

PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION IN SEVEN SMALL PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Findings from the Global Corruption Barometer

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This report presents the perceptions and experiences of corruption of people in seven smaller Pacific countries, and invites further discussion and exploration of their perspectives. It examines views gathered from Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau (an island territory of New Zealand), Palau, Cook Islands, RMI and Nauru. The findings are drawn from research undertaken in early 2021 as part of the first Global Corruption Barometer conducted in the Pacific, the first survey of its kind in these countries. Owing to the difficulties of surveying smaller nations (particularly the difficulties involved in interviewing a sufficiently large sample of their smaller populations), these seven countries are analysed separately in the present report. This offers important insights on corruption and its effects in countries where there is very scarce data on this harmful problem.

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Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. All information was believed to be correct as of November 2022. Nevertheless, Transparency International cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of its use for other purposes or in other contexts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pacific Island countries face particular corruption risks given their relatively small populations, dependence on natural resources, vulnerability to natural disasters and recent transition to democracy. However, evidence about levels and patterns of corruption is still limited.

This report presents views from people in seven smaller Pacific countries on their perceptions and experiences of corruption, and invites further discussion and exploration of the perspectives they shared. It examines views gathered from Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau (an island territory of New Zealand), Palau, Cook Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and Nauru. The findings are drawn from research undertaken in early 2021 as part of the first ever Global Corruption Barometer conducted in the Pacific.

The report shows that, across the board, most respondents associated corruption with politicians, while respondents from the four Polynesian countries in the group were also concerned about corruption in the police. Government corruption was of particular concern in RMI. Experiences with corruption varied, although respondents from RMI and Nauru were more likely to say they

had experienced requests for bribes during elections or had themselves or knew someone who had been subject to requests for sexual favours. While corruption is often associated with elites, the findings show that reciprocity plays an important role in the public's understanding of and response to corruption and informal transactions. Indeed, across the region, patronage relations between politicians and voters (who may demand unofficial favours from their leaders) can exacerbate the potential for corruption. Respondents from the RMI, Cook Islands and Tokelau were most likely to have drawn on personal connections to receive a government service. Most respondents were positive about their government's overall efforts to fight corruption (with the exception of Nauru); however, few believed that officials who engaged in corruption frequently faced the appropriate consequences.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

01

Further efforts are needed to address corruption in politics. Across the region, strengthening, or in some cases introducing, state-based anti-corruption and integrity organisations would be a good first step.

02

High levels of concern in RMI and Nauru over election bribes and sexual favours point to the importance both of strengthening processes to support and monitor elections and of responding to the gendered dimensions of corruption particularly in these two countries.

03

Given that a majority of respondents from all countries, bar Nauru, are positive about some elements of their government's responses to corruption, policymakers should learn from past successes when seeking to address corruption. In all countries, however, much more needs to be done to ensure that those engaging in corruption face sanctions.

04

Awareness-raising measures will be required in countries where perceptions about corruption and informal giving do not match experiences.

05

Given the complex histories, cultures, social structures and economies of each country, anti-corruption reforms will need to be tailored to each country's unique context. In turn, while noting the need for further research, the report highlights potential areas for reform that might help to address some of the key concerns expressed by respondents.

06

The findings point to key areas for future research and monitoring. They suggest that research to evaluate the effectiveness and shortcomings of key integrity agencies would be helpful to identify any particular reforms that might address the issues identified in the report.

INTRODUCTION

While the level of corruption varies, many recognise that it is an ongoing and significant challenge across the Pacific Island region. As a consequence, Pacific Island countries have adopted measures to address the challenge. For instance, almost every country in the region has signed or acceded to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).¹

Also, regional projects to address corruption include the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption (UNPRAC) project, which supports Pacific Island governments' anti-corruption commitments (Integra LLC, 2020). In 2020, Pacific Island political leaders promised to tackle corruption by signing the Teieniwa Vision, which was in turn endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum in 2021. Citizens, sometimes working through non-governmental organisations, also raise their voices against corruption in a variety of ways, including through social and traditional media and public protest (See Kant et al., 2018).

Despite these concerns and commitments, research on corruption in the region remains patchy. In particular, we still know little about how Pacific Islanders themselves perceive corruption and respond to it. While there has been research into public perceptions about corruption in a few countries – for example,

Papua New Guinea (Walton, 2018) and the Solomon Islands (ANU Edge and University of the South Pacific, 2013) – and there have been expert regional and national assessments of corruption (e.g., Larmour, 2012; Hassall, 2017; Walton and Dinnen, 2019), there have been no comprehensive quantitative surveys of ordinary citizens' views about corruption across the region. This makes the findings of the Pacific Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) set out in the present report particularly important. Given the role that citizens play in resisting and, at times, supporting corruption, filling this gap in our knowledge is critical. If citizens' perceptions and experiences of corruption are not understood, then policymakers, researchers and others may fail to understand the extent of the problem or the opportunities for reform.

This report examines citizens' perceptions and experiences of corruption in seven Pacific Island countries that are all small by

population and landmass² but have differing levels of perceived corruption risk – namely Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau (an island territory of New Zealand), Palau, Cook Islands, RMI and Nauru. It does so by analysing the findings of the first Pacific GCB, which was undertaken in 2021 in a total of 17 countries across the region. The findings from ten of the countries have already been analysed in a separate report published by Transparency International.³ Owing to the difficulties of surveying smaller nations (particularly the difficulties involved in interviewing a sufficiently large sample of their smaller populations), the seven remaining countries are now analysed separately in the present report. The findings provide valuable insights into how an array of citizens in the seven countries perceive and experience corruption and anti-corruption efforts. The report also highlights similarities and differences in relation to what we already

know about corruption and anti-corruption in the seven countries and the key findings from the Pacific GCB.

The research was conducted at a particularly challenging time for the Pacific (and indeed for the world). In early 2021, the region was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only were Pacific Island nations significantly affected by responses to the virus, but some were also affected by the virus itself. In response, the Pacific Islands Forum invoked the Biketawa Declaration to facilitate regional assistance (Integra LLC, 2020). International donors, such as Australia, New Zealand and the United States, have also provided assistance to the region. In addition, Pacific Island governments have adopted a range of measures to address the health, social and economic fallout of the pandemic. While such responses were very much needed, some suggest that they can increase corruption risk

(e.g., Kabuni, 2021). In turn, the findings highlight how citizens have perceived and experienced corruption and how they have thought about responses to it at a time of potentially heightened corruption risk.

The following section provides a background on corruption and the responses to it across the region, focusing specifically on some of the key issues that face small island states and territories. The third section describes the methodology that guided data collection for the Pacific GCB. The fourth section sets out a brief background for the countries in question and presents their respective survey findings. The fifth section compares responses and highlights any key themes that have emerged from the analysis. Finally, the report concludes with a summary of the key findings and a set of recommendations.

CORRUPTION AND ANTI-CORRUPTION IN THE PACIFIC

The Pacific Island region is home to over 11 million people and comprises 22 distinct political entities that are scattered across the Pacific Ocean. While many of the countries in the region are terrestrially small, the entire region including ocean bound exclusive economic zones (EEZs) covers a territory roughly equal to the size of Africa.

Though geographically, politically and culturally diverse, the region is often subdivided into three broad cultural areas, namely Melanesia to the southwest, Polynesia to the east and Micronesia to the northwest (see Figure 1). The seven countries in the present study are concentrated in the latter two sub-regions: four are in Polynesia (Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands) and three are in Micronesia (RMI, Nauru and Palau). Broadly, the 1,000 islands that make up

Polynesia are home to a set of related languages, and share a number of cultural similarities (for example, leaders in most places are chosen on the basis of male hereditary bloodlines). In the Pacific, the sub-region of Polynesia is the most culturally and linguistically homogenous. By contrast, Micronesia comprises around 3,000 islands – mostly uninhabited low-lying coral atolls – which feature culturally diverse matrilineal and patrilineal societies.

FIGURE 1: THE PACIFIC



Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, ANU.

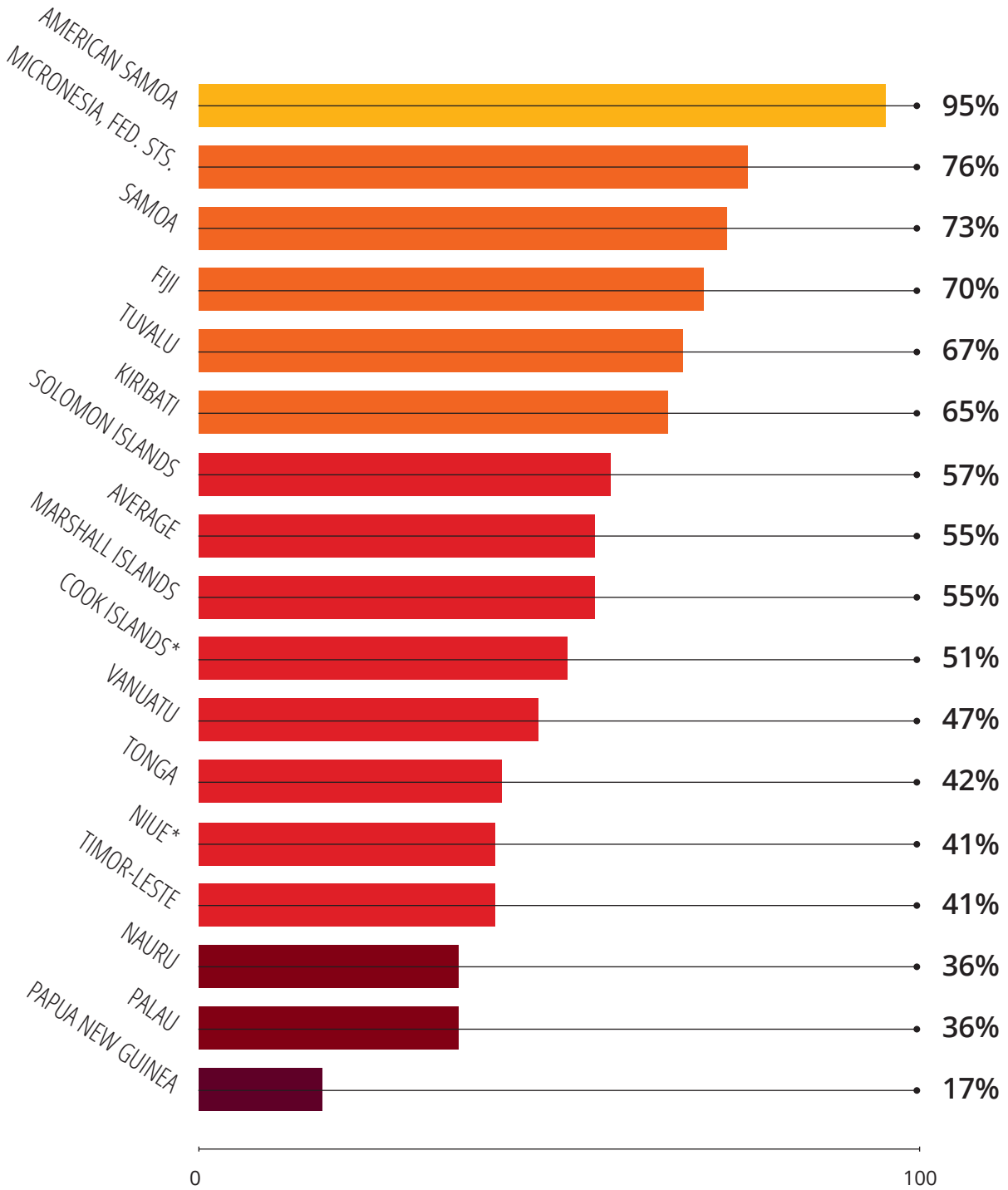
Previous assessments of corruption in the seven countries suggest that each faces different levels of corruption risk. The Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022) provide an assessment of some Pacific Island countries' ability to control corruption through the control of corruption index,⁴ which combines surveys conducted in the countries on their ability to control corruption, and rates them on a scale ranging from a percentile rank of 0 (low control of corruption) to 100 (high level of control). Six out of the seven countries in the study are included (no data for Tokelau are available). Figure 2 shows that only two of the countries – Tuvalu and RMI – score above average for the 16 selected Pacific Island countries that have data. In other words, notwithstanding the limitations of such assessments, at least four of the seven countries included in this report face moderate to high levels of corruption risk within government.

Small Pacific Island states and territories face particular challenges and opportunities in relation to corruption. On the one hand, given their tiny populations and weak or non-existent political parties, local politicians may be more inclined to engage in patronage, nepotism and clientelism (Larmour and Barcham, 2006). As they possess few natural resources, a number of small Pacific Island states and territories have resorted to offshore banking, the sale of internet domains, and the issuing of passports – all sectors that are prone to facilitating or hiding corruption. Fisheries, one of the few natural resources that are available for economic exploitation, can also be a source of corruption (Walton, Keen and Hanich, 2022). In addition, traditions of cultural reciprocity can blur the distinctions between “gifts” and “corruption”, which can mean that citizens support and participate in transactions or other activities that are defined in law as corrupt (Larmour 2012).

On the other hand, as Figure 2 demonstrates, some small Pacific Island states and territories seem less prone to certain types of corruption than larger countries in the region. For example, Tuvalu, Tokelau, RMI, Nauru and Palau all score better on the Worldwide Governance Indicators' Control of Corruption than the much larger Papua New Guinea. Some have suggested that traditions of cultural reciprocity in these small, tightly knit populations might improve accountability (e.g., Barcham, 2007; Chêne, 2010). The present report provides some insights into these debates by furnishing empirical data on how citizens in the seven small Pacific Island states and territories in question perceive and experience corruption and how they think about responses to it.

FIGURE 2: CONTROL OF CORRUPTION INDEX IN THE PACIFIC

2022 except countries with *



Note: All figures from the Worldwide Governance Indicators database (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022). Scores for Tokelau are not available in the WGI database. * = Figures from 2013.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach that informs the analysis is drawn from Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB). The GCB has been designed to understand how the public perceives and experiences corruption. Since 2003, GCB surveys have been undertaken in over 100 countries around the world.

The present report draws on data from the first GCB survey conducted across the Pacific region and focuses on findings from seven small Pacific Island countries. The seven countries were selected for separate analysis because the findings were not, strictly speaking, statistically representative. However, as noted earlier, given the paucity of research on the topic, the results still provide important insights into the public's understanding of corruption and anti-corruption in the seven countries. Also, as outlined in Appendix 1, researchers took a number of steps to ensure that the survey reached a wide variety of citizens.

While some items are the same as those on GCB surveys conducted in other parts of the world, the survey instrument did undergo adaptation for the Pacific, with researchers engaging with experts and testing the instrument in countries across the region.

The final survey instrument included five sections:

- + Screener – Demographics & Selection Protocol
- + Section A – Perceptions of Corruption: this included items on respondents' perceptions of the level of corruption, who might be involved, and the effectiveness of government responses to it.

- + Section B – Experiences with Corruption: this included items about bribery in elections and sextortion.

- + Section C – Attitudes Towards Corruption: this included items about who could make a difference in the fight against corruption, the frequency of grand and petty corruption, and respondents' perceptions of their government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- + Section D – Socio-Demographics

Further information about the methods and approach, including the demographic profiles of respondents, is contained in Appendix 1.

COUNTRY-LEVEL FINDINGS

This section presents key findings from the Pacific GCB survey. It includes a brief outline of the corruption risk and anti-corruption efforts in each of the seven countries. The profiles of the Polynesian countries (Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau and Cook Islands) appear first, followed by those of the countries in the Micronesian sub-region (Palau, RMI and Nauru).



TUVALU

POLYNESIA

Consisting of nine low-lying islands that are home to around 12,000 citizens, Tuvalu is a parliamentary democracy that holds regular and free elections (Freedom House, 2021a). The unicameral parliament, the Fale I Fono, has 16 directly elected members, and the government is headed by a prime minister. The country gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1978; Queen Elizabeth II, represented by a governor-general, is the head of state. The country is relatively culturally homogenous.

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

A number of assessments suggest that government corruption, when compared to other countries in the region, is not a significant problem in Tuvalu (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2021; Freedom House, 2021a; Goldsmith, 2005; Hughes and Gosarevski, 2004). This has been the case for some time, with Hughes and Gosarevski (2004: 18) even suggesting in 2004 that if Tuvalu sustained its approach to government, it “deserves the title of the most successful government in the Pacific”. This view is backed up by the GCB’s findings. Most of the 160 respondents from Tuvalu (59 per

cent) thought that government corruption was either not a problem or only a fairly small issue; although, 35 per cent said it was a very big or big problem. Respondents were ambivalent about the changes to corruption risk in the government. Less than half (48 per cent) believed that corruption had increased a great deal or somewhat over the past year, while 41 per cent believed it had decreased over the same period. Most respondents (89 per cent) said that the government had been transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

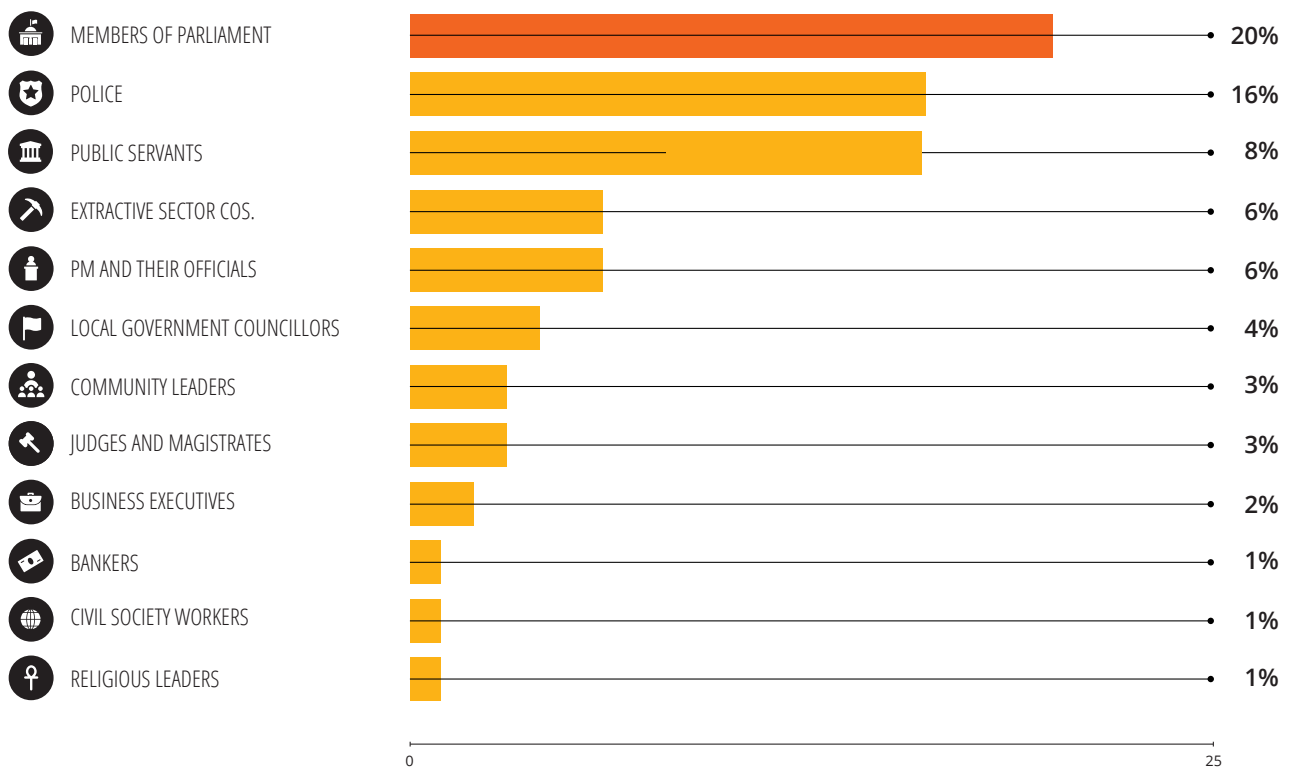
While levels of corruption are comparatively low, some commentators have expressed concern, particularly about

corruption involving politicians and the public service. An assessment of the country’s national integrity systems conducted by former secretary to government Tauaasa Taafaki found that “the public service suffers from a lack of integrity, and accountability by ministers and officials is poor” (2004: 4). Politicians have also been accused of corruption. In 2016, former prime minister Apisai Ielemia was convicted at first instance and jailed on charges related to corruption and abuse of office, which were alleged to have involved the deposit of over US\$15,000 from Japanese and Taiwanese interests into his personal bank account. The conviction was overturned a few weeks later.

As Figure 3 shows, the Pacific GCB found that respondents were most concerned about politicians (20 per cent said MPs were likely to be involved in corruption), the police (16 per cent associated them with corruption) and public

servants (8 per cent thought they were likely to be corrupt). On the other hand, only 1 per cent of respondents believed all or most civil society workers, bankers or religious leaders were involved.

FIGURE 3: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, TUVALU



Note: extractive sector companies may be associated with activities such as logging, mining and fisheries; given the economic and cultural importance of the ocean for countries in the present report, respondents were most likely to associate them with fisheries.

Researchers also asked respondents about their experiences over the past 12 months with six select government institutions and services, namely:

- + a public school
- + a public clinic or hospital
- + a government office in order to get a document they needed
- + a government service provider to get water, sanitation or electricity services
- + the police
- + the courts

Of those who had experiences with at least one of the six select service providers over the past 12 months, very few said they had had to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour in order to get the needed assistance or services. Of those who had some sort of contact with the institutions in question (115 out of 160 respondents), only 3 per cent said they had experienced such informal requests. A sizeable minority (22 per cent) said that, over the past five years, they had been offered a bribe or special favour to vote in a particular way at a national, regional or local election. Five per cent said that, over the past five years, officials had asked them or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

Some respondents were concerned about large-scale corruption. Thirteen per cent said that companies used money or connections to secure profitable government contracts. One-fifth said that the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.

Reciprocity and personal favours

Some have noted that the line between corruption and the cultural practices of reciprocal exchange can be blurred in Tuvalu. The preamble (s. 6) of Tuvalu's constitution recognises the importance of respecting Tuvaluan culture and values, which place a high value on family, village and community ties, landownership, and reciprocal giving (Taafaki, 2004). These values can be at odds with the country's parliamentary system, which promotes impartiality and meritocracy (Taafaki, 2004).

Reciprocity was important to many respondents: almost half (46 per cent) agreed that if someone in a position of responsibility helped them, they should give them a gift or political support to acknowledge the help. However, only 8 per cent said that other people frequently used their political connections to get better service from a government department. Of those who had engaged with any of the six select government services listed above, 10 per cent said that they had

used their personal connections to obtain the services they needed. Moreover, only 13 per cent said that public servants frequently influenced hiring decisions in order to favour a friend or relative. These figures suggest that most respondents did not believe that social obligations necessarily resulted in corruption.

Responding to corruption

Tuvalu has a number of laws and institutions designed to address corruption. The 1965 penal code (amended in 2016) criminalises corruption offences. Key anti-corruption organisations include the attorney general, police force, ombudsman, auditor general, Public Service Commission and Central Procurement Unit. Recently, the government has committed to developing a national anti-corruption strategy (Ministry of Finance, 2019). The Leadership Code Act, which is designed to guide and govern the conduct of the leaders of the people of Tuvalu, was passed in 2006 (Duri and Rahman, 2020).

Tuvalu became a state party to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in September 2015 and, according to the government, has been making efforts to ratify the convention at the national level (Ministry of Finance, 2019). The country is compliant with the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF's) recommendations on money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards.

Also, in 2014, Tuvalu became an observer to the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, 2021).

Respondents appeared to think that these efforts were mostly effective. Close to two-thirds (64 per cent) said that the government was doing fairly or very well when it came to handling the fight against government corruption. However, fewer believed that officials involved with corruption were effectively dealt with: only one-third (34 per cent) said that officials who engaged in corruption frequently faced appropriate action against them.

Tuvalu's constitution also provides for freedom of assembly, and Freedom House reports that civil society organisations operate without interference (Freedom House, 2021a). In 2020, the country had 14 non-governmental organisations registered under the Non-Governmental Organisations Act 2007 (Integra LLC, 2020: 99). Freedom House (2021a) also notes that while there are no reported restrictions on the press, the media industry is relatively small and internet access is limited. However, the limitations were not sufficient to dampen most respondents' belief in the ability of citizens to address corruption. The vast majority (89 per cent) believed that ordinary people could make a difference in the fight against corruption.

In sum, mirroring previous assessments of corruption risk and responses to it in Tuvalu, most respondents were unconcerned about corruption and did not think that it threatened key institutions. Most were satisfied with government responses to the problem. Still, the findings suggest that corruption is still a concern for a sizable minority and a particular problem with MPs, bureaucrats and the police, and can be apparent during elections. The findings also suggest that more needs to be done to sanction officials engaged in corruption. Given that the country has an array of integrity agencies in place, efforts could focus on better coordination and strategising around the country's anti-corruption response.



NIUE POLYNESIA

Located about 2,400 kilometres to the northeast of New Zealand, Niue is home to around 1,600 people – which excludes an absentee population of around 20,000. Niue’s territory consists of a small island of only 261 square kilometres. Since 1974, the country has been a self-governing territory in free association with its previous colonial administrator, New Zealand. Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state and she is represented by New Zealand’s governor-general. Niueans are citizens of New Zealand, but they vote in their own regular national elections. The Niue Legislative Assembly, the nation’s parliament, consists of 20 members, including the head of government, the premier.

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

There have been few assessments of the extent and nature of corruption in Niue, particularly in recent times. In 2013, the Worldwide Governance Indicators rated the country’s control of corruption as relatively poor: it had a percentile rank of 41 out of 100, which was below the Pacific average (Kaufmann and Kraay 2022). However, some have suggested that corruption in Niue is much

less of a problem than the WGI assessment would suggest, particularly when compared to larger Pacific Island nations such as the Solomon Islands or Papua New Guinea (Chêne, 2010; Talagi, 2019). Former premier Toke Talagi (2019) has described corruption in the country as “petty and trivial”.

For a sizeable minority of respondents, corruption was not “petty and trivial”. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the 78 respondents interviewed in Niue believed that government

corruption was a problem. That said, most believed that over the past year the level of corruption in the government had either stabilised (64 per cent) or decreased (15 per cent), while only 6 per cent of respondents said the corruption risk had increased (14 per cent said they were not sure). Just over half (54 per cent) said that the government had been transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 4: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, NIUE

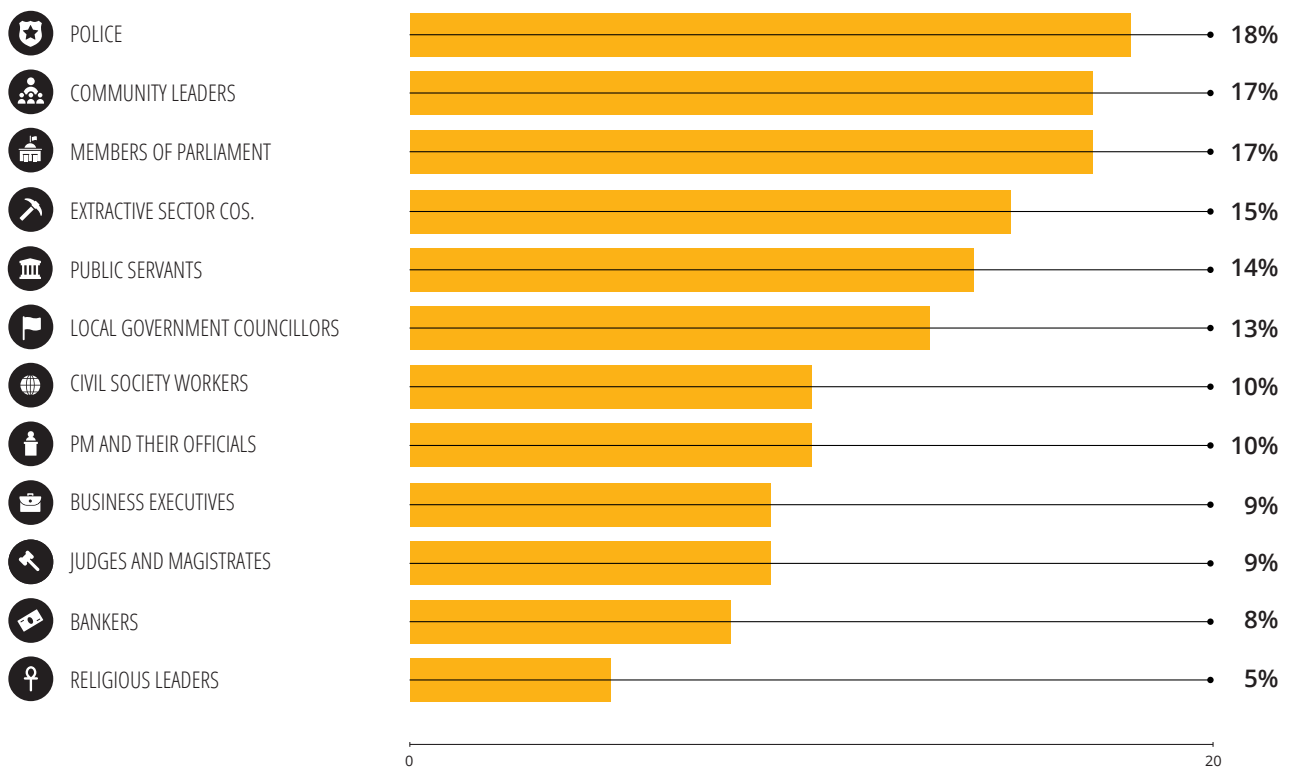


Figure 4 shows that respondents were most likely to associate corruption with the police (18 per cent). In line with past analysis (Talagi, 2004) that associated corruption with non-partisan politics (there are no political parties in the country), a significant minority (17 per cent) also regarded MPs as likely to be corrupt. The same percentage thought community leaders were involved with corruption too.

All 78 respondents said they had engaged with at least one of the six government institutions or services listed earlier, and 18 per cent said they had had to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour in order to get the needed assistance or services. The same proportion of respondents (18 per cent) said they had been offered a bribe or other favour in exchange for their vote. Six per cent said that, over the past five years, officials had asked

them or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

Fewer respondents were concerned about higher-level corruption. Only 5 per cent thought companies frequently used their money to secure government contracts. Also, only 9 per cent thought the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves.

Reciprocity and personal favours

Previous analysis has suggested that obligations of reciprocity – particularly between citizens and politicians – help to drive corruption (Talagi, 2004). Findings from the Pacific GCB suggest that respondents believed reciprocity to be important. Almost half (49 per cent) said they would support someone in power – through gifts or political support – if that person helped them. Moreover, 38 per cent of those who had had contact with select government services said they had used personal connections to get the services they needed. However, only 12 per cent thought other people frequently used their personal or political connections to get better service from a government department and only 10 per cent said public servants frequently influence hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative. In other words, while a high number of respondents had drawn on their personal connections to get assistance, only a few believed that the practice was widespread. This suggests that more needs to be done to increase awareness about the frequency that citizens draw on personal connections to get assistance and about the potential for such activity to undermine effective service delivery.

Responding to corruption

The Niue Act of 1966 provides sanctions against corruption and bribery involving the judiciary, ministers, members of the Assembly, law enforcement officers and other officials. The country does not have an ombudsman or any other watchdog agencies. New Zealand's auditor general audits the country's accounts. Complaints about the government can be made to the head of the department involved, while the Public Service Commission handles any employer-employee complaints within the public service, which is the largest employer in the country (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2009: 23). Niue is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering; the FATF took the country off its blacklist in 2002. In October 2017, Niue acceded to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. While the country has few anti-corruption state-based organisations, the vast majority of respondents (78 per cent) thought that the government was doing a good job in fighting corruption. However, many were concerned about enforcement; only 4 per cent said that officials who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate action against them.

Niue's constitution does not guarantee freedom of expression, although there are few restrictions. The country

is home to a small number of media outlets, which are mostly government-owned (BBC, 2016), including two television stations and a newspaper. There has been growth in online media reporting over the past few years. The Pacific GCB findings suggest that many are concerned that, given the context, it is difficult to join in the fight against corruption. Only 35 per cent of respondents agreed that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against government corruption, although half were unsure either way. That is, 50 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed that ordinary people can make a difference in fighting corruption.

In sum, respondents on the whole were less concerned about corruption in Niue and the responses to it than some previous assessments (e.g., Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022) suggest they might. However, few believed that those who engaged in corruption faced appropriate sanctions and many did not feel that ordinary citizens could make a difference in the fight against corruption. Supporting integrity agencies and efforts to increase citizens' engagement and understanding of corruption – through, for example, training in investigative and citizen journalism – might help to address this concern. The findings also suggest that more could be done to make the public aware of the potential problems associated with drawing on personal favours when accessing government services.



TOKELAU

POLYNESIA

Comprising three coral atolls with a combined land area of approximately 12 square kilometres, Tokelau is home to 1,499 people according to the 2016 census. Tokelau is a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand and Tokelauans are New Zealand citizens. The country has free democratic elections, with the 20 elected members legislating in the General Fono, the country's unicameral parliament. Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, and the government of New Zealand is represented by an administrator, who technically bears responsibility for overseeing the administration of the executive government. In practice, Tokelau is largely self-governed (Government of Tokelau, n.d.). The titular head of state, the Ulu-o-Tokelau, is rotated among the leaders of each atoll on an annual basis.

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

There is a lack of data on the level of corruption in Tokelau. Unlike the other Pacific Island countries in this report, it is not included in the Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022). However, the findings of the Pacific GCB help to fill in the gaps in our knowledge about possible levels of corruption in the country. Out of 58 respondents, 16 per cent said

government corruption was a big problem. One-third thought that corruption had decreased over the past year, while 12 per cent thought it had increased and a further 12 per cent thought it had stayed the same (43 per cent said they did not know). The vast majority (88 per cent) said that the government had been transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Police and community leaders were most likely to be associated with corruption, while nobody believed that religious leaders

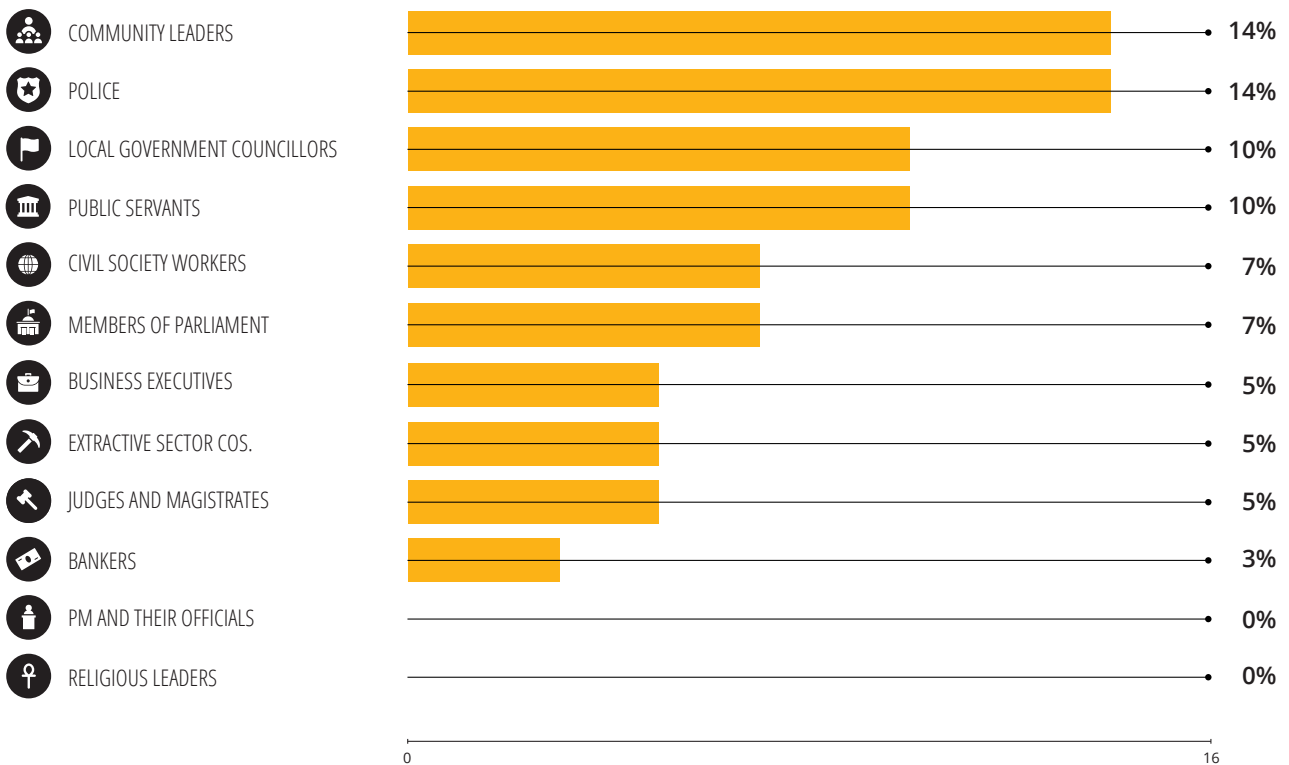
or the PM and their officials⁵ were corrupt (see Figure 5). It is important to note that many respondents were unwilling to evaluate some institutions. This was particularly the case when evaluating companies extracting natural resources (45 per cent replied "don't know") and business executives (43 per cent said they didn't know how likely it was for business executives to be involved in corruption).

Responses suggest that, for many respondents, providing favours to government was an essential part of accessing government services. Of the 53 respondents (out of 58) who had engaged with at least one of the six government institutions and services included in the survey items, 58 per cent said that they had had to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour in order to get the needed assistance or services.

This suggests that more could be done to address the role of informal favours in government service delivery. Far fewer (12 per cent) said they had been offered a bribe or other favour during elections. Nine per cent said that, over the past five years, officials had asked them or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

A sizeable minority were concerned about higher-level corruption. Just over one-third (36 per cent) thought companies frequently used their money to secure government contracts. Even more worryingly, 41 per cent thought the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves.

FIGURE 5: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, TOKELAU



Reciprocity and personal favours

Most respondents valued reciprocity: 59 per cent said that if helped by people in power they would reciprocate with a gift or political support. Over half (57 per cent) of those who had engaged with select government services said they drew on personal connections to get the services they needed. One-third said other people frequently used their personal or political connections to get better service from a government department. A similar number (31 per cent) said public servants frequently influence hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative. This suggests that more could be done to reduce political patronage and the practice of drawing on personal favours in exchange for public goods.

Responding to corruption

Tokelau has laws against corruption, although its unique relationship with New Zealand also determines its responses. Article 75 of the Crimes, Procedure and Evidence Rules 2003 defines and outlaws corruption, while Article 73 defines and outlaws abuse of office. Like Niue, New Zealand's auditor general audits Tokelau's accounts and has uncovered potential corruption. In 2019, the auditor general found "insufficient documentation to support \$9.9m in personnel costs, as well as for a further \$1m

in revenue from a community services levy" (Smith, 2019). In 2020, the country became part of a 2.5-year Pacific-wide anti-corruption partnership involving the Government of New Zealand and the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project worth NZ\$4.5million (UNODC, 2020). Although New Zealand ratified UNCAC in December 2015, its ratification did not extend to Tokelau. Tokelau has yet to ratify or accede to UNCAC.

Just over half of respondents (52 per cent) said that the government was doing fairly or very well in the fight against government corruption. However, once again, many were unwilling to say one way or the other: 38 per cent said they did not know how to assess the government's anti-corruption efforts. Only 29 per cent said officials who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate action against them (21 per cent said they did not know).

Despite many respondents not being able to assess the government's anti-corruption efforts, the vast majority (88 per cent) believed that ordinary people could make a difference in the fight against corruption. What makes this finding even more compelling is that only 5 per cent said they did not know. In other words, while many respondents did not want to answer or did not know about questions around where corruption might be occurring, how much corruption was in the country, or how well the government was

doing in fighting it, they were overwhelmingly certain that they and their fellow countrymen and women could do something about it.

In sum, most respondents were either uncertain or relatively unconcerned about corruption, despite most having to provide favours in exchange for government services. Although many were happy with government efforts to address corruption and believed ordinary citizens could help in the fight against corruption, few believed that those engaged in corruption faced appropriate sanctions. Many also raised concerns about high-level corruption (e.g., 41 per cent thought the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves) and about the pervasiveness of informal favours from public servants (e.g., 31 per cent said public servants frequently influence hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative). The findings point to the importance of achieving stronger oversight of the public service (particularly around the role that favours play in exchange for service delivery), the police and community leaders.



COOK ISLANDS

POLYNESIA

The Cook Islands comprises 15 islands with a land area of 237 square kilometres. The country is home to 17,459 people according to the 2016 census. The Cook Islands is a self-governing country in free association with New Zealand, and Cook Islanders are citizens of both New Zealand and the Cook Islands. Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, represented by the Queen's Representative, while the government is headed by the prime minister. Parliament consists of 24 members elected for five-year terms.

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

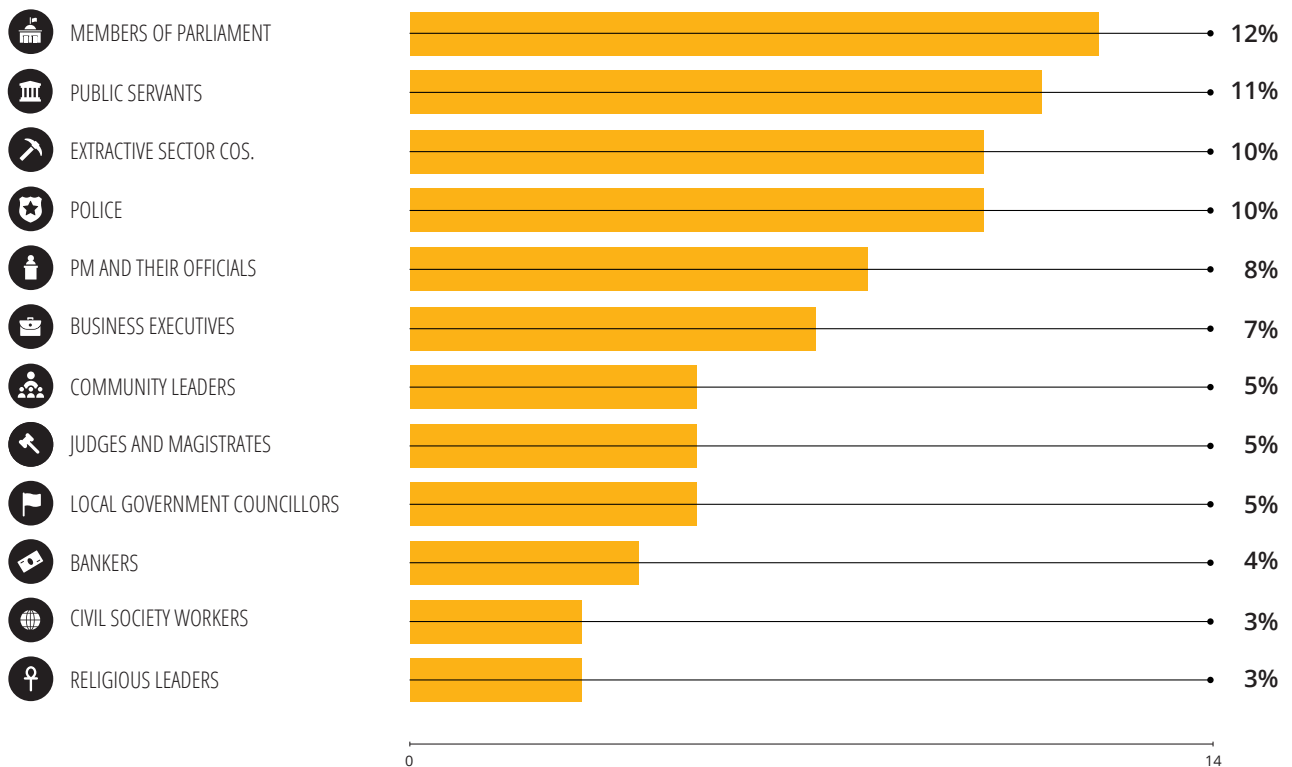
According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators, the country's control of corruption in 2013 was moderate. The Cook Islands had a percentile rank of 51 out of 100, around the average for Pacific Island nations (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022). Out of the 279 respondents from the Cook Islands, 29 per cent said government corruption

was a big problem. Just under half (43 per cent) said that they thought the level of corruption had increased over the past year. The vast majority (90 per cent) said the government had been transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In line with previous assessments (Wickberg, 2013) and political corruption scandals that have appeared in the media (Pacific Waves 2016; Radio New Zealand, 2016; Staff Writers,

2021), respondents were slightly more likely to believe MPs were involved with corruption: 12 per cent associated them with corruption (Figure 6). Following closely on from their concern about MPs, respondents were also concerned about corruption involving public servants (11 per cent believed they were likely to be involved with corruption), the police (10 per cent) and extractive sector companies (10 per cent).

FIGURE 6: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, COOK ISLANDS



For the 222 respondents (out of 279) who had engaged with select government institutions and services over the past year, 20 per cent said they had had to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour in order to get the needed assistance or services. Half of that percentage (10 per cent) said they had been offered a bribe or another favour during elections. Eight per cent said that, over the past five years, officials had asked the respondent or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

A sizable minority of respondents were concerned with large-scale corruption. Just over one-fifth (22 per cent) were concerned that companies frequently used their money to secure government contracts. Also, 18 per cent said the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves.

Reciprocity and personal favours

Like other Pacific Island countries (see Larmour, 2012), researchers have noted that cultural reciprocity plays an important role in the public's understanding of corruption, which can be at odds with national laws (Ingram and Ihrle, 2004: 11). Findings from the Pacific GCB found that this was the case for some Cook Islanders. A quarter said they would reciprocate favours from those in powerful positions and 59 per cent said they had drawn on personal connections to get the services they needed when dealing with select government institutions. In addition, almost half (44 per cent) believed that other people frequently used their personal connections to get better service from a government department. Two-thirds said that public servants frequently influence hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative.

Responding to corruption

In the Cook Islands, there are a number of laws that proscribe corruption, including the Proceeds of Crime Act, the Public Service Act, and Part VI of the Cook Islands Crimes Act 1969, which criminalises the bribery of officials. Other laws include the Criminal Matters Act, the Financial Intelligence Unit Act and the Financial

Transactions Reporting Act (Implementation Review Group, 2020). Government organisations that are tasked with preventing and addressing corruption include the Cook Islands Police Service, the Ombudsman, Crown Law Office, the Tender Committee, the Office of the Public Service Commissioner, the Transnational Crime Unit, the Financial Supervisory Commission and the Financial Intelligence Unit. The national Anti-Corruption Committee, which was formed in 2011 to help with coordination, policy formulation and information sharing, is reportedly developing a National Anti-Corruption Strategy (Implementation Review Group, 2020). The FATF added the country to its list of non-cooperative countries and territories in 2000 because of the lack of transparency in its financial sector. Subsequently, the country was taken off the list in 2005 after the enactment of anti-money laundering legislation and legal amendments in 2003 and 2004 (Wickberg, 2013). In October 2011, the Cook Islands acceded to UNCAC.

Respondents were sanguine about the government's response to corruption. Over 80 per cent believed that the government was doing well in fighting corruption. However, only 7 per cent said officials who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate action against them.

Civil society and the media play a critical role in highlighting and helping to address corruption in the country. The freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly are guaranteed by the Constitution. Still, access to government information can be difficult, and the government can be hostile to the media (International Federation of Journalists, 2020). Despite these difficulties, however, over half (54 per cent) of all respondents believed that ordinary people could make a difference in addressing corruption.

In sum, concern about government corruption was relatively low in the Cook Islands and many respondents were positive about the government's role in addressing it. Still, many said that informal favours are a key part of the public service and politics and very few respondents believed that those who engaged in corruption were adequately punished. This suggests that there might be a need for greater efforts to reduce the role played by personal connections in delivering government services and providing support for integrity institutions, including the Ombudsman and Office of the Public Service Commissioner.



PALAU

MICRONESIA

Palau is a sovereign presidential republic in free association with the United States, from which it gained independence in 1994. The country joined the Compact of Free Association with the US in 1994 and the US continues to provide defence and significant funding. The country consists of over 340 islands and is home to approximately 17,900 people. The national congress is called the Olbiil Era Kelulau and consists of the Senate and House of Delegates. The Council of Chiefs, which is part of the executive along with the president, vice president and cabinet, advises the president on traditional laws and customs. The council can help to provide informal oversight and accountability and check any potential mismanagement or abuse of power by elected officials (Freedom House, 2021b).

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

The Worldwide Governance Indicators rank Palau at the 38th percentile for control of corruption, which is below average for the Pacific. While corruption is a concern, some suggest that any instances are isolated (Global Initiative 2021a). Still, 42 per cent of the 255 respondents from Palau thought that government corruption was a big problem. Moreover, many were concerned that corruption was getting worse, with 40 per cent believing that corruption had increased over the past year. A majority (65 per cent), however, thought the government had been transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

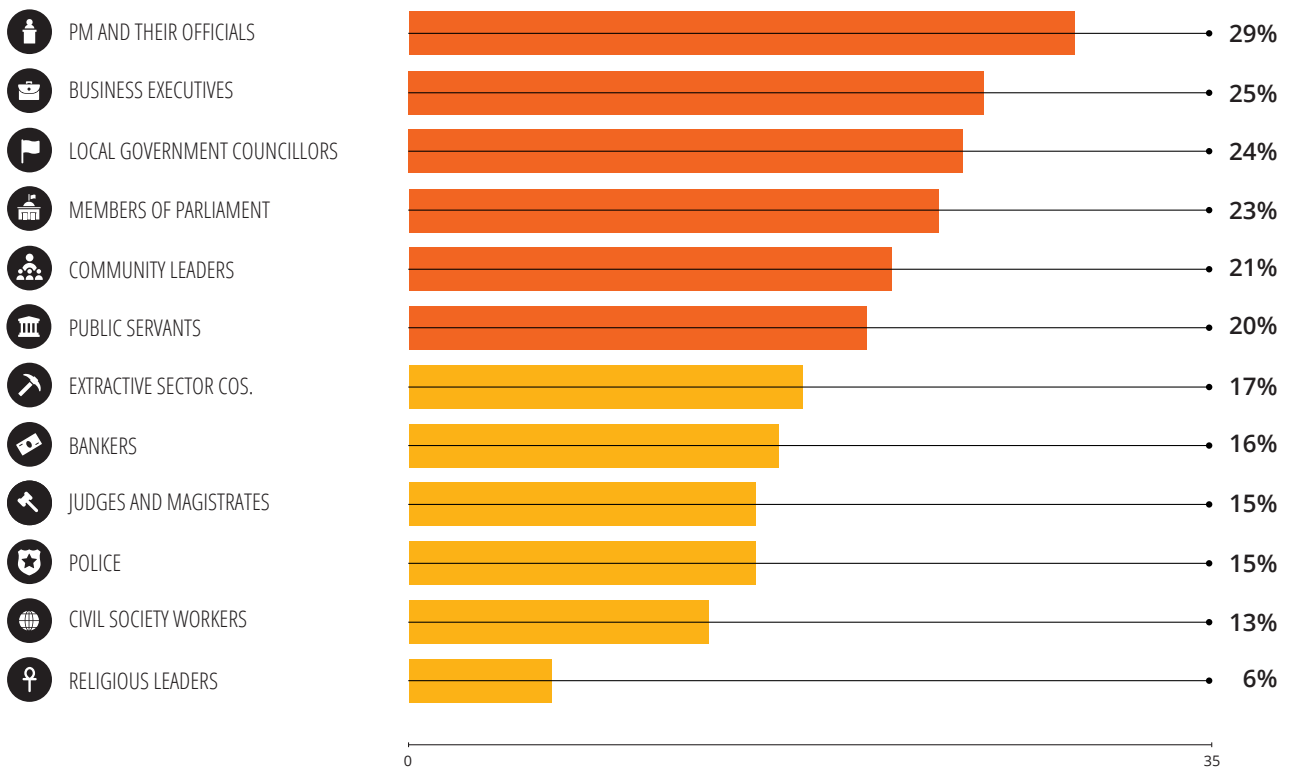
As shown in Figure 7, respondents most associated corruption with the president and their officials (29 per cent), which is perhaps not surprising given that former president Tommy Esang Remengesau (elected in 2000, 2004, 2012, 2016 and 2020) had been convicted of official abuse and corruption in the late 2000s (Freedom House 2010). While Palau's private sector has been called a case of "best practice" in the past when it comes to dealing with corruption (Shuster, 2004: 5), many respondents were not so sure: a quarter believed that business executives were corrupt.

Sixty per cent of respondents (152 out of 255) said that they had engaged with the select government services listed earlier over the past 12 months. Of those who had, 22 per cent said

they had had to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour in order to get the needed assistance or services. A similar proportion (21 per cent) said they had been offered a bribe or other favour in exchange for their vote. 12 per cent said that, over the past five years, officials had asked them or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

More respondents expressed concern about higher-level corruption. In line with the concerns about private sector corruption highlighted above, one-third (32 per cent) thought that companies frequently used their money to secure government contracts. Also, twenty-nine per cent believed that the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves.

FIGURE 7: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, PALAU



Reciprocity and personal favours

As others have noted (e.g., Shuster, 2004) given the smallness of the country and the strength of family ties, both nepotism and favouritism can lead to corruption. In this regard, some respondents suggested that reciprocity and informal

favours were common. Indeed, close to a quarter (23 per cent) said they would reciprocate – through gifts or political support – any assistance provided by people in positions of power. Also, 40 per cent said that they drew on personal connections to get the service they required from the select government institutions listed earlier. Over

half (58 per cent) thought that other people frequently used their personal or political connections to get better service from a government department. Just over half (52 per cent) said that public servants often influenced hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative.

Responding to corruption

Palau has various laws and institutions designed to address corruption. Laws related to corruption include the Penal Code, the Code of Ethics Act, the Government Procurement Act, the Public Auditor Act, the Special Prosecutors Act, and the Public Service System Rules and Regulations. The country is reportedly a leader in addressing corruption in the shipping industry. In 2018, the Palau International Ship Registry (2018) noted that it had become “the first and the only ship registry to have implemented and be certified for ISO 3700: 2016 related to anti-bribery and anti-corruption standards” (Palau International Ship Registry, 2018). The country is not listed on the FATF’s list of non-cooperative countries and territories; however, some have noted that there are significant weaknesses in existing legislation around money laundering, and the country was put back on the EU’s blacklist of non-cooperative countries in 2020 (Radio New Zealand, 2020). Palau acceded to UNCAC in March 2009.

Palau’s anti-corruption efforts are aided by various government agencies, which include the Office of the Attorney General, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Ombudsman (operating through a presidential executive order), the Office of the Special Prosecutor, and the Ethics Commission. The Office of the

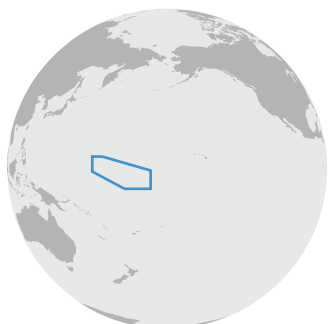
Special Prosecutor in particular has been at the forefront of investigations into high-profile corruption cases, including into former president Tommy Remengesau Jr. for violation of the country’s Code of Ethics. Remengesau was eventually fined for his wrongdoing.

Corruption can also be reported through the public auditor, who can audit public bodies and those receiving government funds; through a special investigator when required (who is appointed by the president); through a special prosecutor (appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate), who can investigate issues of public concern; and through ministers and departmental heads (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2009). Recently, high-ranking officials have faced corruption charges and some convictions have been recorded. They include former Ngirameketii, who was found guilty on a number of charges, including six counts of misconduct in public office and six counts of code of ethics violations (Reklai, 2021).

In line with international assessments (Freedom House, 2021b), most respondents (two-thirds, 67 per cent) said that the government was doing well in fighting corruption. However, only 18 per cent said officials who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate action against them.

Palau has a free press, which is guaranteed in Section 2 of the Constitution, and there are a number of media outlets operating in the country. Still, there are concerns about the financial pressures that they face (Global Initiative 2021a). Also, a range of non-governmental organisations highlight issues of poor governance and human rights abuses, with the government cooperating with international NGOs to address illegal fishing (Global Initiative 2021a). Many respondents believed that ordinary citizens could bolster these efforts: indeed, slightly over half (55 per cent) said that ordinary people could make a difference in the fight against corruption.

In sum, many respondents suggest that government corruption is a significant problem in the country. Those who were concerned about corruption were particularly worried about the president and their officials, and contra some previous assessments (Shuster, 2004: 5), about business executives. While positive about the fight against corruption in the country, respondents were concerned that officials did not face appropriate action against them. This suggests that more needs to be done to strengthen oversight of politicians, public servants and businesspeople, and to ensure that cases of alleged corruption are brought before the courts and effectively prosecuted.



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

MICRONESIA

The RMI consists of an archipelago of 29 atolls, five low-lying coral islands and over 1,000 islets; its landmass totals 113 square kilometres, which are spread over an exclusive economic zone of 1.2 million sq km. The country is home to around 58,000 people, most of whom share a strong sense of nationalism and ethnic unity. RMI is an independent parliamentary republic in a Compact of Free Association with the United States, from which it gained independence in 1979. The president is both head of state and head of government and is elected by the 33 senators within the Nitijela (Parliament). A 12-member council of chiefs – the Council of Iroji – advises the cabinet on customary law and traditional practice.

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

In 2021, the Worldwide Governance Indicators rated RMI in the 57th percentile when it came to control of corruption (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022), which is slightly above (and thus better than) the average for select Pacific countries (see Figure 2 above). Other assessments suggest that, while the government has adopted several measures to address corruption, it remains an ongoing and significant challenge (Pollock, 2004; Freedom House, 2021c). For example, Freedom House (2021c) concludes that corruption is a “chronic problem” in the country. Over half of the 261 respondents from RMI felt the same way: 59 per cent said that government

corruption was a big problem. Two-thirds (64 per cent) believed corruption had increased over the past 12 months. More than a quarter (26 per cent) thought the government had been transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic (although 45 per cent were not sure how to evaluate the government’s response to the crisis).

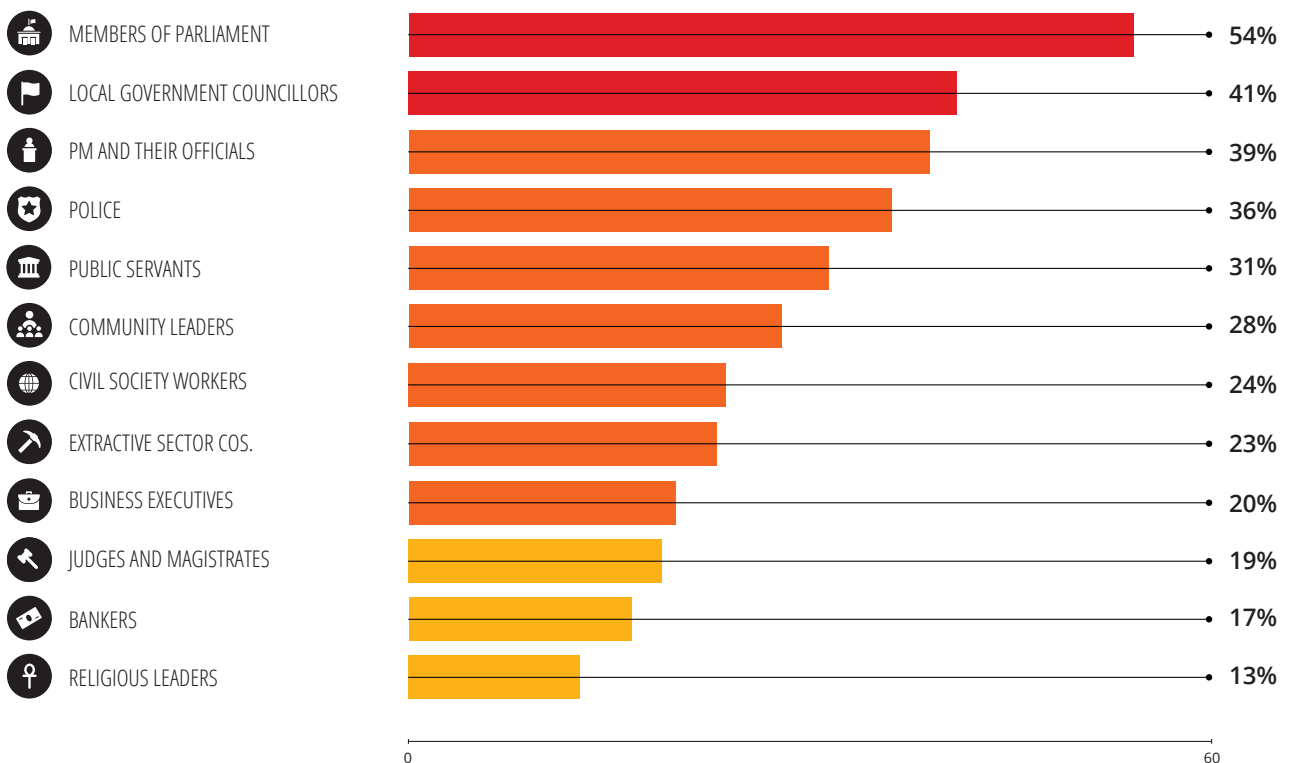
Underlying their concern, respondents associated corruption with a range of groups. Over half (54 per cent) of all respondents believed that MPs were involved in corruption, with many also concerned about corruption in local government (41%) and the president and their officials (39%) (Figure 8).

Of the 94 per cent of respondents who had engaged over the past year with any of the six select

government institutions and services noted earlier, 63 per cent said they had had to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour in order to get the needed assistance or services. Over half (52 per cent) had been asked for a bribe or favour in return for their vote. A similar proportion (55 per cent) said that, over the past five years, officials had asked them or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

Fewer expressed concern about larger-scale corruption. Twenty-seven per cent said the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves. Also, 16 per cent said companies frequently used their money to secure government contracts.

FIGURE 8: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, RMI



Reciprocity and personal favours

While cultural practices vary across the country, traditional values play a significant role in shaping the public's views of corruption. Pollock notes (2004: 11):

Traditional values of gift-giving as a means of social cohesion, and recognition of kin and wider social

ties sit uneasily alongside formal rules against "corrupt" practice. Chiefs and the elite are expected to offer services and gifts when available, such as at election times.

In line with this view, some respondents believed that reciprocity and informal favours were common. Just over a quarter (27 per cent) said they would reciprocate a favour from those in a position of power. Of

those who had engaged with select government services, 72 per cent said that they had used their personal connections to obtain the needed services. 45 per cent said other people frequently used their personal or political connections to get better service from a government department, while 54 per cent said public servants frequently influence hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative.

Responding to corruption

RMI has established a number of laws designed to outlaw corruption and associated behaviour, including Article 240 of the Criminal Code 2011, the Banking Act, the Criminal Code, the Ethics in Government Act, the Public Safety Act and the Rules of Criminal Procedure (Integra LLC, 2020: 133). Despite recent calls to establish an ombudsman, the country does not yet have one. However, other state-based organisations do provide a level of oversight and response to complaints. Examples include the Domestic Financial Intelligence Unit; the attorney general, who conducts investigations into alleged violations of law; the president of the Marshall Islands, who can appoint a commission of enquiry under the Commissions of Enquiry Act 1986; the auditor general, who receives and investigates public complaints; and the Public Service Commission, which deals with grievances from public servants (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2009). In addition, the US General Accounting Office has provided oversight of US assistance to the country.

Over the past few years, the auditor general has highlighted an increasing number of complaints about alleged illegal behaviour by state officials

(Ewart, 2017). A 2018 audit of the country's embassies and consulates by the accounting firm Deloitte found over US\$2.5 million in poorly accounted-for transactions, which could have resulted in the theft of government assets (Johnson 2019). In 2002, RMI was removed from the FATF's first list of non-cooperative countries to implement the forty recommendations against money laundering and was subsequently taken off the FATF's "grey list" a few years later. RMI acceded to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in November 2011. Many respondents were positive in their appraisal of such efforts. Over half said that the government was doing well in fighting government corruption. However, only 11 per cent thought that officials who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate action against them.

The government of RMI generally respects the freedoms of speech and of the press (Freedom House 2021c). However, internet access remains limited (reaching only around 40 per cent of the population) owing to poor infrastructure and high cost. Civil society groups operate freely. Given this context, half of all respondents thought that ordinary people could potentially join in such efforts and make a difference in the fight against corruption.

In sum, while some assessments suggest that RMI has done quite well in containing corruption (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2022), many respondents believed corruption was a serious problem and getting worse. Politicians were most likely to be associated with corruption, while experiences of corruption in the public sector were high. Electoral corruption and sextortion were of particular concern. While many were satisfied with the government's response, few believed that those who engaged in corruption were appropriately sanctioned. Introducing an independent and strongly resourced ombudsman might help to address some of these concerns. Efforts should also focus on corruption during elections and the gendered dimensions of corruption.



NAURU MICRONESIA

One of the world's smallest independent states, Nauru is home to approximately 13,000 people who live on a tiny landmass of 21 square kilometres. The country gained independence from a United Nations trusteeship in 1968. The president, who is elected by a unicameral parliament, is both head of state and head of government. Nauru is a republic with a Westminster-style parliamentary system of government.

Perceptions of and experiences with corruption

In 2021, the Worldwide Governance Indicators ranked Nauru's control of corruption as relatively poor: it had a percentile rank of 38 out of 100, which is below (and thus worse than) the Pacific average. Some blame corruption for the country's spectacular economic decline since independence (Dauvergne, 2021). Corruption has been particularly rampant in the phosphate industry, which was the country's key economic export earner after independence and a key reason why the state was, at one point, one of the wealthiest in the world on a per capita basis. In the 1990s, as the phosphate industry declined, the country became a haven for money laundering and the state got involved in selling

banking licences and passports. A 2004 assessment found that corruption was "running rampant" (Kun, Togomae and Kun, 2004: 5).

Despite efforts to combat corruption, it continues to blight this small Pacific nation. In 2021, it was revealed that the Australian Federal Police had charged the Queensland company Getax with bribery related to its involvement with the country's politicians in order to further its phosphate export business (Fox, 2021). In light of such scandals, 31 per cent of the 101 respondents from Nauru thought that government corruption was a big problem. One-fifth (20 per cent) said corruption had increased over the past year, while 26 per cent said it had decreased. Over half of respondents (59 per cent) said that the government had been

transparent in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Given that past president Baron Waqa (who served in this office from 2013 to 2019) was accused of accepting bribes from Getax (Cooper 2016) and his government was associated with heavy-handed authoritarian rule, it is perhaps not surprising that half of all respondents associated corruption with the president and their officials (Figure 9). While Lionel Aingimea acceded to the prime ministership in 2019 and has since brought about some positive changes (such as responding decisively to Covid-19), the related result may well reflect citizens' ongoing concerns over the office of the president.

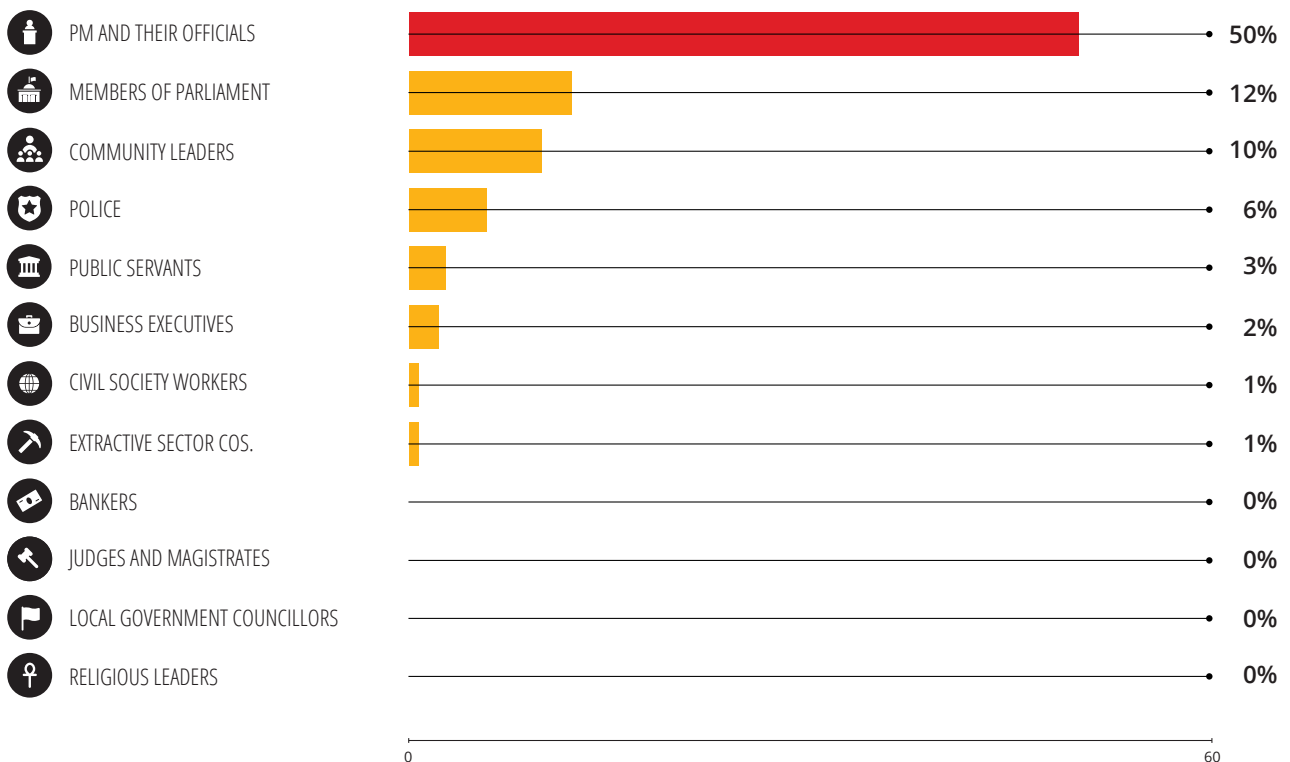
Of the 98 per cent of respondents who had engaged with the select government institutions and services listed earlier, 12 per cent said they had paid a bribe, given a gift or done a favour in order to get the services they needed. Far more (43 per cent) said they had been offered a bribe or other favour in return for their vote. Twenty-eight per cent said that,

over the past five years, officials had asked them or someone they knew for a sexual favour in exchange for a government service.

Most respondents were relatively unconcerned about various types of higher-level corruption. Only 1 per cent thought companies frequently used their money to

secure government contracts, which is surprising given concerns about corruption in the phosphate industry. Fifteen per cent thought the government was frequently run by a few big interests looking after themselves.

FIGURE 9: GROUPS WHERE ALL/MOST ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION, NAURU



Reciprocity and personal favours

While much of the corruption in the country involves a network of national and foreign elites, some have suggested that cultural practices might help to explain in part why corruption continues within the country. In the early 2000s, Kun, Togomae and Kun (2004: 5) found that “[a]spects of traditional culture, especially gift giving and the privileges of elders” contribute to ambivalence towards corruption and the fight against corruption. Findings from the Pacific GCB suggest that many still value reciprocity. Almost half (45 per cent) said they would reciprocate favours from those in positions of power. Of those who had engaged with select government services, 34 per cent said that they had used their personal connections to obtain the services they needed. Still, only 13 per cent said public servants frequently influence hiring decisions to favour a friend or relative. Even though more than a third had drawn on their own personal connections to access government services, fewer still (10 per cent) thought that other people frequently used their personal or political connections to get better service from a government department.

Responding to corruption

Nauru has a number of laws and government institutions designed to address corruption. Laws include the Criminal Code 1899, Criminal Procedure Act 1972, Anti-Money Laundering Act 2008, Proceeds of Crime Act 2004, Public Service Act 1998, Criminal Justice Act 1999, Extradition Act 1973 and Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act 2004 (Integra LLC, 2020: 159). Government institutions that play a role in addressing corruption include the Ministry for Justice and Border Control, Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Financial Intelligence Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, National Police, the judiciary, Nauru Correctional Services, Office of the Director of Audit, and the Nauru Revenue Office/ Department of Finance (Integra LLC, 2020: 154). The country has neither an ombudsman nor a leadership code of conduct, despite draft legislation to establish both.

Many are concerned that government institutions are ill-equipped to address corruption. A 2009 assessment of complaint handling in the country found that “[d]epartments presently have no formal complaint handling procedures... [and] the

police service does not always record or respond to complaints” (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2009: 5). The Global Initiative recently noted that “there are almost no effective mechanisms in place to fight corruption in the state apparatus, and government transparency, on the whole, is very limited” (Global Initiative, 2021b: 3). This assessment has been made in light of the antagonistic stance that the government has sometimes taken towards key oversight mechanisms. In 2014, Prime Minister Baron Waqa dismissed resident magistrate, Peter Law; in turn the country’s Chief Justice, Geoffrey Eames, resigned. During the same year, three opposition members were suspended from Parliament by the speaker after effectively being accused of treason for speaking to foreign media.

However, there are signs that the country has made strides to address at least some of these concerns. Off the back of its growing offshore banking industry, the FATF put Nauru on its blacklist in 2000 and the OECD put the country on theirs two years later. Now, however, the country is no longer on the FATF’s grey or blacklist and it was removed from the OECD’s blacklist in 2003, although the OECD remains concerned about Nauru’s

implementation of its standards. In 2019, the EU removed the country from its “grey” listing of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes. Nauru acceded to UNCAC in July 2012.

Despite concerns about corruption, some respondents were positive about government responses to it. Almost half of all respondents (46 per cent) said the government was handling the fight against government corruption well. However, only 7 per cent said that officials who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate action against them.

While freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution, journalists and media organisations have found it difficult in practice to operate in the country (Freedom House, 2021d). This is particularly the case with foreign journalists, with the government banning the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 2018. Laws passed in 2016 (the Crimes Act) and 2018 (the Administration of Justice Act) introduced criminal charges for defamation and contempt of court that are designed to deter journalists from criticising the government (Freedom House, 2021d). In 2015, Facebook, which is a key source of information for many citizens, was banned by the government. Although

there are no legal restrictions on civil society organisations, the government has restricted those highlighting the conditions of asylum seekers in the country’s detention centre. In this context, one-third (33 per cent) of respondents believed that ordinary people could make a difference in the fight against corruption, while 16 per cent disagreed. Also, 17 per cent sat on the fence (i.e., they neither agreed nor disagreed that people could make a difference) and 35 per cent said they did not know.

In sum, the findings from the Pacific GCB highlight some significant differences between the perceptions of respondents from Nauru and previous assessments about corruption. Previous assessments and allegations of corruption suggest that it is a significant problem (see Fox 2021; Dauvergne, 2021; Global Initiative 2021b), but many respondents in Nauru were relatively unconcerned. This is particularly evident when it comes to the role of companies securing government contracts: while journalists and others have highlighted corruption in the phosphate industry (e.g., Fox, 2021), respondents were unconcerned about companies using money to secure government contracts. Efforts to educate citizens about these issues could help

bring citizens views in line with external assessments about the nature of corruption. Still, many respondents pointed to high levels of electoral corruption and sextortion, suggesting that any reforms might focus on those issues. Very few thought the government was doing enough to sanction those engaged in corruption, and only a minority believed that ordinary citizens could make a difference in the fight against corruption. Their concerns may stem from attacks on the judiciary and media, suggesting that more needs to be done to safeguard and resource these institutions and to introduce a leadership code and an ombudsman.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this report provide five important insights into the seven small Pacific Island countries assessed in the study.

First, responses show that in most of the seven countries, only a minority of respondents thought that government corruption was a significant problem. RMI was the major exception; contra the assessment of the country's control of corruption index in the Worldwide Governance Indicators, the majority of respondents from RMI were concerned about government corruption⁶ and, like respondents from other countries, were concerned that public officials were not appropriately sanctioned. This suggests that anti-corruption reforms are particularly urgent in RMI.

Second, the findings highlight where corruption is likely to take place. In most countries, respondents associated corruption with MPs and/or the president and members of their office (the exception was Tokelau, where respondents were more concerned about the police and community leaders).

Many believed that politicians were likely to have their hands in the till, so to speak. Respondents from all four Polynesian countries also said that the police were likely to be a key source of corruption.

Third, experiences with corruption and informal exchanges vary. In Tuvalu, Niue, Cook Islands, Palau and Nauru, fewer than 25 per cent of respondents said they had provided bribes, gifts or favours in exchange for a government service. While reports of corruption in the five countries are concerning, corruption does not appear to be as widespread as it is in Tokelau and RMI, where most respondents said they engaged in these activities. Still, more research is required to understand the types of exchange involved. For example, future research could ask whether citizens are providing low-value gifts and favours or significant bribes in exchange for government services.

More than 40 per cent of respondents in both RMI and Nauru said they had been offered a bribe or favours in exchange for votes during elections. In both countries, a high proportion of respondents also suggested that officials requested sexual favours in exchange for government services. This suggests that better monitoring of elections and gender-sensitive reforms are particularly needed in the two Micronesian countries.

Fourth, it is important to note that obligations of reciprocity can play an important role in the public's understanding of and response to corruption and informal transactions. Previous research undertaken in all countries has highlighted the central role played by traditional obligations of reciprocity in perceptions of corruption. Indeed, across the region, patronage relations between politicians and voters (who may demand unofficial favours from their leaders) can exacerbate the potential for corruption. This is backed up by findings from the Pacific GCB, particularly in Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau and Nauru, where more than 40 per cent of respondents said they would reciprocate favours from those in positions of power.

In some cases, bribery, gift giving and unofficial favours might be driven at least in part by reciprocal obligations. The findings show that many respondents drew upon their personal connections to get the services they needed. More than half of respondents from RMI (where 72 per cent reported drawing on personal relationships to get a government service), Cook Islands (where the figure was 59 per cent) and Tokelau (57 per cent) said that personal relationships were crucial in accessing government services.

Finally, respondents were mostly positive when reflecting on the fight against corruption. Despite concerns about various types of corruption, a majority of respondents in six out of the seven countries (Nauru was the exception) thought that their government was doing a good job fighting corruption. Half or more of the respondents in five out of the seven countries (Nauru was again the exception in addition to Niue) also believed that ordinary people could make a difference in the fight against corruption. As for the outlier, much more needs to be done to bolster government and civic responses to corruption in Nauru.

However, across all seven countries, few believed that officials who engaged in corruption frequently faced appropriate action. In Niue, Cook Islands and Nauru, fewer than 10 per cent of respondents believed sanctions were frequently enforced. This suggests that more could be done to ensure that those who engage in corruption are investigated and, upon the discovery of clear and sufficient evidence, prosecuted – especially in the three mentioned countries.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this report has examined findings from Transparency International's Pacific GCB conducted in seven small Pacific Island countries. The findings have highlighted respondents' perceptions about and experiences with corruption and their thoughts on anti-corruption efforts.

The report finds that:

- + While concern about government corruption is relatively low across the selected countries, most respondents from RMI expressed concern about government corruption.
- + Politicians are the group most associated with corruption, while the police are of particular concern in the four Polynesian countries.
- + Experiences with corruption vary; however, election bribery and sextortion were reported to be most prominent in RMI and Nauru.
- + Reciprocity plays an important role in the public's understanding of and response to corruption and informal transactions. Respondents from RMI, Cook Islands and Tokelau suggested that reciprocity plays a particularly important role in ensuring that citizens receive public goods.
- + While respondents were mostly positive about the fight against corruption, few believed officials who engaged in corruption frequently faced appropriate consequences.

Six key recommendations flow from these findings. First, respondents were most concerned about corruption involving politicians, suggesting that further efforts are needed to address corruption in politics. Across the region, strengthening, or in some cases introducing (particularly in RMI and Nauru), state-based anti-corruption and integrity organisations would be a good first step. Second, high levels of concern in RMI and Nauru about election bribes and sexual favours point to the importance both of strengthening processes to support and monitor elections and of responding to the gendered dimensions of corruption in the two countries.

Third, policymakers should learn from successes while ensuring those engaging in corruption face appropriate sanctions. In all but one country (Nauru), more than half of all respondents said that their government was doing a good job in addressing corruption and that ordinary citizens could help. This suggests that, at least in the eyes of respondents, some elements of the existing approaches to corruption are working. It is important to acknowledge and understand these successes before implementing further reforms. That said, the findings also suggest that, in all countries, any reform agenda needs to ensure that those who engage in corruption frequently face appropriate sanctions. This is particularly true in the case of Niue, Cook Islands and Nauru.

Fourth, in some countries, awareness-raising efforts may be needed to inform the public of the extent to which corruption really is a problem. This is particularly the case in places such as Nauru where, despite the ongoing concerns expressed by NGOs, academics and others in relation to high-level corruption involving international phosphate companies, relatively few respondents expressed concern about high-level corruption involving extractive sector companies. In this example, it will also be important

that efforts are made to push back against attacks on the judiciary and media.

Fifth, it is important that reforms respond to the unique sets of issues facing the seven countries. While similar in having small territories and populations, they all have different histories, cultures, social structures and economies. In turn, these issues have an impact on the nature of corruption and the potential for addressing it. Given the unique context of each country, a one-size-fits-all approach will likely not address corruption meaningfully. Rather, anti-corruption reforms will need to be tailored to the country. In this vein, the preceding analysis has suggested a number of potential reforms for each country.

Finally, further research might help to elucidate the drivers of corruption and any institutional weakness identified by the findings. For example, citizens are clearly concerned about the inability of their countries to hold the corrupt to account. Further research is required to understand why this is so. In many cases, anti-corruption agencies and law enforcement agencies do not have the appropriate resources to respond and, where this is the case, further research could highlight the nature of the shortfalls and what might be done to address

them. Also, research into political, economic and other constraints that face key integrity institutions, such as the media, judiciary, public prosecutor and others, has the potential to uncover where the gaps are most apparent. Given that almost twenty years have passed since an assessment of the region's integrity institutions, it may now be the time to undertake a comprehensive review of the strength of national and regional integrity systems in the Pacific.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

The Pacific GCB survey was conducted between February and April 2021 by Tebbutt, a research firm based in the Pacific. Owing to restrictions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, research was done over the phone (both mobile and landline).

In total, the survey contained 37 close-ended single-response questions. In six of the seven countries, the survey was offered in English, whereas a translation was available for the respondents from Tuvalu. During the pilot, respondents from all countries reported that they understood the questions.

Researchers identified themselves as representatives of Tebbutt Research and said they were conducting the study on behalf of a client. While this approach was necessary, it excluded anyone who did

not have access to a phone. As Table 1 shows, telephone penetration in some of the seven countries in the study is low, which means that the approach excluded a high proportion of the population. This was particularly the case with RMI, Tuvalu and Cook Islands: less than 40 per cent of their citizens had access to a mobile phone. The total number of respondents in each country varied from 58 in Tokelau (as a territory of New Zealand, it is the smallest country by population) to 279 in the Cook Islands (Table 1).

TABLE 1: ADULT POPULATION, MOBILE PENETRATION AND SAMPLE SIZE FOR SEVEN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES⁷

Country	Adult population	Mobile phone penetration	Sample size
Tuvalu	6,143	24%	160
Niue	1,117	58%	78
Tokelau	825	52%	58
Cook Islands	14,862	32%	279
Palau	16,012	67%	255
RMI	27,847	11%	261
Nauru	5,903	61%	101

This approach most likely resulted in more conservative responses, because trust is less easily built between researcher and respondent over the phone. In addition, research of this kind relies on the perceptions and experiences of ordinary people. In some small islands, the media can be weak, which in turn can limit the public's understanding of corruption, particularly grand corruption. As a result, the survey provides important and overlooked insights into what

citizens think about these issues, but it is no means the last word on corruption in the region.

Still, the research team took a number of steps to ensure that a diverse array of participants were included in the samples for each country. Telephone numbers were called randomly, based on the known possible range of phone numbers in each country. In addition, quotas for gender, age and region were used at the country level to reflect population

parameters obtained from national statistics. As the survey proceeded and quota targets were reached, respondents were filtered based on the established targets. Therefore, while the samples do not in a strict sense provide statistically representative samples of the population, they do provide insights into how a variety of people of different genders, ages and locations interpret corruption and the responses to it.

TABLE 2: AGE AND GENDER OF RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY

	Age profile			Mobile phone penetration	
	18-35	36-55	Over 55	Male	Female
Tuvalu	46%	38%	16%	52%	48%
Niue	33%	36%	31%	49%	51%
Tokelau	40%	34%	26%	43%	57%
Cook Islands	36%	39%	25%	49%	51%
Palau	40%	41%	19%	56%	44%
RMI	60%	27%	13%	51%	49%
Nauru	59%	34%	7%	50%	50%

Table 2, which provides the age and gender profile of respondents, shows that the sample is made up of a roughly even split between men and

women (with the exception of Tokelau and Palau) and that the 18-35 age group accounted for between 33 per cent (Niue) and 60 per cent (RMI) of respondents.

TABLE 3: RESPONDENTS' LEVELS OF EDUCATION

	Up to primary school completion	Post-primary to completion of secondary school	Vocational / Technical	Higher education	Don't know / Refused to answer
Tuvalu	11%	68%	3%	16%	3%
Niue	8%	55%	3%	19%	15%
Tokelau	4%	55%	7%	18%	17%
Cook Islands	1%	45%	9%	14%	31%
Palau	1%	61%	7%	14%	17%
RMI	4%	41%	6%	17%	31%
Nauru	8%	75%	6%	10%	2%

Table 3 shows that respondents in all seven countries were most likely to have finished either all or some of their secondary education. Niue (19 per cent), Tokelau (18 per cent) and RMI

(17 per cent) had the highest proportion of respondents who had finished all or some of their higher education (including bachelor's and master's levels).

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1 At the time of writing, Tokelau has yet to sign the convention, although New Zealand, which has responsibilities for governing Tokelau, has signed it.

2 These countries are often labelled as “small island states” owing to their relatively tiny landmass and small human populations; however, it is important to note that each is connected socially, culturally and economically to vast areas of the Pacific Ocean.

3 <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/gcb-pacific-2021-survey-people-voices-corruption-bribery>

4 The control of corruption index captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests. It also measures the strength and effectiveness of a country’s policy

and institutional framework to prevent and combat corruption. The indicator is a part of the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators, which combine the views of a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries. For more information, see: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Documents>.

5 This was likely interpreted as referring to Tokelau’s head of government

6 The views of respondents from RMI also align to other, more recent assessments (e.g., Freedom House, 2021c).

7 Note: Figures from Robertso Kukutschka, TBC, available at: https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GSMA_MobileEconomy2020_Pacific_Islands.pdf

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