



Picturesque seaside fishing village in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada.



Progress and success by sovereignty?

The attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in small island states, Small Island Developing States, and subnational island jurisdictions

ABSTRACT

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a crucial milestone for small island states (SIS), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs), and understanding perceptions and support from citizens towards the SDGs is critical for governments to implement suitable policies. Notwithstanding progress in

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meeting key SDGs, especially in relation to reducing poverty, social, and gender inequalities, as well as improving access to education and health, there are still areas where progress has stalled, and where governments face difficulties in interpreting public opinion needed to promote effective interventions. This chapter seeks to answer, for a selected group of SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs, the relationship between the importance given to SDGs by island citizens and the actions taken by governments to meet the SDGs. We aim to close a knowledge gap and contribute to a growing debate in island studies, in understanding the characteristics — and, potentially, factors — that shape public perceptions of success in achieving SDGs. The chapter adopts a quantitative approach by using correlation analysis, utilizing an original survey conducted in ten SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs. We find that issues connected to sovereignty, population dynamics, and wealth can potentially help to interpret current gaps in policy implementation and to support the success by governments to meet their SDG targets.

INTRODUCTION

Positioning the research in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals on islands

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a crucial milestone for small island states (SIS), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs), given existing vulnerabilities — generally due to small size and remoteness — which limit economies of scale and increase the relative costs of practically everything (Briguglio et al., 2020). In this context, understanding perceptions and support from citizens towards the SDGs is critical for governments in islands, especially in implementing broadly accepted policies to attain those goals.

Notwithstanding progress in meeting key SDGs, especially in relation to reducing poverty, social, and gender inequalities, as well as improving access to education and health (Sachs et al., 2020), there are still areas where progress has stalled, where governments face difficulties in interpreting what factors delay the achievement of such goals, and how interpreting public opinion can help to promote effective interventions.

This chapter seeks to answer, for a small group of SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs, the relationship between the importance given to SDGs by island citizens and the actions taken by their island governments to meet the SDGs. More specifically, our research tests the hypotheses that the degree of sovereignty, population size, and income levels all have an influence on the importance attached to the SDGs and the success by governments in meeting the targets. As we undertake this analysis, we are aware that SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs may exhibit different characteristics that affect their development and sustainability initiatives. While we respect these distinctions in the analysis and the literature review which follows, much of the literature on these types of islands can be considered complementary.

We aim at closing a knowledge gap and contributing to a growing debate in island studies to understand the characteristics, and potentially determining factors, which shape public perception of success in achieving SDGs. The chapter adopts a quantitative approach by using correlation analysis, utilizing an original survey conducted in ten SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs. More specifically, we seek to determine if characteristics such as sovereignty, population size, and wealth can potentially help to interpret current gaps in policy implementation and the success by governments to meet their SDG targets.

This research contributes to the growing assessment in island studies literature over the impact of smallness — and remoteness — to democracy and policy processes (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018; Lévêque, 2020), and economic (Briguglio et al., 2009), social (Baldacchino, 2005), and environmental (Moncada et al., 2018) development in islands and small states.

Structure of the chapter

The next section discusses all of the factors that, according to the existing body of knowledge, are believed to be conducive to the attainment of SDGs in SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs, while also presenting the current status in relation to SDG agendas in such islands. Public perceptions regarding the achievement of and the progress towards attaining SDGs in SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs are also discussed, including existing research gaps in this area, a feature which prompted our research. The research design and methods employed to test the hypotheses are then presented, with special attention given to the survey instruments used and the island contexts within which the research is undertaken. This section also notes several limitations encountered by the research, while offering suggestions on how to address these challenges. The chapter then provides a descriptive and bivariate analysis of the survey results, discussing them in light of the literature examined in the previous sections, and assesses the degree and relevance of sovereignty, population size, and income as characteristics that may explain the success by governments in meeting their SDG targets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SIS, SIDS, SNIJs, and the SDGs

There are 58 SIDS recognized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), 38 of which are full UN members, and an additional 20 SNIJs that are associate or non-UN members. SIDS are found throughout the oceanic world, including in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans, as well as the South China Sea. In addition to these sovereign island states and this initial group of 20 SNIJs, there are many more semi-autonomous islands that are incredibly important in the world by any measure (Stuart, 2009). Their roles and relationships with

mainland states varies considerably, and can include unions, constitutionally decentralized unions, federations, confederations, federacies, associated states, and overseas territories (Baldacchino & Milne, 2006). If we add the four remaining SIS (Iceland, Malta, Cyprus, and Singapore) to these lists, the number of sovereign and non-sovereign island entities represent a typical size in a global classification, while large states seem more “quirk and anomaly” (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 40).

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is a crucial policy objective for many SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs, both to comply with commitments taken within the international community but also to increase the general wellbeing of their citizens. This is a process that some SIS started from the moment they gained independence. For many SIDS, however, it started in 1994, when the first UN global conference on the sustainable development of SIDS was held in Barbados. One of the outcomes of this meeting was the creation of the Barbados Plan of Action (BPoA). This was followed by the 2005 Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI), the 2010 MSI+5 outcome document, and

the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway adopted in 2014 during the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, all of which cemented the importance of achieving sustainable development for SIDS. More recent attempts to review the 2014 SAMOA Pathway include aligning the achievement of the objectives agreed to in the 2014 international SIDS conference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including monitoring the progress in

the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway by looking at the SDGs and their target indicators.

The body of knowledge regarding SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs has gained significant traction in recent years, with an increasing amount of research, both conceptual and applied, focusing especially on how population characteristics and dynamics, as well as economic structure, act to influence the economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental trajectories of countries and communities alike (Baldacchino, 2018; Briguglio, 2018; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018; Moncada et al., 2021a,b). Many islands have developed ecological, cultural, and societal features that distinguish them from mainlands. However, islands can also be incredibly diverse as a group. One can find low-lying, volcanic, and mountainous islands, cold and warm-water islands, as well as very wealthy and very poor islands (Randall, 2021a). Notwithstanding this diversity, there may be some underlying shared characteristics among islands, including inherent vulnerabilities due to small size and remoteness, which limit economies of scale (Briguglio, 1995), and lead to higher costs of living (Srinivasan, 1986), all of which may act as barriers to achieving the SDGs (Moncada & Bambrick, 2019; Mycoo, 2018; Shultz et al., 2019).

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At the same time, many islands have developed resilient societies and economies. A substantial number of SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs have achieved a relatively high level of economic success, while maintaining strong and long-lasting democratic records (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018). Three schools of thought have emerged to provide possible explanations for this duality of vulnerability and political-economic success. The first infers that small states are no different from larger ones in this profile (Anklesaria Aiyar, 2008; Easterly & Kraay, 2000). The second argues that, although small states face inherent obstacles, they also hold intrinsic advantages, with the latter outweighing the former (Baldacchino & Bertram, 2009). The third school of thought posits that major economic challenges can be offset by appropriate economic policy (Briguglio et al., 2009). Regardless of whether small island states make use of what Baldacchino and Bertram (2009, p. 154) refer to as people's "resourcefulness," or adopt 'policy-induced measures' as suggested by Briguglio et al. (2009), there is a general consensus that external events such as pandemics and climate change can influence the ability of many SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs to build long-lasting resilience and strengthen individual, collective, and institutional responses to external shocks (Tandrayen-Ragoobur et al., 2021). However, this resilience building, especially the complexity associated with sustainable development resilience, may come at a high cost. In fact, per capita costs on islands are higher than in many larger states, putting small island governments at an initial disadvantage (Srinivasan, 1986).

RECENT EVIDENCE CONFIRMS that small states have been highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with mortality rates amongst the highest. However, many small island states have also demonstrated a capacity to respond promptly and to contain the spread of the virus.

Recent evidence confirms that small states have been highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with mortality rates amongst the highest (Randall, 2021b; Telesford, 2021; World Health Organization, 2021). However, many small island states have also demonstrated a capacity to respond promptly and to contain the spread of the virus, probably due to a mix of isolation and jurisdictional powers that have allowed them to govern their responses (Baldacchino, 2020). This seems to be confirmed when we compare regional performances vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, SIDS in the Caribbean have performed better than other mainland regions in Central and South America in containing the spread of the disease (Hambleton et al., 2020). Additional research has also confirmed that small population size and island status can prove advantageous in supporting public health measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Taglioni, 2020), while more relaxed tactics adopted by public authorities which favour short-term economic priorities have often resulted in higher transmission rates (Cuschieri et al., 2020). Understanding what type of response SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs adopt to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic can help us understand whether progress towards achieving the SDGs is still attainable.

Public perception of achievements by governments

In this context, it is important to understand the public perception toward SDGs that exist in SIS, SIDS, and SNIJs in order to design and communicate policy tools to strengthen SDG actions. Public awareness and support of the SDGs play a crucial role in their implementation. It is also vital to understand public attitudes towards SDGs to facilitate and encourage public engagement in SDG actions.

Research suggests that public opinion constitutes an important factor when governments decide to adopt or design policies (Gamson, 1989; Goldstone, 1980; Rohrschneider, 1990). The degree to which public perception is able to influence policy development varies considerably, ranging from very substantial (Stimson et al., 1995)

to keeping the policy “in check” (Jones, 1994, p. 238). Literature on the impact of public perception on the adoption of sustainable development policies is scarce and fragmented, and it has focused primarily on the environmental dimension of sustainable development (Tandrayen-Ragoobur et al., 2021). What we do know, however, suggests that pro-environmental public opinions can encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly policy, while hostile public attitudes can be a key obstacle to any change (Dasgupta & De Cian, 2018).

WHAT WE DO KNOW, however, suggests that pro-environmental public opinions can encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly policy, while hostile public attitudes can be a key obstacle to any change.

The combination of participatory policymaking, science, and the views of experts, together with a proactive inclusion of public opinion, can be critical to understanding how to initiate, or continue, trajectories for the attainment of SDGs (Randall, 2021b; UN, 2019). In this regard, when compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs appear to take a more inclusive approach, actively involving various stakeholder groups, and accounting for all views and opinions to make the commitments long-lasting (Bidarbakhtnia, 2020; Caballero, 2019).

The overall capacity for countries and their populations to meet the SDGs may depend on more than the support and trust that the public shows towards their governments. In fact, other factors such as the wealth of a jurisdiction, their degree of decision-making autonomy, and characteristics such as the size of the population and the economy may also affect outcomes. In this regard, the importance of being a small jurisdiction and being sovereign (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018; Lévêque, 2020), achieving a certain level of economic development (Briguglio, 1995; Briguglio et al., 2009; Glass & Newig, 2019), having strong social relations (Baldacchino, 2005), and environmental standards (Moncada et al., 2021a,b) are also critical. However, there remains a gap in trying to assess the role played by public opinion on the degree of success, or otherwise, of government authorities to achieve SDGs, and the degree to which that

role is shaped by sovereignty, population, and wealth. The SDGs offer an opportunity for governments to design and implement public policies to foster equity, inclusion, and cohesion. It is important, therefore, for both developed and developing nations to engage citizens and incorporate public opinion in the policymaking process (Tandrayen-Ragoobur et al., 2021).

It is in this area that we seek to identify whether island characteristics such as sovereignty, population size, and wealth can help us interpret current gaps in policy implementation and the success by governments in meeting their SDG targets. This research endeavours to fill these gaps, with a focus on 10 island jurisdictions.

METHODS, DATA, AND CONTEXT

This research seeks to use the extant literature on islands and small states to aid in reaching the goals associated with the SDGs by 2030. At this stage we are not attempting to establish causation but rather to assess the strength of associations between public perception on governments' success in achieving the SDGs, taking into account independent variables such as sovereignty, population size, and wealth. This should be considered an intermediate step in a more comprehensive study that would use mixed methods, including quantitative regression analysis and interviews with relevant stakeholders to establish causality.

Correlation is being used in this research to test the relationships between variables, that is a measure of how phenomena are related. To put a value to this relationship, we use a correlation coefficient, which measures the strength of the relationship between two variables and ranges between -1.0 and $+1.0$. A value of zero means that there is no relationship between the variables at all, while -1.0 or $+1.0$ means that there is a perfect negative or positive correlation, respectively. Understanding that relationship is useful because we can use the value of one variable to predict the value of the other variable. Therefore, the greater the absolute value of the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship. Furthermore, we generally calculate a p-value to the correlation analysis, attributing to that result a statistical significance that can rule out errors by chance in interpreting the correlation between variables. In this research, all the results are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, leaving out those statistical relationships that have a margin of error at the generally accepted threshold of 5%.

Surveys and data

An online survey was administered by local research team members on twelve islands, ten of which are represented in this analysis. Consisting of roughly 20 closed-ended Likert-type scaled questions, the surveys were divided into sections consisting of 1) perceptions regarding the performance of island institutions, such as the civil service, the judiciary, and local and island-wide governments; 2) the importance of the SDGs

and the success of island governments in meeting those goals; and 3) the personal actions taken by the participants in incorporating the SDGs into their everyday lives. In addition, most local island researchers included an additional set of questions that focused on perceptions regarding sustainable tourism management on their islands. Island researchers targeted participants from six stakeholder groups: representatives from non-governmental organizations, academics, youth, government workers, businesspeople/entrepreneurs, and members of worker or trade unions. Responses were gathered across the islands over a period of approximately two months, with some island research teams gathering data as early as July 2019 with others finishing as recently as December 2021. Although the language of the surveys was usually English, in order to meet the needs of the local communities and increase response rates, the survey was also administered in French, Greek, and Icelandic where appropriate.

As noted above, we took into account three variables often posited within the islands and small states studies literature as being important within the context of island sustainable development and, by extension, the SDGs. The first is sovereignty. Although sovereignty can be a complex concept, here we divided the ten case study islands between those that the United Nations recognizes as sovereign or independent states (Class 1), and those that are subnational island jurisdictions (Class 0). The second variable is population, represented by dividing the 10 case study islands into three broad categories: those in the lowest quartile (up to 114,290 people — Class 1), those between 25% and the median (273,880 people — Class 2), and those with populations greater than the median (Class 3). For the income or wealth variable, we used Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, and the 2018 World Bank data in US\$ equating national and island GDPs where island data were not available (i.e., Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland), except for Réunion and Lesvos, where we used 2018 data from EUROSTAT in Euros, which were converted to US\$ using the equivalence of €1 = US\$1.21 (as at 21 February 2021). As with the population variable, we used the first quartile (\$11,483) and median GDP (\$23,721) to establish three classes: Class 1 (GDP/capita less than \$11,483), Class 2 (GDP/capita between \$11,483 and \$23,720), and Class 3 (GDP/capita greater than \$23,720). Table 3.1 illustrates some key characteristics of the ten case study islands and the three variables of interest used to test our hypotheses.

Context

Using a pairwise comparative approach, six pairs of small island states and subnational island jurisdictions were selected for the research in the larger Sustainable Island Futures project, of which this is a part. Although every island is unique, the pairs were selected on the basis that they shared at least several of the following characteristics: population size, colonial or post-colonial history, geographical region, economic

TABLE 3.1: Overview of Key Characteristics of the Case Study Islands

Islands	Population	Total Area (KMZ)	GDP (per capita)	Participants (#)	Population Class	GDP Class	Sovereignty
Tobago	60,874	5,131.00	17,038.00	51	1	2	0
Grenada	112,523	348.50	10,808.70	56	1	1	1
PEI	159,713	5,660.00	46,194.70	118	2	3	0
St. Lucia	183,627	617.00	11,611.40	54	2	1	1
Lesvos	114,880	1,633.00	19,582.50	60	1	2	0
Cyprus	1,207,359	9,251.00	27,858.40	42	3	3	1
Newfoundland	479,538	108,860.00	46,194.70	109	3	3	0
Iceland	364,134	103,000.00	66,944.80	67	3	3	1
Reunion	859,959	2,511.00	28,666.18	57	3	2	0
Mauritius	1,271,768	2,040.00	11,099.20	57	3	1	1

Source: Eurostat, 2020; World Bank, 2018.

structure, and area size. The islands are located in the North Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Caribbean and Mediterranean Seas. Two islands located in the Pacific Ocean (Guam and Fiji) participated in the study but are not included in this analysis.



The architecture of homes by the lakeside in Reykjavik, Iceland.

Limitations of the research methods

Establishing causation would support policy more effectively in the adoption of measures that could eventually lead to achieving SDGs in a shorter timeframe. However, the intention of the research presented here is to assess the existence of associations between public perceptions on government success in achieving the SDGs, and relevant independent variables such as sovereignty, population, and income level. Taking this approach does not come without limitations. This study is a first and a necessary step in a more comprehensive research agenda that could potentially use mixed methods, including quantitative regression analysis and interviews of key informants in order to be more confident about causality. The identification of significant levels of association between variables by isolating specific categories can still provide a useful first step into further research in this field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of results

Table 3.2 shows the aggregate results for the perceived importance assigned to each of the SDGs by all of the study participants across all ten islands, where the lowest mean

TABLE 3.2: Importance of SDGs on Case Study Islands

SDGs	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.
SDG1 (No Poverty)	556	2.34	1.82
SDG2 (No Hunger)	556	2.12	1.68
SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)	556	1.95	1.45
SDG4 (Quality Education)	556	2.01	1.53
SDG5 (Gender Equality)	556	2.10	1.60
SDG6 (Water & Sanitation)	556	1.99	1.52
SDG7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	556	2.07	1.53
SDG8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	556	2.06	1.56
SDG9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure)	556	2.20	1.50
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)	556	2.65	1.91
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	556	2.28	1.58
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	556	2.32	1.75
SDG13 (Climate Action)	556	2.07	1.64
SDG14 (Life below Water)	556	1.89	1.49
SDG15 (Life on Land)	556	2.03	1.57
SDG16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	556	2.22	1.67
SDG17 (Partnership for Goals)	556	2.60	1.86

NOTE: On a Likert-type scale, these values range from 1 to 7 where 1 equals “Absolutely critical” and 7 is “Not important at all”. Source: Compiled by authors.

values (in green) are of greatest perceived importance and the highest mean values (in red) are considered least important. The most important perceived SDGs, in rank order, are *life below water* (SDG 14), *good health and wellbeing* (SDG 3), and *water and sanitation* (SDG 6). At the other extreme, the SDGs that are considered to be least important are *reduced inequalities* (SDG 10), *partnership for goals* (SDG 17), and *no poverty* (SDG 1).

The parallel question, where survey participants were asked about the success of their governments in meeting the SDGs on their islands, is presented in Table 3.3. Once again, in rank order, participants felt that their governments had been most successful in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of *quality education* (SDG 4), *water and sanitation* (SDG 6), and *gender equality* (SDG 5), and were least successful in achieving *responsible consumption and production* (SDG 12), *partnership for goals* (SDG 17), and *reduced inequalities* (SDG 10).

TABLE 3.3: Perceived Success in Achieving SDGs on Case Study Islands

SDGs	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.
SDG1 (No Poverty)	556	4.56	1.70
SDG2 (No Hunger)	556	4.39	1.65
SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)	556	4.20	1.65
SDG4 (Quality Education)	556	3.86	1.71
SDG5 (Gender Equality)	556	3.93	1.73
SDG6 (Water & Sanitation)	556	3.91	1.76
SDG7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	556	4.34	1.78
SDG8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	556	4.62	1.66
SDG9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure)	556	4.47	1.61
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)	556	5.18	1.93
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	556	4.42	1.66
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	556	4.85	1.67
SDG13 (Climate Action)	556	4.75	1.67
SDG14 (Life below Water)	556	4.58	1.74
SDG15 (Life on Land)	556	4.61	1.76
SDG16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	556	4.48	1.81
SDG17 (Partnership for Goals)	556	5.02	1.96

NOTE: These values range from 1 to 7, where 1 equals “Extremely successful” and 7 equals “Extremely unsuccessful”.

Source: Compiled by authors.

TABLE 3.4: Correlation Between Perceived Importance of SDGs and Government Success in Achieving SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals	Correlation Coefficients (p)
SDG1 (No Poverty)	0.122
SDG2 (No Hunger)	0.201
SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)	0.154
SDG4 (Quality Education)	0.148
SDG5 (Gender Equality)	0.118
SDG6 (Water & Sanitation)	0.113
SDG7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	0.052
SDG8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	0.071
SDG9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure)	0.139
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)	0.222
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	0.151
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	0.181
SDG13 (Climate Action)	0.081
SDG14 (Life below Water)	0.053
SDG15(Life on Land)	0.093
SDG16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	0.155
SDG17 (Partnership for Goals)	0.224

NOTE: Correlation coefficients in green are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Compiled by authors.

A correlation analysis was conducted on the responses to the previous two questions, i.e., the association between perceived importance of the SDGs and success of governments in achieving the SDGs. Table 3.4 shows where there is a positive and statistically significant correlation (95% and above; presented in green in the table) between these two variables. The only two SDGs that were not highly correlated are *affordable and clean energy* (SDG 7) and *life below water* (SDG 14). However, the picture changes when we disaggregate the correlations according to the specific independent variables.

TABLE 3.5: Correlations Between Perceived Importance and Success at Achieving SDGs, by Governance Status

Sustainable Development Goals	Correlation Coefficients (p)	
	SIS	SNIJs
SDG1 (No Poverty)	0.208	0.056
SDG2 (No Hunger)	0.301	0.131
SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)	0.211	0.105
SDG4 (Quality Education)	0.185	0.121
SDG5 (Gender Equality)	0.161	0.089
SDG6 (Water & Sanitation)	0.181	0.066
SDG7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	0.155	-0.01
SDG8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	0.137	0.023
SDG9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure)	0.244	0.071
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)	0.223	0.189
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	0.303	0.042
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	0.209	0.173
SDG13 (Climate Action)	0.172	0.016
SDG14 (Life below Water)	0.091	0.037
SDG15(Life on Land)	0.082	0.099
SDG16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	0.145	0.152
SDG17 (Partnership for Goals)	0.125	0.248

NOTE: Correlation coefficients in green are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Compiled by authors.

In fact, if we disaggregate this correlation by the governance status of the islands (i.e., SIS versus SNIJ) we see that island states are much more likely to exhibit significant correlations between SDG perceived importance and government success, than is the case with the SNIJs (Table 3.5). All but two of the SDGs for island states have significant correlations at the 95% confidence level, while only eight of the 17 SDGs have statistically significant correlations between these two variables for the semi-autonomous islands.

TABLE 3.6: Correlations Between Perceived Importance and Success at Achieving SDGs, by Population Size

Sustainable Development Goals	Correlation Coefficients (p) Population Groups		
	Low	Medium	High
SDG1 (No Poverty)	0.175	-0.023	0.171
SDG2 (No Hunger)	0.254	-0.005	0.275
SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)	0.129	0.057	0.208
SDG4 (Quality Education)	0.195	-0.008	0.203
SDG5 (Gender Equality)	0.142	-0.071	0.195
SDG6 (Water & Sanitation)	0.151	-0.039	0.175
SDG7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	0.088	-0.061	0.082
SDG8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	0.167	-0.105	0.106
SDG9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure)	0.198	0.037	0.145
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)	0.128	0.174	0.306
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	0.151	0.087	0.185
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	0.371	-0.018	0.154
SDG13 (Climate Action)	0.218	0.012	0.021
SDG14 (Life below Water)	0.151	-0.069	0.025
SDG15(Life on Land)	0.199	-0.068	0.119
SDG16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	0.326	-0.018	0.158
SDG17 (Partnership for Goals)	0.272	0.179	0.215

NOTE: Correlation coefficients in green are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Compiled by authors.

In Table 3.6, we correlate the same two variables (i.e., perceived importance of the SDGs and government success at achieving them), except that we are now differentiating on the basis of population size categories. The smallest and largest islands are much more likely to have statistically significant correlations across the 17 SDGs than are those islands that have medium population sizes. Only two of the SDGs (10 and 17) show significant correlations on these islands.

TABLE 3.7: Correlations Between Perceived Importance and Success at Achieving SDGs, by Gross Domestic Product per Capita Categories

Sustainable Development Goals	Correlation Coefficients (p) GDP Per Capita Groups		
	Low	Medium	High
SDG1 (No Poverty)	0.189	0.144	0.041
SDG2 (No Hunger)	0.292	0.219	0.099
SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)	0.209	0.138	0.849
SDG4 (Quality Education)	0.158	0.212	0.063
SDG5 (Gender Equality)	0.028	0.166	0.073
SDG6 (Water & Sanitation)	0.161	0.117	0.071
SDG7 (Affordable & Clean Energy)	0.188	0.068	-0.042
SDG8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)	0.161	0.124	-0.048
SDG9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure)	0.294	0.108	0.035
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)	0.249	0.112	0.262
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities)	0.281	0.063	0.117
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)	0.252	0.284	0.247
SDG13 (Climate Action)	0.292	0.088	-0.074
SDG14 (Life below Water)	0.082	0.097	-0.061
SDG15(Life on Land)	0.102	0.223	0.003
SDG16 (Peace, Justice, Institutions)	0.171	0.254	0.059
SDG17 (Partnership for Goals)	0.157	0.227	0.242

NOTE: Correlation coefficients in green are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Compiled by authors.

Finally, as seen in Table 3.7, participants on those islands with the lowest per capita incomes are more likely to show a significant correlation between perceived importance of the SDG and government success than is the case on medium and high-income islands. The differences between the low- and high-income islands is especially striking. Approaching this from an exploratory perspective, we need to begin to account for some of the outcomes portrayed in Tables 3.5–3.7.

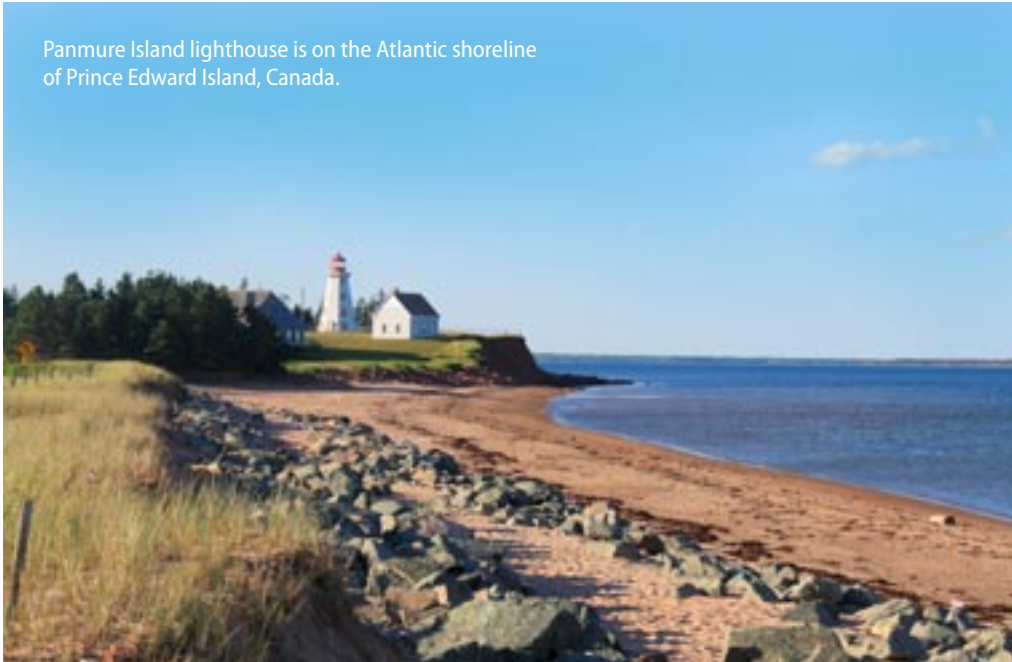
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative results presented above clearly indicate that the characteristics of governance, income, and population size show positive and significant correlations between the variables of perceived importance and perceived government success at achieving the SDGs across the ten islands. One interpretation of the results in relation to governance as it is defined here (i.e., SIS versus SNII) may be that independent countries have more control over legislation, regulations, and the range of actions needed to address all aspects of the SDGs (Royle, 1989). In addition, while local/regional/state governments may have to rely on central governments for funding to support SDG initiatives, governments of independent states are able to allocate resources without approval of more senior or central governments (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019). While

this seems to suggest that island states would be more successful in achieving the SDGs, it runs counter to some island studies research which argues that many non-sovereign islands enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom in setting island-specific policy (Baldacchino, 2004; Baldacchino & Milne, 2009). Therefore, all other things being equal, politically dependent status does not preclude government effectiveness. Moreover, the nature of many SDGs makes them inherently local (e.g., SDG 11, *sustainable cities and communities*). In other words, for them to be successful, the actions must be designed and implemented at the subnational level (Reddy, 2016). It is at the local, small-scale level that key actors are able to come together, develop trust, and agree on a shared vision (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

THEREFORE, ALL OTHER things being equal, politically dependent status does not preclude government effectiveness. Moreover, the nature of many SDGs makes them inherently local (e.g., SDG 11, *sustainable cities and communities*). In other words, for them to be successful, the actions must be designed and implemented at the subnational level.

Another feature that could allow us to better understand the results may be the greater awareness of the importance of the SDGs (and sustainable development in general) among the populations of small sovereign states, especially given their greater statutory responsibility and international transparency of the actions of these governments on the global stage (Hepburn, 2012). Unlike SNIIs, where SDG activity may be subsumed within the policy positions of the larger state, governments and populations of small island states and SIDS are much more conscious of the importance of the SDGs in achieving sustainable development (Quirk & Hanich, 2016). As noted earlier, this relationship is undoubtedly co-mingled with the factor of scale and the boundedness of small islands. Not only is the process of engaging and implementing the SDGs locally based, but local populations are also uniquely placed to see the impacts of unsustainable development on their local physical landscapes and on their own and their neighbours' households. It is not surprising, therefore, to



find a greater awareness of SDGs in small states and to see them occupying a more prominent role in small states' domestic and international policy agendas. Residents of SNIJs may be less likely to believe that their subnational governments are in a legitimate position to actually fully implement SDG actions, given the more limited range of legislative authority or access to sufficient resources on these semi-autonomous islands (Veenendaal, 2016). In other words, the lack of direct responsibility by some non-sovereign jurisdictions to be held accountable for the actions and targets related to the SDGs might create a sense of disengagement by the general public, thereby acting as a barrier to possible actions (Veenendaal, 2016).

The results in relation to relative income, suggesting that lower per capita income is associated with a stronger correlation between perceived importance and success at achieving the SDGs, may be a function of the 'catching up' theory (Dowrick & Nguyen, 1989). This suggests that in low-income places, there are larger margins to improve wealth gaps and increase standards of living, and more room for manoeuvring around policies (Maddison, 2013), including a possible greater visibility of any progress as perceived by citizens. This does not imply that those on developed islands are less likely to think that their governments are succeeding with the SDGs. However, it may suggest that there is a diminishing effect at the margins. This has been seen, for example, in research linking governance to a country's economic status (Briguglio et al., 2019).

While there are challenges in interpreting the results relating to population size categories, with the least and most populated places showing stronger correlations between perceived importance and perceived government success at achieving the

SDGs, one possible explanation may relate to social relations and social capital. As noted by Baldacchino (2005) and others, those living on small islands tend to have denser social networks. The stronger social and political bonds, especially within small communities with limited mobility, when combined with a tendency in internal political processes that is often personalistic (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018; Lévêque, 2020), may lead to higher perceived success by governments in the ability to attain the SDGs.

This research has shed light on the perceptions and attitudes of island stakeholders towards the Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim of identifying critical factors that may help us to implement policies to achieve those goals. Notwithstanding the progress that has already been made in meeting key SDGs, especially in relation to reducing poverty, social, and gender inequalities, as well as improving access to education and health (Sachs et al., 2020), the literature suggests that there are still areas where progress has not been made, and where governments would benefit from evidence that allows them to better interpret public opinion. The results presented above suggest that sovereignty, low and high population size, and relative income may help to fill in explanatory gaps in policy implementation and aid governments in meeting their SDG targets. The results of this research also contribute incrementally to the growing literature in island studies, and specifically that which examines the impact of island population size and remoteness, to democracy and policy processes (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018; Lévêque, 2020), to the level of independence of islands (Baldacchino & Milne, 2009), and to relative wealth (Prasad, 2003) of islands and small states.

Finally, this research also sheds light on the need for academia to take a more proactive position in achieving the SDGs. As noted by Oliveira and colleagues (2020), academics and researchers should do more than provide scientific knowledge and interpret data. They should also take a more normative position, promoting and supporting the SDG agenda, and advising government and community decision-makers in establishing SDG actions and monitoring progress. This is especially important in smaller island jurisdictions where the capacity of governments and NGOs to address the SDGs is already limited. Understanding the importance of an interdisciplinary, place-based perspective on achieving sustainable development, and recognizing the need to adopt locally based solutions, means that island studies scholars are well positioned to effect change within their communities.

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