

'Imi Pono

Hawai'i Wellbeing Survey 2021

Native Hawaiian Wellbeing Strengths and Challenges

Referring to the search for wholeness and balance, 'Imi Pono seeks a more complete picture of wellbeing among Native Hawaiians and Hawai'i residents. As the source and outcome of multiple factors, wellbeing feeds, and is fed by, many streams. Native Hawaiian perspectives on wellbeing emphasize relationships, inter-connections, and balance.

Increasing and sustaining wellbeing requires relevant and actionable data. Despite composing more than one-fifth of Hawai'i's population and enjoying a unique and what should be a privileged status as the Indigenous people of the state, Native Hawaiians are typically reported within the broader category of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. In addition, data collected by state agencies are often narrowly focused and deficit based.

To collect relevant and actionable data, Kamehameha Schools, Lili'uokalani Trust, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs contracted Marzano Research to administer a statewide survey examining Native Hawaiian wellbeing from a holistic and strengths-based perspective. The results will inform organizational planning and improve community services for Native Hawaiians.

Purpose: Strengths and Challenges

The purpose of this brief is to highlight strengths and challenges regarding Native Hawaiian wellbeing to inform communities, support programs, and improve policy. This brief explores commonalities and differences between Native Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian experiences statewide and across counties. Non-Hawaiian refers to Hawai'i residents who selected "no" in response to the question "Are you Native Hawaiian?"

Survey Topics

The survey provides unique insight into a range of topics: cultural, community, and spiritual connections; civic engagement and leadership; quality of life; hope for the future; participation in cultural activities; interaction with the 'āina (the land or, more broadly, that which feeds) and kai (the sea); community strengths; and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey items were informed by previous research conducted in partnership with Native Hawaiian communities.



Strengths and Challenges: Overview

This brief focuses on strengths and challenges of Native Hawaiians across six interconnected dimensions of wellbeing.



Originating in the work of Kūkulu Kumuhana, these dimensions are **Ea** (self-determination, agency), **‘Āina Momona** (healthy and productive lands and people), **Pilina** (mutually sustaining relationships), **Waiwai** (ancestral abundance, collective wealth), **‘Ōiwi** (cultural identity and Native intelligence), and **Ke Akua Mana** (spirituality and sacredness of Mana).

From a Native Hawaiian perspective, a thriving person—and by extension, community—embodies the qualities of Ea, ‘Āina Momona, Pilina, Waiwai, ‘Ōiwi, and Ke Akua Mana. However, these factors are not mutually exclusive, nor do they have singular representations. Instead, the dimensions represent a framework that individuals can customize for their unique contexts and needs.



Sample and Methods

Data were collected from November 2020 through February 2021. Respondents consisted of 755 Native Hawaiians and 703 non-Hawaiians and ranged in age from 18 to 55 and over. The most populated counties, Honolulu and Hawai‘i, contributed the highest percentages of survey responses (57% and 22%, respectively). The least populated counties, Maui and Kaua‘i, had the lowest percentages of survey responses (13% and 8%, respectively). The confidence intervals for the state and Honolulu County—including breakouts for Native Hawaiians within these areas—are 5% or less. Confidence intervals for other counties are greater than 5%; therefore, findings for these counties should not be generalized beyond the survey sample. Respondent data were collected via email, phone, postcard, and social media outlets.

Given the data collection methodology, it is likely that survey respondents are more financially affluent than the general Native Hawaiian and Hawai‘i population. It is important to note that the survey results are a snapshot in time and that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of wellbeing are likely to be felt for years to come. Some negative impacts may continue to deepen despite the rollout of vaccines and gradual return to fuller employment and in-person learning.

For open-ended responses, the six Kūkulu Kumuhana dimensions were used to code the responses to the question “What is one Native Hawaiian issue that you care a lot about?” The one- or two-word responses were most often coded as ‘Āina Momona, Waiwai, Ea, and ‘Ōiwi. Pilina and Ke Akua Mana were coded much less frequently. Interrater percent agreement ranged from 81% to 100% for these categories.

Honolulu residents are somewhat under-represented in this survey, comprising 68% of the state population and 57% of the survey respondents. Maui County residents are proportionately represented (12% of the population and 13% of survey respondents). Residents of Hawai‘i and Kaua‘i counties are over-represented with 22% and 8% of the survey respondents compared to 15% and 5% of the population, respectively.

Strengths and Challenges: Key Findings

The five key findings in this brief are:

- 1. When examined through the six dimensions, Native Hawaiians are major contributors to Hawai'i's wellbeing, consistently reporting higher rates than non-Hawaiians.** For example, 55% of Native Hawaiians reported spending time contributing to the wellbeing of the Native Hawaiian community at least monthly, compared with 33% of non-Hawaiians.
- 2. Native Hawaiians reported relationships (Pilina), land and community ('Āina Momona), culture ('Ōiwi), and spirituality (Ke Akua Mana) as important to their overall wellbeing.** Native Hawaiians were substantially more likely than non-Hawaiians to report the importance of these dimensions. For example, 79% of Native Hawaiians reported 'ohana relationships as extremely important to their wellbeing, compared with 68% of non-Hawaiians.
- 3. Native Hawaiians are significantly more likely than non-Hawaiians to participate in community-building activities (Ea) and express high levels of interaction with the 'āina and kai ('Āina Momona).** For example, 38% of Native Hawaiians reported working with others in the community to achieve a common goal, compared with 28% of non-Hawaiians.
- 4. Native Hawaiians reported greater engagement with cultural issues (Ea), spending more time learning about their culture and language ('Ōiwi), and investing energy in improving the Native Hawaiian community (Waiwai) than non-Hawaiians.** For example, 73% of Native Hawaiians report participating in Native Hawaiian cultural activities at least monthly, compared with 48% of non-Hawaiians.
- 5. On the other hand, on average, Native Hawaiians experienced greater challenges in accessing high-quality and culturally responsive educational programs, earned lower annual household incomes, and reported less satisfaction with their quality of life (Waiwai) than non-Hawaiians.** For example, 61% of Native Hawaiians reported that education program requirements moderately or greatly limited their access, compared with 49% of non-Hawaiians.





Ea is a powerful and evocative word often translated as “sovereignty” and “independence.” However, it also can mean “life” and “breath.”

For our purposes, Ea relates to agency and efficacy: having control over one’s life and feeling like one can make a real difference. One way to express Ea is to know what matters in life. Regarding Native Hawaiian issues such as self-determination, Native land rights, and revitalization of the Hawaiian language, 79% of Native Hawaiians indicated that these issues were either quite a bit or extremely important, compared with 53% of non-Hawaiians.

Strong connections to culture and community are critical to wellbeing. A sense of belonging and purpose is often the foundation of civic engagement, another expression of Ea. In this regard, 38% of Native Hawaiians reported participating in an event to address a community issue (compared with 26% of non-Hawaiians) (*Figure 1*). Similarly, 38% of Native Hawaiians reported working with others in the community to achieve a common goal (compared with 28% of non-Hawaiians) (*Figure 2*).

Figure 1: Native Hawaiians were more likely to report participating in an event to address a community issue in the last 12 months.

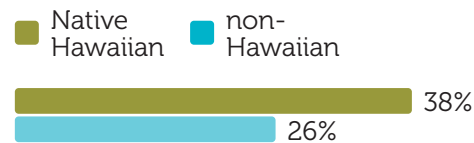


Figure 2: Native Hawaiians were more likely to report working with others in the community to achieve a common goal in the last 12 months.



Rural residents were more likely to report acting on community issues. Results show 19% of residents in Hawai‘i County reported organizing an event to address a community issue in the last 12 months, followed by 18% of Kaua‘i County residents, 13% of Maui County



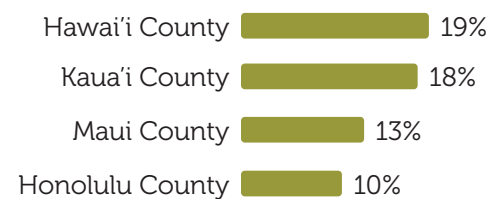
Ea (con't)

residents, and 10% of Honolulu County residents (*Figure 3*). Likewise, 39% of residents from Kaua'i County reported writing a letter or submitting testimony about a community issue, followed by 34% in Maui County, 28% in Hawai'i County, and 23% in Honolulu County.

Respondents identified issues important to them in their own words. A total of 253 responses fit under the broad category of Ea. These responses included environmental rights, land access and ownership rights, protection from overdevelopment, governance, and homestead issues. Access and rights to land and water, the return of lands to Native Hawaiians, the protection from development, and preservation of specific cultural and sacred sites composed the majority of responses (56%). Mauna Kea and

Thirty Meter Telescope were the most common references in the comments. Further representations of Ea include responses such as sovereignty, recognition, self-determination, decolonization, Hawaiian independence, illegal overthrow, occupation, and recognition of rights (36%). A small cluster of comments about homestead issues (e.g., blood quantum and access) and the general economy were coded here as well (7%).

Figure 3: Residents in Hawai'i County were most likely to report organizing an event to address a community issue in the last 12 months.



‘Āina Momona



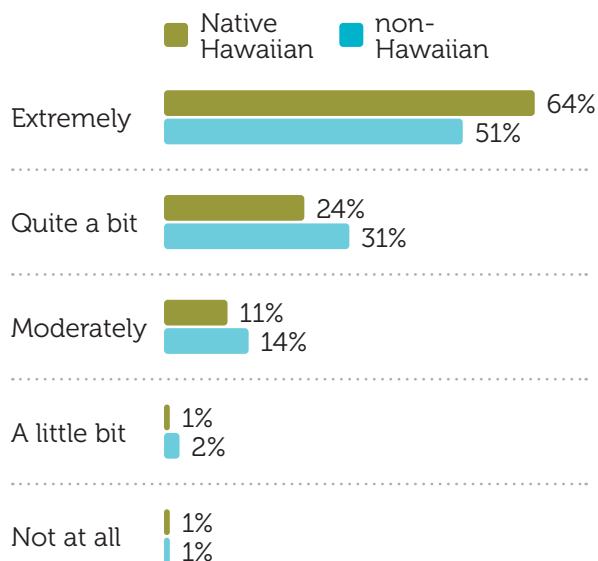
‘Āina Momona is defined as healthy and productive land and people and emphasizes the strong kinship between Native Hawaiians and the land. It connotes intimacy and interdependence, expressing the need for humans to live in harmony with and steward the natural environment.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Native Hawaiians reported the health of the ‘āina and kai (sea) were extremely important to their wellbeing (Figure 4). Native Hawaiians were more likely than non-Hawaiians to say so. When asked where they serve as a leader, a third of Native Hawaiians (33%) reported acting as one on the ‘āina or kai (compared with 20% of non-Hawaiians). Native Hawaiians were also more likely than non-Hawaiians to report interacting with the ‘āina or kai for spiritual or religious reasons (45% compared with 29%, respectively). Native Hawaiians also reported interacting with the ‘āina or kai for cultural (56%) and subsistence reasons (39%) in greater numbers than non-Hawaiians (24% and 26% respectively).

Out of all responses to the open-ended question “What is one Native Hawaiian issue that you care a lot about?” 428 were related to ‘Āina Momona. The majority of these had to do with accessing, protecting and stewarding ‘āina and culture (74%).

The representation of healthy and productive people within ‘Āina Momona was evident in concerns expressed about physical, mental, and spiritual health (19%). This presentation included comments regarding issues of incarceration, foster care, and harmful behaviors such as addiction and abuse.

Figure 4: Native Hawaiians were more likely to report the health of the ‘āina and kai (sea) were extremely important to their wellbeing.



“I believe that all children of Hawai‘i should learn and practice the cultural values of ancestral Hawaiian, especially taking care of the ‘āina and its sustainability.”

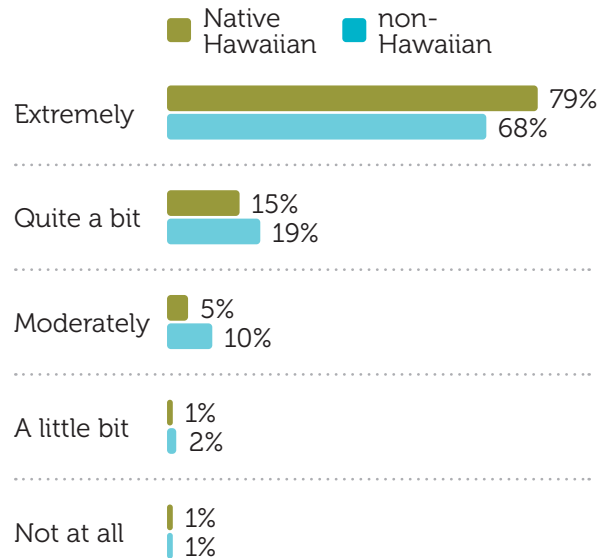
- Respondent



Relationships are central to wellbeing, as they create channels to give and receive support. “Pili,” the root word of Pilina, means to cling, join, or be associated with someone or something.

Healthy ‘ohana relationships (immediate and extended family and close friends) promote broader prosocial behaviors. Among Native Hawaiians, 79% reported that their ‘ohana relationships were extremely important to their personal wellbeing, compared with 68% of non-Hawaiians (Figure 5). Relying on ‘ohana; turning to prayer, meditation, or mindfulness; and setting daily goals, routines, or priorities were the top three strategies most Native Hawaiians reported using when coping with loss or difficult circumstances. Feeling connected to a geographic community is also a means for understanding healthy relationships among people and with the ‘āina. Results suggest that 58% of Kaua‘i County residents felt quite a bit or extremely connected to their geographic community, followed by Hawai‘i County at 53%, Maui County at 47%, and Honolulu County at 38%.

Figure 5: Native Hawaiians were more likely than non-Hawaiians to report ‘ohana relationships as extremely important to their wellbeing.



Waiwai



There are few resources more valuable than wai (fresh water). For Native Hawaiians, the measure of wealth was tied to community contribution and not individual accumulation for its own sake.

Although waiwai can be translated as “assets,” “utility,” and “wealth,” it is important to keep in mind the spirit of collective benefits that surround fresh water. Collective wealth can take many forms, one of which is the investment of time and energy into a shared cause. In this respect, 55% of Native Hawaiians reported spending time contributing to the wellbeing of the Hawaiian community at least monthly, 16% did so weekly and 20% did so daily. Results also indicate that 55% of Hawai‘i County residents spent time contributing to the wellbeing of the Native Hawaiian community at least monthly, followed by 50% of Kaua‘i County residents, 46% of Maui County residents, and

40% of Honolulu County residents. In addition, 46% of Native Hawaiians and 47% of Maui residents reported that their culture and values were extremely important to addressing challenges for Hawai‘i.

On the other hand, important aspects of Waiwai represent challenges for Native Hawaiians. Regarding finances, significantly more Native Hawaiians reported an income between \$25,000 and \$44,000 (14%), compared with non-Hawaiians (10%).

Similarly, when asked about satisfaction with their quality of life, 73% of Native Hawaiians reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 79% of



Waiwai (con't)

non-Hawaiians. Further, 20% of Native Hawaiians reported feeling neutral about their quality of life, compared with 13% of non-Hawaiians. In these ways, ancestral abundance has yet to fully materialize within many Native Hawaiian families, evidenced by the perceived lower quality of life.

Access to quality education is an important measure of Waiwai in a Native Hawaiian community because Waiwai can also be described as the collective wealth expressed in a community's capacity to access and manage resources. Unfortunately, over a third of Native Hawaiians (36%) reported that tuition and fees prevented their access to education programs to a great extent. Similarly, 30% of Native Hawaiians reported that program requirements (e.g., applications) moderately limited their access to education. Although not statistically significant, Native Hawaiians were more likely than non-Hawaiians to say distance restricted their participation in educational programs. Distance and transportation also restricted participation in educational programs in various ways by county. Fifty percent (50%) of Kaua'i County residents, 39% of Hawai'i County residents, 31% of Honolulu County residents, and 32% of Maui residents reported distance and transportation as limiting their access to a great or moderate extent.

The majority of the open-ended responses regarding Waiwai ($n = 312$) were associated with the conditions to support individual and 'ohana contri-

“I care a lot about our land. I think more of our land needs to be Hawaiian owned and operated or used for farming and growing. Sustainability is something that I think is an important thing to highlight being that we are Hawai'i.”

- Respondent

butions toward stronger communities. These responses clustered into three areas: housing (60%), education (25%), and economy (15%). Respondents cared a lot about the availability and affordability of housing. Although respondents generally referred to the lack of affordable housing, they also had specific comments about access to Department of Hawaiian Home Lands homes for eligible Native Hawaiians. Additionally, as a critical determinant of health and economic wellbeing, comments about education reflected the desire for culture to be part of the process, ensuring access to quality 'āina based programs as well as higher education. Respondents also cared about economic wellbeing, noting the poverty among Native Hawaiians, the high cost of living, and financial difficulty making ends meet in the islands.



‘Ōiwi, meaning Native or original, references the significance Native Hawaiians attach to iwi, or bones. As a descriptor, ‘Ōiwi refers to Native Hawaiian identity, culture and intelligence.

For our purposes, ‘Ōiwi refers to knowing who you are, where you come from, and to whom you are committed. Results show 21% of Native Hawaiians reported feeling extremely connected to their ethnic or cultural community, compared with 8% of non-Hawaiians. Fifty-three percent (53%) of Native Hawaiians also reported their cultural heritage was extremely important to their wellbeing, compared with 26% of non-Hawaiians.

Cultural activities and learning experiences are essential ways to celebrate and perpetuate culture. About 73% of Native Hawaiians reported participating in Native Hawaiian cultural activities at least monthly, of which 20% reported doing so daily. In comparison, 48% of non-Hawaiians reported participating in Native Hawaiian cultural activities at least monthly, with 7% doing so daily.

Differences also existed across counties. Seventy-one percent (71%) of Kaua‘i County residents reported participating in Native Hawaiian cultural activities at least monthly, followed by 68% of Hawai‘i County residents, 66% of Maui residents, and 56% of Honolulu County residents.

Ninety-six percent (96%) of Hawai‘i County residents reported spending time learning about Hawaiian culture, followed by Maui islands at 95%, Kaua‘i County at 91%, and Honolulu County at 90%.

The concept of ‘Ōiwi can also be observed in the close relationships between culture and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language). Results show 18% of Native Hawaiians were learning ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, compared with 10% of non-Hawaiians. Just under one in 10 Native Hawaiians (9%) considered themselves to be fluent in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, compared with 1% of non-Hawaiians. Over half of Native Hawaiians (53%) reported that the ability of future generations to speak ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i was extremely important, compared with 34% of non-Hawaiians. Further, nearly three quarters (74%) of Native Hawaiians reported that they could understand common words and phrases in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.

Open-ended responses related to ‘Ōiwi touched on grounding in cultural identity, Native intelligence and cultural values, practices, and ‘ike (knowledge). Respondents cared about preservation, perpetuation, and revitalization of culture, including language and history ($n = 214$). A subset of related comments were specific to the education of keiki (20%). These included comments about culture and language. Further, comments also related to educating the ‘ohana and the general public about the history of Native Hawaiians and Hawai‘i.

Ke Akua Mana



The concepts of Akua (God, gods) and Mana (divine power, authority) allow Native Hawaiians to draw strength from a higher power. Spirituality can be a pōhaku niho for establishing meaning, serenity, and community. (Pōhaku niho are “tooth stones” that anchor traditional Hawaiian dry walls.)

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of Native Hawaiians reported believing in a higher power, compared with 80% of non-Hawaiians. Further, 48% of Native Hawaiians reported their belief in a higher power was extremely important to their wellbeing, compared with 38% of non-Hawaiians (Figure 6).

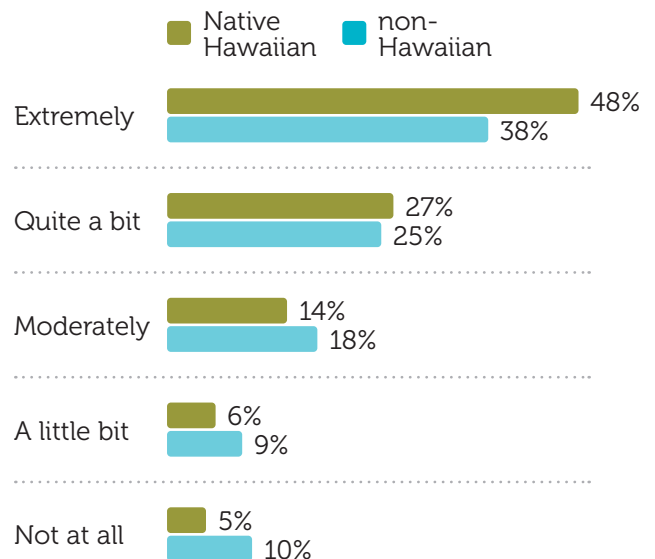
Similar to high rates of feeling connected to a cultural or ethnic community, Native Hawaiians find acceptance and belonging through spirituality. About two-thirds (64%) of Native Hawaiians reported feeling at least moderately connected to a spiritual or religious community.

Pilina and Ke Akua Mana had the fewest number of open-ended ($n = 44$ and $n = 18$, respectively). The majority of responses associated with Pilina were centered on aloha, kuleana, and respecting each other and kūpuna (elders). Additionally, another cluster of respondents noted discrimination issues, disagreement among Native Hawaiians, and concerns regarding social equity. Respondents commented on the sacred nature of ‘āina and kai, with a few specifically naming Mauna Kea, and other sources of healing.

“I believe in protecting our ‘āina, kai, and all our sacred sites from further desecration.”

- Respondent

Figure 6: Native Hawaiians were more likely than non-Hawaiians to report a belief in a “higher power” as extremely important to their wellbeing.



Conclusion

Results from the 'Imi Pono Hawai'i Wellbeing Survey shed much-needed light on the experiences and outcomes of Native Hawaiians. When examined through a holistic, culture-based lens, Native Hawaiians demonstrate high levels of wellbeing along the six dimensions outlined in Kūkulu Kumuhana. Results show Native Hawaiians to be major contributors to Hawai'i's total wellbeing across the key areas of **Ea** (self-determination, agency), **'Āina Momona** (healthy and productive lands and people), **Pilina** (mutually sustaining relationships), **Waiwai** (ancestral abundance, collective wealth), **'Ōiwi** (cultural identity and Native intelligence), and **Ke Akua Mana** (spirituality and sacredness of Mana).

Despite a painful history of colonization and occupation and generations of cultural trauma, Native Hawaiians remain 'onipa'a (steadfast) in their cultural beliefs, values, and practices. Moreover, results indicate Native Hawaiians intentionally draw on their cultural identity to strengthen their families and improve their communities. At the same time, Native Hawaiians continue to experience limitations when it comes to household income, access to educational programs, and satisfaction with their quality of life. Precisely because of these facts, Native Hawaiians can play a pivotal role in steering Hawai'i toward a brighter, sustainable, and more equitable future.



Next Steps

Data from the 'Imi Pono Hawai'i Wellbeing Survey highlight unique strengths and challenges for Native Hawaiians.

With these in mind, the following actions can be taken to increase the momentum of positive change.

- Support organizations and programs that develop Native Hawaiian identity and leadership.
- Prioritize the development of financial programs and services for Native Hawaiians.
- Remove barriers to educational access for Native Hawaiian and rural families.
- Adopt the use of culturally relevant and strengths-based measures of wellbeing at the county, state, and federal levels.
- Share survey results with community members to seek out additional interpretations and applications.

