



**HRMI**  
Human Rights Measurement Initiative

# HUMAN RIGHTS ACROSS THE PACIFIC

2020

.....  
BY THE PACIFIC  
.....

FOR THE PACIFIC  
.....

WITH THE PACIFIC  
.....





Northern Mariana Islands

Guam

Palau

Federated States  
of Micronesia

Marshall Islands

Nauru

Papua New Guinea

Kiribati

Tuvalu

Solomon Islands

Tokelau

Wallis &  
Futuna

Samoa

American  
Samoa

Cook Islands

French Polynesia

Niue

Fiji

Tonga

Vanuatu

New Caledonia

Australia

Aotearoa - New Zealand

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# Foreword



The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) is about collaborative measurement, accurate data, rigorous analysis, and shared outcomes.

Human rights abuses are a constant concern. A growing number of governments and corporations around the world are shrinking civil society spaces.

The Pacific Region is not immune from this. Now more than ever there is a need to expand and deepen the reach of civil society, which includes researchers, media, academia, and community groups. The front-line fight for justice requires an underpinning of strong research and accurate information and insights.

A key feature of HRMI's expert survey this year has been the introduction of a Pacific Module. The Pacific Module is a collaborative and engaging initiative, an effort of co-design between HRMI and Pacific human rights practitioners with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

As this report and HRMI's online Rights Tracker data highlight, improvements need to be made by Pacific Governments in a number of areas. However, those improvements need to be underpinned by greater collaboration with civil society, communities, and other stakeholders. They should also be strengthened by a strong understanding of the Pacific cultural and geo-political contexts.

The information and insights in this report are from the ground – from the victims and those who work with victims. To that end, we acknowledge the bravery and courage of practitioners and victims of human rights abuses who fight every day to have their voices heard.

**Tiumalu Peter Fa'afiu\***  
Aotearoa/New Zealand and Samoa

\*Chair, Pacific Media Network, Aotearoa/New Zealand; Global Director, Amnesty International; former Board Member, New Zealand Media Council

# Our Sincere Thanks



HRMI is a global collaborative project, where many hundreds of committed people join together to create transformative human rights tools.

We are very grateful for the many people throughout the Pacific region who have contributed their time, knowledge, expertise, voice, and mana to help produce the data presented in this report and on the HRMI Rights Tracker. Contributors have sacrificed time with their families, communities, and their core work to travel to the workshop, join online discussions, shape the survey, and encourage others to participate.

In particular, the data in this report would not exist without the following generous contributions:

- 43 activists, advocates, journalists, researchers, and lawyers traveled to Auckland in August 2019 for a co-design workshop. These people generated many important improvements to the survey and our Rights Tracker, and the themes of the Pacific Module.
- Following the workshop, several participants continued to engage with us to help guide the development of the Pacific Module. We appreciate the time, thought, and guidance they contributed.
- Staff at The Pacific Community were very helpful in enabling us to fill data gaps for economic and social rights scores.
- In many countries, a dedicated member of the human rights community has taken on the crucial role of HRMI Ambassador, helping to spread the word and encourage local experts to share their knowledge through the HRMI survey.
- Many of HRMI's human rights scores come from individual human rights practitioners spending an hour or more answering survey questions on the state of human rights in their country. This year, around 200 people across the Pacific region answered the survey (along with hundreds of others around the world) providing the raw data for HRMI scores. Thank you!
- Many people, including our Pacific Engagement Consultants, suggested other people to approach, and encouraged colleagues to participate. We rely on personal recommendations to find appropriate local experts, and are grateful for everyone who nominated or encouraged someone to participate in the survey.
- Over three weeks in May 2020, interested people from around the Pacific joined discussions of the unpublished data and provided feed-back and comments that helped shape this report.

Thank you, all of you.

**The HRMI team,**  
24 June, 2020

# Quality of Life Rights in the Pacific

How well are a country's leaders doing at making sure people have a decent quality of life? HRMI produces scores on economic and social rights so people can tell. For example, here are **Samoa's** latest scores.

## Quality of Life

Economic and Social Rights (2017)

How well is Samoa doing compared to what is possible at its level of income?



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

International human rights law says that more is expected of wealthier countries. Countries need to do as much as they can to fulfil their people's rights, with the aim of constantly improving. So what target should Samoa aim for? We compare its performance to other countries with a similar income level.

On the chart above, the 100% end of the scale is the target we have calculated that all countries at Samoa's level of wealth should be able to reach. Samoa is reaching the target on the right to food, but has room for improvement to reach the target for the other rights.

How do we come up with that target? We bring together two key streams of information — for the first time. We use data from international databases, on things like child survival rates, and school enrolment rates, and combine that information with each country's per capita income. For every level of income, we calculate the best rights outcomes that any country has achieved, and then compare each country's results with that goal.

So Samoa's score of 100% for the right to food tells us that it is setting the standard in that area — it is the best performer at its income level, and may have insights it could share with other similar countries on how they might be able to improve their performance on this right.

HRMI scores are calculated so that every country has a good chance of reaching 100%. We acknowledge that all Pacific countries strive to ensure their people's wellbeing, strengthened by the strong value of community-based wellbeing across Pacific cultures. If any of your country's scores are lower than 100% there is an opportunity to use HRMI data to start conversations with civil society, community leaders, policy advisers, and elected officials over what could be done differently. It may even make sense for your government to learn from other governments identified as performing well on the HRMI Rights Tracker.

On the Quality of Life tab of each country page on our Rights Tracker, you can see more detail, too. You can see scores not just for the five Quality of Life rights we measure, but also the HRMI score for each component *indicator* we use to build the score: For example, for the right to health, we use indicators chosen to give a high-level view of child health, adult health, and reproductive health. Each indicator gets its own score, relative to the 100% benchmark, and then the three indicator scores are averaged to give the score for the right to health. The chart below shows how the **Federated States of Micronesia** is doing on each of these health indicators.

#### How does Federated States of Micronesia perform for the indicators we use for Right to Health?



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)



JPM PHOTOGRAPHY: Children enjoying their lunch after swimming in the river.

Go to [RightsTracker.org](http://RightsTracker.org) to explore your country's Quality of Life scores, including further features not discussed here.



Where data are available, we also display some of the scores separately by sex, so you can see, for example, that more girls in Fiji are enjoying their right to education than boys.

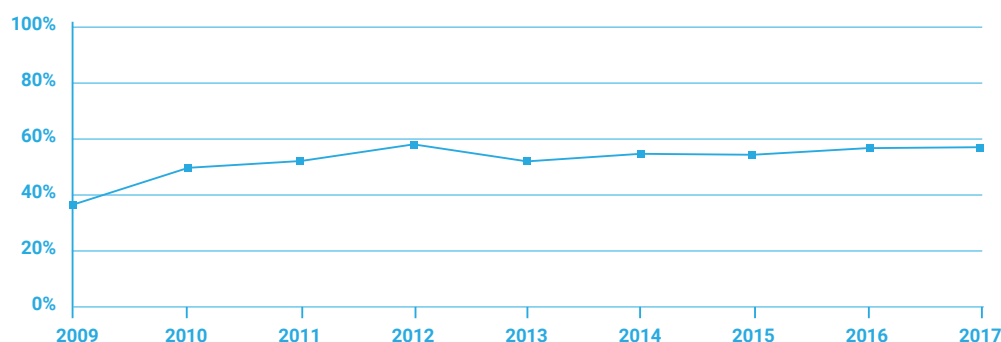
### How does Fiji perform by sex for Right to education?



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

You can also see trends over time. For example, Papua New Guinea has been gradually improving on the right to education.

### How does Papua New Guinea perform over time for Right to education?



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

Because HRMI also collects data through a survey of human rights practitioners (see following section), we have an additional set of data for Pacific countries on which groups of people are particularly affected by rights violations.



Survey respondents are asked to choose from a list of around 30 people groups, and their answers are displayed in word clouds on the Rights Tracker. For example, here is the word cloud for who our respondents said were particularly at risk of not enjoying their right to health in Nauru.

People at risk for

### Right to health

*Interpretation: Larger text = more human rights experts identified this group as being at risk.*

**60%** of our human rights experts identified **Refugees or asylum seekers** as being at risk of having this right violated.



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

People could also tell us in the survey, in their own words, what kinds of rights violations they had observed. These are also summarised for each country on the Rights Tracker.

**Note:** Our economic and social rights scores measure country income using GDP per capita in 2011 PPP\$ to ensure comparability across countries and over time. In those countries where GNI per capita exceeds GDP per capita by a significant amount, our scores will be upward biased. Some Pacific countries do not have GDP per capita data (or GNI per capita data) measured in 2011 PPP\$. For those countries where GNI exceeds GDP, HRMI economic and social rights lead Susan Randolph has computed separate adjusted scores using per capita GNI (2011 PPP\$). For those countries without 2011 PPP\$ per capita income data she has estimated scores using USD per capita income data. These supplemental data scores will be published later this year.

**“Pacific human rights measurement data help states reflect on how they handle their citizens. HRMI is providing an important tool for reducing violence.”**

**Broderick Mervyn**

Pacific Youth and Community Practitioner;  
Coordinator, Ignite4Change, Fiji



# Civil and Political Rights in the Pacific

Everyone should be able to say what they think without being scared; to trust government forces like the police and military to treat them well; to freely join with others to share ideas and work towards common goals; to have their say in how they are governed.

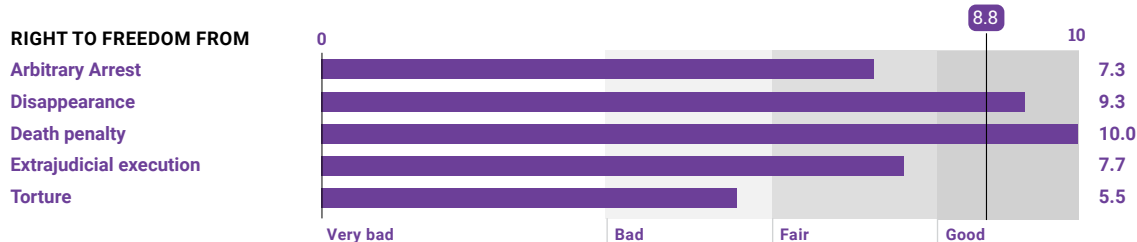
HRMI aims to be useful to people working towards these ideals by tracking each country's progress towards them. We hope that by making our measures available to those tracking each Pacific country's performance within that vision, it may help human rights defenders and practitioners in their work.

We found high scores across the Pacific region, as well as some that can be improved. For example, **New Caledonia** has three out of eight scores in the top 'good' category, and its summary scores for 'Safety from the State' rights and 'Empowerment' rights are reasonably high.

## Safety from the State

Civil and Political Rights (2019)

How well is New Caledonia's government respecting each right?



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

## Empowerment

Civil and Political Rights (2019)

How well is New Caledonia's government respecting each right?



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

Around the world, it is difficult to measure how well countries are doing at keeping their civil and political rights promises. Many instances of Safety from the State violations – like torture – happen in the dark, are difficult to monitor comprehensively, and are usually undercounted. Each country will have different ways of reporting on breaches, so it's hard to compare countries.

To overcome those challenges, HRMI has a unique and robust approach of going right to the source. We ask people on the ground who monitor or report on violations, or represent victims, to fill in a carefully designed questionnaire about how common each kind of rights violation was in the previous year. We also ask each person to score several fictional countries – some with serious problems, some doing very well, and some in between – so that we can understand each respondent's personal scale. Then we apply sophisticated statistical techniques to their answers so the HRMI scores can be compared over time, across different people, and between countries.

On our Rights Tracker you will see all our civil and political rights scores displayed within an 'uncertainty band' to show the range of scores our model says are most likely. A country's score falls into the range of the band with 80% certainty. For example, here are the Empowerment scores for Guam, displayed within their bands. Narrower bands (such as for the right to participate in government in the chart below) tell us that there is more agreement among survey respondents and/or more respondents. Wider bands (such as for the right to assembly and association) tell us that respondents may have provided a bigger range of answers and/or that there were fewer respondents.

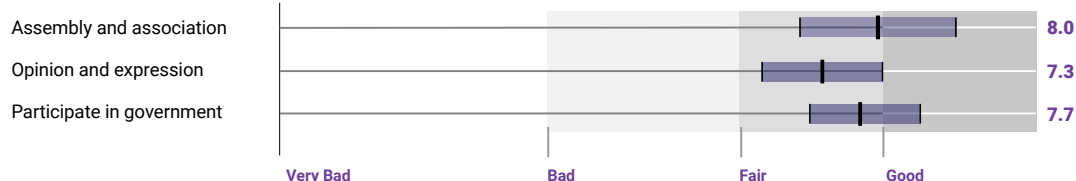
The major challenge we faced in including Pacific countries in the survey was finding enough local human rights practitioners in each place - some of which have very small populations. For some countries, we have not yet reached enough people to be able to produce data. These are French Polynesia, Kiribati, Palau, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Wallis and Futuna. We hope that by 2021, once the Pacific human rights community has had the chance to learn about and use the data we've produced so far, we will be able to connect with more people.

## Empowerment

Civil and Political Rights (2019)

How well is Guam's government respecting each right?

### Right to



Source: 2020 Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) dataset, [www.rightstracker.org](http://www.rightstracker.org)

The second, related challenge was in finding enough local experts who were independent from government, again because of the nature of public life in places with small populations.



We experimented with making two small changes to our methodology to address these challenges. First, instead of our usual minimum of five expert respondents for each country, we decided to go ahead with producing data for countries with three or more respondents. Second, in the countries with the smallest populations, under 120,000 people, we loosened our usual requirement that all respondents be entirely independent from government. In these smallest countries, we allowed some people with significant human rights knowledge to participate, even if they worked for or with the government, as long as there was a low conflict of interest. We kept track of this by asking all respondents from those smaller countries to declare what kind of government involvement they had, and our Methodology Handbook will detail which countries' data included responses from government employees.

Applying both these experimental changes in 2020 meant that we could produce data for several countries that would otherwise not have had enough independent participants.

Survey respondents are also asked which groups of people are most likely to suffer rights violations. We display these answers as word clouds on the Rights Tracker for each country, like the Nauru example on page 7.





# Pacific Specific:

## a new Pacific Module in the HRMI Human Rights Survey

A new addition to the HRMI Human Rights Survey is the 'Pacific Module', a set of questions which only appears for survey respondents who are commenting on countries in the Pacific region.

The themes covered in the Pacific Module were ones identified by participants at the 2019 co-design workshop. From an initial brainstormed list of dozens of human rights concerns, the group settled on five major themes:

- The effect of the climate crisis on human rights
- Indigenous sovereignty
- Indigenous land rights
- Cultural rights
- Violence against vulnerable groups, specifically:  
LGBTQIA+ people; women and girls; children; people with disabilities.

**“There is a critical need for better human rights data in the Pacific Island region. I recommend that the Pacific human rights community use HRMI’s data to develop better strategies, based on this data, to promote and protect human rights.”**



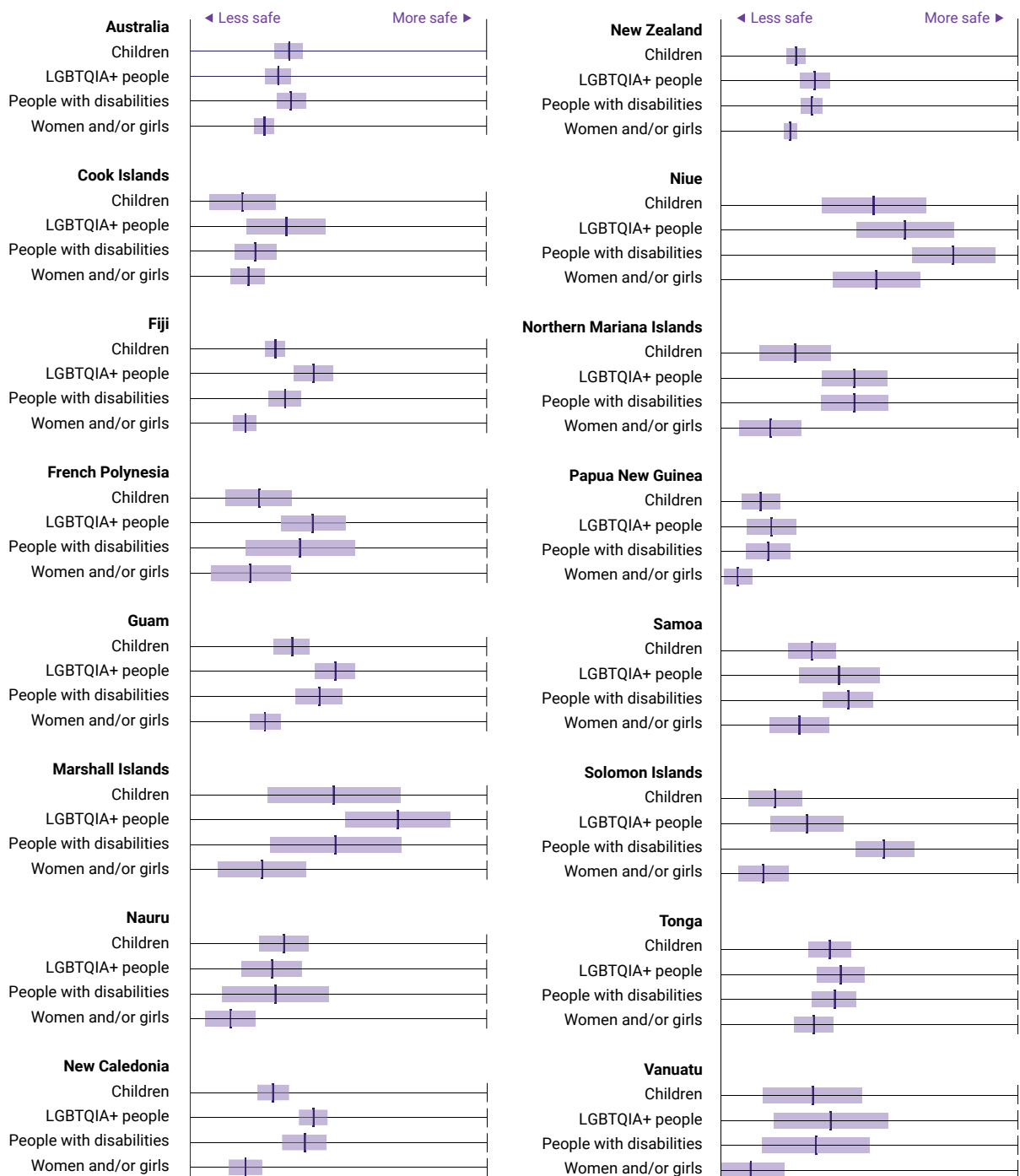
**Imrana Jalal**

International human rights lawyer,  
Co-Founder, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji

## Societal Violence in the Pacific

For this set of questions we used a similar methodology as for the civil and political rights questions, and included questions about the levels of violence in fictional countries, to make the data comparable across respondents, and countries. These scores are shown within uncertainty bands. Wide bars indicate more uncertainty about what the score is. Narrow bars indicate less uncertainty.

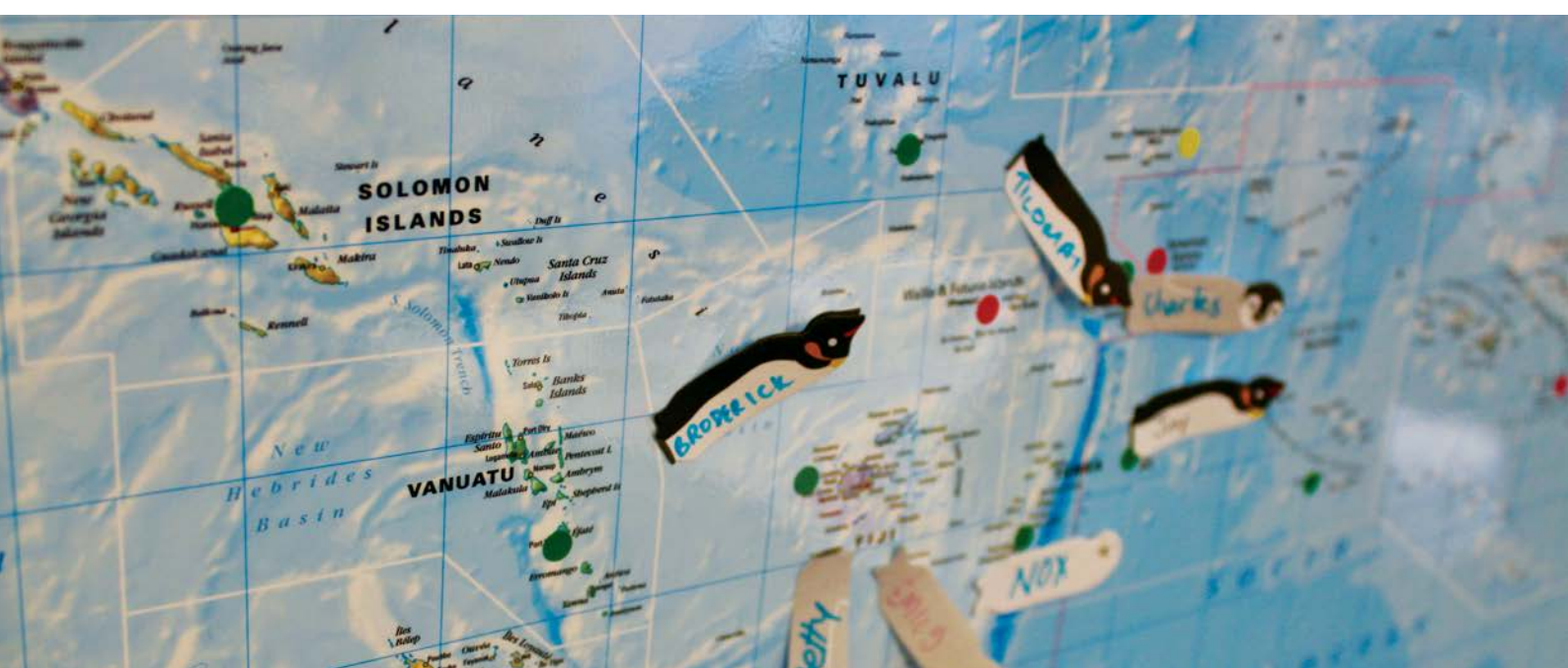
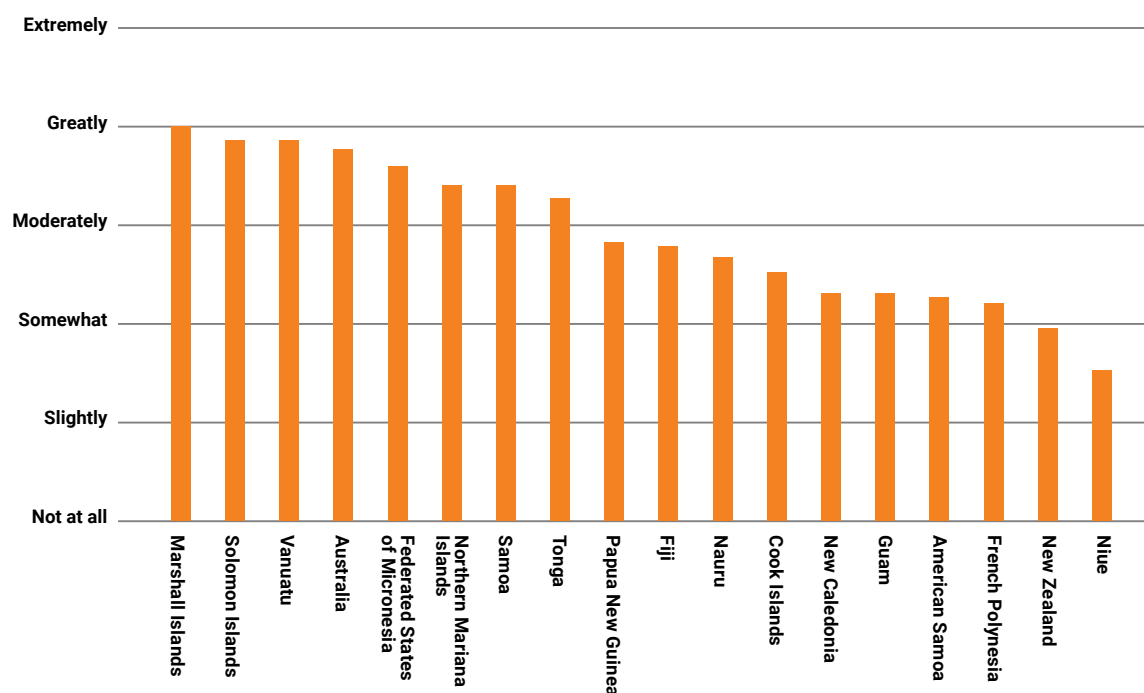
### How safe from violence were people in each of these groups in 2019?



# The Climate Crisis and its Effect on Human Rights in the Pacific

Nearly 200 human rights practitioners from around the Pacific gave their opinion on how much the climate crisis has worsened human rights conditions in their country, on a scale from 'not at all' to 'extremely'. For this question, we simply asked how much effect the climate crisis has had on human rights in each country, without also asking other questions to ensure comparability across countries. These data are therefore less robust than the other scores we produce, although we hope they will provide a platform for future research. The average response for each country is shown in the graph below.

### How much has the climate crisis worsened rights conditions?

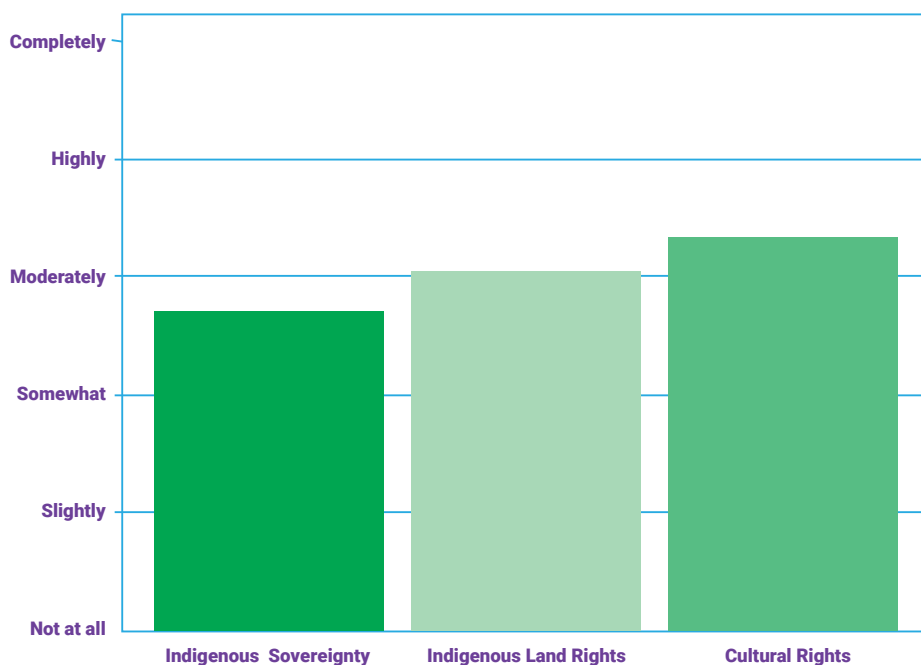


## Indigenous and Cultural Rights in the Pacific

For three further questions, respondents were asked to what extent people in their country could enjoy their indigenous sovereignty and land rights, and their cultural rights.

Taking an average of country scores, we see that all these issues are of concern to respondents:

To what extent are people in the Pacific enjoying these three rights?



JPM PHOTOGRAPHY: At the 2018 Melanesian Arts & Cultural Festival





# What's next for the Pacific Module?

The Pacific Module produced more data than we are able to publish in this short report, including extensive qualitative responses from survey participants on the specific situations in their countries. We hope to make this available in some form shortly.

We are delighted to now have two dedicated HRMI Pacific Data Leads, who have joined the HRMI team to guide the development of the Pacific Module in coming years. Seuta'afili Dr Patrick Thomsen and Dr Sam Manuela are both based at the University of Auckland, and will lead consultation, workshops, and research, to provide data that are created by, with, and for the Pacific. HRMI is currently seeking further funding to support this work.



Sam is a Kūki 'Āirani (Cook Islands) researcher and lecturer based in the School of Psychology at the University of Auckland. Sam's current research focuses on knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about mental health, and he is in the process of developing a study identifying the prevalence of mental illness in the Cook Islands. Sam's interests in HRMI relate to his passion for seeing Pacific realities reflected in the quantitative research and ensuring high quality data benefits Pacific communities.



Patrick is a Samoan researcher and lecturer based at the University of Auckland, with an interdisciplinary background in Pacific and international studies, gender and GLBT studies, politics, development and human rights. He is the Principal Investigator for the Manalagi Project, New Zealand's first health and wellbeing project for Pacific Rainbow and Queer communities, which will also look at how human rights frames are being used by practitioners and activists in this space. His interests with HRMI relate to his goal of helping to develop a culturally-sensitive and Pacific-inclusive measure that understands the diversity of realities for Pacific human rights practitioners in the region.

# About HRMI

The Human Rights Measurement Initiative is the first global project to comprehensively measure the human rights performance of countries. We are a global collaboration of human rights practitioners and academic experts using award-winning and peer-reviewed methodologies to track the human rights performance of countries, and publish scores each year on our Rights Tracker.

We are driven by the knowledge that what gets measured gets improved. We want countries to join a race to the top, where leaders call in their advisers and ask what they need to do to get their human rights scores up.

Founded in 2015, HRMI (pronounced 'her-mee'), is guided by values of collaboration, usefulness, rigour, transparency, innovation and independence.

HRMI is hosted by Motu Economic and Public Policy Research in New Zealand, and the Center for the Study of Global Issues at the University of Georgia in the United States, with team members all over the world.

HRMI's Pacific expansion is being funded by a grant from the New Zealand Aid Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The grant includes a clause guaranteeing HRMI's independence in carrying out its work.

Please follow us on social media as [@rightsmetrics](#), and visit our websites: [humanrightsmeasurement.org](#), and [rightstracker.org](#), where we publish all our findings, freely available under a Creative Commons licence.







**“It is imperative for  
our island nations to  
measure human rights.  
The data begins to tell  
the story and speak  
truth to power so we  
can transform our  
societies.”**

**Joshua Cooper**  
Lecturer / Executive Director  
University of Hawai'i / Oceania Human  
Rights Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights





**DESIGN BY**  
WALTER MOALA

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
FRONT AND BACK COVERS  
JPM PHOTOGRAPHY  
SOLOMONS ISLAND

**FRONT COVER:**  
Woman celebrating her  
graduation with her family at the  
*Solomon Islands National University*

**BACK COVER:** Children playing  
at the *Tuvaruhu River*.