view that the election was neither free nor fair.

Notably, and despite the low official voter turnout rate, respondents reported a substantial level of engagement with the 2022 election campaign (Table 8). A majority of respondents (59%) reported that they had attended a campaign meeting or rally, while 44% said they had tried to persuade others to vote for a certain party or candidate.

Table 8: 'Thinking about the last national election in 2022, did you ... ?' (%)

	Yes	No
Attend a campaign meeting or rally	59	40
Try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party	44	55

Figure 22: What is the main reason you voted? (n=1056) (%)

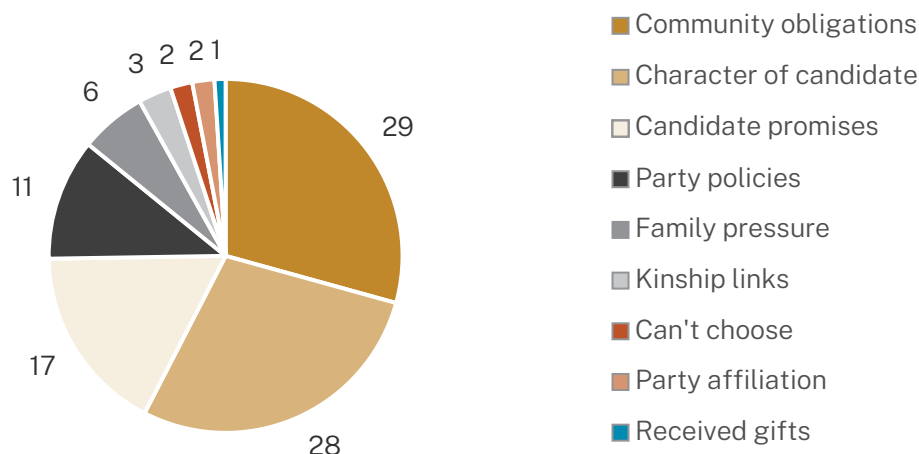


Table 9: Political participation — ‘Have you done any of these things in the past three years?’ (%)

	Never done	Once	More than once
Got together with others to try resolve local problems	46	18	36
Talked to your MP	66	15	19
Signed a petition	80	8	11
Joined an NGO or advocacy group	78	8	14
Attended a demonstration or protest march	82	8	10
Joined a political party	58	17	24

In both cases, men were more likely to have been involved over women: 69% of men reported attending a campaign meeting or rally, compared to 50% of women; and 57% of male respondents had tried to persuade others to vote for a certain party or candidate, compared to 31% of women.

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 standard measures of political participation were undertaken by relatively few respondents, one-third of respondents reported talking to their MP at least once (34%). Higher again was the response rate for ‘got together with others to try resolve local problems’ (54%). This reflects the notion that while formal political engagement might be relatively low (at least outside of campaign periods), informal activities at the local level attract stronger engagement.

Parallel findings were evident when results were disaggregated by level of education. For example, further educated respondents were more likely to have ‘got together to try to resolve local problems’ (66%) than were secondary educated (50%) or non or primary educated respondents (54%).

As noted above, the PAS found a degree of scepticism about the utility of political parties in

Vanuatu’s democracy, with just 57% of respondents agreeing that ‘political parties are suitable for our system of government’. Yet a substantial proportion of respondents (41%) reported having joined a political party in the last three years, with most of that group doing so ‘more than once’. It is likely this is related to campaign activity, noting that there had been two general election campaigns in the three-year period preceding the survey. These figures reflect the fact that new political party memberships form an important part of the election campaigning process. Often this entails new members being paid to campaign on behalf of a party-affiliated candidate. This is a common aspect of election campaigning and does not necessarily reflect a strong commitment to the political party on the part of the party member. Notably, this form of engagement was strongly gendered. Men (60%) were more likely to report joining a political party at least once in the previous three years compared to women (24%).

Reflective of earlier findings, the majority of respondents surveyed engaged with politics in more direct and localised ways. Respondents reported substantially higher levels of engagement with village chiefs and church leaders in dealing with local problems, than with MPs or government officials (Table 10). Some 62% of respondents reported contacting their village

Table 10: Political participation — ‘In the past three years, have you done the following because of because of local problems?’ (%)

	Never done	Once	More than once
Contacted your village chief	39	21	39
Contacted church leaders	38	18	44
Contacted government officials	72	11	17
Contacted your MP	74	11	15
Contacted NGOs or civil society	78	9	13

Box 6: Youth and political engagement

Results suggest that there are wide gaps in how politically engaged youth, adults and seniors are in Vanuatu. Younger ni-Vanuatu were more likely to report lower levels of interest in political participation compared to older respondents, and were less likely to report discussing politics with friends and family. This likely reflects features of traditional political society, in which older male figures dominate traditional hierarchies. Youth (76%) also expressed lower levels of pride in the way democracy works than adults (86%) and seniors (88%). In addition, seniors (77%) and adults (72%) were significantly more likely to agree that the Malvatumauri should have more influence on national politics than youth (62%). Similar findings were found in relation to the Church.

This disconnect from political life was also evident in youth (26%) being far less likely to strongly agree that voting makes a difference to their life compared to seniors (42%). Youth were also less likely to engage with political or village institutions, and with their local communities on political issues. For example, where 45% of youth reported they had 'got together with others to try to resolve local problems', this figure increased to 59% for adults and 61% for seniors. Young people were also less likely to have talked to their MP (23%) over the past three years, compared to adults (40%) and seniors (48%).

Importantly, the disengagement of youth from politics seems to be widely recognised as an issue, with 77% of respondents strongly agreeing that there should be temporary special measures to increase youth representation in parliament.

chief at least once in the previous three years because of local problems, with contact with church leaders equally high at 62%. Notably, these institutions were also found to have significantly higher levels of trust placed in them as discussed above. Respondents reported lower levels of contact with government officials (28%), MPs (26%) and NGOs (21%) about local problems in the preceding three years.

Engagement in local forms of political participation was more common in rural areas. Rural respondents were more likely to have contacted village chiefs and church leaders than their urban counterparts. For instance, 63% of rural respondents had contacted their village chief at least once compared to 53% of their urban counterparts.

However, by far the most significant cohort effect across both these political participation measures was in relation to gender. Men were more likely to have engaged in all forms of political participation than women (see Part 2).

Media and social media

The PAS also examined respondents' use of media and social media in processes of political engagement and participation. These questions covered most trusted media sources, and the use of social media for political engagement and organisation.

Like much of the Pacific, radio outperforms other forms of traditional media, with the largest number of respondents (41%) reporting radio as the most trusted news source for information about politics and the government (Figure 23). Notably, seniors (52%) and adults (43%) were significantly more likely to cite radio as their most trusted news source, than were youth (33%). Similarly, rural respondents were more likely to cite radio as their most trusted news source (44%) than were urban respondents (32%). For their part, urban respondents were more likely to cite television as their most trusted news source (28%) than rural respondents (15%), a figure which clearly reflects differing levels of access.

As has been widely noted, social media use has been growing rapidly in Pacific countries over the last decade, although inequalities in terms of access remain (Finau et al. 2014; Spyksma 2019). The PAS found a large minority of citizens do not regularly use the internet. When asked how often respondents used the internet (Figure 24), 41% of respondents answered 'practically never'. Non-internet users were disproportionately older respondents and women. For example, youth (47%) were far more likely to use the internet 'at least once a day', compared with adults (25%) and seniors (7%). In terms of gender, 47% of women 'practically never' use the internet compared to 35% of men.

This broader context is worth noting when examining the use of social media for political participation (Table 11). A majority of respondents reported that they 'practically never' used social media to engage with politics. For example, 56% had 'practically never' used social media to 'express an opinion about politics and the government', and a much larger majority (81%) had 'practically never' used social media to 'organise for political reasons'. While a majority of respondents had used social media to 'connect with family', it is clear that it is not a primary tool for political participation for many ni-Vanuatu. Nonetheless, the use of social media as a vehicle to 'express your opinion about politics and government' was reported by a substantial minority of respondents (43%).

Figure 23: Trusted news source (%)

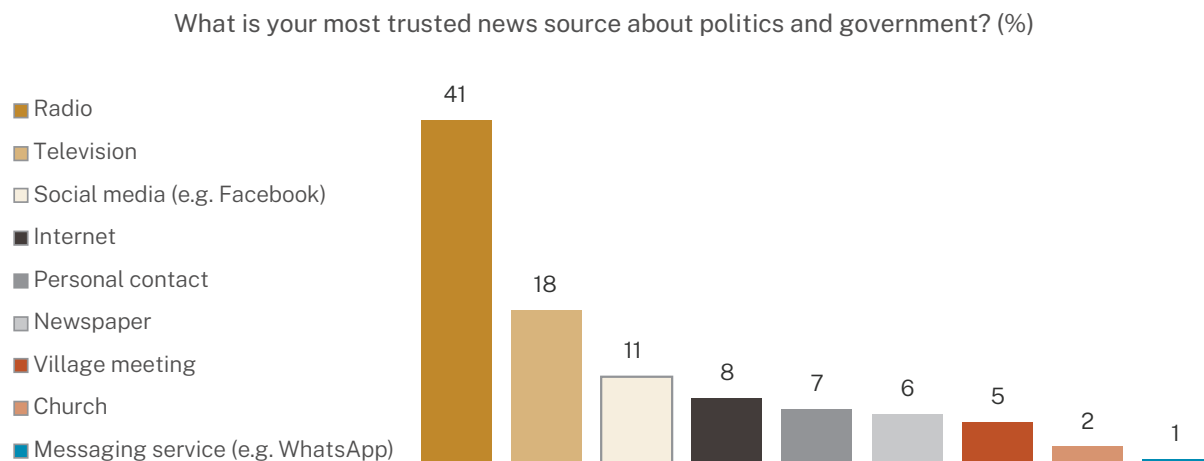


Figure 24: Frequency of internet use (%)

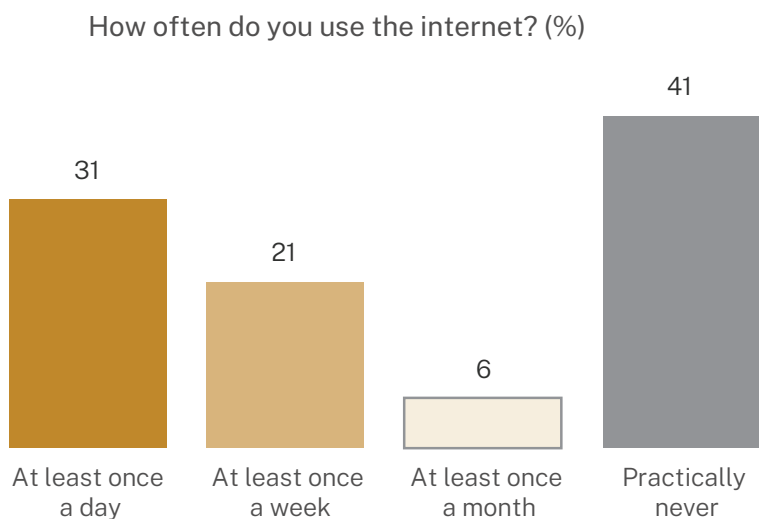


Table 11: Social media — ‘How often do you use social media to ...?’ (%)

Indicator	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	15	14	6	8	56
Organise for political reasons	4	5	4	6	81
Connect with family	31	17	7	10	34

Dispute resolution

Respondents were asked their preferences for the resolution of different kinds of disputes, ranging from ‘disputes between neighbours’, to more serious issues of ‘crimes against property’, and ‘crimes against the person’ (Figure 25). These questions offer insights into how respondents perceive the boundaries between traditional and modern modes of dispute resolution, and where complaints should be addressed when conflicts arise.

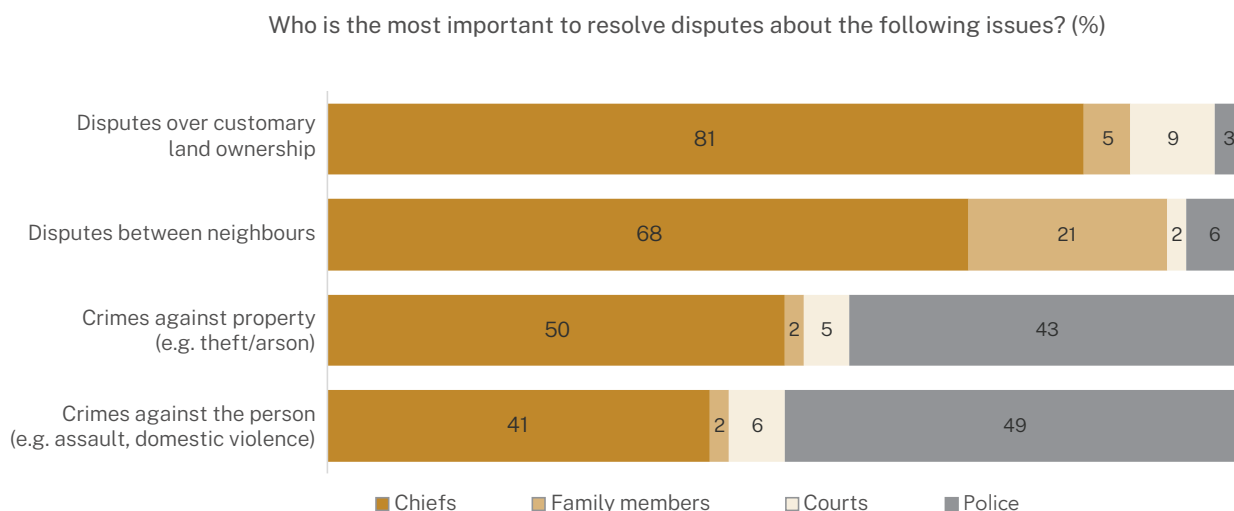
When asked ‘who should resolve disputes over customary land ownership?’, 81% of respondents favoured customary leaders and chiefs. Notably, chiefs were also strongly preferred in addressing ‘disputes between neighbours’ (68%), whereas ‘crimes against property’ or ‘crimes against the person’ drew more mixed responses, divided between chiefs and police.

Interestingly, we found significant differences between younger and older respondents in their preferences for dispute resolution. For instance, younger respondents (50%) were significantly more likely to

prefer police in addressing crimes against property, than were adults (38%). Younger respondents (77%) were also significantly less likely to favour chiefs in disputes over customary land ownership, when compared to the overwhelming level of support among seniors (91%). Rural respondents (85%) were also more likely to prefer chiefs in disputes over customary land ownership, compared to urban respondents (74%). Nonetheless, in all cohorts, support for chiefs as the preferred agent for customary land dispute resolution remains very high.

Rural/urban differences were also prevalent in questions on community safety. While 66% of respondents reported feeling ‘very safe’ in their village, a slightly lower number (59%) of respondents felt safe travelling to other villages. Notably, 74% of rural respondents reported feeling very safe in their village, compared to 44% of urban respondents.

Figure 25: Dispute resolution (%)





Source: Stephanie Russo



Source: Christopher Mudaliar



Source: Department of Pacific Affairs

Part 2 Popular political attitudes in Vanuatu: 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 attitudes to key public policy issues of relevance to Vanuatu. The four key issues highlighted in the report are climate change, labour mobility and the economy, gender equality and international relations.

2.1 Climate change

Climate change poses an existential risk for the Pacific, with the region already experiencing tangible impacts from a warming climate. Vanuatu is considered one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world, consistently ranking first on the World Risk Index until 2021.²¹ The impacts of climate change are manifesting in Vanuatu in a range of significant ways including sea level rises, drought and variable rainfall, coral bleaching and ocean acidification affecting fish stocks, and intensified natural disasters such as cyclones.

The outsized climate risks faced by Pacific states have seen them become strong advocates for climate action on the global stage (Carter 2015; Ratuva 2017). The Government of Vanuatu has been a particularly active voice within global climate fora. It has been a leading proponent of efforts to build an effective ‘loss and damage’ regime. In March 2023, Vanuatu spearheaded a motion in the United Nations General Assembly, approved by acclamation, to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal obligations of states to mitigate climate change (UNGA 1/3/2023). The *Washington Post* argued that Vanuatu had ‘used its moral authority and ability to stage action at the United Nations to achieve outside results on climate issues’ (Birnbau 29/3/2023).

Domestically, the Government of Vanuatu has developed a broad range of climate change policies, centred on the challenge of adaptation. In 2018, Vanuatu was one of the first countries in the world to prepare a comprehensive national policy on climate change and disaster-induced displacement (VNDMO 2018). The policy, which builds on the vision of sustainable development plan *Vanuatu 2030 – The People’s Plan* (DSPPAC 2016), is guided by principles such as respect for *kastom*, human rights and dignity, gender equity, ecological and environmental sustainability, freedom of movement, resilience and traditional knowledge.

The activism of Vanuatu’s government and political elite could be taken to imply broad-based community consensus on the importance of climate change as a

policy imperative. However, relatively little is known about popular attitudes to climate change within Pacific communities at the domestic level including Vanuatu. To date, there has been limited quantitative evidence of the level of awareness of and concern about climate change at a popular level. This is important, as popular attitudes to climate change can influence domestic politics of climate change, how adaptation efforts are constructed and prioritised, and who is included in adaptation processes (Barbara, Howard and Baker 2022; Barbara et al. 2023). Beyerl, Mieg and Weber (2019:144) note that ‘[i]n 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.’

The PAS sought to ascertain popular attitudes to climate change in Vanuatu by asking a series of questions about climate change.

Measuring attitudes to climate change can be very difficult (Nunn et al. 2016). How people understand climate change can vary greatly depending on the circumstances of particular individuals or communities. For example, those dependent on subsistence livelihoods may be more aware of the biophysical changes to the local environment. Considerable debate exists over the impact that definitions of ‘climate change’ in survey questions can lead to biasing respondents towards particular answers, rather than recording their inherent experience. We first asked respondents whether they had observed changes in the climate. A vast majority (94%) of respondents reported observing ‘changes in the climate and its effect on the environment over their lifetime’ (Figure 26).

Following this general question, we asked respondents to identify up to three more specific observations of climate change-related effects (Figure 27). Respondents answered these questions in free-form, with enumerators recording their responses. These are tabulated below.

The most common responses were ‘crop failures’ (16%), followed by ‘shifting seasons’ (14%), ‘rising sea levels’ (13%), and a ‘rise in temperature’ (8%) over their lifetimes.

Respondents were then asked to assess the priority and urgency of climate change as a political issue (Figure 28). Reflecting the priority of the issue at a national level, a significant majority of 81% believed that climate change is ‘an urgent problem that needs to be addressed’.²² This result suggests that the public

Figure 26: 'Have you observed changes in the climate and its effect on the environment over your lifetime?' (%)

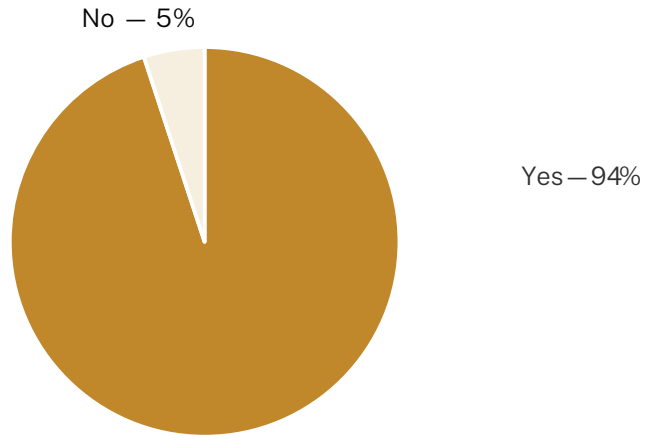


Figure 27: 'What specific changes have you noticed due to climate change?' (%)

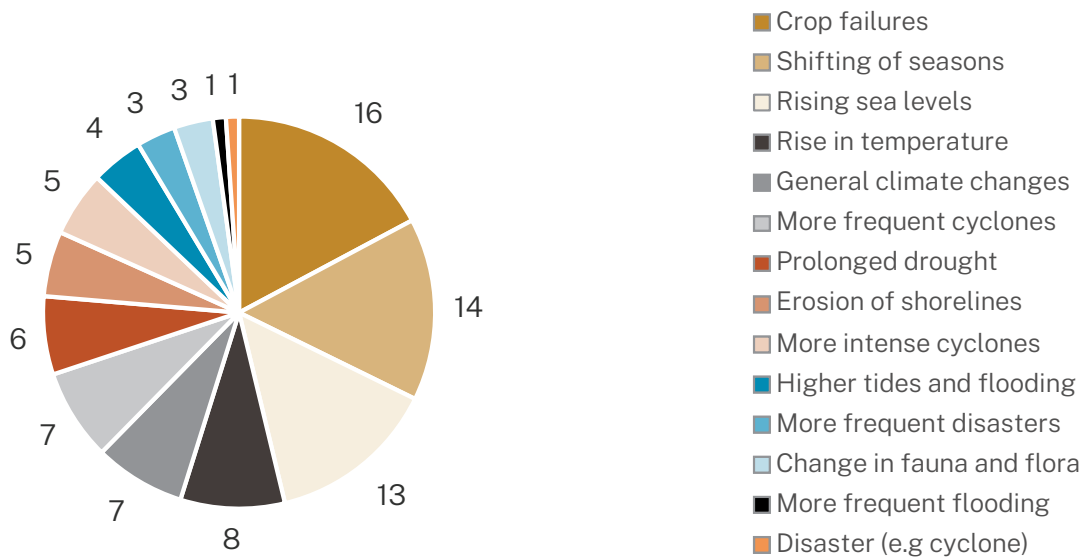


Figure 28: Attitudes to climate change (%)

Which of the following statements do you agree most with? Climate change ... (%)

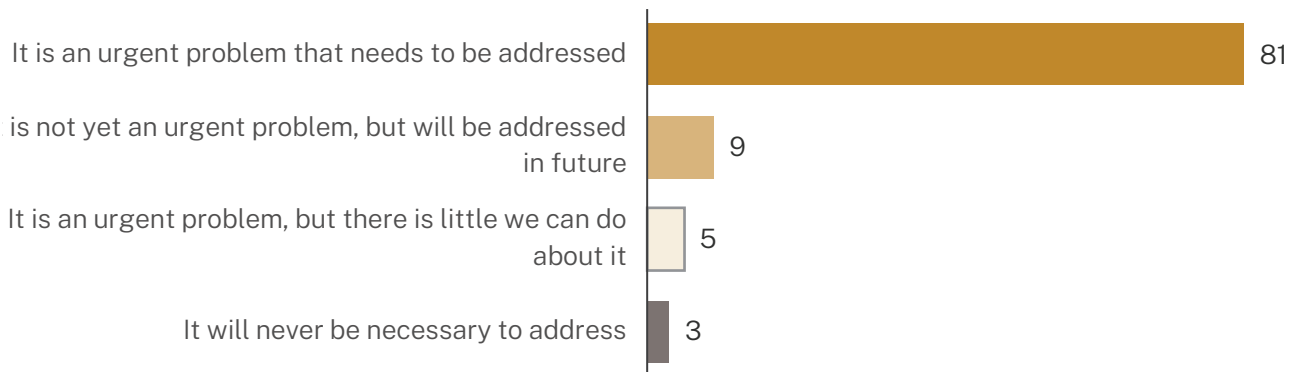
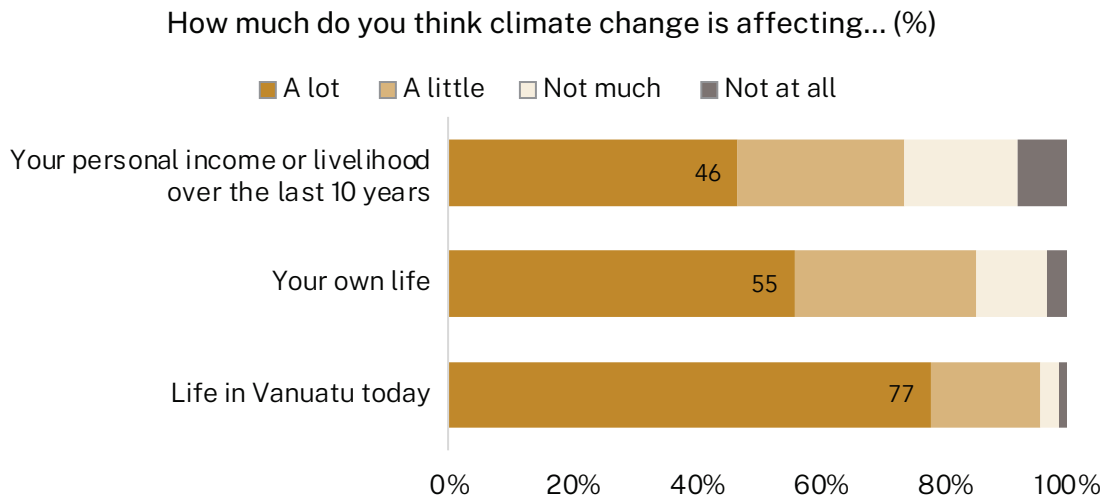


Figure 29: Impacts of climate change (%)



positions of the Vanuatu government on the priority of issues around climate change are widely shared by the public (cf. Leach et al. 2022).

The PAS then asked respondents whether climate change was affecting life in Vanuatu today, how much it affects their own life, and whether they think that climate change has affected their own personal income or livelihoods over the last decade (Figure 29). The purpose of this breakdown was to determine whether any significant differences exist between perceptions of general impacts on Vanuatu at large, and personal perceptions on the impacts of climate change on people’s individual lives.

More than three-quarters of respondents reported that climate change is affecting life in Vanuatu today ‘a lot’ (77%), with just over half reporting it was also impacting their own life ‘a lot’ (55%). Just under half of respondents reported that climate change had impacted their personal income or livelihood over the last 10 years ‘a lot’ (46%).

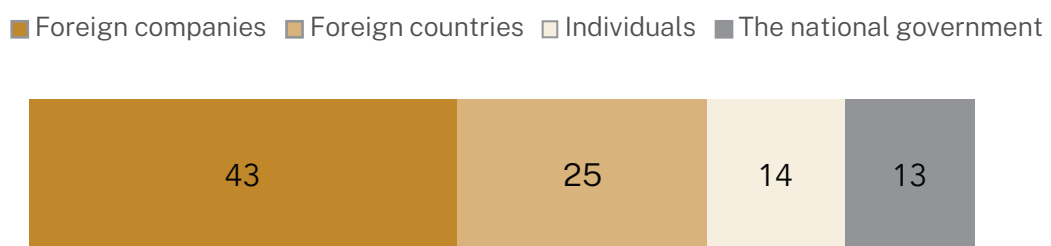
When these results were disaggregated into cohorts, some significant differences were identified. Respondents reporting higher degrees of subsistence reliance (on the produce they catch or grow) were significantly more likely to report that climate change had affected their own lives (61%), compared to those who were less reliant (46%). The equivalent figures for whether

climate change has had an impact on respondents’ ‘personal income or livelihood over the last 10 years’ were 50% (higher subsistence reliance) and 39% (lower subsistence reliance).

The PAS then sought to assess why respondents felt the climate was changing, and who might be responsible for dealing with the effects of climate change. Just over half (57%) of respondents believe that the climate is changing because of ‘human activity, like carbon pollution’. The rest were split between ‘God’s will’ (16%), ‘human activities and natural changes equally’ (12%), and ‘natural processes’ (11%). Respondents reporting higher levels of education were more likely (73%) to believe that climate change was caused by ‘human activity, like carbon pollution’ than respondents with secondary or primary education (55%).

When asked to identify who was responsible for causing the impacts of climate change in Vanuatu, 43% of respondents stated that ‘foreign companies’ were responsible. This was followed by ‘foreign countries’ (25%), ‘individuals’ (14%) and the ‘national government’ (13%) (Figure 30). This is an interesting finding which indicates that a large proportion of respondents attribute responsibility for carbon emissions to ‘foreign companies’ – presumably multinational corporations – rather than governments or individuals.

Figure 30: ‘Who is most responsible for causing the impacts of climate change in Vanuatu?’ (%)



A follow-up question targeted the issue of climate compensation. When asked to choose between ‘countries that contribute the most to the effects of climate change should compensate other countries who contribute less’ and ‘countries should be left to deal with climate change on their own’, a clear majority believed that polluting countries should compensate countries that had contributed less (73%). This aligns clearly with Vanuatu’s position on loss and damage on the global stage.

Building on this, a follow-up question was put to those respondents (n=973) who believed that ‘countries that contribute the most to the effects of climate change should compensate other countries who contribute less’. This subgroup was then asked ‘what sort of support to help communities adapt to climate change would you like to see?’ In these responses, 36% selected ‘help with infrastructure’, 31% ‘help with relocation’, 14% ‘help with their livelihoods and jobs’ and 14% ‘direct compensation’.

When asked ‘who is the most responsible for managing the impacts of climate change in Vanuatu?’, more than half of respondents selected the national government (53%). International governments (31%) were the second most common choice, with NGOs (5%), village communities (4%), municipalities (3%) and universities (1%) less common choices.

Internal climate migration is an increasingly important area of concern within Pacific countries (Campbell and Warwick 2014). At the 2023 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting, leaders endorsed the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility which covers both internal and transnational migration and displacement (PIFS 2023). Vanuatu’s *National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement* recognises five groups of persons of concern: internally displaced people, including individuals who have been evacuated due to natural hazards; people at risk of displacement and/or relocation; people living in informal or peri-urban settlements; internal migrants; and other communities directly or indirectly impacted by displacement. These five categories underline the variety of different forms of climate change and disaster-induced displacement present or potentially present in Vanuatu society. To this end, we asked respondents if they agreed with the following proposition: ‘we have a responsibility to accept other ni-Vanuatu displaced from climate change into our village long-term’. A significant majority of 90% agreed, compared to only 8% who disagreed.

Overall, the survey findings suggest broad-based popular concerns about climate change in Vanuatu, and strong expectations that the national government should actively manage adaptation efforts. They also suggest that climate change is a lived reality for ni-Vanuatu citizens, who identified a range of observable impacts over their lifetimes. The findings also suggest clear popular support for the ongoing push for a sustainable compensation framework in international law.

2.2 Labour mobility and the economy

Given the structural challenges Vanuatu faces in terms of economic development, it has increasingly sought to connect with external economies to bolster national income and create employment opportunities (Cruz and Wells 2023). To this end, Vanuatu has become a significant sending country in regional labour mobility schemes such as those supported by Australia and New Zealand. Vanuatu sends the largest number of workers of any Pacific country within both Australian and New Zealand’s labour mobility schemes (Bedford 2023). Remittance income, which in 2021 was responsible for 21% of Vanuatu’s entire GDP, is expected to provide a large boost to the economy throughout 2024. In Vanuatu, one-fifth of men aged 20–59 years old were recruited for seasonal work between 2022 and 2023, representing a significant proportion of the available workforce (Doan, Dornan and Edwards 2023). The Asian Development Bank notes that one issue facing Vanuatu is the availability of labour, as the government seeks to ‘balance competing demand for skilled workers in tourism at home and for seasonal worker schemes abroad’ (Cruz and Wells 2023:264).

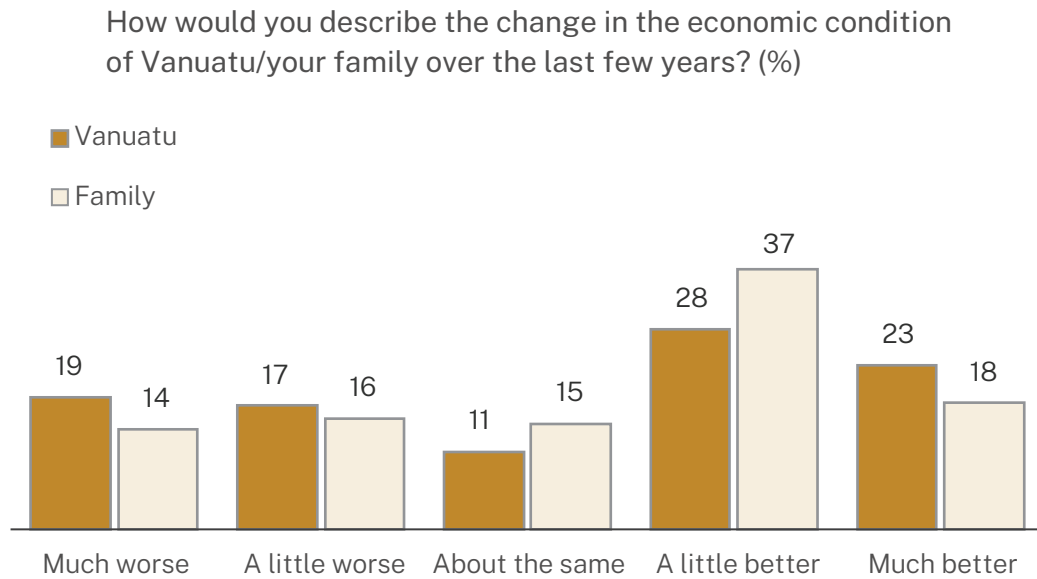
The scale of participation in such schemes, and the consequent impact of the schemes on individuals, families and communities, has seen the topic of labour mobility become an increasingly significant political issue in Vanuatu. This includes social concerns about the impact of such schemes on families and villages, like uneven access leading to inequalities in how economic benefits are distributed, and concerns about the domestic economy, as participation rates grow and domestic labour supply consequently falls (Doan, Dornan and Edwards 2023). A recent rapid assessment conducted by the Vanuatu government suggests that the loss in local labour is particularly problematic for disaster resilience during the cyclone season (DSPPAC 2023).

When respondents were asked if they or someone they knew had been part of a Pacific labour scheme, 9% answered that they had ‘recently been part of one’, 7% were part of a labour scheme ‘long ago’, 49% ‘knew someone who has been part of a labour scheme’, while 33% had ‘never been, or known someone’ who has been on a labour scheme.

When asked how dependent they were on remittance income, 49% of respondents stated that they do not receive remittances at all, 32% reported ‘a little bit’ of dependence, 10% were ‘somewhat dependent’ and 8% were dependent ‘a lot’ on remittance income. Of those who were dependent on remittance income to any degree, 97% said it originated from someone on a labour mobility scheme.

Relevant to the increase in participation in labour mobility schemes, and the income they generate for Vanuatu, the PAS asked respondents about perceived

Figure 31: Assessment of current economic conditions (%)



changes in the wider economy and their own family over the last few years (Figure 31). Overall respondents reported that changes in Vanuatu’s economy over the last few years broadly mirrored their own family’s economic condition.

Notably, those who received remittance income were significantly more likely to think that the economic condition of the country had improved over the last few years (62%), than those who did not (50%). This is a significant finding which highlights the importance of labour mobility schemes to popular perceptions surrounding the trajectory of national economic conditions.

These economic benefits help explain why 77% of respondents reported that they were ‘willing to travel overseas to temporarily work’, compared to just

23% who were unwilling. These figures moderated substantially when asked how willing respondents were to ‘permanently’ move to another country. Here, 40% reported a willingness to move permanently, compared to 59% who were unwilling.

The PAS also sought to gauge popular impressions of the positive and negative aspects of labour mobility schemes. In terms of the most positive aspects of labour schemes (Figure 32), 64% of respondents reported ‘improved household income’, followed by ‘more local business’ (13%), ‘improved village income’ (12%), ‘increased training and work skills’ (4%), ‘more income for churches’ (4%) and ‘increased women’s status’ (1%).

In terms of the identified negatives of Pacific labour schemes, worsening family relations (60%) was rated the most negative aspect of these schemes, followed by

Figure 32: ‘Thinking of the positives, what do you think is the most positive aspect of labour mobility schemes (e.g. RSE/SWP)?’ (%)

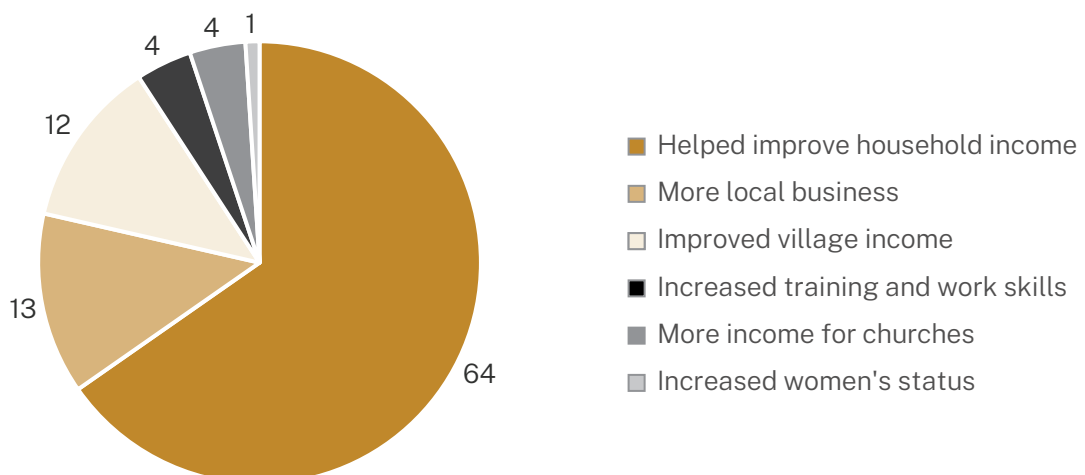
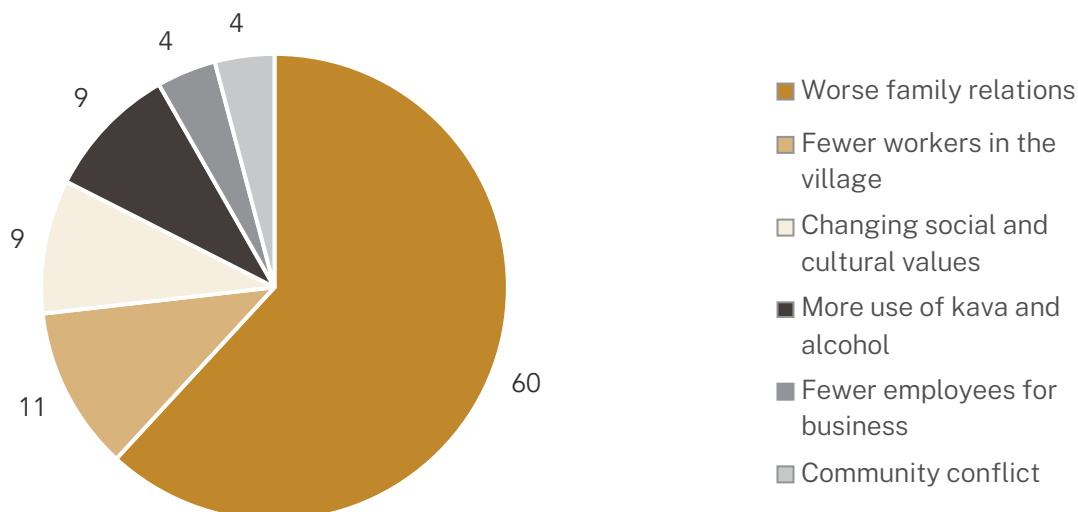


Figure 33: ‘Thinking of the negatives, what do you think is the most negative aspect of labour mobility schemes (e.g. RSE/SWP)?’ (%)



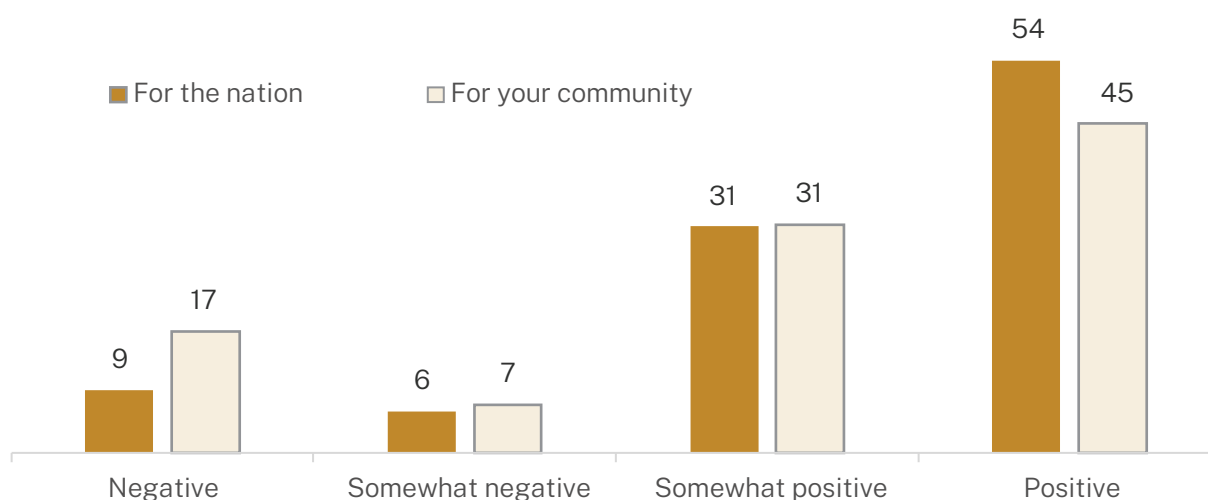
fewer workers in the village (11%), changing social and cultural values (9%), increased use of kava and alcohol (9%), fewer employees for business (4%) and community conflict (4%) (Figure 33).

Overall, however, respondents believed labour mobility schemes had been a net positive for both their community and the nation (Figure 34). Some 85% of respondents believed labour mobility schemes had a positive impact for the nation overall, while 76% agreed labour mobility schemes had been a positive development for their own community.

2.3 Gender equality

Gender inequality is a persistent issue in Vanuatu, not least in the area of political representation: from independence in 1980 to 2023, just six women had been elected to parliament. In the 2022 election, one woman was elected to the 52-seat parliament. Key barriers to greater women’s representation include social norms that discourage women’s participation in decision-making, and a lack of political party support (Ilo-Noka and Dalesa-Saraken 2010; Baker 2018). Reserved seats in the Port

Figure 34: ‘Do you think labour mobility schemes have been a positive or negative ...?’ (%)



Vila and Luganville town councils provide pathways for women at the municipal level, but these measures have not been replicated at the provincial or national levels.

The findings from PAS: Vanuatu (Table 12) suggest that there is strong support for strong women's representation, in principle. When asked about women's representation in Vanuatu's parliament, 82% of respondents believed there were 'too few' women represented in parliament. Another 13% thought the current number of women MPs (1) was 'just right', while 3% felt that was 'too many'. There was also widespread support (87%) for the use of temporary special measures (or gender quotas) in parliament. In terms of demographic differences, senior ni-Vanuatu were more likely to strongly agree (73%) that there should be temporary special measures to increase women's representation in parliament, compared to youth (61%).

There was also strong majority support for women to play an active role in government. Notably, 86% of respondents felt 'women should be involved in politics as much as men'. This finding was reflected in widespread agreement (74%) that 'a woman should become Prime Minister of our country'. Roughly the same level of

support extended to the president with 70% agreeing that 'a woman should become President of our country'. At the time of writing (March 2024), there has never been a woman prime minister or president of Vanuatu.

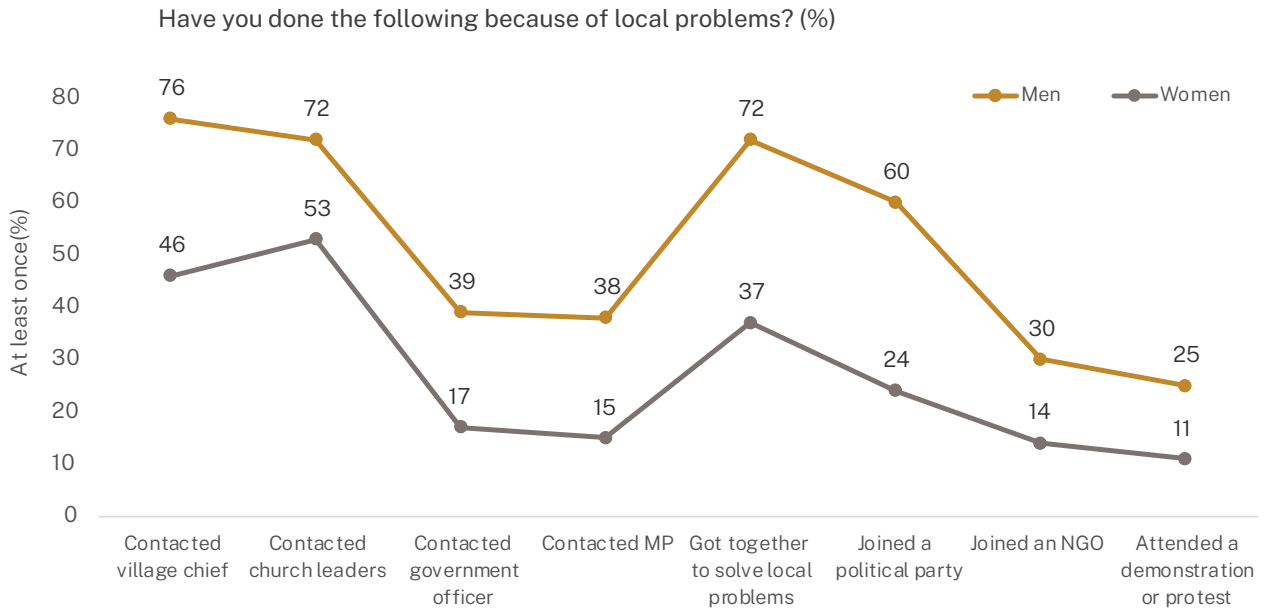
While popular attitudes to women's participation in politics were generally positive, there were nonetheless mixed responses to the proposition that 'in general men are better at political leadership than women', with some 55% expressing agreement. This suggests that while most respondents agreed in principle with the idea of greater women's representation in politics, social norms of leadership still favour men. This seems to be especially true in more traditional political spaces, with 62% of respondents (66% of men and 58% of women) agreeing that women should not speak in the *nakamal* (traditional meeting place where chiefs convene).

In terms of political participation, there is a notable and concerning gender gap. As noted above, women are less likely to engage with politics than men across all the measures surveyed: joining political parties, protesting, talking about politics with friends and family, and contacting leaders about local issues, among other indicators. This gap is illustrated in Figure 35.

Table 12: 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	58	28	86	8	6
A woman should become Prime Minister of our country	51	23	74	13	12
A woman should become President of our country	48	22	70	16	12
There should be temporary special measures to increase women's representation in parliament	65	22	87	8	4
In general men are better at political leadership than women	31	24	55	19	25
Women's contribution to politics should be equally as valued as men	62	23	85	6	7
University education is more important for a man than a woman	13	12	25	26	49
Women should not speak in the <i>nakamal</i>	42	20	62	16	20
Men and women should have the same rights to inherit and own land	41	20	61	19	19
Political parties should do more to include women as candidates	65	24	89	6	4

Figure 35: Gender and political participation (%)



This reflects more limited engagement with politics amongst women respondents. Women (56%) are less likely to report interest in politics compared to men (78%). They are also less likely (27%) to strongly agree that voting makes a difference compared to men (37%).

Taken together, these results paint a picture of unequal political access and participation for women. While there is strong theoretical support for greater women’s representation, including in the most senior political leadership positions, there are also strong social norms at play that prioritise men’s leadership at family, community and political levels. In this context, women are less likely to stand for and win elected political positions; however, the effect goes further, with women also less likely to engage in political activity generally.

2.4 International relations

Vanuatu’s relationships with the outside world are important. Vanuatu’s key interests surrounding climate activism in both regional and global fora have highlighted Vanuatu’s willingness to engage internationally. This engagement has been tested by heightened geopolitical competition in the Pacific region, with Vanuatu, at times, becoming the focus of external actors bidding for influence (Smith and Wesley-Smith 2021). This became evident in 2023, when domestic debate arose over a bilateral security agreement signed by then Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau’s government, and the government of Australia. A key concern about the agreement arose over Vanuatu’s purported neutrality, with Kalsakau stating ‘we are not pro-West, and we are not pro-

Figure 36: ‘Which country has the most influence in the Pacific?’ (%)

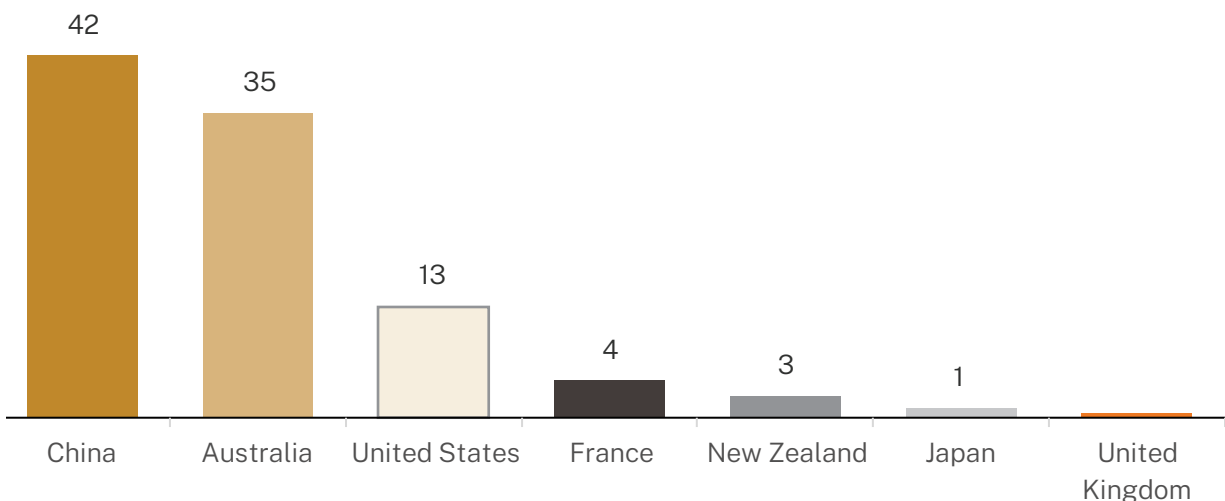
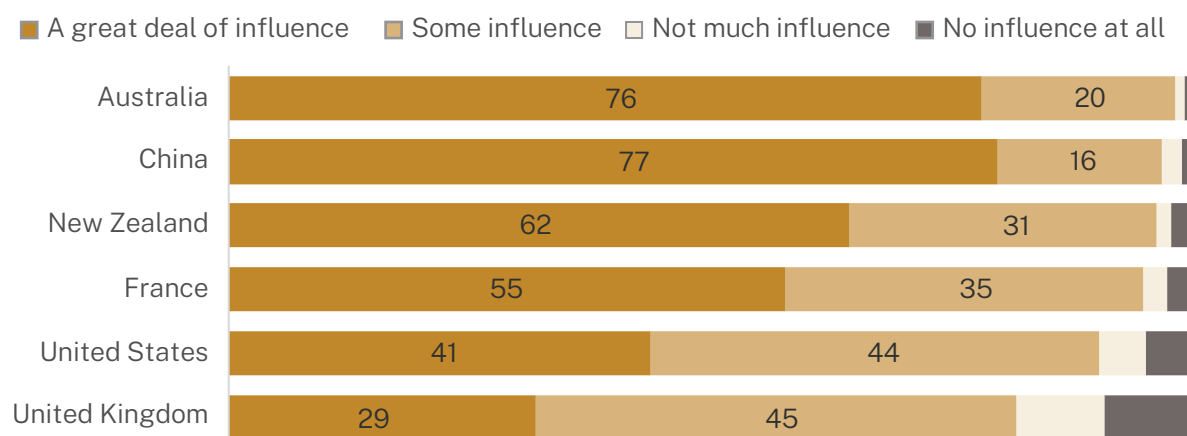


Figure 37: ‘How much influence do the following countries have on Vanuatu?’ (%)



Chinese. We adopt a non-aligned policy’ (Dziedzic, Smith and Lowonbu 5/9/2023).

As a small island developing country, Vanuatu is the recipient of substantial external assistance in the form of grants and loans. Lowy Institute analysis demonstrates that official development finance to Vanuatu averaged \$175 million per year between 2008 and 2021, with around four-fifths of this total comprising grants and the rest in the form of loans. In this time period, Australia was Vanuatu’s largest bilateral aid partner, followed by China and New Zealand (Dayant et al. 2023:26).

We asked respondents a series of questions to assess the perceived influence of different countries active in the Pacific region (Figure 36). Results show a majority (42%) of respondents regarded China as the country with the most influence in the Pacific, followed by Australia (35%) and then the United States (13%).

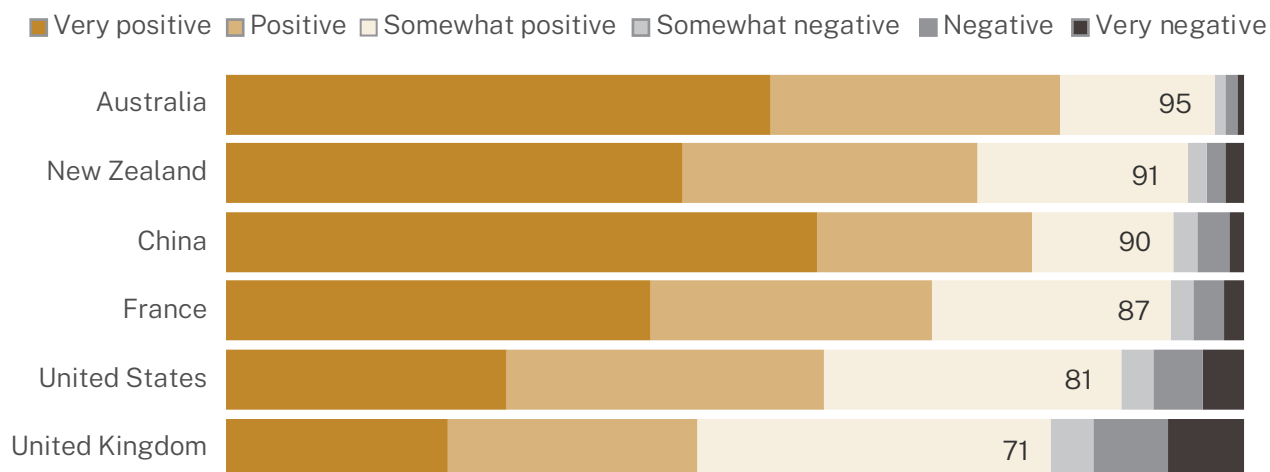
These results were brought into sharper relief when respondents were asked how much influence each of these countries individually have on Vanuatu in particular (Figure 37). Notably, 77% of respondents considered

China to have a ‘great deal of influence’ on Vanuatu, followed closely by Australia (76%). When considering overall influence, Australia was rated as having the most influence (96%).

Significantly, respondents who identified as being more dependent on remittance income were also more likely to regard Australia as influential (49%) than those who were not (33%). This suggests that labour mobility schemes can act as a vehicle for ‘soft power’, given a significant proportion of remittance income is generated by ni-Vanuatu workers in Australia. Notably, Australia and New Zealand are the biggest destinations for ni-Vanuatu seeking work on a Pacific Labour scheme, with Vanuatu accounting for 35% of total visas issued across 2022–23 (Bedford 2023).

Respondents were then asked whether they regarded the identified influence as positive, or negative (Figure 38). Australia (95%), New Zealand (91%), China (90%) and France (87%) stand out as the countries perceived to have the most overall positive influence on Vanuatu, followed by the United States (81%) and the United Kingdom (71%).

Figure 38: ‘How positive or negative is the influence of ... ?’ (%)

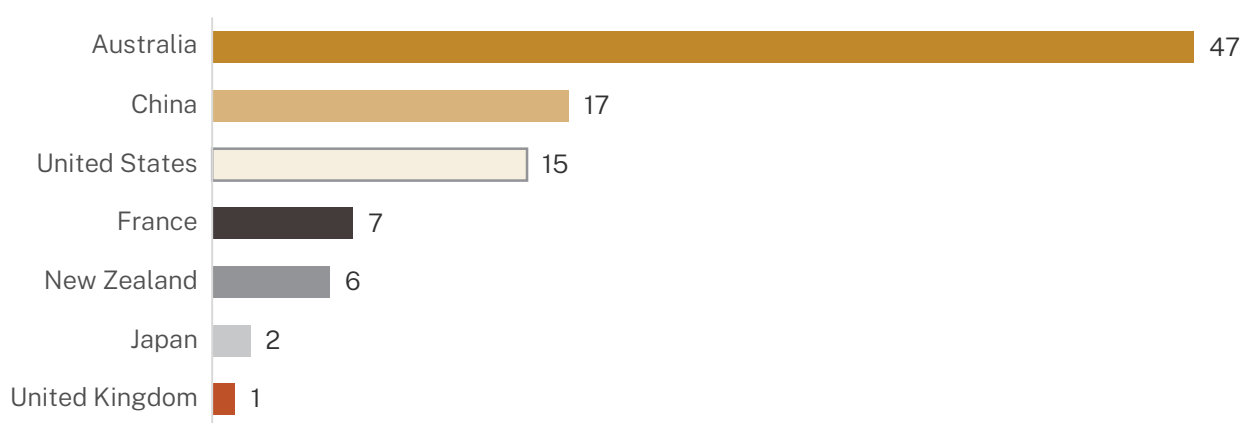


Taken together, these responses suggest ni-Vanuatu citizens have a broadly positive view of international influence, whether from traditional or new partners.

When these results were disaggregated into demographic cohorts, both Australia and New Zealand were regarded as a stronger positive influence by rural respondents than by urban respondents. For instance, 79% of rural respondents thought Australia has a very positive or positive influence on Vanuatu compared to 69% of urban respondents. Similar differences were found for New Zealand, with 66% of rural respondents regarding it as having a very positive or positive influence, compared to 52% of urban respondents.

Respondents were also asked which country should serve as a 'model for Vanuatu's future development' (Figure 39). Here, Australia was the most commonly selected response (47%) with other countries trailing significantly behind. Familiarity with Australia through labour mobility schemes may in part explain this, though it should be noted that the other significant labour mobility partner, New Zealand, was a far less common response (6%). As larger geopolitical powers, both China (17%) and the United States (15%) rated higher as models for development than other alternatives.

Figure 39: 'Which country should be a model for Vanuatu's future development?' (%)



A related question (Figure 40) gauged respondents' perceptions of the key motivations behind foreign aid to Vanuatu. Overwhelmingly, 'economic development' (45%) was listed as the primary reason while other reasons were evenly split. Notably, just 12% thought the primary motivation for aid expenditure was 'gaining influence' in Vanuatu. These responses suggest that ni-Vanuatu citizens view the motives behind foreign aid as predominantly altruistic.

In the context of the domestic debate around the Vanuatu-Australia bilateral security agreement, the PAS asked respondents: 'which country should we prioritise for security agreements?' (Figure 41). Here, the United States (58%) emerged strongly as the most common response, followed by Australia (26%), France (5%), China (4%), New Zealand (1%) and the United Kingdom (1%). This perhaps signifies the enduring status of the United States as a major security actor and strong

Figure 40: Main motivation of countries giving foreign aid to Vanuatu (%)

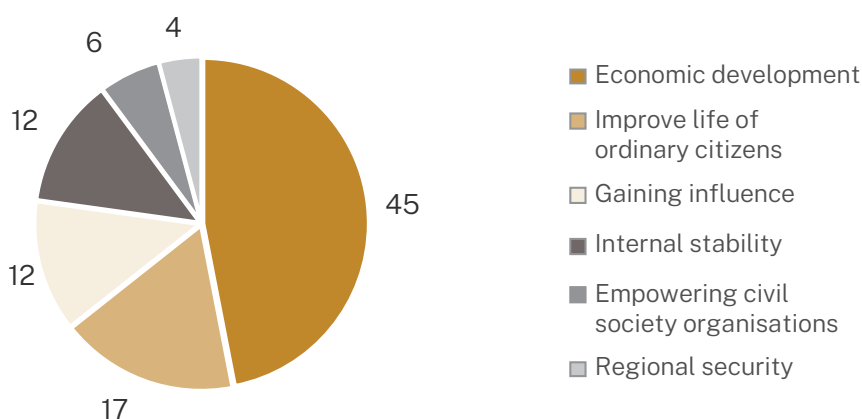
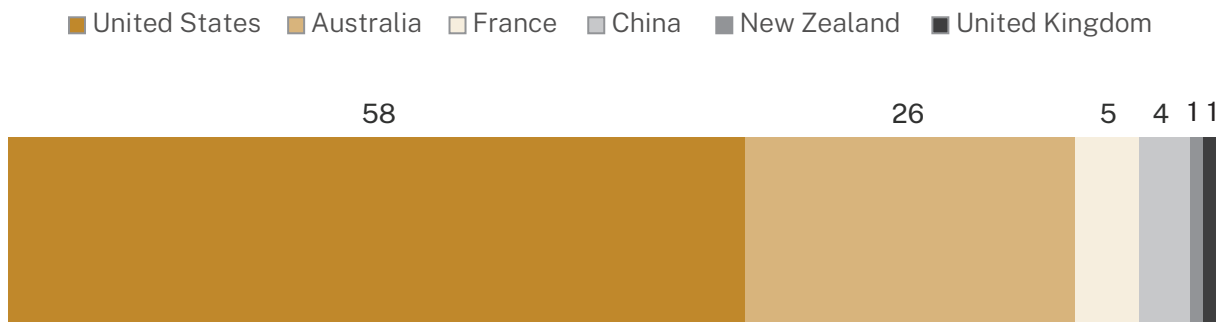


Figure 41: ‘Which country should we prioritise for security agreements?’ (%)



military presence in the Pacific region (see Ratuva 2017), and may also reflect positively on the recent moves by the United States administration to re-engage with the region through initiatives such as the Pacific Partnership Strategy (see Szadziwski and Powles 2023). This emphasis on the United States as a security partner — as compared to questions on development and general influence, where Australia, China and New Zealand are more dominant — is notable.



Source: Kerry Baker

Conclusion

The *Pacific Attitudes Survey: Vanuatu* (PAS: Vanuatu) was conducted in Vanuatu from August to September 2023, surveying a representative national sample of ni-Vanuatu above the voting age of 18. The findings detail an intriguing and complex picture of political and social attitudes, with a distinctive mix of democratic and traditional values in Vanuatu's political culture.

This conclusion highlights six key findings from the survey.

First, **findings demonstrate that ni-Vanuatu have a strong commitment to democracy.** Relatively high levels of satisfaction with democracy, and trust in democratic processes and institutions might be seen as noteworthy, given repeated votes of no confidence in and around the survey period. However, while short-term political instability like that which characterised the data collection period is not unusual, the overall resilience of Vanuatu's democratic system may explain the overall commitment and support for democracy among its citizens.

Second, **politics is generally conceptualised and practised through local and traditional, rather than national, pathways.** In Vanuatu the reach of the state varies, with traditional structures and figures, such as chiefs, and the Church, proving to be more reliable and accessible for many communities. These institutions are afforded a high level of trust, and respondents accordingly reported higher levels of engagement with chiefs and church leaders than with MPs and government officials. Politics is also highly localised in Vanuatu. This local emphasis is valued, with respondents noting a preference for their MP to focus on 'helping with community projects', rather than promoting national development.

Third, **climate change is perceived as a lived reality and urgent issue in Vanuatu.** An overwhelming majority of ni-Vanuatu believe that climate change is an urgent problem that should be addressed, noting that they had observed visible changes over the last 10 years that they attributed to climate change. From the survey results, we see strong and clear expectations that large emitters should compensate most affected nations; that the national government should actively manage adaptation efforts; and that communities have a responsibility to accept displaced people from other areas.

Fourth, **there was widespread support for labour mobility schemes, although there are concerns about the impact on families.** The influence of labour mobility schemes was strongly evident; a majority of respondents had either participated themselves or knew people who had participated in temporary labour migration. Overall, labour mobility schemes were perceived positively by respondents in terms of their impacts on the economy, for local communities, and for the nation generally. However, major drawbacks identified by the respondents included worsening family relations within communities in Vanuatu.

Fifth, **there are noticeable inequalities in access to politics, with women far less likely to participate in both formal and traditional political spaces than men.** There is a substantial gender gap. Intergenerational changes were also evident, with older generations more likely to exert political influence than younger generations. While respondents demonstrated widespread support for greater women's representation in politics in principle, the survey showed that social norms of political leadership still favour men.

Finally, **both China and Australia are seen to have a lot of influence on the Pacific and Vanuatu specifically, and their influence is broadly construed as positive.** China was singled out as being the most influential country in the Pacific, though Australia was identified as the country with the most influence on Vanuatu itself, as well as being perceived by respondents as having the most positive influence on Vanuatu. The results of the PAS: Vanuatu suggest ni-Vanuatu citizens have a broadly positive view of international influence, and of development assistance.

Endnotes

- 1 The first Pacific Attitudes Survey was conducted in late 2020 and early 2021 in Samoa (see Leach et al. 2022).
- 2 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.
- 3 Akvo is a not-for-profit software development foundation specialising in building and maintaining data collection tools. For the PAS: Vanuatu, Akvo provided tablet friendly survey software, survey digitisation, coding support and live monitoring of data entry.
- 4 Except where specifically noted, it should be assumed data from the full sample (n=1330) 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.
- 5 This module was initially adapted from the International Social Survey Programme (with permission) for survey work among tertiary students in Timor-Leste (see Leach 2003, 2008).
- 6 In percentage terms, 'objectivist' indicators were considered 'very important' by an average 86% of respondents, compared to 92% for 'voluntarist' measures.
- 7 This result was reflected elsewhere in the PAS: Vanuatu when respondents were asked 'how proud are you of the way democracy works in Vanuatu?', with 94% expressing overall pride.
- 8 Performance-based indicators in the Global Barometer surveys are also based on satisfaction with 'how democracy works'. Regime-based indicators, however, are a compound measure which considers preference for democracy, and detachment from authoritarian alternatives, to determine the level of 'regime-based' support for democracy (GBS 2018). In Vanuatu, for instance, 47% of respondents disagreed that 'only one party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office'; 53% disagreed that 'we should get rid of elections and parliament and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people'; and 59% disagreed that 'we should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things'. Using the Global Barometer formula, this gave Vanuatu a lower compound score of 59% for regime-based support for democracy, compared to 84% for performance-based support. The equivalent calculations in Samoa resulted in figures of 66% regime-based support and 53% performance-based support for democracy (see Leach et al. 2022).
- 10 The equivalent figure for those with secondary education was 57%.
- 11 The Vanuatu Electoral Commission estimates that given the known issues with inflation of the electoral roll, the actual 2020 election turnout figure could be closer to 70% (VEC 2020).
- 12 Here, 'the Church' is defined broadly and without reference to a specific organisation or institution (reflecting the diversity of Christian denominations in Vanuatu) whereas 'the Malvatumauri' refers specifically to the constitutionally enshrined council of chiefs.
- 13 Writing on Timor-Leste, for example, Cummins and Leach (2012) 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.
- 14 The Global Barometer considers a result of 55% or higher to declare a country to have 'substantive' or 'procedural' definition.
- 15 Trust in institutions is divided into two components by the Global Barometer Surveys network of surveys. The addition of traditional institutions in the Pacific Attitudes Survey is, to our knowledge, unique to popular attitudes surveys. We acknowledge that Vanuatu, like other Pacific states, has hybrid institutions that do not fit neatly into categories such as elected, non-elected and traditional, and as such there is some overlap.
- 16 The police and Vanuatu Mobile Forces (VMF) are combined here as they sit under the same institutional umbrella; however, they have been separated at various times in Vanuatu's history.
- 17 These figures reflect the combined totals of 'quite a lot of trust' and 'a great deal of trust'.
- 18 Economics included issues related to unemployment (7%), wages and income (5%), economic management (3%), taxes (2%) and poverty (1%).
- 19 A high degree of respondents chose not to answer this question (13%). Post survey analysis revealed this was mainly because respondents believed that their MP does nothing.
- 20 Like other Pacific nations, questions have been raised about the accuracy of the electoral roll in Vanuatu. The Pacific Islands Forum report on the 2016 Vanuatu general elections noted that the electoral roll was 'evidently inflated' and raised concerns about the process for removing deceased individuals, duplicate entries and falsified enrolments (PIFS 2016:9). The Vanuatu Electoral Commission's report on the 2020 election acknowledged the electoral roll contained 'a very high number of deceased [individuals] and thousands of duplicates' (VEC 2020:8).
- 21 After a change in the methodological approach, the 2023 World Risk Index ranked Vanuatu as 48th out of 193 countries (Weller 2023).
- 22 While just 3% of respondents answered that it will 'never be necessary to address climate change', a follow-up question sought to clarify why this response was chosen. The two main responses here were 'if it is happening it must be God's will' (1.5% of total respondents) and 'it is not happening/not real' (1%).

Appendix: Enumerator reflections

Participants offered thanks to project coordinators, for providing an opportunity for the people's voice to be heard and seen by the Government. Enumerators were grateful for the opportunity to gain experience and money to help them for their future job opportunities and their families. For most of them, it was their first job after their graduation.

Project Manager Trevor Leodoro

The survey was conducted in a period where the country went through a political crisis. Ni-Vanuatu felt that their opinions could only be expressed through social media platforms like Facebook. As we conducted the survey participants felt there was a space provided for their opinions which could bring change to the country.

Team leader Nazymento Sine

It has been a great honour to participate in this project. We learnt a lot from interviewing different people and the opinions they shared. As for the participants, they were appreciative and glad that this work is being done. They gave their words of thanks to the Australian team for developing and conducting this project and also by saying that they would like to see changes in development in the near future.

Team Leader Gibson Bulu



Source: Stephanie Russo

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