



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction to Policing in the Pacific

**Abstract** Research on policing in the Pacific Islands draws from multiple disciplines, reflecting the multifaceted nature of policing in local contexts that neither fit a Western model of statehood nor adopt an analytic position from the global North. This chapter sets the scene for a focused, contextualised and interdisciplinary discussion of policing in Pacific Islands countries and territories. It recognises the need to analyse policing both within the broader context of the global dynamics of policing, crime and (in)security, and within the specific, complex, and diverse countries and territories of the region. The chapter outlines the structure of the book and provides an overview of the chapters that follow.

**Keywords** Pacific policing · Policing landscape · Policing themes

## BACKGROUND

Police, as the most visible arm of government and the primary interface between a state and its population, signify and implement a state's right to engage in actions intended to ensure legislated acceptable behaviours from its populace (Dunham & Alpert, 2010; Pollock, 1998). The power and authority assigned to state police place police and acts of (and associated with) policing at the forefront of criminological and other popular

discourses. Contemporary policing scholarship has shifted away from a basic focus on police use of authority, power, persuasion, and force to broader multidisciplinary and prismatic understandings of policing as complex (Hughes et al., 2013; Prenzler & Sarre, 2002), evolving (Kelling & Wycoff, 2001), non-singular (Dinnen & Braithwaite, 2009; Greener, 2009; Jones & Lister, 2015; Jones & Newburn, 2006; Loader, 2000), and impacted by contextual variables (Dempsey & Forst, 2015; Newburn, 2012; Watson, 2018; Watson & Kerrigan, 2018). While these topics continue to be explored extensively by policing scholars in developed countries with a history of dominance in knowledge production, the growing body of literature on policing in developing countries, particularly Pacific Islands countries and territories (PICTs), is not as extensive.

Pacific scholars have typically taken an indirect or parallelistic approach to policing that shifts the primary focus away from criminological positioning to an adapted hybridised disciplinary mix more suited to the multifaceted nature of policing in contexts that do not fit neatly into Western models of state(hood). This, in part, serves as an acknowledgement of police as an imported security mechanism that evolves to suit the context. Research from different interdisciplinary camps, specifically anthropology, gender, cultural, and environmental studies—which also account for the majority of sources with a specific focus on policing in the Pacific—draw attention to the myriad of societal manifestations of dysfunctions and threats to security across the Pacific region. These dysfunctions and threats are primarily in relation to marginalised groups, climate, natural resources, and cultural capital. Interdisciplinary scholarship also highlights the inadequacy of responses and the need to expand the scope of discussions aimed at generating actionable solutions. The secondary positioning of policing by scholars in these fields means that scholarly literature is dispersed among multiple de-linked sources with no particular focus on presenting a holistic view of policing in PICTs. This, on the one hand, may be interpreted as a signal to researchers of a need to cover more criminological ground; while, on the other, it might highlight the need for greater collaborative efforts. *Policing in the Pacific Islands* is a combination of both interpretations.

*Policing in the Pacific Islands* examines a large body of secondary data from multiple sources to draw attention to the multifaceted nature of policing in contemporary Pacific Island societies. We explore selected themes relevant to an understanding of the complex roles of policing,

both specifically as critical to governance and service delivery, and more generally in terms of broader issues and future directions in Pacific policing. The political and legal relationship between policing organisations and other government departments, police relationships with women, youth and vulnerable groups, responses to crime and criminality, and the increasing requirement for human resource deployment in a limited or resource-constrained environment are discussed. We provide a contextualised account of policing and how it is practised in small island developing states across the Pacific region, and elaborate on emerging global issues within policing discourses such as terrorism, and transnational and cross-border crimes, and how these issues can affect regional security and governance.

Beyond the focus on policing, we aim to unpack the sometimes singular and historic representations of the Pacific region, which can lead to flawed assumptions about regional uniformity and overshadow the realities of the complexity and diversity of the region. We do this not to deny the existence of similarities across the region, nor to undermine the value of regional discussions and presentations, but to caution against assumptions about the creation of an all-inclusive narrative with applicability for all PICTs. Attention is drawn to the region's rich and varied colonial past (and present), existing complexities between nationalism and dependence, and reliance on external entities and cooperation. Pacific policing is explored as the maintenance of law and order within a specific geographic remit, with local, regional, and international stakeholders that can have competing or conflicting geopolitical agendas. We also highlight the multifaceted nature of policing beyond well-known enforcement roles, as well as the place of different types of regulatory authorities and actors in the Pacific, which are informed by not only law, but also community norms—often referred to as *kastom*—associated with local forms of customary or traditional authority, religion, and Indigenous arbitration practices.

## CHAPTER ORGANISATION

While we acknowledge the multifaceted nature of policing and the wide range of themes covered in policing scholarship, we do not claim to cover all policing-related topics or realities specific to all PICTs. Instead, we discuss five priority themes to provide scholars and practitioners with an overview of the complex issues that are at the forefront of local, regional,

and international Pacific security discourses. These themes are security challenges, the changing crime landscape, multiple security actors, the internationalisation of responses to crime and criminality, and women in security. These themes are discussed in five chapters as follows.

Chapter 2 discusses context-specific issues and challenges faced by police officers in PICTs. It draws on examples from Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia to show that police officers in the Pacific are faced with conventional policing challenges as well as ‘unconventional’ issues specific to island territories with strained resources, strong cultures and traditions, reliance on external support, unconventionally policed spaces, and large and often fragmented jurisdictions. It also examines formal and informal policing roles underscored by tradition, culture, and religion, and shows that policing in the Pacific is as much about improvisation as it is about discretion and professional practice. In addition, this chapter highlights the need for literature based on research evidence that is historically, contextually, and socially specific, if solutions are to be derived to address local and regional policing challenges.

Critical to an understanding of policing in any context are insights into the crime prevention and response mandate. Chapter 3 explores the changing face of crime, disorder, and law enforcement in PICTs. Police organisations across the globe have undergone significant changes in an attempt to respond to the new and emerging threats with which they are faced. This is also true for the Pacific region as climate change induced population displacements, expanded food insecurity, rapid urbanisation, and new technologies are changing crime, disorder, and policing practices. We describe changes in the types of crimes police officers are required to respond to and discuss how these ‘new’ crimes prompt specific types of organisational shifts. We also elaborate on internal adjustments, as well as international partnerships forged as a response to the changing face of crime and disorder.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the plural dimensions of policing provision in the Pacific. This includes the role of diverse policing actors operating at different scales—local, regional, international, and transnational—as constituent parts of broader security assemblages. As well as the familiar form of public police organisations, these actors include informal policing arrangements drawing on local *kastom* and faith-based authority, as well as the expanding domains of transnational and private policing in recent years. The chapter also discusses how growing recognition

of pluralisation by scholars has encouraged a more expansive conceptualisation of policing as a network of power and regulation involving multiple actors and a variety of institutional forms, thereby moving beyond a conventional focus on the police as a discrete organisation. In doing so, the chapter examines how the notion of plural policing unsettles longstanding assumptions about the primacy of states in security governance.

Chapter 5 examines the complex endeavour of international policing. In the Pacific, where countries are typically categorised as developing nations, and some additionally as fragile or conflict-affected states, capacity development has long been a focus of international policing. Additionally, since the beginning of the twenty-first century (and particularly since 11 September 2001), security threats such as terrorism and transnational crime have become increasingly prominent. Resolving such complex internal and external security threats is beyond the capacity of a single jurisdiction; partnerships are crucial, but they are shaped by various social and political forces. This chapter examines the forms of international cooperation that shape and contribute to policing organisations in the Pacific. It provides specific examples of policing partnerships in the Pacific region, discusses the fragility and variances that underpin them, and highlights strengths identified in research and practice on which to build.

Chapter 6 examines women and the institution of policing in the Pacific. Gender equality has been a primary focal area for international, regional, and local organisations working in the Pacific, largely because of high numbers of documented cases of gender inequality and the prevalence of crimes against women. The gender agenda has resulted in significant attention being drawn to police organisations as the most visible arm of governance and because of their role in responding to violence against women and girls. One proposed solution to advancing the gender agenda has been to increase the number of female police officers. Achieving this goal has been hampered by many challenges: professional, institutional, and social. Here, we explore the place of women in highly gendered policing organisations and provide a general overview of the multiple roles they negotiate as women in policing in the Pacific Islands.

We conclude with a summary of key issues presented throughout the book and a discussion about the ways forward for policing in the Pacific Islands. We consider what the preceding chapters together tell us about

policing in the Pacific and how these arguments are situated within (or come into conflict with) broader discourses and theories about contemporary policing practice. We also propose an agenda for future directions for dialogue, research, and scholarship on policing in the Pacific Islands.

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