STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

A joint research project of the USPSA,
Laucala Campus (Suva, Fiji)
and the Balance of Power Program

BALANCE OF POWER

USPSA LAUCALA CAMPUS

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC

A joint research project of the USPSA,
Laucala Campus (Suva, Fiji)
and the Balance of Power Program

Table of contents

List of figures

Acknowledgements

Foreword

Our Pacific Island Leaders' vision, articulated in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, reaffirms their support to the next generation of leaders and commitment to women's empowerment:

> *We support our young people to develop their full potential, empower women to be active participants in economic, political and social life and recognise the importance of creating accessible services and infrastructure to enable all Pacific peoples to participate in and benefit from development outcomes (2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, 2022).*

In support of, and connecting in with, this same vision, the Balance of Power program invested in an initiative that aims to engage, nurture, and support the Pacific's next generation of leaders through a partnership with the University of the South Pacific Students Association (USPSA). Given this regional University – a founding member of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific – is an incubator of tomorrow's leaders, we were excited and privileged to work with these leaders on issues that are important in our region. We collectively recognise, and acknowledge, that many of our current systems are failing, and there is a need for reflection to take stock of where we are as Pacific Islanders and to work together to rechart the 'Pacific way' and promote our cornerstone values of respect, accountability, and shared leadership.

The Pacific region records one of lowest rates of women's representation in parliament even though women are often more than half of the population. This research will serve as a catalyst to broaden and deepen emerging leaders' understanding of women's leadership. By participating in an exploration of attitudes and perceptions around the legitimacy and voice of women leaders, students will be stimulated to engage more intentionally on this issue, potentially opening further opportunities for advocacy, informed by the research findings.

The USPSA and Balance of Power teams welcome the results of this research as it provides critical information and evidence on students' perceptions of women in leadership. It has also exposed opportunities to be further explored to contribute to shifting and challenging deep-seated cultural norms.

Beyond this research, the partnership between USPSA and Balance of Power will continue to work towards advocating a leadership approach that upholds the value of inclusivity, equity, and equality for all peoples of the Pacific. We are excited by what we will continue to learn from this enduring partnership.

Mereani Rokotuibau and Jennifer Kalpokas Doan
Executive Directors
Balance of Power

Abbreviations and frequently used terms

BOP

Refers to Balance of Power, a multi-country program under the Australian Government's *Pacific Women Lead* initiative. The program goal is that 'women are increasingly culturally, socially and politically accepted, and act, as legitimate political leaders and decision makers across the Pacific region.'

Students

Refers to those students participating in this study selected from among the USPSA Laucala student body, members of at least one of the 17 cultural, religious and faith-based groups that form the USPSA Laucala Senate.

USP

Refers to the University of the South Pacific.

USPSA Laucala

Refers to the governing body of students that are currently registered and are pursuing their studies at USP's Laucala campus, Suva Fiji. USPSA is a regional institution that has been established within USP to govern and address the students' welfare. USPSA is formed of the Regional Council that involves all the USPSA branches across the region's USP member countries.

Executive summary

Attitudes to women's leadership

- Student respondents generally agree that women are **under-represented in politics** and that **women's presence** in national government **would make it better**, but women and non-binary students strongly agree more than men.

- More women than men strongly disagreed that **women and men 'had equal rights'**.

- Very few students – male (10%), female (7%) or non-binary (0%) – strongly agreed that women should **return to traditional roles** in society, or that men make better leaders than women.

Legitimate roles for women

- There was marked variation in the degree to which student respondents considered women more or less likely to reach certain leadership positions.

- Students overwhelmingly (90%) considered that women were 'extremely likely' or 'likely' to hold both ministerial positions in **education and health**.

- Students were still optimistic that women would hold the ministerial portfolios of **foreign affairs, finance or attorney general**, although not to the same degree as the portfolios of health and education.

- Roughly half of male and female students considered it likely that a woman would become **prime minister**, but half of those again (25% female students, and 22% male students) considered this 'extremely likely'.

Leadership attributes and qualifications

- With very little gender difference, students did not consider **'aggression', 'arrogance' or 'stubbornness'** as essential leadership qualities. Female students were less likely than both male and non-binary students to consider being '**religious', 'humble', 'assertive' and 'ambitious'** essential leadership qualities.

- All students considered **work with the local community** as far more important than a political background.

Student awareness of women's political leadership

- Most of the student respondents **thought that women represented between 0 and 5 per cent** of elected members of Pacific national legislatures. Slightly more female students than male students admitted that they 'do not know'.

- When asked to reflect on a political leader, male and non-binary students were more likely to **nominate a man than a woman** – irrespective of whether they considered those leaders positively or negatively. Male and non-binary students were both more likely to **view the leadership of male political leaders negatively**.

Introduction

A critical issue for women's leadership – around the world – rests in its legitimacy. The extent to which societies accept and celebrate women as leaders remains variable, if not extremely limited. Social norms – or the ideas and informal rules that determine appropriate social behaviour – tend to ascribe to men the characteristics of an 'ideal leader'. These social norms privilege men's role *outside* the home, and by default, privilege women's role *inside* the home. Some social norms have dictated that women's caring roles conflict with holding leadership positions.[1]

Across many cultures and societies, men are seen as being more appropriate for leadership positions than women, and the women who do hold power are seen as suspicious. These norms often result in women being more reluctant to seek, or accept, positions of influence;[2] or being more likely than men to seek and practise models of leadership that are less hierarchical and more collaborative – on the expectation that these may be more socially 'appropriate' forms of leadership for women.[3] Such norms also help to explain why women's leadership is often more prevalent in NGOs and other social sector organisations, which may be viewed in support of gender norms and stereotypes that label women with a 'natural' affinity for caregiving.

For many women when they do become leaders, traditional or discriminatory gender norms can place an unfair burden, as they may be expected to perform better than men, and often face intense scrutiny for any perceived failure. Women leaders are more likely to face additional criticism and harassment precisely because they have stepped out of a traditional role.[4]

The Pacific is no exception, although there is, notably, some fluidity in the construction of gender norms across the region (and within Pacific Island states). In Papua New Guinea (including Bougainville) and Solomon Islands, for example, women's traditional roles, their narratives in custom, and societal attitudes to women in leadership differ among communities, tribes and language groups. To some extent, variations in Papua New Guinea and the Solomons are explained by differences in matrilineal and patrilineal communities, and by rural/urban settings.[5] In Vanuatu, *kastom* is commonly used to explain and justify women's limited inclusion in political processes. Key venues for political deliberation such as the *nakamal* privilege male voices, and there is usually and expectation that women will follow the decisions of male leaders. In parts of Polynesia, such as Tonga, where women and men's roles have been described as 'equal but separate', women have been able to complement their traditional role in

---

1   Thavy Chhoeun, Panha Sok and Clodagh Byrne, 2008, "'Citadel of Women': strengthening female, leadership in rural Cambodia", *Gender and Development*, Volume 16, Issue 3; Pilar Domingo, Rebecca Holmes, Tam O'Neil, Nicola Jones, Kate Bird, Anna Larson, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Craig Valters, 2015, *Women's voice and leadership in decision-making: Assessing the evidence*, Overseas Development Institute (UK).

2   Abby McLeod, 2015, "Women's leadership in the Pacific", Developmental Leadership Program.

3   Tam O'Neil and Georgia Plank, with Pilar Domingo, 2015, *Support to women and girls' leadership: A rapid review of the evidence,* Overseas Development Institute (UK)

4   Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), 2013, *Women in Leadership: Understanding the gender gap*; Brigitte Filion, 2016, *Sexism, harassment, and violence against women parliamentarians*, Issues Brief, Inter-Parliamentary Union; Ceridwen Spark, 2010, "Changing Lives: Understanding the Barriers that Confront Educated Women in Papua New Guinea", *Australian Feminist Studies*, Volume 25, Issue 63, pp. 17-30.

5   Helen Tavola, Afu Billy, Josephine Kama, 2016, *Advancing DFAT's Work on Leadership and Decision-Making: "The Next Level" Scoping Study on Women in Leadership and Decision-Making*, p.11.

the family with leadership in a specific set of professional fields, such as the public service and higher education institutions. Politics, however, is regarded as a male bastion by community elites.[6]

Since 2014, perception studies of women's leadership have been conducted under the guidance of the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) in Fiji and the Solomon Islands (and in Asia, in Cambodia and Timor-Leste).[7] These studies have been concerned with social attitudes on 'the capacity of women to be political leaders.' Most of the studies have found 'widespread support for the idea that women and men have equal rights' and 'widespread in-principle support that there should be more women in political leadership'.[8] The research also uncovered a disconnect between a general belief in gender equality, and a common preference for the leadership attributions ascribed to men – such as being hard-working, ambitious and self-confident – rather than the attributes ascribed to women – being honest, positive and humble. While these studies are useful snapshots of general social attitudes to women as leaders, no study has yet focused on student attitudes. There is a need to fill this gap in the literature given Pacific students' potential to shape generational change towards gender equality.

6   Orlanda Ward and Jennifer van Heerde-Hudson, 2016, *Lessons Learned on Thinking and Working Politically for the Ratification of CEDAW in Tonga*, p 10.

7   Stella Mulder, Tracy McDiarmid and Lisa Vettori, 2019, *Public Perceptions of Women as Political Leaders: A Multi-Country Study, Synthesis Report*, Melbourne: International Women's Development Agency.

8   See, for example, Patricia Dumaru and Sarah Pene, 2013, *Public Perception of Women in Leadership.* Suva Fiji: Fiji Women's Forum in Partnership with International Women's Development Agency (IWDA).

Identifying the attitudes of a new generation

This research project offered the Balance of Power (BOP) program an opportunity to work with the University of the South Pacific (USP) – an institution long considered one of the key pillars of Pacific regionalism – and its Student Association (USPSA). USP is considered a melting pot of the region's next generation of leaders. This is where lifelong relationships, networks and coalitions are built. Right across the region, USP alumni are represented in decision-making organisations, both public and private. This research project therefore represented an opportunity to engage the next generation of leaders, particularly important considering recent regional discussions around the question, *'What is the Pacific that we want for tomorrow'?*[9]

This research was undertaken in partnership with members of USPSA who well represent the voice of youth leaders in the region. USPSA members are expected to take on a leadership role, as indicated in the mission statement that 'students play an integral role in the strategic direction of the USP at all levels to enhance campus life and academic experience' (USPSA Website).

For BOP, as a program, the outcomes of the research will be important to help shape and guide future engagements with young people, including with, but also beyond, the USPSA. This research served as a catalyst to broaden and deepen these emerging leaders' understanding of the issue of women's leadership and the need for that leadership to be seen as legitimate. By participating in an exploration of attitudes and perceptions around the legitimacy and voice of women leaders, students were encouraged to engage more intentionally on this issue, potentially opening up further opportunities for advocacy, as informed by the research findings.

---

9   In 2018, USP Pacific Studies, Fiji National University (FNU), Pacific Theological College (PTC) and PIANGO co-hosted the inaugural Pacific Philosophy Conference that created space for knowledge and wisdom sharing between Pacific elders and next generation of leaders to work towards reviving Pacific resilience – the way Pacific Islanders cope with increasing social, economic, and health problems, including leadership.

Research approach and methods

The research was informed by the tenets of inclusive Pacific methodology.[10] While primarily quantitative in nature, the study abided by Pacific research values such as respect, reciprocity, humility, and service. For example, the draft questions were shared with USPSA to ensure local buy-in of the project and the initial results were shared in a workshop with participants held in Suva in November 2021 as a mark of respect for their time, knowledge, and contribution. The study aimed to inform different elements of the Pacific community of the findings, on the understanding that these might instigate important discussions about the social value of women's political leadership.

Aim

To understand more comprehensively Pacific students' perceptions of women's leadership, and to identify entry points for future BOP/USPSA activities that might foster more inclusive perceptions of a balance of power in leadership.

Research Questions

This research project was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are Pacific students' perceptions of women in leadership and do these differ by gender and other intersectional factors?
2. Does a student's degree of political awareness encourage a more inclusive understanding of leadership (that is, a balance of power) among Pacific students?
3. What role might the USP and the USPSA play in promoting inclusive leadership in the Pacific?

Assumptions

As with the BOP program more broadly, there are some assumptions about the potential impact and implementation of this study. We assume that:

- Engaging with university students through constructive debate and positive messaging around women's political leadership will contribute to widespread attitudinal and behaviour change;
- Deeply entrenched, traditional cultural and religious beliefs might be shifted through this research process and its findings;
- New perceptions and attitudes developed while studying in Fiji will continue to hold when students return to their country of origin;
- Regional collective action can influence policy makers and leaders of key institutions at the national level.

---

10   Vaoiva Ponton, 2018, 'Utilizing Pacific Methodologies as Inclusive Practice', *SAGE Open*, July-September: 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018792962.

Sample

Given the primary objective of understanding the diverse determinants of leadership participants among Pacific students, the sample was designed to capture responses from the twelve cultural group associations of the USPSA Laucala Campus, the eight religious group associations, and the seven USPSA standing committees.[11]

Methods

Data was collected through a structured online questionnaire (Google form) sent to a randomly generated list of students by email. Student email addresses were provided to the research team by the leaders of the USPSA Cultural Associations. The questionnaire included mostly closed questions, and one open-ended question (the survey instrument is available at Appendix 1). The closed questions closely resembled those developed by Patrina Dumaru and Sarah Pene (both previously based at USP) in 2014 for their study of leadership perceptions in Fiji. The continuation of certain questions allows for a longitudinal comparison with a Fijian cohort. Emailed to students, the questionnaire for self-completion was expected to generate more honest answers and allow students the opportunity to respond at a time of their convenience.

The initially low response rate – in part explained by an outbreak of Covid-19 and a subsequent lockdown, campus closure and examination period – was managed through sustained consultation with USPSA executives. Cultural Association leaders were asked to encourage students to participate, with the specific note that the findings of the study would be useful in identifying entry points for future activities to support inclusive leadership at USP and USPSA. The response rate was also bolstered by the offer of an incentive: three vouchers worth FJD100 were offered and drawn at an initial data analysis workshop.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of the data was undertaken in partnership between the USPSA group leaders, research staff recruited by BOP for this project, and BOP core staff. A data analysis workshop, held in November 2021, ensured all those responsible for data collection were able to consider the data and present their interpretations in a safe space. A collective learning approach known as a 'world café' was used to identify themes and share reflections during the validation workshop. Participants were divided into groups (or cafés) and asked to explore three different sets of ideas, with a facilitator from the BOP team on each table: attitudes towards women in leadership; student awareness of women in leadership; and the role that USP and USPSA can play in promoting women's leadership. This approach ensured that the views and insights of all participants were considered and heard. The reflections of the workshop are incorporated into this report.

---

11 The twelve cultural student associations are: Cook Islands Student Association, Fiji Student Association, i-Kiribati Student Association, Marshall Islands Student Association, Nauruan Student Association, Niuean Student Association, Samoan Student Association, Solomon Islands Student Association, Tokelau Student Association, Tongan Student Association, Tuvaluan Student Association, Vanuatu Student Association. The Fiji Student Association is further subdivided into: Banaban Student Association, Chinese Student Association, iTaukei Student Association, Indo-Fijian Student Association, and Rotuman Student Association.
The eight religious groups are: Christian Fellowship Student Association, Every Nation Student Association, Latter-day Saint Student Association, Catholic Student Association, Soul Seekers Student Association, Islamic Society Student Association, Hindu Student Association, USP International Youth Fellowship.
The seven standing committees are: (1) Welfare and Development Committee, (2) Education Committee, (3) Sports and Recreation Committee, (4) Social Committee, (5) Media & Public Relations Committee, (6) Cultural Committee, (7) Religious Committee.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken very seriously while conducting this research. In the first instance, the BOP ethics process was followed, including submission of an ethics application for approval by the BOP Ethics Committee composed of the Deputy Team Leader (Ethics Committee Chair), the Technical Advisor on Research, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. USP ethics processes were also followed.

The BOP ethics process required research staff to consider questions of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and management of data, processes by which the research would be used for future advocacy and project activities.

Limitations of the Study

A key limitation of the study was evident in students' own reluctance to respond to the questionnaire, due to both study pressures and concerns that privacy might not be respected. The BOP research team worked hard to encourage participation in the survey, facilitate completely private and independent responses, and mitigate perceptions of survey misuse.

A further limitation is the uneven distribution of students participating in the research from across the Pacific in the period in which this study was undertaken, further influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. While to some extent this is a factor of the relative size of the populations from these countries (Nauru being an example), and the impact of these population sizes on the number of students who then form cultural associations at USP, it is also the case that some community leaders were more proactive in encouraging student participation in the survey than others.

Note on the Presentation of Data

The data presented in this report are all disaggregated by gender (male, female, and non-binary). Analyses were also conducted by students' country of birth, as well as type and school of study at USP. Analyses by age did not show clear differences given that the vast majority of students were between the ages of 18 and 35.

Survey participants

In total, 631 students responded to the survey, most of whom where between the ages of 18 and 35, single (and not living in a de-facto relationship), and studying an undergraduate degree. Almost half the students responding to the survey were from Fiji, another quarter were from Solomon Islands, and another fifth from Tonga. Other Pacific Island countries – Vanuatu, Samoa, Nauru, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Tuvalu and Papua New Guinea – were represented by a very small number of students. One student was from outside the Pacific region.

Figure 1: Survey participants by age, marital status, course type and country of origin
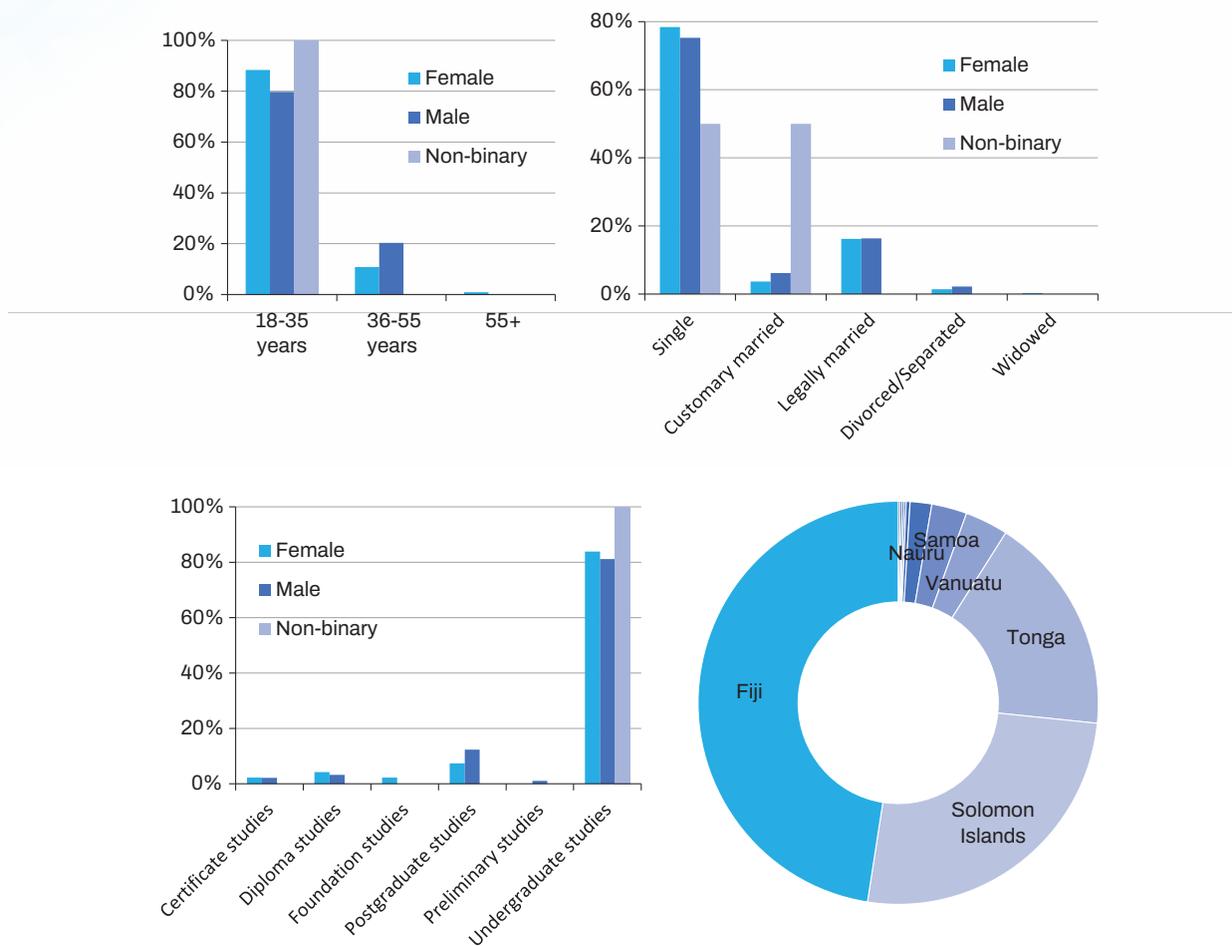
Attitudes towards women's leadership

USP students at Laucala campus agreed that women were under-represented in their country's government (see Figure 2). Women were slightly more likely to strongly agree (44%) than men (39%). Most students considered that women's presence in national government would be better for the country, although non-binary students (100%) and female students (65%) strongly agreed with this statement to a greater extent than male students (49%). Students generally agreed that men and women had equal rights in their country (59% female, 68% male, 100% non-binary) but the female students were the most likely to (strongly) disagree with that statement.

**Figure 2: Perceptions of women's participation in government, by gender**

Women are under represented in my country's government

It would be better for the country if there were more women in national government

In my country today, men and women have equal rights
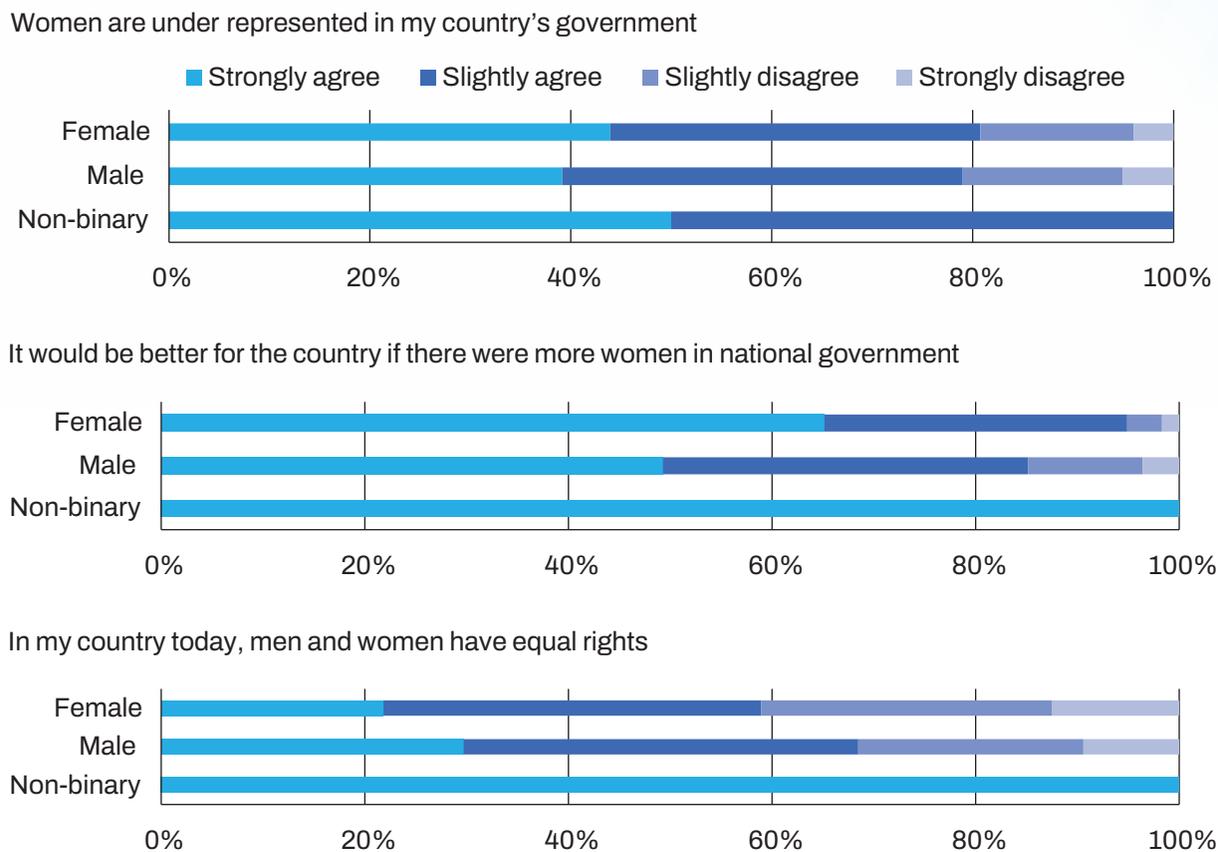
When asked about their attitudes towards leadership and culture (see Figure 3), USP Laucala students were likely to hold progressive, rather than conservative, views. Very few students – male (10%), female (7%) or non-binary (0%) – strongly agreed that women should return to traditional roles in society, or that men make better leaders than women. On both of these questions, students were far more likely to agree with the proposition. There was little difference between students of any gender on the question of culture being supportive of women's leadership, with over 60 per cent of all students slightly agreeing with the proposition. Male students, however, were marginally more likely than female students to disagree.

Figure 3: Perceptions of women's leadership and culture, by gender

Women should return to their traditional roles in society
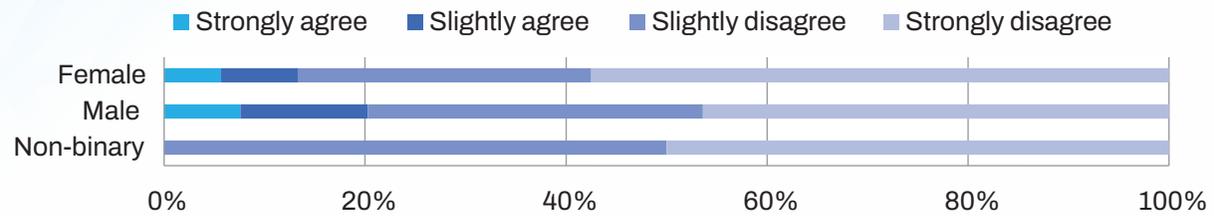
Men generally make better leaders than women
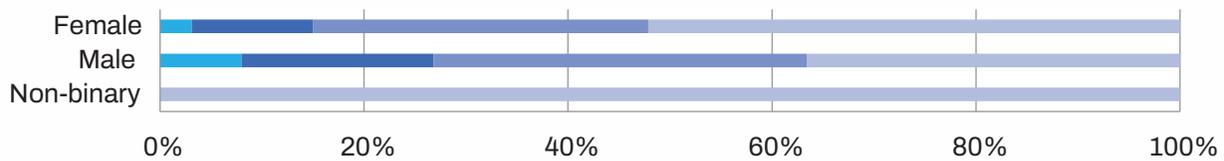
My culture is supportive of women's leadership
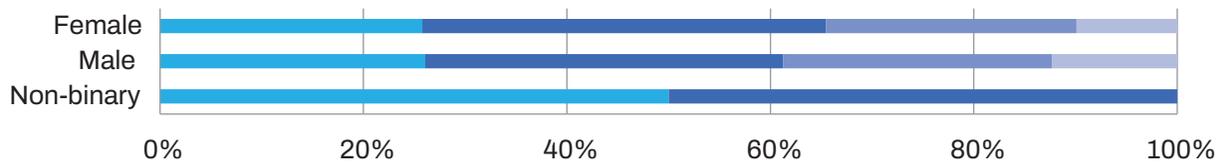
Legitimate leadership roles for women

USP Laucala students were asked to reflect on the likelihood of women holding various political leadership positions, ranging from ministers of specific portfolios to the most senior positions in government and the military. This set of questions had been asked – in the same wording – of Fijian men and women in 2014 to 'gauge people's perceptions regarding possible shifts in public attitudes to women's leadership in the future'. In the 2014 survey, the results 'showed that positions that have been previously held by a woman were deemed more likely to be held by a woman again in the future'.[12] The results of our survey are not dissimilar and show marked variation in the degree to which students considered women more or less likely to reach certain leadership positions.

Figure 4 presents the results of students' perceptions of women holding the 'soft' ministerial portfolios of health and education.[13] Students overwhelmingly considered (90%) that women were 'extremely likely' or 'likely' to hold both of these positions. Over half of the male and female students, and all the non-binary students, viewed the education portfolio as an extremely likely fit for women, and in almost the same proportion, considered women extremely likely to become ministers for health.

Figure 4: Likelihood of women holding 'soft' ministerial portfolios, by gender

Minister for Education
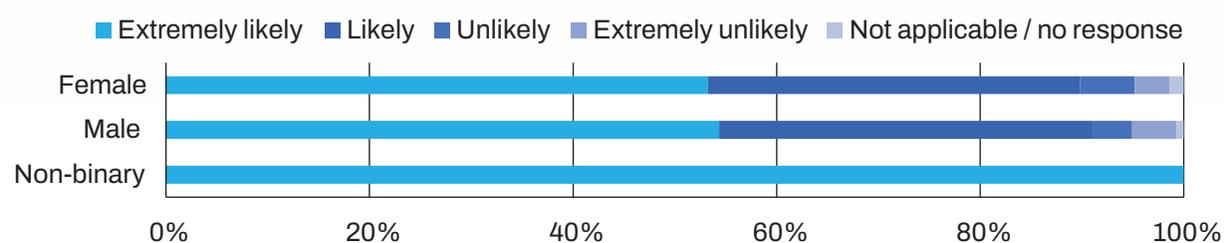
Minister for Health

---
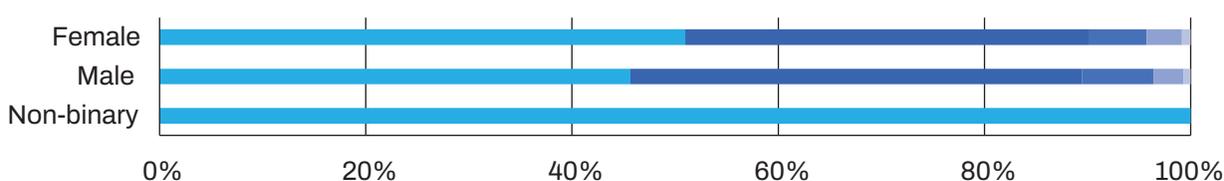
12   Patrina Dumaru and Sarah Pene, 2014, *Public Perceptions of Women in Leadership*. Fiji Women's Rights Movement and International Women's Development Agency. https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Public-Perceptions-of-Women-in-Leadership.pdf

13   The so-called 'soft' cabinet portfolios tend to be those described as having more 'feminine' characteristics such as education, health, women's affairs/gender equality, while 'hard' portfolios include defence, treasury/finance, and infrastructure. See Mona Lena Krook and Diana O'Brien, 2012, 'All the President's Men? The Appointment of Female Cabinet Ministers Worldwide', *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 74, no. 3, pp. 840–55, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381612000382.

Students were still optimistic that women would hold the ministerial portfolios of foreign affairs, finance or attorney general (see Figure 5), although not to the same degree as the portfolios of health and education. While between 72 and 84 per cent of students considered these women likely to hold these positions, only a third – or less – of both male and female students considered women holding these positions 'extremely likely'. Women were considered less likely to hold the position of attorney general than foreign affairs or finance. Students considered women were more likely to become ambassadors for their country than holding any of these ministerial positions.

Figure 5: Likelihood of women holding 'hard' ministerial portfolios, by gender

Ambassador
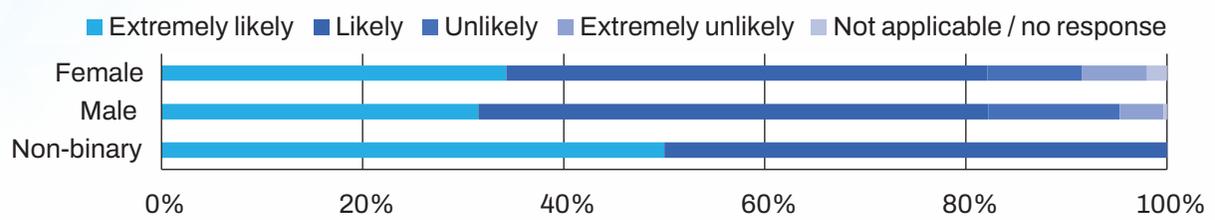
Minister for Foreign Affairs
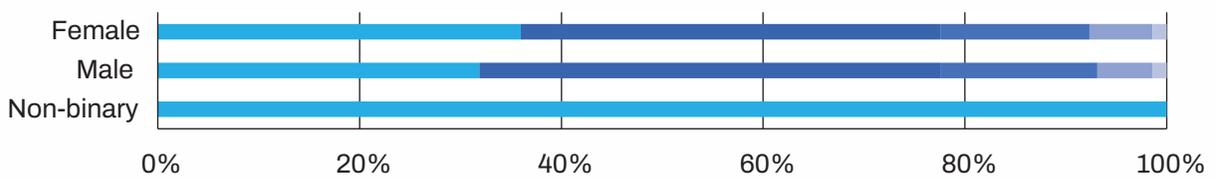
Minister for Finance
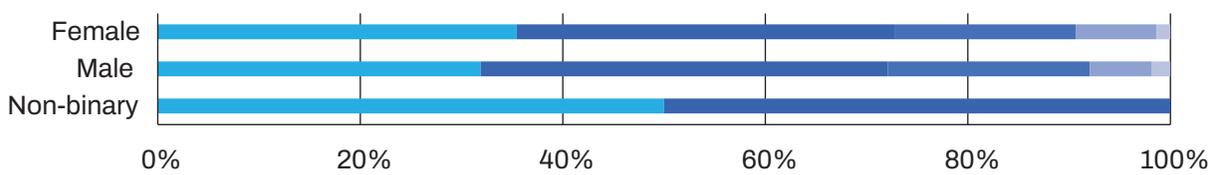
Attorney General
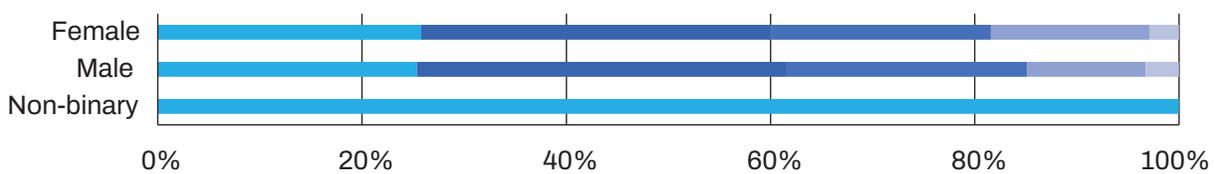
USP students were more evenly divided on the question of women holding the most senior leadership positions in their countries, namely prime minister, president, or head of army (see Figure 6). Roughly half of male and female students considered it likely that a woman would become prime minister, but half of those again (25% female students, and 22% male students) considered this 'extremely likely'. Fewer again considered women likely to become president, although importantly, a greater number of students indicated that this question was 'not applicable' (10% female students, 12% male students, and 50% non-binary students). USP students considered it even less likely (and not applicable) that a woman might become the head of army, although slightly more female students than male students suggested this was 'extremely likely'.

Figure 6: Likelihood of women holding the most senior leadership positions, by gender

Prime Minister

■ Extremely likely ■ Likely ■ Unlikely ■ Extremely unlikely ■ Not applicable / no response

President

Head of Army
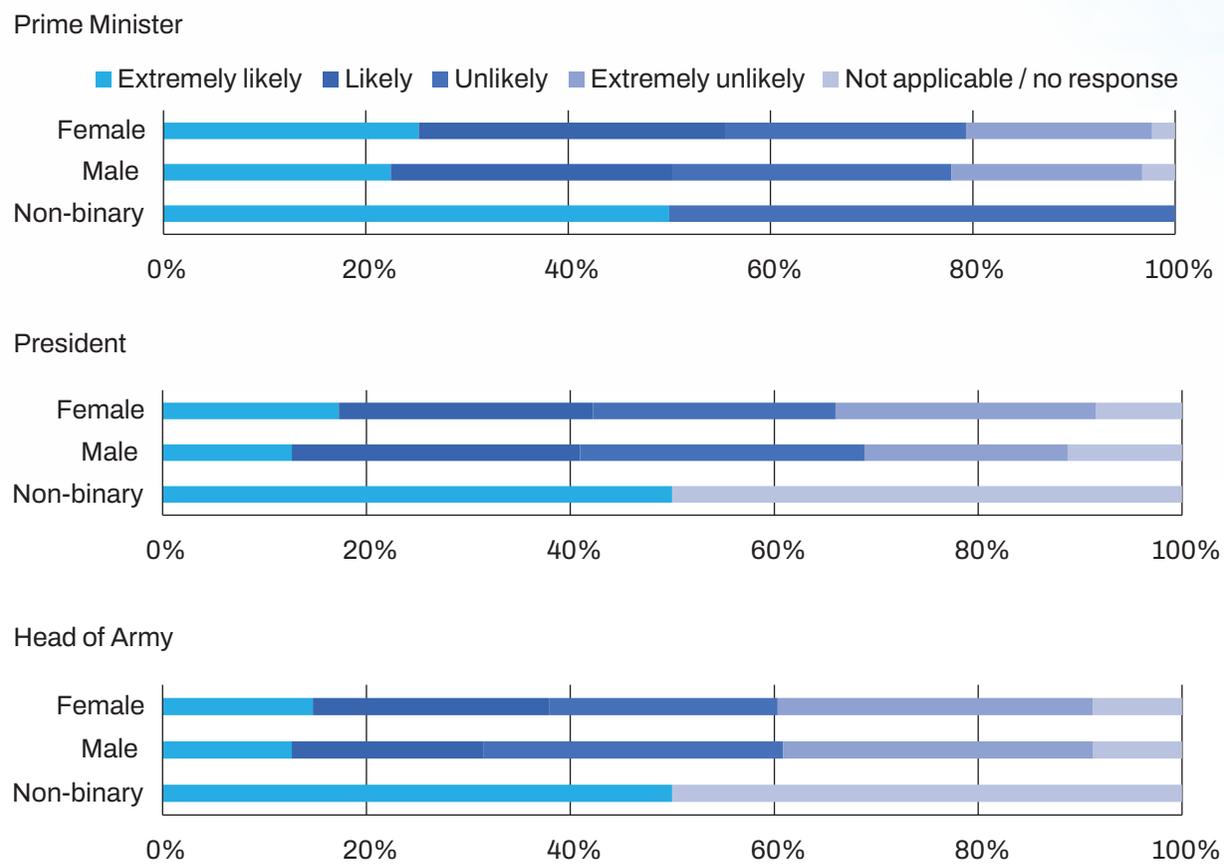
Leadership attributes

USP students were asked to rate a series of leadership qualities as either 'essential', 'very important', 'slightly important', or 'not at all important'. Figures 7 and 8 report the percentage of students who considered specific leadership qualities as 'essential'. With very little gender difference, students did not consider 'aggression', 'arrogance' or 'stubbornness' as essential leadership qualities. Female students were less likely than both male and non-binary students to consider being 'religious', 'humble', 'assertive' and 'ambitious' essential leadership qualities. Female students were slightly more likely than male students, however, to consider being Christian an essential leadership quality.

Figure 7: Leadership qualities considered less 'essential', by gender
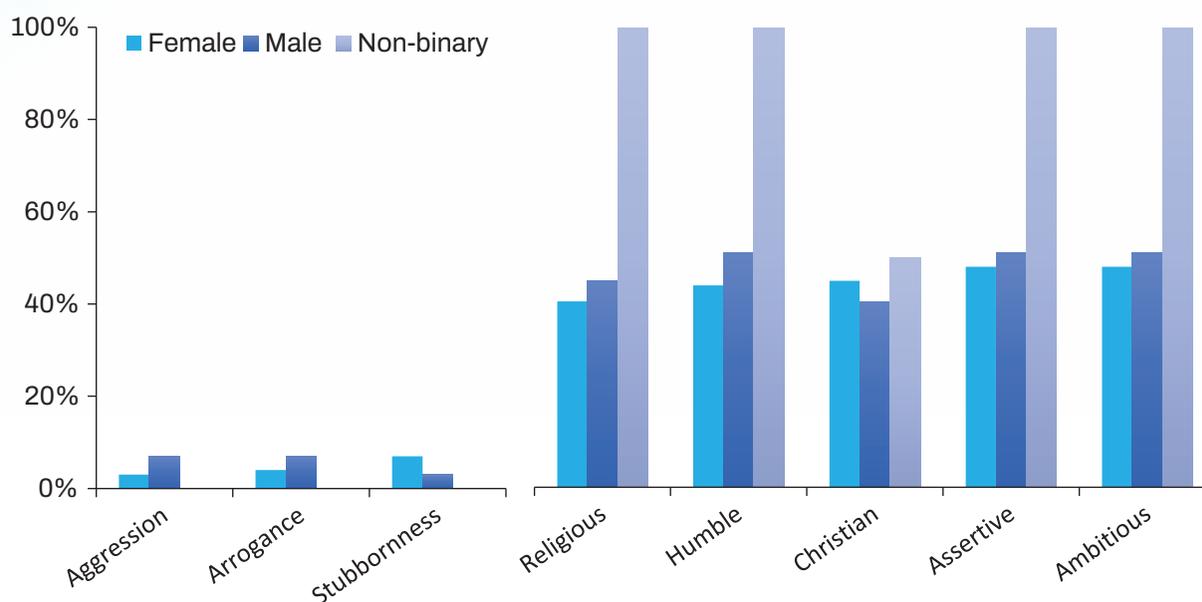
Figure 8 presents the leadership qualities that USP students were more likely to consider 'essential'. At least 60 per cent of all students considered being 'articulate', 'intelligent', 'creative', 'compassionate', 'honest' and 'hardworking' as essential, with slightly larger differences of opinion between female and male students evident in relation to being creative (12 percentage points) and compassionate (10 percentage points). Non-binary students systematically regarded all of the nominated leadership qualities as 'essential'.

Figure 8: Leadership qualities considered more 'essential', by gender
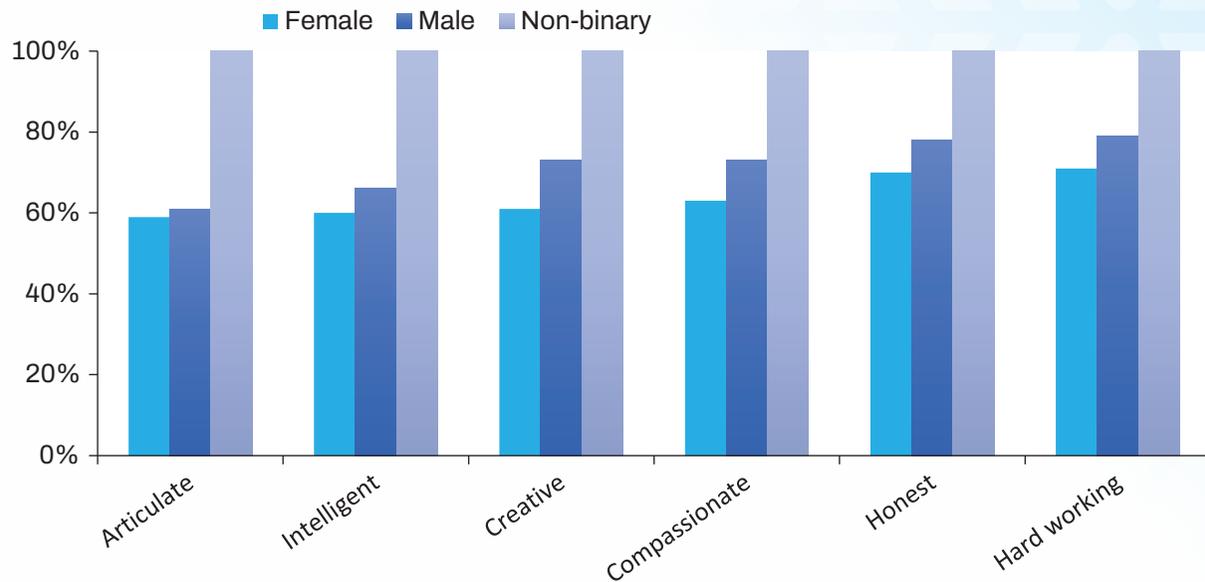
As noted in the introduction, we shared this data with research participants at a workshop in November 2021. In a world café style in which all participants were able to voice and share their interpretations of the data, the data on student attitudes towards women in leadership was considered, as well as what the data did not say ('what is missing') and their interpretations of that data. Participants identified a need for more knowledge and awareness of the need for women in leadership. Students pointed to conservative, traditional mindsets which kept women from participating in leadership. While participants considered that education and new generations of young people brought up in different ways at home would be instrumental in leading that attitudinal shift, they also considered that women themselves needed to become more assertive in their demand for leadership.

Box 1. Attitudes towards women in leadership	
WHAT IS MISSING?	**REFLECTIONS & THOUGHTS**
Knowledge and wisdom	These traits are essential for women's leadership
	Leadership traits like assertiveness are essential for women leaders
Counselling is needed	More awareness and participation are needed
	Times have changed and we need adapt to the change
More empowerment so women can have the courage to lead	Focus group discussions and talanoa sessions would have given a more in-depth view of the realities and statistics
	Better upbringing of children to help change the intergenerational mindset
Change of mentality	Everything begins from home

Leadership qualifications

With respect to the qualifications required to become a political leader, the survey suggests that USP students had quite similar opinions. In terms of the more technical qualifications of speaking English, and having some level of education (see Figure 9), most female and male students agreed that these were essential, or very important (although, interestingly, some non-binary students regarded each of the qualifications as 'not at all important'). The most significant differences between male and female students are evident on the question of a university degree: male students were more likely than female students to consider these either 'essential' (56% compared with 49%) or 'very important'.

Figure 9: Technical leadership qualifications, by gender

Speak English fluently

■ Essential ■ Very important ■ Slightly important ■ Not at all important

Completed secondary school

Have a university degree
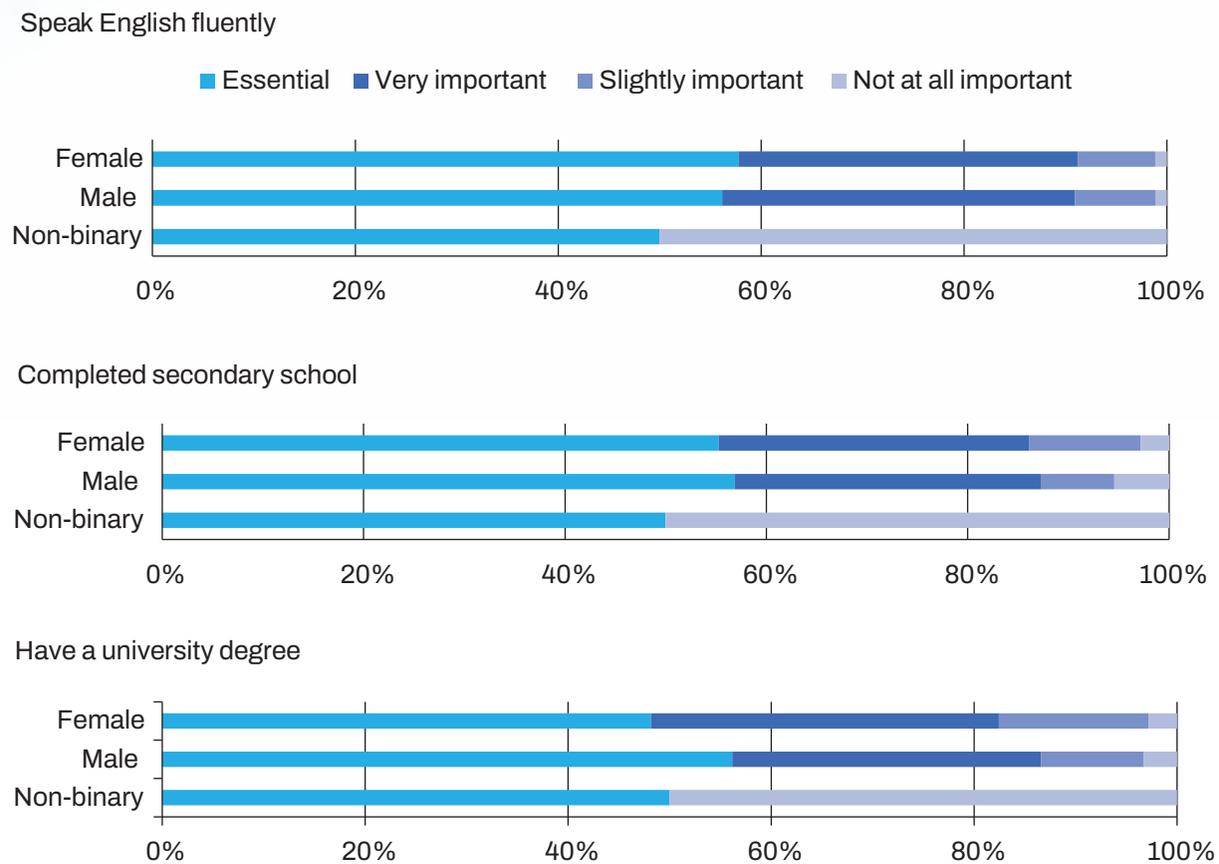
The previous experience or background of leaders was considered less essential than technical qualifications such as speaking English or having a certain level of education (see Figure 10), but still important. All students considered work with the local community as far more important than a political background. Approximately 50 per cent of all students rated community work as either essential or very important, compared with just 20 per cent of female students and 25 per cent of male students considering a political background essential or very important.

Figure 10: Previous experience as leadership qualifications, by gender

Work with the local community
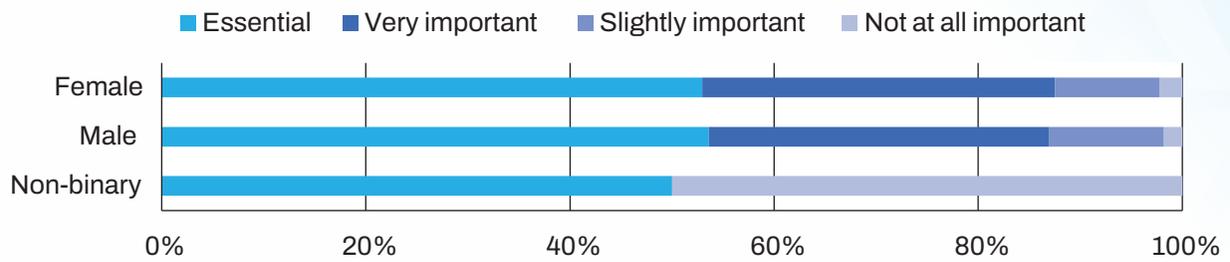
Previous experience in politics
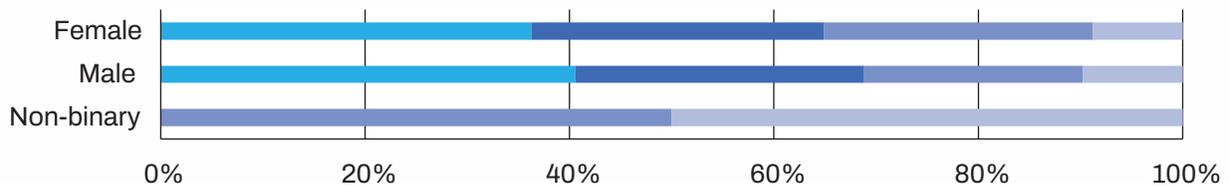
Political background
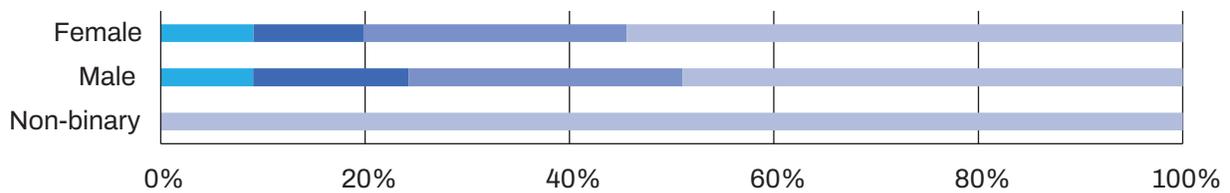
Figure 11: Family as a leadership qualification, by gender

Come from a wealthy family

Legend: ■ Essential ■ Very important ■ Slightly important ■ Not at all important

Female
Male
Non-binary

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Come from a Chiefly family

Female
Male
Non-binary

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
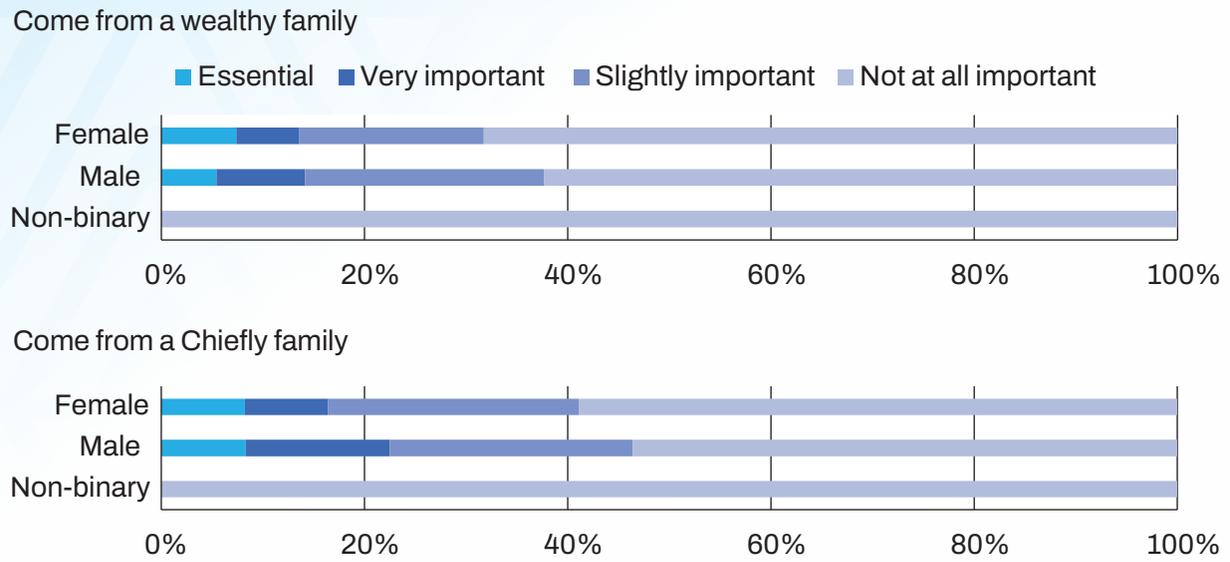
USP students did not consider family connections as a key qualification to enter politics. Approximately 15 per cent of male and female students, and none of the non-binary students considered coming from a wealthy family as 'essential' or 'very important' leadership qualifications. Slightly more male students than female students considered that coming from a chiefly family was 'very important'.

Student awareness of women's political leadership

Figure 12: Students' awareness of the percentage of women in national parliament, by gender
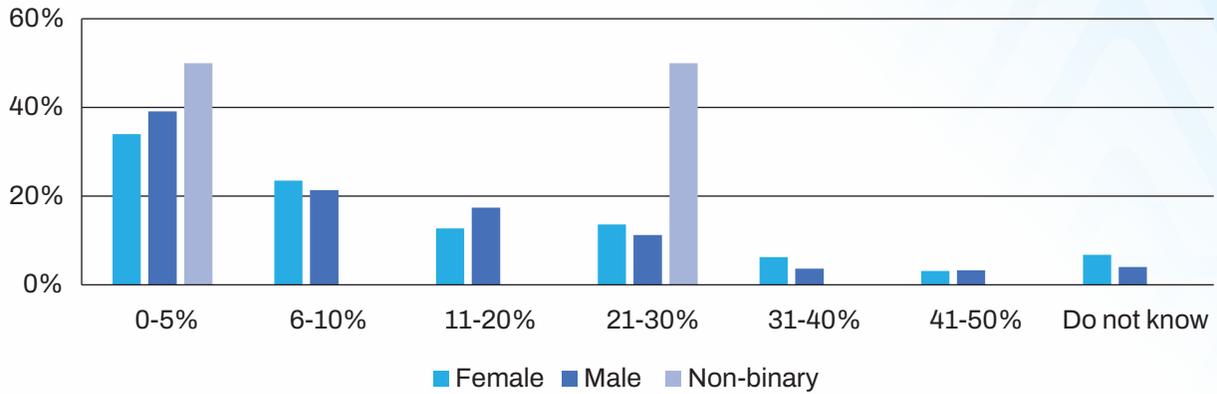
USP students had a quite diverse understanding of women's representation in national parliaments across the region (see Figure 12). Most of the students responding to our survey thought that women represented between 0 and 5 per cent of elected members of Pacific national legislatures. A small minority of students considered that women represented between 31 and 50 per cent of national legislatures in the region. Slightly more female students than male students admitted that they 'do not know'.

Figure 13: Positive and negative perceptions of women political leaders, by gender
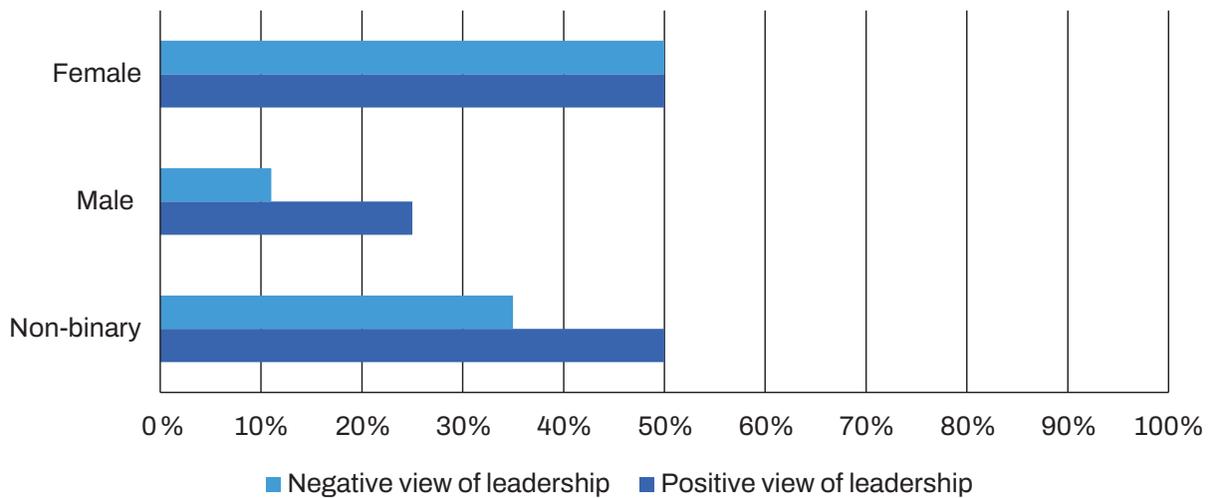
We asked USP students to nominate political leaders whom they perceived positively, as well as leaders they perceived negatively (Figures 13 and 14). Male and non-binary students were more likely to nominate a male political leader than a female political leader – irrespective of whether they considered those leaders positively or negatively.

Of all the women political leaders nominated by the students in the survey (see Figure 13), female students were equally likely to reflect on their leadership negatively (light blue line) and positively (dark

blue line) (50% each way). Male students were less likely to consider (the few) women political leaders they nominated negatively (10%) than positively (20%). Non-binary students were also more likely to view women political leaders positively (50%) than negatively (35%).

Figure 14: Positive and negative perceptions of men political leaders, by gender
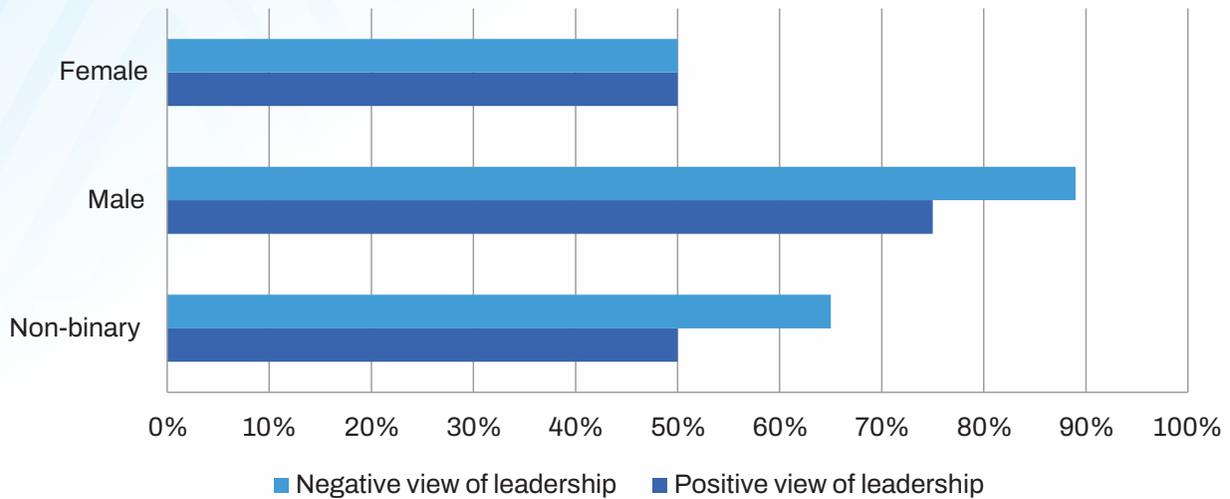
The converse is evident for male leaders (see Figure 14). Male and non-binary students were both more likely to view the leadership of male political leaders negatively. Male students in particular appeared highly dissatisfied with men in politics (88%), compared with 65 per cent of non-binary students and 50 per cent of female students.

When we shared this data on perceptions of leadership with research participants at our workshop in November 2021, the discussion focused on the meaning of leadership. Participants considered that leadership has different meanings, in different Pacific contexts. Democratic and traditional governance contexts, for example, come with quite diverse understandings of leadership, including culturally appropriate leadership. This raised further consideration of the role of culture and religion in defining societal values of leadership in the Pacific. The world café also facilitated a discussion on the role of women in preserving traditional values of leadership when, and if, they only 'support women they know'.

Box 2. Student Awareness of Women in Leadership	
WHAT IS MISSING?	**REFLECTIONS & THOUGHTS**
Knowledge and education (curriculum needs to change)	Need to define what leadership is (different contexts)
Wisdom (proper application of knowledge)	Need to reach through to students and the wider public through other avenues i.e., culture & religion
Moral values (start at home)	
Target the younger generation	Students are aware – but more needs to be done
Linking of culture and religious values to empowerment of women	Conservative mindset makes it harder to discuss in groups
Lack of support from other women – women only support women whom they know	Strengthen policies on equal representation
	Time will change a lot of things

Voting for women

Figure 15: Likelihood of voting for women candidates, by gender

Women candidates participating in national radio/ TV debates

■ Extremely likely ■ Likely ■ Unlikely ■ Extremely unlikely ■ Not applicable / No response

Women establishing development projects in your community

Women candidates leading church groups in your community

Women candidates running a successful business
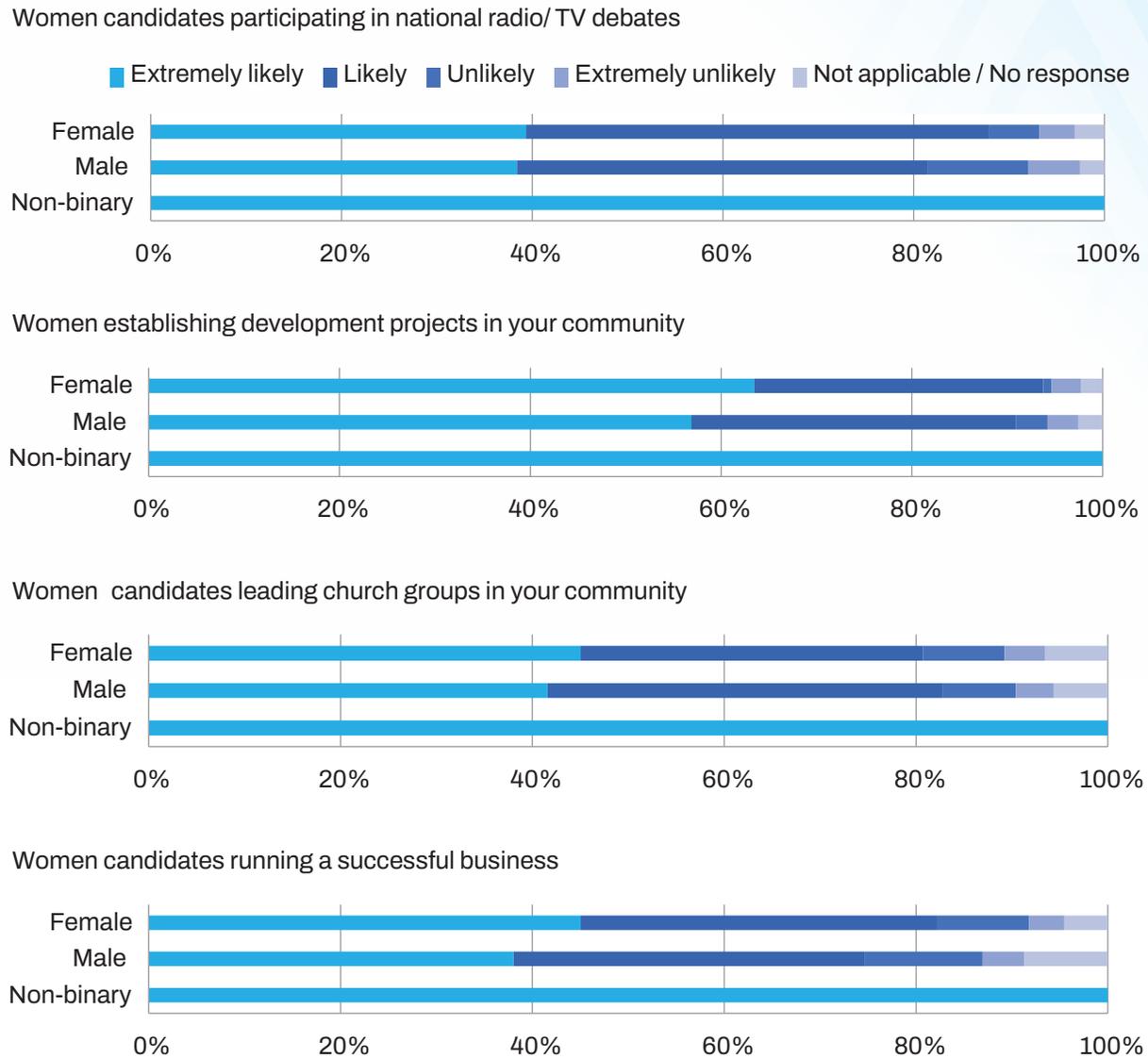
USP students were asked to consider a range of measures that might lead them to consider voting for women candidates at a future general election in their country (see Figure 15). Importantly, very few of the students considered it 'extremely unlikely' that they would vote for a woman, irrespective of the measure being considered. The measure most likely to encourage students (male, female and non-binary) was 'women establishing development projects in [their] community'. Over 60 per cent of female students, 58 per cent of the male students and all the non-binary students would be persuaded to vote for women candidates who were able to bring development projects to communities. Less effective as an encouragement to vote for women was their running a successful business, or participating in national TV or radio debates.

Role of USP and USPSA in promoting women's leadership

Figure 16: Measures to promote women's leadership, by gender

Adopting guidelines and complaints mechanisms to eliminate sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment of staff and students

■ Strongly disagree ■ Slightly disagree ■ Slightly agree ■ Strongly agree
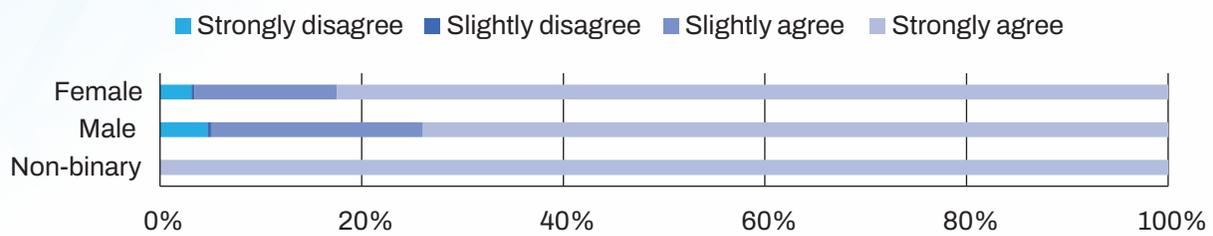
Recruiting and promoting more women in academia
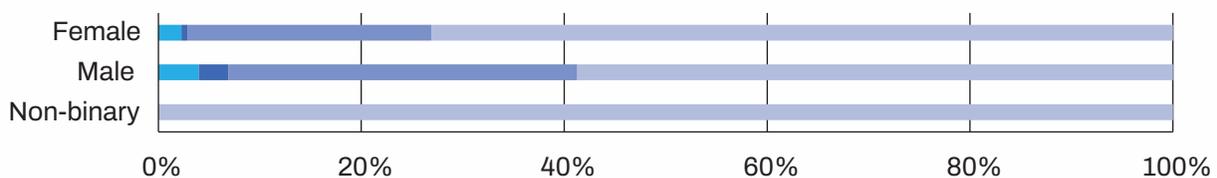
Enrolling more women students in all fields
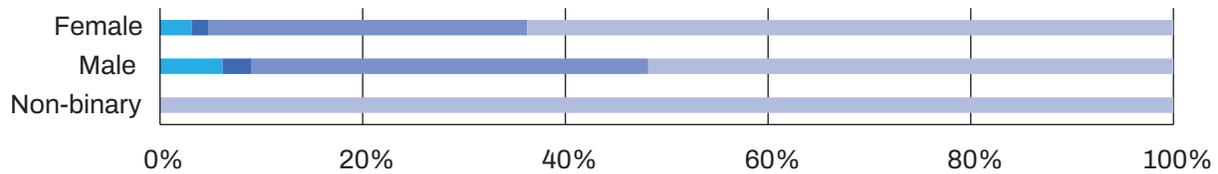
The students all agreed that USP and USPSA had an important role to play in the promotion of women's leadership (Figure 16). Over 50 per cent of all students – male, female and non-binary – strongly agreed that USP could promote women's leadership by adopting guidelines and complaints mechanisms to eliminate sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment of staff and students, recruit and promote more women academics, and enrol more women students across all fields of study. That said, gender differences appear. Male students were less enthusiastic about each one of these measures, with the greatest difference evident in male students' endorsement of the recruitment of more women in academia.

USPSA adoption of quotas

Quotas have been adopted in many sectors to support women's leadership. USP students were asked whether they should be adopted across the university. On this question, there were significant gender differences. Consistently, a maximum of 40 per cent male students strongly agreed that gender parity quotas should be adopted to increase the number of women as professional staff, academic staff, university executives, and students. Female and non-binary students consistently endorsed the idea of quotas to support women across USP; while non-binary students always strongly agreed with the adoption of quotas for professional staff, academic staff, university executives and students. Between 58 and 61 per cent of female students strongly agreed that quotas should be applied to these groups.

Figure 17: Adoption of quotas across the university, by gender

A quota of 50 per cent women <u>professional</u> staff should be adopted
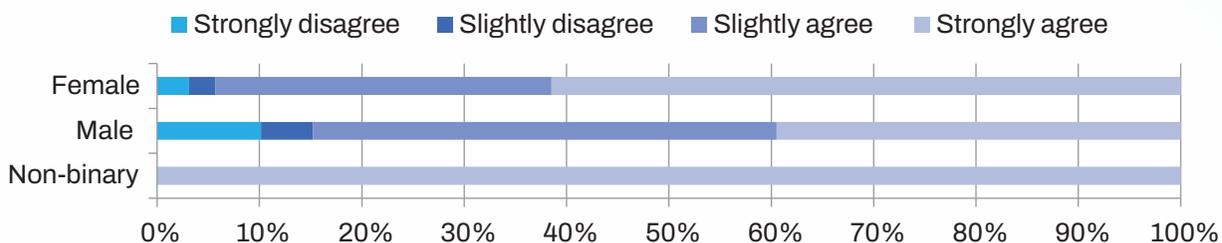
A quota of 50 per cent women <u>academic staff</u> should be adopted
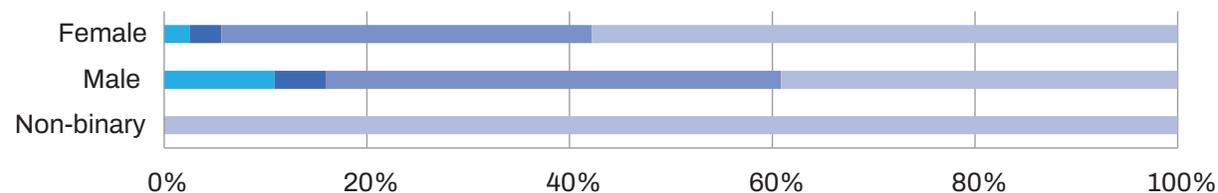
A quota of 50 per cent women in <u>university executives</u> should be adopted
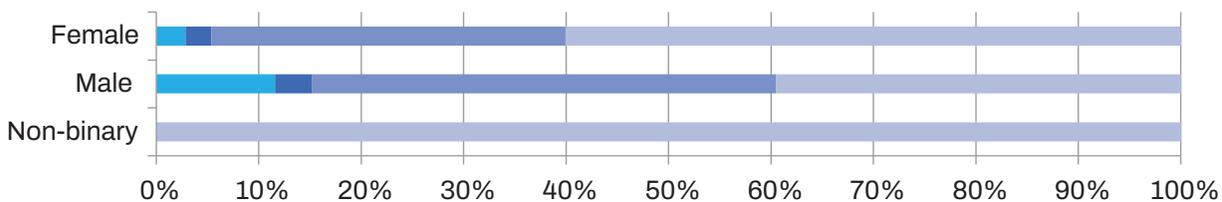
A quota of 50 per cent women <u>students</u> should be adopted
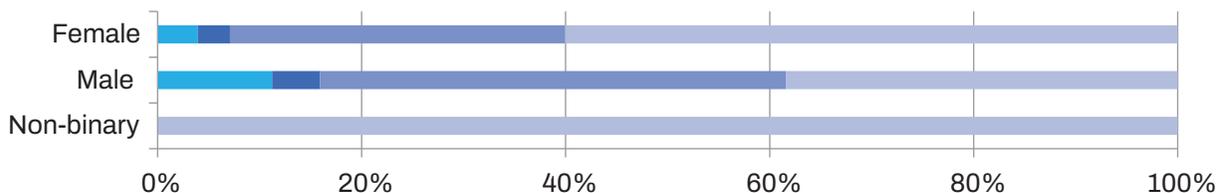
The world café discussion on the role of USPSA in promoting women in leadership (see Box 3) was lively and action orientated. Participants listed a number of activities that USPSA (and USP) could implement including targeted measures to support women's leadership and education through scholarships, ensuring women's participation in cultural group events. The conversation about targeted measures to support women also circled back to mindsets which are fostered at home and in the community, and the need for these to become more progressive.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Box 3. Role of USPSA in Promoting Women in Leadership</td></tr>
<tr><td>WHAT IS MISSING?</td><td>REFLECTIONS & THOUGHTS</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Women's capacity development

Scholarships for women

Enhance student engagement with USPSA (first step)

Education system that supports women

Cultural groups need to include more women's empowerment events

Women themselves to change their mentality

Work with the right people, like minded, like hearted

Promoting USPSA during student orientation week

Allowing cultural leaders to conduct registrations and promote participation

</td><td>

Change our mindset of women taking up leadership roles

Action and more awareness is still needed

We are at the initial stage; we need to promote this partnership in a robust manner

Family is the foundation of every change and development

Active participation from women is needed

Walk the talk

</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 1: Survey instrument

BOP-USPSA Research on Attitudes to Women's Leadership
Draft Questionnaire

Introduction

This research is a partnership project by the Balance of Power (BOP), a multi-country program under the Australian Government's *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* (Pacific Women) initiative, and the University of the South Pacific (USP), specifically the (USP) student association, the (USPSA).

This study will gauge and analyse the extent of student's attitudes, perceptions, and realisation of women's leadership in the Pacific. As students and emerging Pacific leaders this research will be a useful learning tool and platform to help deepen and enhance student's knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding women's leadership, and its legitimacy across diverse socio-cultural and political contexts. Students are encouraged to willingly participate in this research as findings will also be used as a mechanism to help identify entry points for future BOP/USPSA activities focused on fostering more inclusive perceptions on the importance of balance of power in leadership. Nonetheless, BOP-USPSA is interested in:

- Students views of women's leadership in their own country
- Students views of the necessary support needed to facilitate more women in leadership in their own country
- Students views of the roles USP and USPSA need to play in promoting women's leadership.

Please be advised that there are no 'right answers' to any of the questions posed. As mentioned, responses to this questionnaire will be used to identify ways to better support USP, USPSA and BOP in broadening the perceptions and understanding of the legitimacy of women's leadership in the Pacific.

We kindly ask you to respond and email the questionnaire back to bopuspsresearch@gmail.com by the latest on Tuesday **13 April 2021.**

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

Consent to take part in the survey	Please tick
Yes	
No	

PART 1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

For analysis purposes, we need to get some information about you. Once again, we want to assure you that all the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

1. What is your age?	Please tick
18-35 years	
36-55 years	
55+	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

2. What gender do you identify as?	Please tick
Male	
Female	
Other	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

3. Do you consider yourself a person with a disability?	Please tick
Yes	
No	
Prefer not to say	

4. What is your nationality?
Please note: Questions in this survey will ask about your experience in this country.

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

5. Where do you usually live?	Please tick
In a capital (or major) city	
In a provincial town	
In a rural area / town	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

6. What is your marital status	Please tick
Single (never married)	
Legally married	
Customary married, live-in, de facto, engaged	
Divorced / Separated	
Widowed	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

7. What religion do you practice?	Please tick
Christian	
Buddhist	
Muslim	
Hindu	
Other	
None	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

8. How often do you attend religious services?	Please tick
Once a year	
Once a month	
Once a week	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

9. Are you an undergraduate or postgraduate student?	Please tick
Undergraduate	
Postgraduate	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

10. What school, college or centre are you enrolled in?	Please tick
School of Accounting, Finance and Economics (SAFE)	
School of Agriculture, Geography, Environment, Ocean, and Natural Sciences (SAGEONS)	
School of Business and Management (SBM)	
School of Information Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Physics (STEMP)	
School of Law and Social Sciences (SOLASS)	
School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education (SPACE)	
Pacific TAFE (PTAFE)	
Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD)	
Other (please specify below)	

(Tick as many in the space where your answer applies)

11. What USPSA group do you belong to?	Please tick
Cook Islands Students Association	
Vanuatu Students Association	
I-Kiribati Students Association	
Marshall Students Association	
Nauruan Student Association	
Nieuan Student Association	
Samoan Student Association	
Solomon Islands Student Association	
Tokelau Student Association	
Tongan Student Association	
Tuvaluan Student Association	
Vanuatu Student Association	
Fiji Student Association	
Banaban Student Association	
Chinese Student Association	
itaukei Student Association	
Indo- Fijian Student Association	
Rotuman Student Association	
Christian Fellowship Student Association	
Every Nation Student Association	
Latter-day Saint Student Association	
Catholic Student Association	
Soul Seekers Student Association	
Islamic Society Student Association	
Hindu Student Association	
USP International Youth Fellowship	
Others (please specify below)	

PART 2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
Women are under-represented in my country's government				
It would be better for the country if there were more women in national government				
In my country today, men and women have equal rights				
Women should return to their traditional roles in society				
Men generally make better political leaders than women				
My culture is supportive of women's leadership				

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

13. How likely are the following positions to be filled by a woman in your country within the next ten years?	Extremely Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Extremely Likely	Not applicable / No response
Ambassador					
Minister for Education					
Minister for Health					
Minister for Foreign Affairs					
Minister for Finance					
Prime Minister					
Attorney General					
President					
Head of an Army (Commodore General)					

LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

14. How important are the following traits for a leader to have?	Essential	Very Important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Arrogance				
Aggression (aggressive)				
Stubbornness				
Submissiveness (submissive)				
Emotional				
Ambitious				
Assertive				
Christian				
Religious				
Humility (humble)				
Creativity (creative)				
Compassionate (caring)				
Articulate				
Honest				
Hard working				

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

15. Are the following leadership traits for a leader to have?	Important for women leaders to posses	Equally true for men and women leaders	Important for men leaders to posses	Not at all important
Arrogance				
Aggression (aggressive)				
Stubbornness				
Submissiveness (submissive)				
Emotional				
Ambitious				
Assertive				
Christian				
Religious				
Humility (humble)				
Creativity (creative)				
Compassionate (caring)				
Articulate				
Honest				
Hard working				

LEADERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

16. How important are the following leadership qualifications for political leaders in your country?	Essential	Very Important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Speak English fluently				
Have completed secondary school				
Have a university degree				
Have a history of working with the local community to develop projects				
Have a strong and visible presence within the community				
Have a previous experience in politics				
Come from a wealthy family				
Come from a family with strong political background				
Come from a Chiefly family				

PART 3. STUDENT AWARENESS OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

DEGREE OF POLITICAL AWARENESS

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

17. Was the current government in your country elected?	Please tick
Yes	
No	
Do not know	

18. What year was the last national government elections held?	Please tick
Please enter the year here	
Do not know	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

19. What year was the last local government elections held?	Please tick
Please enter the year here	
Do not know	

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

20. What proportion of the parliament do you think women represent in your country?	Please tick
Please enter the year here	
Do not know	

21.   Name a political leader whose leadership style you view positively?
Please enter the name here

22.   Name a political leader whose leadership style you view negatively?
Please enter the name here

VOTING FOR WOMEN

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

22. Would the following activities improve the likelihood of you voting for a woman at the next election?	Extremely Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Extremely Likely	Not applicable / No response
Women candidates participating in national radio/TV debates					
Women candidates participating in a 'practice' parliamentary debate					
Women candidates establishing development projects in your community					
Women candidates leading church groups in your community					
Women candidates running a successful business in your community					

23. If there were one thing that you could do to improve the balance of power between men and women in leadership, what would it be?

PART 4. ROLE OF USP AND USPSA IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

24. To what extent do you agree that the USP Executive and School Leaders should promote women's leadership within the university by …?	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
Recruiting and promoting more women academics in all fields				
Enrolling more women students in all fields				
Adopting guidelines and complaints mechanisms to eliminate sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment of staff and students				

(Tick in the space where your answer applies)

25. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
A quota of 50 per cent women academic staff should be adopted across all schools and colleges				
A quota of 50 per cent women professional staff should be adopted across all schools and colleges				
A quota of 50 per cent women in university executive should be adopted across all schools and colleges				
A quota of 50 per cent women students should be adopted across all schools and colleges				

(Please RANK your top responses from 1 to 4 in the space provided)

25. What should the USPSA do to promote women's leadership within its organisation and groups?	Rank
Establish a mentoring programme for aspiring women leaders	
Organise seminars on women's leadership	
Design and implement programs with men interested in promoting women's leadership	
Lobby (the university, government, private sector) for more women in leadership positions	
Others (please specify below)	