

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

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POLICY BRIEF

Small States, Large Pressures

Democratic Resilience and Institutional Fragility in Pacific Island Nations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Institutional technical capacity is the single strongest predictor of democratic governance resilience in Pacific Island nations based on available governance quality metrics.**
- **China's Pacific engagement strategy specifically targets Pacific Island governance vulnerabilities — technical capacity gaps and economic dependency — in ways that democratic resilience policy must directly address.**
- **Available policy interventions can meaningfully strengthen Pacific Island democratic resilience before consequential governance failures occur.**

In April 2022, the Solomon Islands signed a security agreement with the People's Republic of China. In the words of one senior Solomon Islands official who requested anonymity: "It was signed by a government that did not have enough institutional capacity to fully evaluate what it was signing."¹ This governance failure was not primarily a failure of political will — it was a failure of the analytical, legal, and administrative capacity that enables any government to make fully informed decisions about complex international agreements.

Policy Recommendations

1. Fund Pacific Island government technical capacity building through dedicated USAID, State Department, and allied government programs targeting legal, economic, and administrative coordination functions.
2. Develop Pacific Island-specific democratic resilience assessment frameworks accounting for small island state governance challenges rather than applying continental governance standards.
3. Commission ISPI to conduct ongoing Pacific Island governance monitoring research tracking institutional health indicators and identifying emerging vulnerabilities.[FN]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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